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Book of Mormon Minute, Volume 4: Helaman through Moroni

Author(s): Brant Gardner

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Abstract: The Book of Mormon Minute is a verse-by-verse commentary that was custom-designed for the ScripturePlus app. Each installment covers one to three verses, and ideally can be read in one minute. This commentary focuses on the subtle yet important hand of Mormon in telling the Nephite story. The author, Brant Gardner, will often highlight ways that Mormon makes this narrative truly stunning. In addition, Gardner will touch on points of Nephite history and culture. This commentary is an excellent way to deeply engage with every verse in the Book of Mormon in an easy, digestible way.

Preface

The *Book of Mormon Minute* commentary was created for the ScripturePlus app. It continues to be part of the app. The idea for the commentary was to have something that could be read in a short amount of time yet provide illumination for a set of verses. This version is lightly edited from the text as it appears in the app. It simply changes the format to provide a different way to access the information for those for whom it makes their experience with the text and the commentary easier.

Because the author has also written a more formal commentary on the Book of Mormon (*Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Kofford Books, 2007), it is appropriate to note the way in which the *Book of Mormon Minute* differs from that more complete commentary. The *Book of Mormon Minute* was written fresh without directly consulting *Second Witness*. Thus, these comments may contain insights that at times differ from those in *Second Witness* because they were written over fifteen years later, and the author must have learned something in the interim. The *Book of Mormon Minute* was also written with a more general audience in mind.

One place where there is a continuation of an aspect of *Second Witness*, and a difference from the text in the app, is that this edition standardizes Yahweh as the name for the pre-Mortal Jesus rather than the more heavily Anglicized name Jehovah. The reason is that it is hoped that the shift in name can free readers from some ideas that might be brought to the text based on the way that name has been used.

Beginning with the book of Mosiah, this commentary uses subscript numbers to differentiate between individuals sharing the same name.

The Book of Helaman

Helaman 1

Helaman: Header

An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman, and so forth.

Comments

This book header continues Mormon’s practice of providing a synopsis of the book at the beginning. The practice of doing so probably came from the large plates. Nephi₁ provided book headers for his books on the small plates, as did Jacob.

The headers on the large plates had to have a different purpose, however. Where Nephi₁ and Mormon had outlines, and knew what they were going to write, that would not have been possible on the large plates, because the future was still unknown. This header confirms that Mormon wrote it, rather than copied it. The header ends with the statement that it covers events “even down to the coming of Christ.” That could not have been known by the large plate record keeper.

Incidentally, it is of interest that Mormon states that the book of Helaman covers the time “even down to the coming of Christ,” because it doesn’t. We don’t get that information until our book of 3 Nephi. It is possible that the large plate book of Helaman did contain that information, but that Mormon shifted to a new source for 3 Nephi and therefore, didn’t use the account from Helaman₂, but rather from the personal record of Nephi₃.

Pahoran’s Sons Contend for the Judgment Seat

Helaman 1:1–5

¹ And now behold, it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there began to be a serious difficulty among the people of the Nephites.

2 For behold, Pahoran had died, and gone the way of all the earth; therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the judgment-seat among the brethren, who were the sons of Pahoran.

3 Now these are their names who did contend for the judgment-seat, who did also cause the people to contend: Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni.

4 Now these are not all the sons of Pahoran (for he had many), but these are they who did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people.

5 Nevertheless, it came to pass that Pahoran was appointed by the voice of the people to be chief judge and a governor over the people of Nephi.

Comments

The length of the book of Alma allows modern readers to be too distanced from the end of Mosiah₂'s reign to remember that this new system of the reign of the judges is still new. Even though forty years have passed, there have only been three judges since Mosiah₂ dissolved the monarchy. One of those two was Alma₂, who abdicated after only nine years. The subsequent Chief Judge, Nephihah, ruled for around sixteen years. His son, Pahoran, ruled for around fifteen years.

The first transition in power occurred early enough in the new government that it didn't create any problems. Nevertheless, we see the presence of those who were later called king-men even as early as Alma₂, when Amlici desires to be king (Alma 1:2). In Nephihah's reign, Amalickiah was the one who arose and desired to be a king. During Pahoran's rule, it was the king-men who succeeded in replacing Pahoran for a time.

The situation in Zarahemla continued to be difficult, even though the rebellion had been put down. Thus, when Pahoran dies, there is controversy over who should be the Chief Judge. This was the very situation that Mosiah₂ had foreseen when he established the Reign of the Judges. In accordance with law, the voice of the people selected Pahoran. Not incidentally, it is probable that Pahoran was the eldest, and therefore was elevated to Chief Judge by birthright. This was not a democratic system.

Helaman 1:6–8

6 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, when he saw that he could not obtain the judgment-seat, he did unite with the voice of the people.

7 But behold, Paanchi, and that part of the people that were desirous that he should be their governor, was exceedingly wroth; therefore, he was about to flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion against their brethren.

8 And it came to pass as he was about to do this, behold, he was taken, and was tried according to the voice of the people, and condemned unto death; for he had raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people.

Comments

The process Mosiah₂ set in place did what it was supposed to do. Pahoran was selected to be the Chief Judge, and his brother Pacumeni accepted the result of that legal process. Paanchi did not. As with each of the previous Chief Judges, there was still conflict over the process, and Paanchi and his followers did what Amlici, Amalickiah, and the king-men had done in the previous administrations. He incited people to rebellion.

Paanchi was arrested prior to being able to raise an army and was executed according to law. His crime would certainly have been treason. His death, however, did not end the political problems. A new problem begins in the next verse.

Helaman 1:9–13

9 Now when those people who were desirous that he should be their governor saw that he was condemned unto death, therefore they were angry, and behold, they sent forth one Kishkumen, even to the judgment-seat of Pahoran, and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat.

10 And he was pursued by the servants of Pahoran; but behold, so speedy was the flight of Kishkumen that no man could overtake him.

11 And he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran.

12 Therefore, Kishkumen was not known among the people of Nephi, for he was in disguise at the time that he murdered Pahoran. And Kishkumen and his band, who had covenanted with him, did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found; but as many as were found were condemned unto death.

13 And now behold, Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people, to be a chief judge and a governor over the people, to reign in the stead of his brother Pahoran; and it was according to his right. And all this was done in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges; and it had an end.

Comments

Rather than armed rebellion, such as was undertaken in previous attempts to change the government, this attempt uses stealth and murder. Mormon introduces us to Kishkumen, a man with a very Jaredite name. Mormon uses Jaredite names to highlight actors in the story who are opposed to Nephite ideals, and Kishkumen will be more than just opposed to Nephite ideals. He will form the band that, from this time forward, Mormon will call Gadianton.

We will not learn until Moroni adds the book of Ether that covenants of secrecy, with the purpose of destroying governments by means of murder, will be a hallmark of the ancient Jaredites. But Mormon

knows that, and he will use that Jaredite trait to connect Nephite history to the destruction of the Jaredites through these destructive secret covenants, or secret combinations.

Coriantumr Leads the Lamanites against the Nephites

Helaman 1:14–17

14 And it came to pass in the forty and first year of the reign of the judges, that the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men, and armed them with swords, and with cimeters and with bows, and with arrows, and with head-plates, and with breastplates, and with all manner of shields of every kind.

15 And they came down again that they might pitch battle against the Nephites. And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and he was a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man.

16 Therefore, the king of the Lamanites, whose name was Tubaloth, who was the son of Ammoron, supposing that Coriantumr, being a mighty man, could stand against the Nephites, with his strength and also with his great wisdom, insomuch that by sending him forth he should gain power over the Nephites—

17 Therefore he did stir them up to anger, and he did gather together his armies, and he did appoint Coriantumr to be their leader, and did cause that they should march down to the land of Zarahemla to battle against the Nephites.

Comments

The story here is straightforward, but the way it is told is convoluted. The basic information is that Coriantumr, a Nephite dissenter, leads a Lamanite army against the Nephites. We have seen this pattern before. However, we know nothing about Coriantumr or why the Lamanites might be attacking.

Mormon appears to realize that he has neglected to get some of the details straight and corrects that neglect in verses 16 and 17. The actions represented by those two verses would have occurred prior to what we see in verses 14 and 15, but Mormon was backfilling the information he realized he had missed. This suggests that, while Mormon had an outline of what he wanted to write, he was not copying from a previously written manuscript, but rather writing directly onto the plates.

Helaman 1:18–21

18 And it came to pass that because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government, that they had not kept sufficient guards in the land of Zarahemla; for they had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the heart of their lands to attack that great city Zarahemla.

19 But it came to pass that Coriantumr did march forth at the head of his numerous host, and came upon the inhabitants of the city, and their march was with such exceedingly great speed that there was no time for the Nephites to gather together their armies.

20 Therefore Coriantumr did cut down the watch by the entrance of the city, and did march forth with his whole army into the city, and they did slay every one who did oppose them, insomuch that they did take possession of the whole city.

21 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, who was the chief judge, did flee before Coriantumr, even to the walls of the city. And it came to pass that Coriantumr did smite him against the wall, insomuch that he died. And thus ended the days of Pacumeni.

Comments

Although Pahoran and Chief Captain Moroni had regained control over Zarahemla from the king-men, and undoubtedly believed that they had solidified that city as a Nephite stronghold, the events surrounding the transfer of power after Pahoran's death suggest that there was still discord in the city. Coriantumr's invasion takes advantage of that discord.

Mormon records that the division that existed after Pacumeni's ascension to the judgement seat, and Paanchi's execution, left the city less protected than it might have been. Therefore, Coriantumr is able to enter the land and take over the main city. In doing so, Pacumeni was killed. The transfer of power is even more fragile.

Helaman 1:22–24

22 And now when Coriantumr saw that he was in possession of the city of Zarahemla, and saw that the Nephites had fled before them, and were slain, and were taken, and were cast into prison, and that he had obtained the possession of the strongest hold in all the land, his heart took courage insomuch that he was about to go forth against all the land.

23 And now he did not tarry in the land of Zarahemla, but he did march forth with a large army, even towards the city of Bountiful; for it was his determination to go forth and cut his way through with the sword, that he might obtain the north parts of the land.

24 And, supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land, therefore he did march forth, giving them no time to assemble themselves together save it were in small bodies; and in this manner they did fall upon them and cut them down to the earth.

Comments

Mormon doesn't tell us how the Lamanites entered the land of Zarahemla, but the speed with which they arrived in the heart of the land suggests that they entered through the pass near Manti. We don't hear about Manti after the book of Alma, so we cannot know if it was captured, or simply bypassed.

Coriantumr takes his army up the center of the land of Zarahemla. While he might have thought it would be the strongest defended area, it was, in fact, the least defended. The last major conflict had concentrated on both the western and eastern borders, and those cities had not only been physically fortified, but likely, at least, somewhat garrisoned. That left the center with fewer defenses.

Following the Sidon River valley allowed Coriantumr the most direct route to Bountiful, which, if captured, would significantly weaken the Nephite lands by dividing them in two without a good means of reinforcements and provisions crossing the center.

Helaman 1:25–29

25 But behold, this march of Coriantumr through the center of the land gave Moronihah great advantage over them, notwithstanding the greatness of the number of the Nephites who were slain.

26 For behold, Moronihah had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the center of the land, but that they would attack the cities round about in the borders as they had hitherto done; therefore Moronihah had caused that their strong armies should maintain those parts round about by the borders.

27 But behold, the Lamanites were not frightened according to his desire, but they had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla, and were marching through the most capital parts of the land, slaying the people with a great slaughter, both men, women, and children, taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds.

28 But when Moronihah had discovered this, he immediately sent forth Lehi with an army round about to head them before they should come to the land Bountiful.

29 And thus he did; and he did head them before they came to the land Bountiful, and gave unto them battle, insomuch that they began to retreat back towards the land of Zarahemla.

Comments

The problem that Coriantumr didn't realize was that, while he was presented with a weakened center, there were still large Nephite armies assigned to the borders. Thus, as Coriantumr presses toward Bountiful, Moronihah (Moroni's son and successor) sends reinforcements to Bountiful under the leadership of the seasoned general, Lehi₂. This created a defensive army sufficiently strong that Coriantumr's forces were defeated and forced to retreat toward Zarahemla. This would place them in a center city where they could be easily surrounded. This invasion was essentially defeated, even if it was not yet over.

Helaman 1:30–34

30 And it came to pass that Moronihah did head them in their retreat, and did give unto them battle, insomuch that it became an exceedingly bloody battle; yea, many were slain, and among the number who were slain Coriantumr was also found.

31 And now, behold, the Lamanites could not retreat either way, neither on the north, nor on the south, nor on the east, nor on the west, for they were surrounded on every hand by the Nephites.

32 And thus had Coriantumr plunged the Lamanites into the midst of the Nephites, insomuch that they were in the power of the Nephites, and he himself was slain, and the Lamanites did yield themselves into the hands of the Nephites.

33 And it came to pass that Moronihah took possession of the city of Zarahemla again, and caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace.

34 And thus ended the forty and first year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Moronihah's advantage continued to be that he had armies distributed along the borders. This allowed him not only to send reinforcements to Bountiful, but to still have armies available to cut off the Lamanite retreat. Coriantumr's situation was hopeless, and Zarahemla was recaptured.

Perhaps because of lessons he learned from his father, Moronihah allows the prisoners to depart. There is no mention of a covenant, but it would be a reasonable assumption that a covenant existed, even though Mormon isn't interested enough in this war to give the details of it.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 2

Gadianton Robbers Plot to Kill Helaman

Helaman 2:1–2

1 And it came to pass in the forty and second year of the reign of the judges, after Moronihah had established again peace between the Nephites and the Lamanites, behold there was no one to fill the judgment-seat; therefore there began to be a contention again among the people concerning who should fill the judgment-seat.

2 And it came to pass that Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, by the voice of the people.

Comments

Book names appear to change on the large plates when there is a change in the dynasty. That is, when a new ruler is chosen who is not directly related to the previous ruler (as a brother or son would be). The new book seems to begin with the seating of the first ruler of the new dynasty. That doesn't happen in the book of Helaman. We don't have Helaman₂ seated until the second chapter.

The first point to note is that Helaman₂ is the son of Helaman₁, not of Pahoran. There were several sons of Pahoran (Helaman 1:4), but only three contended for the judgment seat. Helaman₂ wasn't one of them. Therefore, when Helaman₂ is seated, he creates a different dynasty. The fact that the records stayed with Alma₂ may be the reason that the book of Alma was continued, even though Alma₂ had abdicated his position as Chief Judge.

The second point is that the events of the first part of the original chapter of the book of Helaman (our Helaman chapter 1) were perhaps part of the record in the book of Alma on the large plates. As discussed in the commentary on Alma 63, Mormon appears to have ended the book of Alma on the more significant forty-year date, rather than waiting for the beginning of the new dynasty in the less significant forty-second year. The same thing appears to happen at the end of the book of Helaman, where it ends on the nineteenth year, setting the twentieth year as the beginning of 3 Nephi, even though much of the beginning of 3 Nephi arguably comes from the large plates and plausibly the large plate version of the book of Helaman.

Helaman 2:3–5

3 But behold, Kishkumen, who had murdered Pahoran, did lay wait to destroy Helaman also; and he was upheld by his band, who had entered into a covenant that no one should know his wickedness.

4 For there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery; therefore he became the leader of the band of Kishkumen.

5 Therefore he did flatter them, and also Kishkumen, that if they would place him in the judgment-seat he would grant unto those who belonged to his band that they should be placed in power and authority among the people; therefore Kishkumen sought to destroy Helaman.

Comments

In Helaman 2:4, we are introduced to Gadianton, whose name will become the designation used for groups which Mormon considers dangerous to Nephite political life from now to the end of his own book. Even though we first learn of Kishkumen, Mormon has Gadianton supersede him without much more information than that he was able to become the leader of the group that would become known as the Gadianton robbers.

We learned in Alma 8:7 that “it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them.” That naming convention suggests that we might have expected to see the band of Kishkumen, rather than Gadianton. A possible reason for this shift might come from the possible etymology of the name as found in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

Originally, the name was spelled with a double “d”: *Gaddianton*. John W. Welch has suggested that there was, in Hebrew, a *gdd-* root that had a meaning of *bandits*. With the addition of the very Jaredite-sounding *-ianton* ending, it is possible that Mormon intended his readers to understand the name generically rather than as a single person. Mormon’s use of that term from here to the end of his text confirms that he used it as a generic term. Perhaps it was meant to signify “Jaredite bandits/robbers.”

Helaman 2:6–9

6 And it came to pass as he went forth towards the judgment-seat to destroy Helaman, behold one of the servants of Helaman, having been out by night, and having obtained, through disguise, a knowledge of those plans which had been laid by this band to destroy Helaman—

7 And it came to pass that he met Kishkumen, and he gave unto him a sign; therefore Kishkumen made known unto him the object of his desire, desiring that he would conduct him to the judgment-seat that he might murder Helaman.

8 And when the servant of Helaman had known all the heart of Kishkumen, and how that it was his object to murder, and also that it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to murder, and to rob, and to gain power, (and this was their secret plan, and their combination) the servant of Helaman said unto Kishkumen: Let us go forth unto the judgment-seat.

9 Now this did please Kishkumen exceedingly, for he did suppose that he should accomplish his design; but behold, the servant of Helaman, as they were going forth unto the judgment-seat, did stab Kishkumen even to the heart, that he fell dead without a groan. And he ran and told Helaman all the things which he had seen, and heard, and done.

Comments

True to the secret combinations of the Jaredites, Kishkumen used a secret organization to attempt to kill Helaman₂ in the same way that he had killed Pacumeni. Mormon does not tell us how a servant of Helaman₂ had learned of, and infiltrated, the organization that would become known as the Gadianton robbers. Nevertheless, Helaman₂ has a servant who knows enough to know what they plan, and to know how to give a sign so that Kishkumen would believe that he was a co-conspirator.

The servant kills Kishkumen, and reports to Helaman₂. Helaman₂ clearly knew enough of what was happening that there was no question about the legality of what the servant had done.

Helaman 2:10–14

10 And it came to pass that Helaman did send forth to take this band of robbers and secret murderers, that they might be executed according to the law.

11 But behold, when Gadianton had found that Kishkumen did not return he feared lest that he should be destroyed; therefore he caused that his band should follow him. And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness; and thus when Helaman sent forth to take them they could nowhere be found.

12 And more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter. And thus ended the forty and second year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

13 And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi.

14 Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.

Comments

Helaman₂ attempts to arrest the entire band, but Gadianton learns of Kiskumen's death, and they find a way to the wilderness where they escape. This incident ends quickly, but it is important in that it sets up

the reader's expectations for the Gadianton robbers. Mormon explicitly tells his readers that "more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter." Not only spoken of, but the Gadiantons will increasingly become dangerous to the Nephite way of life.

The Gadiantons are so dangerous, that Mormon declares that "this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi." In case his readers mistake his meaning, Mormon makes sure that we know that he doesn't mean the end of just the book of Helaman, but the end of the whole of the Book of Mormon. Of course, it cannot be this same Gadianton who is the cause of the Nephite destruction at Cumorah, but Mormon is blaming this band of Gadiantons *and* their Jaredite-inspired secret combinations. Mormon will continue to weave that theme into his record from this point forward.

This is the end of what was the first chapter of Helaman in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 3

Many Migrate into the Land Northward

Helaman 3:1–2

1 And now it came to pass in the forty and third year of the reign of the judges, there was no contention among the people of Nephi save it were a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people, which affairs were settled in the ending of the forty and third year.

2 And there was no contention among the people in the forty and fourth year; neither was there much contention in the forty and fifth year.

Comments

Mormon's interest in conflict over peace is amply demonstrated in these two verses. He uses the annalistic format of the large plates and marks the passage of the years, simply noting that there is nothing of interest. He will give us very few details until there is something more interesting, or at least more important to his purposes, than times of peace.

It should be noted, however, that although there were no wars or contentions, there was “a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people.” Even in times of peace, the underlying tensions did not vanish from Nephite society. When they are given as dissensions, it is likely that they were either related to continued pressure for a monarchy or against the Nephite religion—in particular, the belief in the coming Messiah.

Helaman 3:3

3 And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention and many dissensions; in the which there were an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land.

Comments

Although this is a very quick statement, it is very important for the way Mormon develops his theological and historical story from this point forward. He has begun pointing his readers to the potential problems in the north, even though the Lamanites in the south continue to be the cause of the periodic wars. In this verse we have two important statements. The first is that there arose contention and dissension. That has happened before, but in previous times the dissenters went south to the Lamanites. When the dissenters went south, they stirred up trouble.

The second statement is that these dissenters go north. Mormon implies that these northbound dissenters also stir up trouble, but the true trouble is manifest only gradually. The real indication of how important Mormon's statement of dissenters going north will become in his text is indicated by the amount of space that he allots in the next few verses (4–16) discussing what he knows, or what he is interested in pointing out, about where they went. When he is finished inserting this that somewhat off-topic information, he repeats that he is dealing with the forty-sixth year (see verse 17 of this chapter), a repetitive resumption that he uses in order to return to a story that he will interrupt beginning, in the next verse.

Helaman 3:4–7

4 And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers.

5 Yea, and even they did spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land.

6 And now no part of the land was desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate.

7 And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell.

Comments

In contrast with the simple statement in verse 3 that dissenters went north, Mormon gives a number of details about the land that he suggests they went to. It is unlikely that he knew precisely where they went, but rather his interest is in making certain that his readers know about this land northward and that Nephite dissenters have gone there. That makes it ripe to become a source of conflict with the Nephites, even while the Lamanites in the south continue to be the more immediate threat.

First, they go to a land that is at “an exceedingly great distance.” There is no way to measure that term, but Mormon clearly tells his readers that it is not the region that is on the other side of the narrow neck that defines the most northern part of the Nephite nation at this time.

Secondly, it is a place of large bodies of waters and many rivers. It is also a place where the large number of residents had rendered the land desolate of timber. Mormon uses that reference to a lack of wood as a new definition of desolation. This is intentional, because he called the land northward the land of Desolation because of the Jaredite destruction. Now it is still a land of Desolation, but because of the many people there who have made the land desolate of timber.

Helaman 3:8–12

8 And it came to pass that they did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east.

9 And the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents, and in houses of cement, and they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up, that in time they might have timber to build their houses, yea, their cities, and their temples, and their synagogues, and their sanctuaries, and all manner of their buildings.

10 And it came to pass as timber was exceedingly scarce in the land northward, they did send forth much by the way of shipping.

11 And thus they did enable the people in the land northward that they might build many cities, both of wood and of cement.

12 And it came to pass that there were many of the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth, did also go forth into this land.

Comments

In a Mesoamerican context, Mormon would be pointing his literary finger at the city of Teotihuacan, which was nearing its peak of power during Mormon's day. It was in Central Mexico, where there was a large lake and many rivers, although the lake is now drained and completely covered by Mexico City.

The lack of timber is also interesting in its connection with building with cement. Teotihuacan extensively uses real cement in its buildings, and the process of creating the cement required burning large amounts of wood. Thus, there was a direct correlation between the lack of timber and the building in cement, with the direction of causation the reverse of what Mormon implies. The building in cement likely caused the lack of trees rather than the lack of trees requiring the alternate building method. Nevertheless, a land with a lack of trees, as well as many bodies of water, was an accurate description of Teotihuacan in Mormon's day.

The composition of the city of Teotihuacan shows that there were divisions in the city where there were areas inhabited by different peoples who were not native to Central Mexico. There were areas, for example, where the evidence is that there were Maya in residence. The Maya cultures would probably

have been those influencing at least the Lamanites, which demonstrates that there was a northern flow of population from what we believe were Book of Mormon lands to that city. Thus, it was probably accurate that some of the people of Ammon also went north.

We will see that it is the Teotihuacan of Mormon's day that interests him, and that he would know the city well. Since this is an inserted text, it would be based on his own understanding rather than anything he had seen in the large plates for Helaman₂'s time period.

Helaman 3:13–16

13 And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them.

14 But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building of temples, and of synagogues and their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.

15 But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites.

16 And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites.

Comments

It is easy to see these verses in the context of the people who went north, and perhaps more specifically with the people of Ammon. That is not the case. When Mormon mentions "this people" in verse 14, he is referring to the Nephites. This becomes clear when he notes that the records are "the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites." Mormon is speaking of the large plates that are kept by the Nephites. There are many, and he can only write the hundredth part of what is on them.

The identification of this record with the large plates is confirmed in verse 16 when Mormon indicates that they have been handed down among the Nephites, until the Nephites became wicked and were destroyed; that is, until Mormon's time.

Peace and Prosperity Established

Helaman 3:17–19

17 And now I return again to mine account; therefore, what I have spoken had passed after there had been great contentions, and disturbances, and wars, and dissensions, among the people of Nephi.

18 The forty and sixth year of the reign of the judges ended;

19 And it came to pass that there was still great contention in the land, yea, even in the forty and seventh year, and also in the forty and eighth year.

Comments

Mormon ends his inserted text with the technique of repetitive resumption. That is where a phrase or idea from the text prior to the inserted material is repeated when the writer returns to the original, or, in this case, to the planned text.

Thus, we not only have the repeated mention that it was the forty-sixth year, and of the contentions and dissensions of that year, but also Mormon's very clear statement indicating that his diversion was intentional: "And now I return again to mine account."

Helaman 3:20–22

20 Nevertheless Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land.

21 And it came to pass that he had two sons. He gave unto the eldest the name of Nephi, and unto the youngest, the name of Lehi. And they began to grow up unto the Lord.

22 And it came to pass that the wars and contentions began to cease, in a small degree, among the people of the Nephites, in the latter end of the forty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Mormon has little to say about Helaman₂. There was an important story to tell about how it happened that Helaman₂ became the chief judge, but after that story, we simply get: "Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land." That is a statement usually reserved for the retrospective of a ruler.

It will happen that this really is the final statement about Helaman₂, until verse 37 in this chapter, when Helaman dies. Mormon was not interested in Helaman₂, but rather in his sons, Nephi₂ and Lehi₃, although more particularly focused on Nephi₂. It is for that reason that Mormon brings them up at this point in his text. He is shifting his narrative focus away from Helaman and onto his son, Nephi₂, who will become the Chief Judge when Helaman₂ dies (see Helaman 3:37).

Helaman 3:23–26

23 And it came to pass in the forty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace established in the land, all save it were the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established in the more settled parts of the land, which at that time were not known unto those who were at the head of government; therefore they were not destroyed out of the land.

24 And it came to pass that in this same year there was exceedingly great prosperity in the church, insomuch that there were thousands who did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance.

25 And so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure.

26 And it came to pass that the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands.

Comments

In Helaman 3:20, Mormon had noted that Helaman₂ was a good ruler, and that “he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God.” Because he did that, “he did prosper in the land.”

In verses 24–26, Mormon provides evidence of that prospering in the land. The most important part of prospering was keeping commandments, for that fulfilled the covenant of the land that allowed the people to prosper. Therefore, the definition Mormon offers of prospering is that “blessings . . . were poured out upon the people,” and “the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands.”

In spite of this, however, Mormon doesn’t want his readers to lose track of the work he had done to introduce the Gadianton robbers and the land northward. Therefore, in verse 23 he noted that they had “continual peace . . . all save it were the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established in the more settled parts of the land.”

It is of interest that those secret combinations were “established in the more settled parts of the land.” This suggests that the Gadianton combinations were the result of the more cosmopolitan aspects of the

large cities, which could be involved in more long-distance trade than the more rural areas that were undoubtedly more focused on farming.

Helaman 3:27–30

27 Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.

28 Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

29 Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

30 And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.

Comments

Mormon is hardly detached from what he is writing. He has a purpose in mind, and while he most often allows the stories to teach their own lessons, there are times when he inserts his own moral of the story. That is what is happening in these verses. Mormon has departed from telling the story to commenting on the lessons to be learned from the story. Even though he has told his readers little of Helaman₂ the Chief Judge, he has indicated that Helaman₂ kept the commandments. Mormon further noted that under Helaman₂'s rule, the people also kept the commandments. That obedience invoked the covenant, and they prospered. Mormon elaborates on the blessings that God may shower upon his faithful people.

It is also important to note that Mormon's text often shows Lamanites becoming Nephites, Nephites who are often more faithful than those who were born Nephites. Here, Mormon declares that the reason for this is that "the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name."

One's ethnicity does not matter. One's politics do not matter. One's previous deviation from the commandments does not matter. What matters is that "whosoever will, may lay hold upon the word of God." All may "land their souls . . . at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven."

Helaman 3:31–33

31 And in this year there was continual rejoicing in the land of Zarahemla, and in all the regions round about, even in all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

32 And it came to pass that there was peace and exceedingly great joy in the remainder of the forty and ninth year; yea, and also there was continual peace and great joy in the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges.

33 And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the judges there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church—not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God—

Comments

Mormon's custom is to note not only the passage of years, but also specific times when there was peace. What is common to his writing about years of peace is that he says virtually nothing about them. Mormon teaches that keeping the commandments led to prosperity, but he doesn't see that prosperity is of the same instructional value as the events which lead the people away from such joy and prosperity. Thus, in verse 33, we see that pride is again entering "into the hearts of the people." We know that nothing good will come of it.

Helaman 3:34–37

34 And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction.

35 Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.

36 And it came to pass that the fifty and second year ended in peace also, save it were the exceedingly great pride which had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land; and it did grow upon them from day to day.

37 And it came to pass in the fifty and third year of the reign of the judges, Helaman died, and his eldest son Nephi began to reign in his stead. And it came to pass that he did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did keep the commandments of God, and did walk in the ways of his father.

Comments

We arrive at the fifty-third year, when Helaman₂ dies and Nephi₂ reigns, according to his birthright. As with his father, Mormon notes that Nephi₂ is a good ruler, and keeps the commandments.

Nevertheless, Mormon is also setting the stage for conflict. Up to this point, the church has withstood the increasing pride, but that won't last. The next chapter returns to conflict.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. Mormon is faithful to his source in marking the years, even though the only significant attention he pays to specific years is when they have wars or contentions.

Helaman 4

Lamanites Take Over Nearly All the Nephite Lands

Helaman 4:1–2

1 And it came to pass in the fifty and fourth year there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed.

2 And the rebellious part were slain and driven out of the land, and they did go unto the king of the Lamanites.

Comments

In Helaman 3, Mormon focused on the movement of Nephite dissenters, as well as some of the Ammonites, into the land northward. In Helaman 4, he notes that there was also dissension in the church and that “the rebellious part” were either killed or went south to the Lamanites.

The Nephite nation is being put under increasing pressure, pressure that will build between now and the time of Christ’s appearance. One of the important aspects of this pressure is that there are again “many dissensions in the church.” That phrase typically has meant that there are those in the church who have accepted the desires for social hierarchy. For some, the top of that hierarchy was a monarch, but from a historical perspective it was probably driven by the influence of surrounding cultures. Those cultures had wealth, and the wealthy had power. Monarchy or not, there was a social stratification.

While not stated, it would not be surprising that one of the dissensions in the church was once again the denial of the coming Messiah. That is, perhaps, the most consistent Nephite religious apostasy.

Helaman 4:3–5

3 And it came to pass that they did endeavor to stir up the Lamanites to war against the Nephites; but behold, the Lamanites were exceedingly afraid, insomuch that they would not hearken to the words of those dissenters.

4 But it came to pass in the fifty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, there were dissenters who went up from the Nephites unto the Lamanites; and they succeeded with those others in stirring them up to anger against the Nephites; and they were all that year preparing for war.

5 And in the fifty and seventh year they did come down against the Nephites to battle, and they did commence the work of death; yea, insomuch that in the fifty and eighth year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in obtaining possession of the land of Zarahemla; yea, and also all the lands, even unto the land which was near the land Bountiful.

Comments

Mormon spent a lot of time describing the war that Chief Captain Moroni fought against the apostate-led Lamanite armies. That war ended before the end of the thirty-fifth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 62:42). This new war began twenty-one years later; it was not the only war since the end of the previous war twenty-one years ago, but it was the one that was even more costly in the loss of Nephite territory than the previous one had been. In the earlier war, the Nephites lost territory on the west and east borders, but the center mostly remained.

In this new war, Mormon gives no details except that the Nephites lost almost all their lands. The discussion of Nephite lands in Alma 22 had the northernmost border as the land of Bountiful, near the narrow neck of land (see Alma 22:30). In this war, the Lamanite armies pushed the Nephites off all the lands south of the land of Bountiful.

Helaman 4:6–8

6 And the Nephites and the armies of Moronihah were driven even into the land of Bountiful;

7 And there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day's journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country.

8 And thus those dissenters of the Nephites, with the help of a numerous army of the Lamanites, had obtained all the possession of the Nephites which was in the land southward. And all this was done in the fifty and eighth and ninth years of the reign of the judges.

Comments

When the Nephites are driven out of almost all their lands, they are concentrated in the land Bountiful. That land provided a better defensive position because it was narrower, and therefore an enemy would be less able to flank the Nephite positions to get around behind them. It was a defensible line both in being narrower and being protected by the west sea and the sea to the east.

Moronihah therefore concentrates on improving the defenses along that line, perhaps with an eye to moving his own population more to the north while keeping a tight grip on the new southern border.

Nephites Regain Half Their Territory

Helaman 4:9–10

9 And it came to pass in the sixtieth year of the reign of the judges, Moronihah did succeed with his armies in obtaining many parts of the land; yea, they regained many cities which had fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.

10 And it came to pass in the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in regaining even the half of all their possessions.

Comments

When Mormon wrote of the war in which Chief Captain Moroni and Helaman¹ fought to regain lost territory, Mormon listed the cities taken, and the strategies used to retake them. Whatever interest he had in that type of detail, it was confined to the time when those two men were fighting for the Nephite nation.

Even with the more devastating loss in this new war, we get virtually no details. In what was certainly fierce fighting to regain “even the half of all their possessions,” we get no such details. The previous war focuses on the traits of leaders and appeared to emphasize times when victory could be accomplished with little loss of blood.

Mormon seems to have included all he cared to of that lesson. This new war had to have been more devastating, but Mormon gives us virtually no details.

Helaman 4:11–13

11 Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.

12 And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites—

13 And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten, and driven before the Lamanites, until they had lost possession of almost all their lands.

Comments

Even without the details of the wars or the people involved, Mormon does have a reason for telling his readers about this war, and he makes sure that they understand it in verses 11–13. It “would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.”

The promise of the land is that the people will prosper on the land if they are righteous. Alma₂ gave his son, Shiblon, the clear example of the two parts of the promise: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence” (Alma 38:1).

The cause of the destruction might be war, but the cause of the dissensions, and therefore the war, was “because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, ye, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren.” This is the antithesis of Nephite religion. It is also the hallmark of Nephite society when they succumb to the temptations of attempting to be too much like their powerful surrounding cultures.

Helaman 4:14–17

14 But behold, Moronihah did preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity, and also Nephi and Lehi, who were the sons of Helaman, did preach many things unto the people, yea, and did prophesy many things unto them concerning their iniquities, and what should come unto them if they did not repent of their sins.

15 And it came to pass that they did repent, and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper.

16 For when Moronihah saw that they did repent he did venture to lead them forth from place to place, and from city to city, even until they had regained the one-half of their property and the one-half of all their lands.

17 And thus ended the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Mormon attributed the loss of so much of the Nephite lands to the general departure of most of the Nephites from the principles of the gospel. In their dire straits, Moronihah “did preach many things unto the people.” Helaman₂’s sons, Nephi₂ and Lehi₃, also preach repentance. Things were bad enough that the people “did repent.” As a direct result, and immediately after saying that “they did repent,” Mormon adds that “they did begin to prosper.”

That prospering was defined as being able to regain half of their property. Mormon had mentioned that Moronihah had regained half of the lost lands in Helaman 4:10. Verses 11–13 of this chapter were Mormon’s

inserted moral, and he uses repetitive resumption to bring his readers back to the timeline and the story by repeating the recapture of one-half of their property in the sixty-first year (verses 16 and 17).

Nephites Spiritually Reawaken

Helaman 4:18–20

18 And it came to pass in the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges, that Moronihah could obtain no more possessions over the Lamanites.

19 Therefore they did abandon their design to obtain the remainder of their lands, for so numerous were the Lamanites that it became impossible for the Nephites to obtain more power over them; therefore Moronihah did employ all his armies in maintaining those parts which he had taken.

20 And it came to pass, because of the greatness of the number of the Lamanites the Nephites were in great fear, lest they should be overpowered, and trodden down, and slain, and destroyed.

Comments

Mormon always has two important things to cover in his story of the Nephites. One is the basic history, but the other is the lesson to be learned from Nephite history. In these three verses, Mormon simply deals with the first of those purposes. He notes that Moronihah had been somewhat successful but hits a stalemate. He has to stop and consolidate his gains.

These three verses cover the history, but Mormon will set up his lesson to be learned by including stories of this war.

Helaman 4:21–26

21 Yea, they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah; and they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God;

22 And that they had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people, insomuch that they were wicked even like unto the Lamanites.

23 And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face.

24 And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples—

25 Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness; and they saw that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous than they, and except they should cleave unto the Lord their God they must unavoidably perish.

26 For behold, they saw that the strength of the Lamanites was as great as their strength, even man for man. And thus had they fallen into this great transgression; yea, thus had they become weak, because of their transgression, in the space of not many years.

Comments

Mormon reiterates his moral from verses 11–13 of this chapter by noting that the Nephites were still too unrepentant to deserve further victories. They had fallen so far that they had lost almost all their lands, but their occasional repentance allowed for some to be regained. Nevertheless, their iniquities were such that “they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and . . . the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them.”

The covenant of the land had a positive promise, but it also had a curse if it was not upheld. Mormon declares that the Nephites, at that time, were still under that curse, even if they had some success regaining some of their lands.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 5

Helaman's Counsel to His Sons

Helaman 5:1–4

1 And it came to pass that in this same year, behold, Nephi delivered up the judgment-seat to a man whose name was Cezoram.

2 For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted.

3 Yea, and this was not all; they were a stiffnecked people, insomuch that they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction.

4 And it came to pass that Nephi had become weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days;

Comments

Nephi₂ began his rule in the fifty-third year of the Reign of the Judges (Helaman 3:37). He abdicated in the sixty-second year, ruling for only ten years. Perhaps he chose the year of his abdication to coincide with the second full five-year period of his reign.

In abdicating, he followed his great-grandfather Alma₂ in leaving the Chief Judge seat to concentrate on the ministry, and for the same reasons. Alma₂ had believed that returning the people to God's commandments would restore them to Yahweh's protection and prosperity. Nephi₂ appears to believe he might have the same experience.

The difference is that in these years there appears to have been an even larger number of the Nephites who had left their covenants to Yahweh behind. Thus, verse 2 proclaims: "For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted." That is the formula for contention and destruction.

Helaman 5:5–7

5 For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them. And these are the words which he spake:

6 Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

7 Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.

Comments

It would not be surprising to learn that many Nephite fathers gave their sons final blessings. We have Lehi₁'s blessings as Nephi₁ recorded them on the small plates, and we have Alma₂ and his grandson, Helaman₂, also giving final blessings. It was probably a general practice, but either additional blessings were not recorded, or Mormon only chose to record those from Alma₂ and Helaman₂.

Helaman₂ begins much as Alma₂ did in the chapters dedicated to the blessings that he gave his three sons. Helaman₂ desired “that [they] should remember to keep the commandments of God.” Doing so would invoke the positive promise of the land.

Also similar to Alma₂'s blessings, Helaman₂ asks his sons to remember their ancestral fathers. Alma₂ specifically spoke of the deliverance of the fathers from captivity, but Helaman₂ only mentions Jerusalem. That was, however, one of the examples of deliverance Alma₂ had used.

Helaman₂ has another reason for bringing up the ancestral fathers, however. Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ left Jerusalem, and Helaman₂ named his sons for those two illustrious ancestors. Therefore, he encourages them to live up to their names: “that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.”

Helaman 5:8–9

8 And now my sons, behold I have somewhat more to desire of you, which desire is, that ye may not do these things that ye may boast, but that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers.

9 O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world.

Comments

In verse 6 of this chapter, Helaman₂ held up the founding fathers, Lehi₁ and Nephi₁, as examples, specifically, examples about whom it had been written in the Nephite records: “when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.” He picks up on the theme of those about whom good has been written. He turns from Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ in the beginning and moves through time to invoke words which King Benjamin had spoken, and, of course, which had been written. Helaman₂ uses Benjamin to comment to his sons the understanding that the coming Messiah would provide redemption from sin.

Helaman 5:10–11

10 And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

11 And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.

Comments

After quoting King Benjamin, Helaman₂ invokes Amulek’s sermon to Zeezrom in Ammonihah. While the coming Messiah would redeem humankind from sin, the redemption is from sin upon conditions of repentance, for humanity cannot be saved while in unrepentant sin.

Helaman₂ had been the record keeper, as his father had been. He not only kept the record, he had clearly read it and learned from it. Although the Nephites only used the word *scripture* to refer to the plates of brass, Helaman₂, nevertheless, considered the more religious parts of the record as scripture. In the case of Amulek and Zeezrom, Helaman₂ had also read the separate account that Alma₂, his grandfather, had kept. Perhaps the fact that it was written by his grandfather made it even more important that he read and understand it.

Helaman 5:12–13

12 And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because

of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

13 And it came to pass that these were the words which Helaman taught to his sons; yea, he did teach them many things which are not written, and also many things which are written.

Comments

Mormon did not include all that Helaman₂ said to his sons (see verse 13). What he did include allows Mormon's readers to understand the desires Helaman₂ had when he named his sons Nephi and Lehi. It also gave Mormon the opportunity to provide yet another strong testimony of the Messiah, as well as a brief recapitulation of his redemptive mission.

The imagery that Helaman₂ used is interesting: "The devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you." In order for the images to have any kind of impact, they must have been natural occurrences that were known, and known to be destructive. As John L. Sorenson has pointed out, those conditions, both whirlwinds and hail, are known from the Mesoamerican region where many believe the Book of Mormon took place.

Nephi and Lehi Go Forth to Preach

Helaman 5:14–16

14 And they did remember his words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God, to teach the word of God among all the people of Nephi, beginning at the city Bountiful;

15 And from thenceforth to the city of Gid; and from the city of Gid to the city of Mulek;

16 And even from one city to another, until they had gone forth among all the people of Nephi who were in the land southward; and from thence into the land of Zarahemla, among the Lamanites.

Comments

When Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ begin their missionary journey, they begin in Bountiful, and then head south. Although Mormon had told us that the Nephites had lost most of their territory, his readers had to remember that this would have included the loss of what had previously been their capital city. Verse 16 drives that home when we learn that Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ enter "the land of Zarahemla, among the Lamanites." In the interim, Bountiful may have, at least temporarily, been established as the new center city.

Even though the recapture of Zarahemla appears to make it again the seat of the Nephites prior to Christ's birth, when the destruction comes at Christ's death, the risen Lord appears in Bountiful. And Zarahemla takes fire (3 Nephi 9:3). The function of the seat of government appears to move north, most likely to Bountiful, after that time.

Helaman 5:17–19

17 And it came to pass that they did preach with great power, insomuch that they did confound many of those dissenters who had gone over from the Nephites, insomuch that they came forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to the Nephites to endeavor to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done.

18 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did preach unto the Lamanites with such great power and authority, for they had power and authority given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them—

19 Therefore they did speak unto the great astonishment of the Lamanites, to the convincing them, insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers.

Comments

The two sons of Helaman₂ follow in the footsteps of the four sons of Mosiah₂, their great-grandfather. They go preaching, eventually preaching to Lamanites.

Nephi and Lehi Miraculously Saved in Prison

Helaman 5:20–22

20 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did proceed from thence to go to the land of Nephi.

21 And it came to pass that they were taken by an army of the Lamanites and cast into prison; yea, even in that same prison in which Ammon and his brethren were cast by the servants of Limhi.

22 And after they had been cast into prison many days without food, behold, they went forth into the prison to take them that they might slay them.

Comments

Again, in parallel to the sons of Mosiah₂, Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ enter the Lamanite lands and are imprisoned (as were three of Mosiah₂'s sons in the land of Middoni). As were those sons of Mosiah₂, Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ are not treated well in prison.

Secular records from the Maya suggest that the mistreatment of captives was common and to be expected. Of course, that might also be said of so many other ancient cultures that even though it fits in that context, it isn't exclusive to that time and place.

Helaman 5:23–26

23 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire, even insomuch that they durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned. Nevertheless, Nephi and Lehi were not burned; and they were as standing in the midst of fire and were not burned.

24 And when they saw that they were encircled about with a pillar of fire, and that it burned them not, their hearts did take courage.

25 For they saw that the Lamanites durst not lay their hands upon them; neither durst they come near unto them, but stood as if they were struck dumb with amazement.

26 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did stand forth and began to speak unto them, saying: Fear not, for behold, it is God that has shown unto you this marvelous thing, in the which is shown unto you that ye cannot lay your hands on us to slay us.

Comments

This event recalls the story in Daniel 3, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are thrown into a fire, and are seen unharmed with an angel in the conflagration. The similarities are superficial, for the point of the story in Daniel is that it was a real fire. In this story, it is a visible manifestation that appeared “as if by fire.” In Daniel, the three were thrown into the fire to be executed. In this story, the appearance of the fire prevents those who came to execute Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ from carrying out their purposes.

In both cases, of course, the deliverance was obviously perceived as a miracle, and led to freedom.

Helaman 5:27–28

27 And behold, when they had said these words, the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth; but behold, they did not fall. And behold, they that were in the prison were Lamanites and Nephites who were dissenters.

28 And it came to pass that they were overshadowed with a cloud of darkness, and an awful solemn fear came upon them.

Comments

The shaking of the earth is not described as though it were a miracle as was the vision of the fire around Nephi₂ and Lehi₃. Assuming a Mesoamerican setting, this was perhaps an earthquake related to the eruption of a nearby volcano. That region is part of a geological region known as the Ring of Fire, a string of active volcanoes. There are several volcanoes in that region.

Being overcome with a cloud of darkness might have been the result of the walls falling down, or of the ejecta from the volcano. In any case, this verse is the start of several more that give a preview of the greater destruction to come prior to Christ’s arrival in the New World.

Helaman 5:29–33

29 And it came to pass that there came a voice as if it were above the cloud of darkness, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings.

30 And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul—

31 And notwithstanding the mildness of the voice, behold the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison trembled again, as if it were about to tumble to the earth; and behold the cloud of darkness, which had overshadowed them, did not disperse—

32 And behold the voice came again, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants. And it came to pass that the earth shook again, and the walls trembled.

33 And also again the third time the voice came, and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man; and the walls did tremble again, and the earth shook as if it were about to divide asunder.

Comments

This is narrative that Mormon is writing, rather than a text he is copying. Therefore, when we see the parallels to the great destruction in 3 Nephi, we must understand that the parallels are intentional. Mormon is setting up these conditions as preludes to both a miracle and to the declaration of a prophet, or of God coming to earth in 3 Nephi.

Most important is the voice from heaven, speaking after the cloud of darkness and the destruction. Mormon spends several sentences on this part of the event, making certain that his readers would be able to associate this miraculous event with the one that is coming in 3 Nephi.

Many Lamanites Are Converted

Helaman 5:34–37

34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites could not flee because of the cloud of darkness which did overshadow them; yea, and also they were immovable because of the fear which did come upon them.

35 Now there was one among them who was a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them.

36 And it came to pass that he turned him about, and behold, he saw through the cloud of darkness the faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels. And he beheld that they did lift their eyes to heaven; and they were in the attitude as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld.

37 And it came to pass that this man did cry unto the multitude, that they might turn and look. And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look; and they did behold the faces of Nephi and Lehi.

Comments

Even though the event is written to highlight parallels to the destruction in 3 Nephi, it is a different event. What occurs now is more similar to the story of the Lamanitish woman Abish (Alma 19:16). Similar to that event, there is “a Nephite by birth” who understands this event as symbolism understandable in the Nephite religion. He therefore convinces the Lamanites to look upon Nephi₂ and Lehi₃, and to understand that a miracle had taken place, a miracle that should be understood in connection with the Nephite religion.

Helaman 5:38–41

38 And they said unto the man: Behold, what do all these things mean, and who is it with whom these men do converse?

39 Now the man’s name was Aminadab. And Aminadab said unto them: They do converse with the angels of God.

40 And it came to pass that the Lamanites said unto him: What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?

41 And Aminadab said unto them: You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.

Comments

Aminadab is the man who had been born a Nephite, and who clearly remembered what he had been taught of the Nephite religion. Seeing the destruction around them, and the miraculous preservation of Nephi₂ and Lehi₃, the Lamanites ask how they might survive this calamity. When they ask “what shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us,” Mormon provides a phrase with two meanings. One would be salvation from the physical conditions that led to the destruction of the walls and the physical cloud of darkness. However, there is the second meaning: they have been under a cloud of darkness because they knew not God.

Thus, Aminadab tells them that the solution is to have faith in Christ. There is no teaching at this time, and Aminadab simply assumes that they know of Christ, and that there were some there who had heard Alma₂, Amulek, and Zeezrom preach of Him. This suggests that many of those present were apostate Nephites, even though they were in Lamanite lands.

Helaman 5:42–45

42 And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed.

43 And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire.

44 And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

45 And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words.

Comments

The events they had witnessed were apparently sufficient to show them that they required a change of heart. Their desire to have the cloud of darkness removed from them was not simply temporal salvation, but a very real spiritual salvation. Their repentance is sufficient that the cloud disperses. That the cloud represented spiritual darkness is witnessed by its being replaced with the vision of a flaming fire of glory around them. Their repentance was confirmed by the Holy Spirit of God.

Helaman 5:46–49

46 And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying:

47 Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.

48 And now, when they heard this they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them.

49 And there were about three hundred souls who saw and heard these things; and they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt.

Comments

In addition to the Spirit descending, the voice of God also comes to them to confirm their conversion and acceptance of the coming Messiah. Angels descended, and the whole event was such a powerful experience that “about three hundred souls” were converted.

Helaman 5:50–52

50 And it came to pass that they did go forth, and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen, insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received.

51 And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers.

52 And it came to pass that they did yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession.

Comments

One of the hallmarks of a true Lamanite conversion during this decade or more has been that those who had been Lamanites and underwent the change of heart and soul to accept the gospel, also laid down their weapons.

Mormon writes the ending of this story as though the Lamanites gave up all their lands to the Nephites. That was certainly not the case. Even though the event takes place in Lamanite lands, it appears to involve apostate, or perhaps conquered, Nephites. Therefore, what the Lamanites gave up was probably the land of Zarahemla.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 6

Helaman 6:1–3

1 And it came to pass that when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges had ended, all these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.

2 For behold, there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them.

3 Nevertheless, the people of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites, yea, because of the church of God, which had been established among them. And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy.

Comments

Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ have tremendous success among the Lamanites, perhaps paralleling, or even exceeding, the successes of the sons of Mosiah₂. Along with the historical information, Mormon includes this story because it is one of his themes that the Lamanites are capable of coming to the true faith. Where the picture of the Lamanites on the small plates is almost always negative, Mormon makes certain to include converted Lamanites—not infrequently with the idea that “their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites.” Because Mormon was writing at the end of the Nephite nation, his hope for the reestablishment of the covenants of Israel among Lehi₁’s descendants lay with the Lamanites. Mormon does repeat the standard ethnocentric pejoratives associated with the Lamanites, but he also makes certain to include stories of Lamanite conversions.

The contrast between verses 1 and 2 with verse 3 is also a typical literary device. In verses 1 and 2, Mormon praises the Lamanites and, specifically in verse 2, declares that “there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked.” That paints a very dim picture of some of the Nephites. However, he contrasts that with verse 3, where he notes that, “nevertheless, the people of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites.”

Mormon makes a distinction between the people of the Nephites and the people of the church. This is more than part of a literary device. It is a continued underlining of the social, religious, and political divisions among the people of the Nephites. Those divisions have frequently festered into dissention.

Nephi, Lehi, and the Lamanites Go into the Land Northward

Helaman 6:4–6

4 And it came to pass that many of the Lamanites did come down into the land of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance.

5 Yea, and many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority, unto the bringing down many of them into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God and the Lamb.

6 And it came to pass that many of the Lamanites did go into the land northward; and also Nephi and Lehi went into the land northward, to preach unto the people. And thus ended the sixty and third year.

Comments

Even though Mormon has drawn parallels to the mission of the sons of Mosiah₂ and the sons of Helaman₂, there is a major difference. The Lamanites have become sufficiently righteous that they send missionaries to the Nephites! This is an important development for two reasons. First, it shows that the Lamanites have truly become more righteous than the Nephites. Second, it sets the stage for the appearance of Samuel the Lamanite later in the book of Helaman. Mormon sets his readers up for that later inclusion by noting that he wasn't the only righteous one, and that there was sufficient righteousness among the converted Lamanites that they would be able to send a prophet to go among the Nephites.

Verse 6 has Mormon continuing his emphasis on the lands northward. There are righteous Lamanites who go north, and Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ also go north. Mormon will briefly tell of that mission later.

Peace Prevails throughout the Land

Helaman 6:7–9

7 And behold, there was peace in all the land, insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites.

8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did also go whithersoever they would, whether it were among the Lamanites or among the Nephites; and thus they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire.

9 And it came to pass that they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites; and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, both in the land south and in the land north.

Comments

From a historical perspective, this appears to be a time of not only peace, but of long-distance travel, which was typically for trade. Verses 8 and 9 confirm the trade aspects of this travel. The ability to increase wealth above and beyond what is basically available to most members of a community come through trade with others. In this case, there is a trade established that connects the south and the north, or the Lamanites and the people of the north.

The value of that long-distance trade route with the north appears at the same time as the beginnings of the movement of populations into Teotihuacan in the valley of Mexico. That trade connection will become a very important part of the end of story of the Nephites and may be the reason that Mormon adds it here. He is preparing his readers for the rest of the Nephite story. Even though we have the remainder of the book of Helaman to go, as well as 3 Nephi, those two books do not cover a significant amount of time. Most of 3 Nephi covers 3 days. Therefore, Mormon is preparing his readers for the aftermath that will lead up to the final destruction.

He is also setting up the events prior to the coming of the Savior as a precursor parallel to the later events. Before the Savior comes, Mormon will have the Gadiantons be the cause of the destruction of the Nephite government, and therefore, the Nephites as a people. That will also be the story in his own eponymous book.

Helaman 6:10

10 Now the land south was called Lehi, and the land north was called Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah; for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south.

Comments

Verse 10 provides some geographical information, but information which is dissimilar to previous discussions of geography. There is still a land south and a land north. There is still Zarahemla in the center. What has shifted is perspective. Mormon gives us no way to know why he calls the land to the south the land of Lehi as opposed to the land of Nephi. Perhaps the previous designations were always to the city of Nephi and the surrounding lands. Perhaps the greater land, now inhabited by righteous Lamanites, is to be included in the sacred geography. In that case, the label “land of Lehi” would be used to include the Lamanite lands. The point of verses 1 through 9 of this chapter has been to include the Lamanites along with the Nephites in mutual prosperity.

The land to the north is Mulek, which makes a distinction between the land of the Jaredites and the original land of the Mulekites. Since both are in the north, both will likely have some negative associations, and Mormon appears to suggest that it is the descendants of the Mulekites who often foment dissent among the Nephites, desiring for a change in religion and a return to monarchy. Since the implication of this geography is positive, it is also likely that the land of Mulek is included in the north so that it can have a more positive connotation than the desolation of the Jaredites.

Helaman 6:11–14

11 And behold, there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind; and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become rich.

12 They did raise grain in abundance, both in the north and in the south; and they did flourish exceedingly, both in the north and in the south. And they did multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land. And they did raise many flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings.

13 Behold their women did toil and spin, and did make all manner of cloth, of fine-twined linen and cloth of every kind, to clothe their nakedness. And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in peace.

14 And in the sixty and fifth year they did also have great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies concerning that which was to come. And thus passed away the sixty and fifth year.

Comments

So many of Mormon's lessons are set up according to a time of righteousness that leads to pride, and that leads to dissensions and to wars. Their prosperity at this time will also lead to problems. What is slightly different about this description of their prosperity is that Mormon spends more time noting that there were more riches, and more crops, flocks and herds. There is great prosperity, both in their living standard and in the things that are useful in trade. Mormon's references to the north will become more important. He begins now to tell a story about the eventual destruction of the Nephite government and way of life due to the influence of the Gadiantons.

Mormon had introduced the Gadiantons early in the book of Helaman, and then had them disappear. After that point, Mormon began to write more about the north than he ever had. He will see the Gadiantons being associated with the north. This prosperity that comes with the greater trade with the north will also increase the numbers of Gadiantons in the Nephite lands.

Gadianton Robbers Rise to Power

Helaman 6:15–16

15 And it came to pass that in the sixty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, behold, Cezoram was murdered by an unknown hand as he sat upon the judgment-seat. And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been appointed by the people in his stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year.

16 And in the commencement of the sixty and seventh year the people began to grow exceedingly wicked again.

Comments

The book of Helaman began with the assassination of a sitting Chief Judge, and an attempt on Helaman². Now we have two more assassinations. Without specifically declaring that the Gadiantons were involved, Mormon expects that his readers will see the parallels and draw the conclusion. Further setting the stage for the Gadiantons is that, in the sixty-seventh year, “the people began to grow exceedingly wicked again.”

Helaman 6:17–19

17 For behold, the Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; therefore they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain.

18 And now behold, those murderers and plunderers were a band who had been formed by Kishkumen and Gadianton. And now it had come to pass that there were many, even among the Nephites, of Gadianton’s band. But behold, they were more numerous among the more wicked part of the Lamanites. And they were called Gadianton’s robbers and murderers.

19 And it was they who did murder the chief judge Cezoram, and his son, while in the judgment-seat; and behold, they were not found.

Comments

As should have been understood, Mormon expressly declares that the Gadiantons are behind the murders. The increase in wickedness has come directly on the heels of the “riches of the world.” Mormon spent time noting the increase of trade, specifically with the north. Now, the Gadiantons are here. The connections between the Gadiantons and the north will continue to be made through Mormon’s coming text.

As the Gadiantons had done before, they achieve their goals through secret murder rather than through the voice of the people. Thus, they move to make a change in the Nephite government by murdering Cezoram and his son. That removed two sitting Chief Judges, and likely threw the question of succession open to their own desires.

Helaman 6:20–21

20 And now it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that there were robbers among them they were exceedingly sorrowful; and they did use every means in their power to destroy them off the face of the earth.

21 But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.

Comments

The contrast between the Lamanite and Nephite response to the presence of the Gadiantons is significant. Mormon is foreshadowing a time when the Nephites would be so much more wicked than the Lamanites that the Nephites would be destroyed while the Lamanites survived. The conditions will be a bit different in the end, because it will be a combination of Lamanites and Gadiantons that will destroy the Nephite nations (which Mormon foretold in Helaman 2:13).

Verse 21 reprises the nature of these Gadiantons. They have secret oaths to protect one another. They desire to gain power and prestige through “their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.” They are out to undermine other societies and peoples for their own gain.

Helaman 6:22–24

22 And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this covenant.

23 And thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God.

24 And whosoever of those who belonged to their band should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkumen.

Comments

The secret signs and words allow the Gadiantons to come in among another people and operate for their own interests without visibly being the cause of the disruption. They could appear to be a peaceful part of society while advocating and instigating major changes.

Even though Mormon will point to the north as their political connection, he continues his theme of noting that the worst enemies of the Nephites are apostate Nephites. These are more insidious than those he has previously mentioned, precisely because they hide their intentions.

The statement in verse 23, that they did their wickedness “contrary to the laws of their country and also to the laws of their God” speaks of the effects upon the Nephites. In verse 31 of this chapter, we will see Mormon’s suggestion that the Gadiantons are from a very different religious tradition.

Helaman 6:25–27

25 Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction.

26 Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit—

27 Yea, that same being who did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth.

Comments

Mormon has had to point to the Gadiantons as the ultimate destroyers of the Nephite nation (Helaman 2:13), even though they disappear after they are first introduced. Mormon makes certain that his readers know that these new Gadiantons follow the same secret oaths and covenants as the first band, but that these Gadiantons may not have been connected directly to the first. This is not a continuation of the same people, but of the same ideas. This is a continuation of the oaths and covenants that Alma₂ wanted Helaman₁ to keep from the Nephite people.

Mormon makes certain that we know that Helaman₁ was not the one to blame. In fact, it was no human who is to blame, but rather Satan, “that same being who did plot with Cain.”

Helaman 6:28–30

28 And also it is that same being who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who led on the people who came from

that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land, until he dragged the people down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell.

29 Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.

30 And behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men.

Comments

As Mormon builds his case against the Gadiantons, he ties them directly to Satan, who is the opposite of, and opposer to, God. Mormon also makes certain to link the Gadiantons, through Satan, to “the people who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land.” Mormon explicitly ties the Gadiantons to the Jaredites. Mormon uses the Jaredites as the example of a destroyed nation. The Gadiantons are connected to them, and thus the Gadiantons bring Jaredite-type destruction upon the Nephites.

Helaman 6:31–33

31 And now behold, he had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites; yea, insomuch that they had become exceedingly wicked; yea, the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness, and did trample under their feet the commandments of God, and did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver.

32 And it came to pass that all these iniquities did come unto them in the space of not many years, insomuch that a more part of it had come unto them in the sixty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

33 And they did grow in their iniquities in the sixty and eighth year also, to the great sorrow and lamentation of the righteous.

Comments

The effect of the Gadiantons among the Nephites is to turn them away from their God, and therefore, away from keeping God’s commandments. Of course, that will invoke the negative part of the promise of the land. If the Nephites do not keep their part of the covenant, God will not protect them in the land.

Specifically, verse 31 tells us that the Gadiantons changed the Nephites, “and [they] did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver.” The idea of having idols must have come from somewhere. It is certainly not a Nephite idea and hasn’t been present (at least as

Mormon tells it) among the Nephites for a very long time. Thus, Mormon is suggesting that these Gadiantons are bringing in foreign ideas, and foreign gods, to the Nephites. The prosperity that came with the trade also brought an exchange of ideas, as happens in almost all human cultures. In this case, many Nephites begin to adopt the ideas, and the religion, of these northern traders. Not only does Mormon associate the Gadiantons with the north, but he also associates them with non-Nephite culture.

Helaman 6:34–36

34 And thus we see that the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him.

35 And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts.

36 And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words.

Comments

The influx of Gadiantons and their foreign ideas and gods causes the Nephites “to dwindle in unbelief.” That phrase, “dwindle in unbelief” is used several times in the Book of Mormon. In the book of 1 Nephi, it is typically in the context of the predictions of the future of the children of Lehi, and in particular, the destruction of the Nephites. Thus, when these Nephites “begin to dwindle in unbelief,” we may be certain that something bad is coming. Indeed, there will be a complete destruction of the Nephite government prior to the arrival of the Savior in Bountiful.

There is a contrast, however. There are righteous Lamanites. The blessings of the Lord are not exclusive to Nephites. Any who obey the covenants has access to the covenant promise of the land.

Helaman 6:37–38

37 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.

38 And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations.

Comments

How is it possible that with a thousand years of being God’s favored people in the New World, could the tables be turned, and the Nephites destroyed, while the Lamanites, supposedly more wicked, should remain? Mormon answers such a possible question by showing that it had happened before. When the Nephites became so wicked that they embraced the Gadiantons, the Lamanites had become so righteous that they hunted them, and the Gadiantons were “utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.”

This reversal of expectations will lead to the destruction of the Nephite nation, which will have to be rebuilt after Christ comes. At this point, however, it is important to know that there are righteous Lamanites who will be able to send Samuel among the Nephites in Helaman chapters 13 through 15.

Helaman 6:39–41

39 And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God.

40 And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction.

41 And it came to pass that thus ended the sixty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Verse 41 closes the chapter with the declaration of the year. Verse 39 describes the problem, that the unrighteous, Gadianton-influenced Nephites “did obtain the sole management of the government,” and that, therefore, the Nephites were “ripening for an everlasting destruction.”

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 7

Nephi Prophecies upon His Tower

Helaman: Header

The Prophecy of Nephi, the Son of Helaman—God threatens the people of Nephi that he will visit them in his anger, to their utter destruction except they repent of their wickedness. God smiteth the people of Nephi with pestilence; they repent and turn unto him. Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites.

Comments

In addition to the headers at the beginnings of named books, Mormon will at times add a header for a chapter. These chapter headers typically reference a source that is not the large plates from which Mormon is taking most of his record. We saw several of these in the book of Alma, where Mormon was using a separate, personal record that Alma₂ had created.

There are two unusual features in this chapter header. The first is that it appears to be given a name: “The Prophecy of Nephi, the Son of Helaman.” The second is that it includes a reference to the record of Samuel the Lamanite, whose prophecy will have its own chapter header (before Helaman 13). In the case of the prophecy of Samuel, it may indicate that it was recorded on Nephi₂’s personal record rather than the large plates, and that Nephi₂ gave it that header. However, it still could be Mormon because he gives chapter headers to the records of the sons of Mosiah₂, whose records appear to have been copied into Alma₂’s personal record.

It is also possible that the interpretation of “The Prophecy of Nephi” as a title is simply a misunderstanding by the compositor. There is a prophecy that is important, but the whole of this record cannot be considered a prophecy. Therefore, it is best to see “the Prophecy of Nephi” as simply one of the descriptions of the contents rather than a title.

Helaman 7:1–3

¹ Behold, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward.

2 For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward, and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them;

3 And they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity.

Comments

Nephi₂ and his brother, Lehi₃, had had great success preaching to previously apostate Nephites, and then to the Lamanites themselves. After those successes, they headed north. Now, Mormon tells us about that part of their missionary journey. It is brief, but important.

Verse 2 tells us that Nephi₂ went to the people in the north and did what he had previously done with success: he preached the word of God. Verse 3 tells us what we need to know about the people in the north: “They did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them.” Even a prophet so great as Nephi₂ could not soften the hearts of those in the north. Once again, Mormon prepares his readers for the eventual destruction of the Nephites that will come at the hands of the Gadiantons who are connected to these unrighteous northern lands.

Helaman 7:4–5

4 And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness, and those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats—having usurped the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men;

5 Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money; and moreover to be held in office at the head of government, to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world, and, moreover, that they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill, and do according to their own wills—

Comments

When Nephi₂ returns to his homeland, he finds that the Gadianton robbers have managed to take over the government. They are not believers in the Nephite religion and appear to have replaced it. The only thing Mormon says is that they have laid “aside the commandments of God.” In the ancient world it was extremely rare to not espouse some religion, and religion was the way ancient peoples defined reality. Thus, laying aside God’s commandments strongly suggests that they were replaced with some other god’s (or gods’) commandments.

In addition to taking over the religious beliefs, they have also overthrown the Nephite religious and political ideal of egalitarianism. There is support for hierarchy, and wealth becomes a means of exercising power. It cannot be known whether the statement that “they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill,” reflected their actions, or simply the antipathy that Mormon certainly feels towards them.

Helaman 7:6–9

6 Now this great iniquity had come upon the Nephites, in the space of not many years; and when Nephi saw it, his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast; and he did exclaim in the agony of his soul:

7 Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord—

8 Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren.

9 But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren.

Comments

Nephi₂ pours out his soul, declaring his agony at finding his nation so completely changed. He suggests that he wishes that he could have lived in different times, when everything was better. It is not uncommon that humankind have fond memories of times when things were good, or at least we believe they were. Thus, this Nephi₂ wishes that he were with Nephi₁ and his family as they came to the New World from Jerusalem. This, despite the intrafamilial conflicts that characterized those early days and the attempted fratricide that led to the division between the Nephites and Lamanites.

Nephi₂, as with most of us, see only the things we wish to see in the past.

Helaman 7:10–11

10 And behold, now it came to pass that it was upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market, which was in the city of Zarahemla; therefore, Nephi had bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden, which tower was also near unto the garden gate by which led the highway.

11 And it came to pass that there were certain men passing by and saw Nephi as he was pouring out his soul unto God upon the tower; and they ran and told the people what they had seen, and the people came together in multitudes that they might know the cause of so great mourning for the wickedness of the people.

Comments

The setting for Nephi₃'s lament is important, because it needs to be explained how he will attract a crowd. Thus, Mormon tells us a little about where he lived, something that is extremely unusual in the Book of Mormon. Mormon doesn't describe living spaces, presumably because he considered them so common as to not require explanation.

Nephi₃'s home is apparently somewhat different. He seems to live in a compound that has a fence around it, and some kind of raised tower in it. This general description does reflect what can be seen archaeologically in Mesoamerica, but only for the elite in the city center. This would not describe the typical dwelling place.

If it were a Mesoamerican home, the tower would have been a lower truncated pyramid which would be open on the top platform. This would be the reason that Nephi₂ could be seen, and heard, by those passing. The fact that it is on the road to the market also meant that many would pass. The road to the market would be one of the most heavily traveled roads.

Helaman 7:12–15

12 And now, when Nephi arose he beheld the multitudes of people who had gathered together.

13 And it came to pass that he opened his mouth and said unto them: Behold, why have ye gathered yourselves together? That I may tell you of your iniquities?

14 Yea, because I have got upon my tower that I might pour out my soul unto my God, because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities!

15 And because of my mourning and lamentation ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel; yea, and ye have great need to marvel; yea, ye ought to marvel because ye are given away that the devil has got so great hold upon your hearts.

Comments

Nephi₂ notices that he has attracted a crowd. Indeed, it is highly likely that this is exactly what he had hoped to do. He knew that the road to the market was heavily traveled, and he also knew that he could be heard on his tower. Had he not wanted to be heard, he could have offered a quieter lament somewhere farther from the public.

When he has their attention, he begins to instruct them. He takes the opportunity to tell them that they have rejected their God, that they have “given away that the devil has got so great hold upon [their] hearts.” Since one of the signs that the people had rejected Nephite values was the desire for wealth and status, the fact that the people were on the way to the market may have also placed Nephi₂ in a position to preach to those who needed to hear the message, whether or not they would actually hear it.

Helaman 7:16–20

16 Yea, how could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo?

17 O repent ye, repent ye! Why will ye die? Turn ye, turn ye unto the Lord your God. Why has he forsaken you?

18 It is because you have hardened your hearts; yea, ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd; yea, ye have provoked him to anger against you.

19 And behold, instead of gathering you, except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts.

20 O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you?

Comments

Nephi₂ calls the people to repentance. The promise of the land is that they would prosper, and be protected, if they kept God's commandment. They are not doing that, and therefore, he tells them: "Except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts." Of course, one of the problems with this call to repentance is that part of the promise was prosperity, and they appear to have prosperity under the Gadiantons; prosperity, but not equality.

When Alma₂ spoke to his sons, and then when Helaman₂ spoke to his sons (Nephi₂ and Lehi₃), the two prophets emphasized remembering the captivity of the fathers. Nephi₂ remembers it and attempts to remind those gathered that it has been their God who had delivered them in the past (see verse 20).

Helaman 7:21–22

21 But behold, it is to get gain, to be praised of men, yea, and that ye might get gold and silver. And ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity.

22 And for this cause wo shall come unto you except ye shall repent. For if ye will not repent, behold, this great city, and also all those great cities which are round about, which are in the land of our possession, shall be taken away that ye shall have no place in them; for behold, the Lord will not grant unto you strength, as he has hitherto done, to withstand against your enemies.

Comments

Nephi₂ comes to the issue of inequality. They have desired to "get gold and silver." That in and of itself is not the problem. Rather it is that "ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world." They desire them so much, that they are willing to reject their religious and political heritage to acquire them. When Mormon suggests that they are willing to "do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against [their] neighbor," he is listing traits that have, in other occasions, been associated with the Gadianton robbers. Nephi₂ is telling them that they have allowed the Gadianton's to take over and change Nephite religion and social structures because they have apparently brought

wealth and prosperity with them. Reading between the lines, this is the result of the trading networks that are being set up.

Nephi₂ also knows that this is a false prosperity, and that it will disappear when the Lord withdraws his protection. That is, in fact, exactly what will happen in the not too distant future.

Helaman 7:23–24

23 For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent.

24 For behold, they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent.

Comments

As early as Jacob, Nephi₁'s brother, the Lamanites had been used as the presumed opposite of the Nephites. In all things, both civil and religious righteousness, the Nephites were presumed to be superior.

This Nephi₂ echoes those same sentiments. The Nephites would naturally suppose themselves superior to the Lamanites, but Nephi₂ tells them “it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent. For behold, they are more righteous than you.” In Jacob’s case, it was an indication that the Nephites were so bad that even the Lamanites were considered better. Here, the Lamanites *are* better. This is the Nephi₂ who had preached to them, and converted them.

One of the things that Mormon shows is that when Lamanites are truly converted, they could become even more righteous and faithful than the Nephites. That is exactly what Nephi₂ is saying here. Invoking the promise of the land again, Nephi₂ tells those gathered that they will be destroyed if they do not repent.

Helaman 7:25–29

25 Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it, yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianon!

26 Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!

27 Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!

28 And except ye repent ye shall perish; yea, even your lands shall be taken from you, and ye shall be destroyed from off the face of the earth.

29 Behold now, I do not say that these things shall be, of myself, because it is not of myself that I know these things; but behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God has made them known unto me, therefore I testify that they shall be.

Comments

Nephi₂ names their greatest sin: “Ye have united yourselves . . . to that secret band which was established by Gadianton.” The Gadiantons have not only taken over the Nephite government, they have altered Nephite religion, and changed Nephite hearts away from their God. Nephi₂ declares that he is speaking in the name of God and declares that “except ye repent ye shall perish.”

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 8

The Gadiantons Stir Up the People against Nephi's Words

Helaman 8:1–4

1 And now it came to pass that when Nephi had said these words, behold, there were men who were judges, who also belonged to the secret band of Gadianton, and they were angry, and they cried out against him, saying unto the people: Why do ye not seize upon this man and bring him forth, that he may be condemned according to the crime which he has done?

2 Why seest thou this man, and hearest him revile against this people and against our law?

3 For behold, Nephi had spoken unto them concerning the corruptness of their law; yea, many things did Nephi speak which cannot be written; and nothing did he speak which was contrary to the commandments of God.

4 And those judges were angry with him because he spake plainly unto them concerning their secret works of darkness; nevertheless, they durst not lay their own hands upon him, for they feared the people lest they should cry out against them.

Comments

Mormon reminds us, in verse 1, that the Gadiantons had taken over the government. The Gadiantons who were passing by were judges. As judges, they were supposed to be caring for the enforcement of law, but apparently the Gadianton influence had changed some of the laws that had been instituted in Mosiah₂'s time.

Verse 4 confirms that, while the Gadiantons had increased in influence and power, there were still divisions among the people. Previously, the divisions had allowed the voice of the people to support the Nephite traditions. Now it appears that the voice of the people had shifted. Still, it was not unanimous. The judges feared to apprehend Nephi₂ “for they feared the people lest they should cry out against them.” There were still many who supported the traditional Nephite ideals.

Helaman 8:5–9

5 Therefore they did cry unto the people, saying: Why do you suffer this man to revile against us? For behold he doth condemn all this people, even unto destruction; yea, and also that these our great cities shall be taken from us, that we shall have no place in them.

6 And now we know that this is impossible, for behold, we are powerful, and our cities great, therefore our enemies can have no power over us.

7 And it came to pass that thus they did stir up the people to anger against Nephi, and raised contentions among them; for there were some who did cry out: Let this man alone, for he is a good man, and those things which he saith will surely come to pass except we repent;

8 Yea, behold, all the judgments will come upon us which he has testified unto us; for we know that he has testified aright unto us concerning our iniquities. And behold they are many, and he knoweth as well all things which shall befall us as he knoweth of our iniquities;

9 Yea, and behold, if he had not been a prophet he could not have testified concerning those things.

Comments

The division among the Nephite people is further put on display in this exchange. The Gadianton judges are in power because they had been able to sway the voice of the people. However, that voice had not been unanimous. In this occasion, they are confronted with a number of people who do not support the new government, but rather believe that Nephi₂ was a prophet.

Nephi₂ becomes a prophet to his people in the old tradition of prophets coming from outside the centers of power. For hundreds of years, the Nephites had been led by leaders who could often be seen as prophets due to the fact that they led the religious lives of the people. That was when the political and religious aspects of the community were more in concert.

Nephi₂ is now a prophet declaring the sins of the rulers. He is as Lehi₁ preaching to an unrepentant Jerusalem. Just as with the prophets in Jerusalem, Nephi₂ was surrounded by those who believed him, even though those in power preferred to silence his voice.

Verse 8 notes that Nephi₂ knows that “all the judgments will come upon us.” Although Mormon will tell the story of a particular prophecy, that isn’t the story the people are referencing here. Here, they are hearing the declaration that they are in danger of the negative aspect of the promise of the land. That is the particular prophetic call that Nephi₂ makes. They are to repent in order to avoid destruction. It is a parallel message to the one that Lehi₁ delivered to Jerusalem.

Nephi Reveals the Murder of the Chief Judge

Helaman 8:10–12

10 And it came to pass that those people who sought to destroy Nephi were compelled because of their fear, that they did not lay their hands on him; therefore he began again to speak unto them, seeing that he had gained favor in the eyes of some, insomuch that the remainder of them did fear.

11 Therefore he was constrained to speak more unto them saying: Behold, my brethren, have ye not read that God gave power unto one man, even Moses, to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea, and

they parted hither and thither, insomuch that the Israelites, who were our fathers, came through upon dry ground, and the waters closed upon the armies of the Egyptians and swallowed them up?
12 And now behold, if God gave unto this man such power, then why should ye dispute among yourselves, and say that he hath given unto me no power whereby I may know concerning the judgments that shall come upon you except ye repent?

Comments

Nephi₂ has enough support among those gathered that he can continue. He invokes Moses as an example of God giving power to one man. It is important to the context that Nephi₂ specifically uses the opening of a passage through the sea as his example. Out of all that Moses did, why that event? Why not Moses receiving the commandments on Sinai, if Nephi₂ were to speak of his prophetic calling?

The reason is thinly disguised, if at all. Moses led his people away from a government that, while rich, did not follow God's commandments. Nephi₂ is declaring that it is his purpose to similarly lead his people away from the rich, but religiously incorrect, Gadiantons who governed them.

In verse 12, he brings the story back to the firm Nephite base: the promise of the land. He may be declared a prophet, but he is only affirming the covenant that God made with Lehi.

Helaman 8:13–16

13 But, behold, ye not only deny my words, but ye also deny all the words which have been spoken by our fathers, and also the words which were spoken by this man, Moses, who had such great power given unto him, yea, the words which he hath spoken concerning the coming of the Messiah.

14 Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.

15 And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal.

16 And now behold, Moses did not only testify of these things, but also all the holy prophets, from his days even to the days of Abraham.

Comments

Mormon has not made it explicit until this point, but everything he has written about the way the Nephite apostasy has occurred in the past should have prepared us for these verses. We learn, explicitly, that one of the aspects of the changes in society under the Gadiantons is the rejection of the teaching of the coming Messiah.

Nephi₂ began with Moses's leading the children of Israel to freedom, implying that he desired to do the same with the Nephites under Gadianton rule. Now, he uses Moses again, but this time to declare that the prophets of old had preached of the Messiah. For this, he selects the raising of the serpent. The

pole with the brazen serpent was raised so that all might see it, and all needed only to look upon it to live. It was a simple thing, but one that many declined to do. Thus, declares Nephi₂, the understanding of the coming Messiah is taught and available, but many have rejected it.

Nephi₂ then transitions from Moses to the even older founder, Abraham.

Helaman 8:17–20

17 Yea, and behold, Abraham saw of his coming, and was filled with gladness and did rejoice.

18 Yea, and behold I say unto you, that Abraham not only knew of these things, but there were many before the days of Abraham who were called by the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son; and this that it should be shown unto the people, a great many thousand years before his coming, that even redemption should come unto them.

19 And now I would that ye should know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.

20 And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah, (Jeremiah being that same prophet who testified of the destruction of Jerusalem) and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah. O then why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy?

Comments

Nephi₂ recalls the original covenant with Abraham, the covenant that created the relationship between God and his people. From that very beginning, declares Nephi₂, Israel had been established through that covenant, and through the authority of those who received the priesthood from Yahweh. From that beginning covenant was the promise that God himself would come down to earth (an oft-repeated phrase in the Nephite records).

Beginning with Abraham, many prophets have afterward testified of the coming of the atoning Messiah. Nephi₂ returns to the idea of prophecy, and the imagery of the Nephite founding father, Lehi₁, preaching that Jerusalem would fall. Nephi₂ declares that they know that it fell, therefore, they should believe other words of prophecy. Specifically, they should believe that the Son of God will come.

Helaman 8:21–23

21 And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Mulek? Yea, and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem? But behold, this is not all—

22 Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem because he testified of these things. Nephi also testified of these things, and also almost all of our fathers, even down to this time; yea, they have testified of the coming of Christ, and have looked forward, and have rejoiced in his day which is to come.

23 And behold, he is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come.

Comments

Nephi₂'s argument about Jerusalem being destroyed is interesting and perhaps instructive about the people who descended from Mulek. When declaring that Jerusalem was destroyed, Nephi₂ does not refer to Lehi₁'s prophetic declaration that he had seen the destruction. He points to the sons of Zedekiah who were slain, all save Mulek. This is the first time in the Book of Mormon that we learn about Mulek as a person. Although the idea of being "sons" of the king might have referred to any in the court, the specific relationship is not the issue. Nephi₂ is suggesting that there is an inherited tradition among Mulek's descendants that they were still in the Old World when Jerusalem was destroyed. Thus, their testimony was of that accomplished fact, and not Lehi₁'s prophetic vision, which some might dismiss.

The next important aspect of this reference to Mulek is that it ties Old World prophecies of the coming of the atoning Messiah to Mulek. This was a politically astute move, as most of the Nephite contentions appear to have been along the dividing lines between the Nephites and the Mulekites. The desires for a different religion and a return to monarchy seem to be ascribed to descendants of Mulek. Nephi₂, therefore, uses that lineage to note that even they knew of the coming of the atoning Messiah.

Verse 23 restates the common Nephite theme that the atoning Messiah will be God come to earth: "He is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come." The phrase "that which is to come" refers to the coming atoning Messiah.

Helaman 8:24–28

24 And now, seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie, therefore in this ye have sinned, for ye have rejected all these things, notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received; yea, even ye have received all things, both things in heaven, and all things which are in the earth, as a witness that they are true.

25 But behold, ye have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment.

26 Yea, even at this time ye are ripening, because of your murders and your fornication and wickedness, for everlasting destruction; yea, and except ye repent it will come unto you soon.

27 Yea, behold it is now even at your doors; yea, go ye in unto the judgment-seat, and search; and behold, your judge is murdered, and he lieth in his blood; and he hath been murdered by his brother, who seeketh to sit in the judgment-seat.

28 And behold, they both belong to your secret band, whose author is Gadianton and the evil one who seeketh to destroy the souls of men.

Comments

The people had declared that Nephi₂ was a prophet (see verse 9 in this chapter). Their declaration saw him as a prophet declaring repentance, and so Nephi₂ declares repentance, boldly, and specifically. He tells the people that “ye have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God.” That surely called for repentance.

The prophetic declaration continues. He tells them that “even at this time ye are ripening . . . for everlasting destruction; yea, and except ye repent it will come unto you soon.” That is fully in keeping with the role of most Old Testament prophets.

However, Nephi₂ also knows that many of the Nephites no longer believe him simply because he declares what they should have known. When they stop believing in God’s truth, they would also stop believing in Nephi. Therefore, Nephi₂ is inspired to a more testable type of prophecy. He declares not only that the judge (presumably the Chief Judge) has been murdered, but he also declares that it was the judge’s brother who committed the murder. Finally, he lays the blame at the feet of the Gadiantons. That is what Gadiantons do. Mormon included the assassination of Cezoram at the beginning of the book of Helaman so we would understand that.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 9

Chief Judge Found Dead

Helaman 9:1–4

1 Behold, now it came to pass that when Nephi had spoken these words, certain men who were among them ran to the judgment-seat; yea, even there were five who went, and they said among themselves, as they went:

2 Behold, now we will know of a surety whether this man be a prophet and God hath commanded him to prophesy such marvelous things unto us. Behold, we do not believe that he hath; yea, we do not believe that he is a prophet; nevertheless, if this thing which he has said concerning the chief judge be true, that he be dead, then will we believe that the other words which he has spoken are true.

3 And it came to pass that they ran in their might, and came in unto the judgment-seat; and behold, the chief judge had fallen to the earth, and did lie in his blood.

4 And now behold, when they saw this they were astonished exceedingly, insomuch that they fell to the earth; for they had not believed the words which Nephi had spoken concerning the chief judge.

Comments

At the end of Helaman 8, Nephi₂ had prophesied that they would find that the Chief Judge had been murdered, and that his brother had killed him. That was a pretty specific and testable statement. It is unsurprising that many hurried to discover whether or not it was true. As it says in verse 2, “now we will know of a surety whether this man be a prophet of God.”

They do find the Chief Judge lying in his own blood, and therefore felt that they had received confirmation that Nephi₂ was a prophet, and, if he had been a prophet in this, he would be a prophet in the calamities he had prophesied, except they should repent.

Helaman 9:5–9

5 But now, when they saw they believed, and fear came upon them lest all the judgments which Nephi had spoken should come upon the people; therefore they did quake, and had fallen to the earth.

6 Now, immediately when the judge had been murdered—he being stabbed by his brother by a garb of secrecy, and he fled, and the servants ran and told the people, raising the cry of murder among them;
7 And behold the people did gather themselves together unto the place of the judgment-seat—and behold, to their astonishment they saw those five men who had fallen to the earth.

8 And now behold, the people knew nothing concerning the multitude who had gathered together at the garden of Nephi; therefore they said among themselves: These men are they who have murdered the judge, and God has smitten them that they could not flee from us.

9 And it came to pass that they laid hold on them, and bound them and cast them into prison. And there was a proclamation sent abroad that the judge was slain, and that the murderers had been taken and were cast into prison.

Comments

This is the beginning of a series of misunderstandings that represent very real possibilities of how such an event would have played out. The underlying cause of this, and the following, misunderstanding, is that the people doubted that there could be a prophet. They would have felt that the easiest explanation was more likely to be believed than the one that pointed to a true prophet of God.

Because the murder had taken place in secret, and recently, the first people on the scene were those who had heard of it from Nephi. Then, when others were made aware, they found people with the recently murdered Chief Judge. The easiest explanation of how they were first on the scene was that they had been the murderers. It wasn't true, but it was a logical first assumption.

Nephi Is Accused

Helaman 9:10–15

10 And it came to pass that on the morrow the people did assemble themselves together to mourn and to fast, at the burial of the great chief judge who had been slain.

11 And thus also those judges who were at the garden of Nephi, and heard his words, were also gathered together at the burial.

12 And it came to pass that they inquired among the people, saying: Where are the five who were sent to inquire concerning the chief judge whether he was dead? And they answered and said: Concerning this five whom ye say ye have sent, we know not; but there are five who are the murderers, whom we have cast into prison.

13 And it came to pass that the judges desired that they should be brought; and they were brought, and behold they were the five who were sent; and behold the judges inquired of them to know concerning the matter, and they told them all that they had done, saying:

14 We ran and came to the place of the judgment-seat, and when we saw all things even as Nephi had testified, we were astonished insomuch that we fell to the earth; and when we were recovered from our astonishment, behold they cast us into prison.

15 Now, as for the murder of this man, we know not who has done it; and only this much we know, we ran and came according as ye desired, and behold he was dead, according to the words of Nephi.

Comments

Those who had first gone to discover whether Nephi₂ had prophesied correctly had been thrown into prison. It is apparent that, at least at this time, there was no requirement for investigation prior to the incarceration of those that supposedly committed the murder.

As many people gathered for the Chief Judge's funeral, the others who had heard Nephi₂'s prophecy would have clearly understood that it had come true, and that would have reminded them that they didn't know where the original five were.

That questioning leads to the opportunity for the five to tell their tale to perhaps a more open trial rather than to just acquiesce to the presumptive conditions that had put them in jail. They testify that they had come to verify Nephi₂'s prophecy. That story would have clearly been verified by the larger number of people who had been there at the time. This exonerates the five but doesn't end the misunderstandings.

Helaman 9:16–19

16 And now it came to pass that the judges did expound the matter unto the people, and did cry out against Nephi, saying: Behold, we know that this Nephi must have agreed with some one to slay the judge, and then he might declare it unto us, that he might convert us unto his faith, that he might raise himself to be a great man, chosen of God, and a prophet.

17 And now behold, we will detect this man, and he shall confess his fault and make known unto us the true murderer of this judge.

18 And it came to pass that the five were liberated on the day of the burial. Nevertheless, they did rebuke the judges in the words which they had spoken against Nephi, and did contend with them one by one, insomuch that they did confound them.

19 Nevertheless, they caused that Nephi should be taken and bound and brought before the multitude, and they began to question him in divers ways that they might cross him, that they might accuse him to death—

Comments

The five were freed, as it was clear that they were innocent. However, the easiest explanation still could not conceive that Nephi₂ was a prophet. Therefore, his knowledge of the event had to have come from having participated in the event.

In addition to this prophecy of the murdered Chief Judge, Nephi₂ had dared to speak out openly against those powerful men who were in the government. He had accused them of leading the people away from God, and if he were to be declared a prophet, it would make it more difficult for those men to retain power. They were only too happy to bring Nephi₂ before the court.

Where the five had been tossed into prison, to be dealt with at a later time, Nephi₂ is brought forth immediately “that they might accuse him to death.” Standing convicted of murder would not only silence his voice but discredit him and therefore remove him as a threat to the Gadianton-led government.

Nephi Reveals the True Murderer

Helaman 9:20–22

20 Saying unto him: Thou art confederate; who is this man that hath done this murder? Now tell us, and acknowledge thy fault; saying, Behold here is money; and also we will grant unto thee thy life if thou wilt tell us, and acknowledge the agreement which thou hast made with him.

21 But Nephi said unto them: O ye fools, ye uncircumcised of heart, ye blind, and ye stiffnecked people, do ye know how long the Lord your God will suffer you that ye shall go on in this your way of sin?

22 O ye ought to begin to howl and mourn, because of the great destruction which at this time doth await you, except ye shall repent.

Comments

The accusers suggest that Nephi₂ might not have actually committed the murder, but that he was “confederate,” or a conspirator, with the person who did. They offer him the opportunity to escape execution and to receive money for his confession. There is no way to know if they were sincere in the offer. It would not have mattered. If Nephi₂ accepted, he would be publicly discredited, which would accomplish their goals of removing him as a threat.

Nephi₂ understood both that he was innocent, and that they, in their own way, were not. They were guilty of corrupt government, and Nephi₂ saw his public trial as an opportunity to begin to reverse the hold they had upon the people. Nephi₂ could show that they were corrupt, and that Nephi₂ was a true prophet of Yahweh. That could lead many people back to their traditional Nephite religion.

Helaman 9:23–35

23 Behold ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should murder Seezoram, our chief judge. But behold, I say unto you, that this is because I have testified unto you that ye might know concerning

this thing; yea, even for a witness unto you, that I did know of the wickedness and abominations which are among you.

24 And because I have done this, ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should do this thing; yea, because I showed unto you this sign ye are angry with me, and seek to destroy my life.

25 And now behold, I will show unto you another sign, and see if ye will in this thing seek to destroy me.

26 Behold I say unto you: Go to the house of Seantum, who is the brother of Seezoram, and say unto him—

27 Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, who doth prophesy so much evil concerning this people, agreed with thee, in the which ye have murdered Seezoram, who is your brother?

28 And behold, he shall say unto you, Nay.

29 And ye shall say unto him: Have ye murdered your brother?

30 And he shall stand with fear, and wist not what to say. And behold, he shall deny unto you; and he shall make as if he were astonished; nevertheless, he shall declare unto you that he is innocent.

31 But behold, ye shall examine him, and ye shall find blood upon the skirts of his cloak.

32 And when ye have seen this, ye shall say: From whence cometh this blood? Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?

33 And then shall he tremble, and shall look pale, even as if death had come upon him.

34 And then shall ye say: Because of this fear and this paleness which has come upon your face, behold, we know that thou art guilty.

35 And then shall greater fear come upon him; and then shall he confess unto you, and deny no more that he has done this murder.

Comments

Nephi₂ gives the people another opportunity to discover that he was a true prophet. Since he was accused of being a conspirator because he knew what he shouldn't have known, Nephi₂ offers a second prophecy. This is the important prophecy, signaled by the literary technique of couching it in the form of a conversation rather than a narrative. This particular narrative provides multiple points of proof that Nephi₂ had information that no one could know, for it predicted a future event. That future event would include a confession, which would remove the doubt from this prediction, for there was no way that Nephi₂ could have caused it, and the confession exonerated him from guilt.

Helaman 9:36–38

36 And then shall he say unto you, that I, Nephi, know nothing concerning the matter save it were given unto me by the power of God. And then shall ye know that I am an honest man, and that I am sent unto you from God.

37 And it came to pass that they went and did, even according as Nephi had said unto them. And behold, the words which he had said were true; for according to the words he did deny; and also according to the words he did confess.

38 And he was brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer, insomuch that the five were set at liberty, and also was Nephi.

Comments

As with the first prophecy, some go to verify this one. As Nephi₂ knew they would, they found everything as Nephi₂ had predicted. They had their confession. That confession made the case very clear, and both the five who had been accused, and also Nephi₂, were freed. There was no other choice.

Nephi Given the Sealing Power

Helaman 9:39–41

39 And there were some of the Nephites who believed on the words of Nephi; and there were some also, who believed because of the testimony of the five, for they had been converted while they were in prison.

40 And now there were some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet.

41 And there were others who said: Behold, he is a god, for except he was a god he could not know of all things. For behold, he has told us the thoughts of our hearts, and also has told us things; and even he has brought unto our knowledge the true murderer of our chief judge.

Comments

The events had a disruptive effect on what had become the religious norm of the people. They had moved away from the traditional Nephite religion, and Nephi₂'s prophecies allowed many to see that he was, indeed, a prophet. They were converted, or perhaps returned to their faith.

There were still others, however, that perhaps did not know the Nephite religion well. They were not immediately converted but couldn't help but notice that something miraculous had happened. Therefore, rather than understand Nephi₂ as a prophet, they wondered if he was a god. This suggestion is reminiscent of Ammon being brought before King Lamoni, where those Lamanites also thought that Ammon might be a god. They, also, did not have access to the traditional Nephite religion before that event, perhaps strengthening the case for foreigners among the Nephites.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 10

Helaman 10:1–3

1 And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them.

2 And it came to pass that Nephi went his way towards his own house, pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him.

3 And it came to pass as he was thus pondering—being much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, their secret works of darkness, and their murderings, and their plunderings, and all manner of iniquities—and it came to pass as he was thus pondering in his heart, behold, a voice came unto him saying:

Comments

In the original 1830 edition, there was no chapter break at this point. Indeed, verses 1 and 2 are the conclusion to the events of Nephi₂'s trial that occupied the ending of Helaman 9. The end of verse 2 and verse 3 are the transition into the next story that Mormon wants to tell.

At this point, the emotionally powerful and potentially deadly events of the trial are over, and Nephi₂ “went his way towards his own house.” He is then thinking about the previous events. In particular, he thinks about the “secret works of darkness, and . . . murderings, etc.” Those are phrases that Mormon uses to designate the Gadianton robbers, even when he doesn't use the name. Thus, Nephi₂ is pondering on those judges who had accused him, and the fact that the Gadiantons have so completely taken over the Nephite government, and much of the religious life.

Helaman 10:4–6

4 Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unweariness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

5 And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

6 Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.

Comments

The voice of the Lord comes to Nephi. The first declaration is a typical, yet important, beginning. Nephi₂ is told that he has done well. That is important, for it would be easy for Nephi₂ to feel that he had been a failure. He had remarkable success among the Lamanites, only to be ineffective in the north, and now unable to change his own people (who Mormon implies are affected by the north, or the north-connected-Gadiantons). Thus, the blessing would come as a comfort for a Nephi₂ who could easily have become discouraged.

Next comes the important statement: “Thou are Nephi, and I am God.” This sounds like so much truism that we could miss that the impact of the statement is an echo of Leviticus 26:12: “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.” Yahweh is reiterating that covenant with Nephi₂, in a very real, and very personal, sense.

The next reason for the declaration that it is Yahweh who is speaking is to declare that he has the power to control the earth. Yahweh can “smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.” More importantly, Yahweh grants that power to Nephi: “Ye shall have power over this people.” Nephi₂ is given the power to do the miracles that Yahweh himself would.

Helaman 10:7–10

7 Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people.

8 And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.

9 And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.

10 And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.

Comments

Yahweh grants Nephi₂ the power to command the elements and to have them obey. That is a fundamental definition of the power of God. Thus, he can “say unto this temple it shall be rent twain, it shall be done.

And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.” These are powers far beyond human capacity, but within the power of the God of the earth.

Verse 7 also speaks of sealing and loosening. Many might have authority to seal or loosen on earth. That depends only upon an authority granted by man. Nephi₂'s authority can extend beyond mortality, and he can seal or loose in heaven as well. Nephi₂ has the ability to tap into the powers of heaven.

Modern saints understand this sealing power in the context of ordinances that may be performed on earth but continue to have validity in the heavens. That is true doctrine but might not have been fully revealed to Nephi. The context of what Nephi₂ will seal is more part of nature. He will give the command to seal on earth, and the heavens will accomplish that command. Note that Yahweh tells Nephi: “If ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.” Nephi₂ can initiate and promise, but it is Yahweh who acts. Nephi₂ can say that a mountain should be cast down, but Yahweh will do it.

Helaman 10:11–14

11 And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction.

12 And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.

13 Now behold, notwithstanding that great miracle which Nephi had done in telling them concerning the death of the chief judge, they did harden their hearts and did not hearken unto the words of the Lord.

14 Therefore Nephi did declare unto them the word of the Lord, saying: Except ye repent, thus saith the Lord, ye shall be smitten even unto destruction.

Comments

Verses 11 and 14 bracket the middle verses with Yahweh's command that Nephi₂ declare that the people will be smitten unless they repent, and the actual declaration to the people by Nephi₂.

In between, Mormon tells us that Nephi₂ went out preaching, and “declare[d] unto them the word of the Lord, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.” In other words, he did just what the Lord told him to do. Verse 13 tells us that even though there had been a miracle to which many could attest, “they did harden their hearts.”

When verse 14 repeats the information that Nephi₂ declared the word of God to them, it was as a final declaration that the penalty was to be imposed. They had had an opportunity to repent and did not.

Helaman 10:15–19

15 And it came to pass that when Nephi had declared unto them the word, behold, they did still harden their hearts and would not hearken unto his words; therefore they did revile against him, and did seek to lay their hands upon him that they might cast him into prison.

16 But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them.

17 And it came to pass that thus he did go forth in the Spirit, from multitude to multitude, declaring the word of God, even until he had declared it unto them all, or sent it forth among all the people.

18 And it came to pass that they would not hearken unto his words; and there began to be contentions, insomuch that they were divided against themselves and began to slay one another with the sword.

19 And thus ended the seventy and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Another miracle occurs, and Nephi₂ cannot be thrown into prison. It still is not sufficient to change the hearts of the majority. There were, of course, some who did believe, and the contention between those two types of people led to violence: “[They] began to slay one another with the sword.” Rather than repent and return to prosperity, the people allow themselves to descend into a civil war.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Helaman 11

Nephi Seals the Rains and a Famine Ensues

Helaman 11:1–2

1 And now it came to pass in the seventy and second year of the reign of the judges that the contentions did increase, insomuch that there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi.

2 And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness. And this war did last all that year; and in the seventy and third year it did also last.

Comments

Even though Nephi² had spoken out against the Gadianton-led government and had provided rather dramatic proof that he could knowledgeably tell the future, the majority of the people did not believe his prophecy that they would be destroyed except they should repent. Thus, they continued doing as they had done.

As Mormon continues to develop this story, he continues to build his case that the Gadiantons were the harbingers of destruction. He does not overtly name them in verse 2, but there is no doubt that “this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction” were the Gadiantons.

Helaman 11:3–5

3 And it came to pass that in this year Nephi did cry unto the Lord, saying:

4 O Lord, do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword; but O Lord, rather let there be a famine in the land, to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto thee.

5 And so it was done, according to the words of Nephi. And there was a great famine upon the land, among all the people of Nephi. And thus in the seventy and fourth year the famine did continue, and the work of destruction did cease by the sword but became sore by famine.

Comments

At the end of Helaman 10, Nephi₂ is given authority to use Yahweh's power. He is told that what he sealed on earth would be sealed in heaven, that if he declared that something should be so, Yahweh, in heaven, would make it so. What Nephi₂ seals is a famine, and what likely caused the famine was sealing the rains.

In a Mesoamerican setting, there are two seasons, a rainy season and a dry season. The water that comes in the rainy season is the time of planting and the growing of crops. Droughts could become severe in many parts of Mesoamerica and have been suggested as a major cause of the fall of the Maya civilization. Thus, a drought would be desperate. It led to a lack of food, which, of course, defines a famine.

An interesting question would be why Nephi₂ chose a debilitating famine rather than an invasion. At times, warfare could also cause famine because crops might be trampled in the fields. The answer, or at least a possible answer, might lie in the idea that the Nephite government had been filled with Gadiantons. If they continued to have contact with the north, it is conceivable that they could call upon the north to aid in a Lamanite invasion, and thus increase the number of Gadiantons in the region.

Helaman 11:6–8

6 And this work of destruction did also continue in the seventy and fifth year. For the earth was smitten that it was dry, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain; and the whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites, so that they were smitten that they did perish by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land.

7 And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi.

8 And the people began to plead with their chief judges and their leaders, that they would say unto Nephi: Behold, we know that thou art a man of God, and therefore cry unto the Lord our God that he turn away from us this famine, lest all the words which thou hast spoken concerning our destruction be fulfilled.

Comments

The supposition that what Nephi₂ sealed was the rain from heaven is confirmed in verse 6: "The earth was smitten that it was dry." In the first year, when the drought began, there were probably already crops in the field and stores set aside. The yield might not have been as good, but the first year of a drought wouldn't have been serious. However, in the second year, the lack of food became critical. It was also a widespread drought, so that even trade could not bring in food, because the possible trading partners didn't have food either: "[T]he whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites."

Times of desperation awake more feelings of dependence upon God than do times of prosperity. These were times of desperation, and so the people began to ask Nephi₂ to pray for relief.

Nephi Unseals the Famine

Helaman 11:9–11

9 And it came to pass that the judges did say unto Nephi, according to the words which had been desired. And it came to pass that when Nephi saw that the people had repented and did humble themselves in sackcloth, he cried again unto the Lord, saying:

10 O Lord, behold this people repenteth; and they have swept away the band of Gadianton from amongst them insomuch that they have become extinct, and they have concealed their secret plans in the earth.

11 Now, O Lord, because of this their humility wilt thou turn away thine anger, and let thine anger be appeased in the destruction of those wicked men whom thou hast already destroyed.

Comments

The judges come to Nephi₂ to ask that he pray to have the famine end. It is important to note that verse 10 declares that they “have swept away the band of Gadianton.” At least symbolically, Mormon is telling his readers that it will be possible for the nation to repent because the destructive Gadiantons have been removed.

The Gadiantons appear and disappear throughout Mormon’s story, starting in the beginning of the book of Helaman. The first time they disappear, they come back, having learned their secret combinations from the devil himself. This time, however, they disappear, and bury their secrets in the earth. Mormon is never dealing with a perpetuation of the exact same band but is dealing with the designs of the band of robbers and their secret combinations.

Nephi₂ prays for restitution of the rains because the destroying Gadiantons have now been destroyed (verse 11).

Helaman 11:12–15

12 O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, yea, thy fierce anger, and cause that this famine may cease in this land.

13 O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain.

14 O Lord, thou didst hearken unto my words when I said, Let there be a famine, that the pestilence of the sword might cease; and I know that thou wilt, even at this time, hearken unto my words, for thou saidst that: If this people repent I will spare them.

15 Yea, O Lord, and thou seest that they have repented, because of the famine and the pestilence and destruction which has come unto them.

Comments

Even though Nephi₂ had been promised that what he would loose on earth would be loosed in heaven, Nephi₂ does not presume to command God. He makes requests. He understands that these things are done through God's power, and he maintains his humility, even though he has been given such a great promised.

Therefore, Nephi₂ asks. Nephi₂ notes that the people have repented, which was the purpose of the famine. It might have been a repentance of convenience, brought on by desperate times, but it at least put the people in a position where they were once again willing to listen to the word of the Lord.

Nephites Again Prosper

Helaman 11:16–20

16 And now, O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, and try again if they will serve thee? And if so, O Lord, thou canst bless them according to thy words which thou hast said.

17 And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain.

18 And behold, the people did rejoice and glorify God, and the whole face of the land was filled with rejoicing; and they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God.

19 And behold, Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness.

20 And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east.

Comments

Yahweh loosed the rains, and the famine eased. That was not in question, as Nephi₂ had been told that he could make that change solely upon asking. The release from famine had the obvious effect of generating great joy. We may suppose that there were many prayers to God for the rains to come. With the introduction of a different religion by the Gadiantons, it is possible that there were many prayers to a different god, or perhaps to many gods. Only Nephi₂'s prayer was effective. Therefore, the people "did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God."

Nephi₂ and his brother, Lehi₃, were both righteous. They had both been successful missionaries, and a successful end of the famine elevated both to a much more respected position. This presumes that the people also began to return to the commandments of the Lord, for "the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land." That was the result of obeying Yahweh's commandments.

Helaman 11:21–23

21 And it came to pass that the seventy and sixth year did end in peace. And the seventy and seventh year began in peace; and the church did spread throughout the face of all the land; and the more part of the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, did belong to the church; and they did have exceedingly great peace in the land; and thus ended the seventy and seventh year.

22 And also they had peace in the seventy and eighth year, save it were a few contentions concerning the points of doctrine which had been laid down by the prophets.

23 And in the seventy and ninth year there began to be much strife. But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, having many revelations daily, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year.

Comments

These verses highlight an important aspect of Mormon’s editing of the large plates. The first is that he follows the annalistic nature of the plates—that is, events are collected chronologically, year by year. The second is that Mormon’s interest is not in peacetime but in times of conflict. Mormon will note that things are going well, but he doesn’t describe them. The seventy-sixth year ended in peace. That is all we know of that year, even though it is certain that there were events recorded for the year on the large plates.

The seventy-seventh year “began in peace.” Good things happened, but Mormon warns that change is coming. There was peace in the seventy-eight year, except for “a few contentions.” In the seventy-ninth year, there “began to be much strife.” Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ were able to calm the strife. However, the incidents are simply listed, with no elaboration. There are no great speeches or sermons, no doctrinal expositions. There is only the general peace that is more often being interrupted by contentions.

Reemergence of the Gadianton Robbers

Helaman 11:24–26

24 And it came to pass that in the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were a certain number of the dissenters from the people of Nephi, who had some years before gone over unto the Lamanites, and taken upon themselves the name of Lamanites, and also a certain number who were real descendants of the Lamanites, being stirred up to anger by them, or by those dissenters, therefore they commenced a war with their brethren.

25 And they did commit murder and plunder; and then they would retreat back into the mountains, and into the wilderness and secret places, hiding themselves that they could not be discovered, receiving daily an addition to their numbers, inasmuch as there were dissenters that went forth unto them.

26 And thus in time, yea, even in the space of not many years, they became an exceedingly great band of robbers; and they did search out all the secret plans of Gadianton; and thus they became robbers of Gadianton.

Comments

Mormon's description of the passage of the years has been leading up to the eightieth year. In that year there is a significant change. Dissenting Nephites have gone to the Lamanites and stirred up trouble. This is not a new thing. It has happened multiple times, and Mormon has made it clear that the most devastating wars with the Lamanites came at the hands of dissenting Nephites.

What is different here is that Mormon attributes this new threat to "robbers of Gadianton." In Helaman 11:10, the secret plans of the previous Gadiantons had been buried. These new Gadiantons seek them out. The connection to other groups named Gadianton is through the ideas and methods they employ, not any direct connection among the groups.

In this case, the new apostate-driven Lamanite incursion begins as more of a guerilla-style warfare, or perhaps simply raids to acquire goods. As time passes, however, they become "an exceedingly great band of robbers," and then they become dangerous Gadiantons themselves.

Helaman 11:27–31

27 Now behold, these robbers did make great havoc, yea, even great destruction among the people of Nephi, and also among the people of the Lamanites.

28 And it came to pass that it was expedient that there should be a stop put to this work of destruction; therefore they sent an army of strong men into the wilderness and upon the mountains to search out this band of robbers, and to destroy them.

29 But behold, it came to pass that in that same year they were driven back even into their own lands. And thus ended the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

30 And it came to pass in the commencement of the eighty and first year they did go forth again against this band of robbers, and did destroy many; and they were also visited with much destruction.

31 And they were again obliged to return out of the wilderness and out of the mountains unto their own lands, because of the exceeding greatness of the numbers of those robbers who infested the mountains and the wilderness.

Comments

What Nephi₂ describes is not a full war, but rather skirmishes. The nature of the conflict is similar to guerilla warfare, where there is a skirmish, and then a retreat. The Gadiantons are established in strongholds in the wilderness and mountains of their own lands and use those lands as a base to raid Nephite holdings.

The Nephites meet them in battle and fight them back, but they do not fight until they are defeated or overly depleted, preferring instead to retreat to the wilderness and mountain strongholds, which are strong enough that the Nephites cannot conquer them.

Helaman 11:32–38

32 And it came to pass that thus ended this year. And the robbers did still increase and wax strong, insomuch that they did defy the whole armies of the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites; and they did cause great fear to come unto the people upon all the face of the land.

33 Yea, for they did visit many parts of the land, and did do great destruction unto them; yea, did kill many, and did carry away others captive into the wilderness, yea, and more especially their women and their children.

34 Now this great evil, which came unto the people because of their iniquity, did stir them up again in remembrance of the Lord their God.

35 And thus ended the eighty and first year of the reign of the judges.

36 And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God. And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity. And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways.

37 And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction.

38 And thus ended the eighty and fifth year.

Comments

Mormon moves quickly through the eighty-first through the eighty-fifth years. There is a continuation of tension with the Gadianton robbers, but there is also a change in the Nephite people. “And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God.” That statement can only lead to worse conditions to come.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. Indeed, all our current chapter 11 is setting up for the resolution of the conditions that Mormon has set us up to expect.

Helaman 12

Mormon Reflects upon Humankind's Corruption

Helaman 12:1

1 And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

Comments

All of Helaman 12 is Mormon's comment on the state of the Nephite people that he described at the end of Helaman 11. It is useful to remember two of the last verses:

And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God. And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity. And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways. And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction. (Helaman 11:36–37)

This “wax[ing] stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness,” came after Mormon's descriptions of the power of Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ as missionaries, and after the conversion of the Lamanites. It came after Nephi₂ had returned to a wicked and Gadianton-led Nephite government, and, particularly, after Nephi₂ miraculously, publicly, and accurately prophesies. It came after they had humbled themselves and Nephi₂ to ease the drought and famine, which was lifted only after Nephi₂ prayed.

After all those witnesses, they nevertheless began to return to ways that led them away from Yahweh's covenants rather than toward them. Although Mormon has been giving his readers a selected history, it was not a dispassionate task. These events might have been around four hundred years before his time, but he saw the same attitude of turning against God's signs among his own people, and writing about it stirred him.

This chapter has Mormon interjecting his own moralistic commentary on the sad faithfulness of the Nephites about whom he is writing.

Helaman 12:2

2 Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

Comments

More than once, Mormon has described what Hugh Nibley termed the “pride cycle” among the Nephites. They obey the commandments, and they therefore prosper because the promise of the land was that they will prosper if they keep the commandments. However, prosperity leads to other temptations. In their world, it put them in contact with other peoples and cultures, and the definitions of prosperity began to be seen in the context of what other people had or did.

Other cultures modeled how to display wealth, and the Nephites seemed to follow. Other cultures displayed how to establish social hierarchies, and the Nephites followed. Mormon never condemns prosperity. He condemns things that become associated with it, such as neglecting the poor and thinking that one person might be better than another. Those were the issues that destroyed the Nephite ideal society.

Note that in verse 2 Mormon suggests how prosperity should have been defined. It is desirable but should lead to “doing all things for the welfare and happiness of [God’s] people.” All his people, not only those who accumulate more than others, either in wealth or because of political power.

Helaman 12:3–5

3 And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.

4 O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!

5 Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom’s paths!

Comments

The negative aspect of the promise of the land is that the people would lose God’s protection if they did not keep their part of the covenant. Thus, Mormon declares that God “doth chasten his people with many afflictions.” The saddest part of the declaration is that even though the Nephites might suffer all kinds of afflictions, “they will not remember him.” Wars have caused them to repent, but only for a time, and often not for a very long time. Famine caused them to repent, but not for very many years. The Nephites, at least as Mormon writes about them, seldom repent for longer than a handful of years before the temptations of prosperity overtake them again.

In verses 4 and 5, Mormon notes that very fact, that the Nephites are “quick to be lifted up in pride.”

Helaman 12:6

6 Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide.

Comments

Mormon notes the irony of a people who prosper based on the promise of the land, and then when they become prosperous, quickly turn from the principles upon which they gained their prosperity. The implication of Mormon’s statement that “they do not desire that the Lord their God, who created them, should rule and reign over them” is that they have selected something else to rule and reign over them. They turn from the principles and laws of God that have produced their prosperity and narrow their vision to the more worldly processes that have led them there. They believe that they have become prosperous on their own and therefore, do not need the God, whom they cannot directly see, but who was behind their prosperity. Prosperity becomes their god.

Helaman 12:7–17

7 O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth.
8 For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God.
9 Yea, behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake.
10 And by the power of his voice they are broken up, and become smooth, yea, even like unto a valley.
11 Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake;
12 Yea, by the power of his voice, do the foundations rock, even to the very center.
13 Yea, and if he say unto the earth—Move—it is moved.

14 Yea, if he say unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done;
15 And thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun.
16 And behold, also, if he say unto the waters of the great deep—Be thou dried up—it is done.
17 Behold, if he say unto this mountain—Be thou raised up, and come over and fall upon that city, that it be buried up—behold it is done.

Comments

Verses 9 through 17 depend upon the argument introduced in verses 7 and 8. There, Mormon declares “how great is the nothingness of the children of men.” He has previously intimated that the Nephites have exalted themselves, but, in doing so, no longer obey God. He contrasts that with the elements, which do not have the advantages of humanity, but nevertheless, obey God.

Verses 9–17 repeat, for emphasis, certain elements that obey God. The large number of the elements that obey God are meant to be contrasted to the Nephites who so quickly forget to obey that same God.

Helaman 12:18–22

18 And behold, if a man hide up a treasure in the earth, and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of the iniquity of him who hath hid it up—behold, it shall be accursed.
19 And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever—behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever.
20 And behold, if the Lord shall say unto a man—Because of thine iniquities, thou shalt be accursed forever—it shall be done.
21 And if the Lord shall say—Because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence—he will cause that it shall be so.
22 And wo unto him to whom he shall say this, for it shall be unto him that will do iniquity, and he cannot be saved; therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved, hath repentance been declared.

Comments

Mormon transitions from speaking of the elements to speaking of humankind. He does this by speaking of an action that humans would do, but where the elements might respond to God and override the human’s action. He is specifically referring to the burying of treasure in the earth. A person may bury treasure, but if God says that it is accursed, it is accursed, and it might never be found.

This allows Mormon to shift from the elements, which are faithful, to the humans who are not. If the treasure was accursed, and not to be found, if a person is unfaithful, “because of [his] iniquities, [he] shalt be accursed forever.”

In spite of this gloomy message, Mormon does not leave us without hope. It is precisely because of these consequences to our unfaithfulness that “repentance [has] been declared.”

Helaman 12:23–26

23 Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved.

24 And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.

25 And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;

26 Yea, who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery, fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation. And thus it is. Amen.

Comments

The end of Mormon’s inserted homily is that the bleak picture of the Nephites falling into pride, and of their dismissal of God’s commandments, need not be permanent. For all of his modern readers, Mormon reiterates that “blessed they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved.” Mormon makes no distinction between those theoretical people who never sin and those who sin and repent. All those who repent are included in those who “have done good [and] shall have everlasting life.”

Mormon ends this section with the testificatory *amen*, which is the seal upon his testimony of what he has written. It also signals the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 13

Helaman: Header

The prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, to the Nephites.

Comments

The presence of a chapter header suggests that there is some change in a source. In the book of Alma, we saw that Mormon used a personal record that Alma₂ wrote which was different from the large plates, which he also kept. On that personal record, Alma₂ recorded texts that came from the sons of Mosiah₂.

In this case, we have had what must have been a large-plate source used for much of the book of Helaman, as evidenced by the consistent use of years to divide up the narrative. Now, however, we have the second addition to that record. The first began in chapter 7, which was marked as “the prophecy of Nephi, the son of Helaman.”

This entry is about Samuel, the Lamanite. It may not have been on the large plates, but was certainly written down in some record, perhaps the personal record that Nephi₂ kept. Mormon has set up the condition where we have seen the Nephites fall away from faithfulness and the Lamanites have become more righteous. They were converted through Nephi₂ and Lehi₃'s efforts, which were reported before the disheartening return to the Nephite people, whose repentance was so hard to achieve, and so short lived.

Into that condition of general apostasy comes a second prophet, yet another witness. This time, it is a prophet from the Lamanites. Mormon continues to show that when the Lamanites are converted, they may become even more righteous than the Nephites.

Helaman 13:1

1 And now it came to pass in the eighty and sixth year, the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses.

Comments

Mormon sets up the conditions that lead to the sermon that Samuel gives. In Helaman 6:1, we learned that “the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites.” That contrast is reaffirmed in verse 1 of this chapter. The “Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God. Wicked Nephites, righteous Lamanites.

In addition to the shock that readers might have with this reversal of what we have become accustomed to believing, we should remember that Mormon is including the stories he thinks we need to know. He has included the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who were converted Lamanites of great faith, who were “a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord” (Alma 27:30). Mormon wants his readers to know that while the Lamanites might be considered the quintessential enemies in the Book of Mormon, they are capable of hearing the word of the Lord and become even more righteous than the Nephites. It is an intentionally hopeful message. Modern Lamanites must understand Mormon’s implicit promise to them. He sees their whiteness, not their blackness, to put it in Book of Mormon imagery. That has nothing to do with skin pigmentation, but the quality of the heart and dedication to the Lord.

Helaman 13:2–4

2 And it came to pass that in this year there was one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla, and began to preach unto the people. And it came to pass that he did preach, many days, repentance unto the people, and they did cast him out, and he was about to return to his own land.

3 But behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, that he should return again, and prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart.

4 And it came to pass that they would not suffer that he should enter into the city; therefore he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart.

Comments

We are introduced to Samuel, the Lamanite. He is always emphasized as a Lamanite. Although not every appearance of his name has “the Lamanite” following it, the adjective is missing only when there is a second use of the name close to the previous use which did call him Samuel, the Lamanite. This tells us that we should pay attention to the fact that he was both Lamanite and a prophet. That is Mormon suggesting to his readers that it is wholly in the Lamanite abilities to become so righteous that they could send a prophet to the Nephites, something contrary to what the Nephite-centric texts would suggest. Additionally, this positive description of a Lamanite suggests again that this comes from a non-large plate source, as the large plates were official records of the Nephites and the conditions of Samuel the Lamanite’s

appearance demonstrate that the official record-keepers of the time would not have been favorable to his visit and message, therefore, it would not have been recorded on the large plates.

As Samuel approaches the people, he is cast out. The Lord tells him to return. This appears to be a type-scene in the Book of Mormon. We have Abinadi called to preach, who attempts it and is rejected, only to be called again. The same occurs with Alma₂ in Ammonihah. He attempts to preach, leaves, and is called back. Type-scenes occur in the Bible, and folklorists understand that certain forms develop that influence the way stories are told. Mormon is carefully crafting his story and plausibly making certain that these stories can be seen as thematic repetitions.

Nephite Treasures Cursed

Helaman 13:5–7

5 And he said unto them: Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people.

6 Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh unto this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people.

7 And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.

Comments

In verse 7, Samuel notes that he had been previously sent to declare repentance to the Nephite people, but they would not receive him. Verses 5 and 6 suggest why. This wasn't a kind message from a soft-hearted God. This was a message of impending destruction, "yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh to this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance."

The doom had two timeframes of fulfillment. One of them was four hundred years in the future. Dr. Mark Wright suggested that it was far enough away that it was hardly a prophecy that any of the listeners took seriously or thought that it would impact their lives. It was, however, an important prophecy precisely in that it was for four hundred years. That time period was called a *baktun* in Maya, and it was emotionally similar to our thousand years. Thus, it was a sacred and symbolic timeframe. One of the concepts associated with time in Mesoamerica is its cyclical nature. Thus, prophesying of a doom in four hundred years would also imply a much more immediate doom that the future doom was to repeat.

The second doom, however, would come much sooner. Samuel is prophesying within six years of the Savior's birth, and by the time of Christ's death, the Nephite nation would dissolve into tribes, and their whole physical world would be subject to physical destruction. That part of the destruction, many of those present would live to see.

Helaman 13:8–11

8 Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent I will take away my word from them, and I will withdraw my Spirit from them, and I will suffer them no longer, and I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them.

9 And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence.

10 Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger, and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction; and this shall surely come except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your destruction.

11 But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord; yea, thus saith the Lord, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not.

Comments

The four-hundred-year prophecy is reiterated. It will come unless the people repent. As it happens, they will repent for a time. There will be a time after Christ appears when there is no contention, and all believe. However, that will fade. The prophecy will be fulfilled.

The symbolic impact of the four-hundred-year period is perhaps emphasized in that it is repeated both in verses 9 and 10. One of the important aspects of the Maya conception of prophecy and time is that it was circular. Things that happened might happen again. Things at the beginning of the four-hundred-year cycle will repeat at the end. Dr. Mark Wright suggests that, in this case, it is the statement of what comes at the end that is being used to mark what will happen soon. Samuel turns to the beginning of the cycle in the next verse.

Helaman 13:12–13

12 Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold, it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved; yea, wo unto this great city, for I perceive, saith the Lord, that there are many, yea, even the more part of this great city, that will harden their hearts against me, saith the Lord.

13 But blessed are they who will repent, for them will I spare. But behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it.

Comments

Samuel tells the people that only the presence of the righteous in Zarahemla is currently preventing its destruction. Nevertheless, the threat of destruction hangs over the city should it become even more unrighteous. That will indeed happen. In the great destruction at the time of Christ's death, we will learn that "the city of Zarahemla did take fire" (3 Nephi 8:8).

Helaman 13:14–17

14 But behold, it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared. But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction; yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her.

15 Yea, and wo be unto the city of Gideon, for the wickedness and abominations which are in her.

16 Yea, and wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in them.

17 And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts, because of the people's sake who are upon the land, yea, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

Comments

The emphasis on destructions that will come sooner than the four hundred years continues. There is no confirmation of the wo pronounced on the city of Gideon. However, the intent is clearly a widespread destruction, for it includes "all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites." During the time of the destructions in 3 Nephi, many cities in the land of the Nephites of this time period are destroyed, with Bountiful (in the northernmost part of the land) being spared. In addition to the cities, there is a curse on the land itself. That also occurs in the destruction reported in 3 Nephi.

Helaman 13:18–20

18 And it shall come to pass, saith the Lord of Hosts, yea, our great and true God, that whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord.

19 For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous; and he that hideth not up his treasures unto me, cursed is he, and also the treasure, and none shall redeem it because of the curse of the land.

20 And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures, because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, and will hide up their treasures

when they shall flee before their enemies; because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord.

Comments

One of the examples given for the power that Nephi₂ might have was that “if a man hide up a treasure in the earth, and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of the iniquity of him who hath hid it up—behold, it shall be accursed. And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever—behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever” (Helaman 12:18–19). Samuel gives a specific prophecy of just such a thing happening. Although there is no confirmation that this is fulfilled in the near future, it will happen in Mormon’s day: “that the inhabitants . . . began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again” (Mormon 1:18).

Helaman 13:21–23

21 Behold ye, the people of this great city, and hearken unto my words; yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith; for behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you.

22 Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord your God for them; yea, your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities.

23 For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land, and also upon your riches, and this because of your iniquities.

Comments

After discussing the futility of trying to hide wealth from the Lord, to preserve it, Samuel makes the condemnation to the people more specific. “This great city” is Zarahemla, and they have become prosperous to the point where they have riches, and “have set [their] hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave [the riches] unto [them].”

The people of Zarahemla have forgotten their part of the covenant. The promise of the land will supply prosperity, even riches, but they may be retained only upon principles of righteousness. This fall from the truth has “caused that a curse should come upon the land.” That is not a curse occurring in four hundred years, but one pronounced with urgency for the current people of the city.

Helaman 13:24–26

24 Yea, wo unto this people, because of this time which has arrived, that ye do cast out the prophets, and do mock them, and cast stones at them, and do slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time.

25 And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.

26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.

Comments

Samuel declares that the people of Zarahemla “do cast out the prophets, and do mock them . . . even as they did of old time.” Perhaps Samuel referenced events that have not been recorded. Perhaps he meant the treatment of Abinadi. However, it is also possible that he referred to the Nephite origin story of those in Jerusalem threatening the prophets, and Lehi₁, the father of the nation. That would make sense of what Samuel suggests that the people say to themselves: “If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets.” That suggests that it is a story of the origins, and the people suggesting that they are better than those who would have slain the founding father. It was a story they had to have known.

What Samuel declares is that even as they think they would not have persecuted the prophets of old, they have actually cast out a real prophet that has come among them. Samuel had been turned away once. The people had witnessed Nephi₂ prophesy, and yet still fell back into their unbelief.

Helaman 13:27–28

27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.

Comments

Although Samuel presents this as a hypothesis, Mormon has made sure that we could name names as examples of this. Both the story of Nehor and Korihor have shown that this form of apostate thinking easily

took hold of many minds and hearts. In the current population, Mormon insinuated that it was the Gadiantons who had brought such ideas to the people. Even though the Gadiantons were removed during the Nephites temporary return to faithfulness after the drought, the last story Mormon told before beginning to discuss Samuel was the story of the return of the Gadiantons. In Mormon's writing, the Gadiantons lead to these very sins associated with costly apparel.

Helaman 13:29–32

29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?

30 Yea, behold, the anger of the Lord is already kindled against you; behold, he hath cursed the land because of your iniquity.

31 And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them.

32 And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say:

Comments

Having their hearts set upon riches has led to the current Nephite state of apostasy. Samuel declares that the coming curse will cause them to lose those riches. The very things they turned to as they abandoned their God will be taken away, along with the cities and the health of the land. As with the humility achieved only after drought and famine, they will again be caused to be humble through their poverty, which will be all the greater because they had once had riches.

Helaman 13:33–36

33 O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us.

34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle.

35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.

36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.

Comments

The people will finally begin to repent, but only after the great destructions. They will attempt to preserve their wealth by burying it in the ground, but they shall still lose it. Perhaps the upheaval in the earth at the time of Christ's death will be the reason that they are not able to find the treasures that they have buried. They will reach for the things they value, and they will see them slip away. Perhaps only upon seeing that devastation and reversal of fortune would they be ready to repent.

Helaman 13:37–39

37 Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those days.

38 But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.

39 O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved.

Comments

In verse 37, Samuel notes that they are surrounded by demons, and “by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls.” They have been invited because of the pride of the people, and their falling away from the true way of God. They will have destroyed the land and the wealth, and then, finally, perhaps the people will be sufficiently humble to repent and prevent the loss of their souls.

As humans, we always expect that we have time to fix wrongs, but Samuel declares that such a time is no longer in the future. It is now. They must listen to his words now and repent now.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 14

Signs for Christ's Birth and Death Given

Helaman 14:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that Samuel, the Lamanite, did prophesy a great many more things which cannot be written.

2 And behold, he said unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.

Comments

Mormon lets us know that he is not including many things that Samuel prophesied. That missing material might have helped us make the transition for the four-hundred-year cycle prophecy that spoke of destructions that would come at the end, but also which were to be fulfilled very soon, near the beginning of that prophesied cycle.

Now, we shift from destruction to salvation. The Nephites have long preached and looked forward to the day when God would come to redeem the people. Just as the four-hundred-year prophecy was particularly relevant in a Mesoamerican setting, so too was a period of five years. Samuel the Lamanite gives us both, and if the Lamanites were more closely tied to the Maya cultures of the time, it is extremely fitting that he should provide prophecies that come in those two significant sets of years.

Helaman 14:3–6

3 And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.

4 Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting;

therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.

5 And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you.

6 And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven.

Comments

When Nephi₂ prophesied of the murder of the Chief Judge, it was a prophecy that was immediately testable. It was true. Samuel's prophecy was equally testable, but only after five years. The problem with prophecies like that is that it is hard to know just how much time five years would be. Was it to be five years precisely, or no longer than five years, or perhaps somewhere within the fifth year?

That meant that while it was specific, it was difficult to time. As with other prophecies, it was really only understood once it was fulfilled. The signs that were to accompany the birth would have been unmistakable. Just as important as the fact of the signs was the nature of the signs. There would be light for a day and a night and a day. There were to be "many signs and wonders in heaven." These signs are all celestial, or heavenly. By their nature they do not belong to earth, and therefore highlight an event that does not belong to the earth, but to heaven. They are fitting for when Yahweh comes to earth.

Helaman 14:7–9

7 And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.

8 And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.

9 And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you; yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord.

Comments

The unmistakable signs in the heavens will cause all to "fall to the earth." That concept is used frequently to represent being overcome with the Spirit, or to otherwise be overwhelmed. We have seen it in the stories of Alma₂, Lamoni and his wife, and then Lamoni's father. All fell to the earth when overcome by the spirit. That is the allusion in verse 7.

These signs are witnesses to the truth of the preaching of the Messiah that has been the fundamental Nephite religious belief from Nephi's time. The signs will not cause belief, but for those who do recognize the import of the signs and "believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life."

Helaman 14:10

10 And now, because I am a Lamanite, and have spoken unto you the words which the Lord hath commanded me, and because it was hard against you, ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me, and have cast me out from among you.

Comments

The problem with Samuel’s prophecies is not only that they are uncomfortable, but that they come from a Lamanite. There is always a strong cultural unease with any person who is called a Lamanite. That is the point that Mormon is making. It is an interesting point, because, based on all other information we have, Samuel should not have been a Lamanite.

From Jacob’s times (see Jacob 1:13–14), the term Lamanite has been used as a collective term for not-Nephite. It functions in the Book of Mormon in the way that *gentile* would function for the Old Testament. When previous Lamanites have been converted, they have *become* Nephites. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies become the people of Ammon. The children of Amulon and his brethren, who were Lamanites due to apostasy from the Nephites and joining with the Lamanites, declared that they should be called “the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites” (Mosiah 25:12).

The Lamanites that Nephi₂ converted would perhaps still be called Lamanites for either (or both) of two reasons. One is that they did not relocate and come under the Nephite government. The second is that it suits Mormon’s purposes to make certain that his readers understand that Lamanites are fully capable of true righteousness. After all, it is to future Lamanites that Mormon writes.

Helaman 14:11–13

11 And ye shall hear my words, for, for this intent have I come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of repentance;

12 And also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

13 And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits.

Comments

Helaman 13:4 noted that Samuel had climbed to the wall to preach, and we are reminded of that fact in verse 11. This will become important in Helaman 16:2.

Samuel declares that he has come to preach of the coming of “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning.” Those are multiple titles given to the same person, just as we understand Jesus to be the mortal name for Yahweh in the heavens.

“Jesus Christ” would have been understood as the name of the Messiah to come to earth. Since the name “Jesus,” in Hebrew, would mean “Yahweh saves,” it was an appropriate name that may or may not have been understood as a personal name rather than a description.

“Son of God” applies to Yahweh while in his mortal mission, at least for the Nephites prior to his mortal mission. Modern readers understand it literally, but that understanding seems to come later for the Nephites.

The “Father of heaven and earth” is not a surprising designation, but it is one that exists as a Maya descriptor for a god as well. The phrase can be translated as “sacred one of heaven and sacred one of earth.” The designation of “Father of heaven” isn’t the same as “Father *in* heaven,” and it is found only in the Book of Mormon.

“Creator of all things from the beginning” also occurs only in the Book of Mormon. It is important to remember that this is a descriptor of Yahweh as creator, reinforcing their understanding that Yahweh is their God, and that it will be Yahweh who personally comes to earth to become “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Helaman 14:14–19

14 And behold, again, another sign I give unto you, yea, a sign of his death.

15 For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

16 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

18 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

19 Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death.

Comments

Samuel declares that he will give a sign of the mortal Messiah’s death. Before he does, however, he reminds the people of why they should care. The death of a God on earth is certainly worth noting, but in this

case it is an event of supreme importance. This death is essential to bring the resurrection, and therefore the redemption of all mankind from the physical separation from God's presence that was initiated in the Garden of Eden.

The events of the Savior's life and death would also bring "to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire."

Helaman 14:20

20 But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead.

Comments

The symbolic signs of Christ's birth and death are couched in terms of light and darkness. At his birth, there is an unmistakable continuation of light. At his death, an unmistakable continuation of darkness.

Helaman 14:21–24

21 Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;

22 Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.

23 And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.

24 And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate.

Comments

The prophecy about what events would accompany the Messiah's mortal death are very clearly and very precisely fulfilled in the destructions witnessed in 3 Nephi, which references this prophecy when the fulfillments are described (see 3 Nephi 8:3):

- thunderings and lightnings for many hours (3 Nephi 8:17 and 19)
- earth shaking and trembling is reported (3 Nephi 8:6)

- rocks broken up (3 Nephi 8:18)
- great tempests (3 Nephi 8:12 and 17)
- mountains arise (3 Nephi 8:10)
- the whole face of the land is changed (3 Nephi 8:17)
- highways broke up (3 Nephi 8:13)
- cities become desolate (3 Nephi 8: 8–10)

Helaman 14:25

25 And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many.

Comments

This verse becomes a focal point when the Savior notes that its fulfillment had not been included in the Nephite records:

Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so? And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled. And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them? (3 Nephi 23:9–11)

Helaman 14:26–29

26 And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me; for he said unto me that there should be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours.

27 And he said unto me that while the thunder and the lightning lasted, and the tempest, that these things should be, and that darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days.

28 And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men—

29 And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation.

Comments

The signs come to mark the important event, but also to testify of it. They also provide witness to the truth of the teachings, so that there “should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men.” While that will be true for a while, the unbelief will return.

Samuel Exhorts Nephites to Repentance

Helaman 14:30–31

30 And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.

31 He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.

Comments

The signs are given so that there might be something tangible on which to base one’s belief, but they do not, and cannot, force belief. Thus, Samuel reiterates: “Ye are permitted to act for yourselves.” Samuel then uses terms we have seen from Alma₂ doctrine of restoration (see Alma 41): “ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good . . . or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.”

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Helaman 15

Helaman 15:1–3

1 And now, my beloved brethren, behold, I declare unto you that except ye shall repent your houses shall be left unto you desolate.

2 Yea, except ye repent, your women shall have great cause to mourn in the day that they shall give suck; for ye shall attempt to flee and there shall be no place for refuge; yea, and wo unto them which are with child, for they shall be heavy and cannot flee; therefore, they shall be trodden down and shall be left to perish.

3 Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them; for behold, they have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved, and also hath he chastened them; yea, in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them.

Comments

Samuel has just related the terrible destructive forces that will be unleashed at the time of Christ's death. The question about those destructions was not whether or not they would come, but how they would affect these Nephites. Samuel tells them that it depends upon their repentance. If they do not repent, "[their] houses shall be left unto [them] desolate." While the destructions certainly open the possibility that Samuel was threatening a dwelling place, it is also possible that he was speaking of the lives of the people and their families. The *house* was both a physical structure and a metaphor for the people who lived there, and that included descendants.

That it was the destruction of people becomes evident in verse 2, which deals with the plights of women and children. Those most vulnerable inhabitants of the land "shall have great cause to mourn." They "attempt to flee and there shall be no place for refuge."

In verse 4, Samuel specifically mentions the people of Nephi twice. That sets up the next verse where Samuel will contrast them with the Lamanites.

Samuel notes that the Nephites "have been a chosen people of the Lord." They will lose that status if they do not repent.

Helaman 15:4–6

4 But behold my brethren, the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually, and this because of the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers. But behold, salvation hath come unto them through the preaching of the Nephites; and for this intent hath the Lord prolonged their days.

5 And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses.

6 Yea, I say unto you, that the more part of them are doing this, and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth; therefore there are many who do add to their numbers daily.

Comments

Samuel compares the Nephites and the Lamanites, and the Lamanites clearly portray the more favored people. Even though the Nephites had been a chosen people (verse 3 of this chapter), they are no longer the more favored of the Lord, for they have not repented but the Lamanites have. Ironically, the Lamanites became converted through Nephite preaching, but now are sending a prophet to call the Nephites to repentance, even as Nephi₂ had called them to repentance.

In verse 6, Samuel notes that “the more part of [the Lamanites] are [walking circumspectly before God], and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth; therefore there are many who do add to their numbers daily.” The Lamanites are repenting. The Nephites are so in need of repentance that they need a Lamanite prophet to call them to repentance.

Helaman 15:7–9

7 And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them—

8 Therefore, as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith they have been made free.

9 And ye know also that they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin; yea, ye can see that they fear to sin—for behold they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and this because of their faith in Christ.

Comments

Samuel declares the message that Mormon wants to emphasize. When the Lamanites are truly converted, they are “firm and steadfast in the faith.” As with the people of Ammon, these new converts have also forsaken warfare and their weapons. Mormon has already told that story, so we who read Samuel’s statement understand how significant that fact is. These new Lamanite converts are like the faithfulness of the people of Ammon. Like those people, “they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and this because of their faith in Christ.”

Helaman 15:10–13

10 And now, because of their steadfastness when they do believe in that thing which they do believe, for because of their firmness when they are once enlightened, behold, the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity—

11 Yea, even if they should dwindle in unbelief the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth—

12 Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them.

13 And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep.

Comments

The promise of the land is that if a people keep the commandments, they will prosper, and be protected in the land. For the Lamanites, it becomes a promise that “the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days.” The prolonging of days refers to the continuation of the Lamanites after the destruction of the Nephites. That returns to the four-hundred-year prophecy with which Samuel began this discourse.

What will happen in that prolonging of days is that there will be a time when they forget, but there is also the promise that there will be a restoration of the knowledge of the truth to them. Remembering that Mormon left out some of Samuel’s discourse (see Helaman 14:1), we need to pay attention to what he did include. This prophecy that the Lamanites would eventually be restored to the truth and would again know their Redeemer, is at the heart of the reason that Mormon wrote the Book of Mormon. They are the focus of the last thing Mormon wrote, recorded in Mormon 7.

Helaman 15:14–17

14 Therefore I say unto you, it shall be better for them than for you except ye repent.

15 For behold, had the mighty works been shown unto them which have been shown unto you, yea, unto them who have dwindled in unbelief because of the traditions of their fathers, ye can see of yourselves that they never would again have dwindled in unbelief.

16 Therefore, saith the Lord: I will not utterly destroy them, but I will cause that in the day of my wisdom they shall return again unto me, saith the Lord.

17 And now behold, saith the Lord, concerning the people of the Nephites: If they will not repent, and observe to do my will, I will utterly destroy them, saith the Lord, because of their unbelief notwithstanding the many mighty works which I have done among them; and as surely as the Lord liveth shall these things be, saith the Lord.

Comments

Even though Yahweh had accepted the Nephites as a chosen people (verse 3 of this chapter), “it shall be better for [the Lamanites] than for [the Nephites] except [they] repent.” The Nephites had all of the advantages but squandered them by turning away from their God and his commandments. Unless they repent, destruction will come.

Although there will be a short time of repentance after the signs of the birth of the Savior, they will still fall away again, and the prophesied destruction will come. The Nephite nation will be destroyed even before the physical destructions accompanying the death of the Savior.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon.

Helaman 16

Samuel Miraculously Preserved from Harm

Helaman 16:1–3

1 And now, it came to pass that there were many who heard the words of Samuel, the Lamanite, which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as believed on his word went forth and sought for Nephi; and when they had come forth and found him they confessed unto him their sins and denied not, desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord.

2 But as many as there were who did not believe in the words of Samuel were angry with him; and they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall; but the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows.

3 Now when they saw that they could not hit him, there were many more who did believe on his words, insomuch that they went away unto Nephi to be baptized.

Comments

Verses 1 and 2 represent a typical literary form that Mormon uses. He presents contrasts. In verse 1, we have many believing Samuel, and then going to find Nephi₂ for more instructions and to be baptized.

Verse 2 has two reversals. The first is that there are those who do not believe, and the second is that some of those who witnessed what they deemed a miracle were converted.

The nature of the miracle requires a little explanation, because our visual perceptions of Samuel preaching on the wall comes from the Arnold Friberg painting that was included with the Book of Mormon for so many years. It has Samuel on a very high wall. Those below shoot arrows and cast stones, but it doesn't seem all that surprising that they miss him as he is so far away.

Mark Wright has noted that our perception is the problem. The more likely height of the walls was much lower, perhaps only somewhat above the height of the tallest person. That meant that Samuel was easily visible and could be easily heard. It should also have meant that he would have been an easy target for stones and arrows. Both slings and bows were military weapons, and in the absence of a standing military, there would have been people round about who were capable with both weapons. Standing only perhaps six feet above the crowd, it was truly a miracle that he could not be hit with the stones or arrows. That was the miracle that was witnessed, and the reason that it was understood as a miracle.

Helaman 16:4–9

4 For behold, Nephi was baptizing, and prophesying, and preaching, crying repentance unto the people, showing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come—

5 Telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, to the intent that they might believe; therefore as many as believed on the words of Samuel went forth unto him to be baptized, for they came repenting and confessing their sins.

6 But the more part of them did not believe in the words of Samuel; therefore when they saw that they could not hit him with their stones and their arrows, they cried unto their captains, saying: Take this fellow and bind him, for behold he hath a devil; and because of the power of the devil which is in him we cannot hit him with our stones and our arrows; therefore take him and bind him, and away with him.

7 And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands, yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people.

8 And behold, he was never heard of more among the Nephites; and thus were the affairs of the people.

9 And thus ended the eighty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Nephi₂ is preaching and baptizing, and there are those who believe, signifying that there were people who repented based on Samuel's words. Nevertheless, there were still many who did not believe Samuel.

We next find out that the summary of the positive results looked forward to the aftermath of the incident. Mormon returns to the incident and its more immediate conclusion. Those who were angry, and had attempted to kill him from a distance, attempted then to take him prisoner. Mormon tells us that: "As they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands." That clearly happened before those who repented could find Nephi₂ so that they could be baptized.

Signs and Wonders Begin to Appear

Helaman 16:10–13

10 And thus ended also the eighty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, the more part of the people remaining in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part walking more circumspectly before God.

11 And these were the conditions also, in the eighty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

12 And there was but little alteration in the affairs of the people, save it were the people began to be more hardened in iniquity, and do more and more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God, in the eighty and ninth year of the reign of the judges.

13 But it came to pass in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges, there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; and the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled.

Comments

Mormon has prepared us for the hardening of Nephite hearts. They had seen a miracle with Nephi², and only believed for a little while. They had seen a miracle with Samuel, but only believed for a little while. By only a couple of years later, “the people began to be more hardened in iniquity, and do more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God.”

It will continue to get worse. Beginning in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges, the people begin to have even more signs that ought to have moved them to belief. They begin to see the signs that would indicate that “the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled.” What they will do is find a way to ignore and dismiss those signs. That is the reason that signs are such a poor means of finding faith. They can be rationalized away.

Helaman 16:14–16

14 And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled.

15 Nevertheless, the people began to harden their hearts, all save it were the most believing part of them, both of the Nephites and also of the Lamanites, and began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom, saying:

16 Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken.

Comments

The signs are so powerful that “angels did appear.” The response was that “the people began to harden their hearts.” There were some who believed. They always are some who can remain faithful. It was a situation where the majority had turned away and would not acknowledge the signs they had seen. It is easy to rationalize, and they did, when they said, “some things they may have guessed right.” It is a common dismissal of signs, if one elects not to understand and believe them.

Helaman 17–21

17 And they began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying:

18 That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come; if so, and he be the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, as it has been spoken, why will he not show himself unto us as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem?

19 Yea, why will he not show himself in this land as well as in the land of Jerusalem?

20 But behold, we know that this is a wicked tradition, which has been handed down unto us by our fathers, to cause us that we should believe in some great and marvelous thing which should come to pass, but not among us, but in a land which is far distant, a land which we know not; therefore they can keep us in ignorance, for we cannot witness with our own eyes that they are true.

21 And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives.

Comments

The denial of the coming Messiah had long been a feature of Nephite apostasy. It was considered the most telling of all the markers of one who had left the Nephite religion. One might continue to follow the law of Moses, but if they rejected the coming Messiah, they rejected a fundamental principle of the Nephite religion.

The people at this time clearly continue that denial, a denial made more ironic in that they were very close to the signs of Christ's birth.

Helaman 16:22–25

22 And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come.

23 And notwithstanding the signs and the wonders which were wrought among the people of the Lord, and the many miracles which they did, Satan did get great hold upon the hearts of the people upon all the face of the land.

24 And thus ended the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

25 And thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons.

Comments

The stage is now set. As the book of Helaman ends, we have a people in apostasy and a people who have rejected the signs that they have seen up to this point. Mormon ends with their denial of the coming Messiah precisely because that Messiah will be the focus of the next book that he edits: the book of Nephi₂, son of Helaman₂.

The Book of 3 Nephi

3 Nephi 1

3 Nephi: Title and Header

Third Nephi, The Book of Nephi, the Son of Nephi, who was the son of Helaman. And Helaman was the son of Helaman, who was the son of Alma, who was the son of Alma, being a descendant of Nephi who was the son of Lehi, who came out of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the king of Judah.

Comments

Third Nephi, the book of Nephi₃, the son of Nephi₂, is the most important book in the Book of Mormon, and perhaps the most distant from the large plates. Other book name changes can be traced to the new person established as the king or chief judge (Mosiah through Helaman). Nephi₃ does not become a ruler in this book. Thus, it is a named book that doesn't fit the standard naming conventions found in the Book of Mormon. Although some of the content will show the markers of having been taken from the large plates, most of the record that Mormon uses is a "shorter but true account . . . given by Nephi" (3 Nephi 5:9).

The header for the book is also unusual in that it changes the purpose for which book headers have been used in the Book of Mormon up to this point. The traditional use of a header is to discuss the content of the book. This header reveals nothing about the content. It is a genealogy. The book will provide testimony of the risen Christ, but it begins by establishing the connection of this Nephi₃ to the first Nephi.

Sign of Christ's Birth Appears

3 Nephi 1:1–3

1 Now it came to pass that the ninety and first year had passed away and it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; and it was in the year that Lachoneus was the chief judge and the governor over the land.

2 And Nephi, the son of Helaman, had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, giving charge unto his son Nephi, who was his eldest son, concerning the plates of brass, and all the records which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem.

3 Then he departed out of the land, and whither he went, no man knoweth; and his son Nephi did keep the records in his stead, yea, the record of this people.

Comments

At the end of the book of Alma, we saw that Mormon may have manipulated the division between the books to make that division line up on the culturally significant forty years of the reign of the judges. The beginning of the book of 3 Nephi may also have been slightly manipulated. In this case, the year of the reign of the judges is not necessarily significant, but the fact that “it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” was monumentally significant. In the very first verse, Mormon expects that his readers understand that there is a major prophecy to be fulfilled. The Messiah was to come six hundred years from the time Lehi₁ left Jerusalem, and this book begins with that very year of that fulfillment.

When the book of Helaman ended, Nephi₂, was the prophet. In verses 2 and 3 we say goodbye to him, even though we do not know in exactly which year the transition took place. What we learn is that Nephi₂ left. His death is not recorded, only his departure, “and whither he went, no man knoweth.” That is very much the way Alma₂’s death was recorded in Alma 45:18–19, where Alma₂ simply went away and was not heard from or about again.

3 Nephi 1:4–7

4 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the ninety and second year, behold, the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be greater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people.

5 But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite.

6 And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.

7 And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass.

Comments

Mormon records that the ninety-first year coincided with six hundred years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. The signs begin appearing early in the ninety-second year. This suggests that there is a full six hundred years counted before the year of the prophecies, and not that the prophecies came in the six-hundredth year. That highlights the problem of counting prophetic years. Even when they are precise to a number of years, it isn’t always clear how the timing relates to those years.

This becomes an issue with the five-year prophecy of Samuel, which was more easily counted and understood, as most who were alive at the time of the prophecy also lived to the time of the signs of its fulfillment. Still, there was sufficient ambivalence that the division between believers and non-believers could widen when one assumption about what the five-years meant came to a deadline and passed. Non-believers see it as proof that the prophecy was incorrect. With the passing of Samuels’s prophetic time, those who disbelieved became stronger and more vocal. They were already likely to have been in the majority, and perhaps even leaders in the government.

3 Nephi 1:8–11

8 But behold, they did watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

9 Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet.

10 Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

11 And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

Comments

The vocal disbelievers were sufficiently powerful that they could not only set a deadline, but also presume to be able to enforce it. This confirms that they were in political power. They set a day when they would officially declare the prophecy unfulfilled. They would also use that occasion to purge the Nephites of those believers who contradicted them.

With that terrible prospect, Nephi₃, the son of Nephi₂ (the Nephi who had been promised that he could seal on earth as well as in the heavens (see Helaman 10:7)), that son of Nephi₂, who had not received the promise that his father received, but who believed along with his father, knelt to pray to God on “behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.”

3 Nephi 1:12–14

12 And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:

13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

14 Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

Comments

The timing of this assurance was important and reassuring, but known only to God. It was not something that could be caused by Nephi₃'s prayer, because the events leading to this date had been set in motion nine months before, and a world away. The coming of the assurance also gave comfort to Nephi₃, but it was a comfort that he could not have shared fast enough to comfort so many fears before the ultimate sign was given. We do not know when in the day Nephi₃ prayed, but it was that very day that there was no night.

Nevertheless, this announcement to Nephi₃ places Nephi₃ in a particular position as a witness to Yahweh coming to earth. He will become one of the special witnesses to the actual appearance of his people's God to those gathered near the temple in Bountiful thirty-four years later (3 Nephi 8:5).

3 Nephi 1:15–18

15 And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

16 And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand.

17 And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth.

18 For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.

Comments

We continue to see the sign of overwhelming emotion, or perhaps fear of God, in the act of falling to the earth. In verse 16, many “who had not believed the words of the prophets . . . fell to the earth and became

as if they were dead.” Then in verse 17, people in all directions “were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth.”

Verse 17 also tells us that there was some confusion in the nature of the prophecy, for “they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear.” That was true in the Old World, but its literal fulfillment for the Nephite believers waited for thirty-four more years.

3 Nephi 1:19–21

19 And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.

20 And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets.

21 And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word.

Comments

Mormon records the fulfillment of the six-hundred-year prophecy, as well as Samuel’s five-year prophecy. There was a day without a night. The signs in the heavens had been given, including the new star. These heavenly signs were important because all humankind knew that they could not accomplish such a feat. That they dealt with the sun and the stars made the signs particularly potent, as cultures in all the world have looked to the sun and the stars for understanding of their god, with some even holding the sun to be a god. Only the God of nature could control them. It was in 1 Nephi 19:12 where Nephi₁ used that title for the God who could cause the destructions that will come at the end of the Savior’s life.

3 Nephi 1:22–23

22 And it came to pass that from this time forth there began to be lyings sent forth among the people, by Satan, to harden their hearts, to the intent that they might not believe in those signs and wonders which they had seen; but notwithstanding these lyings and deceivings the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord.

23 And it came to pass that Nephi went forth among the people, and also many others, baptizing unto repentance, in the which there was a great remission of sins. And thus the people began again to have peace in the land.

Comments

Even with such spectacular and extra-human signs, there were still those who did not believe and who tried to maintain the positions that they had prior to the signs. However, the majority shifted to becoming

believers, where nonbelievers had been in the majority just a day or two before. Thus, Nephi³ and others are successful in baptizing many, and that majority of Nephites living the commandments naturally lead to peace in the land, according to the promise of the land.

3 Nephi 1:24

24 And there were no contentions, save it were a few that began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses. Now in this thing they did err, having not understood the scriptures.

Comments

Even with the substantial witness to the Nephite religion that came in such dramatic form, it was not a time where there was a complete acceptance of the Nephite gospel. In this case, there was still some dissension, and in this case, a dissension that was based on the Nephite religion, but one in which “they did err, having not understood the scriptures.”

The mistake that was made is understandable, for the Nephites understood that the arrival would change things:

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away. (2 Nephi 25:26–27)

It was part of the Nephite teachings that the coming of Christ would lead to a time when “the law ought to be done away.” Thus, these people taught a correct doctrine, but at the wrong time. Although Christ had been born, the fulfilling of the law was to come with his death, not his birth. Only after the atonement had been made was the complete change possible.

Gadianon Robbers Rise to Power Again

3 Nephi 1:25–27

25 But it came to pass that they soon became converted, and were convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should

not pass away till it should all be fulfilled; therefore in this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults.

26 And thus the ninety and second year did pass away, bringing glad tidings unto the people because of the signs which did come to pass, according to the words of the prophecy of all the holy prophets.

27 And it came to pass that the ninety and third year did also pass away in peace, save it were for the Gadianton robbers, who dwelt upon the mountains, who did infest the land; for so strong were their holds and their secret places that the people could not overpower them; therefore they did commit many murders, and did do much slaughter among the people.

Comments

Even those who had preached incorrectly, “soon became converted, and were convinced of the error they were in.” That leads to peace. Sadly, as with most Nephite times of peace, it doesn’t last for long. The sign had been given in the ninety-second year. By the end of the next year, the Gadiantons were reasserting themselves. By mentioning the Gadiantons, Mormon signals that worse times are coming.

Less than two years passed, and Nephite apostasy was beginning again.

3 Nephi 1:28–30

28 And it came to pass that in the ninety and fourth year they began to increase in a great degree, because there were many dissenters of the Nephites who did flee unto them, which did cause much sorrow unto those Nephites who did remain in the land.

29 And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers.

30 And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation.

Comments

An ending of some kind is building, because the Nephites are again apostatizing. To make matters worse, they are becoming Gadiantons. Even among the righteous Lamanites, there was an apostasy from the true religion, and an increase in the influence of the Gadiantons. The destruction of the Nephites at the hands of the Gadiantons is coming. Mormon will see that scene repeat itself four hundred years later.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 2

3 Nephi 2:1–3

1 And it came to pass that thus passed away the ninety and fifth year also, and the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen—

2 Imagining up some vain thing in their hearts, that it was wrought by men and by the power of the devil, to lead away and deceive the hearts of the people; and thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people again, insomuch that he did blind their eyes and lead them away to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing.

3 And it came to pass that the people began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations; and they did not believe that there should be any more signs or wonders given; and Satan did go about, leading away the hearts of the people, tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land.

Comments

A sign was given for the birth of a Messiah on the other side of the world. In the immediate world of the Nephites, after the day without a night, there were no more signs, no more miracles. As a phenomenon associated with nature, it was assumed to have some kind of natural explanation and so, many began to fall back into the routines of their daily lives. Their previous prosperity was returning, and with it their previous relationships with the culture surrounding that prosperity. With no better sign of a Savior than one that they could find a way to excuse, they returned even to a disbelief in the Savior whose sign they had seen.

3 Nephi 2:4–8

4 And thus did pass away the ninety and sixth year; and also the ninety and seventh year; and also the ninety and eighth year; and also the ninety and ninth year;

5 And also an hundred years had passed away since the days of Mosiah, who was king over the people of the Nephites.

6 And six hundred and nine years had passed away since Lehi left Jerusalem.

7 And nine years had passed away from the time when the sign was given, which was spoken of by the prophets, that Christ should come into the world.

8 Now the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ; therefore, nine years had passed away.

Comments

Dr. Mark Wright noticed that the Nephites did not immediately begin to mark time from the sign of the Messiah's birth, but rather backdated that new beginning of their calendar only after 100 years had passed in the reign of the judges. He suggested that the Nephites paid attention to sets of years and preferred to deal with time in more symbolic units. Therefore, even though there was a great rebirth of belief at the time of the sign, the change of the calendar to mark that time came later, only after one hundred years of the reign of the judges had passed.

Modern readers understand the change of a calendar to mark Christ's birth, as we follow a calendar that uses that event as a beginning point. In the Book of Mormon, it was the third time that there was a change in the beginning point of the calendar. The first was when Nephite time was counted from when Lehi left Jerusalem, which was a change from the calendar used in Jerusalem at that time. The second was with the change from monarchy to the reign of the judges.

Nephites and Lamanites Unite against Gadianton Robbers

3 Nephi 2:9–11

9 And Nephi, who was the father of Nephi, who had the charge of the records, did not return to the land of Zarahemla, and could nowhere be found in all the land.

10 And it came to pass that the people did still remain in wickedness, notwithstanding the much preaching and prophesying which was sent among them; and thus passed away the tenth year also; and the eleventh year also passed away in iniquity.

11 And it came to pass in the thirteenth year there began to be wars and contentions throughout all the land; for the Gadianton robbers had become so numerous, and did slay so many of the people, and did lay waste so many cities, and did spread so much death and carnage throughout the land, that it became expedient that all the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, should take up arms against them.

Comments

Verse 9 is interesting. It mentions that Nephi₂, the father of Nephi₃, did not return to Zarahemla. Mormon told of his disappearance in terms that appeared to assume that he had died in 3 Nephi 1:1. Now Mormon simply mentions in passing and, over a decade later, that he still had not returned. Why mention Nephi₂, son of Helaman₂, when it is Nephi₃ who has the records?

Mormon says very little of Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂. His story is coming later. At this point, Mormon is setting up the events that will destroy the Nephite nation, as reported in 3 Nephi 7. By mentioning that Nephi₂, son of Helaman₂, does not return, Mormon symbolically notes that true repentance and true Nephite religion, such as that which Nephi₃ embodied, did not return.

What they got instead was a continued increase in the influence of the Gadianton robbers. They were so prevalent that both Lamanites and Nephites took up arms against them. Also important in this statement is Mormon's separation of the Gadiantons from both the Nephites and the Lamanites. Mormon considers them a third entity, even though some of the members of the Gadiantons were formerly part of either the Nephites or the Lamanites.

3 Nephi 2:12–16

12 Therefore, all the Lamanites who had become converted unto the Lord did unite with their brethren, the Nephites, and were compelled, for the safety of their lives and their women and their children, to take up arms against those Gadianton robbers, yea, and also to maintain their rights, and the privileges of their church and of their worship, and their freedom and their liberty.

13 And it came to pass that before this thirteenth year had passed away the Nephites were threatened with utter destruction because of this war, which had become exceedingly sore.

14 And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites;

15 And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites;

16 And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year.

Comments

Verse 15 notes that the Lamanites' "skin became white like unto the Nephites." This creates the antithesis of God causing "a skin of blackness to come upon [the Lamanites]" (2 Nephi 5:21). The contrast between white and black is intentional and should not be confused with skin pigmentation (see the comments on 2 Nephi 5:20–21).

Note the timing of this change. In verse 12, we have previously converted Lamanites. They were converted by Nephi₂ well over a decade before. They had not only been righteous, but they were so righteous

that they could send a prophet, Samuel, to preach to the Nephites. They do not become “white” until they “did unite with their brethren, the Nephites.” Thus, it appears that “whiteness” is associated with being politically Nephite. The Lamanites and Nephites united against a common foe. The Lamanites are still considered righteous, and Mormon told us in verse 10 of this chapter that the Nephites “did still remain in wickedness.”

The “whiteness” appears only when the Lamanites were “numbered among the Nephites.” The terms are simply further markers of an in-group versus an out-group. There is no relationship here to skin pigmentation.

Nephites on the Brink of Destruction

3 Nephi 2:17–19

17 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fourteenth year, the war between the robbers and the people of Nephi did continue and did become exceedingly sore; nevertheless, the people of Nephi did gain some advantage of the robbers, insomuch that they did drive them back out of their lands into the mountains and into their secret places.

18 And thus ended the fourteenth year. And in the fifteenth year they did come forth against the people of Nephi; and because of the wickedness of the people of Nephi, and their many contentions and dissensions, the Gadianton robbers did gain many advantages over them.

19 And thus ended the fifteenth year, and thus were the people in a state of many afflictions; and the sword of destruction did hang over them, insomuch that they were about to be smitten down by it, and this because of their iniquity.

Comments

The war with the Gadiantons heats up, and each side has its small victories. Nevertheless, Mormon prepares his audience for his upcoming message: “the sword of destruction did hang over them, insomuch that they were about to be smitten down by it, and this because of their iniquity.” The Nephites still have not fully come to live by their covenants, and therefore they are forfeiting the promise of protection that is part of the covenant of the land.

This chapter does end a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 3

Gadianton Leader, Giddianhi, Writes to Lachoneus

3 Nephi 3:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that in the sixteenth year from the coming of Christ, Lachoneus, the governor of the land, received an epistle from the leader and the governor of this band of robbers; and these were the words which were written, saying:

2 Lachoneus, most noble and chief governor of the land, behold, I write this epistle unto you, and do give unto you exceedingly great praise because of your firmness, and also the firmness of your people, in maintaining that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty; yea, ye do stand well, as if ye were supported by the hand of a god, in the defence of your liberty, and your property, and your country, or that which ye do call so.

Comments

As we have seen multiple times, Mormon is much more interested in times of conflict than in times of peace. Perhaps part of the reason is that times of peace so often led to Nephite prosperity, which then led to forsaking God’s commandments, and therefore falling subject to the negative aspect of the promise of the land.

We begin 3 Nephi 3 with the introduction of yet another conflict. Mormon prepared us for this conflict by describing the Nephite turn to apostasy even after the miracle that was shown of Christ’s birth. That they should so soon turn away was sad, but Mormon declares that it was also dangerous, but both apostate Nephites and dissident Lamanites had joined with the Gadiantons, who had become extremely powerful. This chapter begins with the powerful leader of the Gadiantons sending a message to the Nephite government that they should submit or be conquered.

Verse 9 in this chapter tells us that the letter comes for Giddianhi. Giddianhi clearly knows something of the Nephite nation, for he taunts them with principles that are foundational. He “praises” them for “maintaining that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty . . . as if ye were supported by the hand of a god.” Giddianhi understands that those are Nephite foundational principles, but he declares them simply ideas and not realities.

3 Nephi 3:3–5

3 And it seemeth a pity unto me, most noble Lachoneus, that ye should be so foolish and vain as to suppose that ye can stand against so many brave men who are at my command, who do now at this time stand in their arms, and do await with great anxiety for the word—Go down upon the Nephites and destroy them.

4 And I, knowing of their unconquerable spirit, having proved them in the field of battle, and knowing of their everlasting hatred towards you because of the many wrongs which ye have done unto them, therefore if they should come down against you they would visit you with utter destruction.

5 Therefore I have written this epistle, sealing it with mine own hand, feeling for your welfare, because of your firmness in that which ye believe to be right, and your noble spirit in the field of battle.

Comments

Giddianhi was a master of sarcasm. He notes that he has a very large army, one that has been proved in battle, and which has an “unconquerable spirit.” Even worse, they have an “everlasting hatred” for the Nephites. They are ready, they are even anxious, to be sent to destroy the Nephites.

Giddianhi writes that he feels for the Nephites and is personally holding off this army that is straining for the command to go to battle. Only out of such kindness is Giddianhi writing. It is an attempt at intimidation, but one that does not appear to care whether the Nephites are intimidated. Giddianhi clearly believes that he can conquer the Nephites.

3 Nephi 3:6–8

6 Therefore I write unto you, desiring that ye would yield up unto this my people, your cities, your lands, and your possessions, rather than that they should visit you with the sword and that destruction should come upon you.

7 Or in other words, yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us—not our slaves, but our brethren and partners of all our substance.

8 And behold, I swear unto you, if ye will do this, with an oath, ye shall not be destroyed; but if ye will not do this, I swear unto you with an oath, that on the morrow month I will command that my armies shall come down against you, and they shall not stay their hand and shall spare not, but shall slay you, and shall let fall the sword upon you even until ye shall become extinct.

Comments

Giddianhi suggests that the only hope for the Nephites is to submit to him and his people. That would avoid warfare and the death of many. That part was certainly true, but it would also mean the end of the Nephites.

Part of the conditions would be that they “unite with [the Gadiantons] and become acquainted with [their] secret works, and become [their] brethren that [the Nephites] may be like unto [the Gadiantons].”

The stick after this carrot was that it was going to happen either way. If the Nephites did not submit, it would happen by force of arms.

3 Nephi 3:9–10

9 And behold, I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the secret society of Gadianton; which society and the works thereof I know to be good; and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us.

10 And I write this epistle unto you, Lachoneus, and I hope that ye will deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood, that this my people may recover their rights and government, who have dissented away from you because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government, and except ye do this, I will avenge their wrongs. I am Giddianhi.

Comments

Verse 9 teaches us something about how Mormon is using the name Gadianton in his text. Giddianhi is the leader and declares that he is the governor over this group that Mormon has called Gadiantons. Mormon has Giddianhi declare that he is the governor “of this the secret society of Gadianton.” The way Mormon uses the name Gadianton suggests that the name is probably something Mormon has added to the letter. The purposes for which Mormon is using the name also tell us why Giddianhi declares that he leads a “secret society.”

When one puts into a political letter that they lead a “secret society,” it stretches the imagination to see it as “secret.” In this case, Giddianhi uses the name and description for intimidation factor. A society that is truly secret could not be intimidating, because no one would know about it.

What we are seeing is Mormon using the Nephite historical record to teach the lesson from history that his future readers need to know about. Mormon has declared that the Gadiantons will be the force that destroys the Nephites in Mormon’s day (see Helaman 2:13). He is setting up his readers’ understanding of the dangers of that society, and linking them to the secret societies that destroyed the Jaredites.

This light manipulation of history should not be thought of as Mormon being inaccurate, or that there is anything wrong with the translation of the text. This is the same type of history that we see in much of the Old Testament, where historical events are used as the foundation for the stories that would educate the readers. It is a sign that the Book of Mormon follows ancient canons of how history should be used, rather than those of the more modern society in which Joseph Smith lived.

Nephites and Lamanites Gather in a Central Defensive Location

3 Nephi 3:11–15

11 And now it came to pass when Lachoneus received this epistle he was exceedingly astonished, because of the boldness of Giddianhi demanding the possession of the land of the Nephites, and also of threatening the people and avenging the wrongs of those that had received no wrong, save it were they had wronged themselves by dissenting away unto those wicked and abominable robbers.

12 Now behold, this Lachoneus, the governor, was a just man, and could not be frightened by the demands and the threatenings of a robber; therefore he did not hearken to the epistle of Giddianhi, the governor of the robbers, but he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength against the time that the robbers should come down against them.

13 Yea, he sent a proclamation among all the people, that they should gather together their women, and their children, their flocks and their herds, and all their substance, save it were their land, unto one place.

14 And he caused that fortifications should be built round about them, and the strength thereof should be exceedingly great. And he caused that armies, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites, or of all them who were numbered among the Nephites, should be placed as guards round about to watch them, and to guard them from the robbers day and night.

15 Yea, he said unto them: As the Lord liveth, except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in nowise be delivered out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers.

Comments

The key to this event will be the statement in verse 12 that Lachoneus “was a just man.” The evidence that he was a “just man” comes in his response: “he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength.” He was a believing Nephite and turned to the Lord. When the Nephites are faithful to Yahweh they are protected, and Lachoneus is reminding his people of that promise.

However, as with all human actions, while we pray fervently to God for assistance we should also be working just as fervently to make the desired outcome happen. Thus, along with prayer, Lachoneus “caused that fortifications should be built round about them.” Still, after all human preparation was done that they could do, Lachoneus reminds his people: “except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in nowise be delivered out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers.”

3 Nephi 3:16–18

16 And so great and marvelous were the words and prophecies of Lachoneus that they did cause fear to come upon all the people; and they did exert themselves in their might to do according to the words of Lachoneus.

17 And it came to pass that Lachoneus did appoint chief captains over all the armies of the Nephites, to command them at the time that the robbers should come down out of the wilderness against them.
18 Now the chiefest among all the chief captains and the great commander of all the armies of the Nephites was appointed, and his name was Gidgiddoni.

Comments

Lachoneus had asked two things of his people: prepare spiritually and prepare physically. To their credit, this time they listen. One of the next important decisions was to appoint a military leader. The “chiefest among all the chief captains” was to be Gidgiddoni. Gidgiddoni turns out to have been a very wise general.

3 Nephi 3:19–21

19 Now it was the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains, (save it were in their times of wickedness) some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy; therefore, this Gidgiddoni was a great prophet among them, as also was the chief judge.

20 Now the people said unto Gidgiddoni: Pray unto the Lord, and let us go up upon the mountains and into the wilderness, that we may fall upon the robbers and destroy them in their own lands.

21 But Gidgiddoni saith unto them: The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands; therefore we will prepare ourselves in the center of our lands, and we will gather all our armies together, and we will not go against them, but we will wait till they shall come against us; therefore as the Lord liveth, if we do this he will deliver them into our hands.

Comments

The people had done as they asked, and then made assumptions of what the next best course might be. They felt that they were prepared, and sufficiently repentant that the Lord would be on their side. They ask Gidgiddoni to “let us go up upon the mountains . . . that we may fall upon the robbers and destroy them in their own lands.”

Gidgiddoni realized that while they were strong, the Gadiantons were not only stronger, but that they probably had better defensive positions in mountains that they knew well. While difficult for some to understand, rather than attack Gidgiddoni has them wait to be attacked. He promises that this tactic will allow them to have a victory. Perhaps the most difficult thing to do in hard times is wait for the victory which will only come later.

3 Nephi 3:22–24

22 And it came to pass in the seventeenth year, in the latter end of the year, the proclamation of Lachoneus had gone forth throughout all the face of the land, and they had taken their horses, and their

chariots, and their cattle, and all their flocks, and their herds, and their grain, and all their substance, and did march forth by thousands and by tens of thousands, until they had all gone forth to the place which had been appointed that they should gather themselves together, to defend themselves against their enemies.

23 And the land which was appointed was the land of Zarahemla, and the land which was between the land Zarahemla and the land Bountiful, yea, to the line which was between the land Bountiful and the land Desolation.

24 And there were a great many thousand people who were called Nephites, who did gather themselves together in this land. Now Lachoneus did cause that they should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the great curse which was upon the land northward.

Comments

Part of Gidgiddoni's tactics was a scorched earth policy. He pulled all of the people and their flocks from the land near to where the Gadiantons were, and moved them all north toward the land Bountiful. While that conceded land to the Gadiantons, it did not provide them any way to raid for food. It also concentrated the Nephites in a smaller area, making themselves not only more defensible, but providing more people in a concentrated area to fight against the Gadiantons should they come upon them.

Of course, while this policy had advantages, it also had the difficulty of uprooting peoples and lives. Many were greatly inconvenienced by the actions. It was not a painless solution.

3 Nephi 3:25–26

25 And they did fortify themselves against their enemies; and they did dwell in one land, and in one body, and they did fear the words which had been spoken by Lachoneus, insomuch that they did repent of all their sins; and they did put up their prayers unto the Lord their God, that he would deliver them in the time that their enemies should come down against them to battle.

26 And they were exceedingly sorrowful because of their enemies. And Gidgiddoni did cause that they should make weapons of war of every kind, and they should be strong with armor, and with shields, and with bucklers, after the manner of his instruction.

Comments

In addition to withdrawing to a more defensible position and removing available food from the Gadiantons, the people continued to prepare militarily. In addition to defensive works, Gidgiddoni armed his people.

This is clearly not the end of the story, and this was not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. That edition used a single chapter for our chapters 3–5.

3 Nephi 4

3 Nephi 4:1–4

1 And it came to pass that in the latter end of the eighteenth year those armies of robbers had prepared for battle, and began to come down and to sally forth from the hills, and out of the mountains, and the wilderness, and their strongholds, and their secret places, and began to take possession of the lands, both which were in the land south and which were in the land north, and began to take possession of all the lands which had been deserted by the Nephites, and the cities which had been left desolate.

2 But behold, there were no wild beasts nor game in those lands which had been deserted by the Nephites, and there was no game for the robbers save it were in the wilderness.

3 And the robbers could not exist save it were in the wilderness, for the want of food; for the Nephites had left their lands desolate, and had gathered their flocks and their herds and all their substance, and they were in one body.

4 Therefore, there was no chance for the robbers to plunder and to obtain food, save it were to come up in open battle against the Nephites; and the Nephites being in one body, and having so great a number, and having reserved for themselves provisions, and horses and cattle, and flocks of every kind, that they might subsist for the space of seven years, in the which time they did hope to destroy the robbers from off the face of the land; and thus the eighteenth year did pass away.

Comments

The wisdom of Gidgiddoni's plan is discovered in verses 2 and 3. The Gadiantons were an army. They had marched into a new land. A problem of armies is supply, and most important in the supply line is food. While they can carry enough food for a time, an extended campaign, such as a campaign of conquest, requires that the food supply be replenished. While that might happen from the homeland, it was typical for armies to confiscate food in the lands they were conquering. Except, in this case, there was no food to scavenge. Although the text only mentions animals, it is certain that Gidgiddoni also had his people take all the grains they had with them, and if they couldn't carry it, or it wasn't sufficiently ripe, to destroy the fields. This ensured that the Gadiantons couldn't scavenge the land.

This leads directly to verse 4. Without food, they are required to return to their mountain strongholds. The next question would be whether the Gadiantons could simply take over the fields. They certainly could have taken over some of the fields, but the Nephites could destroy those fields with small sorties. The result was that there was a large buffer zone between the Nephites and the Gadiantons and the Gadiantons couldn't safely occupy the now deserted territories to begin the process of growing again (see verse 6 below). That would take time that the Nephite sorties would not give them.

Even though the Nephites had the stores to survive a seven-year siege (verse 4), it was in the next year that the Gadiantons chose to attack.

Gadiantons' First Siege Attempt

3 Nephi 4:5–7

5 And it came to pass that in the nineteenth year Giddianhi found that it was expedient that he should go up to battle against the Nephites, for there was no way that they could subsist save it were to plunder and rob and murder.

6 And they durst not spread themselves upon the face of the land insomuch that they could raise grain, lest the Nephites should come upon them and slay them; therefore Giddianhi gave commandment unto his armies that in this year they should go up to battle against the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that they did come up to battle; and it was in the sixth month; and behold, great and terrible was the day that they did come up to battle; and they were girded about after the manner of robbers; and they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn, and they had head-plates upon them; and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies of Giddianhi, because of their armor, and because of their being dyed in blood.

Comments

Verse 6 confirms that Gidgiddoni had established a scorched earth policy which was aided by occasional sorties that could disrupt any attempts to grow food. Thus, if the Gadiantons were to accomplish their desires, they had to conquer the Nephites.

They attack in the nineteenth year, the sixth month. Gidgiddoni's withdrawal into the north began near the end of the seventeenth year (3 Nephi 3:22). That withdrawal would have taken some time. Thus, this attack comes somewhere around a year after that withdrawal had been accomplished.

When the Gadiantons attack, "they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn." We cannot know precisely what all of this looked like. For one thing, there were no sheep, so we aren't sure what the reference to the lamb-skin might have been. We can be comfortably certain that a shorn head meant a shorn head, but the reason might be cultural. In Mesoamerica, captives

are often shown being grasped by a shock of their hair. Perhaps the shorn head would signal that this would be a fight in which there would be no captives. We can also expect that whatever was dyed in blood (the text could refer to the lamb-skins dyed in blood, or even the warriors), that was a visible symbol that was intended to give fright to the enemy.

3 Nephi 4:8–10

8 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

9 And it came to pass that when the armies of Giddianhi saw this they began to shout with a loud voice, because of their joy, for they had supposed that the Nephites had fallen with fear because of the terror of their armies.

10 But in this thing they were disappointed, for the Nephites did not fear them; but they did fear their God and did supplicate him for protection; therefore, when the armies of Giddianhi did rush upon them they were prepared to meet them; yea, in the strength of the Lord they did receive them.

Comments

The descriptions in verse 7 of the lamb-skin and the blood were indications that the Gadiantons wanted their physical appearance to be intimidating. Thus, when the Nephites “had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God,” the Gadiantons interpreted that event as showing that their desire to intimidate had been accomplished. This emboldened the Gadiantons.

Mormon makes certain that we see the contrast. The Gadiantons were joyful because they had misinterpreted the Nephites’ actions. He tells us that “in this thing they were disappointed.” That dry foreshadowing informs Mormon’s readers what is coming next, when the Gadiantons rushed to the attack, but the Nephite’s received them “in the strength of the Lord.”

3 Nephi 4:11–14

11 And the battle commenced in this the sixth month; and great and terrible was the battle thereof, yea, great and terrible was the slaughter thereof, insomuch that there never was known so great a slaughter among all the people of Lehi since he left Jerusalem.

12 And notwithstanding the threatenings and the oaths which Giddianhi had made, behold, the Nephites did beat them, insomuch that they did fall back from before them.

13 And it came to pass that Gidgiddoni commanded that his armies should pursue them as far as the borders of the wilderness, and that they should not spare any that should fall into their hands by

the way; and thus they did pursue them and did slay them, to the borders of the wilderness, even until they had fulfilled the commandment of Gidgiddoni.

14 And it came to pass that Giddianhi, who had stood and fought with boldness, was pursued as he fled; and being weary because of his much fighting he was overtaken and slain. And thus was the end of Giddianhi the robber.

Comments

Like other descriptions of warfare outside of the second half of the book of Alma, Mormon gives few details of this battle, which was nevertheless so terrible a slaughter “that never was known so great a slaughter among all the people of Lehi since he left Jerusalem.”

The Nephites are victorious, and when the Gadiantons are fleeing, Gidgiddoni gives them pursuit, eventually killing even their leader, Giddianhi. Many Gadiantons escaped to their mountains. While this battle has been decided in favor of the Nephites, the war had not yet been won.

Gadiantons’ Second Siege Attempt

3 Nephi 4:15–16

15 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites did return again to their place of security. And it came to pass that this nineteenth year did pass away, and the robbers did not come again to battle; neither did they come again in the twentieth year.

16 And in the twenty and first year they did not come up to battle, but they came up on all sides to lay siege round about the people of Nephi; for they did suppose that if they should cut off the people of Nephi from their lands, and should hem them in on every side, and if they should cut them off from all their outward privileges, that they could cause them to yield themselves up according to their wishes.

Comments

Having been beaten before, the second time that the Gadiantons attack they attempt a different strategy. Rather than giving the Nephites time to withdraw and to create a vacant buffer zone, the Gadiantons attempted to siege the Nephites. The text says they laid the siege “round about,” but it is doubtful that they had sufficient numbers to fully surround them. It does not appear that the Gadiantons controlled the north; we will see in a few verses that Zemnarihah will attempt to flee in that direction but is cut off.

The Gadiantons would not necessarily need much on the east or the west, as the seas were effective geological barriers to escape in those directions. Perhaps this refers more to covering as much of the defended city as possible.

3 Nephi 4:17–20

17 Now they had appointed unto themselves another leader, whose name was Zemnarihah; therefore it was Zemnarihah that did cause that this siege should take place.

18 But behold, this was an advantage to the Nephites; for it was impossible for the robbers to lay siege sufficiently long to have any effect upon the Nephites, because of their much provision which they had laid up in store,

19 And because of the scantiness of provisions among the robbers; for behold, they had nothing save it were meat for their subsistence, which meat they did obtain in the wilderness;

20 And it came to pass that the wild game became scarce in the wilderness insomuch that the robbers were about to perish with hunger.

Comments

Sieges are a difficult form of warfare because so little happens. They are often won or lost based on food and water. In this case, the advantage continued to lie with the Nephites, who had provisions to last for seven years when the first battle occurred and had certainly worked to add to those stores since then.

The Gadiantons still had a supply chain problem. There was nothing that they could scavenge, especially with a wilderness that had been apparently over-hunted. In Mesoamerica, if they were hunting for wild animals, there were very few that were large. Thus, they would need very large quantities of the smaller animals and that would deplete them quickly.

The problem of food is just as difficult for those laying siege as for those who are being besieged.

3 Nephi 4:21–23

21 And the Nephites were continually marching out by day and by night, and falling upon their armies, and cutting them off by thousands and by tens of thousands.

22 And thus it became the desire of the people of Zemnarihah to withdraw from their design, because of the great destruction which came upon them by night and by day.

23 And it came to pass that Zemnarihah did give command unto his people that they should withdraw themselves from the siege, and march into the furthestmost parts of the land northward.

Comments

Verse 21 confirms that the Nephites would sortie from their defensive position to harass the Gadiantons. The combination of the effects of those losses and the problem of food has Zemnarihah try a different tactic. In this case, he attempts to go north. That is not explained and somewhat unusual, because the Gadianton stronghold was in the south.

As speculation, if the Gadiantons did have the connections to the northern city and culture, then this attempt to go north was to head toward safety, back to their homelands.

3 Nephi 4:24–27

24 And now, Gidgiddoni being aware of their design, and knowing of their weakness because of the want of food, and the great slaughter which had been made among them, therefore he did send out his armies in the night-time, and did cut off the way of their retreat, and did place his armies in the way of their retreat.

25 And this did they do in the night-time, and got on their march beyond the robbers, so that on the morrow, when the robbers began their march, they were met by the armies of the Nephites both in their front and in their rear.

26 And the robbers who were on the south were also cut off in their places of retreat. And all these things were done by command of Gidgiddoni.

27 And there were many thousands who did yield themselves up prisoners unto the Nephites, and the remainder of them were slain.

Comments

Gidgiddoni knows that the Gadiantons were attempting to flee north, and he cuts off their retreat. Because he is in the land Bountiful, Gidgiddoni controls the narrow neck that leads into the land northward. Thus, geography helped Gidgiddoni prevent Zemnarihah from simply marching around the Nephite defending armies.

Gidgiddoni manages to get troops both in front of and behind Zemnarihah's army. Therefore, they were in an untenable position, and many died before they realized that they were defeated and had to surrender.

Zemnarihah Ceremonially Executed

3 Nephi 4:28–33

28 And their leader, Zemnarihah, was taken and hanged upon a tree, yea, even upon the top thereof until he was dead. And when they had hanged him until he was dead they did fell the tree to the earth, and did cry with a loud voice, saying:

29 May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth.

30 And they did rejoice and cry again with one voice, saying: May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, protect this people in righteousness, so long as they shall call on the name of their God for protection.

31 And it came to pass that they did break forth, all as one, in singing, and praising their God for the great thing which he had done for them, in preserving them from falling into the hands of their enemies.

32 Yea, they did cry: Hosanna to the Most High God. And they did cry: Blessed be the name of the Lord God Almighty, the Most High God.

33 And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction.

Comments

Zemnarihah was “hanged upon a tree.” This was an ignominious death. There are depictions of hangings on some Mesoamerican codices.

Mormon gives voice to the people’s exuberance at the end of both Zemnarihah and the war by allowing them a speech rejoicing in God’s protection. This is an example of where the people’s righteousness did invoke the projection promised in the covenant of the land.

This is not the end of the chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 5

All Nephites Believe in Christ

3 Nephi 5:1–3

1 And now behold, there was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken; for they knew that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled.

2 And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come, because of the many signs which had been given, according to the words of the prophets; and because of the things which had come to pass already they knew that it must needs be that all things should come to pass according to that which had been spoken.

3 Therefore they did forsake all their sins, and their abominations, and their whoredoms, and did serve God with all diligence day and night.

Comments

There was originally no chapter break between the text of our chapters 3–5. Understanding that these three verses were part of the previous chapter allows us to see the context for this discussion of Nephite righteousness. They had just almost two years of struggle against the Gadiantons, during which they had been confined to a much smaller area. In spite of the hardships, however, they had managed to retain their faithfulness to the commandments, and thus understood that it was the fulfillment of the promise of the land that they were saved from the Gadiantons.

Although Mormon has told his readers that the Gadiantons would eventually be the downfall of the Nephite nation (see Helaman 2:13–14), he also wants us to understand that faithfulness to God, his commandments and his covenants, could have protected them. Because such faithfulness could protect the Nephites, we are to understand that it may also protect us.

An important aspect of this Nephite faithfulness was knowing “that Christ had come.” We are reading Mormon’s lead into the supreme event of Nephite history, when Christ not only had come to the world, but would come to the righteous Nephites in the New World.

3 Nephi 5:4–6

4 And now it came to pass that when they had taken all the robbers prisoners, insomuch that none did escape who were not slain, they did cast their prisoners into prison, and did cause the word of God to be preached unto them; and as many as would repent of their sins and enter into a covenant that they would murder no more were set at liberty.

5 But as many as there were who did not enter into a covenant, and who did still continue to have those secret murders in their hearts, yea, as many as were found breathing out threatenings against their brethren were condemned and punished according to the law.

6 And thus they did put an end to all those wicked, and secret, and abominable combinations, in the which there was so much wickedness, and so many murders committed.

Comments

The end of the Gadiantons at this time resulted in the removal of this particular Gadianton gang. As with other iterations of the Gadiantons, their destruction only appears to be their final downfall. They will return.

The Nephites continue to use the same tactics as we saw with Chief Captain Moroni. When he took prisoners, he allowed them the opportunity to gain their freedom through a covenant. In this case, the covenant was not that they would not fight, but that they converted to the Nephite religion and covenanted with God.

Verse 6 declares that “thus they did put an end to all those wicked, and secret, and abominable combinations,” at least until they arise again, and in not too many years.

Mormon Explains His Record

3 Nephi 5:7–12

7 And thus had the twenty and second year passed away, and the twenty and third year also, and the twenty and fourth, and the twenty and fifth; and thus had twenty and five years passed away.

8 And there had many things transpired which, in the eyes of some, would be great and marvelous; nevertheless, they cannot all be written in this book; yea, this book cannot contain even a hundredth part of what was done among so many people in the space of twenty and five years;

9 But behold there are records which do contain all the proceedings of this people; and a shorter but true account was given by Nephi.

10 Therefore I have made my record of these things according to the record of Nephi, which was engraven on the plates which were called the plates of Nephi.

11 And behold, I do make the record on plates which I have made with mine own hands.

12 And behold, I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon, the land in which Alma did establish the church among the people, yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression.

Comments

In the middle of Mormon's narration of events, he inserts something about his writing, and about who he is. From verse 8 through the end of this chapter (which also ended a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon), we have Mormon describing himself and the reason he is writing his record.

The first thing of note is in verse 9. After saying that he cannot write the hundredth part of all the records, he notes that there is, in addition to the archive of the large plates, "a shorter but true account . . . given by Nephi." Mormon is telling us that he is taking some of the account in 3 Nephi from Nephi's personal record. Even though he announces it at this point, it is not clearly the source until 3 Nephi 8.

Next, we have the introduction of Mormon himself. This is the first time in our current Book of Mormon that we are introduced to the editor who has framed what we have read. Surely in the part of his work that was lost (known as the 116 lost pages), there must have been another introduction to Mormon and why he was writing. Nevertheless, we get it here. Why here, if it must have been done earlier? The answer is in the next few verses.

3 Nephi 5:13–17

13 Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.

14 And it hath become expedient that I, according to the will of God, that the prayers of those who have gone hence, who were the holy ones, should be fulfilled according to their faith, should make a record of these things which have been done—

15 Yea, a small record of that which hath taken place from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, even down until the present time.

16 Therefore I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the commencement of my day;

17 And then I do make a record of the things which I have seen with mine own eyes.

Comments

Mormon is nearing the reason for which he writes, which is the appearance of the Savior to those gathered in Bountiful. He identifies himself as "a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He further notes that "I have been called of him to declare his word among his people." In the Book of Mormon, the word *disciple*

is used where a modern writer would use *apostle*. This is Mormon's introduction of himself as an apostle, and one who has received a command to write so that future readers would know this message.

Mormon's commission was to make "a small record" of the Nephites from the time Lehi₁ left Jerusalem to his own day. He does that by working with what we call the large plates of Nephi. He declares that he will also write "the things which I have seen with mine own eyes."

3 Nephi 5:18–20

18 And I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record; nevertheless there are many things which, according to our language, we are not able to write.

19 And now I make an end of my saying, which is of myself, and proceed to give my account of the things which have been before me.

20 I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi. I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ, that he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, (and no one knew it save it were himself and those whom he brought out of that land) and that he hath given me and my people so much knowledge unto the salvation of our souls.

Comments

In his capacity as *disciple*, or apostle, Mormon declares that he has made "a just and true record." It is interesting that Mormon understands that it can be "just and true" even though it is not comprehensive. He has selected those things that fit the message he wanted to deliver.

In verse 19 he says that "now I make an end of my saying," but he is only beginning to end what he has to say. Mormon is writing off-script at this point. Verse 19 tells us that he knows that he needs to return to the planned text, but he still has more on his mind before he does.

The beginning of this final statement (at this time) is a repetition of who he is. He declares that he is a "pure descendant of Lehi." There is no way to fully know what he means. He might trace his genealogy through one of the tribes of Lehi₁'s sons, but it is unclear how any lineage would be considered "pure" after a thousand years. The concept is probably not genetic, or even political. Mormon has said that he was to write about the Nephites from the time Lehi₁ left Jerusalem, and Mormon the apostle is connecting himself as an ideologically, or religiously pure, descendant of Lehi₁, and therefore drawing a straight line from Lehi₁'s righteousness to Mormon as an apostle.

3 Nephi 5:21–26

21 Surely he hath blessed the house of Jacob, and hath been merciful unto the seed of Joseph.

22 And insomuch as the children of Lehi have kept his commandments he hath blessed them and prospered them according to his word.

23 Yea, and surely shall he again bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord their God.

24 And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth.

25 And as he hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them.

26 And then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed; yea, as the Lord liveth so shall it be. Amen.

Comments

The *amen* ends Mormon's inserted testimony and declaration. What he has declared is that he is a *disciple*, or apostle, and that he has a mission to spread God's word. He is doing that through what he writes, but he also knows that what he writes is for some future generation. Therefore, at the end of his insertion, his thoughts turn to the house of Jacob to which his people will eventually be reunited and reconciled. Nephi₃ spent time thinking of, and preaching about, the restoration of the House of Israel. Mormon, at the end of the Nephite nations, thinks, and writes, of the same thing: "surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob." Mormon ends with his apostolic declaration: "then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 6

Peace and Prosperity Are Restored

3 Nephi 6:1–3

1 And now it came to pass that the people of the Nephites did all return to their own lands in the twenty and sixth year, every man, with his family, his flocks and his herds, his horses and his cattle, and all things whatsoever did belong unto them.

2 And it came to pass that they had not eaten up all their provisions; therefore they did take with them all that they had not devoured, of all their grain of every kind, and their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things, and they did return to their own lands and their possessions, both on the north and on the south, both on the land northward and on the land southward.

3 And they granted unto those robbers who had entered into a covenant to keep the peace of the land, who were desirous to remain Lamanites, lands, according to their numbers, that they might have, with their labors, wherewith to subsist upon; and thus they did establish peace in all the land.

Comments

A straightforward reading of these verses would have the Nephites stay in the land Bountiful for four years after the war had ended in the twenty-second year (3 Nephi 5:7). This would not be the correct way to read these verses. Verses 2 and 3 repeat the basic information from 3 Nephi 5:4–6. What has happened in between is Mormon's insertion of his own tasks and feelings. Those were an unplanned insertion into the text, and thus Mormon returns to his text with the process of repetitive resumption (see 1 Nephi 6, in volume 1, for more on repetitive resumption).

When the war ended, the Nephites returned to their homelands, and then Mormon's count of years (3 Nephi 5:7 and 3 Nephi 6:1) takes place. We return the events of the text to the correct time period in the next verse.

3 Nephi 6:4–9

4 And they began again to prosper and to wax great; and the twenty and sixth and seventh years passed away, and there was great order in the land; and they had formed their laws according to equity and justice.

5 And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression.

6 And now it was Gidgiddoni, and the judge, Lachoneus, and those who had been appointed leaders, who had established this great peace in the land.

7 And it came to pass that there were many cities built anew, and there were many old cities repaired.

8 And there were many highways cast up, and many roads made, which led from city to city, and from land to land, and from place to place.

9 And thus passed away the twenty and eighth year, and the people had continual peace.

Comments

The righteousness of the people had allowed them to defeat the Gadiantons, recognizing that Yahweh was with them. The promise of the land protected them. When the war was over, they did not immediately forget their lessons, and continued to obey the commandments.

According to the promise of the land, they began to prosper. Their prosperity was manifest in the improvements in cities and in roads. This peace continued for two years from the date at the beginning of the chapter. However, as noted in the comments on verses 1–3 of this chapter, Mormon had repeated information that actually belonged in the twenty-second year. Therefore, this time of peace lasted, for the Nephites, a remarkable six years.

Wickedness Builds among the People

3 Nephi 6:10–12

10 But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

11 For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

12 And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

Comments

Sadly, Nephite prosperity leads to pride. This began in the twenty-ninth year with disputing among the people. There are times when disputing means religious differences, but at other times, such as this one, the disputing is about social rank.

It is not a coincidence that the greater prosperity is accompanied by “many merchants in the land.” Trade and exchange of goods is how we mark our prosperity. If all have access to these things, then there are no social divisions. However, when circumstances allowed some Nephites to have increased access over others, that is when the Nephite pride-problem of thinking oneself better than another person came into play.

The fact that there were many lawyers and officers reflects an increasing complexity of life, and therefore greater opportunities to suggest that one’s social position might be superior based on communal perceptions of that position. Certainly, the mention of merchants, lawyers, and officers in verse 11 suggests that they were important people and were among those positions referenced in verse 12, when it says: “The people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning.”

The idea that only some were given the chance to learn fits in well with what is known for most ancient complex societies. Education was reserved for the higher social echelons. There was no such thing as universal education, or schools which all could attend.

3 Nephi 6:13–16

13 Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble; some did return railing for railing, while others would receive railing and persecution and all manner of afflictions, and would not turn and revile again, but were humble and penitent before God.

14 And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

15 Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world.

16 And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years.

Comments

By this point in Mormon’s writings, we expect that righteous Nephites will have a short time of peace and then become prosperous and create a hierarchical society. That is the harbinger of this not going well for the Nephites. Although we expect it, it is always sad to see. In this case, it is even sadder because it followed the rather spectacular sign of the Messiah’s birth, and most recently, the miraculous salvation for the Gadianton robbers.

Nevertheless, there is again “a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up.” The idea of inequality does not immediately appear to suggest that the church should have been broken up, but social equality was one of the important Nephite ideals. When the majority began to favor inequality (obviously favored by those who could see themselves as better than others), a fundamental church teaching was no longer believed. That probably led to discarding other Nephite beliefs, and therefore, lack of belief broke up the church. While there were those who were “willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord,” those people were now in the minority. The majority did not feel inclined to keep the commandments of the Lord.

Mormon spends more time on this moral discussion of the effect of keeping and breaking the commandments than he typically does in narrative. He is not quoting a prophet here, but simply making his own conclusions known. Mormon knows what is coming, and he wants his readers to understand how it happened. Knowing how this event happened will also help understand the condition of the Nephites in Mormon’s day.

Prophets and Leaders Murdered in Secret

3 Nephi 6:17–20

17 And thus, in the commencement of the thirtieth year—the people having been delivered up for the space of a long time to be carried about by the temptations of the devil whithersoever he desired to carry them, and to do whatsoever iniquity he desired they should—and thus in the commencement of this, the thirtieth year, they were in a state of awful wickedness.

18 Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God.

19 And now it was in the days of Lachoneus, the son of Lachoneus, for Lachoneus did fill the seat of his father and did govern the people that year.

20 And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings.

Comments

Things are so bad among the Nephites that the majority “did wilfully rebel against God.” It was not because they had not been taught, but they chose to rebel against the commandments, indeed against the whole of Nephite religious and political thought.

Into such an atmosphere, God did not abandon his people, but sent prophets to them, “men inspired from heaven and sent forth.” That was the definition of the Old Testament prophets. These were not men of power or position, but rather of calling. It was their calling to “testify boldly.” This is the thirtieth year. It will be in the thirty-fourth year that the next signs of nature will be given of the Messiah’s death in the Old World.

3 Nephi 6:21–25

21 Now there were many of the people who were exceedingly angry because of those who testified of these things; and those who were angry were chiefly the chief judges, and they who had been high priests and lawyers; yea, all those who were lawyers were angry with those who testified of these things.

22 Now there was no lawyer nor judge nor high priest that could have power to condemn any one to death save their condemnation was signed by the governor of the land.

23 Now there were many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ who testified boldly, who were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor of the land until after their death.

24 Now behold, this was contrary to the laws of the land, that any man should be put to death except they had power from the governor of the land—

25 Therefore a complaint came up unto the land of Zarahemla, to the governor of the land, against these judges who had condemned the prophets of the Lord unto death, not according to the law.

Comments

Mormon explains that while the people might have forsaken Nephite religious ideals, they did still hold to the concept of the law. Rather than mob action, they reported the prophets to their chief judges. Nevertheless, as with the discomfoting aspects of many of the Old Testament prophets, the people’s preferred solution was to silence them by putting them to death.

The Governor of the land retained that ability. We see in verse 21 that there are many chief judges, and that there is a Governor over all the land. At the beginning of the book of Alma, there was only the Chief Judge. That position appears to have become the Governor over all of the land, and it would be reasonable to assume that the individual cities and their associated land would also have chief judges.

The complaint comes to the Governor in Zarahemla. These prophets are to be tried according to the law.

3 Nephi 6:26–30

26 Now it came to pass that they were taken and brought up before the judge, to be judged of the crime which they had done, according to the law which had been given by the people.

27 Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law.

28 And they did enter into a covenant one with another, yea, even into that covenant which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness.

29 Therefore they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a covenant to destroy them, and to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law.

30 And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings.

Comments

Mormon uses this incident to discuss how the Gadianton ideas returned to the Nephites, even after defeating the Gadiantons, after declaring them gone, only eight years earlier. Those who want to quiet the prophets enter into covenants to make that happen, and also to find a way to “destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land.”

This has long been the most pernicious of Nephite apostasies. In this case, however, the apostates do not leave to join the Lamanites. They take over from within.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 7

3 Nephi 7:1

1 Now behold, I will show unto you that they did not establish a king over the land; but in this same year, yea, the thirtieth year, they did destroy upon the judgment-seat, yea, did murder the chief judge of the land.

Comments

There was no chapter division at this point in the 1830 edition, and beginning at this point separates the statement that “they did not establish a king” from the context that prompted it, which was the immediately preceding verse (3 Nephi 6:30) which said that the people who took over the government wanted to “establish a king over the land.”

There was an attempt to change the nature of the government of the Nephite people. What it accomplished instead was the destruction of the Nephite government, and therefore the dissolution of the Nephite people as a nation. This is Mormon’s ultimate message about the Gadiantons. They destroy nations. He has already declared that the secret combinations destroyed the Jaredites and tied those same secret combinations to the Gadiantons.

Although we will see that there will again be Nephites, Mormon tells us that before Christ appeared, they had been destroyed through the influence and actions of the Gadiantons. As a writer who believed in cycles of history, Mormon wants his audience to understand that just as the Gadiantons caused the destruction of the Nephites in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, that they will also cause the destruction of the Nephites in Mormon’s time. Mormon foreshadowed that lesson in Helaman 2:13–14:

And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi. Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.

Nephite Government Dissolves and Tribes Remain

3 Nephi 7:2–4

2 And the people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; and thus they did destroy the government of the land.

3 And every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes.

4 Now behold, there was no man among them save he had much family and many kindreds and friends; therefore their tribes became exceedingly great.

Comments

When the government of the nation fell apart, the Nephites easily divided into tribes. The reason that they so easily fell into tribal organizations is probably because those divisions had never completely left the society. We hear of people of different tribes throughout the text, and they were probably representative of a principle of organization that operated on a more local level. Therefore, the collapse of the government that unified the tribes did not create anarchy, but simply removed a unifying layer of government.

Within the tribes, there had already been an organizational structure. Even if the person who eventually became the “chief or leader” over them had already been the figurative head of the tribe, there was probably a “voice of the people” to sustain them in the more direct ruling role.

Tribal rule did not mean that they were small, as indicated in verse 4, which states that “their tribes became exceedingly great.” As an organizational unit, the tribe held together smaller units, which might (in more modern terms) be called clans, and then families within the clans.

3 Nephi 7:5–8

5 Now all this was done, and there were no wars as yet among them; and all this iniquity had come upon the people because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan.

6 And the regulations of the government were destroyed, because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.

7 And they did cause a great contention in the land, insomuch that the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked; yea, there were but few righteous men among them.

8 And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire.

Comments

Verses 5 and 6 conclude the introduction to the conditions existing before the great destructions. The government was destroyed “because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.” Even without writing the word Gadianton, Mormon clearly points to them with the indication that they operated through secret combinations, a phrase that also ties them to the Jaredites.

In verse 8 we have another place where Mormon will give a time, and then back up to describe events leading up to that time. Verse 13 of this chapter verifies that Mormon is still giving events of the thirtieth year.

The timing Mormon gives is also complicated because it does not easily fit into the declared dates in his text. The twenty-ninth year was when he indicated that they began to turn from righteousness. The six years Mormon mentions does not exactly fit in the timeframe he has given us. The Messiah will come to Bountiful late in the thirty-fourth year. He concludes the twenty-eighth year with peace and has the beginning of the twenty-ninth as when “there began to be some disputings” (3 Nephi 6:10).

A possible solution is simply that Mormon saw the interval differently that we do. In English, if today were Monday, the next Monday would be seven days from today. In many Spanish speaking countries, the week is calculated as “de hoy en ocho,” or literally, “eight days from today.” The meaning is precisely the same, but English does not count today, and Spanish does. Perhaps that explains Mormon’s six years when we see only five. It can also be understood by realizing that the clean divisions of events into years may not have been as clean as he writes them. Thus, the contentions might have been beginning in the end of the twenty-eighth years. The Savior appears in the end of the thirty-fourth year (see 3 Nephi 10:18, which occurs before the Savior’s appearance).

Jacob Becomes King of a Secret Combination

3 Nephi 7:9–11

9 Now this secret combination, which had brought so great iniquity upon the people, did gather themselves together, and did place at their head a man whom they did call Jacob;

10 And they did call him their king; therefore he became a king over this wicked band; and he was one of the chiefest who had given his voice against the prophets who testified of Jesus.

11 And it came to pass that they were not so strong in number as the tribes of the people, who were united together save it were their leaders did establish their laws, every one according to his tribe; nevertheless they were enemies; notwithstanding they were not a righteous people, yet they were united in the hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government.

Comments

The dissolution of the Nephite nation did not remove the Gadiantons from the land, nor those who had supported them. Their attempted takeover of the government simply caused so much division that the Nephite government, as an overarching layer over the various cities and lands (and tribes), was dissolved.

Those who had been favorable to the Gadiantons remained so, and gathered together in their own government. Over that reduced population, the Gadiantons declared a king. They had wanted a change to the government, and they made that change. They simply were not recognized by as many people.

3 Nephi 7:12–13

12 Therefore, Jacob seeing that their enemies were more numerous than they, he being the king of the band, therefore he commanded his people that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land, and there build up unto themselves a kingdom, until they were joined by dissenters, (for he flattered them that there would be many dissenters) and they become sufficiently strong to contend with the tribes of the people; and they did so.

13 And so speedy was their march that it could not be impeded until they had gone forth out of the reach of the people. And thus ended the thirtieth year; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi.

Comments

After toppling the Nephite government and establishing their own king over a much smaller people, Jacob, the new king, decides that they have to go north. When they were strong enough to survive harassment on the journey, they leave the land and continue north, “out of the reach of the people.” For all we can tell, those tribes who had previously been Nephite, remained in the land of Zarahemla.

Even though Mormon doesn’t tell much of this Gadianton king, or what they did, he makes certain to explain that the Gadiantons head north. Conceptually, he is tying the Gadiantons (those who destroyed the Nephites just before the Messiah appeared) to the north, where the Gadiantons, who destroyed the Nephites of Mormon’s days, came from.

Nephi Preaches and Performs Miracles

3 Nephi 7:14

14 And it came to pass in the thirty and first year that they were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred and friends; nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of

government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, inso-much that in some degree they had peace in the land; nevertheless, their hearts were turned from the Lord their God, and they did stone the prophets and did cast them out from among them.

Comments

In the last two verses, Mormon finished the story of the Gadiantons. The flight into the north certainly took place after the thirty-first year, but in verse 14, we return again to that earlier year. Mormon is telling multiple stories, and he does so by finishing a story, and then backing up to the common point of departure. We see this clearly here, but he also used that technique to tell the stories of Zeniff's people and the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah₂.

The story for these tribes is that they may not have been Gadiantons, but they were still not correctly following the Nephite religion. "Their hearts were turned from the Lord their God, and they did stone the prophets and did cast them out from among them." That information sets up the next story in the following verse.

3 Nephi 7:15–20

15 And it came to pass that Nephi—having been visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord, therefore having seen angels, and being eye-witness, and having had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ, and also being eye-witness to their quick return from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations;

16 Therefore, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds—went forth among them in that same year, and began to testify, boldly, repentance and remission of sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

17 And he did minister many things unto them; and all of them cannot be written, and a part of them would not suffice, therefore they are not written in this book. And Nephi did minister with power and with great authority.

18 And it came to pass that they were angry with him, even because he had greater power than they, for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily.

19 And in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and even his brother did he raise from the dead, after he had been stoned and suffered death by the people.

20 And the people saw it, and did witness of it, and were angry with him because of his power; and he did also do many more miracles, in the sight of the people, in the name of Jesus.

Comments

Mormon has painted a very bleak picture of the Nephites. Of course, it was not all bleak, for there were some righteous Nephites remaining. For them, the focal point was Nephi₃, who had “been visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord.” It is important that Mormon should make Nephi₃’s spiritual qualifications clear, for it will be Nephi₃’s eyewitness account of the Savior’s appearance upon which Mormon will base his account.

Nephi₃ is righteous and blessed with communication with the heavens. This is in contrast to the majority of the people, who had hard hearts and blind minds. Nephi₃ does what a prophet should do. He goes among them to preach, and he preaches with power. Mormon writes: “[He] did minister many things unto them; and all of them cannot be written, and a part of them would not suffice.” Mormon’s task was to abridge, or to make a more concise record. Apparently, he felt that he could not abridge what Nephi₃ had done and decided not to include all of it. What he will include are the most important events that Nephi₃ witnessed and recorded. Nevertheless, Mormon gives the very briefest of summaries in verses 18–20.

3 Nephi 7:21–23

21 And it came to pass that the thirty and first year did pass away, and there were but few who were converted unto the Lord; but as many as were converted did truly signify unto the people that they had been visited by the power and Spirit of God, which was in Jesus Christ, in whom they believed.

22 And as many as had devils cast out from them, and were healed of their sicknesses and their infirmities, did truly manifest unto the people that they had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and had been healed; and they did show forth signs also and did do some miracles among the people.

23 Thus passed away the thirty and second year also. And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins.

Comments

Mormon has told three separate stories that all occurred simultaneously: the dissolution of the Nephite nation into tribes, the Gadiantons seating a king and then fleeing north, and now Nephi₃’s preaching efforts. Mormon confirms that they were simultaneous by repeating that they occurred in the thirty-first year.

3 Nephi 7:24–26

24 Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water.

25 Therefore, there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins.

26 And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized unto repentance; and thus the more part of the year did pass away.

Comments

After the sad news that the majority of the people had rejected both the Nephite nation and the Nephite religion, Mormon ends with recognizing that there were still some who believed, and that there was a continuation of the mission of the gospel. People who repented were baptized; leaders and teachers were appointed. The Nephite nation may have been dissolved, but many remained who continued to believe in the Nephite gospel.

Mormon does not tell us where these people were. With the difficulties of travel in the ancient world, and the animosity that Mormon indicated was endemic to the separated tribes, it would appear to be reasonable that these believers would also desire to be together as a community rather than mixed in with people who would persecute them. A movement of this people into the land Bountiful may explain why that was the location mentioned where the resurrected Savior appeared.

Mormon ends a chapter at this point. The nature of the text to this point suggests that Mormon intermingled information from the large plates (represented by the annalistic listing of the years) as well as Nephi₃'s personal record (represented by the favorable recording of Nephi₃'s actions). In the next chapter, however, that shift will be complete. Thus, Mormon creates a chapter break between these chapters and the next, which will begin the crucial story of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 8

The Sign of Christ's Death Occurs (3 Nephi 8–10)

3 Nephi 8:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity—

2 And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away;

Comments

Mormon appears to have mixed his sources in chapters 1–7 in 3 Nephi. At this point, however, he declares that he will be concentrating on a single source that was not part of the large plates. Although he does not identify Nephi₃ as the writer, it is clear from the description that “he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus.” Mormon had recently written about the miracles Nephi₃ performed in 3 Nephi 7:19.

Because Mormon is using a record that didn't come from the large plates, he wants to testify to his readers that the record is still a true record. This is almost certainly the “shorter but true account” that Mormon mentioned in 3 Nephi 5:9, where Mormon did clearly name Nephi₃ as the writer of the account.

It is perhaps because this record is separate from the annalistic record of the large plates that Mormon must also testify to the accuracy of the dating. It is a record that is not tied to the other years, but Mormon declares that there is no reason to believe that the dating is incorrect.

3 Nephi 8:3–4

3 And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land.

4 And there began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people, notwithstanding so many signs had been given.

Comments

Samuel had predicted the times for the birth and death of the mortal Messiah. Just as there were some who looked for the signs of his birth, there were others who doubted. The same conditions occur with the prophecy of the Messiah's mortal death. There were some who looked forward for the signs, and others who doubted. Mormon makes certain to write these two incidents in parallel. While the first sign was light, this will be darkness; both appropriate images associated with the birth and death of the Messiah. Mormon's point is that both were miraculous signs, and that the conditions of belief among the Nephites were also similar.

Great Destruction throughout All the Land

3 Nephi 8:5

5 And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

Comments

The coming of this "great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land" was on a very specific date. Although that might appear as a way to firmly date Jesus's death in the Old World, there are two issues in making a direct correlation. The first is that we do not know when the Nephites considered their new year to begin. There is no reason to assume that it must have been the same calendar as we use.

Secondly, the correlation of Nephite years to our years appears to have some difficulties that might be explained by a different method of calculating what a *year* meant. Where we use three hundred and sixty-five days, with an extra day every four years, it is possible that the Nephites began tracking years according to a lunar calendar, which was prevalent in Jerusalem at the time they left. In the New World, they may have adapted to the more pan-Mesoamerican use of a three-hundred-and-sixty-day calendar (which was one of the available calendars; others were also used). This shorter *year* appears to allow the important events that can be timed to the Old World to fit better. Those two events are the departure from Jerusalem, which can be dated from Old World records where we know what year in our calendar corresponds to the first year of the reign of Zedekiah. The birth of Christ is the second somewhat fixed point, although there are scholarly discussions about precisely how to correlate that event to our calendar.

3 Nephi 8:6–11

6 And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

7 And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land.

8 And the city of Zarahemla did take fire.

9 And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned.

10 And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain.

11 And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward.

Comments

Verse 5 in this chapter introduced the destruction with “a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.” These verses expand that information with details. There are two important aspects of the descriptions in this chapter. The first is that they are sufficiently detailed that they allow us to understand, with reasonable accuracy, the source of these natural phenomena.

The second is that the descriptions cover more distance than any one person could experience at the time they occurred. Thus, these are remembered descriptions, and some of the information was probably collected from other people and not the result of Nephi₃'s personal knowledge. The cities of Zarahemla and Moroni were in different locations, with Zarahemla in the center of the land and Moroni near the east sea. While the burning of Zarahemla and the sinking of Moroni would have been reported, the actions would have taken some time, and it is very doubtful that Nephi₃ himself could have witnessed them both. Even though Mormon declares that the timing and the events are accurate, from a historical viewpoint, we should understand that they represent collected reports of what happened.

The descriptions of the destructions in the land southward have a counterpart in the land northward.

3 Nephi 8:12–14

12 But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

13 And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough.

14 And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate.

Comments

There were two regions of destructions. It appears that the land Bountiful might have been a refuge from the worst of the destructions, based on the descriptions that will come for that city. Thus, the two regions are south of Bountiful, and north of Bountiful. Even though there are two locations, the nature of the destruction is similar in both.

Geologists looking at the descriptions of the destruction note that all the elements are best explained by a volcanic event. The thunderings and lightnings are demonstrated aspects of some volcanic events, and spectacular photographs of the associated lightnings are available on the Internet. Volcanic eruptions are also often accompanied by earthquakes. The reason that the descriptions require a volcano and not just an earthquake comes from the descriptions of the thunderings and shakings lasting for hours. Earthquakes clearly shake the earth, but for minutes, not hours.

3 Nephi 8:15–17

15 And there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceedingly great, and there were many in them who were slain.

16 And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away.

17 And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

Comments

The comparison of the statement that “there were some cities which remained” with the statement that “the face of the whole earth became deformed” is important. The face of the earth is the surface, and with roads being broken up, and cities destroyed, there were clearly changes throughout the lands southward and northward. However, cities did not change location (save those that were submerged). The land southward did not become the land eastward.

Thus, the fact that there was great destruction should not suggest that it would be impossible to discover geographic information about the Book of Mormon. Mormon himself appears to understand that he can describe a geography before the catastrophe and that it would have meaning to those who could recognize the locations.

Of course, there are many possible locations that have been proposed for the Book of Mormon, and discussions over the different models will continue. Still, the idea that there were so many changes that we cannot discover anything about geography doesn't fit with the reality behind this type of natural disaster.

3 Nephi 8:18–19

18 And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.

19 And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land.

Comments

The breaking of the rocks is most reasonably the result of the slipping of a fault line, which generated the earthquake, and perhaps was the impetus for the eruption of the volcano, or volcanos, at that point. The quaking of the earth lasted for three hours. Although we do not know exactly how the Nephites divided time within a day, three hours is clearly longer than earthquakes, by themselves, would last.

Assuming Mesoamerica as a possible location for the Book of Mormon lands, those lands are along the Ring of Fire where there is a line of active volcanos, many of which erupted around the time of Christ (dating is often not precise). Because there is destruction in the land southward and the land northward, there may have been more than one volcanic event. Because we are seeing a retrospective view of these destructions, it is also possible that there were two eruptions at similar times but need not have been exactly at the same time.

The important part of verse 19 is the reference to darkness, for that is the feature that is the conceptual opposite of the light at Christ's birth. The day without a night is paralleled to the darkness on the land.

Three Days of Impenetrable Darkness

3 Nephi 8:20–23

20 And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness;

21 And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all;

22 And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land.

23 And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them.

Comments

The most important part of these verses comes in verse 23. The darkness “did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen.” It is not a coincidence that there were three days of darkness as a contrast to three days of light at Christ’s birth. The two miraculous events precisely bookend his life.

The nature of this vapor of darkness also fits with the description of the vapors released by some volcanic eruptions. Similar descriptions have been reported for other volcanic eruptions in history.

3 Nephi 8:24–25

24 And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla.

25 And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible.

Comments

These events had been foretold. Although there were certainly many who wished that they had repented before these events, there were certainly righteous people who were also affected by the destructions. The case of Bountiful will be discussed later, but there were certainly other righteous people in other locations. Natural disasters cannot pinpoint their effects and hurt only the wicked.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 9

Yahweh Speaks to the Survivors

3 Nephi 9:1–2

1 And it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land, crying:

2 Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!

Comments

In the midst of total destruction, under the blanket of thick darkness, the people had already begun to fear. That fear could only have been amplified when, through the darkness, came the voice of Yahweh. It had to be the voice of Yahweh, for Yahweh was God over all nature, and, for those who remembered the prophecies, they understood that there was a condemnation upon the people. With all that fear, this God does not yet provide comfort, but rather declares his power. Yahweh will tell the people of the extent of the destruction. They would only know the destruction that was around them, but Yahweh will let them know that it was not just them that saw destruction, but many, many others also witnessed it.

The promised destructions had come because people had not repented. Nevertheless, Yahweh declares to those who were still alive that they were still under the command to repent. At this point, they would have understood exactly how great the physical destruction might be. At least at that very time, the people would have been willing to repent of most anything.

3 Nephi 9:3–6

3 Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof.

4 And behold, that great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof to be drowned.

5 And behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof, to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them.

6 And behold, the city of Gilgal have I caused to be sunk, and the inhabitants thereof to be buried up in the depths of the earth;

Comments

The first city mentioned is Zarahemla. Although others are listed somewhat by region, Zarahemla is first, and not in the same region as Moroni or Moronihah. It is mentioned first because it was the “first city” in terms of conceptual importance. It was the capital and therefore, the most important city. It was burned. If Zarahemla were no more, then the Nephites would understand how great the destruction was, even before the rest of the cities listed.

The city Moroni was already mentioned as having been sunk in the sea, but that was an account written after the fact. For most of the people, they learned of that disaster through the voice of Yahweh, which made it more terrible.

Yahweh’s power over nature is emphasized by the symbolic death of the cities, being buried in both water and earth. If that imagery were to be understood, then the fire of Zarahemla might also have been symbolic of the burning of the wicked in the great judgment.

3 Nephi 9:7–8

7 Yea, and the city of Onihah and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Mocum and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Jerusalem and the inhabitants thereof; and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them.

8 And behold, the city of Gadiandi, and the city of Gadiomnah, and the city of Jacob, and the city of Gimgimno, all these have I caused to be sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof; and the inhabitants thereof have I buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them.

Comments

The descriptions of destruction move from the center (Zarahemla) to the eastern border (Moroni and Moronihah) to a list of cities that now appear to be more in the south. The declaration is intended to show that the destruction is over all the land. The imagery of burial continues both with water and earth. Where Yahweh had declared at the beginning of this litany that the people were still to repent, the

emphasis on these particular cities is that they were destroyed because of their rejection of the prophets, and of the true way.

3 Nephi 9:9–11

9 And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness, which was above all the wickedness of the whole earth, because of their secret murders and combinations; for it was they that did destroy the peace of my people and the government of the land; therefore I did cause them to be burned, to destroy them from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them.

10 And behold, the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I caused to be burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof, because of their wickedness in casting out the prophets, and stoning those whom I did send to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations.

11 And because they did cast them all out, that there were none righteous among them, I did send down fire and destroy them, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom I sent among them might not cry unto me from the ground against them.

Comments

The litany of destruction appears to move even further south. We should remember that the Lamanites had, at one time, been more righteous than the Nephites. However, at least some of their cities had either not become converted or had returned to a state of unbelief and persecution of the prophets. Thus, we see some cities that must certainly have been in the Lamanite lands, such as the city of Laman, listed as having been destroyed. This was not a condemnation of only Nephites, but of all who lived in that region, and all in that region had at least had the opportunity to learn of Yahweh. They had not repented. They were destroyed.

3 Nephi 9:12–13

12 And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

13 O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?

Comments

We are not told where the people were who were able to hear this voice. Yahweh declares that they were spared “because [they] were more righteous” than the people of the destroyed cities. That would have been a declaration for the majority of the population, but there were probably still those who heard the voice, but who might still need to repent.

The idea that there were a people who were more righteous suggests that perhaps this account comes from the land Bountiful, which appears to have been largely spared. Bountiful was the land to which the Nephites had retreated to finally defeat the Gadiantons, a defeat that was attributed to their righteousness. Thus, it is possible that there remained a concentration of believers in Bountiful, which would fit the Yahweh’s description of those spared due to righteousness.

It is also important to note that while Yahweh declares that there had been great destructions, and that the effect of those destruction would obviously generate fear in those who survived, Yahweh also offers his hand: “[R]eturn unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you.” Those who survived might have been more righteous, but Yahweh desired even greater obedience.

3 Nephi 9:14–15

14 Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.

15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.

Comments

If the people repent and “come unto me”, they would have eternal life. The voice then declares who he is: “Jesus Christ, the son of God.” That declaration is further qualified by discussing the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father.

It is easy for modern readers to see these verses in the light of all of the discussions about the nature of the Godhead. That would be anachronous for the Nephites. The Nephites had believed that Yahweh was their God, and that Yahweh would descend to the earth to become the mortal Messiah.

It is in that context that we should see this declaration. The destructions were predicted to accompany the death of the Messiah. This voice identifies himself as the same as the mortal Messiah whose death was witnessed with the destructions and darkness. The title “son of God,” in Nephite terms, meant God while on the earth. Jesus is declaring first that he is the predicted Messiah, who had died. He is also clearly back in the heavens, and in the heavens, the Nephites had called him Yahweh, or God, or the Father.

Modern readers understand the difference between God the Father and Yahweh, his son. That reality may have been known among the Nephites, just as it was at one time among the Hebrews. However, the clear understanding of the division of the two may not have been clearly understood until Christ was among them, and still speaking to his Father. At that time, the meaning of being “with the Father” would be clarified.

The list of titles in verse 15 recalls Samuel’s prophecy that this very being would come: “And also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name” (Helaman 14:12).

3 Nephi 9:16–18

16 I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.

17 And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.

18 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Comments

The purpose of these declarations was not to elucidate the nature of the Father, but to solidify the Nephite understanding of who the Messiah is. Therefore, the resurrected Jesus declares that he was the very one who had been on earth: “I came unto my own.” In spite of having been mortal, he is yet Yahweh, the “beginning and the end.” That is a definition of God.

Most importantly, Jesus announces two important facts. First is that through his teachings he has given to all the chance to become “sons of God.” The second is that: “in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.”

3 Nephi 9:19–20

19 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.

Comments

Apart from the obvious requirement to rebuild their world from the surrounding destructions, the announcement that the law of Moses had been fulfilled would have been daunting. The law had told them what they needed to do, and now what would they do? They are only given the bare outlines of the change. There will be a shift from communal sacrifice of animals to the personal sacrifice of one's own broken heart.

More details would come when the Savior came, and taught, in Bountiful.

3 Nephi 9:21–22

21 Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.

22 Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

Comments

The Nephite teachings had long emphasized that when the Messiah came, he would bring redemption. Yahweh therefore declares that he had done so. That prophecy is declared fulfilled.

The personal meaning of that redemption is that all might come to Yahweh and repent and be received. In this context, coming as a little child might be a reference to the fact that little children had to learn how to act, and now that the law had been fulfilled, the Nephites were as children, again needing to learn what they should do.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 10

3 Nephi 10:1–2

1 And now behold, it came to pass that all the people of the land did hear these sayings, and did witness of it. And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours;

2 For so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours.

Comments

There was a thick darkness over the land. Yahweh's voice had come. So many overwhelming events had just occurred that when they ceased, and everything appeared to stop, the people also seem to stop in order to contemplate. Where there had been loud lamenting for the destruction, there was now profound silence. That silence lasted for "the space of many hours." When it was finally interrupted, it was again by the voice of God.

3 Nephi 10:3–7

3 And it came to pass that there came a voice again unto the people, and all the people did hear, and did witness of it, saying:

4 O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you.

5 And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.

6 O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.

7 But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers.

Comments

The first time the voice was heard, it was easy to hear an angry God, declaring destruction at his judging hand. The declaration that it was the God who was also the Messiah whom they had awaited must have ameliorated the terror somewhat. Still, it was a solemn people who waited in quiet to see what might come next.

The next voice is perhaps no longer an angry God, but a sorrowful one. There is lamentation for the fact that Yahweh would have preferred to protect rather than destroy. This is a lamentation not only for the Nephites, but for the whole house of Israel. After all, when the voice was first heard, Yahweh had declared that “my own received me not” (3 Nephi 9:16).

The Darkness Dissipates

3 Nephi 10:8–10

8 And now it came to pass that after the people had heard these words, behold, they began to weep and howl again because of the loss of their kindred and friends.

9 And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

10 And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.

Comments

The important difference between the weeping and howling in verse 8 and the praise and thanksgiving of verse 10 is the intervening information that “the three days [did] pass away . . . and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend.” The terror of nature faded, and with the light of morning came the promise that life would return. While the people were still in darkness and amidst the destruction, their hearts were overcome with sadness.

The new day gave new hope. That the day came would have been seen as Yahweh’s promise to allow them to repent.

3 Nephi 10:11–13

11 And thus far were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets.

12 And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared—

13 And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness.

Comments

From verse 11 though the end of the chapter is Mormon's conclusion to this event. Even though he was using Nephi₃'s record, Mormon could not help but make certain that the important lessons would be underscored. He begins his discussion of the moral of these events in verse 11. This is the reason that there is a repetition of the idea that the more righteous people were saved and their cities were not destroyed. That is the moral of the story.

It was also part of history, but as a historical event, it suggests that the more righteous people had remained in the more northern part of Nephite lands, and those lands were spared the destruction on both the south and the north. Geologist Dr. Jerry Gover examined the fault plates in the proposed region of Mesoamerica and suggests that the nature of the underlying geology explains both the destruction on the south, and the reason that Bountiful was not affected by that destruction, being on more a solid underlying geology.

3 Nephi 10:14–17

14 And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets.

15 Behold, I say unto you, Yea, many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things.

16 Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed.

17 Behold, our father Jacob also testified concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph. And behold, are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph? And these things which testify of us, are they not written upon the plates of brass which our father Lehi brought out of Jerusalem?

Comments

Mormon has made sure to enter the descriptions of the destructions because they were prophesied events, and Mormon wants to be sure that his readers understand that true prophecy is fulfilled. More important than the destructive events was the event that presaged them: the birth and death of Jesus in mortality.

That was the message that the Nephite prophets had taught. Mormon makes certain that we understand that the prophecies are even older, tying them to the sacred records of the Old World through the prophets Zenos and Zenock, who he has previously cited in connection to these prophecies.

The destruction witnessed that all the prophecies were true. However, one would remain, and that was that Yahweh would come to this people.

3 Nephi 10:18–19

18 And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, in-somuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—
19 Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter. Therefore for this time I make an end of my sayings.

Comments

The one remaining, and crucial, prophecy was that Yahweh himself would manifest himself to the Nephites. Mormon is now ready to tell that story. He ends his own words and returns to Nephi₃'s account in the next chapter.

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. It is fitting that Mormon would make certain to have a division at this point so that the ministry of the Savior might have a structural importance as well as its doctrinal importance.

3 Nephi 11

3 Nephi 11: Header

Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did minister unto them; and on this wise did he show himself unto them.

Comments

In 3 Nephi 5:9, Mormon indicated that he would use a “shorter but true account” for this book. It appears that the heavy quotation from that account might have begun in 3 Nephi 8. Here, in 3 Nephi 11, Mormon gives us a chapter header. Mormon has used those to indicate a change in sources, but that might not be the case for this chapter. Certainly, he used Nephi₃'s record for this account, but he might have begun using that account much earlier.

What is certain is that this is a significant chapter, and a significant part of Mormon's message. Therefore, Mormon introduces this most important part of his work by declaring that it is the witness to what happened with Jesus Christ, or, in Nephite terms, Yahweh on earth, when he appeared to the people gathered in Bountiful.

The Resurrected Lord Visits the People at Bountiful

3 Nephi 11:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.

2 And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

Comments

Mormon indicated that these events occurred “in the ending of the thirty and fourth year” (3 Nephi 10:18). Since the sign of Christ’s death occurred in the “thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month” (3 Nephi 8:5), these people are gathering almost a year after the beginning of the destruction. This allowed them time to recover from the destruction and to have some semblance of normality return.

With sufficient time to be physically ready, they could turn to spiritual questions and so they are gathered around the temple. Although the temple grounds might have been a normal gathering area for a large crowd, there may have been some religious festival that had them gathered at that location at that time. There were fall harvest festivals that were part of their Jewish heritage; similar harvest-related ceremonies are not uncommon among agricultural peoples in the ancient world.

If they are assembled for a religiously themed harvest, it may be that there were natural associations with growing things and the death and resurrection of humankind. The seemingly dead seed is placed into the ground, and from that “death” arises new life. That context would easily explain how their minds would naturally turn to the atoning Messiah who had come. It would have been the most natural of conversations.

3 Nephi 11:3–7

3 And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

4 And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.

5 And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.

6 And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

7 Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

Comments

Although we cannot be certain, it is highly likely that those gathered at the temple had heard Yahweh’s voice from the Heavens pierce the darkness not a year earlier. This time, it is a regular day, even if it might have been a special feast day. There were no portents in the sky of a coming event. We might imagine a sunny day with a nice blue sky and white clouds. On that peaceful day, a voice again comes from Heaven.

The last time the voice had come from Heaven, the earth had been shaken. This time, the earth was calm, but the power of the voice “did pierce them . . . that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake.” They might not have understood the voice at first, but they understood whose voice it was.

The declaration in verse 7 does two things. The first is that it announces that their long-awaited Messiah had come. It also defined a clear division between Father and Son. That understanding would be more important as Jesus taught. However, it was a distinction that was important at that time to indicate that even when God appeared on earth, there was no void in Heaven. The Father continued to watch over his children, even when the Son was on earth.

3 Nephi 11:8

8 And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

Comments

No one who witnessed this event could ever forget it. Faulty as human memory can be, there are events that burn into that memory such that we know what we were doing at a particular time. For example, those awaiting news of the first moon landing can typically describe where they were, and what they were doing. This event, of Christ’s appearance, was even more memorable.

They still did not fully comprehend what was happening, for the verse says that they “thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.” Even though the Father had introduced the Son, Nephite understanding may not have comprehended that distinction as clearly as modern Christians do. They would learn, but in their current understanding they would more easily recognize Yahweh, their God, to be the heavenly voice, and that therefore, it was another being who descended.

3 Nephi 11:9–12

9 And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:
10 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.
11 And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

Comments

In the Old Testament, God's stretched out hand is a sign of condemnation. That is clearly not the meaning of this stretched forth hand. The hand would have been an invitation, a welcome.

The people might have wondered if the being who came to them were an angel, but Yahweh makes certain that they know who he is. Not only does he give his name in mortality (Jesus) and title (Christ), but he makes sure that they understand that he is the very one whom the prophets "testified shall come into the world."

Now understanding that they were in the physical presence of their God, they fall to the earth. That action is often noted in the Book of Mormon as a representation of being overcome by the Spirit. If the spirit could have that effect, how much more of an effect would the very miraculous and dramatic appearance of the being they have known as Yahweh make.

3 Nephi 11:13–14

13 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

14 Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

Comments

Dr. Mark Wright noticed that when the resurrected Savior appeared to his disciples in the Old World, John repeats three times that Christ showed first his hands, and then his side. In the New World, Christ showed first his side, then his hands and feet. Wright noted that the wound in the side would show that he died. That understanding tells us why there was such a subtle difference.

In the Old World, all of the disciples knew Christ had died. Many had been there. Thus, when Christ appeared, he didn't need to demonstrate that he had died, but rather that the living being they saw before them was the very one who had died, hence the marks in the hands.

In the New World, it was very obvious that they saw a living being. They had never known the mortal Christ. Therefore, what was important in the New World was that they understood that this living being had died, and the wound in his side would have clearly spoken to them, revealing to them that the recipient of such a wound had indeed died. Christ showed each group what they needed to know to fully understand that he had actually risen from the dead.

3 Nephi 11:15–17

15 And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

16 And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

17 Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

Comments

The Nephite teaching had not only been that God would come down to earth to redeem mankind, but that the redemption would involve a victory over death and sin. The Nephites gathered in Bountiful had understood that the signs had been given that the Messiah had died. Now they had in front of them the witness that he had arisen. If they were gathered together for a harvest festival and were speaking of conversing about his death, they were now powerfully reminded that his death was not an ending, but rather a very important turning point.

Understanding that, “they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and worship him.” Why would they worship Jesus, and not the Father? They still needed to learn that there are clear differences between them. They had been taught that God himself would come down. Now that event had come true. They had always worshipped Yahweh, and now that Yahweh was with them, they were overcome in such a way as to praise and worship him even more.

3 Nephi 11:18–19

18 And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth.

19 And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.

Comments

It is significant that the Savior calls out Nephi₃. Nephi₃ had been a powerful prophet, and there would be no one else that would merit the position of such divine and public recognition. When the Savior would later designate his disciples (the Book of Mormon term for what we would call apostles), it is certain that Nephi₃ would be the head of that body, and therefore head of the church. It is also probable that this Nephi₃ later became the head of the new Nephite nation, and therefore it is for him that our book of 4 Nephi would be named.

Starting at this point, and through the end of the chapter, the instructions are given to the twelve rather than to all who had gathered. Those gathered undoubtedly heard the instructions, but the teachings were directed to the twelve. The shift from speaking to the congregation and then to the twelve, and then to the congregation, will occur again during Christ's visit.

Christ Explains His Doctrine

3 Nephi 11:20–27

20 And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

21 And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven.

22 And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you.

23 Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

24 And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

25 Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

26 And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

27 And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

Comments

In 3 Nephi 12:1, we learn that “the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve.” After calling them, Jesus instructs them on how to baptize. The instructions are on the form. The qualifications had been known at least since Alma¹'s use of baptism as both the cleansing symbol and the symbol of entrance into the church.

Perhaps there had been some discussions about how baptisms were to be performed, and that is why the details were given (see verse 28). However, most important is the prayer that is to be used. It ends in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. That clear designation of the Godhood meant that the Nephites would, from this point forward, expand their understanding of the nature of their God.

3 Nephi 11:28–31

28 And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

29 For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

30 Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

31 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine.

Comments

These verses mark a turn in the teaching. It is important to understand that the very first thing that Christ does, after demonstrating who he was, was to personally authorize those who could baptize. Baptism was the way to accept Christ's atoning mission. Therefore, as they had clearly accepted him, they needed to demonstrate and covenant that acceptance through baptism.

After that, there are other things to be taught and Christ uses the problem of disputations as the pivot. There have been times of peace among the Nephites, but often the ending of that peace was initiated by disputes. Christ declares that "the spirit of contention is not of me." That doesn't mean there should be no discussion, nor learning of new things through asking questions. The problem is "the spirit of contention," which is a fault of the soul. It is anger in the questioning that does not lead to peace of the spirit.

Verses 30 and 31 make the pivot through a contrast: "[T]his is not my doctrine" is contrasted to "I will declare . . . my doctrine."

3 Nephi 11:32

32 And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

Comments

As Christ begins to expound his doctrine, he begins by expounding on the nature of God. This was not a repetition of information that they had always known. This was a definition that they needed to learn and understand. Before understanding doctrine, they needed to understand the attributes of God. They needed to learn of the Godhead. That principle is not clearly taught in the Book of Mormon until Christ appears and emphasizes it.

3 Nephi 11:33–35

33 And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

34 And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

35 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

Comments

After the buildup to declare his doctrine, Christ simply says that it is “whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.” That’s it. That is the doctrine that he gives. That this is the most important doctrine further highlights why Christ first authorized men to perform baptisms, and only after that did he begin to teach principles.

Although this seems simple, it is a condensed teaching. The first part is to “believe in [Christ].” That is not a request to acknowledge that he exists, but rather a command to covenant to follow what he teaches. Modern English sees belief as somewhat less than faith, but the New Testament uses the word *believe* when the underlying text has the verbal form of *faith*. English does not have a verb for *faith*. Christ is telling the people to have faith in him, but an active faith, one that has them do those things that he asks.

Baptism becomes the symbol of the covenant we make to be faithful to Christ’s teachings. This is the doctrine, not because there is no more to do, but because it encompasses all we should do. It is similar to Christ’s declaration that the two greatest laws are to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Many like-minded teachings are condensed into these two briefly stated principles, or commandments. They are not the only things that we are to do, but they encapsulate the larger number of things that demonstrate that we have arrived at a point where we truly obey those two laws.

Verse 35 strongly echoes verse 32, thus forming bookends around the verses dealing with the things that are part of the doctrine.

3 Nephi 11:36

36 And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

Comments

Christ has repeated this information multiple times in this part of the record of the first things he said to the Nephites. He was instructing them, not simply repeating formulas. This was new information and

they needed to learn it. The repetition let them know that they should not allow it to be lost in all the other miraculous events and words that they would experience and hear. This was important. This was new.

3 Nephi 11:37–41

37 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

38 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

40 And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

41 Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth.

Comments

The command to “become as a little child” is unique to the Book of Mormon, but it is related to one of Jesus’s sayings, recorded in both Mark and Luke: “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of god as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). The idea of receiving these teachings as a little child may refer to both the capacity for learning, and for the fact that what children learn when they are young form the foundations for things they later learn in life. If we were to take language as a model, if we were to learn to obey the Lord with the easy fluency with which we speak our native language, we would naturally obey and live the commandments.

Christ reiterates that this is his doctrine, and that it is the foundation of the other teachings which he will give them. It is not all, it is the foundation; the foundation built on rock and not on sand. Following the declaration that this is his doctrine, Christ commands that they teach it.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 12

Christ Preaches at the Temple (cf. Matthew 5–7)

3 Nephi 12:1

1 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am.

Comments

Jesus had been instructing the twelve, and now returns to addressing the whole congregation. It is doubtful that Jesus had separated the disciples in order to instruct them individually, so the congregation clearly saw, and heard, Jesus select and teach them as a group. In verse 1 he introduces them to the congregation as those who have been chosen to minister to them. Thus, the twelve were called, and in the presence of the congregation, presented as a group that was to be followed.

Even though the Nephites had been performing baptisms before, and with divine authority, Jesus appropriates baptism as an important ordinance of his doctrine. Thus, it might be the same action, but it has been placed into a new context. In that new context, that of the doctrine of the risen Christ, these twelve have been given public authority to baptize. They are also authorized to “baptize . . . with fire and with the Holy Ghost,” a feature not present (that we know of) in the previous Nephite baptisms.

3 Nephi 12:2

2 And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and

come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.

Comments

Jesus establishes the authority of the twelve to baptize beyond those who were present. It was undeniable that those who were present would all desire baptism, for they were in Christ's presence. However, there would come a time when Christ would not be with them, and yet people would need to repent and believe. Therefore, Christ notes that they, too, are blessed. They will believe upon the words of those who testify that they have seen him, even if they see him not.

The intent is an echo of what we see in John 20:29: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed."

After this verse, the text follows Matthew 5. Orson Pratt made his divisions of these chapters so that the Book of Mormon sections that closely follow the Sermon on the Mount would be easily compared. The 1830 text did not tie chapter endings to the endings of New Testament chapters.

3 Nephi 12:3

3 Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:3. The form of the Beatitudes is to start with a declaration that a people who are usually considered distinctly not blessed, will receive a blessing in the heavens.

In this case, the poor on earth, where they have no power or kingdom, receive a kingdom in heaven. The intended contrast is between their poverty on earth, and heavenly wealth.

The idea that they are poor in spirit goes along with the idea of poverty. Alma₂ specifically noted that correlation in The Book of Alma:

Ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved. And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? (Alma 32:12–14)

3 Nephi 12:4

4 And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:4.

The contrast here is between the great sadness of mourning, and the idea that they would be comforted. Typically, mourning is associated with the death of a loved one. The comfort that Jesus promises is the resurrection. In the next life, the sadness of our earth life will be turned to joy, for we will be with our loved ones again.

3 Nephi 12:5

5 And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:5.

On earth, if one is meek, one might not attempt to improve one's situation. The meek might not seek to improve their status. Thus, they represent powerlessness. However, in the next life, those who are meek because of their circumstances on earth will be able to change places with the mighty. They may not inherit power on earth, but they will in heaven. Of course, as with all the beatitudes, each of these conditions assumes that the person who is represented by the trait is faithful in living the gospel.

3 Nephi 12:6

6 And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Comments

In Matthew 5:6 (KJV), the sentence ends with "they shall be filled." In 3 Nephi, "with the Holy Ghost" has been added.

The pure contrast is between those who hunger and those whose hunger would be sated. However, there is also the desire to move the meaning from simple desire for food to a more spiritual meaning. Therefore, those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness." That hunger will also be sated, through the influence of the Holy Ghost. The addition adds to the parallelism.

3 Nephi 12:7

7 And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:7.

This Beatitude is a comparison rather than a contrast. There is not reversal, but rather what Alma₂ taught as a doctrine of restitution. That is, we have restored to us according to what we have done on earth. “The meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful” (Alma 41:13). The last phrase of Alma 41:13 is merely a different way of stating the message of verse 7 here.

3 Nephi 12:8

8 And blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:8.

This Beatitude continues the trend of parallels rather than contrasts. The pure in heart, regardless of their physical circumstances, will have the ultimate reward, for they shall see God. Of course, the pure in heart are those who keep God’s commandments.

3 Nephi 12:9

9 And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:9.

In both Jesus’s Jerusalem and in the Nephite world, there was a context of conflict. For those in Jerusalem, it was with the Romans. In the Nephite world, it was traditionally with the Lamanites, but also within the Nephite people themselves. Those conflicts led to dissensions, and those wars and contentions were always dangerous. In those conditions of conflict, Jesus is preaching conciliation and peaceful ways of living, rather than rising in rebellion, or initiating military actions on those with whom we might disagree. When he indicates that “they shall be called the children of God,” he is indicating that this is the way to follow God’s commandments.

3 Nephi 12:10

10 And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Comments

There is no change from Matthew 5:10.

In Jesus's Jerusalem, this Beatitude perhaps looked to the future. There would come a time when there would be persecution for his sake. Jesus declares that the persecution, while sad, is rewarded in heaven.

While persecutions were in the future for the incipient Christians in the past, persecutions were in the very recent past for many of those assembled in Bountiful. For them, this Beatitude was particularly personal.

3 Nephi 12:11–12

11 And blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;

12 For ye shall have great joy and be exceedingly glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.

Comments

Verse 11, and most of verse 12, are unchanged from Matthew 5:11–12. The change at the beginning of verse 12 does not add to or alter the meaning from Matthew.

Matthew: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad."

3 Nephi: "For ye shall have great joy and be exceedingly glad."

These two verses are a continuation of the saying in verse 10. It repeats the basic theme and expands upon it. This duplication and expansion are indications that, in the Old World, this was a condition that would come to pass for most who listened. For the New World, it was again more relevant to their immediate past experience. The current Nephites would usher in a period of peace, where this kind of persecution would not be seen again for two hundred years.

Becoming Salt and Light (cf. Matthew 5:13–16)

3 Nephi 12:13

13 Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

Comments

As with verse 12, the beginning of this verse differs from Matthew 5:13.

Matthew: “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

3 Nephi: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth.”

The addition in 3 Nephi appears to be related to a difference in the audience. The address is slightly different, but the essential meaning is unchanged.

Why are the people who are listening to Jesus, in either hemisphere, the “salt of the earth”? The ancient world valued salt much more highly than do modern societies, for we have discovered ways to produce it in such quantities that none who desire it lack it. For ancient Rome, it was valuable enough that wages were declared in units that would be required to purchase salt. So, the people are being told that they are valuable, but that isn’t all. If we season with salt, we do not use much. Thus, the people are valuable, even if they are few, even if they are not the majority in the populations around them.

As for losing flavor, if there are impurities in the salt, then it loses its ability to be salty. Thus, Jesus is admonishing this small group of believers to remain pure and faithful so that their value to the world might be fulfilled.

3 Nephi 12:14–16

14 Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house;

16 Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Comments

There are minor changes from Matthew 5:14–16. The change at the beginning of verse 14 is the same kind as the change we saw in verse 13 of this chapter. In Matthew we have the simple statement: “Ye are the light of the world,” and here “I give unto you to be the light of this people.” The most interesting part of that change is the use of *people* instead of *world*. Perhaps it is an indication that the New Testament would have a longer and wider distribution than the Book of Mormon.

These verses continue the concept of Christians being the salt of the earth. They are also the light. They are not the world, but a way of enlightening the world by bringing the understanding of Jesus’s gospel to the world.

Therefore, the admonition is to share the gospel. The light is to be put on display and used for a good purpose rather than be hidden away. In the Old World, this commission often led to the problem of being persecuted for Jesus's sake. Nevertheless, the mission to preach Christ's message was more important than the possible persecutions for so doing.

Fulfilling the Law (cf. Matthew 5:17–38)

3 Nephi 12:17–18

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil;

18 For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.

Comments

There is no change in verse 17 from Matthew 5:17, but there are interesting changes in the next verse.

Matthew 5:18: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

3 Nephi 12:18: "For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled."

In 3 Nephi, the Matthean phrase "Till heaven and earth pass" is deleted. The final phrase is altered from "till all be fulfilled," to "but in me it hath all been fulfilled." The difference is the distinction between the mortal Jesus and the resurrected Jesus. In his mortal realm, that fulfillment was still in the future; by the time Christ appeared to the Nephites, it had already been accomplished. Therefore, there was no reason to declare that the law of Moses would continue until it was fulfilled, which is what earlier Book of Mormon prophets had taught, because (also as prophesied) Jesus was that fulfillment.

In Jerusalem, the people were interested in whether what Jesus taught contradicted the law under which they lived. He affirmed that the law was valuable, but that there would come a point where it would be ultimately fulfilled.

The people gathered in Bountiful would have had the same questions about the relationship of Christ's doctrine to what they had known. Jesus sets the stage for teaching them the important differences by declaring that the prophesied fulfillment had come.

3 Nephi 12:19–20

19 And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.

20 Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Comments

Verses 19 and 20 of Matthew are absent. In their place are two new verses. The essential difference is that the Matthean verses were more specific to the congregation in the Old World, whereas these verses are more specific to the people in Bountiful and those to whom they would preach.

For the New World, Christ declares that he has come to give “the law the commandments of my Father.” That distinction between Jesus (Yahweh, whom the Nephites understood to be their God) and the Father, is one of the lessons being taught at this time.

Rather than the law that emphasized actions, Christ emphasizes a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It is not that those concepts were never previously required, but rather that they were being elevated in importance while the more communal aspects of religion, that were part of the law of Moses, were fulfilled. The declaration is not that the people should become righteous, but rather that the individual person should become righteous. Each individual must keep Christ’s commandments or not be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

3 Nephi 12:21–22

21 Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, and it is also written before you, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God;

22 But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Comments

The major difference in 3 Nephi 12:21 from Matthew 5:21 is the addition of “and it is also written before you.” There will be other times when the New World Sermon appears to emphasize a written word where the Old World Sermon spoke mostly to the oral law.

In 3 Nephi 12:22, the phrase “without a cause” in Matthew, is left out. That is a disputed clause and might not have been part of the original sermon. The effect is to point out the danger of anger rather than the action of murder.

In the Book of Mormon, verse 22 also introduces a number of doctrinal amplifications, where a condition is set, and then there is an elaboration or alteration of that condition. In this case, the statement comes with the declaration of a known law: “[T]hou shalt not kill” (referenced in verse 21). While that phrase is well known in English, the intent is much more to be “thou shalt not murder.” Jesus does not remove that law. He said he wouldn’t, and he doesn’t.

He does, however, provide a form of fulfillment for the law by amplifying it. Not only should one not murder, they should not become so angry that they would contemplate murder. It is unlikely that Jesus thought that humankind could ever rid ourselves of all anger. The problem that is presented is intended to fit into the context of murder. One can only murder another if the other person dies. However, attempted murder differs only in the result for the victim. For the perpetrator’s soul, the damage is the same.

Since Jesus is encouraging individual righteousness, that personal righteousness requires that we no longer anger so much that we even wish we might murder. The eternal consequences for us might be the same, regardless of the effect on the possible victim.

3 Nephi 12:23–24

23 Therefore, if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—

24 Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.

Comments

The corresponding verses are Matthew 5:23–24:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

The 3 Nephi version leaves out references to bringing a gift to the altar. That “gift” was the sacrifice under the law of Moses. Since the New World situation is moving away from the context of the law of Moses, bringing a sacrifice as part of a petition to God was no longer applicable. Therefore, it was removed.

What becomes important in Jesus’s elaboration of the meaning of the law was that one’s heart be an appropriate sacrifice. Thus, if one came to the Lord burdened with conflicts with another, those earthly issues should be reconciled so that one could approach the Lord with a pure heart and a contrite spirit.

3 Nephi 12:25–26

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time he shall get thee, and thou shalt be cast into prison.

26 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence until thou hast paid the uttermost senine. And while ye are in prison can ye pay even one senine? Verily, verily, I say unto you, Nay.

Comments

The verses in Matthew 5:25–26 read:

Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The 3 Nephi teaching adapts to the New World context by removing the layers of authorities that were part of Jesus’s world. The Old World *farthing* becomes a New World *senine* (see Alma 11:3–8 for the definition of a senine).

To be “in the way with him” means to be on the same road or path. Thus, differences might arise, but they should be settled amicably at the time, and not accelerated to the point that legal authorities would become involved. This admonition is arguably more relevant to what we know of Jesus’s Jerusalem than to what would be present in Bountiful at the time of the sermon.

3 Nephi 12:27–28

27 Behold, it is written by them of old time, that thou shalt not commit adultery;

28 But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.

Comments

The only difference between these two verses and the same-numbered verses in Matthew 5 is the New World emphasis on written scripture rather than oral learning that was a feature of the Matthean Sermon.

Similar to the amplification of the commandment that we should not commit murder, the commandment against adultery is shifted from the sin of the accomplished fact to the desire that might lead to the attempt. As with the amplification of the commandment on murder, the emphasis shifts from the victim to the perpetrator as the location of the problem. This is not to say that Jesus did not have sympathy for victims, but rather than he was concerned for all souls, and particularly those whose hearts had become so hardened that they might even consider some of these heinous crimes.

3 Nephi 12:29–30

29 Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart;
30 For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.

Comments

Matthew 5:29–30 are not represented here at all. They read:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

In their place are two verses that act as a summary of the commandments up to that point. In the New World sermon, this section has an interim summary indicating that these are all things that should be done. Even though it follows directly the teaching on adultery, it is meant to deal with all of the previous similar amplifications.

3 Nephi 12:31–32

31 It hath been written, that whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.
32 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whoso shall marry her who is divorced committeth adultery.

Comments

The major difference between these verses and those in Matthew are the change from “it had been said” in Matthew to “it hath been written” in 3 Nephi. The “verily, verily” has been added to verse 32, but it doesn’t alter the meaning.

These verses are difficult for modern readers because we understand, and the Church allows, that there are times when divorce is appropriate. The intent of these verses is also likely to be an amplification of divorce conditions. In that context, Jesus is contrasting the ease of obtaining a divorce under the law of Moses with the desire to treat marriage as a serious contract. Jesus did note that there were conditions where divorce would be necessary, although the only one he listed was fornication. Even without a list of other conditions, the idea is that marriage is to be treated seriously, and not ended frivolously.

There is no way of knowing what the conditions surrounding divorce might have been in the New World. The teaching that it was to be treated seriously would still have been applicable.

3 Nephi 12:33–37

- 33 And again it is written, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths;
34 But verily, verily, I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;
35 Nor by the earth, for it is his footstool;
36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair black or white;
37 But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever cometh of more than these is evil.

Comments

There are two differences of note between the 3 Nephi verses and those in Matthew. The first, in verse 33, in 3 Nephi, is the continued New World emphasis on the written commandment, where Matthew speaks of the oral law.

The second is Matthew 5:35: “Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.” In 3 Nephi, the phrase “neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” is left out. That would make sense, since the New World Jerusalem was a city infamous for apostate Nephites who would not hear the sons of Mosiah₂ (see Alma 21:1–4).

These verses deal with the more ancient custom of declaring oaths. Prior to the concept of written contracts, oaths were used to officially seal agreements. What had happened by Jesus’s time was that different oaths might have different meanings, some being stronger than others.

What Jesus is teaching is that we should be honest in our dealings with others. We should not create loopholes in our agreements that would allow us to break our agreement easily. Thus, we say “yea, yea; nay, nay.” In other words, we say what we mean, without so many nuances that we could not be trusted.

3 Nephi 12:38–39

- 38 And behold, it is written, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;
39 But I say unto you, that ye shall not resist evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;

Comments

The only change from Matthew 5:38 is the now familiar change to an emphasis on “it is written,” rather than “it hath been said.”

These two verses deal with the way in which we are to retaliate against those who might harm us. The “eye for an eye” rule creates social balance by requiring that what one inflicts on another person might be inflicted against the perpetrator. This is a particularly horrible inversion of the Golden Rule.

The amplification for the rule of retaliation was that one should obey the law willingly. In the Old World, Jesus’s listeners were subject to Roman law. Even if they desired it, the “eye for an eye” rule was impossible

in their situation. Even the ability to resist might be removed. Hence, it was wise not to retaliate (and make matters worse). The solution was to accept the subjugation that they could do nothing about.

Nevertheless, this was not an abject acceptance of being belittled. In order for one to be struck on the right cheek by a right-handed person, it would have to be a backslap, which was highly insulting. The typical result would be an escalation and attempt to regain honor by some form of retaliation. Particularly under Roman rule, that could be disastrous.

However, by turning the other cheek, the person could symbolically both recognize that they were politically powerless but insist that the person doing the smiting treat them as an equal, with the forehand slap rather than the backhand. Jesus was teaching his listeners to retain their dignity in a difficult political situation.

The situation was not like that for those listening to Jesus, at that time. However, perhaps all of them could remember a time when they also underwent oppression. It would still have been an important lesson to learn from their past, if not in their present.

3 Nephi 12:40–45

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also;
41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away.
43 And behold it is written also, that thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy;
44 But behold I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who spitefully use you and persecute you;
45 That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.

Comments

There are no differences in verses 40 through 44 from the same verses in Matthew 5, save for the shift from “ye have heard” to “it is written.” 3 Nephi 12:45 removes the final phrase from Matthew 5:45: “and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

These instructions were certainly tailored to the conditions of the Roman rule. The intent of the verses is to teach Jesus’s listeners how to treat their enemies. In both the Old and New Worlds, Christians had lived in a society where they were surrounded by enemies, although that condition was much more recent for the Nephites.

Thus, the conclusion is in verses 43 and 44. The relationship of the community of their enemies is to love them rather than hate them. This principle is perhaps exemplified in Alma 31:5: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had

more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.”

3 Nephi 12:46–47

46 Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled.

47 Old things are done away, and all things have become new.

Comments

Verses 46 and 47 are unique to the Book of Mormon, and do not include the reference to publicans (see Matthew 5:46–47).

These verses conclude this set of lessons by linking them to the nature of the law. Nephi₃ had preached that the Messiah would fulfill the law: “And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses” (2 Nephi 25:30). Yahweh’s voice from heaven at the end of the three days of darkness declared the long-awaited event had come to pass: “In me is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:17).

Therefore, at the end of this section of the sermon that has been explaining how the law of Christ would related to the law of Moses, Jesus reiterates that the “those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled.”

Verse 47 echoes the words of Paul: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

3 Nephi 12:48

48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

Comments

The important addition to this verse is “even as I.” This difference marks the difference between the sermon given by the mortal Jesus and the resurrected being who taught the Nephites at Bountiful.

The command to be perfect sounds more daunting than it was meant to. The word that becomes, in English, *perfect*, has a different definition than our assumption of “without flaw.” It means that something is brought to its end or has become complete. Therefore, it signals, for us a process, not a state. We are not to become complete overnight. There are things that we must do. Therefore, even though Jesus was without sin in this life, he was still undergoing an important process, a process that was not completed unto after his death and resurrection.

We do not know how long it will take us to finish our progression, but the important fact is that we are moving along the right path in this life. Just as with Jesus, being complete in that sense is not part of this world. It was for him, and is for us, something to be finished only after our purpose in this life is over. Until then, we are admonished to “endure to the end” (for example, see 3 Nephi 15:9). It is significant that in that phrase, “end” is the same word that is used to define “perfect.”

We are on a path of progression, and we should be consistent, and persistent, in following it until we have reached its end, until we have completed the goals for which earth life was instituted.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The chapter was ended here to better correlate with Matthew, chapter 5.

3 Nephi 13

Instructions against Hypocrisy (cf. Matthew 6:1–18)

3 Nephi 13:1–4

1 Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor; but take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.

2 Therefore, when ye shall do your alms do not sound a trumpet before you, as will hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth;

4 That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.

Comments

The only significant difference from Matthew 6:1–4 is found in verse 1. The phrase “Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor,” is added. It is interesting to speculate why this addition was appropriate in the New World. Aiding the poor has been a Nephite teaching from the beginning, but the descriptions of Nephite society in the years leading up to the sign of Christ’s birth, and then the time leading up to the signs of his death, suggest that the Nephite nation had begun to turn its back on assisting the poor. When the Book of Mormon describes the Nephites being increased in pride during their times of riches, one of the complaints is that they neglect the poor. It is perhaps a reminder of this duty that was important at this point.

The sayings on alms are not given only to reinforce the need for them, but to discuss our personal relationship to them. This section of the Sermon on the Mount begins a series of examples which will end with the conclusion that those who do seemingly righteous things for the glory that might come to them from men will have their reward. That is, if they do things so that men will regard them, then it is only men who will so regard them, not God.

The underlying message of all of these is that what God requires is not simply our actions, but that the motivations for our actions be correct.

3 Nephi 13:5–8

5 And when thou prayest thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.

Comments

There are no significant differences between these verses and the parallels found in Matthew 6:5–8.

These instructions will introduce the Lord’s prayer in the next verses. The introduction sets up the need for correct humility before God in prayer as opposed to prayers offered as public demonstrations. It is not a condemnation of public prayer, but of the motivations behind it.

If the one who prays in public desires that people recognize that person as particularly pious, then they are offering the prayer for their own benefit and are not truly desiring communion with God. The admonition to pray in secret is again not a suggestion that there should be no public prayers, but that the purpose of prayer is communion, which can be done in secret where no other person could see or hear it. God sees. God hears. That is the purpose of prayer.

Vain repetitions might include some of the stock phrases we all learn from our culture, but that was not the intent of these verses. Many prayers in the ancient world were more akin to what we might compare to a magic spell. They were formulas that were designed to suggest that using that formula would require God to hear, and act on the subject of the prayer. God’s desire for our prayers is that they be more communication, and less an attempt to suggest that God ought to do our will.

3 Nephi 13:9–13

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

12 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

13 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Comments

There are three important differences between these verses and the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13. The first is the addition of “after this manner therefore pray ye” at the beginning of verse 1. That change clarifies that this is a model rather than a dictated form of prayer. The difference between an example and a fixed text suggests that prayer should be personalized, and not use these very words as though they had a specific power above the nature of an example. To do so might elevate them to the “vain repetitions” of verse 7 of this chapter.

The second is that “thy kingdom come” is removed from the beginning of Matthew 6:10. There is no context to tell us why that phrase was omitted, but it is possible that it is the suggestion that the resurrected Christ standing before them represented the ushering in of that kingdom.

The third change is that Matthew 6:11, “Give us this day our daily bread” has been removed entirely (Orson Pratt split the Matthean verse 13 into two verses to be able to keep the verse numbers the same). There is no clear reason for the elimination of that verse, though it might be related to the absence of bread as a staple in native diets.

3 Nephi 13:14–15

14 For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you;

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Comments

The comments on 3 Nephi 12:7 suggested that “blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” represented an expression that the way we act towards others will be a model for how God acts with us. That is the theme in these two verses. In the first, God forgives us when we are forgiving. The warning is in verse 15. If we are unforgiving, then the Father is unforgiving. The way we judge others will influence the way that God judges us.

This is also the theme from later in the Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:1–2).

This is not a verse telling us not to judge. Agency requires that we make judgments. It is simply a warning about the nature and quality of our judgments. It warns us that the way we judge others will be a model for how God judges us.

3 Nephi 13:16–18

16 Moreover, when ye fast be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face;
18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father, who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 6:16–18.

Jesus returns to examples of how humankind might perform religious labors to be noticed by others rather than because of their devotion to God. In this case, the subject is fasting. It is assumed that fasting is important and should be done. The difference, as with the other examples, is *for whom* one is fasting. That is, do we fast to improve our relationship to God, or to humankind. If we perform the tasks specifically so others will see and recognize how righteous we are, then we are not truly righteous.

The theme is repeated that those who do such things for the accolades of humankind will get the reward they look for, but only that reward. God will reward the heart, not the performance.

Love God (cf. Matthew 6:19–24)

3 Nephi 13:19–21

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal;
20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.
21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 6:19–21.

The underlying theme of everything Jesus has taught is the relationship of the individual to God. In the Beatitudes, it underscored the ultimate goal that transcends many of the hardships of this life. Most recently, the theme was how the individual approached deity.

The series of amplifications taught how the law of Moses was fulfilled, not by removing the moral laws, but by expanding them.

These verses provide the reason behind all the actions that have been described up to this point. Acting in the ways Jesus has described will “lay up . . . treasures in heaven.” That word choice was intentional; Jesus’s audiences on both hemispheres were well aware of what earthly treasures were like. What they are taught is that by acting correctly and living the commandments, they prepare themselves for greater treasures in the kingdom of heaven.

The declaration that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” is particularly poignant for the Nephites. Their history is replete with times when they set their hearts on worldly riches, and it led them away from God’s commandments, and therefore away from the protection of the covenant of the land. That led to destruction.

3 Nephi 13:22–23

22 The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 6:22–23.

The key to understanding these verses is understanding the nature of the image of “The light of the body is the eye.” In Mediterranean cultures, it was believed that one’s eyes saw by *emitting* light rather than receiving it. They were the instruments through which an internal light illuminated the world. The next phrase is “if . . . thine eye be single.” The original meaning of “single” was *unmixed*, which does not necessarily make the interpretation of this image of “the light of the body is the eye,” any easier. However, if we see that the word *unmixed* is synonymous with *pure*, the image becomes clearer. The image refers to the type of light that was known in the ancient world. In oil lamps, pure and good oil produces a steady light. A mixed fuel source, or a corrupted fuel, would cause the flame to sputter. Thus, the imagery all deals with the internal light of the body.

That physical understanding is transformed into a spiritual message. The gospel is what is inside, not outside. Therefore, if we, in secret, or inside, follow the commandments, then the light of the eye represents a whole body filled with light. In some ways, it also speaks to the way we see the world, where the quality of our righteousness alters the way we view the world. We see others through the lens of what we have come to be.

3 Nephi 13:24

24 No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 6:24.

This verse is a section conclusion. Jesus has been talking about the things that we might do that could be recognized by others, or by God. What he says here is that we cannot have both. We cannot perform

our religion to be praised and recognized by others and still receive God's approval. The two are antithetical. If we perform for others, we receive only the reward that others give. If we perform with an eye single to God, then God rewards us.

In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, this verse ended a chapter. Orson Pratt wanted to make the texts that were clearly parallel easier to compare, so he used the New Testament chapter breaks rather than this one. It appears that the Book of Mormon chapter division highlighted the information given in verse 25 that Jesus began to address the disciples rather than the whole congregation.

Special Instructions Given to the Twelve (cf. Matthew 6:24–34)

3 Nephi 13:25–26

25 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Comments

The major addition to Matthew 6:25–26 is the addition of the information that at this point Jesus turns from the congregation and addresses the twelve. This suggests that some of the interpretations of these passages should relate to them and their mission rather than to the whole. Nevertheless, there is a message that these verses, along with verses 26–31, are appropriate for all audiences.

The difficult reading is “take no thought.” That phrase seems to suggest that we don't worry about such things, and we simply accept what happens. That is not the message. There is nothing in any other teaching of Jesus that suggests that we do nothing but wait for God to take care of us. That is a violation of agency, if nothing else.

This set of verses, from 25 through 31, are all similar examples that lead up to the conclusion in verses 33 and 34.

3 Nephi 13:27–34

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin;

29 And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, even so will he clothe you, if ye are not of little faith.

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.

Comments

Unfortunately, the critical phrase for the interpretation of these readings has been removed. At the beginning of Matthew 6:32, it says “for after all these things do the Gentiles seek.” That is the key. The issue is the seeking. Verse 21 above noted that “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” These verses [27–34] are examples of that. The phrase “take no thought” means that we do not place our hearts on those things mentioned in these verses, that we do not seek those things as our highest priority. It does not mean that we should not work towards them, but that God will bless our efforts. They are all examples to show that God cares.

These verses also show that God cares even for those who do not have the wealth of the world. We can be satisfied with what we do have. There is, however, no indication that God’s statement to Adam was rescinded: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Genesis 3:19 KJV).

The other interpretation of these verses, as pertaining to the mission of the disciples, is that they go “without purse or scrip” (see Mark 6:8 and Luke 10:4). Those were conditions where the disciples had to rely upon the charity of others rather than upon their own labor as they performed their missionary tasks.

There is no end to a chapter at this location in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Orson Pratt ended the chapter here to make it comparable to the chapter divisions in Matthew.

3 Nephi 14

Multitude Are Given Further Instructions (cf. Matthew 7)

3 Nephi 14:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he turned again to the multitude, and did open his mouth unto them again, saying: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Comments

The change from Matthew 7:1–2 comes in verse 1. The final phrase, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” is the same as in Matthew, where it is the whole of the first verse.

The rest of verse 1 has Jesus turning from addressing the twelve, as described in 3 Nephi 13:25, and now addressing the whole congregation. The distinction that the ending verses of Matthew 6 and 3 Nephi 13 is principally in having those verses being given to the twelve rather than as commandments to the whole congregation.

Verses 1 and 2 set up a complementarity of action, where the way we behave towards others on earth will be a model for how God will behave towards us at the time of judgement. The point is certainly not that we should not judge. The very nature of agency requires that we make constant judgements. The admonition does stop with “judge not.” It continues to tell us what the caution is.

Verse 2 continues to explain the complementary nature of our judge. Whatever measure we use to judge our fellow human beings, that measure will be used to judge us. Thus, if we are unforgiving of small errors, God will similarly be harsh with our small errors. See the comments on 3 Nephi 12:7 for how this teaching correlates to Alma₂'s teaching of the doctrine of restoration.

Doctrine and Covenants 88:22–24 teaches us the principle that what we learn to become on earth will be an important aspect of our judgment:

For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory. And he who cannot

abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory; therefore he is not meet for a kingdom of glory. Therefore he must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory.

3 Nephi 14:3–5

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother: Let me pull the mote out of thine eye—and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:3–5.

These three verses are an elaboration of the lesson of verses 1 and 2. Verses 1 and 2 simply indicated that we should be careful in the way we judge others. These three verses tell us one of the reasons. There are times when we can be critical of some small problem that we see in someone else, while we are totally oblivious to the larger sin in our own lives. This is another reason that we should “judge not, that [we] be not judged.”

Verses 3–5 teach the same message as the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35).

3 Nephi 14:6

6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:6.

This command can be read on its own, but it is better to see it in the context of the verses which preceded it, else it misses that important context.

Verses 1 and 2 set the basic commandment about judging with care. Verses 3–5 gave an example of where we might withhold judgment and exercise charity.

In that context, verse 6 is a discussion of a time where we must exercise judgment that might be called uncharitable. Of course, the gospel should be preached, but we need to cautiously exercise our judgment. Not all are ready or willing to receive the gospel. In the conditions that were coming in Jerusalem, the gospel really could be dangerous. Those to whom they would preach really could turn on them and rend them.

In the New World of the Book of Mormon, this was not a caution against the future, but an example from the past. The recent conditions, beginning with the death sentence issued for the believers if the signs of Christ's birth did not arrive by a stated time, were indelibly imprinted on their memories. They had experienced the problem of casting pearls to swine.

The New World knew of dogs, but not of swine. Rather than the English-language word "swine" to label that animal, the original Nephite language probably described a different animal.

3 Nephi 14:7–8

7 Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

8 For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:7–8.

In the context of the preceding verses, these two answer the question: "How shall we learn how to judge righteously?" The answer is to turn to God, who will answer. The imagery is one that was well known in ancient Jerusalem, and a practice with which we are also familiar. If someone knocks on your door, you open to see who it is. Thus, if you symbolically knock on God's door, he will open it to you.

When we communicate with God, we ask for what we need. In the context of the preceding verses, it might be to learn how to judge. If we seek that answer, we will find it. However, the imagery is not limited to the question implied by the context. It is a general comfort to know that God is anxious to help us find what we are looking for. What we must do is approach God in humility and faith.

3 Nephi 14:9–11

9 Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:9–11.

These verses are the expansion of the previous verses admonishing us to ask God for what we need. The reason for these statements is to help the hearers understand the nature of God. God is powerful, and

therefore it would be understandable to approach him with fear and trembling. We might not know how we will be received.

In the New World, this was particularly apt, for it was in the beginning of that same year that the earth had undergone tremendous destruction, and there had been thick darkness for three days. For those at Bountiful, it was abundantly clear that God had power, and that power could be destructive and fearful. Therefore, it was important to emphasize that, as a good earthly father, our Heavenly Father knows how to give good gifts.

Verses 9 and 10 are images that are more appropriate to Jerusalem than to the New World. The typical bread that was baked was not in formed pans as we know them, but closer to a half sphere. Therefore, their bread and a stone had at least a visual similarity.

The common fish in Galilee was long and thin and therefore had a kind of visual similarity to a serpent. Both images are suggesting that if we ask for bread, or a fish, a kind father would not give us just something similar, and which did not meet our needs.

3 Nephi 14:12

12 Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

Comments

This is the Golden Rule. It comes as the capstone, and final command, that concludes the messages taught in verses 1–11.

Verses 1 and 2 set the basic commandment about judging with care. Verses 3–5 gave an example of where we might withhold judgment and exercise charity. Verse 6 demonstrates a time when judgement needed to be used in ways that recognized that not all are righteous. Verses 7–8 tells us to turn to God to understand what we need to know. In context, it is to understand how to judge in all situations. Verses 9–11 comforts those asking, that they might know that God will respond to them favorably.

Finally, verse 12 gives us God’s guideline. We might need more specific guidelines for some occasions, such as those listed in verse 6, but as a rule of thumb, the “measure” for how we are to judge is: “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Jesus declares that this message encapsulates “the law and the prophets.” We remember, with this phrase, Jesus’s declaration: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil” (3 Nephi 12:17. Matthew 5:17).

3 Nephi 14:13–14

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat;

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:13–14.

Jesus shifts his narrative from the general way that we should treat each other to a more specific discussion of how we are to follow him. He uses the analogy of gates and roads. In the Old World, this was perhaps one of the reasons that his early followers did not use the term *Christianity*, but *The Way*, as a description of their religion.

Jesus makes a contrast between following two different paths: His, and the world's. The difference is that following the world's path is easy. The gate is wide, and broad is the way. Lots of people travel it.

Nevertheless, for his "Way", the gate is narrow. There are a limited number of people who will be able to pass through it. Similarly, "narrow is the way" indicates that there are limited numbers who will be able to travel that road. While not mentioned here, these phrases invoke comparisons to Lehi, and Nephi's dream/vision of the Tree of Life, and those who are able to make it along the way, and then remain to eat the fruit of the tree.

3 Nephi 14:15–20

15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.

Comments

There are no changes from Matthew 7:15–20.

After Jesus told his followers that it will be difficult to find and walk the path that he sets out, and which leads to eternal life, the next important question is how could one discover that path?

Jesus warns them that because they are in the world, and the world's gates are wide and roads are broad, that it will be the path of least resistance to go that way. There will be many temptations to follow that easier path. There will be false prophets who will promise another way, perhaps an easier way. However, it will not be a way that leads to eternal life.

Verses 16–19 elaborate with an example that an agrarian people would understand. They understood the nature of trees and fruit, and therefore they would easily understand that the fruit bore an important relationship to the nature of the tree. Here, the image of the fruit would certainly have

triggered Nephite memories of the fruit of the Tree of Life, and the goal of taking that fruit which is desirable above all others.

The lesson is concluded in verse 20. How shall we know if one who is asking us to follow is someone who should be followed? “By their fruits ye shall know them.” We live in a world where it has become even easier to be attracted by comforting words, which can so easily be distanced from the speakers’ actions because we do not know them and may never meet them. It is therefore imperative that we understand the true actions and heart of those who would preach to us and follow only those whose hearts and actions demonstrate God’s laws.

3 Nephi 14:21–23

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Comments

The message that there would be ravenous wolves who would lead the faithful away from the path was serious enough that Jesus continued along that theme. Part of the sheep’s clothing is that there would come those who would promote their ideas by declaring that they are preaching Christ. They might pray to him. They might invoke his name. However, if they are not a good tree, they cannot provide the good fruit. Therefore, Christ notes that even though they might appear to follow him, he does not recognize them (“I never knew you”).

3 Nephi 14:24–27

24 Therefore, whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock—

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand—

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Comments

This segment of the Sermon on the Mount (or, as it is known for the New World, the Sermon at the Temple), ends with the declaration that Jesus has taught the people essential information on how to follow him. If they do as he has taught, they will be as a house built on a firm foundation.

Since he has also discussed the idea that there might be counterfeit gospels, he also notes that if they do not follow his instructions, they would be on a sandy foundation that cannot hold up. The counterfeit gospels, even those who call his name, do not have the power to build a firm foundation of faith that will lead to eternal life.

The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon ends a chapter at this point.

3 Nephi 15

The Fulfillment of the Law Explained

3 Nephi 15:1–4

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and said unto them: Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father; therefore, whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day.

2 And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he perceived that there were some among them who marveled, and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

3 And he said unto them: Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

4 Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.

Comments

Jesus had taught for an unknown amount of time, perhaps as long, or longer, than it would take us to read Matthew chapters 5 through 7. Having finished with the teaching of the things Jesus had taught in the Sermon on the Mount, he looked around to assess how his message had been received. In Matthew, we have the end of the sermon and then Jesus descending from the mountain. In Bountiful, Jesus remains with them, and builds upon both what he said and the people's reaction to it.

The first important reaction is what must have been paramount on his listeners' minds. They had been taught, and looked forward to this day, that the law of Moses would be fulfilled. Once before, at the time of the signs of Christ's birth, there had been those who tried to preach that the law was fulfilled, but they were in error (see 3 Nephi 1:24). They must have wondered if the law truly were fulfilled, and what that would mean. Therefore, Jesus addresses this issue directly. The beginning is twofold. First, he declared that "old things had passed away, and that all things had become new." Then he declared: "I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses." It was now unambiguous.

3 Nephi 15:5–8

5 Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end.

6 Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled.

7 And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come.

8 For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.

Comments

The next part of the discourse deals with the question of what it meant for the law to be fulfilled. These were people who had lived the law of Moses and traced their living of that law back to the Old World. How does something that old and respected change, and what does it mean to say that it is fulfilled?

Christ reiterated the phrase from the Sermon at the Temple that he did not come to destroy the prophets (3 Nephi 12:17). He was not changing everything that the prophets had said. They taught truth, and truth remained.

However, there is a distinction and there is something new. Before discussing what is new, he reiterated the important part of what would be retained from that which was old: “The covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.”

3 Nephi 15:9–10

9 Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.

10 Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me.

Comments

The Yahweh of the heavens stood before the people in Bountiful, clothed in a resurrected body. Thus, when he declares that he is the origin of the law, it is both the firm foundation upon which the new law will be built, but it is also a declaration that he was the author of the law that was old. To make the connection between the old and new, he brings up the prophets again. He will give new commandments, but just as with the prophets of old, the message is that we owe God obedience to whatever God’s commandments might be. The prophets had testified of the importance of keeping covenants and commandments. They knew of Christ and knew that those fundamental principles would remain.

The Twelve Taught about “Other Sheep” (cf. John 10:16)

3 Nephi 15:11–13

11 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he said unto those twelve whom he had chosen:

12 Ye are my disciples; and ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph.

13 And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you.

Comments

Again, Jesus turns specifically to the twelve disciples. While Jesus had taught that those who followed him were a light to the world (3 Nephi 12:14), the disciples are expressly given the command to be that example. They are to be the teachers of the people, and the guardians of the covenant made with the house of Joseph of old.

When Jesus tells the disciples that “this is the land of your inheritance,” he is not specifically giving land to the twelve but defining their realm of operation. The New World has been given to the house of Lehi, and the twelve represent the New World and will have responsibility for it. This is not a promise of land ownership, but of responsibility to the people on the land. Even those not in Bountiful at this time must receive the light of the gospel, and that is in the hands of the twelve to direct.

3 Nephi 15:14–18

14 And not at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell it unto your brethren at Jerusalem.

15 Neither at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell unto them concerning the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father hath led away out of the land.

16 This much did the Father command me, that I should tell unto them:

17 That other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

18 And now, because of stiffneckedness and unbelief they understood not my word; therefore I was commanded to say no more of the Father concerning this thing unto them.

Comments

Jesus answers what might have been another question on the people’s minds. If Jesus had taught in the Old World, did that mean that he had told the Old World people about *this* people, and that perhaps there would be other Old World people (tribes) coming? That would happen in the future, according to Nephi’s prophecy. Was that coming soon?

Jesus tells them that he did not let the Old World know about them. This people, and others that the Father had led out of Jerusalem, were known to God, but not to those of the Old World.

Nevertheless, even though they were currently multiple separate peoples, they would all have the chance to receive Christ's teachings. They would all be brought into the fold of the Shepherd.

The contrast with these people who had been led away were those people in Jerusalem itself. Those people had not understood the gospel, and therefore they were not made aware of the peoples in other lands who were receiving the Gospel.

3 Nephi 15:19–21

19 But, verily, I say unto you that the Father hath commanded me, and I tell it unto you, that ye were separated from among them because of their iniquity; therefore it is because of their iniquity that they know not of you.

20 And verily, I say unto you again that the other tribes hath the Father separated from them; and it is because of their iniquity that they know not of them.

21 And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Comments

Jesus makes certain that these people know that they were one of the tribes that the Lord led out, but that there were others. Thus, they, and the others, will eventually be gathered back together. Before that ultimate reunion, they would all have the opportunity to learn the Gospel. Even though Jesus had not told the Old World about them specifically, he had obliquely included them as “other sheep” (John 10:16).

3 Nephi 15:22–24

22 And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching.

23 And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost.

24 But behold, ye have both heard my voice, and seen me; and ye are my sheep, and ye are numbered among those whom the Father hath given me.

Comments

Consistent with his message that his word was not received in Jerusalem, Jesus also notes that his oblique reference to other sheep was not properly understood. The discussion of what the alternative interpretation was appears to relate to post-Christ Christian interpretations of the scripture. Therefore, this might not

yet have happened in the Old World, but it would. Thus, Jesus can speak of it as though it had happened, which would be less confusing.

These people are his sheep because they have directly heard his voice. That was not a privilege reserved only for the Old World.

This is not the end of a chapter in 1830. Indeed, the next chapter picks up this same theme of the “other sheep.”

3 Nephi 16

3 Nephi 16:1–3

1 And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.

2 For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them.

3 But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them.

Comments

Jesus told the people in Bountiful that he had not specifically told those in Jerusalem about them. What he did, was mention that he had other sheep. Now, he tells those in Bountiful the very same thing. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World, and neither those in Jerusalem nor those in Bountiful should consider themselves unique. There are yet other sheep, and those other sheep must still hear his voice.

We do not know who those other sheep were, nor how they heard his voice. What we do know is that if the Nephites had not kept their record, we would not have known that he came to them. Thus, if Christ visited others and they did not write it, or their records did not survive time, we would not know of that visit, even though it had been made.

The Gentiles and the House of Israel

3 Nephi 16:4–5

4 And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they who have seen me and been with me in my ministry, do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy Ghost, and also of the other tribes whom

they know not of, that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, that through the fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed, who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.

5 And then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfil the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel.

Comments

As a nation so firmly tied to records, it would have been inconceivable that they would not have written about this experience. Despite that fact, the Savior commands them to write. Since he was commanding them to do what they would naturally have done, the question is why Jesus made that request.

The purpose is intertwined with the first Nephi₃'s vision of a book coming from them to the world. It was intertwined with Mormon's record. They were to write so that it would be in the Book of Mormon, and so that when the Book of Mormon came to the world, the Gentiles and the remnant of their seed would have these words.

The purpose was part of the beginning of the end of the scattering of Israel. It was an important beginning of the process of gathering "them in from the four quarters of the earth."

3 Nephi 16:6–7

6 And blessed are the Gentiles, because of their belief in me, in and of the Holy Ghost, which witnesses unto them of me and of the Father.

7 Behold, because of their belief in me, saith the Father, and because of the unbelief of you, O house of Israel, in the latter day shall the truth come unto the Gentiles, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto them.

Comments

Christ's focus continues to be on the future, when the Book of Mormon would come forth to bless the Gentiles. He declares "blessed are the Gentiles." That would be a shocking statement to the Nephites, as their experience with those that would be defined as Gentiles was typically Lamanite. Christ was reversing expectations.

That reversal is amplified when the blessing on the Gentiles for belief is contrasted with the unbelief of the house of Israel. Nevertheless, this is no more than a reiteration of lessons that had been taught since the days of Isaiah in the Old World, and since the first Nephi in the New World (see Isaiah 49:22–23 and its quotation in 1 Nephi 21:22–23, and again in 2 Nephi 6:6–7).

3 Nephi 16:8–11

8 But wo, saith the Father, unto the unbelieving of the Gentiles—for notwithstanding they have come forth upon the face of this land, and have scattered my people who are of the house of Israel; and my people who are of the house of Israel have been cast out from among them, and have been trodden under feet by them; 9 And because of the mercies of the Father unto the Gentiles, and also the judgments of the Father upon my people who are of the house of Israel, verily, verily, I say unto you, that after all this, and I have caused my people who are of the house of Israel to be smitten, and to be afflicted, and to be slain, and to be cast out from among them, and to become hated by them, and to become a hiss and a byword among them—

10 And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

11 And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

Comments

More of the future is laid out. The important part of this discussion is to return to the importance of the house of Israel. There will be faithful Gentiles who are blessed, but there will also be unfaithful Gentiles who come upon this land and will scatter those native peoples that they find. Eventually, those unfaithful Gentiles will succumb to the same kinds of forces that led the house of Israel astray. They will “be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs,” among others negative traits.

It will be “in that day” that “I will remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.” When Jesus uses “in that day,” it is a general timeframe, even though it is linked to a specific beginning event. The Gentiles may have been in unbelief for a time, but there will come a time when the Lord will bring forth the gospel. The beginning of that time is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 16:12–15

12 And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel.

13 But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.

14 And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father.

15 But if they will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel.

Comments

Jesus lays out possibilities for the future, without choosing between them. There would come a time when the Gentiles would no more have power of the house of Israel. The righteous Gentiles will then be numbered with the house of Israel. They will be adopted into the covenant and will become part of the house of Israel. When that happens, if the Gentiles are righteous, then the house of Israel will not wreak vengeance upon them for all that has been done to them.

However, if the Gentiles do not hearken to the voice of God, “I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down.” In that condition, the house of Israel would wreak vengeance on the Gentiles.

3 Nephi 16:16–20

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me—that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance.

17 And then the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled, which say:

18 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

19 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

20 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

Comments

Jesus has been speaking of the house of Israel in the future, and now brings it back, at least tangentially, to those in the congregation around him. This is the land of their inheritance. They will be preserved upon the land according to the covenant of the land. Through righteousness, they will be blessed.

The Gentiles appear to also inherit that blessing of the land, for they too will prosper only upon principles of righteousness. If the house of Israel is righteous, and the Gentiles are not, Jesus had said that the house of Israel would rise up against the Gentiles.

To punctuate the blessing of the land, and the blessing on the New World branch of the house of Israel, Jesus cites Isaiah 52:8–10. There will be redemption and reconciliation after a time of destruction visited upon the house of Israel. It will be well.

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 17

The Savior Heals the Sick and Afflicted

3 Nephi 17:1–4

1 Behold, now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked round about again on the multitude, and he said unto them: Behold, my time is at hand.

2 I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time.

3 Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.

4 But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

Comments

Leading up to verse 1, Jesus has descended to stand before the people gathered at Bountiful. He has had that multitude come to him and examine his wounds. He has called twelve disciples, and then given to them a version of the Old World Sermon on the Mount. He has added even more teachings. It has been a very long day, and one that undoubtedly had sapped the people's spiritual and physical strength.

Jesus compassionately recognizes this, and therefore suggests that he had done enough for the day. He tells them to go home and rest, promising that he would return the next day. His statement that “Behold, my time is at hand” must refer to the information in verse 4: “But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel.”

3 Nephi 17:5–6

5 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.

6 And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.

Comments

Although it was true that it had been a long day and that the people were spiritually and physically tired, it was not true that they were ready for their God to leave. Very few in the history of the world have been in the physical presence of God, and typically even then for a relatively short period of time. The people in Bountiful understood that they were living through an experience unique in recorded history. They did not want it to end. At the thought of their God leaving, their emotions spilled out, and “they were in tears.” Christ saw this, understood this, and had compassion for their heartfelt desires.

3 Nephi 17:7–10

7 Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy.

8 For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.

9 And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.

10 And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.

Comments

The Nephites had been taught since the time of Nephi³ that their God would rise with “healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 25:13). That phrase, and idea, is best known for Malachi 4:2, but Jesus will repeat it later in 3 Nephi 25:2. Perhaps for that reason, the people understood that healing was associated with the Messiah, and that would be what Jesus perceived.

He invites them to bring those who are sick to him. There are very few populations of any size who do not have some who are ill, or lame, or blind, or are otherwise afflicted among them. In the ancient world, before modern medicine, it was even more common. Therefore, there were in the congregation those who could be healed.

They came, and they were healed. Understandably, their thankfulness, their adoration, was so great that “they did bathe his feet with their tears.”

Christ Ministers to the Children

3 Nephi 17:11–12

11 And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

12 So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him.

Comments

Christ had healed in Jerusalem. He had also said, on one occasion: “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me.” He then “laid his hands on them” (Matthew 19:14–15).

The risen Christ is even more dramatic in Bountiful. He has all the children in the congregation brought to him, and he stands in the midst of them as they sit on the ground around him. As this was a request for the children, the adults back away to see what will transpire.

3 Nephi 17:13–15

13 And it came to pass that when they had all been brought, and Jesus stood in the midst, he commanded the multitude that they should kneel down upon the ground.

14 And it came to pass that when they had knelt upon the ground, Jesus groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel.

15 And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

Comments

Jesus has the entire congregation kneel. The children are closest, but the adults are not far off. Everyone is kneeling. While standing, Jesus begins to pray. About what? He is “troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel.” Why begin this way in such a joyous occasion when he has appeared to the faithful of the house of Israel in Bountiful?

We do not know the rest of the prayer, for “the things which he prayed cannot be written.” However, we can guess from the presence of the children and the beginning sadness for the wicked of the house of Israel, that the Savior was praying for the future. Although it appears to begin in sadness, it certainly would not have ended that way. The presence of the children placed them in a position to represent the future, and his blessings and prayers for them would not be forgotten. They were the next generation which would more fully enjoy the peace and prosperity that would follow Christ’s visit.

3 Nephi 17:16–18

16 And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father;

17 And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.

18 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome.

Comments

We can only wonder at what was said. We can only hope to one day have the power of the communication that Jesus had with his father. There was information in that prayer, but more than information, there was powerful emotion. Both the words and the emotions were beyond capturing in a written record.

Nevertheless, we do learn that even though the prayer began with dismay at the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel, that was not the whole theme of the prayer for the result was far from the sadness of the prayer's beginning. At the end, "so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome."

3 Nephi 17:19–22

19 And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.

20 And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

21 And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

22 And when he had done this he wept again;

Comments

At the end of the prayer, it was not the end of the event. Jesus had all arise, and his own emotions spilled over. He declared "my joy is full," and he wept.

Then, he focuses on the children around him. They had been around him during the prayer, and much of the prayer likely foretold the future to, and about, them. He gives each a blessing. And "he wept again."

3 Nephi 17:23–25

23 And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

24 And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

25 And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children.

Comments

After the blessing, the congregation is asked to see their little ones. Not only to see them as their children, but to see with spiritual eyes. They see the children blessed through the ministering of angels, surrounded with the power of Heaven as though encircled by fire. Being surrounded by apparent fire was a visual witness to spiritual power, and it was previously manifested when the brothers Nephi₂ and Lehi₃ found themselves in a Lamanite prison. This current event is a much more glorious experience, but it places the children in the company of righteous prophets. With such a transcendent experience, how could any of those children not remain faithful all their days? No wonder there was peace in their land, and they lived faithfully according to Jesus's commandments.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 18

Jesus Institutes the Sacrament

3 Nephi 18:1–4

1 And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.

2 And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth.

3 And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.

4 And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude.

Comments

The break in the chapter separates this event from the important context of the blessing of the children that proceeds it. While they are not directly connected, it is important to remember that this is a people who were tired and had been directed to go home. They had refused, and Christ stayed.

After the emotional drain of the blessing on the children, Jesus had the twelve bring bread and wine to him. He broke the bread and blessed it. He gave it to the disciples, and then to the entire congregation. We don't have the information on how much bread and wine the disciples were to bring, but there were about "two thousand and five hundred souls" (3 Nephi 17:25) present. It is doubtful that the twelve could carry what was needed for that many people.

Therefore, we are probably seeing a repetition of the feeding of the multitude as Jesus had done in the Old World. When Jesus had earlier asked them to bring those needing to be healed, he had said: "For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you" (3 Nephi 17:8). Perhaps the miraculous feeding of the multitude was another fulfillment of the desire that Jesus do for them as he had done to those in Jerusalem.

3 Nephi 18:5–9

5 And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name.

6 And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you.

7 And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

8 And it came to pass that when he said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup and drink of it, and that they should also give unto the multitude that they might drink of it.

9 And it came to pass that they did so, and did drink of it and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled.

Comments

Only after they had eaten is it made clear that in addition to this being a miracle, it was also a model for their future partaking of the sacrament. In verse 5, Jesus notes that there will be those who will have the power to break bread and bless it. Of course, we know that this is a power that would have been given to the twelve, but the implications are that there would be even more who could perform that sacrament.

Before the distribution of the wine, it was made clear that there was a sacred context in which these common food items became symbols. They were no longer just food to assuage hunger or thirst, but the symbols that indicated that spiritual hunger and thirst were fulfilled in the mission of Jesus, the Christ.

3 Nephi 18:10–11

10 And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you.

11 And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

Comments

Jesus instructs the twelve that this sacrament was something that should be repeated: “this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized.” Although that might indicate that it was to be done prior

to baptism, modern readers understand that this is an oft-repeated event to renew the covenants we made at the time of our baptism.

The Nephite people had been familiar with the concept of a church as a gathering of believers inside a society that also included non-believers. The people gathered at Bountiful were certainly all believers now, even if there might have been some who were not believers before.

3 Nephi 18:12–14

12 And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things. And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock.

13 But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall, and the gates of hell are ready open to receive them.

14 Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall keep my commandments, which the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you.

Comments

Earlier, Jesus had noted the need to build upon a rock rather than on a sandy foundation (3 Nephi 11:40). He repeats that theme here but defines what that rock is. Jesus has given them commandments of what they should do: “If ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock.”

Jesus had also declared that it was his doctrine that all should repent and be baptized (3 Nephi 11:30–35). To the commandments of repentance and baptism, Jesus added the sacrament as a frequent reminder of those commandments, and of baptismal covenants. This was the rock. This was the foundation. When Jesus declared his doctrine, he also declared that his doctrine was the rock upon which their religious lives should be built.

3 Nephi 18:15–16

15 Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

16 And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you.

Comments

Jesus commends prayer. This is not given as a commandment, but as an important aspect of their religious life. Prayer would open the communication between the person and God. In this case, the declaration

that they should pray was directed to all, but then also indicated that “so shall ye pray in my church.” The great prayer that they heard from Jesus was the clearest model, although the Sermon at the Temple also provided instructions on prayer.

Prayer was to be both individual and communal, and in both cases was to be done to be heard of God rather than of men. The Nephites had long known to pray, so this was not a new commandment. In Alma 33:3–11, Alma₂ commends the words of Zenos as a model for prayer. Jesus was indicating that the need for prayer had not been fulfilled, even thou the law of Moses had been.

Instructions for Meeting Together

3 Nephi 18:17–23

17 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto his disciples, he turned again unto the multitude and said unto them:

18 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

19 Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name;

20 And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you.

21 Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed.

22 And behold, ye shall meet together oft; and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not;

23 But ye shall pray for them, and shall not cast them out; and if it so be that they come unto you oft ye shall pray for them unto the Father, in my name.

Comments

Jesus turns from the twelve and addresses the congregation. The declaration that “whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” is a promise that our righteous prayers will be heard. The key is the phrase: “which is right.” There are certainly times when we may believe that we are praying righteously, but the answer we desire does not come. There is something in God’s wisdom which knows that, for an unknowable divine reason, it isn’t right.

Verse 22 tells the congregation how to deal with those who might come to join with them who are not currently part of their congregation. They are to be accepted and prayed for.

The important piece of this instruction for the Nephites was: “Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name.” That is the clearest teaching that there is a distinction between the Father and

Jesus. This is no longer the assignment of titles based on heaven or earth, where Yahweh is Father while in Heaven, but Son while on earth. This is an instruction to pray to the being that Jesus considers his father, and to do so in Jesus's name. That makes absolutely clear that the Nephites are to learn a new understanding of their God.

Only at the time of Jesus's appearance do the Nephites begin to learn of the Godhead as opposed to the belief only in Yahweh.

3 Nephi 18:24–25

24 Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed.

25 And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world; and whosoever breaketh this commandment suffereth himself to be led into temptation.

Comments

In the Sermon at the Temple, Jesus had told the congregation (as he had in Jerusalem) that they were light to others (Matthew 5:14; 3 Nephi 12:14). Jesus reprises that teaching. They are to hold up their light, and it is Jesus as the Christ who is that light. Even after Christ is no longer in their presence, they are to symbolically invite all to come to Christ, “that [they] might feel and see” as this people had.

3 Nephi 18:26–29

26 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he turned his eyes again upon the disciples whom he had chosen, and said unto them:

27 Behold verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you another commandment, and then I must go unto my Father that I may fulfil other commandments which he hath given me.

28 And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it;

29 For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood ye shall forbid him.

Comments

As with the law of Moses, there were community rules for living the law of Christ. In modern days, we understand that there is an organization known as a church, within which there are laws establishing how that

community of believers is to be governed. That need was also present when the church and the community were essentially the same. Thus, there were laws laid down to define the boundaries of the community.

One of those was participation in the sacrament. It was to be done worthily, or as believers. The idea that it was to be done worthily must have meant that one was willing to obey the doctrine of Christ, which was repentance and baptism. It does not mean that those of us who might most need the sacrament to renew our covenants after repentance should not partake.

3 Nephi 18:30–32

30 Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood.

31 But if he repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered.

32 Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.

Comments

How should the twelve handle situations where there were those among them who were not believers, or who had not undergone repentance? The instruction was to be patient and try to bring all souls to repentance, and then baptism. However, those who would not, “shall not be numbered among my people, that [they] may not destroy my people.”

The process of numbering someone among his people has an earthly component and a heavenly one. The earthly component allowed for the need to declare that someone might not be included in the community. The heavenly component would be that only those numbered with the Good Shepherd’s sheep would inherit the kingdom.

Still, the hope was always to attempt to teach the gospel. Nevertheless, the Nephites were painfully aware of the problems of apostates among their congregation, as those who opposed their religion had often caused literal destructions through wars.

3 Nephi 18:33–35

33 Therefore, keep these sayings which I have commanded you that ye come not under condemnation; for wo unto him whom the Father condemneth.

34 And I give you these commandments because of the disputations which have been among you. And blessed are ye if ye have no disputations among you.

35 And now I go unto the Father, because it is expedient that I should go unto the Father for your sakes.

Comments

These commandments finally conclude the lessons of the day. Jesus would return the next day, but this time he really was leaving. Even in leaving, he makes it clear that “it is expedient that I should go unto the Father for your sakes.” No matter how much the people might have desired that he stay, they really were in need of a break. Even though there would be some who would sleep little, they needed time to process and understand what had transpired in that most miraculous day.

Authority Given to the Twelve

3 Nephi 18:36–39

36 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had touched them all, and spake unto them as he touched them.

37 And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore they did not bear record; but the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost. And I will show unto you hereafter that this record is true.

38 And it came to pass that when Jesus had touched them all, there came a cloud and overshadowed the multitude that they could not see Jesus.

39 And while they were overshadowed he departed from them, and ascended into heaven. And the disciples saw and did bear record that he ascended again into heaven.

Comments

Giving the authority to grant the gift of the Holy Ghost was visibly manifest, but the people didn't hear the words. Therefore, they only later learned that this was what had passed when Jesus touched the disciples.

Jesus ascended. “The disciples saw and did bear record that he ascended again into heaven.” The twelve were his earthly testators. They would certainly attest that he had come among them, but the most important part of their testimony was that he had ascended to Heaven. Thus, the God had descended to earth, but is now back in Heaven, doubly declaring that the teachings Jesus gave while with them were from God, even though they were given on earth.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 19

The Twelve Minister to the Multitude

3 Nephi 19:1–3

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ascended into heaven, the multitude did disperse, and every man did take his wife and his children and did return to his own home.

2 And it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had ministered unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude.

3 Yea, and even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and insomuch did they send forth unto the people that there were many, yea, an exceedingly great number, did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude.

Comments

The typical ancient city consisted of a central population with a large amount of farmland associated with it. Often, people might live in the city but still go to their fields every day. Many others lived in that farmland. Therefore, when Jesus had appeared to those gathered in the city, those who were in the farmlands would not have been aware of the important event happening in the city.

Such was the joy that was felt that it needed to be shared. Jesus would return on the next day, and there were probably many in the city who were related to those who lived in the farmlands. Therefore, they sent messengers to bring those people in. Since we never hear of any mode of transport, other than walking, in the Book of Mormon, the distance they could go was limited by how far they could walk in the available time. Even though that might be perhaps twenty miles in a day, they had to go and return. The messengers would not want to miss Jesus's return.

Thus, while many were sent out, they would not have reached a different city. At least in Mesoamerica, even very large cities tended to be a 3-day walk apart. Perhaps there was a small village that was within reach, but if the gathered were “an exceedingly great number,” it would have been less than twice the first day's crowd of two thousand five hundred (3 Nephi 17:25).

3 Nephi 19:4–6

4 And it came to pass that on the morrow, when the multitude was gathered together, behold, Nephi and his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah—now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen—and it came to pass that they went forth and stood in the midst of the multitude.

5 And behold, the multitude was so great that they did cause that they should be separated into twelve bodies.

6 And the twelve did teach the multitude; and behold, they did cause that the multitude should kneel down upon the face of the earth, and should pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus.

Comments

Jesus had not said when he would return, save it were “on the morrow.” There were no hourglasses to tell the time of day, and the people were undoubtedly anxious to make sure they missed nothing of the divine visit.

Therefore, the crowd had gathered, but Jesus had not yet come. The twelve divided the people into groups so that each one of the twelve could teach a smaller congregation. One of the things they did was to pray. They were to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, and that might have been one of the important teachings, as the understanding of the Godhead would have been new to those who had not been there on the previous day.

Verse 1 names the twelve. We don’t hear the names again, save for Nephi. The most interesting name is Timothy, not because of the name, but because we learn that Nephi₃ had raised him from the dead, something not otherwise attested to in our text.

3 Nephi 19:7–8

7 And the disciples did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus. And it came to pass that they arose and ministered unto the people.

8 And when they had ministered those same words which Jesus had spoken—nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken—behold, they knelt again and prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus.

Comments

These verses highlight two prayer events at that time. The disciples pray, and then rise to minister to the people. What they do is teach “those same words which Jesus had spoken.” For many it was a refresher course, but there were many new people who had come in from the outlying areas for whom this was important new information.

Then, they pray again. Once again, there is the emphasis that they pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. The only reason for the frequent repetition of this fact is that it was new information that needed to be learned.

3 Nephi 19:9–14

9 And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them.

10 And when they had thus prayed they went down unto the water's edge, and the multitude followed them.

11 And it came to pass that Nephi went down into the water and was baptized.

12 And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen.

13 And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

14 And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them.

Comments

When they prayed, they prayed “for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them.” The result of this desire is that they go to the water and are baptized, after which “they were filled with the Holy Ghost.” Although many were previously baptized, it appears that the baptism was associated with the gift of the Holy Ghost, which was not part of the previous Nephite baptism. In the New Testament, John explained that “the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

Modern members of the church are familiar with our practice of only baptizing once. Even in the earlier days of the Church in Utah, there were baptisms performed for spiritual renewal. Questions about why the people would be baptized again stem from a much more recent modern practice that did not apply even in the earlier years of the Church in Utah.

Christ Leads the Multitude in Prayer

3 Nephi 19:15–16

15 And it came to pass that while the angels were ministering unto the disciples, behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them.

16 And it came to pass that he spake unto the multitude, and commanded them that they should kneel down again upon the earth, and also that his disciples should kneel down upon the earth.

Comments

After the people had received the Holy Ghost, and while the angels came to minister to the twelve, Jesus arrived. It was an appropriate time, for one of the functions of the Holy Ghost is to testify of Jesus the Christ. If they had not already been fully convinced that the being before them was the anticipated Messiah, the Holy Ghost bore strong witness to that fact as he stood among them.

3 Nephi 19:17–18

17 And it came to pass that when they had all knelt down upon the earth, he commanded his disciples that they should pray.

18 And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God.

Comments

Jesus commands the people to pray, and they do. They “did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God.” Why did they pray to Jesus?

The Nephite doctrine of the Messiah was that it would be their God come to earth. Thus, they believed it was Yahweh who stood before them. In the modern Church, we also understand that Jesus is the mortal aspect of Yahweh, so they prayed to their God as they had always done.

The idea that there would be a Father that is different from Yahweh was a new teaching for the people. Even though it had been emphasized multiple times, including that morning, that they were to pray to the Father in Jesus’s name, they had not yet fully understood and internalized that teaching. The glorified being standing before them was rather obviously more than human, and all of their previous teaching said that it was their God who would visit them. He was there. It is hardly surprising that they would pray to him directly.

3 Nephi 19:19–23

19 And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them, and went a little way off from them and bowed himself to the earth, and he said:

20 Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world.

21 Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words.

22 Father, thou hast given them the Holy Ghost because they believe in me; and thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me; and they pray unto me because I am with them.

23 And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one.

Comments

Jesus departs a little from them. The text does not tell us if all heard what he spoke but since we have a record of it, at least Nephi₃ heard. Certainly, others would have.

Two things are important in this prayer. The first is that Jesus thanks the Father for the Gift of the Holy Ghost that has been given to the people and asks that it be given to all who believe.

The second is that Jesus prays *to the Father*. In the context of the prayer of the people directed to Jesus, he immediately models prayer, a prayer directed to the Father, and not to himself. One of the reasons for this prayer is to emphasize the new teaching about the Father. Thus, we have verse 23: “And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one.”

The people may have prayed to Jesus, but Jesus immediately modeled the way to pray to the Father, ending with the important declaration of his relationship with the Father.

3 Nephi 19:24–26

24 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples, and behold, they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire.

25 And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof.

26 And Jesus said unto them: Pray on; nevertheless they did not cease to pray.

Comments

In spite of the prayer that Jesus had modeled, the disciples continued to pray to him. They too, were learning. Rather than correct them, he blessed them. Then he told them to continue to pray. The experience of being in Christ’s presence was overwhelming, as were attempts to have them fully understand the modeled redirection of their prayers to the Father.

3 Nephi 19:27–30

27 And he turned from them again, and went a little way off and bowed himself to the earth; and he prayed again unto the Father, saying:

28 Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and I pray for them, and also for them who shall believe on their words, that they may be purified in me, through faith on their words, even as they are purified in me.

29 Father, I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me out of the world, because of their faith, that they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.

30 And when Jesus had spoken these words he came again unto his disciples; and behold they did pray steadfastly, without ceasing, unto him; and he did smile upon them again; and behold they were white, even as Jesus.

Comments

For the second time, Jesus moves “a little way off” to pray to the Father. This prayer is not for instruction, but of gratefulness for the faith of the twelve, as well as those who were gathered. The previous experience describing whiteness (verse 25 in this chapter) indicated that the apostles had been purified, and that is how Jesus speaks of them. He expresses thanks “that [the Father has] purified those whom [He, Jesus, has] chosen.

In verse 29, Jesus says: “I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me out of the world, because of their faith, that they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.” This is a recognition that not all who are in the world will be capable of receiving the purification Jesus spoke of. Nevertheless, Jesus prays for those who do have the ability to understand, keep the commandments, and become purified. When he says that “they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me,” it is a reference to their ultimate exaltation, their presence in the Celestial Kingdom.

3 Nephi 19:31–34

31 And it came to pass that he went again a little way off and prayed unto the Father;

32 And tongue cannot speak the words which he prayed, neither can be written by man the words which he prayed.

33 And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed.

34 Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man.

Comments

For a third time Jesus goes “a little way off” to pray. This time, no record is kept. In fact, Nephi₃ records that the words were so powerful and sacred that they cannot be written. So powerful were the words, that he repeats the statement, in verses 32 and 34, that they could not be written.

3 Nephi 19:35–36

35 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.

36 Verily I say unto you, there are none of them that have seen so great things as ye have seen; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard.

Comments

When Jesus returns to the people, he declares that they have great faith, and that because of that faith, they have seen great things that others had not. This was a faith strong enough that after Jesus's departure, these people formed the core of a society that would live in peaceful obedience to the commandments for nearly two hundred years. They would prosper in that time, but not fall to the previous sins of pride that had limited their times of peace to a few years. This faith extended their peace longer than they had ever known, and perhaps longer than the rest of the world has ever known.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 20

3 Nephi 20:1

1 And it came to pass that he commanded the multitude that they should cease to pray, and also his disciples. And he commanded them that they should not cease to pray in their hearts.

Comments

The disciples had been praying to Jesus. Three times Jesus left them to pray himself, and then returned. The disciples continued to pray. At this point, Jesus has work to do, and must begin teaching the lessons of the day. He tells them to cease praying. However, lest his intent be misunderstood, he told them that they should not cease to pray in their hearts.

There are times when we are in the formal attitude of prayer, as were the disciples. It can be an intense experience, and even with a private effect, there are times when it is appropriate in public. Nonetheless, just as Jesus had work to do, so do we. There are times when we cannot be in the formal attitude of prayer. Nevertheless, the things we think about, the way we treat others, the attitudes that we express, can all witness to an internal prayer that we can carry with us always.

Sacrament Is Administered Again

3 Nephi 20:2–7

2 And he commanded them that they should arise and stand up upon their feet. And they arose up and stood upon their feet.

3 And it came to pass that he brake bread again and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat.

4 And when they had eaten he commanded them that they should break bread, and give unto the multitude.

5 And when they had given unto the multitude he also gave them wine to drink, and commanded them that they should give unto the multitude.

6 Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude;

7 But he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink.

Comments

The previous day had also seen what appears to have been a miraculous feeding that was associated with the sacrament. On this day, also, the Savior reinforces the sacrament, but it is presented more clearly on this day. It is interesting that on both days the sacrament is a portion of a communal meal. That was the pattern in early Christianity. The separation of the sacrament as an ordinance from the communal meal occurred later in Christianity.

3 Nephi 20:8–9

8 And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled.

9 Now, when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.

Comments

Jesus institutes the symbolic associations of the bread and wine. They represent his mortal mission, that which occurred when he was literally flesh and blood. The eating simply evoked internalizing the symbols. Both symbols pointed to what the Nephites had long looked for: the mortal atoning mission of the Messiah. Through the remembrance of these symbols, or emblems, the people were to remember that atoning mission.

Christ Prophecies of the Last Days

3 Nephi 20:10–14

10 And it came to pass that when they had all given glory unto Jesus, he said unto them: Behold now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel.

11 Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled—behold they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them—

12 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel.

13 And then shall the remnants, which shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west, and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them.

14 And the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance.

Comments

Turning to the work of the day, Jesus returns to a theme from the previous day, which was the gathering of the house of Israel. This is done both for remembrance and for its importance, but also because there were new people in the congregation who had not directly heard the information on the previous day.

Jesus commends the words of Isaiah to them. While Nephi₃ doesn't include long copied chapters like Nephi₁ did, the reason for remembering Isaiah was similar. Isaiah was the prophet of a scattering, and therefore Jesus desired, and spoke of, the gathering of that which had been scattered.

Verse 13 notes that there are many who were "scattered abroad upon the face of the earth." Verse 14 places the Nephites as one of them. The fact that they came from Jerusalem and were given this land places them as part of the prophecies.

3 Nephi 20:15–17

15 And I say unto you, that if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people—

16 Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; and ye shall be in the midst of them who shall be many; and ye shall be among them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.

17 Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off.

Comments

Verses 16 and 17 quote Micah 5:8 and 9.

The gathering is yet in the future; the time had not yet come that the Gentiles would scatter this people. However, there will still be a continuation of the blessings upon the house of Jacob. The Gentiles might, at some point, scatter Yahweh's people (and it was prophesied that that would happen to this people), nevertheless there will come a time of reversal, where the house of Israel will be dominant. Israel will be able to defend herself against her enemies.

3 Nephi 20:18–22

18 And I will gather my people together as a man gathereth his sheaves into the floor.

19 For I will make my people with whom the Father hath covenanted, yea, I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass. And thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth. And behold, I am he who doeth it.

20 And it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent it shall fall upon them, saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the Gentiles.

21 And it shall come to pass that I will establish my people, O house of Israel.

22 And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you.

Comments

Verses 18 and 19 are references to Micah 4:12 and 13.

After Israel becomes more powerful, the gathering will occur. These are God's people. To be gathered as sheaves into the floor represents gathering something of value. The result of the gathering will be a strengthening of the house of Israel, and God will be the King, dispensing justice through his "sword of . . . justice."

Verse 21 says that "I will establish my people, O house of Israel." The house of Israel already exists, so the establishment cannot be a beginning, but perhaps the creation of a firmer foundation of the house of Israel. With the gathered Israel together, God can become the king to rule on earth during the millennium.

After discussing the establishment of the whole of the house of Israel, Jesus turns to the subject of this land and this people. They, too, will be established in the land. Those of the New World house of Israel will be the leadership of the gathered house of Israel for those in the New World. "The powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of [them]." When they are established as the New World governing body for the house of Israel, Jesus will be with them. Having the resurrected Savior be the one to say this, the people understand that the same Savior will be in their midst at that future time.

3 Nephi 20:23–26

23 Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.

24 Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me.

25 And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

26 The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant—

Comments

Verse 23 references Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Luke, the writer of the book of Acts in the New Testament, referenced this scripture in Acts 3:22 and 7:37. Nephi, referenced that verse in 1 Nephi 22:20.

It happens with some frequency that during the translation process, Joseph Smith would quote an Old Testament scripture, but the version of that scripture as it appears in the New Testament. That is the case here, and we can tell that, as a translator, it was Acts 3:22 that he had in mind. Notice the similarity between verses 24–26 of 3 Nephi 20, and Acts 3:24–26: “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

The use of these more familiar verses to provide the text that was intended is one of the methods that Joseph used to translate the Book of Mormon. The intent of Jesus’s words was to declare himself the fulfillment of prophecy, something that those who had been with him the day before had learned but is being repeated for those who arrived more recently. The use of passages familiar to the readers of the Book of Mormon that translated the intent of the Nephite words occurs several times, and simply indicates that the purpose of the translation was to speak to the modern audience rather than the ancient one.

3 Nephi 20:27–29

27 And after that ye were blessed then fulfilleth the Father the covenant which he made with Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed—unto the pouring out of the Holy Ghost through me upon the Gentiles, which blessing upon the Gentiles shall make them mighty above all, unto the scattering of my people, O house of Israel.

28 And they shall be a scourge unto the people of this land. Nevertheless, when they shall have received the fulness of my gospel, then if they shall harden their hearts against me I will return their iniquities upon their own heads, saith the Father.

29 And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father.

Comments

When Jesus declared that he was the one who was promised to come as the atoning Messiah, the Nephites would have immediately understood that Yahweh stood before them. Having established who

he was, he turns to the covenants that he has made, declaring that they will be fulfilled. As God, he has the power to fulfill them.

Each of these verses references the Father. The Nephites have known their God by that title (see 1 Nephi 22:9: “The making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham”). Jesus has declared himself to be Yahweh come to earth, the one who made the covenants. Therefore, he can promise to complete them.

3 Nephi 20:30–35

30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

31 And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

32 Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye.

33 Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

34 Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

Comments

There will come a time when the people of the earth have had the opportunity to know the fulness of the gospel, that they will believe in, and have faith in, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus reiterates the prayer lesson that the people should “pray unto the Father in my name.”

To support this future event, Jesus turns to Isaiah, whose words he had commended to the people (see verse 11 in this chapter), although he modifies them to be even more appropriate to the occasion.

Isaiah 52:8 is quoted in verse 32, except verse 32 leaves out “when the Lord shall bring again Zion.” Jesus’s purpose is to declare *himself*, not Zion, therefore he leaves out that phrase. Instead of the mention of Zion, we get verse 33 which refers to the gathering, which was likely Isaiah’s intent in the phrase not quoted.

Isaiah 52:9 is quoted in verse 34, with no significant change. Isaiah 52:10 is quoted in verse 35. The verse in Isaiah reads: “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” The additions are the tighter declaration of *the Father* (a Nephite title for Yahweh), and then the final statement: “the Father and I are one.” In the context of Jesus’s declaration of who he is, this verse becomes a scriptural defense of the identity of the being who is speaking to those gathered in Bountiful.

3 Nephi 20:36–38

36 And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money.

Comments

Jesus again quotes Isaiah. These verses are found in Isaiah 52:1–3. Where the purpose of the previous quotation from Isaiah (verses 30–35 of this chapter) was to declare Jesus, these verses are directed at the people. Jesus has laid out the promise of the gathering and declared his power to fulfill it.

These verses are telling the congregation that they have a responsibility. They must “awake, and put on [their] strength.” Jesus has declared that he is Yahweh with whom they have covenanted, and renewed his commitment to that covenant. Now, the people have a responsibility to fulfill their part of the covenant. In the context of the previous day’s sermon, this is a covenant renewal, where the commitment to the old covenant is transferred and renewed in the covenant accompanying the predicted atoning Messiah.

3 Nephi 20:39

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak.

Comments

This transitional phrase among quotations (Jesus will return to quoting in the next verses) continues the theme of identification. One of the purposes of this entire episode is the declaration that Jesus is the very Yahweh whom the Nephites had been taught would come to earth, and who would come to them.

3 Nephi 20:40–45

40 And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

41 And then shall a cry go forth: Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.

42 For ye shall not go out with haste nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rearward.

43 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

44 As many were astonished at thee—his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men—

45 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Comments

Verses 40–45 reference Isaiah 52:7, 11–15. These verses return to the identification of Jesus as Yahweh and declare that he has the power to bring to pass the fulfillment of covenants. He will be the one who will be their king. It is possible that these verses were given to reference the Nephite record of Abinadi before King Noah, whose priests had asked for an explanation of verse 40. Assuming that the Nephites present were versed in their own religious history, they should have made the connection, and therefore remembered Abinadi's explanation that pointed to Yahweh, the coming atoning Messiah. See Mosiah 15:13–20.

3 Nephi 20:46

46 Verily, verily, I say unto you, all these things shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance.

Comments

Having established again that Jesus was the very Messiah for whom they had waited, he quoted Isaiah in the previous verses to indicate that the awaited Messiah would lead them, and particularly that he would publish peace as well as publish salvation. His conclusion to this section is that he declares that there will come a time when Jerusalem would “be inhabited again with my people.” That is, Christ was setting in motion events that would gather Israel. The predictions were that they would be gathered in both the Old World and the New. In this case, the emphasis is on the return to Jerusalem.

There is no break at this point in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 21

A Sign Is Given

3 Nephi 21:1–2

1 And verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion;

2 And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign—for verily I say unto you that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles that they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them;

Comments

These verses cannot be properly understood unless we remember that the break between them and the previous chapter is artificial. These verses were part of that discourse, and part of the original chapter. Thus, we remember that Jesus had been describing the time of the gathering of the house of Israel. Those who heard clearly understood that they had not yet been gathered, and so the next most logical question was when that would happen. That is the question these verses answer: “I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place.” Jesus does not give a date but a sign. That would not be a problem for a people who had lived through the signs of his birth and death, and now clearly understood that the signs, when fulfilled, would mean that the event they foretold was also real, and imminent.

What was the sign of the beginning of the gathering? It was the things that Jesus told them “shall be made known unto the Gentiles.” The Book of Mormon is the sign.

3 Nephi 21:3–6

3 Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you;

4 For it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

5 Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity;

6 For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel;

Comments

The most interesting aspect of the Nephite record of Christ's words coming to the future generations of those who were "established in this land, and . . . set up as a free people," was that they would receive that word through the Gentiles. That was unexpected. Why would the word of the gathering of the house of Israel come through a Gentile?

Jesus says that it is so that "He may show forth his power unto the Gentiles." In Nephi's vision of the future of the world, he saw that the Gentiles would be invited into the covenant. Having the Book of Mormon come first to the Gentiles was an invitation for them to be adopted into the house of Israel by what they could learn from the New World testament of Christ by the New World house of Israel.

3 Nephi 21:7–8

7 And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things—it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel.

8 And when that day shall come, it shall come to pass that kings shall shut their mouths; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Comments

When the Book of Mormon comes to the remnant of the house of Israel, those whom the modern Church calls Lamanites, that is the sign that the gathering is beginning. Those will be days of fulfilling prophecy, and for that reason Jesus reprises Isaiah 52:15, which he had quoted only nine verses earlier in 3 Nephi 20:45: "kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."

3 Nephi 21:9–10

9 For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them; and there shall be among them those who will not believe it, although a man shall declare it unto them.

10 But behold, the life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.

Comments

This prophecy can be read in two ways. The first is that “a man” is literally a single man. That would clearly mean Joseph Smith would be the one to bring the record to light to provide its teachings. He would be persecuted, but Yahweh would protect him to be able to deliver the message. Of course, that happened.

The second reading is that “a man” is generic. It could apply to all of us who, believing, share our beliefs and attempt to spread the gospel. We too may be preserved in our efforts.

Of course, Joseph’s martyrdom declares that the divine protection covers a specific mission, and does not assure a life free from harm, difficulties, and eventually death.

3 Nephi 21:11

11 Therefore it shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant.

Comments

This is a transitional verse which moves from the quotation of a positive prophecy of the future state of those who believe to the future state of those who will not believe. The reference to what Moses said is in Genesis 17: 14: “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” It sets up the next quotation of scripture (verses 12–21 of this chapter), which quotes Micah 5:8–15.

3 Nephi 21:12–21

12 And my people who are a remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.

13 Their hand shall be lifted up upon their adversaries, and all their enemies shall be cut off.
14 Yea, wo be unto the Gentiles except they repent; for it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Father, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots;
15 And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strongholds;
16 And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy land, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers;
17 Thy graven images I will also cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee, and thou shalt no more worship the works of thy hands;
18 And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee; so will I destroy thy cities.
19 And it shall come to pass that all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, shall be done away.
20 For it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that at that day whosoever will not repent and come unto my Beloved Son, them will I cut off from among my people, O house of Israel;
21 And I will execute vengeance and fury upon them, even as upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Comments

These verses include quotes from Micah 5:8–15. Verse 12 adds the phrase “my people who” in order to include the audience in the prophecy that was given in the Old World. Micah was roughly contemporaneous to Isaiah, and his teachings would have been in the plates of brass.

There are some minor differences from Micah, the most important of which is that verses 19 and 20 are inserted, and do not appear in Micah.

In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, there was a chapter break at this point, even though the sermon clearly continues. Orson Pratt combined the sermon, which is what we modern readers would expect. The original break appears to have been triggered by the end of the longer quoted passage from Micah.

A New Jerusalem Shall Be Built

3 Nephi 21:22–25

22 But if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance;
23 And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem.
24 And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem.
25 And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst.

Comments

Verses 22–25 continue to refer to the Gentiles. After discussing the fate of the unbelieving Gentiles, Jesus turns to the faithful Gentiles. They will be those who assist in the gathering. They will assist as the united house of Israel builds a New Jerusalem, which is a symbolic center for the New World gathered, just as the Jerusalem in the Old World serves as the symbolic center for the house of Israel in the Old World.

This assistance reprises Isaiah 49:22–23: “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

Nephi¹ and his brother Jacob both quoted these verses with the emphasis on the way the Gentiles would aid the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 21:22–23, and 2 Nephi 6:6–7 where Jacob is teaching). Thus, this allusion also serves to underscore what Nephi¹ and Jacob taught.

3 Nephi 21:26–29

26 And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem.

27 Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.

28 Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance.

29 And they shall go out from all nations; and they shall not go out in haste, nor go by flight, for I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rearward.

Comments

The gathering will include all of the house of Israel and will commence after the publication of the Book of Mormon, which is the sign of the beginning of the process. Jesus had indicated that he would protect the “man” who taught these things (see verses 9–10 of this chapter). This is where that promise that could be read as a prophecy about an individual is clearly expanded to all believers. In this important work, Jesus declared: “I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rearward,” quoting Isaiah 52:12, which he had quoted more fully in 3 Nephi 20:42.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

3 Nephi 22

The Lord's Covenant of Peace to Be Fulfilled (cf. Isaiah 54)

3 Nephi 22:1–3

1 And then shall that which is written come to pass: Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.

2 Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes;

3 For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Comments

The statement “And then shall that which is written come to pass” is the transition from one prophecy of Isaiah to another. This time, we have the entirety of Isaiah 54 quoted in this chapter. Orson Pratt structured the chapter and verses so that the correlation would be easily seen. There are no other changes to the verses as they appear in the King James Version of the Bible.

This chapter is a positive view of the future of Israel. It begins with an Israel in a miserable state. She is compared to a barren woman. This was a devastating condition for an ancient Israelite woman, for her and her husband's line were cut off. They would have no descendants. The reversal is that Israel is promised that she will have many descendants. “More are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife.” Redeemed Israel would spread more than the descendants of the nations who had deemed themselves superior to her.

The increased progeny meant that her “tent” had to be expanded. That is, the *house* of Israel would increase, not simply in progeny, but in righteous descendants. The reversal would mean that the house of Israel would eventually have power over their enemies. In this case, the enemies are simply labeled Gentiles.

3 Nephi 22:4–7

4 Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame; for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

5 For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—the God of the whole earth shall he be called.

6 For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.

Comments

Coming from a place of previous subjugation, Israel is understandably cautious. The Lord reminds her that he is her “maker, [her] husband, the Lord of Hosts.” He is her “Redeemer,” a title most apt for the purpose of this verse.

The powerful message to the Old World house of Israel, and perhaps just as poignant to the New World house of Israel gathered in Bountiful after such terrible destructions, is: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.”

3 Nephi 22:8–9

8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

9 For this, the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee.

Comments

Continuing the theme of redemption, Yahweh acknowledges that he had allowed hard times to come upon them, but yet he will keep his covenant with them. He reminds his people that after the destruction of the great flood, he promised that he would not do so again. While it is easy for us to apply that universal flood to universal humankind, for Israel, it was their ancestor who was saved from the destruction, and the promise was given to them. Thus, this image reinforces the declaration that God has not forgotten them, even in their trials.

3 Nephi 22:10–14

10 For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

11 O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

12 And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.

13 And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.

14 In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression for thou shalt not fear, and from terror for it shall not come near thee.

Comments

Verse 10 uses mountains as the example of the permanence of God's covenant. Even should the mountains be removed, yet will his covenant remain. At the end, when the gathering is done, then will the reversal be complete. They will enter, not a primitive natural Eden, but a new Eden with the benefits of accumulated earth life provided.

3 Nephi 22:15–17

15 Behold, they shall surely gather together against thee, not by me; whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.

16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.

17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall revile against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

Comments

The position of the house of Israel after the gathering will be a complete reversal. Where other nations had overpowered her in the course of history, she will no longer fear. When the gathering begins, God will “have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work.” Were we to stop reading at this point, the instrument would be the Book of Mormon. However, the continuation simply indicates that God will defend his people, and against them no weapon would prosper.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 23

Commission to Search the Scriptures

3 Nephi 23:1–3

1 And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.

2 For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel; therefore it must needs be that he must speak also to the Gentiles.

3 And all things that he spake have been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake.

Comments

Jesus has recently quoted extensively from Isaiah, and therefore it is appropriate that he reiterate that “ye ought to search these things.” Surely, we can take the phrase “great are the words of Isaiah” as applying to the whole book, but in the present context, it was Isaiah’s prophecies of the gathering that were the most important. Even though his speaking of the gathering was particularly important for scattered Israel, they also speak of the role of the Gentiles in the last days, therefore: “he must speak also to the Gentiles.”

Jesus affirms their value by declaring that “all things that he spake have been and shall be.”

3 Nephi 23:4–5

4 Therefore give heed to my words; write the things which I have told you; and according to the time and the will of the Father they shall go forth unto the Gentiles.

5 And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things.

Comments

Jesus has been speaking of a gathering of Israel that was important information for those in Bountiful, but was nothing that would occur in their lifetimes, nor of any descendants they would ever know. What did it mean for them?

It meant that they were part of God’s plan, and that their current part was much more easily understood: “And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things.”

Although this admonition to repent and be baptized is the succinct summary of Christ’s gospel, it clearly included more that they should learn to do. Therefore, they were to search the prophets, for the prophets knew of the lessons that the people should learn.

Admonition to Write Additional Prophecies

3 Nephi 23:6–13

6 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he said unto them again, after he had expounded all the scriptures unto them which they had received, he said unto them: Behold, other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not.

7 And it came to pass that he said unto Nephi: Bring forth the record which ye have kept.

8 And when Nephi had brought forth the records, and laid them before him, he cast his eyes upon them and said:

9 Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so?

10 And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled.

11 And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them?

12 And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written.

13 And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded.

Comments

Jesus tells the people that he wants to augment their scriptures, so he has Nephi₃ bring them. He declares, “other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not.” One way to read that phrase is that they are supposed to write scripture that they have not written. The other way, and the way that explains what is to come, is that they are to write things they do not have. In other words, “other scriptures I would that ye should write, that [ye do not have].”

One of the reasons it is read as a fault of recording is that the first example is something that they neglected to write. It is not uncommon to suppose that they had neglected anything Samuel had said, but that is not what Jesus says. He specifically says that it was the part about “many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them.”

They corrected that error. However, Jesus continues. 3 Nephi 24:1 states: “And it came to pass that he commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi.” These were words that they “had not,” or didn’t have.

Quotation and Commentary on Malachi 3–4

3 Nephi 23:14

14 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had expounded all the scriptures in one, which they had written, he commanded them that they should teach the things which he had expounded unto them.

Comments

This verse was originally part of the next chapter. Orson Pratt moved it to this chapter to allow him to make our chapter 24 more tightly correlate to Malachi 3.

3 Nephi 24

3 Nephi 24:1–4

1 And it came to pass that he commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi, which he should tell unto them. And it came to pass that after they were written he expounded them. And these are the words which he did tell unto them, saying: Thus said the Father unto Malachi—Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

Comments

The book of Malachi was written after the Lehites left Jerusalem. Therefore, they did not have those scriptures. Nevertheless, Jesus wanted them to have certain parts of what Malachi wrote because it fit in with the teachings he was presenting. Therefore, “it came to pass that he commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi, which he should tell them.” Jesus dictated two chapters from Malachi. Our chapter 24 (save for the introduction) corresponds to Malachi 3.

The “Lord whom ye seek” is Yahweh, and he will “suddenly come to his temple.” The temple is the dwelling of Yahweh, so it is understandable that Yahweh would come. This prophecy of the coming of Yahweh is still in the future, as we will see as the text progresses. Therefore, we should understand who the messenger might be. The simplest explanation is that it is a generic category of all the prophets who prepare God's people for his millennial arrival. Were there to be a single person, it would have been the mortal Messiah who came to prepare for the ultimate arrival of Yahweh on earth. Although we understand that they are the same person, there is a difference between the mortal Jesus and the resurrected Jesus.

The next 3 verses clearly show that we are dealing with a description of the end of times. At that time, Yahweh will come as a refiner's fire. A refiner's fire does not destroy, it purifies. Hence Yahweh will be "as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi."

There will be a restitution of the pure way to worship God and live his commandments.

3 Nephi 24:5–6

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts.

6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Comments

When Yahweh comes to establish his Kingdom on earth, he will come as a judge against all those who could not live his commandments. However, even though he will come as a judge to purge the wicked in a refiner's fire, the "sons of Jacob are not consumed." With the sons of Jacob, Yahweh has a covenant, and that covenant remains.

The Wicked Rob God (cf. Malachi 3:7–12)

3 Nephi 24:7–9

7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say: Wherein shall we return?

8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say: Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Comments

The power of the covenant assures that Yahweh will accept a repentant Israel. There are some, however, who may assume that since they are of the house of Israel by birth, or perhaps even by baptism, that that connection will assure them salvation. That is what is meant when the sons of Jacob ask, "Wherein shall we return?" In other words, how can we *return* if we are already part of the covenant?

Yahweh declares that even those under the covenant can rob God of his just dues, and the obedience required as the human part of the covenant. Again, the sons of Jacob might wonder if it was possible that they had robbed God.

Yahweh answers that the whole nation had robbed him, and therefore is under condemnation. The specifics come in the next verses.

3 Nephi 24:10–12

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the fields, saith the Lord of Hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Comments

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are familiar with verse 10, and we often quote it in support of the way we offer tithing. In the ancient world, it would be much more like tithing in kind, for they did not have a monetary economy.

Nevertheless, in the context more original to Malachi (and applicable to those in Bountiful), the tithes and offerings were manifestations of faithfulness to the covenants. The ancient tithes supported the priests in the temple. The offerings were the sacrifices to be offered on behalf of the community. In both cases, bringing tithes and offerings were part of faithfully adhering to the human part of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

How are the windows of heaven opened with tithes and offerings? Both were destined for the temple, and thus the meaning beyond the specifics is that the temple (or temples, in the modern world) would be able to operate and become the true house of the Lord. In the temple, communication with God increases, and hence God can bless us. When we live according to our covenants, we can receive the blessings of heaven.

God Will Remember Who Serves Him (cf. Malachi 3:13–18)

3 Nephi 24:13–15

13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say: What have we spoken against thee?

14 Ye have said: It is vain to serve God, and what doth it profit that we have kept his ordinances and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?

15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Comments

Verses 14 and 15 are both in the “voice” of those who asked the question from verse 13: “What have we spoken against [God]?”

The answer is that those of the house of Israel had begun to exalt secular wisdom as a replacement for God’s wisdom. The future reward God promised was not as tangible as what the world promises, therefore, they would say that “it is vain to serve God.” They would say that it did no good to serve God.

More important is the complaint: “[W]hat doth it profit that we have kept his ordinances and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?” They saw their difficulties and assumed that it meant that God was not watching over them. If God doesn’t make everything better, what good is he?

Yahweh says that this thinking is a reversal of eternal truth. God is watching and caring for us, even though we “call the proud happy.” They also note that “they that tempt God are even delivered.” This is their variant of “God doesn’t seem to punish the wicked.” It is an expectation based on a more myopic vision that God has.

Yahweh is telling Israel (a lesson absolutely applicable to the Nephites) that accepting the measure of the world for success is folly.

3 Nephi 24:16–18

16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

17 And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

18 Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

Comments

The contrast to those spoken of in verses 13–15 of this chapter come in these final verses. Where there are some who have departed from God’s way, those who do fear the Lord are not left without support. They are written into the book of remembrance, indicating that Yahweh knows who they are, and they are His. This is explicit in verse 17.

At the end times, all the house of Israel will be judged. The righteous “shall . . . return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 25

The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord (cf. Malachi 4)

3 Nephi 25:1–3

1 For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Comments

Chapter 25 continues the Savior’s dictation of Malachi. These verses continue the theme of chapter 24, which was concerned with the end days. These also describe that time. In chapter 24, verse 2, the triumphant Messiah of the final days would come as a refiner’s fire.

In chapter 25, the focus is not on purifying Israel, but on the effect upon the wicked. This fire is a destructive fire: “all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day cometh shall burn them up, saith the lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

That is indeed a fearsome prospect, therefore, the Lord notes that those who believe on Christ need not fear, as they “shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall,” calves who are cared for and in a comfortable place.

The significant difference between verse 2 and the Malachi 4:2 model is the difference between Malachi’s “Sun of righteousness,” and the “Son of Righteousness” that we see in 3 Nephi. *Sun* and *Son* are homophones. They sound exactly alike. Even though Malachi uses “Sun,” the title certainly is intended to point to Christ. When Joseph Smith dictated the text to his scribe, the scribe heard the word from the context supplied what a modern reader would assume, which is that it should be a title for the Son of God. In the printer’s manuscript there is an example of this very issue. During the dictation of the New World Sermon on the Mount, the scribe wrote, “For he maketh his son to rise on the evil.” That error was caught, and *son* crossed out, and replaced with *sun*, written above it.

3 Nephi 25:4–6

4 Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord;

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Comments

Verses 2 and 3 of this chapter turned to the salvation of the righteous through the burnings of the wicked in the last days. How shall they be righteous enough to deserve that final salvation? In verse 4 they are told to live the commandments as they know them.

Then, the Lord promises that Elijah will return and “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” The house of Israel will be gathered not only from the four corners of the earth, but throughout time. The binding into a covenant family will be the means of final salvation.

This was not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 26

3 Nephi 26:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had told these things he expounded them unto the multitude; and he did expound all things unto them, both great and small.

2 And he saith: These scriptures, which ye had not with you, the Father commanded that I should give unto you; for it was wisdom in him that they should be given unto future generations.

Comments

The modern chapter division separates these verses from their important context. It was done to make the Malachi chapters match the King James Version chapters and verses. However, these verses serve to confirm that the intent of Jesus’s examination of the Nephite scriptures was to add what they did not have. One of those things was the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy that the dead would rise from their graves and be seen, an event that would have happened between the beginning of the year when the destructions occurred and now. This is because they were a witness that the destructions signaled Christ’s death, which also signaled that he would rise from the dead.

The important verse is verse 2, which closes the adding of scripture by noting that Jesus had given them scripture which they “had not with [them].”

3 Nephi 26:3–5

3 And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away;

4 And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

5 If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation; being on a parallel, the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand, according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ, who was before the world began.

Comments

The phrase “the elements should melt with fervent heat” echoes the same phrase in 2 Peter 3:10. The phrase “earth should be wrapt together as a scroll” echoes Isaiah 34:4: “the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll.” These are descriptions of the final days, and therefore fit the description that Jesus “did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory.”

That coming in glory will also signal the beginning of the final judgment, where the dead would “stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.” As with Alma₂'s doctrine of restoration, good on earth is restored to good in Heaven, and evil to a “resurrection of damnation.”

This was the end of the chapter in the original Book of Mormon. Orson Pratt moved these verses to the beginning of the next chapter to be able to preserve the chapter and verses for the quoted Malachi chapters (see 3 Nephi, chapters 24–25 in our current edition).

Mormon Only Writes What Is Permitted

3 Nephi 26:6–10

6 And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people;

7 But behold the plates of Nephi do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people.

8 And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken.

9 And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them.

10 And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation.

Comments

Verses 6–13 are an insertion into the text. In these verses, Mormon the narrator is replaced by Mormon the editor, the one who selected the texts to be recorded. He notes that it is impossible to write everything that happened on his plates, but there is a more complete account on the plates of Nephi. When Mormon uses

the term *plates of Nephi*, he is referring to what we call the large plates of Nephi. He doesn't mention the small plates of Nephi except in Words of Mormon, where he specifically introduces them.

Mormon notes that he has had to make selections from the material available to him and reiterates that his guiding principle in making those selections was "to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles." The statement that they would come from the Gentiles indicates that he knew, as he wrote, something of how the Book of Mormon would come forth in the latter days.

Verses 9 and 10 speak to those future descendants of the New World house of Israel who would receive the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 26:11–13

11 Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people.

12 Therefore I, Mormon, do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord. And now I, Mormon, make an end of my sayings, and proceed to write the things which have been commanded me.

13 Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them.

Comments

Mormon began this discussion of his writing by noting that he couldn't write the hundredth part of what the plates of Nephi contained. At the end of the insertion, he notes that he wanted to write more but the Lord constrained him. It is important to note that Mormon said: "And now I, Mormon, make an end of my sayings, and proceed to write the things which have been commanded me." There were things he was commanded to write in addition to those things that he was not to write.

When he says that he makes an end of his sayings, he is declaring that the insertion of his own thoughts as the editor or historian are ended, and he is returning to his role as the narrator of events.

The Savior Continues to Minister

3 Nephi 26:14

14 And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter.

Comments

At the beginning of the second day of his visit, Jesus had miraculously provided bread and wine and more clearly taught the Sacrament. He then spent time explaining the goal of the gospel, explained by describing the ultimate ending of this earth life and the meaning that this life holds for the next.

After that explanation which included both scripture they had, and scripture they did not have, Mormon explains that there were things he could not write (verse 11 of this chapter).

As Mormon returns to Jesus's actions of the second day, he gives another event that he could describe without the specifics of the words. The children had their tongues loosened, "and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things."

This was an evident miracle. We do not know the age of the children involved, but it was young enough that they would not have known the things which they spoke, and they probably would not have been capable of speaking the more sophisticated language that is implied.

3 Nephi 26:15

15 And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them, and had gone unto the Father, after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, and had ascended unto the Father—

Comments

At the end of the day, Jesus repeats the healing of the sick and even raised one from the dead. While he had performed healing miracles on the first day as well, there were new people the second day, and they too deserved, by their faith, to be healed.

Then, having accomplished these things, Jesus "ascended unto the Father."

The Name of the Church Revealed

3 Nephi 26:16–21

16 Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together, and they both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them.

17 And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And many of them saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written.

19 And they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another.

20 And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them.

21 And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ.

Comments

The beginning of the third day followed the model of the second day. The twelve taught the doctrine of Christ: repentance and baptism. After having their God physically present with them for two days, it is easy to imagine that the people were both teachable and anxious to accept the doctrine of Christ. Therefore, even more were baptized.

Less clear in these verses is a shift between verses 16 and 17. In verse 16, Mormon is describing the third day's visit; then he stops.

In verse 17, we pick up on the aftermath of Christ's visit. The apostles continued to preach and to baptize. This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition, and is a mildly unfortunate division, because 3 Nephi 27:1–22, which originally ended this chapter, really is part of the discussion of the twelve after Christ ascended after the third day. If there were to have been an artificial division, it would have been better to have begun at verse 17 of this chapter in order to keep the story of the twelve together.

3 Nephi 27

3 Nephi 27:1–3

1 And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching the things which they had both heard and seen, and were baptizing in the name of Jesus, it came to pass that the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting.

2 And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they were praying unto the Father in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you?

3 And they said unto him: Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter.

Comments

On the second day of Christ's visit, the day began with the twelve preaching to the people. On the third day of Christ's visit, the day began with the twelve again preaching to the people. For three days, the Savior had been among the multitude, then he ascended to heaven. The end of the third day is not explicit, but there is a division between what Jesus did on that day and the teachings of the apostles, which occurs between 3 Nephi 26:16 and 17. These verses were originally part of the previous chapter and should be understood in connection with 3 Nephi 26:17–21.

This event must occur some undescribed time later. The twelve are *journeying*. They are traveling to different places to preach the word, and the implications of these events that will be described are that they were alone.

Thus, at some indeterminate time after Christ's appearances in Bountiful, he returns to the twelve while they are in the process of spreading the message. They were traveling as a group. Jesus appears to them and asks, "What will ye that I shall give unto you?"

They respond that they want the name by which the church should be called. Names were important. We remember that it was a royal occasion in which King Benjamin gave his people a new name (Mosiah 1:11–12). In the ancient world, the name was declared to encapsulate the essence. Therefore, the name by which the doctrine of Christ would be called was important.

Why the Church Bears Jesus's Name

3 Nephi 27:4–8

4 And the Lord said unto them: Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

5 Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day;

6 And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.

7 Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

8 And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.

Comments

Jesus describes the principle on which they might give the church a name. He had taught that they should pray to the Father in his name, and that in his name they were baptized. The people who were baptized were to take upon them his name. In other words, they were to be identified with him. It would be something similar to a child that is adopted into a family and takes the family name. They become identified through the family name. Thus, Jesus notes, “How be it my church save it be called in my name?”

3 Nephi 27:9–12

9 Verily I say unto you, that ye are built upon my gospel; therefore ye shall call whatsoever things ye do call, in my name; therefore if ye call upon the Father, for the church, if it be in my name the Father will hear you;

10 And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it.

11 But if it be not built upon my gospel, and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return.

12 For their works do follow them, for it is because of their works that they are hewn down; therefore remember the things that I have told you.

Comments

The church is identified with Jesus Christ because it teaches, and is the fountain of, his gospel. Even though the twelve had learned that there was a Father in Heaven who was separate from Jesus (who had identified himself as Yahweh, the one who gave the law to Moses, see 3 Nephi 15:5), it was still Jesus

who was the head of the church. They will pray to the Father, but that prayer will only be effective if done in Jesus's name.

Therefore, the church is built on the gospel, and the gospel requires that humankind live the commandments. If they are not living the commandments and teachings of the gospel, they will be as the stubble that Jesus had previously declared would be burned at the end. They would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Gospel Defined

3 Nephi 27:13–17

13 Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

14 And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

15 And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

16 And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

17 And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.

Comments

If it is important to live according to the gospel, it is also important to understand it. Jesus provides the foundation of the gospel, which is his atoning sacrifice. That sacrifice opens the possibility of repentance, and repentance will allow humankind to change and improve, and therefore stand “guiltless before [the] Father” in the final judgment.

The important aspect of repentance is that it should lead to a real change. Serial repentance of the same error is not the definition of living the Gospel. The requirement is to endure to the end. We *endure* in the sense that we keep going, not in the sense of suffering. The Gospel is consistently described as bringing joy. Thus, the association of endurance as something hard to bear is not the image that is being projected. It is the continuance, the perseverance to repent as a means of improvement, that we may achieve the promised ultimate joy.

3 Nephi 27:18–22

18 And this is the word which he hath given unto the children of men. And for this cause he fulfilleth the words which he hath given, and he lieth not, but fulfilleth all his words.

19 And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

20 Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

21 Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do;

22 Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Comments

The conclusion to the nature of the gospel that they were to teach was repentance and baptism so that humankind could stand clean before their God at the final judgement. The phrase “no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom” is a unique Book of Mormon reading probably based on Isaiah 52:11: “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.” The verse in Isaiah referred to the temple, which was symbolically the presence of the Lord. Therefore, the concept that uncleanness should not enter God’s presence is the message of Isaiah 52:11, which is stated differently in the Book of Mormon.

This verse ended the chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon.

Additional Instructions to the Twelve

3 Nephi 27:23–26

23 Write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden.

24 Write the works of this people, which shall be, even as hath been written, of that which hath been.

25 For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men.

26 And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged.

Comments

Jesus had commanded the people to update their scriptural records with new material when he was with them on the second day. On this occasion, he commands the twelve to write both of his visit, and of the works of the people. The immediate reason given was that these things would be written in the Heavenly records, and from them the people would be judged.

There is another reason for this commandment, however. At that time, there was no Nephite nation. There were separate tribes about whom we know nothing after the great destructions that witnessed to Christ's death in the Old World. Thus, there was the possibility that the tradition of keeping the plates of Nephi might have ended. Jesus commands that it continue. It was possible to continue because the records had been kept by Nephi₃ and the current head of the twelve disciples. The command to write what Christ had said may have been taken up by more than one of the twelve, but it certainly was taken up by Nephi₃. It is his record of this event that Mormon used in 3 Nephi.

3 Nephi 27:27

27 And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.

Comments

Jesus declares that the twelve are given the authority to be judges of the people. Earlier, he had said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (3 Nephi 14:1-2).

There was an inherent issue in judging. It was possible that there might be an unrighteous judgement. Therefore, Jesus also declares to them that they should judge "according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just."

The final command to them as judges was that they purify themselves to judge as Christ would judge. Therefore, what quality, what kind, of men ought they be? Christ declares simply, but with a powerful implication: "Even as I am." That implication is even stronger when we remember that Christ is Yahweh, and one of the designations of Yahweh was "I Am."

3 Nephi 27:28-29

28 And now I go unto the Father. And verily I say unto you, whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you.

29 Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh, receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

Comments

Jesus repeats to the twelve two things he had said before. This is for emphasis, and to make sure that they understand that it applies to them.

Verse 1 is a repeat of 3 Nephi 18:20. Verse 2 is a repeat of 3 Nephi 14:7.

3 Nephi 27:30–33

30 And now, behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you, and also this generation; yea, and even the Father rejoiceth, and also all the holy angels, because of you and this generation; for none of them are lost.

31 Behold, I would that ye should understand; for I mean them who are now alive of this generation; and none of them are lost; and in them I have fulness of joy.

32 But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation from this generation, for they are led away captive by him even as was the son of perdition; for they will sell me for silver and for gold, and for that which moth doth corrupt and which thieves can break through and steal. And in that day will I visit them, even in turning their works upon their own heads.

33 And it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he said unto his disciples: Enter ye in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death, and many there be that travel therein, until the night cometh, wherein no man can work.

Comments

Verse 30 and 31 speak of the joy in the gospel. They contrast with the sorrow of verse 32 about the fourth generation after their time. This juxtaposition with joy and sorrow is a literary model of reversals that we see in many places in the Book of Mormon.

Having spoken of the joy of following the gospel, and the sadness for those (the fourth generation to come) who would not follow, Jesus repeats the message from 3 Nephi 14:13–14.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 28

Wishes of the Twelve Granted

3 Nephi 28:1–3

1 And it came to pass when Jesus had said these words, he spake unto his disciples, one by one, saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?

2 And they all spake, save it were three, saying: We desire that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our ministry, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom.

3 And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest.

Comments

At the beginning of chapter 27, Jesus asked the disciples “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” The answer was that they wanted to know the church’s name.

At the beginning of chapter 28, Jesus asks a similar question: “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?” Although the questions were similar, they appear to differ in whom the question was addressed. In chapter 27, the address appears to be to the twelve. In these verses, the question is to each disciple individually.

Nine of the twelve want nothing more than the reward of the just. After the “age of man,” or until they die, they will continue to serve the Lord. At that time, they simply want to go to their reward. The difference is perhaps that they would “speedily come unto [the] kingdom,” but the destination is the same as awaits any faithful member.

Jesus blesses them for their desire and declares that after they live to the “age of man,” here declared to be “seventy and two years,” they would come to his kingdom. Even though this is a specific number, it is probably not meant to be specific. The fact that it contains a multiple of 7 indicates a completeness, thus the “age of man.” The “and two years” likely meant that they would live long— longer than just the normal “age of man.”

3 Nephi 28:4–6

4 And when he had spoken unto them, he turned himself unto the three, and said unto them: What will ye that I should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father?

5 And they sorrowed in their hearts, for they durst not speak unto him the thing which they desired.

6 And he said unto them: Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me.

Comments

Jesus turns to the three who had a different desire and asks it of them. They appear to believe that it was audacious, for they “durst not speak” of it. They didn’t need to. Jesus told them that he understood the thing that they desired, which was the same thing as John the Beloved desired (see John 21:21–23).

In addition to their desire, the lesson of this verse is that it underscores that God knows our hearts even before we can express them to him. Jesus had taught: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (3 Nephi 14:11). God knows what we need and blesses us accordingly. Sometimes, even when we are unable to articulate our needs.

3 Nephi 28:7–9

7 Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.

8 And ye shall never endure the pains of death; but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in the kingdom of my Father.

9 And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world; and all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, for ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me, while the world shall stand.

Comments

The three, known in modern literature as the Three Nephites, are given their desire. It is difficult to comprehend the nature of their desire. To date, they have waited for the transition to the next life for over two thousand years. Two thousand years of working for the kingdom. Jesus blessed them with a lack of mortal pains and sorrows, but that part of the blessing also meant that there would be little rest. They had not requested a life of leisure, but one of work— a very long life of work.

3 Nephi 28:10–12

10 And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one;

11 And the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men, because of me.

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he touched every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed.

Comments

The ultimate reward of the three was that they would have “fulness of joy; and . . . shall sit down in the kingdom of [the] Father.” That is indeed a marvelous blessing, but it must be remembered that it is the blessing available to all:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalms 16:11)

But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever. (2 Nephi 9:18)

3 Nephi 28:13–15

13 And behold, the heavens were opened, and they were caught up into heaven, and saw and heard unspeakable things.

14 And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that they could utter the things which they saw and heard;

15 And whether they were in the body or out of the body, they could not tell; for it did seem unto them like a transfiguration of them, that they were changed from this body of flesh into an immortal state, that they could behold the things of God.

Comments

These three verses refer to the Three Nephites, and not to all of the twelve. They had requested the opportunity to remain on earth, to continue to work to preach the gospel, until Christ should return. They could not do that as mortals. Thus, there was a process of change: “for it did seem unto them like a transfiguration of them, that they were changed from this body of flesh into an immortal state.”

One wonders how they had the strength to continue in their process of preaching among mortal humanity after they had beheld “the things of God.”

Ministry and Miracles of the Twelve

3 Nephi 28:16–18

16 But it came to pass that they did again minister upon the face of the earth; nevertheless they did not minister of the things which they had heard and seen, because of the commandment which was given them in heaven.

17 And now, whether they were mortal or immortal, from the day of their transfiguration, I know not; 18 But this much I know, according to the record which hath been given—they did go forth upon the face of the land, and did minister unto all the people, uniting as many to the church as would believe in their preaching; baptizing them, and as many as were baptized did receive the Holy Ghost.

Comments

Having described the change in the Three Nephites, Mormon speaks a little of their subsequent mission. He is interested in them, not only because of their unique story, but because we will learn that they have personally ministered to him. He knew them (see verse 26 of this chapter).

Their mission was to teach, and therefore they taught. The other disciples also taught, but these personal witnesses to the marvelous appearance of the Savior in Bountiful continued their first-person testimony through the ages.

3 Nephi 28:19–23

19 And they were cast into prison by them who did not belong to the church. And the prisons could not hold them, for they were rent in twain.

20 And they were cast down into the earth; but they did smite the earth with the word of God, inasmuch that by his power they were delivered out of the depths of the earth; and therefore they could not dig pits sufficient to hold them.

21 And thrice they were cast into a furnace and received no harm.

22 And twice were they cast into a den of wild beasts; and behold they did play with the beasts as a child with a suckling lamb, and received no harm.

23 And it came to pass that thus they did go forth among all the people of Nephi, and did preach the gospel of Christ unto all people upon the face of the land; and they were converted unto the Lord, and were united unto the church of Christ, and thus the people of that generation were blessed, according to the word of Jesus.

Comments

The ministry of the Three Nephites was not easy. There came a time when they were persecuted and thrust into a furnace and into a den of wild beasts. Mormon is telling of stories he knows, but these are stories that will not happen for over two hundred years. Mormon will refer to them again in 4 Nephi 1:29–33.

In spite of persecutions, they persist in their labors to bring souls to the gospel of Christ.

The Three Will Minister throughout the World

3 Nephi 28:24–28

24 And now I, Mormon, make an end of speaking concerning these things for a time.

25 Behold, I was about to write the names of those who were never to taste of death, but the Lord forbade; therefore I write them not, for they are hid from the world.

26 But behold, I have seen them, and they have ministered unto me.

27 And behold they will be among the Gentiles, and the Gentiles shall know them not.

28 They will also be among the Jews, and the Jews shall know them not.

Comments

In verse 24, Mormon says that he will make an end of his interjection into the story. However, as with many other times when he makes that statement, he still has something to say. Perhaps, to Mormon, it meant that “I have just a few comments to make at the end.”

He was going to list the names of the three but was forbidden to do so. Since it is doubtful that any who might meet them in the modern world would know them by their Nephite names, it is perhaps to make sure that we understand that while they had a different mission, the three were not to be exalted over the other nine disciples. All had made righteous choices, and all would receive the same resurrection, and the same exaltation. In modern terms, they would all be inheritors of the Celestial Kingdom.

Verse 26 indicates that almost four hundred years after their transformation, they ministered personally to Mormon. Mormon was therefore a disciple who could witness to the Savior because he had spoken directly with those who had been there, and there were three—which even exceeded the requirement to establish truth in at least the mouth of two.

3 Nephi 28:29–32

29 And it shall come to pass, when the Lord seeth fit in his wisdom that they shall minister unto all the scattered tribes of Israel, and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, and shall bring out of them unto Jesus many souls, that their desire may be fulfilled, and also because of the convincing power of God which is in them.

30 And they are as the angels of God, and if they shall pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus they can show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good.

31 Therefore, great and marvelous works shall be wrought by them, before the great and coming day when all people must surely stand before the judgment-seat of Christ;

32 Yea even among the Gentiles shall there be a great and marvelous work wrought by them, before that judgment day.

Comments

The three are not just apostles to the Nephites. They are apostles to the world. When Mormon states that they will minister to the scattered tribes of Israel, we understand that they are not even limited to the New World. Therefore, when they labor “even among the Gentiles,” it will be to assist them in coming to the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their adoption into the house of Israel.

3 Nephi 28:33–35

33 And if ye had all the scriptures which give an account of all the marvelous works of Christ, ye would, according to the words of Christ, know that these things must surely come.

34 And wo be unto him that will not hearken unto the words of Jesus, and also to them whom he hath chosen and sent among them; for whoso receiveth not the words of Jesus and the words of those whom he hath sent receiveth not him; and therefore he will not receive them at the last day;

35 And it would be better for them if they had not been born. For do ye suppose that ye can get rid of the justice of an offended God, who hath been trampled under feet of men, that thereby salvation might come?

Comments

The Book of Mormon preaches in black and white terms. It describes the ideal, and its opposite. Therefore, the idea is that “if ye had all the scriptures which give an account of all the marvelous works of Christ, ye would, according to the words of Christ, know that these things must surely come.”

Verses 34 and 35 describe the state of those who do not believe. These are not simply unbelievers, but those who had the opportunity to know, and repent, but do not do so even up to the last day. For those, life on earth will have been wasted, for they never achieved the purpose for which they were born.

3 Nephi 28:36–40

36 And now behold, as I spake concerning those whom the Lord hath chosen, yea, even three who were caught up into the heavens, that I knew not whether they were cleansed from mortality to immortality—

37 But behold, since I wrote, I have inquired of the Lord, and he hath made it manifest unto me that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies, or else it needs be that they must taste of death;
38 Therefore, that they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow save it were for the sins of the world.

39 Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day; but there was a change wrought upon them, insomuch that Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them; and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy, and that the powers of the earth could not hold them.

40 And in this state they were to remain until the judgment day of Christ; and at that day they were to receive a greater change, and to be received into the kingdom of the Father to go no more out, but to dwell with God eternally in the heavens.

Comments

These verses are interesting, both for what they teach as well as for where they appear in the chapter. The teaching is that the transformation of the three was not a death and resurrection, but a different type of change in the body. It was a transformation that made it so that “Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them.” This suggests that Satan’s ability to tempt us is related to the tests of mortality, and once we are beyond mortality, we are beyond his reach.

The location of these verses is interesting because these verses answer a question posed in verse 17 of this chapter. In between verse 17 and verse 36, we learn that there was more than one writing session. At some point, Mormon inquired of the Lord, and then received an answer. Not only does that reinforce the idea that God gives us the answers when we ask in faith, but it tells us that even a single chapter was not written in a single sitting.

This is not the end of the chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 29

The Lord Will Remember His Covenant People

3 Nephi 29:1–2

1 And now behold, I say unto you that when the Lord shall see fit, in his wisdom, that these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel, concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance, is already beginning to be fulfilled.

2 And ye may know that the words of the Lord, which have been spoken by the holy prophets, shall all be fulfilled; and ye need not say that the Lord delays his coming unto the children of Israel.

Comments

In the 1830 edition, these nine verses were part of the preceding chapter. They continue the things that Mormon decided to write *after* he said that “I, Mormon, make an end of speaking concerning these things for a time” (3 Nephi 28:24). There will be a total of 25 of our verses that he added after he said that he was making an end. Clearly, he thought of more that he wanted to say.

In the previous chapter, Mormon had been speaking of the Three Nephites, and the last verse of that chapter would have led directly to verse 1 of this chapter. It spoke of the Three Nephites remaining until the last days.

These two verses pick up on the theme of the last days, but now Mormon has shifted away from the Three Nephites, who had ministered to him (3 Nephi 28:26), to the work that he was writing, which also was destined to be part of the beginning of the last days. When Mormon says, in verse 1, that “these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles,” he is referring to the Book of Mormon. It will be made known first to the Gentiles, and then to all, that we “may know that the words of the Lord, which have been spoken by the holy prophets, shall all be fulfilled.”

3 Nephi 29:3–4

3 And ye need not imagine in your hearts that the words which have been spoken are vain, for behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.

4 And when ye shall see these sayings coming forth among you, then ye need not any longer spurn at the doings of the Lord, for the sword of his justice is in his right hand; and behold, at that day, if ye shall spurn at his doings he will cause that it shall soon overtake you.

Comments

In the last days it will be clear how the Lord has been faithful to his covenant and will have redeemed his covenant people. When the Book of Mormon comes among the future generations, it will be another testament of Jesus Christ.

3 Nephi 29:5–9

5 Wo unto him that spurneth at the doings of the Lord; yea, wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!

6 Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost!

7 Yea, and wo unto him that shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ; for he that doeth this shall become like unto the son of perdition, for whom there was no mercy, according to the word of Christ!

8 Yea, and ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn.

9 Therefore ye need not suppose that ye can turn the right hand of the Lord unto the left, that he may not execute judgment unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel.

Comments

After the positive comments of the preceding verses, Mormon pronounces a wo upon those who will deny “these sayings,” or the Book of Mormon. They will be denying the revelations of God, and therefore denying the Christ as well. In keeping with the black and white preaching in the Book of Mormon, there will be those who will accept the sayings and become heirs of the kingdom, and there will be those who will not accept the sayings, and upon those, judgement and condemnation will be pronounced.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 30

Gentiles Called to Repentance

3 Nephi 30:1–2

1 Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you, for, behold he commandeth me that I should write, saying:

2 Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel.

Comments

These two verses are not only their own chapter in our current edition of the Book of Mormon, but they were also their own chapter in the original 1830 edition. They serve as the conclusion to the book of 3 Nephi, and more importantly, to the highlight of Mormon's text: the appearance and teaching of the Savior in Bountiful after his resurrection.

Mormon was a disciple, which our modern terminology would call an apostle. At the end of this book, he adds an apostolic conclusion. He speaks to those who will read what he is writing and tells them that they are to “hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.” Even though the words that Jesus commanded were those that Mormon was to write, Mormon made sure to declare that they came through the authority of the Christ.

Mormon knew that the Book of Mormon would come first to the Gentiles, and so he addresses them here (he will address the Lamanites at the end of his eponymous book). The Gentiles are called to repentance, and to “be numbered with [the] people who are of the house of Israel.”

The Book of 4 Nephi

4 Nephi 1

4 Nephi 1: Header

*The Book of Nephi, Who Is the Son of Nephi—One of the Disciples of Jesus Christ.
An account of the people of Nephi, according to his record.*

Comments

None of the books of Nephi in the Book of Mormon were originally designated by number. Each was *the book of Nephi*, and distinguished in the title with the genealogy. Thus, what we have typeset as a header may have been part of the intended title, at least up to the description of Nephi as “one of the disciples of Jesus Christ.” The final sentence is probably the header proper.

Because we have four books of Nephi, and we know of three [men named] Nephi’s (son of Lehi₁, son of Helaman₂, and son of Nephi₂, who was the son of Helaman₂), it has been assumed that this new book must indicate yet another Nephi. There is no evidence for a Nephi₄, son of Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, son of Helaman₂. The title of the book clearly indicates two things: 1) this Nephi is the son of Nephi; and 2) this Nephi is one of the disciples.

It is that last designation that helps us understand that the Nephi₃ whose name is used for this book is the same as the one from whose personal record the book of 3 Nephi was taken. Further evidence is in the first verse of the book, which indicates: “the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about.” Thus, the book of 4 Nephi begins soon after the end of the book of 3 Nephi, and not enough time later to suggest that the Nephi₃ (who appears to have been the head of the twelve disciples) would have passed away.

Why then a different book? There are two reasons. The first is that the book of 3 Nephi was taken from Nephi₃’s personal record, with some backup in the early chapters from the large plates. In 4 Nephi, we are getting Mormon’s severe condensation of Nephite history. The passage of time is noted in a way that echoes the annalistic format of the large plates.

When the book of 3 Nephi began, Nephi₃ had the large plate record, and he was the record keeper. He kept the record of the previous dynasty, to which he did not belong. The Nephite nation had been destroyed prior to the arrival of the Savior in Bountiful. Nevertheless, the large plates were in Nephi₃’s possession.

In 4 Nephi, we have a reconstitution of the Nephite people as a nation. While it does not clearly state that Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, had become their ruler, it is a logical inference from his position among the twelve, his possession of the records, and the fact that 4 Nephi bears his name. Thus, 3 Nephi was a book outside of the large plate record, and 4 Nephi returns to the large plates with a new dynasty, and therefore, a new book name.

A Zion Society Is Established

4 Nephi 1:1–4

1 And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about. And as many as did come unto them, and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they did also receive the Holy Ghost.

2 And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

3 And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.

4 And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.

Comments

The book of 4 Nephi records only the barest amount of information beyond the passage of time. At the beginning, we learn about the aftermath of the Savior’s visit to his people in Bountiful. Jesus had called twelve disciples (the Book of Mormon designation for what we would call apostles), and they did what they had been called to do. They preached the gospel as Christ had taught them.

They, and all others in Bountiful, were able to bear extremely strong testimony to the truth that Jesus was the Christ, for they had seen, heard, and been with him for days. Thus, that powerful testimony was effective as they traveled through the land to teach. They converted and baptized many.

The result of so many believing in the same thing, and having the same goals, allowed for a time when “there were no contentions and disputations among them.” There “continued to be peace in the land.”

Verse 3 shows that they implemented the New Testament version of social equality and caring for one another. They “had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.” The long-held Nephite goal of treating others well, of not neglecting the needy, had finally come to pass, and lasted longer than during the previous years.

4 Nephi 1:5–9

5 And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men; and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus.

6 And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.

7 And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, insomuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned.

8 Yea, even that great city Zarahemla did they cause to be built again.

9 But there were many cities which had been sunk, and waters came up in the stead thereof; therefore these cities could not be renewed.

Comments

Mormon notes that the disciples did as Christ had done, which was to work miracles of healing the sick, raising the dead, and causing the lame to walk and the blind to see. We do not get any description of these events. We don't get the stories of the disciples going to a people and preaching and then being presented with these opportunities. Mormon is eschewing story-telling for a rapid and condensed version of events. They happened, but it isn't the story he wants to tell. What is important is the witness of the effect of the gospel and the Savior's visit on the people.

In addition to healing people, the destruction of the land began to be healed as well. Cities which had been burned were rebuilt. Those cities that were underwater remained underwater, however. That tells us that the rebuilding process was done by humans and was not a miracle. The people began to do what people do and rebuilt what they could after the terrible destruction.

4 Nephi 1:10–13

10 And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people.

11 And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.

12 And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.

13 And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus.

Comments

The people had begun to live according to the commandments. Although “they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God,” they retained the promise of the land. The promise was that they would prosper if they lived according to the commandments. They were doing that. They prospered. Mormon “proves” it by declaring that “the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people,” and “there was no contention among all the people, in the land.”

Verse 11 notes that they were married. That was certainly true, but it is such obvious information that Mormon certainly didn’t suggest that this was something new. What he is indicating is that life returned to normal, and to normal activities, such as marrying, and being given in marriage.

Verse 11 is functionally similar to Luke 17:27, which speaks of Noah: “They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.” Marrying and being given in marriage simply refer to life continuing as normal.

4 Nephi 1:14–16

14 And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away, and the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead; and also many of that generation had passed away.

15 And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

16 And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

Comments

Although Mormon lists years, he lists years without expressing anything happening in them. Then, in verses 15 and 16, he tells us what he had said in verse 13 about there being no contentions in the land. This is simply a time marker. The story that Mormon is interested in will come later. Now, he is, quite literally, marking time.

4 Nephi 1:17–18

17 There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

18 And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land.

Comments

Even though these two verses continue the minimal information that Mormon has been giving, it is important to note that there were no robbers. Not only were they having peace, but they were able to keep out those who would attempt to destroy them. Even more importantly, there were no “Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ.” That is an important point. The old animosity between Lamanites and Nephites was removed when they all left behind their inherited labels and prejudices and became a new people.

When the “first generation” passed away, we may see that as approximately one hundred years. The Book of Mormon appears to use the term *generations* for that large number of years, rather than meaning an actual human generational change.

Handing Down the Record

4 Nephi 1:19–22

19 And it came to pass that Nephi, he that kept this last record, (and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi) died, and his son Amos kept it in his stead; and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi also.

20 And he kept it eighty and four years, and there was still peace in the land, save it were a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land.

21 And it came to pass that Amos died also, (and it was an hundred and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ) and his son Amos kept the record in his stead; and he also kept it upon the plates of Nephi; and it was also written in the book of Nephi, which is this book.

22 And it came to pass that two hundred years had passed away; and the second generation had all passed away save it were a few.

Comments

Verse 19 declares that Nephi, who had been keeping the large plate record, passed away. This appears to have come after a lifetime of perhaps nearing a hundred years. His son, Amos, keeps the record until he dies. Then his son, Amos (another son named for the father), has the record.

This gets us to two hundred years since the birth of Christ in Nephite years. It is an important milestone because it is halfway to the final destruction. It is the righteous half. That will all change in the next verses.

The division between righteousness and wickedness that fits precisely on the two-hundred-year boundary is strongly suggestive that Mormon is fitting history into a more symbolic package. The events certainly happened, but it takes longer to shift a whole society than the movement of a single year to the next. The events surely happened but would have happened over time. The marking of the year 200 as the turning point is a symbolic use of numbers and time.

Pride and Divisions Emerge

4 Nephi 1:23–26

23 And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ.

24 And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

25 And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

26 And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.

Comments

The newly formed, and newly inclusive, nation of Nephi had lived the commandments for two hundred years. Therefore, they prospered. After two hundred years, they finally return to the problems of old. They became rich, and once they became rich they “were lifted up in pride,” and began wearing costly apparel, that harbinger of a people drifting away from the commandments.

The earlier egalitarianism was abandoned, and social hierarchies were becoming normal. Thus, “they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.” It was what we would expect of a people who began to wear costly apparel.

4 Nephi 12:27–29

27 And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the

more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness.

28 And this church did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan who did get hold upon their hearts.

29 And again, there was another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility and their belief in Christ; and they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them.

Comments

Within ten years, the unified Nephite society was essentially dissolved. “There were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel.” The original disciples, save three, had died by this time. The loss of the eyewitnesses appears to have allowed room for disputation, and therefore there existed separated congregations which interpreted the gospel in different ways.

There was also, of course, “another church which denied the Christ.” That was the common theme of the influence of the outside world on the Nephite faithful. Reading between the lines, there was a period of relative isolation from other nations, and then a time when the connections between people started up again. One of the ways to acquire riches was always through trade with outside peoples. They traded not only in goods, but apparently in ideas. Those ideas infiltrated Nephite society and returned them to the more divided people that they were before the great destruction at Christ’s death in the Old World.

4 Nephi 1:30–33

30 Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them, and they did cast them into prison; but by the power of the word of God, which was in them, the prisons were rent in twain, and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them.

31 Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all these miracles, the people did harden their hearts, and did seek to kill them, even as the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus, according to his word.

32 And they did cast them into furnaces of fire, and they came forth receiving no harm.

33 And they also cast them into dens of wild beasts, and they did play with the wild beasts even as a child with a lamb; and they did come forth from among them, receiving no harm.

Comments

Even the three disciples who had tarried were no longer respected and universally believed. They were persecuted. These events are being reported at some time after the Nephite year 210, after the birth of Christ. These are the events Mormon earlier referenced when speaking of the three (see 3 Nephi 28:19–22):

And they were cast into prison by them who did not belong to the church. And the prisons could not hold them, for they were rent in twain. And they were cast down into the earth; but they did smite the earth with the word of God, insomuch that by his power they were delivered out of the depths of the earth; and therefore they could not dig pits sufficient to hold them. And thrice they were cast into a furnace and received no harm. And twice were they cast into a den of wild beasts; and behold they did play with the beasts as a child with a suckling lamb, and received no harm.

4 Nephi 1:34–39

34 Nevertheless, the people did harden their hearts, for they were led by many priests and false prophets to build up many churches, and to do all manner of iniquity. And they did smite upon the people of Jesus; but the people of Jesus did not smite again. And thus they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness, from year to year, even until two hundred and thirty years had passed away.

35 And now it came to pass in this year, yea, in the two hundred and thirty and first year, there was a great division among the people.

36 And it came to pass that in this year there arose a people who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ; and among them there were those who were called by the Lamanites—Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites;

37 Therefore the true believers in Christ, and the true worshipers of Christ, (among whom were the three disciples of Jesus who should tarry) were called Nephites, and Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites.

38 And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites, and Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites; and they did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe, even as their fathers, from the beginning, did dwindle.

39 And it was because of the wickedness and abomination of their fathers, even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning.

Comments

Once upon a time, things were so good that there were no “manner of -ites” (4 Nephi 1:17). By the Nephite year 231, that idyllic time had ended. Once again, we have “-ites,” and they fall into the previous categories of unbelief. While it is certain that tribal distinctions remained, it would be unusual for all of those who apostatized from the Nephite religion to just happen to belong to the old designations for the unbelievers.

Mormon is doing what Jacob did hundreds of years before: “But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:14).

We should understand that Mormon is creating a restored Nephite nation, along with restoring its self-identity. The important part is not in names, but rather in functions. There are the righteous, and they are called Nephites. Once again, there are others. Verses 38 and 39 emphasize that things have come around to the conditions in the beginning. Just as there was hatred in the beginning, there is hatred again. Mormon is emphasizing the return to that period.

Wickedness Prevails

4 Nephi 1:40–42

40 And it came to pass that two hundred and forty and four years had passed away, and thus were the affairs of the people. And the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God.

41 And they did still continue to build up churches unto themselves, and adorn them with all manner of precious things. And thus did two hundred and fifty years pass away, and also two hundred and sixty years.

42 And it came to pass that the wicked part of the people began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton.

Comments

With the reappearance of Lamanites, there is a reappearance of wickedness. Again, this is a literary device, and should not be seen as something that is inherent in all definitions of Lamanites at all times. This division occurs, and once again the Lamanites “became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God.” Mormon is showing a cyclical reappearance of the conditions prior to Christ’s arrival. In Jarom 1:6 we had learned that: “And they [the Lamanites] were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites.”

Most importantly, the people who are against the Nephites are sufficiently wicked that the Gadiantons are going to appear yet again. Mormon has already told us that they caused the ultimate downfall of the Nephites (Helaman 2:13–14). Therefore, they had to come back, along with all the other ills of society.

4 Nephi 1:43–45

43 And also the people who were called the people of Nephi began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites.

44 And from this time the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world.

45 And it came to pass that when three hundred years had passed away, both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another.

Comments

Mormon seems to suggest that there was a general prosperity in which both the Nephites and the Lamanites shared. That prosperity led both people to pride, and therefore, both people to wickedness.

Mormon is preparing his readers for the final demise of the Nephites and contrasts the previous righteous state of both Lamanites and Nephites with the nearly universal separation from gospel principles in the land. Even though we still have the labels of Lamanite and Nephite, they can no longer be used to suggest righteousness versus wickedness. They were both “exceedingly wicked, one like unto another.”

Handing Down the Record

4 Nephi 1:46–49

46 And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.

47 And it came to pass that after three hundred and five years had passed away, (and the people did still remain in wickedness) Amos died; and his brother, Ammaron, did keep the record in his stead.

48 And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away, Ammaron, being constrained by the Holy Ghost, did hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation, which were sacred—even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ.

49 And he did hide them up unto the Lord, that they might come again unto the remnant of the house of Jacob, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron.

Comments

The conditions leading up to Mormon’s personal story are nearly universal rejection of gospel principles. Even worse, “the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus.”

The record keeper Amos, son of Amos, died in the Nephite year 305. His brother, Ammaron, then took up the record. He kept all of the records until deciding, in the Nephite year 320, that the conditions were too unsafe for preserving the records. To preserve them, he “did hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records.” This ends the record that Ammaron kept in the book named for Nephi₃.

Ammaron will then look for someone to take up the records. He will find Mormon.

The Book of Mormon

Mormon 1

Mormon 1:1

1 And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the Book of Mormon.

Comments

Up to this point, Mormon has been abridging the large plates of Nephi, with additional material taken from a few select separate sources, most notably Alma₂'s personal record and Nephi₃'s personal record. Now, Mormon leaves behind his role as either official record keeper or abridger of records. This is his own record, viewing his own life in retrospect. While many of these events would have been recorded on the large plates that he also kept, this is a record written particularly for this project.

Nevertheless, when he says that he calls it “the Book of Mormon,” it would be more appropriate to keep *book* in lowercase, as “the book of Mormon.” This “record of the things which I have both seen and heard” is his personal book, not the larger work to which it is attached. This is his intended closing to his masterwork.

Mormon 1:2

2 And about the time that Ammaron hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me, (I being about ten years of age, and I began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people) and Ammaron said unto me: I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe;

Comments

In 4 Nephi 1:48–49 we learned that Ammaron hid up all the records in the Nephite year 320. Mormon tells us that it was about that time that Ammaron came to him. When Ammaron approached him, Mormon was 10 years old, therefore, he was born in the Nephite year 310 (or close thereto, depending upon how the months in the ten years lined up with the dates).

That Mormon was already being trained “after the manner of the learning of my people” at age ten suggests that he was in a royal family, though not necessarily the closest family to the ruler. We never see Mormon as the ruler of the nation, only as the General over all the armies.

Mormon 1:3–4

3 Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people.

4 And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people.

Comments

Ammaron selects Mormon to be the official Nephite archivist, but with the understanding that the commission was as yet beyond the abilities of the ten-year-old Mormon. Therefore, Mormon was to continue his education with the knowledge that he would eventually be a record keeper. That knowledge doubtless guided the nature of his studies, and perhaps some of the types of lessons he chose to learn well.

When Mormon turned twenty-four, he was to retrieve all the records and begin the task of being the keeper of the large plates and the official historian writing upon those large plates. As with previous archivists, Ammaron tells Mormon the type of information the large plates are to contain: “ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people.”

War Begins between the Nephites and Lamanites

Mormon 1:5–9

5 And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father’s name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me.

6 And it came to pass that I, being eleven years old, was carried by my father into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla.

7 The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea.

8 And it came to pass in this year there began to be a war between the Nephites, who consisted of the Nephites and the Jacobites and the Josephites and the Zoramites; and this war was between the Nephites, and the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites.

9 Now the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites were called Lamanites, and the two parties were Nephites and Lamanites.

Comments

Mormon gives us a little more biographical information. He is named after his father, and he is “a descendant of Nephi.” It is assumed that he meant Nephi₁, son of Lehi₁. However, he does not say so, and it is possible that he meant the Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, who was a disciple of Christ. Mormon was also a disciple (the Book of Mormon term for *apostle*), and that would make a connection to the more recent Nephi₃ an intriguing possibility. Coming nearly a thousand years after Nephi₁, it would be impossible to have a completely accurate genealogy, and would indicate a general connection rather than a literal direct descendent.

Mormon is taken south to Zarahemla. Zarahemla had been rebuilt after having been burned in the destruction preceding Christ’s appearance in Bountiful. It would appear that the center of Nephite government had been relocated to the more northern lands (and probably Bountiful). Thus Mormon₁ (his father), took Mormon₂ south. The reason appears to be a war between Nephites and Lamanites. It would appear that both Mormon and his father were part of a warrior culture, if not a warrior caste. His father would likely be in charge of at least some of the armies. Mormon (the son) would later also assume command.

Importantly, we have the definitions of *Nephite* and *Lamanite* again according to the traditional tribal affiliations. These were reconstituted after there were no such divisions. See the commentary for 4 Nephi 1:38.

Mormon 1:10–12

10 And it came to pass that the war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon.

11 And it came to pass that the Nephites had gathered together a great number of men, even to exceed the number of thirty thousand. And it came to pass that they did have in this same year a number of battles, in which the Nephites did beat the Lamanites and did slay many of them.

12 And it came to pass that the Lamanites withdrew their design, and there was peace settled in the land; and peace did remain for the space of about four years, that there was no bloodshed.

Comments

The “war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon.” This would be upriver from Zarahemla proper, and closer to the location of Manti (if that city still stood—that would be the

most typical approach point of the Lamanites from the south. The geography dictated that it was the natural entry point, and that has not changed in the over three hundred years since the last reported war.

At this point, we will begin to see more strength numbers listed for military units. Mormon was a military man, and also a military historian. Thus, the sizes of the armies were important to him. Nevertheless, this was an era where tallying large numbers would have been difficult and there was no science of calculating population numbers. Thus, we will see numbers, but as with most ancient records, the large numbers may not have represented the actual number, which was likely smaller.

As with other times in the past, the Nephites are victorious, and the Lamanites retreat. There is peace for four years, which is one of the longer periods of peace (excluding the two hundred years of peace as mentioned in 4 Nephi 1, of course).

Mormon Is Forbidden to Preach

Mormon 1:13–14

13 But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples, and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people.

14 And there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief.

Comments

The wickedness that began just two hundred years after Christ's birth was intensifying. The Nephite victories were beginning to be based on their own strength, and not upon their reliance upon the Lord or the promise of protection.

They were sufficiently wicked that the Three Nephites were taken from them. Mormon had chronicled, in 4 Nephi 1:30–33, the poor treatment the Three had received. The Lord removed them, and with the increased wickedness, there was insufficient righteousness to be able to command miracles.

It was a serious time, so much so that “the Holy Ghost did not come upon any.” There were no new converts. There was no gift of the Holy Ghost because the people were insufficiently righteous to qualify to receive it. Mormon is telling the end-story of his people, and the beginning of the end was when they rejected the gospel and therefore the covenant of the land.

Mormon 1:15–17

15 And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.

16 And I did endeavor to preach unto this people, but my mouth was shut, and I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold they had wilfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land, because of their iniquity.

17 But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts the land was cursed for their sake.

Comments

Even in an unrighteous world, not all people are unrighteous. They may be in the minority, but their faith is still beneficial to them. In Mormon's case, his faith was strong enough that he "was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus." That was powerful faith, and undoubtedly part of his call as a disciple (apostle).

As with other disciples who had testimonies of Jesus Christ, Mormon wanted to preach, but his "mouth was shut, and [he] was forbidden" to preach. The key to the Nephite wickedness was that "they had wilfully rebelled against their God."

Mormon 1:18–19

18 And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again.

19 And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite.

Comments

At the beginning of this chapter, Mormon and his father go south to fight against the Lamanites and are victorious. After describing how wicked the Nephites have become, Mormon notes that there were also many Gadianton robbers who "did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth."

In 4 Nephi 1:46, Mormon had noted that the Gadiantons had made a reappearance, and "gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic." That desire for the gold and silver apparently led to some attempting to hide their own wealth so that the Gadiantons could not have access to it.

In a Mesoamerican context, these Gadiantons would probably be the people of Teotihuacan. During this time period they were a very powerful city and people, and they were actively expanding their trade routes into the areas where we believe the Nephites would have been, as well as further south

into Lamanite territory. This would be the reason that 4 Nephi 1:46 spoke of them as “[trafficking] in all manner of traffic.”

The “sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics” of verse 19 plausibly refer to the foreign religion that was infesting the land along with the Gadiantons who would have brought that religion.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Mormon 2

Another War between the Nephites and Lamanites

Mormon 2:1–2

1 And it came to pass in that same year there began to be a war again between the Nephites and the Lamanites. And notwithstanding I being young, was large in stature; therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader, or the leader of their armies.

2 Therefore it came to pass that in my sixteenth year I did go forth at the head of an army of the Nephites, against the Lamanites; therefore three hundred and twenty and six years had passed away.

Comments

In Mormon 1:15, Mormon indicated that he had been fifteen and had “somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord.” After that statement, he spoke of the return of the Gadianton robbers. In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, our chapters 1 and 2 were combined into the original chapter I (using the Roman numeral for the 1830 chapters).

This is important because we are beginning the next year in Mormon’s life, and the next phase of his career. Either somewhere in his fifteenth year, or early in his sixteenth, Mormon was made the leader of the Nephite armies. That one so young was selected probably tells us two things. First, that he was born to a military family and therefore had military training. Second, his father had probably died in the earlier war with the Lamanites.

The contrast between the previous war and this one is important and instructive and will be noted in the next verses.

Mormon 2:3–7

3 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and twenty and seventh year the Lamanites did come upon us with exceedingly great power, insomuch that they did frighten my armies; therefore they would not fight, and they began to retreat towards the north countries.

4 And it came to pass that we did come to the city of Angola, and we did take possession of the city, and make preparations to defend ourselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that we did fortify the city with our might; but notwithstanding all our fortifications the Lamanites did come upon us and did drive us out of the city.

5 And they did also drive us forth out of the land of David.

6 And we marched forth and came to the land of Joshua, which was in the borders west by the seashore.

7 And it came to pass that we did gather in our people as fast as it were possible, that we might get them together in one body.

Comments

In Mormon 1:8–10 he described a war with the Lamanites where the Nephite armies defeated them and the Lamanites retreated. That was in the Nephite year 321. In the year 327, there is again war, and this time the results are dramatically different. This time, “the Lamanites did come upon us with exceedingly great power, insomuch that they did frighten my armies; therefore they would not fight, and they began to retreat towards the north countries.”

What changed between the victorious Nephites in the Nephite year 321 and the Nephites of 327, who turned and fled rather than fight? While verse 3 simply indicates that the Lamanites had come, we should remember that this chapter should not be separated from the context of the end of our chapter 1. In those verses it mentions that “Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land” (Mormon 1:18).

What had changed? Now there were Gadiantons among them. In a Mesoamerican context, that would have been warriors from Teotihuacan, who were feared and whose military conquests were becoming unstoppable. The warriors of Teotihuacan also wore distinctive dress, as can be seen in the carved monuments among the Maya. Thus, the Nephite armies would have been able to see them clearly among the Lamanites. Their visual presence and plausible reputation might explain the difference between the previously victorious Nephites and these Nephites who saw their opposing armies and simply fled. The new invasion was so effective that the Nephites were easily driven out of the more southern holdings.

Mormon 2:8

8 But behold, the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites; and notwithstanding the great destruction which hung over my people, they did not repent of their evil doings; therefore there was blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land, both on the part of the Nephites and also on the part of the Lamanites; and it was one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land.

Comments

Lest we misunderstand Mormon's description of this new invasion, "the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites." Mormon had declared in Helaman 2:13–14 that the Gadiantons would prove the downfall of the Nephite people. As he begins to tell the Nephite end story, Mormon intentionally emphasizes the presence of the Gadiantons. He blames them, and therefore emphasizes their presence.

Mormon also tells us that in spite of the terrible destruction created by the robbers and the Lamanites, the Nephite people "did not repent of their evil doings." Perhaps, if they were to repent, the promise of the land might be invoked to save them. Even though the promise continued, the Nephite refusal to repent left them unqualified for that divine protection.

Mormon Sorrows for His People

Mormon 2:9–11

9 And now, the Lamanites had a king, and his name was Aaron; and he came against us with an army of forty and four thousand. And behold, I withstood him with forty and two thousand. And it came to pass that I beat him with my army that he fled before me. And behold, all this was done, and three hundred and thirty years had passed away.

10 And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity, and began to cry even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet; for behold no man could keep that which was his own, for the thieves, and the robbers, and the murderers, and the magic art, and the witchcraft which was in the land.

11 Thus there began to be a mourning and a lamentation in all the land because of these things, and more especially among the people of Nephi.

Comments

Mormon may have been young, but he was not ineffective. The Nephites had suffered greatly, some of which was due to the fact that the Nephite armies had fled rather than engaged their enemies. In this particular engagement, three years into the war, Mormon finally notes a Nephite victory.

Along with the victory, Mormon notes that the Nephites finally "began to repent of their iniquity." Nevertheless, "there began to be a mourning and a lamentation in all the land." Even with repentance beginning, there was much sorrow for all the loss of life and lands. Sadly, even their repentance was perhaps too little, and too late.

Mormon 2:12–14

12 And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering

of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people.

13 But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.

14 And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives.

Comments

Verses 12 and 13 provide a sad contrast. Mormon has hope that their “lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow” would turn them to true repentance. The reality was that, as a people, it did not lead to repentance. It was simply sorrow. Therefore, rather than meriting God’s assistance, the Nephites preferred to struggle on their own, and to trust in their own flesh. With verse 14, Mormon puts the finishing touches on the foundation of the reason for the Nephite destructions. The Gadiantons had joined the Nephites, and the Nephites had abandoned their God.

Mormon 2:15–16

15 And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away.

16 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and forty and fifth year the Nephites did begin to flee before the Lamanites; and they were pursued until they came even to the land of Jashon, before it was possible to stop them in their retreat.

Comments

By verse 16, the war was into its eighteenth year. It was not getting any better for the Nephites. They continued to be pushed north. Mormon specifically notes that they were pursued into the land of Jashon, where they were finally able to hold up for a short time.

Mormon 2:17–19

17 And now, the city of Jashon was near the land where Ammaron had deposited the records unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed. And behold I had gone according to the word of Ammaron, and taken the plates of Nephi, and did make a record according to the words of Ammaron.

18 And upon the plates of Nephi I did make a full account of all the wickedness and abominations; but upon these plates I did forbear to make a full account of their wickedness and abominations, for behold, a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man.

19 And wo is me because of their wickedness; for my heart has been filled with sorrow because of their wickedness, all my days; nevertheless, I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day.

Comments

Mormon takes a small deviation from his record of the wars to note that the city of Jashon was “near the land where Ammaron had deposited the records.” Mormon 1:3 informed us that they were deposited in the hill Shim. Mormon was to take the records from the hill when he was twenty-four. In the Nephite year 345, Mormon would have been thirty-five. Did he not obey the command of eleven years earlier?

Although we cannot know for certain, it is probable that he did retrieve the current Nephite record when he was twenty-four, as instructed. He forgot to mention it in the correct chronology, but when he got to this point in the record, he realized that he had not made it clear that he had taken the record from that hill. Therefore, he inserts that information here. It is the right location, but the wrong time. The location simply reminded Mormon that he needed to clarify that he had, and was keeping, the record according to the promise made to Ammaron.

It is also important to note that he says, “upon the plates of Nephi I did make a full account of all the wickedness and abominations; but upon these plates I did forbear to make a full account.” Mormon is speaking of two sets of plates. The first, upon which he wrote the “full account,” was the current Nephite record. It was not the full archive, as will be clear in Mormon 4:23, when he again goes to retrieve records from the hill Shim.

The designation of “upon these plates,” is the abridgement that we know as *the Book of Mormon*, including the book of Mormon where he is recording his own history with the less than full account of the Nephite wickedness.

Mormon 2:20–23

20 And it came to pass that in this year the people of Nephi again were hunted and driven. And it came to pass that we were driven forth until we had come northward to the land which was called Shem.

21 And it came to pass that we did fortify the city of Shem, and we did gather in our people as much as it were possible, that perhaps we might save them from destruction.

22 And it came to pass in the three hundred and forty and sixth year they began to come upon us again.

23 And it came to pass that I did speak unto my people, and did urge them with great energy, that they would stand boldly before the Lamanites and fight for their wives, and their children, and their houses, and their homes.

Comments

Once again, they were driven further north. The picture that there were breaks in the attacks and then a renewal of attacks in the following years is a reasonable depiction of Mesoamerican warfare. First, there would be the need to stop for harvests. Secondly, however, there are two seasons in Central America, the rainy season and the dry season. Warfare tended to be fought in the dry season and not during the rainy season. John L. Sorenson looked at the descriptions of the months in which battles were fought and found that they also tend to cluster into two seasons. Warfare was only common in the dry season, a condition common to cultures in that region.

Mormon 2:24–26

24 And my words did arouse them somewhat to vigor, insomuch that they did not flee from before the Lamanites, but did stand with boldness against them.

25 And it came to pass that we did contend with an army of thirty thousand against an army of fifty thousand. And it came to pass that we did stand before them with such firmness that they did flee from before us.

26 And it came to pass that when they had fled we did pursue them with our armies, and did meet them again, and did beat them; nevertheless the strength of the Lord was not with us; yea, we were left to ourselves, that the Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us; therefore we had become weak like unto our brethren.

Comments

Along with the seasonal nature of warfare, it is also possible that not all the opposing armies were always the ones to fight the battles. At this point, they are simply the enemy, and Mormon makes no real distinction as to which groups might be attacking them.

It was also true that the early flight of the Nephites before the Gadianton and Lamanite armies at the beginning of this chapter did not mean that the Nephites were never victorious. In that case, they were. The problem was that it was not a lasting peace, but only a reprieve. The inexorable march toward Nephite destruction was on.

Ten-Year Peace Established by Treaty

Mormon 2:27–29

27 And my heart did sorrow because of this the great calamity of my people, because of their wickedness and their abominations. But behold, we did go forth against the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton, until we had again taken possession of the lands of our inheritance.

28 And the three hundred and forty and ninth year had passed away. And in the three hundred and fiftieth year we made a treaty with the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton, in which we did get the lands of our inheritance divided.

29 And the Lamanites did give unto us the land northward, yea, even to the narrow passage which led into the land southward. And we did give unto the Lamanites all the land southward.

Comments

There is a temporary reprieve because the Nephites were able to be somewhat successful. The Nephites had been driven far enough north that they were now in the lands northward. Although Mormon does not reiterate it here, these are the lands that he had named Desolation, and were called Desolation because they were the lands where the Jaredites had met their end.

The treaty divides the land at the narrow neck. The Nephites lost the land southward which had been their homeland for about six hundred years by this time. They were now no longer in the land of their inheritance, but in the land of destruction, the land Desolation.

It is important to note that once again Mormon emphasizes that the robbers of Gadianton are among the Lamanites and that they were one of the parties to the treaty.

This is the end of the chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon.

Mormon 3

Mormon 3:1–3

1 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did not come to battle again until ten years more had passed away. And behold, I had employed my people, the Nephites, in preparing their lands and their arms against the time of battle.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord did say unto me: Cry unto this people—Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared.

3 And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God.

Comments

The treaty gave the Nephites ten years of peace. The dire need of fleeing and fighting had not turned them to God, and now they saw no need, since things were peaceful. Mormon had been prohibited to preach to his people when he was younger (see Mormon 1:17). Now he was commanded to do so, perhaps as a final opportunity to turn to their God. They would not.

War Resumes

Mormon 3:4–6

4 And it came to pass that after this tenth year had passed away, making, in the whole, three hundred and sixty years from the coming of Christ, the king of the Lamanites sent an epistle unto me, which gave unto me to know that they were preparing to come again to battle against us.

5 And it came to pass that I did cause my people that they should gather themselves together at the land Desolation, to a city which was in the borders, by the narrow pass which led into the land southward.

6 And there we did place our armies, that we might stop the armies of the Lamanites, that they might not get possession of any of our lands; therefore we did fortify against them with all our force.

Comments

The Lamanite king's declaration that a war would begin was not unusual in Mesoamerican warfare. Battles could be at designated times, with warnings given. This will happen again at the beginning of the final battle at Cumorah.

At this time, Mormon moves south to the narrow neck but still, pointedly, in the land of Desolation. They gather into a fortified city at the narrow neck which would make it harder for a Lamanite army to pass them by. They place themselves in the best possible defensive position.

Mormon 3:7–9

7 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and first year the Lamanites did come down to the city of Desolation to battle against us; and it came to pass that in that year we did beat them, insomuch that they did return to their own lands again.

8 And in the three hundred and sixty and second year they did come down again to battle. And we did beat them again, and did slay a great number of them, and their dead were cast into the sea.

9 And now, because of this great thing which my people, the Nephites, had done, they began to boast in their own strength, and began to swear before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren who had been slain by their enemies.

Comments

The wisdom of amassing their strength at the best possible defensive position was evident in their ability to beat back attacks in two consecutive years. Those victories embolden the Nephites, and “they began to boast in their own strength.” They were so sure of their prowess that they desired to seek revenge, believing that they were strong enough to do so.

Mormon Withdraws His Leadership

Mormon 3:10–13

10 And they did swear by the heavens, and also by the throne of God, that they would go up to battle against their enemies, and would cut them off from the face of the land.

11 And it came to pass that I, Mormon, did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people, because of their wickedness and abomination.

12 Behold, I had led them, notwithstanding their wickedness I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and my soul had been

poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long for them; nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts.

13 And thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins.

Comments

Mormon understood that they had been victorious because of the strong defensive position, an advantage that disappeared if they did as they desired and pursued their enemy southward.

Mormon made a difficult decision, and “did utterly refuse from [that] time forth to be a commander and a leader” of the people. For all that he had done to help them win victories, they did not understand why they had won, and they would not repent so that the Lord could be invoked for the protection of the land, through the covenant of the land.

Mormon had worked to the best of his military and religious capabilities to preserve his people. He felt that he was being rejected, and therefore withdrew from their leadership.

Mormon 3:14–16

14 And when they had sworn by all that had been forbidden them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that they would go up unto their enemies to battle, and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren, behold the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying:

15 Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth.

16 And it came to pass that I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard, according to the manifestations of the Spirit which had testified of things to come.

Comments

Mormon did not make such a momentous decision without the Lord’s guidance. The Lord declared that they were ripe for destruction. While the communication did not specifically affirm Mormon’s decision, it highlighted the correctness of his assessment of his people’s wickedness. Therefore, Mormon “utterly refused to go up against mine enemies.” He had given the best possible counsel, and it had been refused.

Mormon 3:17–19

17 Therefore I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel, when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance;

18 Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth; yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem.
19 And I write also unto the remnant of this people, who shall also be judged by the twelve whom Jesus chose in this land; and they shall be judged by the other twelve whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem.

Comments

In the previous verse (verse 16), Mormon indicated that he was a witness to his people's destructive decisions. Verse 17 gives us his conclusion of what he would do rather than lead his people. He would attempt to lead a future people that he would never meet. He wrote, and notes in these two verses, that he is writing to the Gentiles and to the house of Israel. Mormon could not lead his people back, but he commends that task to the Gentiles and the house of Israel "when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance." Future generations should prepare for the gathering in which Mormon's Nephites could not participate.

Finally, he writes to those who are the remnants of the New World house of Judah, those remaining descendants of Lehi, or those adopted into their blessings. His message will also be directed to them.

Mormon 3:20–22

20 And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil;

21 And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very God.

22 And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Comments

Mormon has paused in his historical descriptions to address those to whom he is writing. This comes after he has declared that he no longer believes that he can do anything for his current people, therefore, his thoughts turn to future generations that he might be able to help to avoid the fate awaiting his own people.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Thus, this statement is an aside in his historical narration and not yet a final declaration. That will come, but will come in our chapter 7.

Mormon 4

Nephites and Lamanites Continue to Battle

Mormon 4:1–3

1 And now it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and third year the Nephites did go up with their armies to battle against the Lamanites, out of the land Desolation.

2 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites were driven back again to the land of Desolation. And while they were yet weary, a fresh army of the Lamanites did come upon them; and they had a sore battle, insomuch that the Lamanites did take possession of the city Desolation, and did slay many of the Nephites, and did take many prisoners.

3 And the remainder did flee and join the inhabitants of the city Teancum. Now the city Teancum lay in the borders by the seashore; and it was also near the city Desolation.

Comments

Mormon had declined to lead the Nephite armies because they had begun to believe that they were strong enough to go on the attack. Without Mormon to attempt to deter them, they did attack, leaving their stronghold and moving into the land southward.

Mormon had been correct. They were defeated and driven back to the point where they lost an important defensive city near the narrow neck. At this point in his story, Mormon is repeatedly describing the Nephites in the land of Desolation, and even that they had a city called Desolation. He is declaring that the Nephites are now in both the physical and spiritual place that caused the destruction of the Jaredites, and which will lead to their own destruction.

Mormon 4:4–5

4 And it was because the armies of the Nephites went up unto the Lamanites that they began to be smitten; for were it not for that, the Lamanites could have had no power over them.

5 But, behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed.

Comments

Mormon specifically blames the Nephite defeat on their eagerness to take the war to the enemy. This might be a reiteration of the Nephite preference to avoid wars of aggression, as indicated in Alma 43:47: “And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.”

It may also have had to do with the strength of their defensive position, which was lost, if they left it to attack a stronger army. Perhaps it was both reasons. Ultimately, Mormon blames the defeats on Nephite wickedness.

Mormon 4:6–9

6 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did make preparations to come against the city Teancum.

7 And it came to pass in the three hundred and sixty and fourth year the Lamanites did come against the city Teancum, that they might take possession of the city Teancum also.

8 And it came to pass that they were repulsed and driven back by the Nephites. And when the Nephites saw that they had driven the Lamanites they did again boast of their own strength; and they went forth in their own might, and took possession again of the city Desolation.

9 And now all these things had been done, and there had been thousands slain on both sides, both the Nephites and the Lamanites.

Comments

With a foothold in the city of Desolation, the Lamanites prepare to push on to the next city in line, the city of Teancum. This time, however, they are the ones who were beaten back, and they lose the city of Desolation as well. It was a Nephite victory, but a costly one; “there had been thousands slain on both sides.”

Mormon 4:10–13

10 And it came to pass that the three hundred and sixty and sixth year had passed away, and the Lamanites came again upon the Nephites to battle; and yet the Nephites repented not of the evil they had done, but persisted in their wickedness continually.

11 And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.

12 And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people.

13 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did take possession of the city Desolation, and this because their number did exceed the number of the Nephites.

Comments

The Nephite victory was short-lived. The Lamanites return and this time force the Nephites from both the cities of Desolation and Teancum. It was a terrible battle: “It is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people.” Fortunately, Mormon leaves it at that and does not attempt to further horrify his readers with actual descriptions of the awful carnage.

Mormon 4:14

14 And they did also march forward against the city Teancum, and did drive the inhabitants forth out of her, and did take many prisoners both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.

Comments

This war appears to be worse than any previously fought in Nephite history. In particular, Mormon notes that the opposing army of Gadianton-infested Lamanites “did take many prisoners both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.”

In a Mesoamerican context, this comment fits, but is worth a note. It was not unusual in Mesoamerican warfare to take opposing warriors as prisoners, and to sacrifice them. That was probably happening in many of the wars between Lamanites and Nephites. It was sufficiently common that it was not worth mentioning, a cultural assumption that Mormon didn’t believe it necessary to explain. However, it was necessary to explain that now women and children were being taken as sacrifices.

Mormon appears to be suggesting that warfare is changing, and the cultural rules for acceptable ways to wage war were also shifting. It had not been common to take women and children, but now they were being taken. Even worse, they were sacrificed to foreign gods. It was an unspeakable crime. Mormon’s plausible purpose in relating this goes beyond the need to report history. It was an indication of the shift in the nature of warfare. All the rules were being destroyed along with civilization.

Although not specifically associated with sacrificing captured women and children, it is notable that Teotihuacan is credited with altering the nature of Mesoamerican warfare and introducing a more deadly aspect than had been previously known.

Mormon 4:15–18

15 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and seventh year, the Nephites being angry because the Lamanites had sacrificed their women and their children, that they did go against the Lamanites with exceedingly great anger, insomuch that they did beat again the Lamanites, and drive them out of their lands.

16 And the Lamanites did not come again against the Nephites until the three hundred and seventy and fifth year.

17 And in this year they did come down against the Nephites with all their powers; and they were not numbered because of the greatness of their number.

18 And from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites, but began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun.

Comments

The change in the rules of warfare that allowed the Gadianton-infused Lamanites to take women and children captives to use as sacrifices understandably angered the Nephites. That anger led them to a fierce attack that temporarily pushed the Lamanites back. The victory didn't last long. This time, the Lamanites arrived with such overwhelming force that the Nephites could not stand before them.

Mormon 4:19–22

19 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come down against the city Desolation; and there was an exceedingly sore battle fought in the land Desolation, in the which they did beat the Nephites.

20 And they fled again from before them, and they came to the city Boaz; and there they did stand against the Lamanites with exceeding boldness, insomuch that the Lamanites did not beat them until they had come again the second time.

21 And when they had come the second time, the Nephites were driven and slaughtered with an exceedingly great slaughter; their women and their children were again sacrificed unto idols.

22 And it came to pass that the Nephites did again flee from before them, taking all the inhabitants with them, both in towns and villages.

Comments

The futile nature of Nephite resistance is beginning to show. There had always been more Lamanites than Nephites. This situation wasn't due to lineal Lamanites having more children, but the fact that the label *Lamanite* indicated anyone who was not Nephite. There were many more Lamanites, and many other cultures that hadn't had any interaction with any lineal descendants of Lehi.

The Nephites still fought hard. They were fighting for their families and lives. They were still losing. After a brief victory at Boaz, the Lamanites come against them again. Not only do warriors lose their lives, but again women and children are taken to become sacrifices.

Mormon Returns to the Place of the Final Battles

Mormon 4:23

23 And now I, Mormon, seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land, therefore I did go to the hill Shim, and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord.

Comments

At this point, it had become clear that the Nephites were not going to be able to hold on to many of their lands. Mormon understands that the Nephite archive in the hill Shim was threatened. Mormon had been to the hill, as commanded, and had removed the Nephite record he was writing on. That single collection of plates was not the whole of the archive. It could not have been. There had been nearly a thousand years of Nephite history, and they had to have been written on many sets of plates.

Words of Mormon 1:3 describes Mormon searching through records to find the rest of the reign of Benjamin, only to find a set of plates (which we know as the small plates) which he had not known were there. If there had only been a couple sets of plates, that explanation would make no sense. There was a large archive of records. They were under threat. Mormon retrieves all of them from the hill Shim.

This event is critical for understanding when and how Mormon created the Book of Mormon. It was an abridgement of all of Nephite history, and history that wasn't even available to him until after he removed these records from the hill Shim. Therefore, the conception to write the Book of Mormon, and the source materials used to write it, were not available before this time, sometime after the defeat at Boaz.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Mormon 5

Mormon 5:1–3

1 And it came to pass that I did go forth among the Nephites, and did repent of the oath which I had made that I would no more assist them; and they gave me command again of their armies, for they looked upon me as though I could deliver them from their afflictions.

2 But behold, I was without hope, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them; for they repented not of their iniquities, but did struggle for their lives without calling upon that Being who created them.

3 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come against us as we had fled to the city of Jordan; but behold, they were driven back that they did not take the city at that time.

Comments

Mormon did not regain faith in his people. He no longer believed (though perhaps he hoped) that they would repent and return to the Lord. Nevertheless, in spite of what he saw as a hopeless situation, he allowed the people to convince him to return as the head of the armies. The conditions that had caused him to leave that position had not changed, but Mormon perhaps saw that they needed what hope they could muster. He returned.

The first mentioned action in which he led the armies was as the Nephites fled to the city of Jordan. There they were able to hold off the Lamanite advance and earn some respite.

Mormon 5:4–5

4 And it came to pass that they came against us again, and we did maintain the city. And there were also other cities which were maintained by the Nephites, which strongholds did cut them off that they could not get into the country which lay before us, to destroy the inhabitants of our land.

5 But it came to pass that whatsoever lands we had passed by, and the inhabitants thereof were not gathered in, were destroyed by the Lamanites, and their towns, and villages, and cities were burned with fire; and thus three hundred and seventy and nine years passed away.

Comments

This war is different from any that had previously been fought. It was no longer the aim of the enemy to conquer; it was to destroy. This type of warfare is expensive, and there must be sufficient reason to justify the costs.

In a Mesoamerican context, the Nephites had controlled access through the narrow neck of land, thus potentially controlling trade that would go between the lands northward and the lands southward. The major populations at the time of this war of destruction were Teotihuacan in the north and the various Maya nations in the south. This was a time where trade was increasing, something that we begin to see in Mormon's record: "And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic" (4 Nephi 1:46).

The increased trade suggests the need for stable trade routes from north to south, and the Nephites were apparently either hindering that trade, or in a position to do so. That would be unacceptable to the powers in the north and the south. Hence, the Gadiantons (north) and the Lamanites (south) were combined in this final war. It was economically beneficial to both to eliminate the threat that the Nephites posed or could pose.

Mormon's Message to the Remnant and the Gentiles

Mormon 5:6–9

6 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and eightieth year the Lamanites did come again against us to battle, and we did stand against them boldly; but it was all in vain, for so great were their numbers that they did tread the people of the Nephites under their feet.

7 And it came to pass that we did again take to flight, and those whose flight was swifter than the Lamanites' did escape, and those whose flight did not exceed the Lamanites' were swept down and destroyed.

8 And now behold, I, Mormon, do not desire to harrow up the souls of men in casting before them such an awful scene of blood and carnage as was laid before mine eyes; but I, knowing that these things must surely be made known, and that all things which are hid must be revealed upon the house-tops—

9 And also that a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles, who the Lord hath said should scatter this people, and this people should be counted as naught among them—therefore I write a small abridgment, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen, because of the commandment which I have received, and also that ye might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of this people.

Comments

Verses 6 and 7 continue the litany of losses. The combined forces against them are overwhelming, and the Nephites cannot resist. They are continually fleeing, and for those who could not flee, the result was in living under a conquering nation and destruction.

Verse 8 begins a transition into Mormon's expression of his feelings about this final war. It is terrible, but he does not desire to dwell on the destruction. What he wants to do is use this story as a warning for the future, to declare that "all things which are hid must be revealed upon the house-tops." The "things which are hid" are the sins of the Nephites in abandoning their God.

To expose these things on the house-tops means to write them in a message for the future. That begins in verse 9. Mormon is writing so that "a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles." He is writing "a small abridgment," which is the Book of Mormon.

Mormon 5:10–12

10 And now behold, this I speak unto their seed, and also to the Gentiles who have care for the house of Israel, that realize and know from whence their blessings come.

11 For I know that such will sorrow for the calamity of the house of Israel; yea, they will sorrow for the destruction of this people; they will sorrow that this people had not repented that they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus.

12 Now these things are written unto the remnant of the house of Jacob; and they are written after this manner, because it is known of God that wickedness will not bring them forth unto them; and they are to be hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time.

Comments

Mormon is very clear that he is writing for a future audience. He addresses his work, this Book of Mormon, to the seed of the house of Jacob in the New World. By this time, he understands that this will be those he has called Lamanites. He also writes to "the Gentiles who have care for the house of Israel." This phrase recalls Isaiah's prophecy: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders" (Isaiah 49:22).

Mormon 5:13–14

13 And this is the commandment which I have received; and behold, they shall come forth according to the commandment of the Lord, when he shall see fit, in his wisdom.

14 And behold, they shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go—that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant;

Comments

Mormon continues his description of the text that he is writing. Though it will not come to his current people, God has promised that it “shall come forth . . . when he shall see fit, in his wisdom.” That occurred with the printing of the Book of Mormon in 1830.

The purpose of the Book of Mormon is that future readers “may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That statement is very similar to the one that Moroni provided for the Title Page: “And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.”

Mormon 5:15–18

15 And also that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles; for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry.

16 For behold, the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind.

17 They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father.

18 But now, behold, they are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they.

Comments

Verses 15 and 17 renew the discussion of invoking a curse in terms of dark and white. Where Nephi had spoken of a “skin of blackness” (2 Nephi 5:21), the curse has moved away from *blackness* and *skin*, and has simply become having a *dark personality*. It is no longer even *skin*, but “this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people.” That is the definition of those who reject God and is not a statement of hygiene, let alone pigmentation. That is contrasted with a previous state: “They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd.” What has changed? “Now, behold, they are led about by Satan.”

There is no discussion of skin color. The contrast between dark and white represents unrighteousness (following Satan) and righteousness (following Christ). The change from white to dark was occasioned by leaving God, and it happened to Nephites as well as Lamanites.

Mormon 5:19

19 And behold, the Lord hath reserved their blessings, which they might have received in the land, for the Gentiles who shall possess the land.

Comments

Lehi¹ had obtained a promise, a covenant, that went with the land. They would prosper if they lived according to the commandments. During Mormon's time, they failed so utterly that they invoked the negative aspect of the covenant. If they did not follow the commandments, they would be destroyed.

Mormon declares that, even though the negative promise of destruction is being enacted upon the Nephites, God has not removed the covenant. The "Lord hath reserved their blessings." Those blessings have been transferred to "the Gentiles who shall possess the land." That divine process is alluded to in Luke 19:26: "For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

Mormon 5:20–24

20 But behold, it shall come to pass that they shall be driven and scattered by the Gentiles; and after they have been driven and scattered by the Gentiles, behold, then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham and unto all the house of Israel.

21 And also the Lord will remember the prayers of the righteous, which have been put up unto him for them.

22 And then, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways?

23 Know ye not that ye are in the hands of God? Know ye not that he hath all power, and at his great command the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll?

24 Therefore, repent ye, and humble yourselves before him, lest he shall come out in justice against you—lest a remnant of the seed of Jacob shall go forth among you as a lion, and tear you in pieces, and there is none to deliver.

Comments

After telling the Gentiles that they inherit the promise of the land, he reminds them that they inherit both the positive and negative aspects of the curse. They too will be blessed if they follow God but cursed if they do not. Therefore, Mormon calls the Gentiles to repentance in verse 22.

Verse 23 echoes Isaiah 34:4. Verse 24 refers to Micah 5:8, but in the form quoted in 3 Nephi 20:16. The point of those two verses is to note that the Gentiles must also repent, lest they invoke the negative promise, and they too would be destroyed; “lest a remnant of the seed of Jacob shall go forth among [them] as a lion.” Ironically, Mormon prophecies that God’s instrument of their possible destruction would be the remnant of the seed of Jacob, a phrase referring to the seed of Lehi. In other words, the Lamanites would be that instrument.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Mormon 6

The Destruction of the Nephites

Mormon 6:1

1 And now I finish my record concerning the destruction of my people, the Nephites. And it came to pass that we did march forth before the Lamanites.

Comments

This verse did not begin a new chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. It was a logical break because it moved from Mormon's personal interjection about his purposes in writing to the continuation of his story.

In context, this verse served that exact function. Mormon's comments were technically out of place in his narrative, and therefore he needed to return to his planned history. He does it by recognizing that he had moved away from the text and needs to move back to the planned narrative.

Mormon 6:2–5

2 And I, Mormon, wrote an epistle unto the king of the Lamanites, and desired of him that he would grant unto us that we might gather together our people unto the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah, and there we could give them battle.

3 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites did grant unto me the thing which I desired.

4 And it came to pass that we did march forth to the land of Cumorah, and we did pitch our tents around about the hill Cumorah; and it was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains; and here we had hope to gain advantage over the Lamanites.

5 And when three hundred and eighty and four years had passed away, we had gathered in all the remainder of our people unto the land of Cumorah.

Comments

Verse 2 explains that Mormon wrote a letter to the enemy king requesting permission to gather together in the land of Cumorah. Mormon must have believed that it would be a final battle, and the king likely agreed that it would be the final battle. Therefore, the king granted the request.

Even though Mormon had noted that the nature of warfare was becoming more destructive (particularly toward the women and children who were taken captive to be sacrificed), there were still rules of warfare. One of them allowed for battles that were scheduled. Thus, neither the request nor the granting of the request would have been out of place in a historical context, particularly a Mesoamerican context.

In the Nephite year three hundred and eighty-four the Nephites were gathered in Cumorah, and the end was officially beginning.

Mormon 6:6

6 And it came to pass that when we had gathered in all our people in one to the land of Cumorah, behold I, Mormon, began to be old; and knowing it to be the last struggle of my people, and having been commanded of the Lord that I should not suffer the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred, to fall into the hands of the Lamanites, (for the Lamanites would destroy them) therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.

Comments

Mormon had retrieved the Nephite archive from the hill Shim so that he would have access to it, and so it would not be lost to the rapidly advancing Lamanite armies. That condition was being repeated, but in a much worse way, in Cumorah.

Mormon knew that they were involved in “the last struggle of [his] people.” Therefore, he was again concerned for the safety of the Nephite archive. There was nowhere to take it, therefore, he “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to [him] by the hand of the Lord.” His desperate hope was that they would be safe, “for the Lamanites would destroy them.”

The important part of this act of preservation is the final phrase where he gave “a few plates” to his son Moroni. Those “few plates” were those containing The Book of Mormon. They were not buried in Cumorah but were given into Moroni’s care. They were not immediately handed over, however, as Mormon continued to write in them after the final battle. Then, Moroni wrote additions to Mormon’s record, consisting of Mormon 8–9, the book of Ether, and the book of Moroni. Clearly, Moroni did as he was asked and kept the plates. They certainly were not among those already buried in Cumorah. In his own book, Moroni notes that he was continuing to write long after the end of the Nephites at Cumorah (Moroni 1:1, 4).

Thus, there is no record that Mormon's plates were ever in the Nephite Hill Cumorah. Moroni possessed them in his wanderings some thirty-six years later (Moroni 10:1). While it is possible that he returned from wherever he had found safety, to bury the plates in a hill now occupied by an enemy that had sworn to kill him, it does not seem likely. The plates were certainly preserved in a hill, one to which Joseph Smith had easy access when the Lord's time was right for the record to come forth.

Mormon 6:7–10

7 And it came to pass that my people, with their wives and their children, did now behold the armies of the Lamanites marching towards them; and with that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked, did they await to receive them.

8 And it came to pass that they came to battle against us, and every soul was filled with terror because of the greatness of their numbers.

9 And it came to pass that they did fall upon my people with the sword, and with the bow, and with the arrow, and with the ax, and with all manner of weapons of war.

10 And it came to pass that my men were hewn down, yea, even my ten thousand who were with me, and I fell wounded in the midst; and they passed by me that they did not put an end to my life.

Comments

Mormon had been correct that this was the last battle. He had chosen a location that gave him the best possible defensive position, but to no avail. The numbers assembled against him and his people were too great. Even though the hill was defensible, it was not described as having fortifications. Thus, terrain alone was the advantage.

The people fell before the onslaught. Mormon fell, and escaped death only because he already appeared to be dead.

Mormon 6:11–15

11 And when they had gone through and hewn down all my people save it were twenty and four of us, (among whom was my son Moroni) and we having survived the dead of our people, did behold on the morrow, when the Lamanites had returned unto their camps, from the top of the hill Cumorah, the ten thousand of my people who were hewn down, being led in the front by me.

12 And we also beheld the ten thousand of my people who were led by my son Moroni.

13 And behold, the ten thousand of Gidgiddonah had fallen, and he also in the midst.

14 And Lamah had fallen with his ten thousand; and Gilgal had fallen with his ten thousand; and Limhah had fallen with his ten thousand; and Jeneum had fallen with his ten thousand; and Cumenihah,

and Moronihah, and Antionum, and Shiblom, and Shem, and Josh, had fallen with their ten thousand each.

15 And it came to pass that there were ten more who did fall by the sword, with their ten thousand each; yea, even all my people, save it were those twenty and four who were with me, and also a few who had escaped into the south countries, and a few who had deserted over unto the Lamanites, had fallen; and their flesh, and bones, and blood lay upon the face of the earth, being left by the hands of those who slew them to molder upon the land, and to crumble and to return to their mother earth.

Comments

Mormon lists the numbers of the dead. They are large numbers. There were certainly large numbers of Nephites, but ancient records often inflated numbers that could not be counted. With only twenty-four remaining Nephites, they surely did not count each fallen body. They had no science of estimates. What they did have, however, was military units. Thus, “Lamah had fallen with his ten thousand; and Gilgal had fallen with his ten thousand,” etc. These were military units that were of a proscribed number, but the reality could have been less than that number. Aztec military units consisted of eight thousand warriors. They used a base-20 counting system and therefore, what we see as an unusual number was, for them, very similar to a base-10 count of ten thousand.

Mormon notes that only twenty-four survived. However, that was not the total number of survivors, for there were “a few who had deserted over unto the Lamanites.” That “few,” might have been a much larger number.

The importance of this level of destruction is to highlight that this was a different type of war. It was a war of annihilation, not of acquisition of territory. As previously noted, these are expensive types of wars, and there had to have been some force that made it worth the cost. Book of Mormon scholars assume that it was the trade route between Teotihuacan and the Maya kingdoms.

Mormon Laments the Fallen

Mormon 6:16–20

16 And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

17 O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

18 Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

19 O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!

20 But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

Comments

When the Nephites had been righteous, they were “white and delightsome.” They had become “dark and loathsome” through their refusal to obey the commandments. It was for that previous generation, and the lost opportunities of the current generation, that Mormon laments. They could have been among the *fair ones*, but “have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive [them].”

An intriguing possibility is that the name *Nephi* also meant “good, fair.” Thus, this repetition of “O ye fair ones” may have been a more literary play on the meaning behind the term *Nephite*.

Mormon 6:21–22

21 And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

22 O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

Comments

Mormon lamented the massive Nephite deaths in verses 17–20 of this chapter. He ends by lamenting that their fate may be even worse than death. Now that they have died, they must stand before the very Christ whom they had rejected, “to be judges according to [their] works.” Therefore, Mormon exclaims: “O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you!”

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Mormon 7

Message to the Surviving Remnant

Mormon 7:1–5

1 And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers; yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel; and these are the words which I speak:

2 Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

3 Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

4 Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

5 Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up.

Comments

These verses originally followed immediately upon Mormon's lamentation for the destruction of his people. He had just stated of his current destroyed people: "O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you" (Mormon 6:22). Now he transitions from the sadness of what cannot be recovered to a future remnant of that destroyed people who will still be capable of restoration to the house of Israel.

Therefore, as Mormon begins, he speaks to his future audience. Although he has previously known that his future audience would include the Gentiles, he is speaking particularly of the remnant of his people. They are the ones who are on his mind in these final days. This will be the last time that Mormon writes on the plates. After this, Moroni takes over. Thus, this chapter gives us Mormon's final thoughts on the work he has produced.

What should that future remnant know? That they are descendants and inheritors of the blessings of the house of Israel. That they must repent. That they must come to the knowledge of their fathers (through Mormon's writing), and that this will lead them to "believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God."

Very interesting is that they “must lay down [their] weapons of war.” That aspect of repentance has been used to show what happened when the Lamanites became righteous. Most readers of the Book of Mormon remember the Anti-Nephi-Lehies who laid down their weapons of war, and we see that again in Helaman 5:50–51.

Mormon 7:6–8

6 And he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead, whereby man must be raised to stand before his judgment-seat.

7 And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end.

8 Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you.

Comments

The Nephite nation had been destroyed. There were no more Nephites. By definition, those who remained were Lamanites, but Mormon had taken pains to note that there was no significant difference in righteousness among the peoples. For nearly two hundred years, both groups had given up their designations as opposites, and were joined in righteousness. After that time, both began to become wicked again, and Mormon once again declined to lead his people in war due to their unrighteousness.

Therefore, when Mormon spoke to future descendants who would be of the house of Israel, he would have designated them as Lamanites, but only as a category and not as enemies, nor as being unrighteous. Mormon told of different Lamanite populations who repented, and those who did became arguably more righteous than the Nephites. That is certainly the message of the Book of Mormon to modern Lamanites. They inherit the blessings, and, upon accepting Christ and living the gospel, can become “white and delightful,” not because there is any physical change, but because they are the inheritors of the Lamanites who became white, or righteous, even more so than the Nephites.

Mormon 7:9–10

9 For behold, this is written for the intent that ye may believe that; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them.

10 And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen.

Comments

Verse 9 begins by declaring: “This is written for the intent that ye may believe *that*.” The word *that* refers to Jesus Christ and his gospel, referenced in the preceding verse. Thus, Mormon again declares that the purpose of the Book of Mormon is to be a witness to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

His final declaration to the future Lamanites is to assure them that they are “a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore [they] are numbered among the people of the first covenant.” That means that all of the blessings of the covenant can pertain to them “if . . .” The “if” is that “[they] believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost.”

These are Mormon’s last words, and the end of a chapter that originally included our chapters 5–7.

Mormon 8

Moroni Completes Mormon's Record

Mormon 8:1

1 Behold I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon. Behold, I have but few things to write, which things I have been commanded by my father.

Comments

At some point after Mormon finished writing the last chapter, he gave the plates containing the Book of Mormon to Moroni. Mormon had finished what he had intended to write, which covered from the time of Lehi, to his final words to future descendants of the New World house of Israel after the destruction of the Nephite nation at Cumorah. At this point, the Book of Mormon did not include the book of Ether, and certainly not the book of Moroni. It would have included the small plates, probably as an appended record.

Moroni indicates that his father did command that he write a few things, and so we have Moroni's voice at the end of Mormon's personal book. In the 1830 edition, our two chapters containing Moroni's words were a single chapter.

Mormon 8:2–3

2 And now it came to pass that after the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah, behold, the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed.

3 And my father also was killed by them, and I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But behold, they are gone, and I fulfil the commandment of my father. And whether they will slay me, I know not.

Comments

Moroni gives us information about the aftermath of the battle at Cumorah. There were twenty-four survivors. Those survivors went "into the country southward." That is an interesting direction since it sent them into Lamanite territory. It put them in the middle of the Lamanites who were hunting them. Nevertheless,

they headed south. In a Mesoamerican setting, that would be logical only for the language. It would be easier to survive if they could at least speak the language. In an era long before photographs or painted portraits, there would be few who could recognize them upon sight, and those should have been kin and therefore, somewhat protective for them.

Nevertheless, it wasn't sufficient, and Mormon was discovered and killed. Moroni doesn't tell us how long after Cumorah this took place, but it was at least months and probably years. It would take some time for Moroni to receive the news of his father's death, regardless of when it occurred. In verse 6, Moroni declares that four hundred years have passed since Christ's birth, and that tells us that he is writing some sixteen years after the destruction at Cumorah.

What we see at the beginning of this chapter is a very lonely and psychologically wounded Moroni. He expects that he too might be killed soon, and so he writes the specific commands that his father gave him so that he would be able to finish his father's great work.

Mormon 8:4–6

4 Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not.

5 Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not.

6 Behold, four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.

Comments

When the Nephite archive was threatened by changing political conditions, Ammaron had hidden the archive in a hill, called Shim. Mormon had retrieved that entire archive from the hill Shim, but then found himself at Cumorah and the whole archive was threatened again, so he buried them in a hill at Cumorah, save a few plates which he gave to Moroni. Now Moroni, carrying with him the records that would be given to Joseph Smith, declared that he too would preserve them by burying them "in the earth." (Joseph obtained them from Hill Cumorah.)

At this point, Moroni has spent sixteen years avoiding those who were hunting him. He doesn't tell us the direction he traveled, but if the others had gone south, we may expect that Moroni did not stay at Cumorah either. Given the location where his record was taken from the earth (at Cumorah), it appears that he may have gone north. Depending upon when he heard that his father had been killed, which seems to suggest that he had not left the lands where he could receive that information, he still had perhaps years to travel north before deciding that the end was coming.

Moroni says “my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not.” The “intent thereof” was to declare that Jesus was the Christ through the medium of the Nephite story. Moroni certainly could more succinctly state that fact, but he did not have the room to write yet another work of the size of what his father had done.

Mormon 8:7–9

7 And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more; and great has been their fall; yea, great and marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites.

8 And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it. And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war.

9 And now, behold, I say no more concerning them, for there are none save it be the Lamanites and robbers that do exist upon the face of the land.

Comments

Verse 7 sounds as if there were more than twenty-four survivors. Even though that was the count Moroni gave, it would not be surprising that there were some who claimed to be Nephites who had not participated in the battle but remained in smaller villages that had been passed by. Those were also hunted down, presumably so that they would not hold a grudge and some future day be strong enough to act on it.

Verse 9 tells us that Moroni followed his father’s descriptions of the nature of the people who had destroyed the Nephites. It was not just Lamanites, but Lamanites and Gadianton robbers. At the end, there were only the Lamanites (the traditional southern enemies) and the Gadiantons (the more recent northern enemies).

Mormon 8:10–11

10 And there are none that do know the true God save it be the disciples of Jesus, who did tarry in the land until the wickedness of the people was so great that the Lord would not suffer them to remain with the people; and whether they be upon the face of the land no man knoweth.

11 But behold, my father and I have seen them, and they have ministered unto us.

Comments

The Nephites were gone. The only ones who remained (besides Moroni) who believed in the Nephite God were the Three Nephites. Moroni declares that he knows this from personal experience with them. Although

Moroni says nothing of his interaction with them, we can surmise that they would have had some role in helping to preserve Moroni and the important record he bore.

Mormon 8:12–14

12 And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you.

13 Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, and my father was a descendant of Nephi.

14 And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord; the plates thereof are of no worth, because of the commandment of the Lord. For he truly saith that no one shall have them to get gain; but the record thereof is of great worth; and whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless.

Comments

As did his father, Moroni addresses the future readers of this record. Interestingly, Moroni's first thought is to tell those future readers not to condemn it "because of the imperfections which are in it." That would be an easy phrase to use to suggest that any grammatical or other types of errors are to be excused, but that isn't what Moroni meant. The imperfections were in being able to convey the message. If the one who receives the book doesn't condemn it, "the same shall know of greater things than these." That isn't a statement that the reader would better understand grammar or spelling, but that they would understand the things of the Lord. In case we missed that point, Moroni declares that he would, "were it possible, . . . make all things known unto you."

As he concludes his father's record, he declares who he is. It was important to know the writer, and so he tells us his name and his relation to Mormon. He then declares that "I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord." This is a final blessing, a sealing of meaning, upon the record with which he has been entrusted.

Mormon 8:15–16

15 For none can have power to bring it to light save it be given him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory, or the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord.

16 And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God.

Comments

Moroni has certainly asked to know the future of this record, and, just as surely, it was revealed to him. Much of the liturgical nature of the book of Moroni could be explained as Moroni's instructions to Joseph on how to establish the Church that would be founded on this book. At this point, he notes that the one to bring it forth will be blessed.

As the last one having responsibility for the record, and begin the one who was to bury it, it is understandable that Moroni would be very curious about who would take it "out of the earth" and bring it to light.

Mormon 8:17–22

17 And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. But behold, we know no fault; nevertheless God knoweth all things; therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire.

18 And he that saith: Show unto me, or ye shall be smitten—let him beware lest he commandeth that which is forbidden of the Lord.

19 For behold, the same that judgeth rashly shall be judged rashly again; for according to his works shall his wages be; therefore, he that smiteth shall be smitten again, of the Lord.

20 Behold what the scripture says—man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord, and vengeance is mine also, and I will repay.

21 And he that shall breathe out wrath and strifes against the work of the Lord, and against the covenant people of the Lord who are the house of Israel, and shall say: We will destroy the work of the Lord, and the Lord will not remember his covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel—the same is in danger to be hewn down and cast into the fire;

22 For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled.

Comments

As with the earlier comment about errors in the text, this statement in verse 17 requires that it be read in the context of the explanation about the errors. The errors are "the faults of a man." However, Moroni states "we know no fault." Because it is recorded by human hands, it is subject to the best efforts a human could make, and Moroni declares that is exactly what has happened.

Nevertheless, "God knoweth all things," which means that God knows both the places where there might be faults, but also that the doctrine it teaches is correct. Since that doctrine comes from God, those who condemn the book are inadvertently condemning God.

Verse 18 is a variation on the problem of asking for signs. Moroni expects that the future readers might decide that they need more of a sign than the fact of its existence (and translation). They should be wary of tempting the Lord.

The intent of this set of verses (verses 17–22) is to declare to future readers that this is the work of God and fulfills God’s promises (that the record of the Nephites would come forth).

Mormon 8:23–25

23 Search the prophecies of Isaiah. Behold, I cannot write them. Yea, behold I say unto you, that those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord; and as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them.

24 And he knoweth their prayers, that they were in behalf of their brethren. And he knoweth their faith, for in his name could they remove mountains; and in his name could they cause the earth to shake; and by the power of his word did they cause prisons to tumble to the earth; yea, even the fiery furnace could not harm them, neither wild beasts nor poisonous serpents, because of the power of his word.

25 And behold, their prayers were also in behalf of him that the Lord should suffer to bring these things forth.

Comments

The command to “search the prophecies of Isaiah” is one that is repeated often in the Book of Mormon. Moroni merely commends them, noting that “I cannot write them.” The inability to write them had to be related to the room available on the plates, not Moroni’s abilities. Moroni also knew that much of Isaiah was on the small plates that he knew would be appended to his father’s record. Therefore, there was no need to write them.

Why does Moroni commend Isaiah? Isaiah prophesied of a gathering, and the Book of Mormon had been foretold as one of the precursors to that final gathering. God made a covenant, and God keeps his covenant.

Mormon 8:26–27

26 And no one need say they shall not come, for they surely shall, for the Lord hath spoken it; for out of the earth shall they come, by the hand of the Lord, and none can stay it; and it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead.

27 And it shall come in a day when the blood of saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and the works of darkness.

Comments

Moroni has shifted from the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to the final gathering to which it is to be a precursor. Therefore, Moroni turns to events of the last days. These should not be read as happening

in the time that the Book of Mormon was published, but rather as events that signal the great ending game that will include the gathering of all Israel. Moroni declares that those times will come, and before they do there will be problems in the world.

Mormon 8:28–32

28 Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied, and churches become defiled and be lifted up in the pride of their hearts; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches.

29 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be heard of fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke in foreign lands;

30 And there shall also be heard of wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places.

31 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.

32 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins.

Comments

Moroni continues with the events that will precede the final battle between Good and Evil, God and Satan. That final time will come after dark times when God will have been denied, and even churches will turn from their divine purpose and act for themselves and for their own gain.

Condemnation of the Wickedness of the Last Days

Mormon 8:33–35

33 O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled.

34 Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

35 Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

Comments

Moroni has certainly seen a vision of the future. Part of that vision was to see the coming forth of the record he was finishing and committing to the earth. However, he saw more. He saw the picture that perhaps Nephi¹ had seen, that spoke of the ending of the reign of man and the coming of the reign of God.

Mormon 8:36–41

36 And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

37 For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

38 O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world?

39 Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?

40 Yea, why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans to mourn before the Lord, and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord from the ground, for vengeance upon your heads?

41 Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer.

Comments

Moroni continues his description of the end times, and his lament for the mistakes of humankind at those last days. Moroni personifies them and asks why they violate the basic gospel principles. Throughout the Nephite record, the wearing of costly apparel has led to social stratification and the neglect of the poor. Moroni sees that it will continue to be a problem in the future (verse 37–39).

This was not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Mormon 9

Message to Unbelievers

Mormon 9:1–5

1 And now, I speak also concerning those who do not believe in Christ.

2 Behold, will ye believe in the day of your visitation—behold, when the Lord shall come, yea, even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, yea, in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God—then will ye say that there is no God?

3 Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws?

4 Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.

5 For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you.

Comments

This chapter is the second part of the original Mormon chapter IV, which consisted of our current chapters 8 and 9. These are Moroni’s closing words on his father’s record. At the end of our chapter 8, Moroni was describing the conditions of the wicked at the last days.

In this part, he turns to a specific set of people, “those who do not believe in Christ.” His hope, of course, is to get them to open their minds and hearts to believe in Him. Therefore, he asks those who do not believe in Christ if they do not think that they might change their minds when the last days come, “in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God [Jesus Christ].”

When they are in that situation, they will no longer be able to deny the Christ. The important question is “do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws?” This concept that our own hearts and souls will determine our final judgment (seen in verses 3–5) is more strongly stated in Doctrine and Covenants 88: 22–24:

For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory; therefore he is not meet for a kingdom of glory. Therefore he must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory.

Message to Those Who Reject God's Revelations

Mormon 9:6–8

6 O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day.

7 And again I speak unto you who deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies, nor gifts, nor healing, nor speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues;

8 Behold I say unto you, he that denieth these things knoweth not the gospel of Christ; yea, he has not read the scriptures; if so, he does not understand them.

Comments

To avoid the problem Moroni discussed in verses 3–5 of this chapter, that we would not be able to be happy in the presence of a God we had denied, Moroni declares that: “O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto God.” Repentance is the important first step. It is also the beginning of the gospel of Christ as taught in the Book of Mormon, that one must repent, and be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost.

Speaking to those who deny Christ, they also deny revelations, prophecies and other spiritual gifts. They deny them not because they do not exist, but because they also deny the scriptures in which the evidence of those gifts is recorded.

Mormon 9:9–11

9 For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing?

10 And now, if ye have imagined up unto yourselves a god who doth vary, and in whom there is shadow of changing, then have ye imagined up unto yourselves a god who is not a God of miracles.

11 But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are.

Comments

The argument begins in the previous verses by noting that those who deny Christ also deny the record of the gifts of the Spirit as recorded in the scriptures. A reason they might do so is that they might believe that although perhaps in ancient days such things might have happened, they do not happen in the current day.

That is the proposition against which he argues that they must continue, for “God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” A definition of God is his trustworthiness and stability. Without that, he would not be God.

In contrast to the God that the unbelievers have imaged, Moroni proposes to “show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The repetition of the “God of” the different patriarchs is meant to demonstrate that they all believed in the same God, and even though they lived at different times, God was to them, and for them, the same God.

Mormon 9:12–14

12 Behold, he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man.

13 And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death.

14 And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still.

Comments

Following the declaration in the previous verses that the God of the different patriarchs is the same God, he had declared that it was that same God who created the heavens and earth. That leads to the discussion of the purpose for the creation of this earth by that consistent God. Moroni begins with Adam, and quickly explains the fall, and therefore the necessity of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

Because Christ has provided the infinite sacrifice and reversed the conditions that required temporal and spiritual death, he is qualified to judge those who have lived on this earth. There will come a time when “he that is filthy shall be filthy still,” and “he that is righteous shall be righteous still.” This life matters to the formation of our eternal character.

Message to Those Who Reject Miracles

Mormon 9:15–18

15 And now, O all ye that have imagined up unto yourselves a god who can do no miracles, I would ask of you, have all these things passed, of which I have spoken? Has the end come yet? Behold I say unto you, Nay; and God has not ceased to be a God of miracles.

16 Behold, are not the things that God hath wrought marvelous in our eyes? Yea, and who can comprehend the marvelous works of God?

17 Who shall say that it was not a miracle that by his word the heaven and the earth should be; and by the power of his word man was created of the dust of the earth; and by the power of his word have miracles been wrought?

18 And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles.

Comments

Moroni returns to those who deny that miracles continue (see verse 7 in this chapter). Moroni declares that God has not ceased to be a God of miracles. He turns to the scriptures to note that God has certainly been a God of miracles, and that his power was given to Jesus Christ while on earth to do miracles. Since God is constant, he was—and therefore is a God of miracles.

Mormon 9:19–20

19 And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

20 And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust.

Comments

What Moroni does admit is that it appears that “God ceased to be a God of miracles.” As an unchanging being, how is it that this appears to have changed.

Moroni is clear. It is our fault, not God’s. “And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust.”

Admonition to Believe in Christ

Mormon 9:21–23

21 Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth.

22 For behold, thus said Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry, yea, and also to all his disciples, in the hearing of the multitude: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;

23 And he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned;

Comments

In contrast to those who do not believe in Christ, the fate of those who believe in Christ “shall not be damned.” Moroni began in verse 1 of this chapter discussing the problem of those who do not believe in Christ. Clearly, they should. To help them do so, the gospel is to be preached, and for that reason God gave the disciples the responsibility to go into the world and preach the gospel to all.

Mormon 9:24–26

24 And these signs shall follow them that believe—in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover;

25 And whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth.

26 And now, behold, who can stand against the works of the Lord? Who can deny his sayings? Who will rise up against the almighty power of the Lord? Who will despise the works of the Lord? Who will despise the children of Christ? Behold, all ye who are despisers of the works of the Lord, for ye shall wonder and perish.

Comments

Moroni had declared in verse 20 of this chapter that “the reason why [God] ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief.” What happens when that condition is reversed, and the children of men repent and believe? Miracles return. God is constant, and when we are worthy of the miracles through our faith in Jesus Christ, the miracles can return. Thus, those miracles can become a sign of the righteous.

The language of verse 24 follows Mark 16:17–18: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

Mormon 9:27–29

27 O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.

28 Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God.

29 See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out.

Comments

Moroni is wrapping up his argument. He spoke of the fate of those who do not believe in Christ, and of God’s faithfulness to provide both the Savior and miracles. The reversal of the doom of unbelief is faith, and Moroni now admonishes his readers to be among the believers: “Despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord.”

The key to gaining faith is to open communication between God and our hearts. We must ask of the Father, and “doubt not, but be believing.”

Moroni also reiterates the importance of this life as a time to learn to know Christ. Thus, he admonishes us to “be wise in the days of [our] probation.”

Finally, we are to be baptized to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, it isn’t the simple act of immersion, but the worthy immersion that allows it to cleanse us and put us on the correct path to God. From that point, we still are required to live according to the commandments. Thus, we are admonished to “endure to the end.”

Mormon 9:30–31

30 Behold, I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead; for I know that ye shall have my words.

31 Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.

Comments

Moroni has been discharging his responsibility to teach the gospel of Christ. Now, he comes to the end of his words, and of his father’s record and masterwork. He turns to what he has written.

It is easy to assume that when Moroni speaks of the imperfections in what he and others have written that he must be referring to mistakes in recording, or words, or grammar, or maybe in missing some historical event. That is not the message. The imperfections Moroni is interested in here are those of the human condition. They are the times when we deviate from the straight course of God's way. That is the reason that Moroni commends to us that we learn from their imperfections, that "[we] may learn to be wiser than [they] were."

Mormon 9:32–33

32 And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.

33 And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record.

Comments

These two verses are well-known, and perhaps well-misunderstood. Beginning with verse 33, we have Moroni telling us that neither he, nor his father, wrote in Hebrew. What that clearly means is that there were no Hebrew characters on the plates. What is ambiguous about this is whether some other writing system was used to represent Hebrew words. That has long been an interpretive assumption, but one which finds little solid evidence outside of many of the names in the text which do appear to have not only Hebrew etymologies, but also appropriate meanings in the context of the stories in which they are found.

Verse 32 declares that both Mormon and Moroni wrote "in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian." That statement is also ambiguous in that it describes the writing system, but not the language encoded by that writing system. Important also, is the note that Moroni never says that there was a language that *was* reformed Egyptian. The *characters* were *called* reformed Egyptian. Since they were not Egyptian, the importance of the meaning of *reformed* is paramount, yet unknown.

Moroni only appears to tell us what we dearly would love to know. Except he doesn't. The little information leaves the debate open, and the years since the translation into English has not provided conclusive evidence of what he meant by these two verses.

Mormon 9:34–37

34 But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our language; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof.

35 And these things are written that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren, who have dwindled in unbelief.

36 And behold, these things which we have desired concerning our brethren, yea, even their restoration to the knowledge of Christ, are according to the prayers of all the saints who have dwelt in the land.

37 And may the Lord Jesus Christ grant that their prayers may be answered according to their faith; and may God the Father remember the covenant which he hath made with the house of Israel; and may he bless them forever, through faith on the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Comments

Moroni understands, and declares, that “none other people knoweth our language.” Moroni understands that it would come forth in translation. The only hint that he understood that process was his statement that “the Lord knoweth the things which we have written.” Moroni trusted that God’s knowledge would support the translation of that unknown language.

The Book of Mormon was written with a purpose, and by inspiration. The positive message was that future generations would believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ. However, one of the responsibilities that Mormon and Moroni shared was to preach the gospel. They did that in the Book of Mormon. Thus were “these things . . . written that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren.” They have fulfilled their responsibility to do what they could do to assist in the final gathering of the New World house of Israel.

The Book of Ether

Ether 1

Ether: Header

The record of the Jaredites, taken from the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah.

Comments

This header was not part of the original Book of Mormon but was added for the 1920 edition. The book of Ether is named for the compiler of the record. This is the model that we see for the book of Moroni and the small plates of Nephi. It differs from the naming conventions discernible for the books that Moroni edited from the large plates of Nephi, or his other sources, in the case of 3 Nephi.

The addition of this header in 1920 uses the word *Jaredites* to describe the people of this record. This is according to Moroni 9:23, where Moroni uses that term. Moroni's statement is the only place where that word appears in the Book of Mormon. Nowhere in the book of Ether do we have a designation for the people as a whole, and it is perhaps a misleading label for it makes it appear that there were only this one people in the land. The sure reading is that we have the story of a single lineage that had been associated with the ruling line.

It is difficult to read too far between the lines, but it does appear that there were people available where rebellious sons could find a following and build an army sufficient to defeat their fathers. Certainly, archaeology would tell us that there were many more peoples in the region than only those who this particular record follows.

Origins of the Jaredite Record

Ether 1:1–2

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country.

2 And I take mine account from the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi, which is called the Book of Ether.

Comments

In Mosiah 28 we have the story of King Mosiah₂ translating the twenty-four plates through the use of the “two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow” (Mosiah 28:13). After telling the story of the translation and the reaction of the people to having it read to them, Mormon noted: “And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account” (Mosiah 28:19).

Mormon gave no indication that he thought he would provide that information, and we have the book of Ether because Moroni fulfilled his father’s promise that “all people should know the things which are written in this account.”

Although Moroni says that he took his account from the “twenty and four plates,” it is unlikely that he made a new translation. A king and a prophet had already created a translation through the divinely assisted interpreters. There was no reason to do it again. Additionally, if the book of Ether were translated while Moroni was traveling, after the destruction of Cumorah, he must have had the twenty-four plates with him, but then decided not to include them with the plates that were buried for safety reasons. They were sacred records and ignoring them would have been unthinkable. It is most probable that he worked from a copy of Mosiah₂’s translation.

Ether 1:3–5

3 And as I suppose that the first part of this record, which speaks concerning the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower, and whatsoever things transpired among the children of men until that time, is had among the Jews—

4 Therefore I do not write those things which transpired from the days of Adam until that time; but they are had upon the plates; and whoso findeth them, the same will have power that he may get the full account.

5 But behold, I give not the full account, but a part of the account I give, from the tower down until they were destroyed.

Comments

The record of Ether was a record of a new people, and to justify the authority of that new people, they needed to attach themselves to antiquity. Thus, the presence of the origin story of the world was part of their story, and they connected themselves to its beginning. That sacred beginning linked them to the biblical stories of creation, down to the time of the Tower of Babel. This confirms the comment about the record that Mormon made when discussing Mosiah’s translation and when reading that translation to his people:

Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam (Mosiah 28:17).

Because the knowledge in that verse was well-known, Moroni saw no reason to repeat it.

It would have been important to have what their record said, for it could have provided slightly different views of those events that would be useful to religious historians. However, assuming that Moroni had that record in translation, it is plausible that Mosiah₂ had already translated it in conformance with the scriptures he knew, perhaps in the same way that the citations of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon come from the King James Version that Joseph knew, rather than from a retranslation of those texts.

Ether's Lineage

Ether 1:6–33

6 And on this wise do I give the account. He that wrote this record was Ether, and he was a descendant of Coriantor.

7 Coriantor was the son of Moron.

8 And Moron was the son of Ethem.

9 And Ethem was the son of Ahah.

10 And Ahah was the son of Seth.

11 And Seth was the son of Shiblon.

12 And Shiblon was the son of Com.

13 And Com was the son of Coriantum.

14 And Coriantum was the son of Amnigaddah.

15 And Amnigaddah was the son of Aaron.

16 And Aaron was a descendant of Heth, who was the son of Hearthom.

17 And Hearthom was the son of Lib.

18 And Lib was the son of Kish.

19 And Kish was the son of Corom.

20 And Corom was the son of Levi.

21 And Levi was the son of Kim.

22 And Kim was the son of Morianton.

23 And Morianton was a descendant of Riplakish.

24 And Riplakish was the son of Shez.
25 And Shez was the son of Heth.
26 And Heth was the son of Com.
27 And Com was the son of Coriantum.
28 And Coriantum was the son of Emer.
29 And Emer was the son of Omer.
30 And Omer was the son of Shule.
31 And Shule was the son of Kib.
32 And Kib was the son of Orihah, who was the son of Jared;
33 Which Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered.

Comments

The prophet who wrote this final record was Ether. Just as his people were connected to antiquity through the origin stories from the Old World, Ether needed to trace his authority to antiquity. Thus, we have a genealogy of Ether traced back to the original leader of the people, Jared.

This genealogy is then linked to the Old World through the origin story, specifically to the Tower of Babel. They become one of the separated people, therefore inheriting all of the authority that came with that pre-Jared connection.

Jared and His Brother Cry unto the Lord

Ether 1:34–37

34 And the brother of Jared being a large and mighty man, and a man highly favored of the Lord, Jared, his brother, said unto him: Cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words.

35 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon Jared; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded.

36 Then Jared said unto his brother: Cry again unto the Lord, and it may be that he will turn away his anger from them who are our friends, that he confound not their language.

37 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon their friends and their families also, that they were not confounded.

Comments

The story of the Tower of Babel is the essential connection between the Jaredites and the Old World. Their authority to become a people and carry with them God's blessings is given origin at that point. Understanding that there was a separation of peoples to come, Jared commands his brother (apparently the prophet, compared to Jared's more formal role as a leader) to pray that they would not be separated because of language. Jared, his brother, and his people retain their language, their identity, and therefore, their heritage. Nevertheless, they are still separated. They will be divided and removed to a new location.

The brother of Jared, "being a large and mighty man," joins other "large and mighty men" in the Book of Mormon. Coriantumr "was a large and a mighty man" (Helaman 1:15). Others do not get that particular designation, yet are "large in stature" (Nephi, in 1 Nephi 2:16; and Mormon in Mormon 2:1). Such designations would have indicated someone perhaps larger than expected, but the impact of the statement was to suggest that they were somehow outstanding. In the ancient Mediterranean, such epithets were indicative of qualities, not necessarily of physical build. We should not assume that any peoples of the Book of Mormon were much different than their surrounding populations.

Ether 1:38–43

38 And it came to pass that Jared spake again unto his brother, saying: Go and inquire of the Lord whether he will drive us out of the land, and if he will drive us out of the land, cry unto him whither we shall go. And who knoweth but the Lord will carry us forth into a land which is choice above all the earth? And if it so be, let us be faithful unto the Lord, that we may receive it for our inheritance.

39 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord according to that which had been spoken by the mouth of Jared.

40 And it came to pass that the Lord did hear the brother of Jared, and had compassion upon him, and said unto him:

41 Go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female, of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy families; and also Jared thy brother and his family; and also thy friends and their families, and the friends of Jared and their families.

42 And when thou hast done this thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth.

43 And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth. And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me.

Comments

The result of the confounding of languages at the Tower of Babel was the dispersal of peoples, and perhaps a deep story of the reason behind the nations of the world. For the Jaredites, it clearly indicated a separation of peoples. They were not only separated by their language, but they obtained a promise that they would further be separated by being given a new land.

They are commanded to gather families and flocks. They were moving an entire people. There is a hint of where they went. The first indication is that the Lord tells them to move north. These are a people from the ancient Near East. Thus, heading north will put them on a course toward three possible bodies of water: the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, or the Mediterranean. Which of these bodies of water is the most probable will be dependent upon information found in future verses. However, that future information will strongly point to the Mediterranean.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 2

Journey into the Wilderness

Ether 2:1–3

1 And it came to pass that Jared and his brother, and their families, and also the friends of Jared and his brother and their families, went down into the valley which was northward, (and the name of the valley was Nimrod, being called after the mighty hunter) with their flocks which they had gathered together, male and female, of every kind.

2 And they did also lay snares and catch fowls of the air; and they did also prepare a vessel, in which they did carry with them the fish of the waters.

3 And they did also carry with them deseret, which, by interpretation, is a honey bee; and thus they did carry with them swarms of bees, and all manner of that which was upon the face of the land, seeds of every kind.

Comments

In Ether 1:33–36, we learned of two men: Jared and the brother of Jared. We were not given any particular details as to why these two men are the preeminent actors in the beginning of the book of Ether. We must hypothesize.

We see Jared's name consistently, and just as consistently, the absence of a name for the brother of Jared. Nevertheless, it is clear that the brother of Jared is the prophet. This information suggests that Jared is the clan leader, the recognized head of the family and groups of families. His brother functions as the prophet. Although modern readers often associate the leader and the prophet as the same person, that was not always the case in the ancient world. It was frequent in the Old Testament that there would be a recognized leader, a king during the time of Hebrew kingship, and then an advisor who would be the one able to discern the will of God.

That appears to be the relationship we see between Jared, his brother, and the people that form their community. These people will become identified with the person who establishes them as a new people; they will become Jaredites. The political position of leadership will continue through Jared. His brother serves an important function, but it is his importance as a conduit between his people and God that serves to define him. His continuing lineage will not play a known part in the later history of the Jaredite people.

As these new Jaredites prepare to travel, they gather what they will need for the journey. There is some small disconnect between this description and the specific timing of events, because we are told that they gather fish to keep in a vessel so that they could take fish with them (verse 2). We have yet to be told that they arrived at a shore or were commanded to build vessels. The point of these verses is the travel preparation, not the precise timing of their travels.

It is interesting that the wreck of a Roman vessel has been found (in 1986) that has tank-like structures that appear to have been used for transporting live fish. While the Roman period is long after the date of the Jaredites, it nevertheless suggests that such an idea did appear in antiquity. Finding that one vessel was a spectacular find, and the absence of finding earlier ones just as easily suggests the lack of preservation of those ships.

Ether 2:4–6

4 And it came to pass that when they had come down into the valley of Nimrod the Lord came down and talked with the brother of Jared; and he was in a cloud, and the brother of Jared saw him not.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded them that they should go forth into the wilderness, yea, into that quarter where there never had man been. And it came to pass that the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood in a cloud, and gave directions whither they should travel.

6 And it came to pass that they did travel in the wilderness, and did build barges, in which they did cross many waters, being directed continually by the hand of the Lord.

Comments

Verses 4 and 5 both mention that the Lord appeared to the brother of Jared “in a cloud.” That phrase will be repeated in verse 14, following the statement in verse 13, that “And now I proceed with my record.” These statements will form the bracketing around verses 7–12, which are an aside in the text.

The important information for the story is that God led the people of Jared through the wilderness to the place where they “did build barges, in which they did cross many waters.” That part of the story will also be repeated, but with greater elaboration after the inserted text.

A Choice Land

Ether 2:7–10

7 And the Lord would not suffer that they should stop beyond the sea in the wilderness, but he would that they should come forth even unto the land of promise, which was choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people.

8 And he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

9 And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

10 For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

Comments

These verses are the beginning of the editorial insertion that consists of verses 7–12. The beginning of verse 7 is actually part of the planned text, and perhaps the statement that “they should come forth even unto the land of promise.” However, the mention of the land of promise triggers the aside. The remainder of verse 7 describes that promised land as “choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people.”

That statement leads into the covenant made with the brother of Jared, that “whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.” That is essentially the same covenant made with Lehi. It is a statement that God would lead people to this new land, and that they would be preserved if they remained faithful, but if they did not, they would be destroyed.

Ether 2:11–12

11 And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

12 Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.

Comments

One of the questions to be asked of the book of Ether is how Moroni used Mosiah₂'s translation to create his text. The plausible answer is that Moroni followed his father's practice of using the plates of Nephi. There would be times when Mormon recounted the story, and there were times when he copied information from his sources. Moroni appears to be using that same method.

The difference in detail between the recounting of the Jaredite preparations to embark on their journey to the New World, that precede and follow the insertion found in verses 7–12, strongly suggest that Moroni is retelling the story at this point rather than copying it.

A second question might have been whether it was Ether or Moroni who made this insertion into the story. These two verses strongly suggest that it was Moroni. Both he and his father address the future Gentiles, for they knew that they were writing (at least in part) to them. Thus, verse 11 should be easily assigned to Moroni. The rest of the verses, by association, should be assigned to Moroni as well.

Ether 2:13–14

13 And now I proceed with my record; for behold, it came to pass that the Lord did bring Jared and his brethren forth even to that great sea which divideth the lands. And as they came to the sea they pitched their tents; and they called the name of the place Moriancumer; and they dwelt in tents, and dwelt in tents upon the seashore for the space of four years.

14 And it came to pass at the end of four years that the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.

Comments

Verses 13 and 14 return the reader to the main story after Moroni’s aside about the land of promise in verses 7–12. What is obscured with this insertion is that the Jaredites made two trips across many waters. The first came after they had gathered their provisions and traveled northward out of the Valley of Nimrod. The second came after they had reached a place where they camped for four years. This second journey is made clear in verse 16 of this chapter.

With the need to traverse two bodies of water in two different sets of barges, it is most probable that they set out across the Mediterranean and stopped either on the southern coast of the Iberian peninsula, or along the northern coast of Africa. From that point, they would cross the Atlantic.

The Jaredites remain on the coast for four years. The place was called Moriancumer, and perhaps was named for Jared’s brother, since Joseph Smith revealed that the brother of Jared was named Mahonri-moriancumer, or Mahonri Moriancumer.

The important part of this particular part of the story is that the people were quite comfortable not embarking on the next part of the journey for four years. Perhaps they were building the barges but had not yet used them. For whatever reason, the time had come for them to depart, and the Lord had to chastise the brother of Jared because they had not yet done so.

The brother of Jared was chastised “for the space of three hours.” We don’t know how they would have measured time, but it was surely a significant amount. Had the brother of Jared not prayed at all?

That is a possible reading, but another reading would be that he had not asked the essential question about when they should begin the journey that God had already told them to take (see verses 5 and 6 of this chapter).

Ether 2:15

15 And the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord for his brethren who were with him. And the Lord said unto him: I will forgive thee and thy brethren of their sins; but thou shalt not sin any more, for ye shall remember that my Spirit will not always strive with man; wherefore, if ye will sin until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And these are my thoughts upon the land which I shall give you for your inheritance; for it shall be a land choice above all other lands.

Comments

What does it mean that “Jared repented of the evil which he had done?” In this context, the “evil” was that he had not obeyed the Lord. We should assume no more than that. God had commanded them to prepare, build barges, and depart. They were four years waiting on the seashore, and thus had not fulfilled a direct commandment. In that thing, the brother of Jared and all the people had committed sin. It was the sin of direct disobedience. Thus, the Lord could forgive them, if they would not sin anymore and if they would prepare to go to that land that was promised for their inheritance.

Building Barges and Solving Problems

Ether 2:16–17

16 And the Lord said: Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did go to work, and also his brethren, and built barges after the manner which they had built, according to the instructions of the Lord. And they were small, and they were light upon the water, even like unto the lightness of a fowl upon the water.

17 And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish; and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and the ends thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish.

Comments

The Lord tells the brother of Jared to “go to work.” That might be an instruction to all of God’s people in all times. There are things we are commanded to do, and perhaps times when we have symbolically remained in place for four years.

God tells the brother of Jared to build barges “after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built.” That confirms that this is the second time that the people of Jared would cross the waters in vessels. They build them again. Perhaps the instructions we see here were given previously, but even if they were, Moroni elects to include them prior to the major sea voyage. The barges were to be built water-tight and be capable of being covered by water and not sinking. This should not be assumed to mean that they were intentionally submarine-like vessels, but only that they would be able to survive major storms at sea.

The Problem of Air

Ether 2:18–21

18 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, I have performed the work which thou hast commanded me, and I have made the barges according as thou hast directed me.

19 And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer? And also we shall perish, for in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them; therefore we shall perish.

20 And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold, ye shall stop the hole, that ye may not perish in the flood.

21 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did so, according as the Lord had commanded.

Comments

This part of the story is told through multiple occasions where the brother of Jared comes to the Lord with questions. Apart from the story, the lesson is clearly that our changing circumstances in life will require our continued conversation with God, and our continuing to seek counsel from Him. We may receive information for the next steps, but those next steps may lead to more questions, and further reasons to rely upon the Lord.

In this case, the brother of Jared sees to the building of the barges. While they were to be similar to those built previously, they were also clearly different. The brother of Jared needed multiple instructions on how to make them functional.

In this conversation, there are multiple problems: how would they be lighted, steered, and how could the occupants breathe in a sealed barge? These verses describe the solution to the breathing issue. The answer is that they should have a hole in the top and a hole in the bottom of the barge’s hull. While having

holes in the hull is usually something to be avoided in a vessel, it is possible that these two holes were connected by a tube. (A modern-day engineer has suggested such a mechanism and has demonstrated how it might work.)

The Problem of Light

Ether 2:22–25

22 And he cried again unto the Lord saying: O Lord, behold I have done even as thou hast commanded me; and I have prepared the vessels for my people, and behold there is no light in them. Behold, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?

23 And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire.

24 For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. Nevertheless, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea; for the winds have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods have I sent forth.

25 And behold, I prepare you against these things; for ye cannot cross this great deep save I prepare you against the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come. Therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?

Comments

The brother of Jared returns to the Lord after building the vessels in the way described. That left a major question unanswered. How were they to get light, or were they to cross the waters in nearly perpetual darkness?

The Lord asks the brother of Jared what he thinks should be done. Before requesting an answer, the Lord indicates the problem. Because the vessels will be sealed, and at times under water, they cannot have a fire within it. Importantly, in verse 24, the Lord tells them that “the winds have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods.” In verse 25 he reiterates that Yahweh must protect them against “the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come.” The implication is that Yahweh is behind them, and controls the elements and therefore, he will be behind their travel and protect them all through it.

The Lord will provide them the direction needed, but not the solution to light. That solution, he leaves for Jared to determine. That also is the way the Lord works with us. In modern revelation, the Lord has clarified: “Wherefore, let them bring their families to this land, as they shall counsel between themselves

and me. For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:25–26).

That is what the brother of Jared was doing with the Lord. They were counseling together, but the Lord did not command in all things. Agency is important, but using our agency for our own benefit is extremely important.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 3

Ether 3:1

1 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared, (now the number of the vessels which had been prepared was eight) went forth unto the mount, which they called the mount Shelem, because of its exceeding height, and did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass; and he did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord, saying:

Comments

Due to the modern chapter divisions, this verse has become disconnected from the situational context which caused the brother of Jared to approach the Lord with stones. In Ether 2:23, the Lord asked the brother of Jared what he thought should be done to light the vessels, since they could not have fire. The Lord did not provide the solution, but outlined the problem and allowed the brother of Jared to come up with a way to provide the light.

What the brother of Jared came up with was sixteen small stones that somehow had been “molten out of a rock.” The brother of Jared had created stones that would not have occurred in nature, and then asked God to further alter their nature. There are legends of miraculous lights associated with Noah’s ark, and perhaps that inspired the brother of Jared’s solution.

Ether 3:2–5

2 O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

3 Behold, O Lord, thou hast smitten us because of our iniquity, and hast driven us forth, and for these many years we have been in the wilderness; nevertheless, thou hast been merciful unto us. O Lord,

look upon me in pity, and turn away thine anger from this thy people, and suffer not that they shall go forth across this raging deep in darkness; but behold these things which I have molten out of the rock.
4 And I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea.
5 Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this. We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men.

Comments

The brother of Jared restates the problem that is to be solved. The Lord had said that they might be “encompassed about by the floods,” and in the earlier verse the Lord had declared that this was the reason they could not use fire as a light.

As the brother of Jared brings his petition to the Lord, he declares that he understands that “because of the fall our natures have become evil continually.” This sentence recalls the similar statement that “the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done” in Ether 2:15. The brother of Jared approaches the Lord to request assistance; assistance he understands that he does not merit.

In verse 3 he also recalls that the Lord had to chastise him, and all the people, for remaining too long on the coast without obeying the command to depart for the promised land. Nevertheless, he asks the Lord to touch the stones, to change their nature from inert stone to miraculous instruments of light. In spite of the brother of Jared’s declaration that he has no right to request anything of God, he nevertheless has faith that God can, and will, do it.

The Brother of Jared Sees the Lord through the Veil

Ether 3:6–8

6 And it came to pass that when the brother of Jared had said these words, behold, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear.
7 And the Lord saw that the brother of Jared had fallen to the earth; and the Lord said unto him: Arise, why hast thou fallen?
8 And he saith unto the Lord: I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood.

Comments

In verse 4 of this chapter, the brother of Jared asks God to touch the stones with his finger. God does. The brother of Jared sees the finger as a finger of flesh and blood and falls down from fear. The brother of Jared had specifically asked that God touch the stones with his finger, but he would not have expected to actually witness the act. God had previously appeared in a cloud. While the brother of Jared, and indeed many prophets, had used anthropomorphic terms to describe God, they may not have presumed that it would be as real as what the brother of Jared saw.

This story is told as a conversation to highlight the miracle. We note that the brother of Jared clearly did not feel that a conversation with the Lord was unexpected, it was only the vision of the finger. The story has Yahweh ask why the brother of Jared had fallen, even though it is sure that God would have known the reason.

The reason was the presence of God in a recognizable form. God was not in a cloud, he was visible in a finger, a finger that suggested that there was truly a being that was recognizable as being similar to mortal humanity.

Ether 3:9–13

9 And the Lord said unto him: Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this?

10 And he answered: Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me.

11 And the Lord said unto him: Believest thou the words which I shall speak?

12 And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie.

13 And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

Comments

What the brother of Jared saw was a premortal Yahweh, prior to the time that he took upon himself “flesh and blood.” The conversation continues with the Lord asking the brother of Jared: “Sawest thou more than this?” This question was at least interpreted as an invitation to have a wider vision of the premortal body of Yahweh.

Because of his faith, the brother of Jared is able to see what had previously only been assumed to have been in the cloud. Verse 13 is fascinating because it assumes information that is not given in the conversation. Yahweh declares that because of the brother of Jared’s faith, he is redeemed from the fall, and could be brought into God’s presence. This is an important statement even though we do not know how much

of the atoning mission of the Messiah the brother of Jared knew. What he did know is the most important thing, i.e., through the redemption from the fall, the brother of Jared could be in God's presence. That theological doctrine became a dramatic reality as he was literally in the presence of his God.

Ether 3:14–15

14 Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

15 And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

Comments

To be certain that the brother of Jared understands who it is standing before him, Yahweh declares that he is the very God “who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people.” That is, the God who stated that the brother of Jared was redeemed from the fall was the very one, and the only one, who could make that declaration.

Verse 15 has an interesting statement that God had not shown himself to any man prior to this time. Nevertheless, Exodus 33:11 says that Moses spoke with God “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” In 1 Kings 11:9 we are told “And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.” Even Isaiah says: “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

The difference between the brother of Jared's experience and these experiences of other prophets is that all of them understood that they were in the presence of God but knowing that they were in his presence did not mean that they viewed the form of God.

Moses spoke with God face to face, but so did the brother of Jared in his conversations prior to the vision of the finger. The Isaiah passage comes in a poetic description that shows the majesty of God filling a temple. It was a statement of presence, not a vision of the premortal form.

Thus, while others had similarly been in God's presence, and had similarly conversed with God, it was the revelation of the premortal body that was unusual. However, that raises the second question. In the New Testament we find: “No man hath seen God at any time” (1 John 4:12). Joseph Smith provided the clarification that explains that seeming contradiction: “For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 67:11).

Ether 3:16–20

16 Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.

17 And now, as I, Moroni, said I could not make a full account of these things which are written, therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites.

18 And he ministered unto him even as he ministered unto the Nephites; and all this, that this man might know that he was God, because of the many great works which the Lord had showed unto him.

19 And because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.

20 Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him.

Comments

As Moroni worked with his source material, he was understandably impressed with the brother of Jared's experience. It was something that he felt he needed to explain. First, he clarifies that Yahweh appeared "unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites." That statement both clarifies that the premortal spirit body reflects the mortal form, but also that the experience of the brother of Jared was confirmed in that Yahweh also appeared to the Nephites, albeit at a different phase of his mission.

Verse 18 continues the comparison. Moroni sees kinship between what the brother of Jared experienced and the visitation of the resurrected Christ. They were the same God, saving his children both before and after the act that performed the atonement.

Verses 17 through 20 are in Moroni's direct voice. Nevertheless, we see him as the editor of the text in verse 14 (of this chapter) when Yahweh declares: "I am Jesus Christ." That is a name by which Moroni knew the Savior, and a declaration that "I am the Messiah" would have been logical, the mortal name of Jesus would not have been given, nor would it have been useful. Since we do not know the language spoken by the Jaredites, they may not have understood the Hebrew behind the mortal name: "Yahweh saves."

Ether 3:21–24

21 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man.

22 And behold, when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read.

23 And behold, these two stones will I give unto thee, and ye shall seal them up also with the things which ye shall write.

24 For behold, the language which ye shall write I have confounded; wherefore I will cause in my own due time that these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write.

Comments

Mormon had been told that there were things that he should not write. The brother of Jared was told that his was a sacred experience, but only a personal one. He was not to tell of the experience. Nevertheless, he was to write it. His record would eventually be available, but only to one who had the tools required to interpret the writing that had been confounded. These tools were two stones, which were kept throughout Jaredite history and kept with the plates of Ether.

These two stones, known as the interpreters, appear to be the ones Moroni buried with the plates for Joseph Smith to find, and therefore, to have the tools to translate. Nevertheless, they were not the only such tools. When Limhi asks Ammon if there is someone who could translate the plates of Ether that Limhi's people had found, Ammon tells him: "I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer" (Mosiah 8:13).

Prior to Mosiah₂ having the plates of Ether, and presumably the two stones that accompanied them, he already had interpreters, and had used them. There is no reason to believe that the two stones were the only interpreters, though certainly their sacred provenance would make them pre-eminent among such tools. The fact that Joseph Smith also had other stones that were used as translating tools confirms that the two stones were not unique, and not uniquely essential to the process of divine translation.

The Vision Is Sealed Up

Ether 3:25–28

25 And when the Lord had said these words, he showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth.

26 For he had said unto him in times before, that if he would believe in him that he could show unto him all things—it should be shown unto him; therefore the Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things.

27 And the Lord said unto him: Write these things and seal them up; and I will show them in mine own due time unto the children of men.

28 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that he should seal up the two stones which he had received, and show them not, until the Lord should show them unto the children of men.

Comments

After being told that there were things that were to be written, but unavailable to the world, Yahweh gave the brother of Jared a vision of the spiritual history of the world. It would have covered much of the same information that we have from Nephi¹'s vision of the tree of life.

The brother of Jared was also to write them, but the writing was to be sealed up. The experience ends with the admonition to seal up the two stones, to be kept separate from the wider world. They were not physically sealed, for they were available to accompany the plates of Ether. They would have been sacred objects passed through righteous lines until they came to Ether.

This is not the end of the chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 4

Ether 4:1

1 And the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to go down out of the mount from the presence of the Lord, and write the things which he had seen; and they were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he should be lifted up upon the cross; and for this cause did king Mosiah keep them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people.

Comments

Moses descended from the mountain with scripture. The brother of Jared descended the mountain with the command to write scripture. A major difference was that Moses's scriptures were to be given immediately. Those that the brother of Jared were to write "were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he should be lifted up upon the cross; and for this cause did King Mosiah₂ keep them, that they should not come into the word until after Christ should show himself unto his people."

Moroni was writing after Christ had shown himself unto his people. The command that this part of the record should be kept until after Christ had arisen explains why the description of what Mosiah₂ read to his people covered only the beginning and did not even allude to the appearance of the Savior to the brother of Jared (see Mosiah 28:17–18).

Ether 4:2–4

2 And after Christ truly had showed himself unto his people he commanded that they should be made manifest.

3 And now, after that, they have all dwindled in unbelief; and there is none save it be the Lamanites, and they have rejected the gospel of Christ; therefore I am commanded that I should hide them up again in the earth.

4 Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared.

Comments

These verses suggest that the reason that the brother of Jared's account should not be written until after Christ had shown himself referred to Christ's appearance in Bountiful, and not to his mortal mission in the Old World. The separation of the hemispheres would have kept the New World writings from those in the Old World whether they were commanded to be written, or only revealed at a certain time.

Verse 3 flows from that meaning. The experience of the brother of Jared seeing the pre-mortal Messiah was written after Christ appeared in Bountiful, and eventually, that people to which he had revealed himself "all dwindled in unbelief; and there is none save it be the Lamanites."

Keeping the record from the Nephites made their experience with the resurrected Christ a marvelous, and somewhat unexpected event. Knowing the experience of the brother of Jared would not add to that majesty. However, now that the record was being prepared for a future readership, it could serve as another testament to the God who condescended to earth to become the Messiah.

Ether 4:5–7

5 Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them. And he commanded me that I should seal them up; and he also hath commanded that I should seal up the interpretation thereof; wherefore I have sealed up the interpreters, according to the commandment of the Lord.

6 For the Lord said unto me: They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord.

7 And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are.

Comments

Although it had been commanded that this part of the record of Ether should not be written before Christ's appearance in Bountiful, that had happened, and therefore Moroni could receive the commandment to write them.

The next statement appears to refer to a future event, but it is related in past tense. Moroni says that he was commanded to write, and he did. He was also commanded to seal up "the interpretation thereof" and to include the interpreters so that they could be made known. This conforms with the command to Ether to write, but that his writing would be sealed up (Ether 3:27). However, in that verse, the sealing appears to be related to the vision of the future.

A possible reading is that there were two parts of Ether's story that were sealed. The first was his experience with the premortal Yahweh. The second was the revelation of the future. Perhaps Moroni

was permitted to only write the first part. The second part remained sealed and has yet been allowed to come forth.

The part that Moroni included was to come forth to the Gentiles at a future date, and if those Gentiles were faithful to God's commandments, then they could have the same blessings as the brother of Jared.

Ether 4:8–10

8 And he that will contend against the word of the Lord, let him be accursed; and he that shall deny these things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I show no greater things, saith Jesus Christ; for I am he who speaketh.

9 And at my command the heavens are opened and are shut; and at my word the earth shall shake; and at my command the inhabitants thereof shall pass away, even so as by fire.

10 And he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples; and if it so be that I do not speak, judge ye; for ye shall know that it is I that speaketh, at the last day.

Comments

These verses continue Moroni's comments that were triggered by the text in Ether, but they are not directly related to it. The suggestion that when the Book of Mormon comes forth that there might be those who "contend against the word," is a theme that both his father and he have previously discussed. Moroni's focus is on the people who will receive this text, and this experience is the real spiritual message, it is the only place where there is a strong testimony of the Christ, in which is the message that most interested both his father, Mormon, and himself.

Thus, these statements about what will happen to the unbelievers refer to those who will not believe in Christ, not those who won't accept the book of Ether as ancient.

Ether 4:11–12

11 But he that believeth these things which I have spoken, him will I visit with the manifestations of my Spirit, and he shall know and bear record. For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good.

12 And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world.

Comments

Verse 11 is the contrast to the previous verses addressed to those who would not believe in Christ. This verse addresses “he that believeth these things which I have spoken.” Those things concern the person and power of the Messiah, the God who condescended to come to earth.

The next question is how one might know that something is true. The answer is a reformulation of “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20 KJV). This formulation is not as succinct, but it connects Good with God. “Whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me.” This *good* is not only associated with the gospel, but also with all good things humankind may do, even if they may not have the gospel to understand deeper reasons for their actions. There are so many who have lived on earth without the possibility of having known the gospel, and there are many whose *good* is, and has been, done through a spiritual influence that they perhaps cannot name.

Nevertheless, for those who have the gospel, we understand that our *good* comes because of the resurrected Christ, who declared “I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world.”

Ether 4:13–17

13 Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.

14 Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.

15 Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel.

16 And then shall my revelations which I have caused to be written by my servant John be unfolded in the eyes of all the people. Remember, when ye see these things, ye shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed.

17 Therefore, when ye shall receive this record ye may know that the work of the Father has commenced upon all the face of the land.

Comments

These five verses are written directly to the future Gentile readership of the Book of Mormon. The promise is that if they believe in the Book of Mormon, that God “will show unto [them] the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.” That statement appears to refer to the sealing of the record of the brother of Jared’s vision of the future of the world.

That assumption appears to be confirmed when verse 16 links those things to be revealed with those things “written by [Christ’s] servant John.” The coming forth of the Book of Mormon, therefore, becomes a sign that the events of the ending of days are being put into motion (verse 17).

Ether 4:18–19

18 Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name; for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned; and signs shall follow them that believe in my name.

19 And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world. And behold it is I that hath spoken it. Amen.

Comments

The closing admonition is the same as both Mormon and Moroni have previously declared: “Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto [Christ], and believe in [his] gospel, and be baptized in [his] name.” That is the gospel. That is the fundamental message of the entire Book of Mormon.

The closing *amen* finalizes what was originally only the first chapter of the book of Ether, now comprising our chapters 1–4.

Ether 5

Moroni's Word of Warning

Ether 5:1–2

1 And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God.

2 And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work;

Comments

This very short chapter was also a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. It is Moroni speaking, and it is unrelated to his task of writing the book of Ether. When he states, “Ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates,” it is very clear that Moroni is addressing Joseph Smith directly. This entire chapter is written directly to the person who will be translating the records. It is obvious that Moroni has seen him, and, as part of the vision he has had of the coming forth of the record that he and his father wrote, he saw Joseph’s role as well.

The testificatory *amen* at the end of the previous chapter was the reason the chapter had ended. What Moroni was speaking of at that time was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and he gave an admonition to those who would receive it that they should repent and be baptized (Ether 4:18–19). With that on his mind, Moroni turned his thoughts to Joseph Smith and the way in which this record might be deemed to be true. That was a topic he covered in Ether 4:11–12, and he picks it up here, but in a much more precise direction toward Joseph Smith, also setting the stage for the three and eight witnesses.

Ether 5:3–5

3 And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true.

4 And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day.

5 And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God.

Comments

Although verse 2 of this chapter allows for the eight witnesses, the instructions are specifically for the three witnesses. Those were the first to receive that privilege. The reason for choosing three is based on the Deuteronomic requirement of the number of witnesses that would establish truth. Therefore, the three are intended to represent a truthful witness.

Verse 4 indicates that they would not only be able to testify of the plates, but also of the “power of God.” Thus, it was only the three that received the visionary experience. The promise to the three is that if they are repentant and continue in faithfulness, they would “come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, [and] they shall be received into the kingdom of God.” Even though the three may have wavered in their testimony of Joseph, they never did waver in their testimony of the plates and their experience as witnesses.

Ether 5:6

6 And now, if I have no authority for these things, judge ye; for ye shall know that I have authority when ye shall see me, and we shall stand before God at the last day. Amen.

Comments

Moroni closes this chapter with *amen*, because he is testifying to the truth of what he has just declared. Interestingly, he also states, in a negatively introduced statement, that he has authority from God “for these things” of which he declared. Humankind might wonder about his authority, but when we present ourselves before God in our judgement, we will know for certain that he did have that authority.

Ether 6

Crossing the Waters

Ether 6:1–3

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to give the record of Jared and his brother.

2 For it came to pass after the Lord had prepared the stones which the brother of Jared had carried up into the mount, the brother of Jared came down out of the mount, and he did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels.

3 And thus the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness.

Comments

Moroni understood that he had inserted himself and his interests into the story of the brother of Jared, and therefore, specifically marks the return to the text in verse 1. The quick conclusion to the story is that the brother of Jared descended the mountain with the stones that Yahweh had touched. They now provided light. While Moroni explains that “the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children,” we should read that statement as having dual intent. The first intent is just as he said. It was an event. The stones provided the light that they needed. However, it was also important that Yahweh had touched them, and the light of the world gave part of that light to the stones. In Ether 4:12, Yahweh had explained: “Behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world.” That is the unstated second meaning of verse 3.

Ether 6:4

4 And it came to pass that when they had prepared all manner of food, that thereby they might subsist upon the water, and also food for their flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them—and it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God.

Comments

There are old Jewish legends speaking of a stone giving light to Noah's ark. This verse appears to similarly tap into the story of Noah. There is all manner of "flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them." From a historical point of view, they certainly had to take with them food and water, and perhaps that was a reason to take live animals as a way to continually provide food during the long sea journey. However, the wording appears to imitate the ark story. Since we know from both Mosiah₂ and Moroni that the early part of the record of Ether contained the old creation stories, it is probable that it also included the story of Noah, and this part would be an intentional echo that would tie this journey across the waters to Noah's journey. Both preserved a people upon the waters.

Ether 6:5–8

5 And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind.

6 And it came to pass that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind.

7 And it came to pass that when they were buried in the deep there was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight like unto the ark of Noah; therefore when they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters.

8 And it came to pass that the wind did never cease to blow towards the promised land while they were upon the waters; and thus they were driven forth before the wind.

Comments

The descriptions of the "furious wind" not only provide an explanation of how the vessels traveled, it underscores the divine assistance of the journey. Yahweh is the God of the earth and the elements, and particularly the seas. God had said as much in Ether 2:24: "for the winds have gone forth out of my mouth."

This is an ancient connection. Robert Alter's translation of Genesis 1:1 says, "When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said . . ." The power of the wind was used as a metaphor for God's Spirit, a practice that continued in the New Testament. Therefore, when there is a wind propelling the vessels, we are to understand that it was God who drove them to their promised land.

Ether 6:9–10

9 And they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord.

10 And thus they were driven forth; and no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them; and they did have light continually, whether it was above the water or under the water.

Comments

These two verses reinforce the concept that it was God who moved and protected them. The people of Jared recognize God's hand, and therefore sing his praises. Not only were they driven by the wind (indicating God's spirit moving them), but they were not affected by any monster of the sea. Yahweh was the God who, in the old stories, had defeated the water monster Rahab. They were physically protected, and they understood that they owed it to their God.

Arrival in the Land of Promise

Ether 6:11–13

11 And thus they were driven forth, three hundred and forty and four days upon the water.

12 And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them.

13 And it came to pass that they went forth upon the face of the land, and began to till the earth.

Comments

Note the similarities between this terse explanation of crossing the waters and landing with the similar event that preceded the establishment of the Nephite nation:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land. And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land. And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance (1 Nephi 18:22–24).

In both cases, there is very little mentioned about the actual journey, and the indication of the success of the journey is that both peoples began to till the earth. In both cases, the intent is to indicate that they

arrived safely, and that their promised land would supply their needs, represented by being able to start a new civilization by planting both food, and themselves, in the land.

Ether 6:14–18

14 And Jared had four sons; and they were called Jacom, and Gilgah, and Mahah, and Orihah.

15 And the brother of Jared also begat sons and daughters.

16 And the friends of Jared and his brother were in number about twenty and two souls; and they also begat sons and daughters before they came to the promised land; and therefore they began to be many.

17 And they were taught to walk humbly before the Lord; and they were also taught from on high.

18 And it came to pass that they began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply and to till the earth; and they did wax strong in the land.

Comments

The origin story of the Jaredites continues with further evidence that they prospered in their new land. They multiplied. They “were taught to walk humbly before the Lord,” which allowed them to fulfill their part of the covenant of the land. Therefore, they prospered and “they began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply and to till the earth.”

Choosing a King

Ether 6:19–21

19 And the brother of Jared began to be old, and saw that he must soon go down to the grave; wherefore he said unto Jared: Let us gather together our people that we may number them, that we may know of them what they will desire of us before we go down to our graves.

20 And accordingly the people were gathered together. Now the number of the sons and the daughters of the brother of Jared were twenty and two souls; and the number of sons and daughters of Jared were twelve, he having four sons.

21 And it came to pass that they did number their people; and after that they had numbered them, they did desire of them the things which they would that they should do before they went down to their graves.

Comments

The genesis story of the Jaredite people arrives at the important part of the story. Jared “began to be old,” a phrase we see in the Book of Mormon, which indicates that the patriarch is on his deathbed. This

is the story of the transition from a single family (and friends) to larger divisions that would still trace their origin back to Jared. It is a parallel to the delineation of the tribal affiliations which we saw as Lehi¹ gathered his family and blessed them according to what became a standard tribal identification system.

Ether 6:22–24

22 And it came to pass that the people desired of them that they should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them.

23 And now behold, this was grievous unto them. And the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.

24 But Jared said unto his brother: Suffer them that they may have a king. And therefore he said unto them: Choose ye out from among our sons a king, even whom ye will.

Comments

Either the record of Jared echoed a similar hesitation for a king like unto what Nephi¹ had, or we have a translation colored by Nephite history. Both are possible. The people desire a king, and the brother of Jared cautions against it.

Jared, who has a ruler over him, tells his brother: “Suffer them that they may have a king.” It was understood that the king would be declared from Jared’s lineage.

Reigns and Rebellions of Orihah, Kib, and Corihor

Ether 6:25–30

25 And it came to pass that they chose even the firstborn of the brother of Jared; and his name was Pagag. And it came to pass that he refused and would not be their king. And the people would that his father should constrain him, but his father would not; and he commanded them that they should constrain no man to be their king.

26 And it came to pass that they chose all the brothers of Pagag, and they would not.

27 And it came to pass that neither would the sons of Jared, even all save it were one; and Orihah was anointed to be king over the people.

28 And he began to reign, and the people began to prosper; and they became exceedingly rich.

29 And it came to pass that Jared died, and his brother also.

30 And it came to pass that Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers.

Comments

The brother of Jared's hesitation to have a king may have influenced most of Jared's sons to refuse the position of becoming king. While this event has similarities to the episode of the sons of Mosiah² also declining to become king, there is no implication in this record that the reason was that they had a higher purpose in mind. In this case, we are simply left to guess why they declined.

Orihah accepts. Even though he was not the firstborn, he accepted the position. It was not a question of righteousness, however, for Orihah "did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father." The Jaredite nation, therefore, begins with a righteous king.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 7

Ether 7:1–4

1 And it came to pass that Orihah did execute judgment upon the land in righteousness all his days, whose days were exceedingly many.

2 And he begat sons and daughters; yea, he begat thirty and one, among whom were twenty and three sons.

3 And it came to pass that he also begat Kib in his old age. And it came to pass that Kib reigned in his stead; and Kib begat Corihor.

4 And when Corihor was thirty and two years old he rebelled against his father, and went over and dwelt in the land of Nehor; and he begat sons and daughters, and they became exceedingly fair; wherefore Corihor drew away many people after him.

Comments

After the transcendent experience the brother of Jared had with his God, we return to the record of Ether and find that it is distinctly different from the kind of record we have received through Mormon. Moroni has the same task as did Mormon, to take an original document, and turn it into an important historically based moral instruction. After the experience with God and the brother of Jared, the record turns far from spiritually uplifting content, and rather simply and rapidly begins to recount history.

We must remember that Mormon was working with a record of history that would have had the same kinds of events, but he also had both the original with all its detail, and records of other important people, from whom he took most of the important religious content. The record of Ether was already compiled by Ether from other records, and Moroni had only that one document to work from. Moroni gives us history and will interject lessons as he can.

The rapid-fire history has the Jaredites begin well with Jared's son, Orihah, who "did execute judgment upon the land in righteousness." Although the text does not specifically mention multiple wives, we might hope that a single wife had not given birth to thirty-one children.

By the time of Orihor's grandson, Corihor, things were starting to turn bad, and Corihor "rebelled against his father" and left to found a different city and people.

An interesting phrase is found in verse 4: “and they became exceedingly fair; wherefore Corihor drew away many people after him.” Although the language of becoming *fair* is the same as what we see in Nephite writings, there is no indication that there was any specific cursing involved. Thus, it is unlikely that this *fair* meant anything other than what we might call *blessed*. This continues to suggest that the word must be seen as metaphorical in both the Nephite texts and the Jaredite record.

Ether 7:5–7

5 And when he had gathered together an army he came up unto the land of Moron where the king dwelt, and took him captive, which brought to pass the saying of the brother of Jared that they would be brought into captivity.

6 Now the land of Moron, where the king dwelt, was near the land which is called Desolation by the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that Kib dwelt in captivity, and his people under Corihor his son, until he became exceedingly old; nevertheless Kib begat Shule in his old age, while he was yet in captivity.

Comments

As a distant parallel to the Nephite/Lamanite division, Corihor not only leaves his father’s lands and founds a new people, but he comes against his father in war. Unlike the Nephite stories where they are victorious until the end, the Jaredites will have multiple times where the rulership of the lands will change.

We are also introduced to a new concept in the Book of Mormon, one that does not appear anywhere except the Jaredite record. We have a captive king who is kept alive but imprisoned. The reason is not given. Some ancient societies believed that the person of the king was sacred, and should not be harmed, even if defeated. That could be the case. It certainly was not the case among the Nephites, as the Gadiantons murdered rulers in order to advance their cause.

In Kib’s old age, he begat Shule. Shule, therefore, is Corihor’s younger brother. When we return to the genealogy in Ether 1:31–32, that genealogy goes directly from Kib to Shule. Corihor is not mentioned.

Days of Shule

Ether 7:8–10

8 And it came to pass that Shule was angry with his brother; and Shule waxed strong, and became mighty as to the strength of a man; and he was also mighty in judgment.

9 Wherefore, he came to the hill Ephraim, and he did molten out of the hill, and made swords out of steel for those whom he had drawn away with him; and after he had armed them with swords he returned

to the city Nehor, and gave battle unto his brother Corihor, by which means he obtained the kingdom and restored it unto his father Kib.

10 And now because of the thing which Shule had done, his father bestowed upon him the kingdom; therefore he began to reign in the stead of his father.

Comments

Even though Kib was effectively in prison, that did not mean that he did not have access to his wife (or wives, more likely). Thus, in his old age he has another son. Importantly, that son is not restricted to a prison, but is free to raise and arm a rebellion that successfully defeats his older brother Corihor. This releases Kib, but Kib is not restored to kingship. That passes directly to Shule.

Verse 9 speaks of creating “swords out of steel.” There is no known metal forging that early in the New World. This may be a translation issue. The brother of Jared had “molten” stones, and perhaps that term is used for stones here. If so, it would have been obsidian which was the standard means of providing a cutting blade in Central America, being much sharper than knapped stone. Some obsidian can be knapped to be as sharp as a surgical scalpel.

Ether 7:11–17

11 And it came to pass that he did execute judgment in righteousness; and he did spread his kingdom upon all the face of the land, for the people had become exceedingly numerous.

12 And it came to pass that Shule also begat many sons and daughters.

13 And Corihor repented of the many evils which he had done; wherefore Shule gave him power in his kingdom.

14 And it came to pass that Corihor had many sons and daughters. And among the sons of Corihor there was one whose name was Noah.

15 And it came to pass that Noah rebelled against Shule, the king, and also his father Corihor, and drew away Cohor his brother, and also all his brethren and many of the people.

16 And he gave battle unto Shule, the king, in which he did obtain the land of their first inheritance; and he became a king over that part of the land.

17 And it came to pass that he gave battle again unto Shule, the king; and he took Shule, the king, and carried him away captive into Moron.

Comments

Jaredite intrigue continues. With Shule as the king, Corihor comes into line. However, Corihor’s son rebels against his uncle, and the process recurs. Noah raises an army and dethrones Shule, taking Shule captive.

Although Moroni does not point it out, it is possible that this political instability is one of the reasons that Mormon saw connections between the Jaredites and the Gadiantons who were also bent on political disruption.

Ether 7:18–20

18 And it came to pass as he was about to put him to death, the sons of Shule crept into the house of Noah by night and slew him, and broke down the door of the prison and brought out their father, and placed him upon his throne in his own kingdom.

19 Wherefore, the son of Noah did build up his kingdom in his stead; nevertheless they did not gain power any more over Shule the king, and the people who were under the reign of Shule the king did prosper exceedingly and wax great.

20 And the country was divided; and there were two kingdoms, the kingdom of Shule, and the kingdom of Cohor, the son of Noah.

Comments

Once again there is a division in the land. This time there are very clearly two separate nations. Conflict is the order of the day. The major conflicts are arising within ruling families, with sons avenging fathers, or rescuing fathers, or taking over for their fathers. As there are more Jaredites, there is more conflict.

Ether 7:21–22

21 And Cohor, the son of Noah, caused that his people should give battle unto Shule, in which Shule did beat them and did slay Cohor.

22 And now Cohor had a son who was called Nimrod; and Nimrod gave up the kingdom of Cohor unto Shule, and he did gain favor in the eyes of Shule; wherefore Shule did bestow great favors upon him, and he did do in the kingdom of Shule according to his desires.

Comments

Again, war between the two separated peoples is waged. This time Shule's people come out on top. They have a combined kingdom, for a while. Shule is considered to be a king who was faithful to God, but the next verses show that there were large divisions among the people. They had not only had political differences, but they had already managed to have many who left behind the religion of Jared and his brother.

Ether 7:23–27

23 And also in the reign of Shule there came prophets among the people, who were sent from the Lord, prophesying that the wickedness and idolatry of the people was bringing a curse upon the land, and they should be destroyed if they did not repent.

24 And it came to pass that the people did revile against the prophets, and did mock them. And it came to pass that king Shule did execute judgment against all those who did revile against the prophets.

25 And he did execute a law throughout all the land, which gave power unto the prophets that they should go whithersoever they would; and by this cause the people were brought unto repentance.

26 And because the people did repent of their iniquities and idolatries the Lord did spare them, and they began to prosper again in the land. And it came to pass that Shule begat sons and daughters in his old age.

27 And there were no more wars in the days of Shule; and he remembered the great things that the Lord had done for his fathers in bringing them across the great deep into the promised land; wherefore he did execute judgment in righteousness all his days.

Comments

We begin to learn that there was religious apostasy among the people as well as political differences. We do not learn where those religious differences came from, but if we assume that the Jaredites arrived in the New World along the Gulf Coast of Mexico (which is a plausible assumption), they would have discovered people already there, just as the later people of Lehi must have discovered when they landed in a different location, on a different coast. Those people were forming a culture that is now known as Olmec, which is a name given to a general set of artistic and other physical remains that have similarities in region and time. The religion of the people we call Olmec would have been different from that of the Jaredites. It is quite likely that the early religious difficulties arose from the conflicts with the previously dominant religion of the region.

The situation is widespread enough that the people reject the prophets, and King Shule had to step in to make peace. He did, and kept peace through the remainder of his days.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 8

Reigns of Omer and Jared

Ether 8:1–5

1 And it came to pass that he begat Omer, and Omer reigned in his stead. And Omer begat Jared; and Jared begat sons and daughters.

2 And Jared rebelled against his father, and came and dwelt in the land of Heth. And it came to pass that he did flatter many people, because of his cunning words, until he had gained the half of the kingdom.

3 And when he had gained the half of the kingdom he gave battle unto his father, and he did carry away his father into captivity, and did make him serve in captivity;

4 And now, in the days of the reign of Omer he was in captivity the half of his days. And it came to pass that he begat sons and daughters, among whom were Esrom and Coriantumr;

5 And they were exceedingly angry because of the doings of Jared their brother, insomuch that they did raise an army and gave battle unto Jared. And it came to pass that they did give battle unto him by night.

Comments

The pattern of instability occurs again, with the same overall story being repeated. Omer has a son, Jared, who rebels against him and succeeds in obtaining half of the kingdom, and then uses that power base to wage war against his father. Jared is successful, but Jared is never named in the Ether chapter 1 genealogy. While he was a son and became king, he was not a king by normal accession, and apparently that was the only kind of accession recognized in the official king list.

As with Kib, Omer is in captivity but still able to have children. The pattern repeats and the displaced children, Esrom and Coriantumr, rebel.

Plotting against the King

Ether 8:6–12

6 And it came to pass that when they had slain the army of Jared they were about to slay him also; and he pled with them that they would not slay him, and he would give up the kingdom unto his father. And it came to pass that they did grant unto him his life.

7 And now Jared became exceedingly sorrowful because of the loss of the kingdom, for he had set his heart upon the kingdom and upon the glory of the world.

8 Now the daughter of Jared being exceedingly expert, and seeing the sorrows of her father, thought to devise a plan whereby she could redeem the kingdom unto her father.

9 Now the daughter of Jared was exceedingly fair. And it came to pass that she did talk with her father, and said unto him: Whereby hath my father so much sorrow? Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

10 And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

11 And now Omer was a friend to Akish; wherefore, when Jared had sent for Akish, the daughter of Jared danced before him that she pleased him, insomuch that he desired her to wife. And it came to pass that he said unto Jared: Give her unto me to wife.

12 And Jared said unto him: I will give her unto you, if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

Comments

These verses easily conjure up the biblical passages about Salome dancing to entice a man to bring another man's head to her father. There are clearly superficial similarities, but Dr. Nicholas Frederick (BYU Professor of Ancient Scripture) took a careful look at the two stories and found that the differences outweigh the similarities. An important difference is the nature of the role that the daughter of Jared plays compared to that of Salome. Salome acts at her mother's behest. The daughter of Jared is the instigator in Ether.

The reasons for the inclusion of the stories also differ. In the New Testament, Salome explains the death of John the Baptist. In Ether, the daughter of Jared is the initiator of secret oaths and combinations. Those are two different concepts, and secret combinations are, for Mormon and Moroni, the most important message given in the book of Ether.

Ether 8:13–15

13 And it came to pass that Akish gathered in unto the house of Jared all his kinsfolk, and said unto them: Will ye swear unto me that ye will be faithful unto me in the thing which I shall desire of you?

14 And it came to pass that they all swore unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life.

15 And it came to pass that thus they did agree with Akish. And Akish did administer unto them the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning.

Comments

Because the plates of Ether were compiled by a single person, Ether, we cannot tell whether it was Ether or Moroni (or even Mosiah₂ as the original translator) who supplied the general narrative. However, it is highly likely that at least verse 15 comes from Moroni. This part of the story describes the beginning of the secret combinations that Mormon had declared were so dangerous that they would see the end of the Nephites. The key phrase is that these were oaths “given by them of old . . . which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning.”

Compare that phrase to Helaman 6:29: “Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.” While Mormon credits Satan, rather than Cain, both Mormon and Moroni see these oaths as being ancient, and ultimately stemming from Satan (the one who enticed Cain to murder for gain).

Ether 8:16–19

16 And they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to plunder, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms.

17 And it was the daughter of Jared who put it into his heart to search up these things of old; and Jared put it into the heart of Akish; wherefore, Akish administered it unto his kindred and friends, leading them away by fair promises to do whatsoever thing he desired.

18 And it came to pass that they formed a secret combination, even as they of old; which combination is most abominable and wicked above all, in the sight of God;

19 For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man.

Comments

This is the reason that Moroni included this story. Perhaps there were so few stories that he included every story that Ether had recorded, but the meaning of this story assured that it would be included. This

is the story that caused Mormon to desire that the Jaredite story be ultimately told. This is the story that Mormon did not want told widely so that the secret combinations would not be continued.

To make sure that we get the message, Moroni warns us that “the Lord worketh not in secret combinations.” This is not of God, but of the Adversary.

Rise of Secret Combinations, Moroni’s Warning

Ether 8:20–22

20 And now I, Moroni, do not write the manner of their oaths and combinations, for it hath been made known unto me that they are had among all people, and they are had among the Lamanites.

21 And they have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.

22 And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not.

Comments

This story has a moral that is so important that Moroni clarifies it by making it explicit. He inserts his own words into the text. Why is the story so important? In verse 21, he tells us that their oaths and combinations “have caused the destruction of his people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.”

Moroni therefore reasonably cautions his future readers to make sure that they do not fall to the same oaths and combinations. Ultimately, nations who embrace those elements self-destruct, “they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground.”

Ether 8:23–26

23 Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be.

24 Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up.

25 For it cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies; even that same liar who beguiled our first parents, yea, even that same liar who hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning; who hath hardened the hearts of men that they have murdered the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out from the beginning.

26 Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.

Comments

Moroni continues his warning to his future readers against adopting these secret combinations. Although this story had been withheld for a long time so that the people would not see and adopt them, Moroni writes this much by command. It is a command to write so “that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men.”

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 9

Secret Combinations Begin Destruction

Ether 9:1–2

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed with my record. Therefore, behold, it came to pass that because of the secret combinations of Akish and his friends, behold, they did overthrow the kingdom of Omer.

2 Nevertheless, the Lord was merciful unto Omer, and also to his sons and to his daughters who did not seek his destruction.

Comments

In Ether 2:13, Moroni says: “And now I proceed with my record.” That statement followed several verses that he had interjected into the text to underscore something he wanted his readership to understand. We see it again in verse 1 of this chapter, and for the same reason. Moroni will repeat it in Ether 13:1.

Mormon did the same thing when he returned to a story that he had diverged from; it was not always after an inserted moral lesson, but after a different story had been told. Mormon’s language was “I [or we] return to the account” (see Alma 22:1, 22:35; Helaman 3:17).

We are now returned to the story of the secret combination to overthrow Omer. It was successful.

Ether 9:3–6

3 And the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family, and traveled many days, and came over and passed by the hill of Shim, and came over by the place where the Nephites were destroyed, and from thence eastward, and came to a place which was called Ablom, by the seashore, and there he pitched his tent, and also his sons and his daughters, and all his household, save it were Jared and his family.

4 And it came to pass that Jared was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness; and he gave unto Akish his daughter to wife.

5 And it came to pass that Akish sought the life of his father-in-law; and he applied unto those whom he had sworn by the oath of the ancients, and they obtained the head of his father-in-law, as he sat upon his throne, giving audience to his people.

6 For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people; therefore Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead.

Comments

There is a small wrinkle in the story of Omer's overthrow. He is not kept captive. He and his family (save Jared, who had rebelled) traveled "many days, and came over and passed by the hill of Shim, and came over by the place where the Nephites were destroyed." Having also passed Cumorah, they stop at Ablom, on the seashore. Moroni sees Omer as a righteous king fleeing along the same basic path as did the later Nephites.

The rest of the story continues to describe the evils of secret combinations. Secret combinations placed Jared on the throne, but Akish (the one who had made the oaths) was not satisfied. He did what later Gadianton secret combinations would do. He murdered Jared "as he sat upon his throne."

Moroni lectured on the evils of secret societies at the end of chapter 8, and now he reiterates those evils. "So great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people."

Ether 9:7–9

7 And it came to pass that Akish began to be jealous of his son, therefore he shut him up in prison, and kept him upon little or no food until he had suffered death.

8 And now the brother of him that suffered death, (and his name was Nimrah) was angry with his father because of that which his father had done unto his brother.

9 And it came to pass that Nimrah gathered together a small number of men, and fled out of the land, and came over and dwelt with Omer.

Comments

Jaredite patterns reassert themselves. Akish kills one son, and therefore angers another. Once again, political unrest will occur as a son turns against his father. That this son, Nimrah, was considered righteous is foreshadowed by having him flee to join with Omer, who was a righteous king before he was overthrown.

Ether 9:10–11

10 And it came to pass that Akish begat other sons, and they won the hearts of the people, notwithstanding they had sworn unto him to do all manner of iniquity according to that which he desired.

11 Now the people of Akish were desirous for gain, even as Akish was desirous for power; wherefore, the sons of Akish did offer them money, by which means they drew away the more part of the people after them.

Comments

By this point in the Book of Mormon, readers understand that when a people begin to desire gain and power that they are ripe for a fall. Mormon's text elaborates that story over and over. We see it here in the briefest of statements, and with none of the textual hints that Mormon used to tell us that the fall was coming again. There is no "costly apparel" here. There is no neglect of the poor. We just see them desirous for gain and power. Nevertheless, the pattern will remain the same. They are ripe for destruction.

Omer's Lineage Restored to Power

Ether 9:12–14

12 And there began to be a war between the sons of Akish and Akish, which lasted for the space of many years, yea, unto the destruction of nearly all the people of the kingdom, yea, even all, save it were thirty souls, and they who fled with the house of Omer.

13 Wherefore, Omer was restored again to the land of his inheritance.

14 And it came to pass that Omer began to be old; nevertheless, in his old age he begat Emer; and he anointed Emer to be king to reign in his stead.

Comments

In the now-common pattern, Akish's sons rebel against him and he loses the kingdom. This time, however, there is so much destruction that Akish's sons do not rule, but the kingdom is restored to Omer. Omer "began to be old." As with the typical pattern, after that statement, we have the anointing of a new king: Emer. Emer appears in the king list in Ether 1, but Jared and Akish do not, even though both ruled.

Ether 9:15

15 And after that he had anointed Emer to be king he saw peace in the land for the space of two years, and he died, having seen exceedingly many days, which were full of sorrow. And it came to pass that Emer did reign in his stead, and did fill the steps of his father.

Comments

Emer's father, Omer, was considered a righteous king. Emer is considered righteous. The promise of the land was made to the founding father, Jared, just as it was later to Lehi. The people would prosper on principles of righteousness. Emer is righteous. His people prosper as the Lord took "the curse from off the land."

Ether 9:16–20

16 And the Lord began again to take the curse from off the land, and the house of Emer did prosper exceedingly under the reign of Emer; and in the space of sixty and two years they had become exceedingly strong, insomuch that they became exceedingly rich—

17 Having all manner of fruit, and of grain, and of silks, and of fine linen, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things;

18 And also all manner of cattle, of oxen, and cows, and of sheep, and of swine, and of goats, and also many other kinds of animals which were useful for the food of man.

19 And they also had horses, and asses, and there were elephants and cureloms and cumoms; all of which were useful unto man, and more especially the elephants and cureloms and cumoms.

20 And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands; and he commanded that whoso should possess the land should possess it unto the Lord, or they should be destroyed when they were ripened in iniquity; for upon such, saith the Lord: I will pour out the fulness of my wrath.

Comments

Verse 16 begins the description of what it meant for a Jaredite to “become exceedingly rich.” Verse 20 confirms that the reason is that they were living according to the commandments, and therefore Yahweh kept his part of the covenant and blessed them in the land.

Most of the definition of wealth concerns things that are required for a basic living. There was food, both of grains and of kept animals, “which were useful for the food of man.” There are also things above simple subsistence. They do have silks, linen, gold, silver, and other precious things.

Interestingly, they have animals called cureloms and cumoms. There is no indication what those animals might have been, save that they were apparently particularly useful. It is also not known why these animal names were transliterated, while the others were translated. It might be related to the fact that the original names might have been known in the Jaredite language, but not in the Nephite language into which Mosiah₂ translated.

Rebellion and Conflict Return

Ether 9:21–25

21 And Emer did execute judgment in righteousness all his days, and he begat many sons and daughters; and he begat Coriantum, and he anointed Coriantum to reign in his stead.

22 And after he had anointed Coriantum to reign in his stead he lived four years, and he saw peace in the land; yea, and he even saw the Son of Righteousness, and did rejoice and glory in his day; and he died in peace.

23 And it came to pass that Coriantum did walk in the steps of his father, and did build many mighty cities, and did administer that which was good unto his people in all his days. And it came to pass that he had no children even until he was exceedingly old.

24 And it came to pass that his wife died, being an hundred and two years old. And it came to pass that Coriantum took to wife, in his old age, a young maid, and begat sons and daughters; wherefore he lived until he was an hundred and forty and two years old.

25 And it came to pass that he begat Com, and Com reigned in his stead; and he reigned forty and nine years, and he begat Heth; and he also begat other sons and daughters.

Comments

The record returns to the sparse accounting for the generations. Emer was righteous, and begat Coriantum, who ruled (and who appears in the king list in Ether 1).

All continues to be good in Coriantum's reign, and he begets Com, and Com begets Heth. There is apparently no rebellion, and therefore either the original text, or Moroni, has little to say about those years. It is likely that the original text was this sparse. Moroni fills out the information with moralistic insertions, but not elaborations of history. He didn't have the information to do so.

The phrase in verse 22, "Son of Righteousness," helps us determine that this is Moroni writing. He would have read his father's work, and is referencing 3 Nephi 25:2, which is quoting Malachi. Both here and in 3 Nephi 25:2, the scribe wrote the homophone *son*, instead of *sun*, as it appears in Malachi.

The ages listed for Coriantumr and his first wife are difficult to reconcile with a reasonable life span in antiquity. It does appear that many of those listed would have lived to a reasonably old age, but a hundred and forty-two is beyond a reasonable old age. This suggests that there is some insertion of mythical numbers into the record that Ether used. Given the time when he lived, an exaggeration in the life of what was considered to be a righteous king would not have been surprising.

Ether 9:26–29

26 And the people had spread again over all the face of the land, and there began again to be an exceedingly great wickedness upon the face of the land, and Heth began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father.

27 And it came to pass that he did dethrone his father, for he slew him with his own sword; and he did reign in his stead.

28 And there came prophets in the land again, crying repentance unto them—that they must prepare the way of the Lord or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent.

29 But the people believed not the words of the prophets, but they cast them out; and some of them they cast into pits and left them to perish. And it came to pass that they did all these things according to the commandment of the king, Heth.

Comments

Even though there is a consistent pattern of sons rebelling against fathers, it was not the absolute pattern. In this case, Heth received the throne as his right, but as with the later king Noah of the Zeniffites, he turned from God.

In such times, God is not silent, but sends warnings through his prophets. In this time, however, the prophets are rejected and they are cast out. As with the Nephites, this turn to wickedness after righteous blessings will lead to a fall.

The Great Dearth

Ether 9:30–31

30 And it came to pass that there began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth.
31 And there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people. And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents, towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites Zarahemla.

Comments

A drought occurs. There is no indication that this drought came because a prophet sealed up the heavens, as Nephi² later did in Nephite history. Nevertheless, the drought comes and disrupts life. One of the interesting aspects is that poisonous serpents appear. If the Book of Mormon took place in Central America, there are a number of poisonous serpents there. In the conditions of a drought, the serpents also need water, and therefore might come closer to human habitation looking for it. Thus, they are in greater contact, and have greater opportunity to endanger the human population.

Ether 9:32–35

32 And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward.

33 And it came to pass that the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous serpents.

34 And it came to pass that the people did follow the course of the beasts, and did devour the carcasses of them which fell by the way, until they had devoured them all. Now when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord.

35 And it came to pass that when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them from famine.

Comments

The effect of the drought is that there is some kind of migration to the south. In the Mesoamerican region, there is a movement of Zoquean speakers southward. There is next to nothing known of the reasons for that migration, but those movements southward are the plausible explanation for why the later Mulekites may have also followed those routes southward to arrive in Zarahemla after landing on a coast. As with the drought in Nephi₂'s time, the people eventually turn to God, and God restores the rains.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 10

Rebuilding the Kingdom

Ether 10:1–3

1 And it came to pass that Shez, who was a descendant of Heth—for Heth had perished by the famine, and all his household save it were Shez—wherefore, Shez began to build up again a broken people.

2 And it came to pass that Shez did remember the destruction of his fathers, and he did build up a righteous kingdom; for he remembered what the Lord had done in bringing Jared and his brother across the deep; and he did walk in the ways of the Lord; and he begat sons and daughters.

3 And his eldest son, whose name was Shez, did rebel against him; nevertheless, Shez was smitten by the hand of a robber, because of his exceeding riches, which brought peace again unto his father.

Comments

The story of the Jaredites is a story of a specific lineage of rulers. Those who rule cities or areas who are not part of that direct line do not show up on the king list in Ether 1, even though in the text of Ether 9–10, that provides the chronological history of those kings, other names are mentioned.

The context for Shez is that he is the son of Heth (according to the king list), but here, in verse 1, he is listed only as “a descendant of Heth”). Heth was an unrighteous king, and a great drought occurred during his reign, a drought that was severe enough that it resulted in his death. Shez takes up the throne, and “did build up a righteous kingdom.”

Nevertheless, in the common Jaredite pattern, his oldest son (also named Shez) rebels against him. Lest we think that all these stories are only type scenes, Shez, the son, doesn’t gain victory and isn’t even defeated in battle. He “was smitten by the hand of a robber.” Mormon’s use of the term “robber” would have suggested Gadianton robbers, but while we see secret combinations in Ether, we do not see Gadiantons. Thus, “robber” really could simply be a robber. However, the possibility that it relates to a secret combination cannot be dismissed, as that is the leitmotif of the Jaredite record. When we see later, in verse 33: “And in the days of Com there began to be robbers in the land; and they adopted the old plans”, it increases the plausibility that the robber in verse 3 was connected to a secret combination. It is an unanswerable question whether “robber” in the book of Ether influenced Mormon’s designation of Gadianton robbers, or if Mormon’s use influenced the way Moroni used the term.

Ether 10:4–6

4 And it came to pass that his father did build up many cities upon the face of the land, and the people began again to spread over all the face of the land. And Shez did live to an exceedingly old age; and he begat Riplakish. And he died, and Riplakish reigned in his stead.

5 And it came to pass that Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men's shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings.

6 And he did erect him an exceedingly beautiful throne; and he did build many prisons, and whoso would not be subject unto taxes he did cast into prison; and whoso was not able to pay taxes he did cast into prison; and he did cause that they should labor continually for their support; and whoso refused to labor he did cause to be put to death.

Comments

Perhaps the most important part of these three verses is the note that Shez lived to an extremely old age, and begat Riplakish. This continues to confirm that the Jaredites practiced ultimogeniture, or the inheritance of the last-born son, rather than the first. The first son was Shez, and the Comments about Shez the son are the reason that verse 4 begins with “his father,” referring to Shez, father of Shez, and father of Riplakish.

Riplakish is the epitome of a bad king. It wasn't just that he “did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord,” but he was unfair to his people, laying upon them heavy taxes and conscripting labor for his own benefit.

Rebellions and Uprisings

Ether 10:7–8

7 Wherefore he did obtain all his fine work, yea, even his fine gold he did cause to be refined in prison; and all manner of fine workmanship he did cause to be wrought in prison. And it came to pass that he did afflict the people with his whoredoms and abominations.

8 And when he had reigned for the space of forty and two years the people did rise up in rebellion against him; and there began to be war again in the land, insomuch that Riplakish was killed, and his descendants were driven out of the land.

Comments

Once again, there is a rebellion against the king. In this case, however, it was not a son, but the people themselves who rose against Riplakish and removed him from office. Significantly, all his kin were driven out of the land. Riplakish had been so bad that the people did not want any of his children to be rulers.

Ether 10:9–10

9 And it came to pass after the space of many years, Morianton, (he being a descendant of Riplakish) gathered together an army of outcasts, and went forth and gave battle unto the people; and he gained power over many cities; and the war became exceedingly sore, and did last for the space of many years; and he did gain power over all the land, and did establish himself king over all the land.

10 And after that he had established himself king he did ease the burden of the people, by which he did gain favor in the eyes of the people, and they did anoint him to be their king.

Comments

Where the king list in Ether 1 showed Shez as a son of Heth, but the detailed record only mentioned him as a descendant, both the king list and this more detailed record agree that Morianton was a descendant of Riplakish. It is not clear if he was a son, but he was certainly related to those who had been driven out of the land when Riplakish was expelled. Morianton gathers “an army of outcasts,” which would suggest that the core group was made up of those who had been expelled. It is unlikely that they could have been an army in and of themselves, but they were likely the leaders of this new group which begins to take over cities, and eventually they anoint a king over the city from which they had been expelled.

Morianton reverses the onerous practices of Riplakish, with the result that “he did gain favor in the eyes of the people, and they did anoint him to be their king.” This is the only suggestion that there might have been some principle such as the voice of the people that we see in later Nephite politics, where the kings ruled by the voice of the people.

Ether 10:11–13

11 And he did do justice unto the people, but not unto himself because of his many whoredoms; wherefore he was cut off from the presence of the Lord.

12 And it came to pass that Morianton built up many cities, and the people became exceedingly rich under his reign, both in buildings, and in gold and silver, and in raising grain, and in flocks, and herds, and such things which had been restored unto them.

13 And Morianton did live to an exceedingly great age, and then he begat Kim; and Kim did reign in the stead of his father; and he did reign eight years, and his father died. And it came to pass that Kim did not reign in righteousness, wherefore he was not favored of the Lord.

Comments

Morianton “did do justice unto the people,” but he, himself, was not righteous. The general peace allowed for the creation of new cities and of prosperity, but when he begets a son in his “exceedingly great age,” that son, Kim, “did not reign in righteousness.” That clearly foreshadows another downturn in Jaredite society.

Ether 10:14–16

14 And his brother did rise up in rebellion against him, by which he did bring him into captivity; and he did remain in captivity all his days; and he begat sons and daughters in captivity, and in his old age he begat Levi; and he died.

15 And it came to pass that Levi did serve in captivity after the death of his father, for the space of forty and two years. And he did make war against the king of the land, by which he did obtain unto himself the kingdom.

16 And after he had obtained unto himself the kingdom he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; and the people did prosper in the land; and he did live to a good old age, and begat sons and daughters; and he also begat Corom, whom he anointed king in his stead.

Comments

This time the rebellion becomes a brother rising against a brother, rather than a son against his father. The father had led a time of basic prosperity, and perhaps that allowed all his sons to bask in the benefits of that prosperity. The change in rulership to the last-born son, one born in Morianton's exceedingly great age, may have been the trigger for one of the brothers to rise up.

Even though the brother becomes king, he is not the expected king following the traditional pattern. Not only isn't he named in the king list, he isn't even named in the text of this chapter (nor of chapter 9), which lays out the chronological history of the kingdom. Similar to other cases, the previous king is not killed, but kept in a type of captivity which still allowed him to have children. One of those, Levi, serves the function of restoring the kingdom. It is Levi who next becomes the king. He begets Corom.

A Period of Righteousness and Prosperity

Ether 10:17–19

17 And it came to pass that Corom did that which was good in the sight of the Lord all his days; and he begat many sons and daughters; and after he had seen many days he did pass away, even like unto the rest of the earth; and Kish reigned in his stead.

18 And it came to pass that Kish passed away also, and Lib reigned in his stead.

19 And it came to pass that Lib also did that which was good in the sight of the Lord. And in the days of Lib the poisonous serpents were destroyed. Wherefore they did go into the land southward, to hunt food for the people of the land, for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter.

Comments

The story moves quickly through times when there were no disruptions. Corom “did that which was good,” and his son Kish becomes king. No information whatsoever is provided about Kish. All that we know is that he begets Lib.

There was an increase of people in the time of Lib. The descriptions here show the people of Jared spreading across the land, and specifically, hunting game. Lib is mentioned as a great hunter, and that leads to the description of the land southward as a place where Lib the hunter might get game.

Ether 10:20–22

20 And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land.

21 And they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game. And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants.

22 And they were exceedingly industrious, and they did buy and sell and traffic one with another, that they might get gain.

Comments

The vocabulary of “the land northward” and of “the narrow neck of land” suggests that this is Moroni’s interjection. The description of the land northward being covered with inhabitants recalls Helaman 3:8 where Mormon had indicated that those in the land northward “began to cover the face of the whole earth.” When Moroni adds that they “did buy and sell and traffic one with another, that they might get gain,” we see a reflection of 4 Nephi 1:46: “And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.”

Mormon had used the Jaredites as the model for the Gadiantons, and Moroni is making certain to point out those aspects of the Jaredite record that support his father’s use of the document.

Ether 10:23–28

23 And they did work in all manner of ore, and they did make gold, and silver, and iron, and brass, and all manner of metals; and they did dig it out of the earth; wherefore, they did cast up mighty heaps of earth to get ore, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of copper. And they did work all manner of fine work.

24 And they did have silks, and fine-twined linen; and they did work all manner of cloth, that they might clothe themselves from their nakedness.

25 And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth, both to plow and to sow, to reap and to hoe, and also to thrash.

26 And they did make all manner of tools with which they did work their beasts.

27 And they did make all manner of weapons of war. And they did work all manner of work of exceedingly curious workmanship.

28 And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it.

Comments

These verses are also best seen as Moroni's insertion into the text. They do not follow the style of the text before, nor of what will come after. The use of repetitive resumption for this insertion is more subtle than other examples because the structure of naming the kings makes the connection so much more logical. Moroni leaves his text speaking about Lib, and returns to Lib. (See Comments for 1 Nephi 6:1–6 for information on repetitive resumption.)

The purpose of these verses is to describe the Jaredites as a powerful people. They had been promised that they would be a great people, and Moroni wants to make certain that the reader understands that, at least during times when the people were righteous, they were the great people that the Lord had promised them. "And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it" (Ether 10:28).

Secret Combinations Cause Rebellion

Ether 10:29–31

29 And it came to pass that Lib did live many years, and begat sons and daughters; and he also begat Hearthom.

30 And it came to pass that Hearthom reigned in the stead of his father. And when Hearthom had reigned twenty and four years, behold, the kingdom was taken away from him. And he served many years in captivity, yea, even all the remainder of his days.

31 And he begat Heth, and Heth lived in captivity all his days. And Heth begat Aaron, and Aaron dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Amnigaddah, and Amnigaddah also dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Coriantum, and Coriantum dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Com.

Comments

The unusual practice of keeping a royal line in captivity is underscored in these verses where it is no longer just the deposed king, but an entire lineage that is kept captive. All these names appear in the genealogy

in these verses, but only Hearthom and Com became rulers. The others were captives throughout their lives. That is at least four generations that lived in captivity before that will change with Com.

Ether 10:32–34

32 And it came to pass that Com drew away the half of the kingdom. And he reigned over the half of the kingdom forty and two years; and he went to battle against the king, Amgid, and they fought for the space of many years, during which time Com gained power over Amgid, and obtained power over the remainder of the kingdom.

33 And in the days of Com there began to be robbers in the land; and they adopted the old plans, and administered oaths after the manner of the ancients, and sought again to destroy the kingdom.

34 Now Com did fight against them much; nevertheless, he did not prevail against them.

Comments

Com is the one who rebels and creates a new kingdom, restoring his family to rule. The first step was to create a division, and then after forty-two years, to conquer the rest of the land.

For Moroni, the importance of Com's rule is that "there began to be robbers in the land; and they adopted the old plans, and administered oaths after the manner of the ancients." Once again, the domination of secret combinations among the Jaredites is brought out to make certain that Moroni's readers continue to understand that important connection. That connection was the reason that Mormon wanted the records to be added to his work, since it was Mormon who, in his writing, used the Jaredite secret combinations as the progenitors of the Gadianton robbers.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 11

Ether 11:1–3

1 And there came also in the days of Com many prophets, and prophesied of the destruction of that great people except they should repent, and turn unto the Lord, and forsake their murders and wickedness.

2 And it came to pass that the prophets were rejected by the people, and they fled unto Com for protection, for the people sought to destroy them.

3 And they prophesied unto Com many things; and he was blessed in all the remainder of his days.

Comments

This is the first time we see a disconnect between the righteousness of the king and the people. Typically, the king is given as the representative of all the people and therefore the cause of the people turning against God. Com is the exception. This chapter was not originally separated from the previous chapter in our current editions of the Book of Mormon, so the reason that there is such a disconnect can easily be lost if we select and read this chapter separately from the previous one.

In Ether 10:33–34, we learned: “And in the days of Com there began to be robbers in the land; and they adopted the old plans, and administered oaths after the manner of the ancients, and sought again to destroy the kingdom. Now Com did fight against them much; nevertheless, he did not prevail against them.”

Com attempted to be righteous, but the secret combinations had begun to take hold of the people’s hearts. Thus, Com not only “did not prevail” against the robbers, but he similarly did not prevail against his own people’s turn to wickedness, as seen in their rejection of the prophets.

Ether 11:4–6

4 And he lived to a good old age, and begat Shiblom; and Shiblom reigned in his stead. And the brother of Shiblom rebelled against him, and there began to be an exceedingly great war in all the land.

5 And it came to pass that the brother of Shiblom caused that all the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people should be put to death;

6 And there was great calamity in all the land, for they had testified that a great curse should come upon the land, and also upon the people, and that there should be a great destruction among them, such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land except they should repent of their wickedness.

Comments

Again, we see that the next king, Shiblom, is born late in the king's life. Shiblom became king but had many older brothers who could have desired the power of the position. Once again, we see one of them rebelling against Shiblom.

Shiblom's reaction differed from his father's. Where the prophets came to Com for protection, Shiblom declares that they should be put to death. The text says that he "caused that all the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people should be put to death," but it is hard to see that there would be a prophet at this time who had not been teaching that the penalty of not keeping the covenant of the land was to fall upon them. Those prophets had declared a great destruction, and in verse 4 we see that there is war in the land.

Ether 11:7

7 And they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations; wherefore, there began to be wars and contentions in all the land, and also many famines and pestilences, insomuch that there was a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth; and all this came to pass in the days of Shiblom.

Comments

Although it is certainly possible that this particular declaration was on the plates of Ether, it was either selected, or emphasized, because this is the principal lesson that Mormon had extracted from this document, and at least, a major theme that Moroni had highlighted. The people had become wicked and followed what are described here as "wicked combinations", rather than secret combinations. Nevertheless, Moroni follows Mormon in seeing that the worst of the destructions among the Nephites were due to these wicked combinations that Moroni had specifically labeled as "robbers" in Ether 10:33.

Ether 11:8–11

8 And the people began to repent of their iniquity; and inasmuch as they did the Lord did have mercy on them.

9 And it came to pass that Shiblom was slain, and Seth was brought into captivity, and did dwell in captivity all his days.

10 And it came to pass that Ahah, his son, did obtain the kingdom; and he did reign over the people all his days. And he did do all manner of iniquity in his days, by which he did cause the shedding of much blood; and few were his days.

11 And Ethem, being a descendant of Ahah, did obtain the kingdom; and he also did do that which was wicked in his days.

Comments

The Jaredite story is moving rapidly to the end. As it does, it continues to give only an outline of the facts, without filling out too many details. For example, verse 9 introduces Seth, but without telling us who Seth is nor why he was brought into captivity. We learn that he is the son of Shiblom only in the genealogy (see Ether 1:11). As the son, and presumably the last-born son, Seth was to be the heir to the kingdom, but he was kept in captivity. In the end, Seth's son Ahah, succeeds in rebellion and gains the throne.

As the story moves to the final destruction, we see Ahah doing “all manner of iniquity in his days,” and his son, Ethem, “also did do that which was wicked in his days.” The continued iniquity will invoke the cursing part of the covenant of the land. Ethem is Ether's great-grandfather.

Ether 11:12–14

12 And it came to pass that in the days of Ethem there came many prophets, and prophesied again unto the people; yea, they did prophesy that the Lord would utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth except they repented of their iniquities.

13 And it came to pass that the people hardened their hearts, and would not hearken unto their words; and the prophets mourned and withdrew from among the people.

14 And it came to pass that Ethem did execute judgment in wickedness all his days; and he begat Moron. And it came to pass that Moron did reign in his stead; and Moron did that which was wicked before the Lord.

Comments

The Lord did not cease trying to recover his people, but they continued to refuse the prophets. Thus, not only Ethem, but his son Moron, continued to do “that which was wicked before the Lord.” The prophets that were rejected told of the utter destruction of the Jaredites. The prophets were ignored. The prophecy of destruction is now only two named sons (Coriantor and Ether) away from being fulfilled (see the genealogy list: Ether 1: 6–7).

Ether 11:15–18

15 And it came to pass that there arose a rebellion among the people, because of that secret combination which was built up to get power and gain; and there arose a mighty man among them in iniquity,

and gave battle unto Moron, in which he did overthrow the half of the kingdom; and he did maintain the half of the kingdom for many years.

16 And it came to pass that Moron did overthrow him, and did obtain the kingdom again.

17 And it came to pass that there arose another mighty man; and he was a descendant of the brother of Jared.

18 And it came to pass that he did overthrow Moron and obtain the kingdom; wherefore, Moron dwelt in captivity all the remainder of his days; and he begat Coriantor.

Comments

These verses highlight the complex problem of tracing both kingship and genealogy among the Jaredites. It also suggests that the destruction of the Jaredites will be not only the model for the Nephite destruction, but also that the division between Nephites and Lamanites was also similar to an unexpressed political divide among the Jaredites. Unlike the Nephite record, we never hear of another people. We do hear that sons rebelled against fathers, and also that there are splits within the kingdom. The reality of their politics is that there must have been sufficient separation of some cities that a rebelling son could build up a power base.

In verse 17 we find that another outsider to the listed genealogy, another “mighty man,” overthrew and captured Moron. We don’t know this man’s—this king’s—name. The fact that he is a descendant of the brother of Jared confirms that Jared’s line was not the only one to claim a right to rule. We cover this diversity because we call all these people Jaredites, a term that only appears once in the Book of Mormon, in Moroni 9:23. The fact that Moroni uses the name Jaredites does not mean that that is what they called themselves, or that there was even a unity of peoples. The history of Mesoamerica strongly suggests that there was no such overarching single government. We simply read it that way because we have only the story of one particular lineage.

Ether 11:19–23

19 And it came to pass that Coriantor dwelt in captivity all his days.

20 And in the days of Coriantor there also came many prophets, and prophesied of great and marvelous things, and cried repentance unto the people, and except they should repent the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction;

21 And that the Lord God would send or bring forth another people to possess the land, by his power, after the manner by which he brought their fathers.

22 And they did reject all the words of the prophets, because of their secret society and wicked abominations.

23 And it came to pass that Coriantor begat Ether, and he died, having dwelt in captivity all his days.

Comments

Again, we have a royal lineage living and producing children while in captivity. Ether is the last of the line, and the one who compiled the source record which Mosiah₂ translated, and Moroni told.

It is easiest to see these verses as Moroni's summary. While the prediction of the destruction of the people is a common theme, the addition that there would come a different people to possess the land would be known to Moroni and would perhaps be of little interest to the people receiving the prophets. Since they, the people, didn't believe the prophets that their own people would be destroyed, thinking that another people would come, it would not have been any more convincing. It was, however, fulfilled prophecy. Moroni clearly saw how that part of history fit into his own.

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Ether 12

Ether Prophecies to the People

Ether 12:1

1 And it came to pass that the days of Ether were in the days of Coriantumr; and Coriantumr was king over all the land.

Comments

Our current chapter 12 of the book of Ether was a single chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon as well. The break between chapters is therefore original at least to the way Moroni recorded it and it cannot be known if it follows a similar division on Ether's record.

The difference between the chapters up to this point and this one is that we leave the very terse description of only the outlines of events and begin to see the more complex history that occurred during Ether's life. He was a witness both in that he saw it, and that he wrote it.

We learn that while Ether follows a lineage that traces through kings, the most recent royalty had been held in captivity. Even while in captivity, however, it appears that some of the sons of a king might not remain captive. That appears to be the case with Ether. We might therefore suggest that he was not the last-born, and therefore not a designated heir to the throne.

We learn in verse 1 that Ether's lineage is still out of power. Coriantumr is king. However, Coriantumr does not appear in the genealogy list in Ether chapter 1.

Ether 12:2–5

2 And Ether was a prophet of the Lord; wherefore Ether came forth in the days of Coriantumr, and began to prophesy unto the people, for he could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him.

3 For he did cry from the morning, even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed, saying unto them that by faith all things are fulfilled—

4 Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.

5 And it came to pass that Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not.

Comments

Even though this is Ether's record, and we are now in the part of his record to which he was an eyewitness, we still see the text in the third person. Therefore, we are seeing either the text that Mosiah₂ translated, or that Moroni is editing. The use of the third person suggests that we are seeing Moroni's summary here.

Ether was a prophet sent to give the people yet one last chance to repent and turn to God. Where the previous descriptions of prophets among the people typically told only of their rejection, Ether's record more explicitly states that in his day (as was probable in earlier times as well), there were some who did believe. Not all were turned from God (see verse 4).

The Trial of Faith

Ether 12:6–9

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

7 For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world.

8 But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen.

9 Wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith.

Comments

As did his father, Mormon, Moroni makes a temporary end to telling the history, and tells the moral of the history. With the backdrop of the relentless stories of rebellions and walking wickedly before God, it seems unusual that Moroni would insert a discourse on the nature of faith. It is plausible that these thoughts were triggered by his summary of Ether's preaching in the previous verses (2–5). In those verses, Moroni described Ether faithfully teaching, with only a few who believing him. Moroni

personally understood that the destruction of a people did not mean that every person in that destroyed nation had abandoned faith.

Moroni saw in Ether the example of faith in adversity. When we see the language echoing Hebrews 11:1, the important part isn't the whole of the verse, but the wording of the verse's ending: "hoped for and not seen." Moroni is placing a definition of faith in the context of adversity, a faith that can remain strong even when the results, or the justification for that faith, are not seen.

Thinking on Ether's personal mission, Moroni sees the problem of a faithful prophet, who is preaching to a nation that rejects him. Still, the reception of the message does not mean that the message wasn't true. Ether was in a trial of his faith, but "ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith." That statement parallels the admonition against looking for signs. Looking for signs reverses the process, suggesting that the witness might come first. It is rather that we must be prepared and be faithful so that we might be worthy of the witness.

Because it is Moroni speaking, he is not exclusively speaking of the brother of Jared when he says that "Christ showed himself unto our fathers," though that is appropriate in this record. Moroni would include any time that God was present, even if only in a cloud, or in a fire on a rock (as witnessed by Lehi). Moroni also included the time that Christ literally showed himself in Bountiful. All of those occasions were made possible through faith and were not given to create faith.

The purpose of Christ is to be the foundation upon which our hopes can be built. Having declared himself among men, Christ is the anchor to which we may tie our hopes, and therefore be "partakers of the gift" of eternal life.

Ether 12:10–12

10 Behold it was by faith that they of old were called after the holy order of God.

11 Wherefore, by faith was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way; and it is by faith that it hath been fulfilled.

12 For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.

Comments

Ether 12:10 reflects the teaching Moroni knew from Alma 13:10: "Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish."

Verse 11 declares that it was the faith of the Israelites that allowed them to enter into the covenant known as the law of Moses. Jesus Christ fulfilled that law, and it was done by faith. How might that have

happened? Christ entered his final days on earth understanding what would befall him. The earthly consequences were absolutely clear. The heavenly benefits had been declared, but required faith so that he could act with an eye to the heavenly benefit rather than the earthly distress and pain.

The language of Ether 12 is unique, but the principle that links faith and miracles was taught from the beginning, and throughout, Nephite history. See 2 Nephi 26:13; 27:23; Mosiah 8:18; Alma 37:40; 3 Nephi 19:35.

Ether 12:13–18

13 Behold, it was the faith of Alma and Amulek that caused the prison to tumble to the earth.

14 Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites, that they were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

15 Behold, it was the faith of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites.

16 Yea, and even all they who wrought miracles wrought them by faith, even those who were before Christ and also those who were after.

17 And it was by faith that the three disciples obtained a promise that they should not taste of death; and they obtained not the promise until after their faith.

18 And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God.

Comments

Moroni did not have an apparatus for quoting scripture as we do. He couldn't refer to chapter and verse in the stories that his father had written, but he could recall them by the names of those involved and the associated incident. Those who have read the Book of Mormon are familiar with these names and stories. Moroni assumes that his readers would know them, and therefore agree that they had faith prior to the time the miracle was performed.

The interim conclusion echoes the premise: "And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God" (verse 18).

Ether 12:19–21

19 And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.

20 And behold, we have seen in this record that one of these was the brother of Jared; for so great was his faith in God, that when God put forth his finger he could not hide it from the sight of the brother of Jared, because of his word which he had spoken unto him, which word he had obtained by faith.

21 And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil.

Comments

Moroni is explicit that he is including the brother of Jared among those who have seen “with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith.” In addition to the brother of Jared, there were equally important visions of the future, such as Nephi¹, had received in his Tree of Life vision. The emphasis on the brother of Jared is appropriate since Moroni is writing in the book of Ether, where we learn of that story.

Weak Things Will Be Made Strong

Ether 12:22–25

22 And it is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles; therefore the Lord hath commanded me, yea, even Jesus Christ.

23 And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them;

24 And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them.

25 Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words.

Comments

Moroni shifts his focus. He has been speaking of faith, but a faith that looked to Jesus Christ. Now, he speaks of those who have had faith, and have been able to see the future. One of the things that they have seen is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Moroni now focuses on that project on which he is working.

Looking forward to that time, Moroni is concerned that what he and his father have written might not effectively communicate the message. The message is that the Gentiles should take these words to those

who would be called Lamanites. Moroni addresses his lament to God and worries that “the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing.” He declares that he and the other prophets have sufficient faith, but that their faith might not be communicated in the more impersonal medium of writing.

Moroni has read the vision of the future that the brother of Jared wrote, but which he sealed up. We do not have it to be able to verify that the brother of Jared was so much better at writing about faith than were Mormon or Moroni. We now have what Mormon and Moroni wrote, and even though they feared that their writings might not be sufficient, millions now have faith in them, and use them to spiritually guide their lives.

Ether 12:26–27

26 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

Comments

The Lord responds that some of what Moroni fears will be part of the process: “Fools mock.” It will happen. It has happened. When the final accounting comes, however, “they shall mourn.” These things are true, and truth will be attested at the last day.

The next lesson is one that easily expands far beyond the context of writing the Book of Mormon, or even its reception. God teaches us a lesson about our humanity. We have weaknesses, and God “will show unto [us our] weakness.” Those weaknesses can be explicit. We might hide them. We might not even realize we have them.

Nevertheless, God “give[s] unto men weakness that they may be humble.” We must understand that we rely upon God and turn to him in faith. Of course, we also have strengths, and all humankind understands that we can do for ourselves in those things where we are strong. It is in our weakness that we most often realize that we should turn to God.

The miracle that comes after that exercise of faith is that God will then “make weak things become strong unto [us].” Sometimes that does mean that someone weak in writing or speaking might become strong in writing and speaking. Sometimes it means that even if that particular thing never becomes significantly better, we do. We become stronger by founding ourselves in faith, particularly faith in Jesus Christ.

Ether 12:28–29

28 Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.

29 And I, Moroni, having heard these words, was comforted, and said: O Lord, thy righteous will be done, for I know that thou workest unto the children of men according to their faith;

Comments

Verse 27 records that the Lord told Moroni: “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble.” The context for the Comments on weakness began with Moroni worrying that his own weakness in writing would hinder the acceptance of the Book of Mormon. God responds that weaknesses will be made into strength, and then specifically notes that the Gentiles can be shown their weakness. If some might desire to mock, there would be others who would be humble, and that humility would bring them to God in “faith, hope and charity.” By implication, they would accept the Book of Mormon. It is for that reason that Moroni, upon hearing those words, “was comforted.” He understood that his weakness would not result in the failure of the book to do what it was intended to do.

Ether 12: 30–31

30 For the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, Remove—and it was removed. And if he had not had faith it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest after men have faith.

31 For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples; for after they had faith, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power.

Comments

These comments follow immediately upon Moroni’s understanding his personal weakness in writing would not be a hindrance. The reason is that faith can overcome his weakness. Thus, in verse 29 he had said: “For I know that thou workest unto the children of men according to their faith.” Having declared that God works according to faith, Moroni provides examples of great things that had been done through faith. If the brother of Jared might remove a mountain, God could find a way to make the Book of Mormon a strength rather than an example of weakness in writing.

Verse 28 of this chapter introduced the Pauline formula of faith, hope, and charity. Moroni has taken that trilogy and expanded upon its principles.

These two verses conclude his explication of the requirement of faith. For Moroni, faith is a force that marshals action. Few will ever have the power of the disciples, even less will have the power to move a mountain. Nevertheless, in each individual life, faith provides the power to do and to progress. Faith is usually seen in the small miracles, not the large ones. Faith is often a quiet force that commits us to continue to follow the path to God, even though the way becomes difficult at times.

Ether 12:32–34

32 And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared.

33 And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men.

34 And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father.

Comments

Having concluded his exposition about faith, Moroni turns to hope. He defines hope as a looking forward to a goal. In verse 32, the final goal is a house prepared for man among God’s mansions. It is our hoped-for inheritance. Hope, in the context of faith, hope, and charity, is not simply a wish, but a desire fixed on a goal. Faith may be “the principle of action in all intelligent beings” (*Lectures on Faith*, Lecture First: 9), but hope defines the goal upon which we focus our actions.

Moroni moves to the topic of charity, and the ultimate charity is the love of God for the world, and love that provided a savior. While that is the ultimate charity, it is one that permits us to develop our own charity, our own love for others. We begin with those who are already able to love others, but who are expected to progress to a more Godlike love (where God could love the whole world, even the world that would crucify his Son). That attribute of godhood is an essential lesson of our life on earth, for “except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of [God].”

Verse 33 says that Moroni remembers that the Lord had said: “[T]hou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again.” Moroni may have been referring to Christ’s appearance at Bountiful, as seen in 3 Nephi 9:22. However, the language in both cases is very close to John 10:17: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” Verse 33 probably modeled the wording of John 10:17, but the visit of the Savior provided the meaning and context to it.

Ether 12:35–36

35 Wherefore, I know by this thing which thou hast said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly.

36 And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.

Comments

Moroni concludes his explanation of his understanding, and with the explanation of faith, hope and charity, he returns to the reason that it became a question in the first place: “I know by this thing which thou has said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them.” Moroni began this inserted plea with the fear that his weakness in writing might harm the purpose of the Book of Mormon. He declares to the Lord that he understands that God will assist, and he prays that future recipients of the Book of Mormon might have the faith, hope and charity, and will accept the Book of Mormon. For those of us who have faith, hope and charity, we also require those attributes in order to live according to the book’s precepts.

In verse 35, the use of the word *talent* very clearly follows the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–29.

Moroni Bids Fairwell

Ether 12:37–41

37 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.

38 And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood.

39 And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things;

40 And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing.

41 And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen.

Comments

Moroni had been pouring his heart out to the Lord, concerned for his role in an important event, and worried that he was insufficient in his efforts. God replied: “If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful.” What God requires of us is that we are faithful. God does not require of us that other people have the reactions to our efforts that we desire. It is sufficient that we be faithful.

With that encouragement, Moroni is ready to return to his task. He bids “farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love.” He is nearing the conclusion of his writing, and appears to believe that after he has finished, he will write no more. In Moroni 1:1 he stated: “Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished.”

As he bids his own farewell, he returns yet again to his fear of his weakness in writing (verse 40). His final statement of his own, before concluding Ether’s record, is “I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written.” That is Moroni’s message, and that was his father’s message. That was also the Nephite message. However, it is not the message of the book of Ether. We are seeing Moroni in this chapter, quite apart from the text that he is editing.

This is the end of the chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 13

Ether 13:1

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to finish my record concerning the destruction of the people of whom I have been writing.

Comments

The whole of our chapter 12 was also a complete chapter in the original. That was appropriate because it was entirely Moroni's writing, and unrelated to the specifics of the book of Ether. Having departed from the text he was editing, however, Moroni must return and he does so explicitly. He will return to the point where he left off, which was introducing Ether, but Moroni doesn't use the technique of repetitive resumption that his father (and Nephi₁) used. Moroni's method is to declare explicitly that he is returning to the record after he departed from it.

The New Jerusalem

Ether 13:2–4

2 For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man; and that after the waters had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord; wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him who dwell upon the face thereof;

3 And that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord.

4 Behold, Ether saw the days of Christ, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land.

Comments

Ether was righteous, and Moroni gives some details to let us know that he was. The reason is not simply to indicate that he was righteous, but to create the contrast between a prophet who was sent to give the

people of Jared one last chance, which they reject. The contrast dramatically places Ether on the side of the God, whom he has seen, and the people who reject him and therefore implicitly follow the Adversary. They are ripe for destruction, and Ether is the witness to it, just as a righteous Mormon was witness to the Nephite destruction. Moroni does not make that comparison explicit, but he would have understood it.

One of the interesting aspects of the declaration of Ether's righteousness is that he has a vision of the future of the land. One of the things he sees is the New Jerusalem. That name is certainly one that the Nephite translator added to Ether's text. The Jaredites left the Old World at a time that they may not have had any record of the Old Jerusalem, and therefore would not understand the concept of a New Jerusalem. Nevertheless, seeing the future of the land, Ether would see the establishment of the seat of God in the New World, even if he did not understand it by the name we have learned to call it.

Ether 13:5–6

5 And he spake also concerning the house of Israel, and the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come— after it should be destroyed it should be built up again, a holy city unto the Lord; wherefore, it could not be a new Jerusalem for it had been in a time of old; but it should be built up again, and become a holy city of the Lord; and it should be built unto the house of Israel—

6 And that a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type.

Comments

The specific description of Jerusalem and its relationship to the house of Israel was undoubtedly added by the translator (see the Comments for verses 5–6 of this chapter). Ether saw how the history of the land he was on would play out, and that included the understanding that there would be a seat of government for each hemisphere.

Ether 13:7–8

7 For as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there; wherefore, the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not, even as he was merciful unto the father of Joseph that he should perish not.

8 Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance; and they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old; and they shall no more be confounded, until the end come when the earth shall pass away.

Comments

Although the result of this discussion is to further information on the New Jerusalem, the parallel that is drawn is interesting. Joseph is brought to Egypt and died there. Joseph was an exile and died in a foreign land. Nevertheless, his lineage was preserved. Ether knows that his people came from the Old World and knows that they too are about to die in that symbolic exile. The implicit promise is that, although the people of Jared will die in this land, there will still be a remnant preserved, and there will be ultimate redemption in the final days.

Ether 13:9–12

9 And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new.

10 And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel.

11 And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who were scattered and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth, and from the north countries, and are partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham.

12 And when these things come, bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first.

Comments

Ether saw the events of the ending of times. Those will be days when all things “have become new.” This is when the injustices of the world are healed, and God himself comes to claim his people and govern them. That is the context of the New and Old Jerusalem. God will come first to the New Jerusalem, and then to the Old.

Verse 12 indicates that this “bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first.” The only place where we see that scripture is in the New Testament. See Matthew 19:30; 20:16. It is unknown to which scripture Moroni might be referring. Although this information discusses Ether’s vision, the vocabulary and context are Moroni’s retelling. Thus, it is possible that just as the risen Christ taught texts that we find in Matthew, this scripture may have been one that was given, but not recorded, in the account Mormon elected to use, one that Mormon suggested was a “shorter but true” account (3 Nephi 5:9).

Coriantumr and His Enemies

Ether 13:13–15

13 And I was about to write more, but I am forbidden; but great and marvelous were the prophecies of Ether; but they esteemed him as naught, and cast him out; and he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people.

14 And as he dwelt in the cavity of a rock he made the remainder of this record, viewing the destructions which came upon the people, by night.

15 And it came to pass that in that same year in which he was cast out from among the people there began to be a great war among the people, for there were many who rose up, who were mighty men, and sought to destroy Coriantumr by their secret plans of wickedness, of which hath been spoken.

Comments

Moroni has a record that gives the prophecies of Ether, but he is not copying them. He is telling them and using his own vocabulary and concepts to describe them, typically in places where Moroni would recognize the elements from Ether's prophecy that Moroni had either also seen, or learned of, from the Nephite records. He confirms that this is his process by noting that he was "about to write more." Moroni confirms that he is making selections from the record available to him.

Turning from the righteousness of Ether, Moroni returns to the more secular history. This story will be told in details that were largely absent in the historical recounting up to this point.

In those turbulent times, Ether removes himself from the places of war, and remains in a safe spot to become the chronicler of the end of his people. The introduction to the end comes in the time when Coriantumr is king (Ether 12:1). Coriantumr doesn't appear in the genealogy because he is not of that direct lineage.

Significantly, Moroni makes certain to note that at this time of the final destruction, the "secret plans of wickedness" are clearly mentioned as a cause. Although there are other important events in Jaredite history, the one that Mormon emphasized, and the one that Moroni makes certain that is underscored, is the secret combinations. Those combinations are less often called robbers in this text, because the Gadianton robbers is a name from late in Nephite history. Nevertheless, Mormon, and now Moroni, see them as equivalent, and equivalently harbingers of the destruction of a people.

Ether 13:16–17

16 And now Coriantumr, having studied, himself, in all the arts of war and all the cunning of the world, wherefore he gave battle unto them who sought to destroy him.

17 But he repented not, neither his fair sons nor daughters; neither the fair sons and daughters of Cohor; neither the fair sons and daughters of Corihor; and in fine, there were none of the fair sons and daughters upon the face of the whole earth who repented of their sins.

Comments

War is the theme at the end of the book of Ether, and Coriantumr is described as one trained in “all the arts of war and the cunning of the world.” It is likely that his opponents were similarly trained.

Coriantumr is also one who will not repent. Verse 17 declares that the sons and daughters of Cohor and Corihor will not repent. Those are two names from deeper in Jaredite history. They are sons of Noah, who was a king who did not follow God. It is quite possible that when Mormon wrote the story of Zeniff’s son, he may have borrowed Noah’s name from the Jaredite record and used it to provide a context to the wickedness of Zeniff’s son.

By invoking unrighteous ancestors, the conflict is given deep roots in Jaredite culture, and deep roots in a people with a history of rejecting God and his teachings. Thus, when they are unrepentant in the last days, it is unsurprising, and a continuation of the influence of an ancestral tradition.

Ether 13:18–22

18 Wherefore, it came to pass that in the first year that Ether dwelt in the cavity of a rock, there were many people who were slain by the sword of those secret combinations, fighting against Coriantumr that they might obtain the kingdom.

19 And it came to pass that the sons of Coriantumr fought much and bled much.

20 And in the second year the word of the Lord came to Ether, that he should go and prophesy unto Coriantumr that, if he would repent, and all his household, the Lord would give unto him his kingdom and spare the people—

21 Otherwise they should be destroyed, and all his household save it were himself. And he should only live to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance; and Coriantumr should receive a burial by them; and every soul should be destroyed save it were Coriantumr.

22 And it came to pass that Coriantumr repented not, neither his household, neither the people; and the wars ceased not; and they sought to kill Ether, but he fled from before them and hid again in the cavity of the rock.

Comments

God has Ether give the people one last chance. He goes to Coriantumr and lays out the future, including that the people would be destroyed, and that Coriantumr would survive and live to see another people who would receive the promise of the land.

Coriantumr does not repent. Coriantumr turns against Ether and attempts to kill him. Although not stated, it is certain that the Lord’s protection assisted Ether to escape and return to his cave.

Coriantumr Versus Shared

Ether 13:23–24

23 And it came to pass that there arose up Shared, and he also gave battle unto Coriantumr; and he did beat him, insomuch that in the third year he did bring him into captivity.

24 And the sons of Coriantumr, in the fourth year, did beat Shared, and did obtain the kingdom again unto their father.

Comments

Even though Mormon and Moroni saw the story of the Jaredites as a type of the destruction of the Nephites, there were significant differences. One of those was ultimogeniture, and the other is the fascinating Jaredite practice of capturing opposing kings and keeping them in captivity. That happens again in these verses. Coriantumr is defeated and brought into captivity, and then his sons are able to free him. It is a pattern often seen in Jaredite history.

Ether 13:25–31

25 Now there began to be a war upon all the face of the land, every man with his band fighting for that which he desired.

26 And there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land.

27 And it came to pass that Coriantumr was exceedingly angry with Shared, and he went against him with his armies to battle; and they did meet in great anger, and they did meet in the valley of Gilgal; and the battle became exceedingly sore.

28 And it came to pass that Shared fought against him for the space of three days. And it came to pass that Coriantumr beat him, and did pursue him until he came to the plains of Heshlon.

29 And it came to pass that Shared gave him battle again upon the plains; and behold, he did beat Coriantumr, and drove him back again to the valley of Gilgal.

30 And Coriantumr gave Shared battle again in the valley of Gilgal, in which he beat Shared and slew him.

31 And Shared wounded Coriantumr in his thigh, that he did not go to battle again for the space of two years, in which time all the people upon the face of the land were shedding blood, and there was none to restrain them.

Comments

The contrast between the details of the battles between Shared and Coriantumr only serve to highlight the absence of such stories for the earlier history. It would appear that when Ether wrote, he was most interested in the final days, and therefore only gave the bare bones of the history needed to get to the end.

Once again, however, it is emphasized that “there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land,” even though we are given no details of what they are doing and how they are involved. Their presence alone is sufficient to let the reader know that the end is coming.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 14

Ether 14:1–2

1 And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land.

2 Wherefore every man did cleave unto that which was his own, with his hands, and would not borrow neither would he lend; and every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defence of his property and his own life and of his wives and children.

Comments

This chapter was part of a single chapter that included our chapters 13–15. Therefore, it could easily be missed that these verses are meant to reflect the statement in Ether 13:26 that “there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land.”

There is a strong probability that these particular words are due to Moroni’s reading of the record rather than a quotation from it. Compare the descriptions of these two verses to what Mormon wrote about the time leading up to the Nephite demise:

But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts the land was cursed for their sake. And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again. (Mormon 1:17–18)

Moroni is ensuring that the parallels of the two destructions are evident.

Coriantumr Versus Gilead

Ether 14:3–6

3 And now, after the space of two years, and after the death of Shared, behold, there arose the brother of Shared and he gave battle unto Coriantumr, in which Coriantumr did beat him and did pursue him to the wilderness of Akish.

4 And it came to pass that the brother of Shared did give battle unto him in the wilderness of Akish; and the battle became exceedingly sore, and many thousands fell by the sword.

5 And it came to pass that Coriantumr did lay siege to the wilderness; and the brother of Shared did march forth out of the wilderness by night, and slew a part of the army of Coriantumr, as they were drunken.

6 And he came forth to the land of Moron, and placed himself upon the throne of Coriantumr.

Comments

Even though Moroni is highlighting aspects of the final wars of the Jaredites in order to link them to the destruction of the Nephites, there are clear differences between the two sets of events. Jaredite wars are always indicated as family affairs. The winds of change blew frequently, and there were different people rising to the throne during the lifetime of a single man (in this case Coriantumr): he was the king, he was then taken captive, he once again became king, and finally he was defeated with an army in exile. That pattern differs from anything we have seen in the Nephite record.

Ether 14:7–10

7 And it came to pass that Coriantumr dwelt with his army in the wilderness for the space of two years, in which he did receive great strength to his army.

8 Now the brother of Shared, whose name was Gilead, also received great strength to his army, because of secret combinations.

9 And it came to pass that his high priest murdered him as he sat upon his throne.

10 And it came to pass that one of the secret combinations murdered him in a secret pass, and obtained unto himself the kingdom; and his name was Lib; and Lib was a man of great stature, more than any other man among all the people.

Comments

Being a Jaredite king was a tenuous position. It was even more so when the secret combinations were involved. In verse 9 we find them doing what they did among the Nephites, they murder a king as he sat on his throne. Verse 9 certainly speaks of the death of Gilead, but it is unclear if somehow verse 10 refers to that event, or to the subsequent death of the high priest who killed Gilead. It is possible that the high

priest mentioned in verse 9 was the one who killed him. The specifics are less important than the presence of the secret combinations, which continue to be shown as destroyers of kings, and of peoples.

Coriantumr Versus Lib

Ether 14:11–16

11 And it came to pass that in the first year of Lib, Coriantumr came up unto the land of Moron, and gave battle unto Lib.

12 And it came to pass that he fought with Lib, in which Lib did smite upon his arm that he was wounded; nevertheless, the army of Coriantumr did press forward upon Lib, that he fled to the borders upon the seashore.

13 And it came to pass that Coriantumr pursued him; and Lib gave battle unto him upon the seashore.

14 And it came to pass that Lib did smite the army of Coriantumr, that they fled again to the wilderness of Akish.

15 And it came to pass that Lib did pursue him until he came to the plains of Agosh. And Coriantumr had taken all the people with him as he fled before Lib in that quarter of the land whither he fled.

16 And when he had come to the plains of Agosh he gave battle unto Lib, and he smote upon him until he died; nevertheless, the brother of Lib did come against Coriantumr in the stead thereof, and the battle became exceedingly sore, in the which Coriantumr fled again before the army of the brother of Lib.

Comments

The final Jaredite wars have no easy victors or defined defeats. The wars move back and forth over the land, with each side prevailing at different times. These verses describe the battles between Coriantumr and Lib and conclude with a shift in the combatants when Lib is killed. In spite of the loss of Lib, Lib's brother takes over and causes Coriantumr to flee the scene. This again differs from incidents seen in Nephite history where the death or capture of the leader of the enemy army might signal the end of the conflict.

Coriantumr Versus Shiz

Ether 14:17–20

17 Now the name of the brother of Lib was called Shiz. And it came to pass that Shiz pursued after Coriantumr, and he did overthrow many cities, and he did slay both women and children, and he did burn the cities.

18 And there went a fear of Shiz throughout all the land; yea, a cry went forth throughout the land—Who can stand before the army of Shiz? Behold, he sweepeth the earth before him!

19 And it came to pass that the people began to flock together in armies, throughout all the face of the land.

20 And they were divided; and a part of them fled to the army of Shiz, and a part of them fled to the army of Coriantumr.

Comments

Shiz is the final leader to oppose Coriantumr. He is apparently a fearsome warrior, having driven off Coriantumr's army and, apparently, successfully taking over numerous cities. Moroni does not want him to be seen in any kind of favorable light, however, so he mentions that "he did slay both women and children, and he did burn the cities." The final days are set with a people divided into two separate and conflicting loyalties.

Ether 14:21–23

21 And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage, that the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead.

22 And so swift and speedy was the war that there was none left to bury the dead, but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood, leaving the bodies of both men, women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become a prey to the worms of the flesh.

23 And the scent thereof went forth upon the face of the land, even upon all the face of the land; wherefore the people became troubled by day and by night, because of the scent thereof.

Comments

The comment that the war was "swift and speedy" is the reason that "there was none left to bury the dead." Rather than stopping the war to perform rites for the dead, the destruction continued, and the dead were left on the land. It is possible that the conquering army did bury those of their own people who had died, but this devastation was certainly committed upon the enemy. Sadly, Moroni would have been all too familiar with "the scent thereof."

Ether 14:24–27

24 Nevertheless, Shiz did not cease to pursue Coriantumr; for he had sworn to avenge himself upon Coriantumr of the blood of his brother, who had been slain, and the word of the Lord which came to Ether that Coriantumr should not fall by the sword.

25 And thus we see that the Lord did visit them in the fulness of his wrath, and their wickedness and abominations had prepared a way for their everlasting destruction.

26 And it came to pass that Shiz did pursue Coriantumr eastward, even to the borders by the seashore, and there he gave battle unto Shiz for the space of three days.

27 And so terrible was the destruction among the armies of Shiz that the people began to be frightened, and began to flee before the armies of Coriantumr; and they fled to the land of Corihor, and swept off the inhabitants before them, all them that would not join them.

Comments

After fleeing before Shiz's army, Coriantumr's army are finally driven to a location where they must make a stand, and they fought with a vengeance that caused enough destruction among Shiz's armies that it was Shiz's turn to retreat. As they retreat, they apparently kill any of the people they meet who will not join their army. That is a level of destruction against non-combatants that confirms that we are to see them as the worse of the two armies, though neither was considered righteous.

Ether 14:28–31

28 And they pitched their tents in the valley of Corihor; and Coriantumr pitched his tents in the valley of Shurr. Now the valley of Shurr was near the hill Comnor; wherefore, Coriantumr did gather his armies together upon the hill Comnor, and did sound a trumpet unto the armies of Shiz to invite them forth to battle.

29 And it came to pass that they came forth, but were driven again; and they came the second time, and they were driven again the second time. And it came to pass that they came again the third time, and the battle became exceedingly sore.

30 And it came to pass that Shiz smote upon Coriantumr that he gave him many deep wounds; and Coriantumr, having lost his blood, fainted, and was carried away as though he were dead.

31 Now the loss of men, women and children on both sides was so great that Shiz commanded his people that they should not pursue the armies of Coriantumr; wherefore, they returned to their camp.

Comments

The destruction continues, and Coriantumr is wounded so badly that he had to be carried from the field of battle “as though he were dead.” Perhaps that allowed a short respite, but there is a temporary break in the devastation.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. The story of the destruction continues in the next, and final, chapter of the book of Ether.

Ether 15

Coriantumr's Sorrow

Ether 15:1–3

1 And it came to pass when Coriantumr had recovered of his wounds, he began to remember the words which Ether had spoken unto him.

2 He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.

3 He began to repent of the evil which he had done; he began to remember the words which had been spoken by the mouth of all the prophets, and he saw them that they were fulfilled thus far, every whit; and his soul mourned and refused to be comforted.

Comments

As Ether, chapter 14, ended, Coriantumr had been injured and was carried away from the battlefield. Shiz caused his armies to withdraw. There was a pause in what had been a nearly constant battle of death and destruction. In Coriantumr's personally injured state, and with the time to reflect, he remembered Ether's prophecy to him (Ether 13:20–21). Coriantumr finally understood that Ether's prophecy was being fulfilled, and perhaps for the first time, he saw that his entire people might be destroyed. Finally, he "began to repent of the evil which he had done."

Ether 15:4–6

4 And it came to pass that he wrote an epistle unto Shiz, desiring him that he would spare the people, and he would give up the kingdom for the sake of the lives of the people.

5 And it came to pass that when Shiz had received his epistle he wrote an epistle unto Coriantumr, that if he would give himself up, that he might slay him with his own sword, that he would spare the lives of the people.

6 And it came to pass that the people repented not of their iniquity; and the people of Coriantumr were stirred up to anger against the people of Shiz; and the people of Shiz were stirred up to anger against the people of Coriantumr; wherefore, the people of Shiz did give battle unto the people of Coriantumr.

Comments

Coriantumr attempts to stop the destruction, offering to give up the kingdom if it would end the war. Shiz was somewhat amenable, but his personal hatred desired personal revenge upon Coriantumr for the death of his brother, Lib (Ether 14:16).

There can be times when hatred overtakes reason. Neither side was in a mood to be forgiving, or to work towards peace—and so the war continued.

Ether 15:7–11

7 And when Coriantumr saw that he was about to fall he fled again before the people of Shiz.

8 And it came to pass that he came to the waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all; wherefore, when they came to these waters they pitched their tents; and Shiz also pitched his tents near unto them; and therefore on the morrow they did come to battle.

9 And it came to pass that they fought an exceedingly sore battle, in which Coriantumr was wounded again, and he fainted with the loss of blood.

10 And it came to pass that the armies of Coriantumr did press upon the armies of Shiz that they beat them, that they caused them to flee before them; and they did flee southward, and did pitch their tents in a place which was called Ogath.

11 And it came to pass that the army of Coriantumr did pitch their tents by the hill Ramah; and it was that same hill where my father Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord, which were sacred.

Comments

The changing tides of the war saw Coriantumr and his army flee. They came to “the waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all.” Having the definition added suggests that this name was in Ether’s record and had to be interpreted so that it could be understood that they came to the shore of a large body of water. In a Mesoamerican view of the geography of the Book of Mormon, this would have been along the Gulf of Mexico.

Most importantly, they move again. This time going southward. Coriantumr’s army “did pitch their tents by the hill Ramah.” That name must also have been on Ether’s original plates. In this case, Moroni doesn’t give an interpretation, but rather a more important definition: “It was that same hill where my father Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord.” See Mormon 6:6 for the set of records that Mormon buried in Cumorah.

Moroni does not tell us how he knows that the Jaredite hill Ramah is the same as the Nephite hill Cumorah. Perhaps it was by revelation. Perhaps it was the symbolic symmetry of the destruction of the two peoples at the same location, for the same sin of turning away from God.

Coriantumr Versus Shiz: The Final Battle

Ether 15:12–14

12 And it came to pass that they did gather together all the people upon all the face of the land, who had not been slain, save it was Ether.

13 And it came to pass that Ether did behold all the doings of the people; and he beheld that the people who were for Coriantumr were gathered together to the army of Coriantumr; and the people who were for Shiz were gathered together to the army of Shiz.

14 Wherefore, they were for the space of four years gathering together the people, that they might get all who were upon the face of the land, and that they might receive all the strength which it was possible that they could receive.

Comments

Moroni would have seen yet another parallel between the destruction of the Jaredites and Nephites. Not only were they at the same hill, but he notes that there is a time when all the people are gathered together for a final battle. This recalls the words of Mormon: “And I, Mormon, wrote an epistle unto the king of the Lamanites, and desired of him that he would grant unto us that we might gather together our people unto the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah, and there we could give them battle” (Mormon 6:2).

There is a difference, of course. The Jaredites gather for four years, and we don’t have the timing to know how long Mormon had to prepare. Four years would appear to be a very long time, and it is possible that the number is more symbolic than literal. The number four was a number of completeness among Mesoamerican peoples, similar to the Hebrew use of seven. When we see seven in the Bible, we pay attention because it may be symbolic more than literal, and the same should occur in the New World with the number four. As a number of completeness, it signaled that this was the end of the gathering.

Ether 15:15–16

15 And it came to pass that when they were all gathered together, every one to the army which he would, with their wives and their children—both men, women and children being armed with weapons of war, having shields, and breastplates, and head-plates, and being clothed after the manner of war—they did march forth one against another to battle; and they fought all that day, and conquered not.

16 And it came to pass that when it was night they were weary, and retired to their camps; and after they had retired to their camps they took up a howling and a lamentation for the loss of the slain of their people; and so great were their cries, their howlings and lamentations, that they did rend the air exceedingly.

Comments

The first battle is inconclusive, but deadly. Moroni records that “after they had retired to their camps they took up a howling and a lamentation for the loss of the slain of their people; and so great were their cries, their howlings and lamentations, that they did rend the air exceedingly.” That is an understandable reaction, but also a plausible description. The process of mourning in the ancient world often took the form of visible and audible distress.

Ether 15:17–19

17 And it came to pass that on the morrow they did go again to battle, and great and terrible was that day; nevertheless, they conquered not, and when the night came again they did rend the air with their cries, and their howlings, and their mournings, for the loss of the slain of their people.

18 And it came to pass that Coriantumr wrote again an epistle unto Shiz, desiring that he would not come again to battle, but that he would take the kingdom, and spare the lives of the people.

19 But behold, the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed; wherefore they went again to battle.

Comments

Even though Moroni saw similarities between the Nephite battle at Cumorah and the Jaredite end at Ramah, there were differences. Mormon describes only a single, terrible battle. The Jaredite battle raged back and forth. Coriantumr again attempts to end the conflict, but things are too far gone. They were on their way to destruction.

Another important difference between the end of the Jaredites and the end of the Nephites is that there was a victorious army which defeated the Nephites. There were clearly losses on both sides, but only the Nephites were destroyed. In the case of the Jaredites at Ramah, both contending armies are Jaredite. Thus, for them it was a mutual destruction. There was no victor. Everyone lost.

Ether 15:20–26

20 And it came to pass that they fought all that day, and when the night came they slept upon their swords.

21 And on the morrow they fought even until the night came.

22 And when the night came they were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine; and they slept again upon their swords.

23 And on the morrow they fought again; and when the night came they had all fallen by the sword save it were fifty and two of the people of Coriantumr, and sixty and nine of the people of Shiz.

24 And it came to pass that they slept upon their swords that night, and on the morrow they fought again, and they contended in their might with their swords and with their shields, all that day.

25 And when the night came there were thirty and two of the people of Shiz, and twenty and seven of the people of Coriantumr.

26 And it came to pass that they ate and slept, and prepared for death on the morrow. And they were large and mighty men as to the strength of men.

Comments

Moroni tells the story in repeated events and phrases. This gives a picture of the continued destruction. Sleeping on their swords is an image of both war weariness, and an unwillingness to bend. The battle would continue, inexorably. Finally, there are few left standing and they prepare for one last battle, knowing that many of them would die, but not quite understanding that there would only be one remaining.

Ether 15:27–29

27 And it came to pass that they fought for the space of three hours, and they fainted with the loss of blood.

28 And it came to pass that when the men of Coriantumr had received sufficient strength that they could walk, they were about to flee for their lives; but behold, Shiz arose, and also his men, and he swore in his wrath that he would slay Coriantumr or he would perish by the sword.

29 Wherefore, he did pursue them, and on the morrow he did overtake them; and they fought again with the sword. And it came to pass that when they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood.

Comments

In many ancient battles that were hand to hand, exhaustion was often the real killer. Two evenly matched fighters might not find advantage, but if exhaustion entered the picture, the danger increased. These men were exhausted. One more time there is a chance to end things without total destruction, “but behold, Shiz arose, and also his men, and he swore in his wrath that he would slay Coriantumr.”

Ether 15:30–31

30 And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz.

31 And it came to pass that after he had smitten off the head of Shiz, that Shiz raised up on his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died.

Comments

The action of Shiz arising and struggling for breath, without his head, is a difficult scene to imagine. Nevertheless, a modern medical doctor examined the passage and noted that if the sword was not precisely at the neck, but at the base of the skull, then it was actually the severing of the midbrain. With Coriantumr's documented exhaustion, there is no reason to expect that he made a clean decapitation. Cutting through the midbrain would result in the rising, though clearly the idea that he "struggled for breath" was not a medical description, but a literary one.

Ether 15:32–34

32 And it came to pass that Coriantumr fell to the earth, and became as if he had no life.

33 And the Lord spake unto Ether, and said unto him: Go forth. And he went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled; and he finished his record; (and the hundredth part I have not written) and he hid them in a manner that the people of Limhi did find them.

34 Now the last words which are written by Ether are these: Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen.

Comments

Ether's prophecy was fulfilled. This record does not describe Coriantumr being discovered by the people of Zarahemla (prior to their unification with Mosiah₂'s Nephites). We learn of that in Omni 1:21.

There are few things in the book of Ether where we can easily know when Moroni quoted his source rather than summarized it. Indeed, for the most part, Moroni summarized. That is not true of the conclusion. At the end, Moroni quotes Ether's words. Whether the *amen* was part of the quotation, or added by Moroni is immaterial. For both men, the final word was a testimony to what had been recorded.

The Book of Moroni

Moroni 1

Moroni Continues to Write

Moroni 1:1–4

1 Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished; and I make not myself known to the Lamanites lest they should destroy me.

2 For behold, their wars are exceedingly fierce among themselves; and because of their hatred they put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ.

3 And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life.

4 Wherefore, I write a few more things, contrary to that which I had supposed; for I had supposed not to have written any more; but I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord.

Comments

The book of Moroni is the only book of more than one chapter that did not have its chapters altered in the 1879 edition. Thus, these four verses were a chapter to themselves when Moroni wrote them.

They are very clearly written after Moroni finished the editing of the book of Ether, as he states in verse 1. It is also an admission that Moroni's assigned writing tasks were completed. He has finished his father's (Moron's) record and made sure that his father's desire concerning the record of Ether was fulfilled.

Moroni's brief explanation of what his life was like is a vision of loneliness and constant danger. We cannot tell, from this short description, where he is at the time of this writing. He speaks of Lamanites trying to destroy him, but since the term Lamanite was a generic term for "not-Nephite," that doesn't help us know whether he stayed near his ancestral lands or had traveled to a different place.

What he does say is that he has time to think, and having thought on his mission and the future of the record he was preserving, his thoughts turned to the future. The book of Moroni is almost entirely focused on the person, and then the people, who would receive the record of his father, to which he had added the book of Ether.

Moroni 2

Conferring the Gift of the Holy Ghost

Moroni 2:1–3

1 The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them—

2 And he called them by name, saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles.

3 Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost.

Comments

Chapters 2–5 of the book of Moroni concern the priesthood practices of the church. Ether, chapter 5, is quite clearly Moroni addressing Joseph Smith as an aside in the process of editing Ether. It concerns the permission given Joseph to show the plates to three witnesses. That direct address to Joseph Smith tells us that Moroni has either seen him in vision or has an understanding of the events that will unfold when the Book of Mormon is given to the world.

Knowing that Moroni has previously addressed Joseph, it is easy to see that these instructions on how to perform the sacred ordinances, that are part of the restoration of the Church, are also directed to Joseph Smith. Moroni understood the nature of what was to come, and therefore provides Joseph with a short handbook on how church ordinances are to be done.

This chapter's instruction is for conferring the Gift of the Holy Ghost. It is instruction, rather than the specific wording of the ordinance. The important aspects referenced in these verses are:

- The priesthood holder places his hands on the persons head
- He calls the person by name
- He calls on the Father, in Jesus Christ's name
- He declares that this ordinance is performed by God's (priesthood) authority
- He bestows the gift of the Holy Ghost ("give[s] the Holy Ghost")
- He closes in the name of Jesus Christ ("in my name shall ye give it")

Moroni 3

Priesthood Ordination

Moroni 3:1–4

1 The manner which the disciples, who were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers—
2 After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them, and said:
3 In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest (or if he be a teacher, I ordain you to be a teacher) to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

4 And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them.

Comments

The next instruction is how to ordain those who are called to administer in the Church, priest and teachers. Verse 2 is the instruction of the action of the laying on of hands, and verse 3 is a model of the words to be stated. Verse 4 implies that this was the practice in the Nephite Church, and that it was done “by the power of the Holy Ghost.” We expect to read “by the power of the Priesthood,” not “the power of the Holy Ghost.” It is possible that the “power of the Holy Ghost” is being used in the context of priesthood and authority, as witnessed by the Holy Ghost.

The modern Church has taken these verses as an example of how to perform ordinances, just as the Lord’s Prayer is given as an example of how to offer a prayer. Neither example was meant to model precise words. Formal, set words are not used, but rather the essential elements that we are to adhere to are given.

Moroni 4

Administration of the Sacrament

Moroni 4:1–2

1 The manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church; and they administered it according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true; and the elder or priest did minister it—

2 And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying:

Comments

As in the ordinance instructions in chapter 3, there are instructions for actions, and instructions for words. Verses 1–2 provide the actions. The appropriate officiators, elders and priests, administer the symbols of the sacrament. Thus, there is a need for correct authority to be used in sacralizing the common elements of bread and water into their greater symbolic meaning. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not teach that the bread and water are physically transformed, but only that they are changed from secular to sacred. Kneeling has been understood as a means of showing reverence before God, and thus the officiators kneel.

Blessing on the Bread

Moroni 4:3

3 O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Comments

When the bread has been sacralized (sanctified), it is no longer for nutrition of the physical body, but for the nourishment of “the souls of all those who partake of it.” It is also a reminder of one of the two elements of the Atonement, the physical body. Thus, the bread becomes the symbolic remembrance of the Atonement’s reversal of physical death.

The covenant is “to remember.” Remembering as a simple mental action is not the type of remembering required here, but it is a remembering that invokes action. In this case, the action of keeping “his commandments which he had given them.”

Moroni 5

Blessing on the Wine

Moroni 5:1–2

¹ The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they took the cup, and said:

² O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Comments

Even though this is a separate chapter from chapter 4 which provided the instructions for the blessing of the bread, the blessing of the wine (and in modern practice, water) is a continuation of how to perform the sacrament ordinances. Therefore, it is assumed that the physical descriptions from Moroni 4:1–2 continue to apply. Those authorized to administer the sacrament will kneel to pray.

In the Old World, wine was used specifically as an apt symbol for the blood of Christ. The two elements were bread and wine, or body and blood. Symbolically (as suggested in the Comments on Moroni 4:3), the bread represented the victory over physical death. The blood represented the victory over spiritual death, the facilitation of the ability to repent, and to, therefore, be forgiven.

Although water doesn't hold the same color symbolism, it is yet essential for life, and fits into the context of Christ being the "water of life" (Revelation 21:6). We do not know what liquid the New World saints used. There is some indication that there were grapes, but as with our modern substitution of water for wine, the particular liquid is less important than its symbolic meaning.

As with the bread, the wine (or water) is not for nourishing the body but rather the soul. It is also a call to the remembrance of covenants.

Both prayers end with the blessing that we "may always have his Spirit to be with [us]." These are not physical blessings, but spiritual ones; therefore, it is the Spirit that will be with us; not earthly elements, but a spiritual presence.

Moroni 6

Baptism and Church Membership

Moroni 6:1–3

1 And now I speak concerning baptism. Behold, elders, priests, and teachers were baptized; and they were not baptized save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it.

2 Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins.

3 And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.

Comments

Moroni begins this chapter by speaking about the ordinance of baptism. He starts out stating who should be baptized. Of all the people in the world, who receives this ordinance? Before commenting on Moroni's specifics, it should be noted that there is no evidence that the Nephites understood the ordinance of baptizing for the dead, which deals with a very different type of application of the baptismal covenant. For the dead, all are baptized so that they will have the ability to accept or reject it. For baptisms of living persons, which is what Moroni is discussing, there are necessary requirements for baptism.

The first requirement is that the candidate should have “brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of [baptism].” The phrasing is a little surprising, for when we see “elders, priests, and teachers,” we assume that Moroni is speaking of those who will do the baptizing. He is not. He is only saying that these kinds of people should be baptized, and that they should be worthy of baptism.

The second requirement is that “they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins.” Repentance is an important precursor to baptism, and an important part of both the worthiness and the manifestation of fruitful works. If we do not repent, we have not “brought forth fruit meet” for baptism.

Finally, the baptismal covenant to take upon oneself the name of Christ, and to follow his commandments “to the end,” is to persevere in bringing forth good fruit.

Moroni 6:4

4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.

Comments

Moroni moves to the next important question: what happens after baptism?

The person who has been baptized is “numbered among the people of the church of Christ.” This means that they have entered into the community of Christ. They are considered part of that community and are partakers of communal benefits and obligations. What is interesting is that entry into the church of the newly baptized is characterized by the obligations of those who are in the church already. The newly baptized are to be cared for “that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ.”

Church Meeting and Administration

Moroni 6:5–6

5 And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

6 And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

Comments

Having explained the responsibilities of the members of the church, Moroni turns to speak of the community into which the baptized person has entered. How did that subcommunity of the larger population function?

Moroni clearly defines church in terms of a community. He had previously said that the community should care for its new members, and now he is saying that it should “meet together oft.” When they meet, what should they do? They should be a community, and they should fast and pray to commune with God, and they should “speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.”

Moroni continues to reinforce the purpose of the community: they, the church, partake of the sacrament often. While it simply says that they met “in remembrance” of the Lord, it is likely that there was also an understanding of covenant renewal in the ordinance.

Moroni 6:7–8

7 And they were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them; and whoso was found to commit iniquity, and three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the elders, and if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ.

8 But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven.

Comments

As in any family, any community, life is not a continually smooth path. There would be no need to have the community care for the “welfare of their souls” (verse 5 in this chapter) if there were no threats to those souls. Thus, the next responsibility is not directed to the freshly repentant and baptized, but to the members of the community who must live their lives as best they can. Thus, while they try to keep iniquity out of their lives, it will enter in for some. The principle of repentance returns to primary importance.

The community cares for those who desire to be a part of the community. If a member were to sin and not repent, “their names were blotted out.” They had not fulfilled the requirement to be a part of the community. Nevertheless, repentance was primary, and “as oft as they repented . . . they were forgiven.”

Moroni 6:9

9 And their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or to exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done.

Comments

What happened when they met together oft? The Spirit led them. Activities that were deemed spirit-led and appropriate were preaching, praying and singing. Doubtless there could be others, but those are some of the ones listed.

Moroni 7

Moroni 7:1

1 And now I, Moroni, write a few of the words of my father Mormon, which he spake concerning faith, hope, and charity; for after this manner did he speak unto the people, as he taught them in the synagogue which they had built for the place of worship.

Comments

This is the only verse of this chapter that Moroni wrote, rather than copied. As he indicates, he is entering into his record a talk his father gave. Why might Moroni randomly add a sermon, and particularly at this point in his record? Certainly, because he respected his father, but there is probably another reason. While Moroni has broken his book into chapters, there is a theme in chapters 2 through 7. Moroni has been laying down the way a church is to function.

In Moroni 6:9, the verse just previous to this chapter (if read consecutively), Moroni declared: “And their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or to exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done.”

Thus, we find that Moroni gives us a sermon, in a synagogue (or other gathering place) where the church would meet. He provides an example of the type of preaching and exhortation that he thought should be given in church meetings.

Moroni 7:2–3

2 And now I, Mormon, speak unto you, my beloved brethren; and it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and his holy will, because of the gift of his calling unto me, that I am permitted to speak unto you at this time.

3 Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.

Comments

As Mormon begins to preach, he declares the authority by which he speaks. This is not a declaration of priesthood authority, but rather of spiritual authority, the Spirit being a part of the community of those who have taken upon themselves the name of Christ. As an example of how our sermons might be, Mormon would suggest that we express our ideas as the Spirit motivates us.

There is a difference between Mormon's authority and the authority that most of us bring to our talks. He is a leader in the church and is therefore able to address "you that are of the church," and to be able to make statements that go far beyond most statements that we make in Sacrament meetings. Mormon, therefore, can declare that "[you] have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord." Although we can learn something from him as a speaker, we also remember that he is an Apostle and therefore able to make such pronouncements.

Discerning Good and Evil

Moroni 7:4–7

4 And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.

5 For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.

6 For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing.

7 For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness.

Comments

As a sample sermon, Mormon's example shows that explaining scripture for greater understanding is a useful model. He begins with references that can be traced to Christ's sermons in the New World (which also trace to the Sermon on the Mount in the Old World). Thus, he begins by saying that he can understand their "peaceable walk with the children of men" because of their good works (verses 4–5). In the Sermon at the Temple, the phrase was "by their fruits ye shall know them" (3 Nephi 14:20).

From the concept that we can be known by our good works, Mormon moves to the importance of the motivation behind the good works. He calls on two themes from Christ's sermons. The first is "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (3 Nephi 14:9–11).

Those verses set up the relationship between the moral character and the giving of the gift, or, in the new context, the works. Nevertheless, Mormon understands that there is a possibility that one could do

work without the correct motivation. To resolve that, he again refers obliquely to the Sermon’s several discussions of hypocrisy. When one does something for the praise of men, and receives the praise of men, Christ declared that “they have their reward” (3 Nephi 13:16).

It is possible that the more direct reference was “Therefore, if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you” (3 Nephi 12:23–24).

However, it appears to have retained more of the Old World context than appears in our translation. The corresponding verse explains why the word *gift* appears in the reference: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23–24).

Moroni 7:8–10

8 For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God.

9 And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such.

10 Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift.

Comments

As an example of a talk using scripture, Mormon refers to scripture, and then expands and clarifies meaning. In this case, the issue is the dichotomy between action and intent. Returning to the concept of the gift, if it is not given with the correct intent, then it truly is not given. There are expectations, perhaps. The gift might be given, but with the expectation of getting something back from the receiver. When the text says that “he is counted evil before God,” we must remember that the Book of Mormon speaks in terms of polar opposites. There is God, and there is the opposite of God (the adversary, or Satan). Thus, if not of God, then it is “evil,” perhaps without the moral implications of that word.

Moving from a gift to a parallel of prayer, Mormon similarly notes that the act of praying is to communicate inward desires, and if those inward desires are contrary to God’s principles, then God does not recognize that act as true prayer.

At the conclusion of the logical reasoning section (verses 8, 9), Mormon restates that “a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift.”

Moroni 7:11–13

11 For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.

12 Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.

13 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

Comments

Verses 11 through 13 provide a shift from a negative perspective (an evil man cannot do good works) to the more positive expression that “that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually.”

With the Book of Mormon perspective that only discusses the widely opposed poles of good and evil, evil comes from the evil one, and “good cometh of God.” As the next logical step, Mormon has established that we can know that something is of God because it is good. However, how do we know what is good? He turns to that question in the next verses.

Moroni 7:14–16

14 Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.

15 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

16 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

Comments

The important part of judging is to be careful to judge correctly. Although some might misread the Matthean admonition of “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1) as a caution against judgement, Mormon clearly understands its correct meaning. Judging is inherent in agency. Where Matthew was concerned with the effect of judging on the person doing the judging, Mormon is asking a different question. Therefore, there is no hint that one might not judge, or even be hesitant to judge.

In Mormon, “it is given unto you to judge.” Why? “That ye may know good from evil.” Our agency only functions if we can tell the difference between good and evil. Without the difference, and without being

able to discern the difference, we would be again in the state that existed in the Garden of Eden, a state that had to change to allow for our progression.

If it is so essential that we judge between good and evil, how can we be sure that we are judging correctly, that we are not judging “that which is evil to be of God?” Mormon’s declaration is that “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil.” The Spirit of Christ is a universal gift, perhaps endowed at the time of the Fall. It is the assurance that it is possible for us to discern good from evil. There is in us something like a conscience, but deeper and stronger, if we learn to listen to it. For all humankind, throughout all time and in all places, the Spirit of Christ is the assured measuring stick whereby we can judge good from evil.

Moroni 7:17–18

17 But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

18 And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.

Comments

Mormon continues to tie together the pieces of his argument. He gave the Spirit of Christ as the way to judge in verse 16 of this chapter, and now links any judgement call to the question of whether it might have been made in error. Since a good does not come but from the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ leads always to the good.

As Mormon concludes this section of the sermon, he has declared that good comes from God, and that we can find that good even in a confusing world by listening to the Spirit of Christ that has been given to every person. Now, at the end of this section, he realizes that our humanity at times places us in confusing circumstances. Only at this end of section do we get the restatement of the requirement “judge not, that ye be not judged.” Of course, Mormon’s reference would be to 3 Nephi 14:1, rather than to Matthew.

Faith

Moroni 7:19–21

19 Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

20 And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing?

21 And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby ye may lay hold on every good thing.

Comments

Verse 19 is another common transition in Mormon's writings. He gives a statement that concludes his previous argument and uses it to launch the next topic. In this case, Mormon has taught that we should judge, and that we can judge that which is good. Now, the question becomes how we "will lay hold upon every good thing." This is not a question of where to find the good, but rather how to incorporate the good into our lives. The "lay hold" wording becomes a statement of action, a statement of doing. It is not "Where do we learn?", but "How do we become, how do we do good?"

The answer, for Mormon, lies in the nature of faith. It will not be surprising to learn that Mormon sees "faith," in his language, as more of an action verb, more so than does the English language. Some other languages (such as Greek of the New Testament) have a verb "to faith." English does not. That English lacks this verb only means that we (as perhaps primarily English speakers) need to learn how to see faith in action, in spite of a limited vocabulary.

Moroni 7:22–25

22 For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing.

23 And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come.

24 And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them.

25 Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ.

Comments

As the run-up to the discussion on faith, Mormon spends time on understanding the principles upon which faith is enacted. Once again, that focus is on Christ. Before Christ came to the world, prophets prophesied of his mission. The reason that Mormon focuses on the prophecies from before Christ's time is that it was a time where there was a promise made, but as yet unfulfilled. Into that void, the expectation, without a fulfillment, entered a faith that allowed them to proceed with the correct doctrine, to learn and repent,

even prior to the time when the atonement technically initiated the ability for those actions. Thus, Mormon models faith as acting at times when the fulfillment is not known.

Moroni 7:26–29

26 And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they become the sons of God. And as surely as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you.

27 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men?

28 For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens.

29 And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.

Comments

Having discussed faith before the fulfillment, Mormon turns to faith in times after the fulfillment. No longer a faith that looked to the coming of Christ, faith acted to allow us to ask of the Father in prayer. It was now a personal unfulfillment that faith looked to work through. It similarly acted to allow us to understand that God exists and is willing to answer our prayers.

The miracle of Christ's atonement did not remove God from our lives and did not remove our need for God's merciful intervention in our lives. While Christ "answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him," we are not to suppose that our relationship with the God of the heavens is any less, nor that miracles, big and small, cannot still happen among the children of men.

Moroni 7:30–32

30 For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

31 And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him.

32 And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men.

Comments

The first part of verse 29 was important to the conclusion of the previous verses, but the ending part of that verse is the introduction to verses 30–32. Again, Mormon pivots from one topic to the next, within the same sentence. Verse 29 spoke of the ministering of angels. Thus, it is angels who “are subject to him (Christ)”, as stated at the beginning of verse 30. There are still miracles, still angels, and the heavens still care for humankind.

This pivots to the important subject of repentance, for “the office of [the angels’] ministry is to call men unto repentance.” Note that repentance prepares humankind for faith in Christ (verse 32). The next two verses continue to explain this interface between repentance and faith.

Moroni 7:33–34

33 And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

34 And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved.

Comments

It is no mistake that Mormon’s discussion of faith should lead to Christ’s statement that “ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.” Even though the context has been about miracles, these miracles are those that come when we exercise faith. Again, English doesn’t have a verb form for *faith*, but it would really be helpful here. However, it is implied that faith and power are made equivalent. Faith is power, not in knowledge but in doing—in acting upon our agency.

With that beginning in verse 33, Mormon immediately moves to what is required to have a faith that is powerful: “Repent all ye ends of the earth.” Faith is to be exercised in principles of Godliness, and those principles require that we come to Christ having repented of the sins, or any habit, or beliefs, or intentions, or social stigmas, that might have kept us from those divine principles. We repent, signaling a willingness to change. Just as faith is a principle of action, repentance is also a principle of action, one that is a prerequisite to exercising that faith.

Moroni 7:35–38

35 And now, my beloved brethren, if this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased?

36 Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?

37 Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

38 For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made.

Comments

Mormon’s conclusion to this section pulls together the threads of the argument. How may Mormon’s audience know that what he has said is true? “God will show unto you . . . that they are true.”

Then, Mormon returns to the important arguments. The God of their past is the God of their present, the God of their future. The faith that supported the ministration of angels and of miracles might be dormant, but it is not removed. With true faith, all of those hallmarks of the great faith of the past may return to our present.

Finally, the greatest miracle is to be saved, and that requires that “they shall have faith in his name.” Faith in Christ is required. Faith in Christ is possible.

This ends Mormon’s section explaining faith. He moves to the principle of hope in the next verses.

Moroni 7:39–40

39 But behold, my beloved brethren, I judge better things of you, for I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness; for if ye have not faith in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church.

40 And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?

Comments

In verse 4 of this chapter, Mormon had said: “And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.” Now he returns to that Apostolic declaration to place even more emphasis on it: “I judge better things of you.” What does he mean by that?

In this case, the judgement continues to be more of an Apostolic blessing. He has judged his people and found them good. The “better things” are that they are able to move to the next important phase of Christian life beyond repentance and faith. Therefore, Mormon turns to the concept of hope. He begins with the rhetorical question, “How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?” The obvious desired answer is that it could not be done, but now he needs to explain why that might be true. What is this hope? The next verses begin to answer the question.

Hope

Moroni 7:41–42

41 And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

42 Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.

Comments

Mormon’s answer to “What is hope?” is simple. Perhaps too simple. His definition of hope is connected to “the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him.” It seems almost circular, since this was also part of the ideas around faith.

The problem is again one of language. If we remember that the New Testament uses *faith* as a verb (our English translations must use “believe” for that meaning), then we can see the difference in that *hope* is a noun. The difference is not only related to the part of speech, contrasting a verb and a noun. Seeing the difference allows us to fine-tune our understanding of hope.

Faith is a principle of action, but it needs something to act upon, and particularly, something to act *for*. Hope is the definition of the goal. Hope is understanding the ultimate reason for our actions. Hope is the direction to which we act, with faith. Thus, hope holds out the prize, and faith moves us to capture it.

Charity

Moroni 7:43–44

43 And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart.

44 If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that

Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity.

Comments

Mormon pivots to the final aspect of the trilogy of faith, hope, and charity. Having defined faith as the active agent and hope as the understanding of the goal, charity becomes the qualification for one of the main objects we are to learn in our journey to God. Mormon declares that unless we are “meek, and lowly of heart, . . . [our] hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and the lowly in heart.” That sets up a definition of the type of person that we are to become.

How do we learn those attributes? Through charity. Without charity we are nothing; but, of course, now we need to understand why that might be true.

The specific phrase “if he have not charity he is nothing” echoes 1 Corinthians 13:2. It also appears in the Book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 26:30. Rather than suppose that Mormon learned the phrase from Nephi, (though he certainly could have), it is probable that 1 Corinthians influenced the vocabulary in both cases (here, in verse 44, and in 2 Nephi).

Moroni 7:45–47

45 And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

46 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Comments

Having posited charity as an essential quality of our change from the natural human to the godly human, Mormon needs to describe those qualities so that we understand what we are to develop. Therefore, verse 45 gives the definition of those qualities that we are to develop if we are to embody the principle of charity. Lest we think that those form a finite list, Mormon declares that “charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever.” Since our hope is in the kingdom of God, Mormon notes that “whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.”

This definition is essentially the same as the one Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Although the language comes from Paul, the meaning and principle are eternal and describe the qualities we should be developing to become more Christ-like.

Moroni 7:48

48 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

Comments

As Mormon ends his sermon, he commends his congregation to action. This was not simply a sermon for information, but of motivation to action. That is what he encourages at the end. As he ties up the conclusion, he again uses a phrase that should be familiar as coming from scripture (even though he does not designate it as scripture): “When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.” The language of that phrase is from 1 John 3:2. Perhaps there was a similar scripture in the Nephite canon that evoked that image. For the modern reader, the connection to 1 John 3:2 is easier. Our verse 48 is the result of translation.

Moroni 8

Moroni 8:1

1 An epistle of my father Mormon, written to me, Moroni; and it was written unto me soon after my calling to the ministry. And on this wise did he write unto me, saying:

Comments

Even though the book of Moroni feels somewhat disconnected, chapters 2–7 were actually a set of instructions for how one should “do church.” When we get to chapter 8, we hit a different type of information. Perhaps the introduction of the letter that comprises Moroni 8 and the one that will comprise Moroni 9 were triggered by the inclusion of his father’s sermon as an exemplar in Moroni 7.

The two letters are very different. This letter provides another theological treatise, while the letter in Moroni 9 is informational and gives history. The occasion of this letter is that it comes “soon after [Moroni’s] calling to the ministry.” Thus, the circumstance of Moroni’s new position (probably a calling as a disciple, or in modern terms, apostle) dictated the more religious nature of this particular letter. It is more administrative instruction than a personal letter from a father to his son.

Moroni 8:2–4

2 My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work.

3 I am mindful of you always in my prayers, continually praying unto God the Father in the name of his Holy Child, Jesus, that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end.

4 And now, my son, I speak unto you concerning that which grieveth me exceedingly; for it grieveth me that there should disputations rise among you.

Comments

Mormon's introduction to his letter to his son is somewhat formal, particularly compared to the tone we will see in the letter in Moroni 9. The reason is that Mormon is writing to his son as part of his recent call to the ministry. This is an administrator's letter first, and secondly a letter to his son.

Therefore, Mormon's content in the introduction is about his ministry and the fact that Mormon is praying for him in the execution of that ministry. That ends the personal aspect of the letter. Verse 3 turns to business. Mormon understands that there have been disputations, and he needs to quell them. This suggests that it is Moroni's new responsibility to do so, and his father is providing the information that he is to teach to quell the disputations.

The historical implication of the letter itself is that Mormon and Moroni were, at the time, in very separate regions. Mormon was leading an army, and Moroni may have been laboring in a city that was deeper in Nephite territory. Eventually, as the Nephites were swept up to Cumorah, the two were reunited—but that is after this letter.

Baptism of Little Children Is a Gross Error

Moroni 8:5–6

5 For, if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children.

6 And now, my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you; for, for this intent I have written this epistle.

Comments

Mormon declares that the particular dispute is over the baptism of little children. That will be the subject of the letter. It is interesting that the content of the letter explains the reasons for his views concerning infant baptism; he does not simply respond to the question of infant baptism with a simple yes or no.

As with other examples in the Book of Mormon, the language and vocabulary used sound similar to discussions over infant baptism in Joseph's day. However, the histories created for many Mesoamerican peoples suggests that they had a similar rite, one that was sufficiently similar: Spanish Catholic priests declared that washing and cleansing of the newborn was considered a baptism.

The fact that the later Spanish fathers' might have seen this rite and associated it with baptism similarly suggests how the influence of the practice could have entered Nephite practice. There were elements that were similar, and many that were not, so we do not have a case where there was a remembrance of baptism in the later native cultures, a position that several Spanish priests advocated.

Nevertheless, the idea of washing and cleansing was sufficiently similar that shifting the timing of the baptism to an earlier point to coincide with a known cultural rite would not have been unusual. Indeed, it likely provides a mirror to the same process in the Old World, where the earliest indications of baptism required a conversion and confession that certainly implied that accountability was necessary prior to baptism.

Moroni 8:7–9

7 For immediately after I had learned these things of you I inquired of the Lord concerning the matter.

And the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying:

8 Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.

9 And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children.

Comments

The process for transmitting this official doctrinal message to Moroni is important. Mormon appears to have the position of leader of the church, what we would call the President (although there is no indication that Nephites ever used that type of title). As the leader, Mormon still understood that the true head of the Church is Christ, and therefore the question is posed in prayer. What comes is revelation, and Mormon passes the information to his son as a declaration of authority from Christ.

The actual revelation is given in verse 8. It is a pretty simple declaration that the function of the atonement, and therefore the attendant baptism, is a commitment to repentance and a covenant of entrance and discipleship. Christ declares: “the whole need no physician.” Thus, the atonement operates on those who are in need, not those upon whom there is no need. Little children qualify as having no need, “for they are not capable of committing sin.” There are two aspects of the atonement. The first, which is the physical death, or the inheritance of Adam, is removed through the universal atonement. It is the second death, spiritual death, which is in question here. That type of “death” occurs through separation from God through sin. Little children are not capable of sin; therefore, there is no need for that part of the atonement as regards to little children. It is that part of the atonement that baptism recalls.

Verse 9 makes it clear that the concept of political correctness was not present in Mormon’s day. It is a harsh statement that baptizing little children “is solemn mockery before God.” Nevertheless, that is what he said. We should understand why he said that. In short, it is because it is contrary to the reason for which baptism was instituted, hence contrary to God’s plan. Mormon will have something similar to say in verse 16 of this chapter.

Moroni 8:10–11

10 Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children.

11 And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

Comments

As Mormon continues his letter, he now instructs Moroni on what he is to teach the people, according to the revelation quoted in verse 8. “This thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin.” This is not a negative teaching. There is no indication that Moroni is to preach *against* the baptism of children, but rather that he should teach the correct understanding of baptism, which will automatically give the people the understanding that “they shall all be saved with their little children.”

The important teaching is that “baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.” In that context, there is no need for little children to be baptized. It is not that baptizing little children is such a terrible thing to do, but rather that infant baptism has been misunderstood and there is no need for infant baptism.

In the context of Mesoamerica, this explanation would allow for the continuation of their birth practices but requires that those practices continue to be seen as separate from baptism.

Little Children Are Alive in Christ

Moroni 8:12–16

12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism!

13 Wherefore, if little children could not be saved without baptism, these must have gone to an endless hell.

14 Behold I say unto you, that he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell.

15 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.

16 Wo be unto them that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent. Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear.

Comments

Mormon now turns to the problems that might be created if one were to suggest that children needed baptism. The argument is encapsulated in the exclamatory sentence “How many little children have died without baptism!” Although infant deaths sadly still occur, the modern world has made great strides in preserving children and mothers through childbirth. That was not the case in more ancient history. There were few families where a child had not been lost early, perhaps even during childbirth.

The argument Mormon presents is the contrast between the declared need for any baptism at all, and the death of very young children. While he would agree that baptism is essential, if it applied to infants there would be a painfully large number who had not been able to be baptized, and would be condemned to an everlasting hell without any chance to live their life—and to repent in order to bring forth fruit meet for baptism.

It is this result, the implicit condemnation of innocent children, that Mormon believes is the mockery of God’s plan: “For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.” In a more modern world, it might be assumed that all children might have had access to a priest for baptism, but in the ancient world it was hardly assured.

Moroni 8:17–19

17 And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.

18 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.

19 Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy.

Comments

Mormon compares his fatherly love to that of the pure love of Christ. He extends that love to all children. Mormon declares that God does not change, and therefore it is God’s love that will cover for the children who die before their time, before the time when they could be accountable for their actions. It is “awful wickedness” to teach that a little child requires baptism to cleanse them from sins they cannot commit. Baptism is a fruit of repentance, but little children certainly cannot repent. In some people’s minds, little children still do not meet the qualifications for baptism. The point is, however, that little children do not need repentance or baptism.

Moroni 8:20–23

20 And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.

21 Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. I speak it boldly; God hath commanded me. Listen unto them and give heed, or they stand against you at the judgment-seat of Christ.

22 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—

23 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

Comments

In verse 9, Mormon began his discussion of infant baptism by calling the baptism of little children “solemn mockery before God.” In verse 23, he repeats: “It [infant baptism] is mockery before God.”

Before coming to the end of this discussion, Mormon also recapitulates the relationship of little children to the mercies of Christ, declaring that the atonement covers them without baptism, because they are not in need of it. “All little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law.” That last phrase is an important addition to the discussion. To this point, everything has focused on the baptism of little children. Nevertheless, the teaching also expands to a different realm. The issue is not simply the baptism of children, but also the baptism of others who have no law.

Mormon has declared that baptism follows repentance, and repentance requires an understanding that one is contrary to God’s law. In one very important phrase, Mormon expands the teaching beyond children to include “all they that are without the law.”

Baptism Is the Fruit of Repentance

Moroni 8:24–26

24 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.

25 And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

26 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.

Comments

After the condemnatory remarks, Mormon ends with a positive principle. Repentance is possible only for those who “are under condemnation, and under the curse of a broken law.” That is, one can only repent of a sin if one knows that they have committed it. If a person does not understand the law, they cannot have intentionally strayed from it. We live according to the knowledge we have, and we repent only of those things where we know that we are “under condemnation,” or when we have violated a law that we know.

This understanding of repentance is important because “the first fruits of repentance is baptism.” Baptism follows repentance, which follows the understanding of the law so that sin is understood and applicable.

The remission of sins changes us because it allows us to begin again, and to become meek and humble. It allows us to realign ourselves with the law that we know. If we know God’s law, then the remission of sins reconciles us to God.

Moroni 8:27–30

27 Behold, my son, I will write unto you again if I go not out soon against the Lamanites. Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent.

28 Pray for them, my son, that repentance may come unto them. But behold, I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them; and in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost.

29 And after rejecting so great a knowledge, my son, they must perish soon, unto the fulfilling of the prophecies which were spoken by the prophets, as well as the words of our Savior himself.

30 Farewell, my son, until I shall write unto you, or shall meet you again. Amen.

Comments

At the very end of the letter, Mormon steps away from an administrative role and concludes by giving fatherly counsel. These last verses shift to a more familiar tone, and it becomes a sad statement that, while little children might not need repentance and baptism, the “big children,” or the Nephite nation, is in dire need of repentance. Where the little children did not require repentance and baptism, the Nephite nation not only requires repentance, but is refusing repentance. Sadly, Mormon notes that “after rejecting so great a knowledge, my son, they must perish soon.” We do not know the length of time that “soon” was, but it was not more than a few years.

At the time of the letter, Mormon does not know that he will meet with Moroni. The next letter will continue with that hope of reunion, along with sadness for the unrepentant Nephites.

Moroni 9

Mormon's Epistle on the Abominations of the People

Moroni 9:1–3

1 My beloved son, I write unto you again that ye may know that I am yet alive; but I write somewhat of that which is grievous.

2 For behold, I have had a sore battle with the Lamanites, in which we did not conquer; and Archantus has fallen by the sword, and also Luram and Emron; yea, and we have lost a great number of our choice men.

3 And now behold, my son, I fear lest the Lamanites shall destroy this people; for they do not repent, and Satan stirreth them up continually to anger one with another.

Comments

This letter is a stark contrast to the letter in chapter 8. That letter was more formal, almost what we might call a First Presidency letter. This is clearly a letter from father to son, and it passes on the information of the day: sad information, but needed information.

Even though Mormon and Moroni are far enough apart that they have to resort to letters (and Mormon is clearly on the frontlines of the war), Moroni would have heard of the conflicts even though they had not yet reached where he was at the time. Therefore, it is most appropriate for his father to note immediately, that “I am yet alive.”

In Moroni 8:4, Mormon wrote of something that “grieveth [him] exceedingly.” Now he writes of very different news, “which is grievous.” These are hard times.

Mormon tells Moroni that the war is not going well. They are losing important men, or at least men that Moroni would have known, and for whom he would grieve. Most importantly, however, is that Mormon “fear[s] lest the Lamanites shall destroy this people; for they do not repent.”

That is an interesting statement because it is not only a prediction throughout the Book of Mormon, but a theme that Mormon ties to the destruction of the Jaredites. Yet, at the time of this letter, it might appear that Mormon does not yet know, but only fears, that the destruction will come.

The details of the timing of this letter are beyond these notes, but it appears highly likely that the Book of Mormon was written after this letter. Hence, we are seeing a time prior to the writing of Mormon's masterwork, a time when perhaps he held out just a little hope; a time when he at least feared their destruction rather than knew it too well.

Moroni 9:4–6

4 Behold, I am laboring with them continually; and when I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against me; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them.

5 For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death; and they have lost their love, one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually.

6 And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God.

Comments

Mormon the General spoke of the war. Mormon the Apostle now speaks of the second “war” he is fighting. Just as he is losing the battle for their physical lives, he is also losing the battle for the Nephites’ spiritual lives. His descriptions of the people’s reaction to his preaching is completely recognizable. If he speaks “with sharpness,” they become angry. When he uses “no sharpness they harden their hearts.”

Mormon is speaking of a people who have given themselves over to the bloodlust of war: “They thirst after blood and revenge continually.”

Nevertheless, Mormon does not advocate giving up, but encourages himself and Moroni to “labor diligently, for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation.” They do not necessarily labor in hope of success, but out of the duty of the calling.

Moroni 9:7–8

7 And now I write somewhat concerning the sufferings of this people. For according to the knowledge which I have received from Amoron, behold, the Lamanites have many prisoners, which they took from the tower of Sherrizah; and there were men, women, and children.

8 And the husbands and fathers of those women and children they have slain; and they feed the women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers; and no water, save a little, do they give unto them.

Comments

Mormon returns to the issue of the war, and the sad way in which the war is developing. He is commenting on things that he clearly feels have gone beyond the honorable way of war. In the ancient world, war was never a pretty thing. It was always gruesome, but typically there were rules that one would follow. Mormon appears to be suggesting that the nature of warfare has changed. Indeed, previous wars had the goal of political and economic dominance. This war is a war of intended destruction. It really was different.

Particularly abhorrent to Mormon was the treatment of captive women and children. He passes on the report that has come to him that “they feed women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers.” That is abhorrent. That is beyond our understanding. It was probably hyperbole.

If we are placing the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica, there was certainly a practice of ritual cannibalism. However, in Mesoamerica, and in virtually all known cases, cannibalism is not acceptable except within certain confines, and typically those are considered by the practitioners as sacred. Thus, we can be certain that women and children were sacrificed. That was known practice, under certain circumstances, in Mesoamerica.

Ritual cannibalism was practiced, but nothing in the practice would suggest that it was used to humiliate, which is the suggestion here. If they were actually fed the flesh of the fathers, there would have been some religious meaning behind it, even though we would not agree with the religion that would do that.

Moroni 9:9–10

9 And notwithstanding this great abomination of the Lamanites, it doth not exceed that of our people in Moriantum. For behold, many of the daughters of the Lamanites have they taken prisoners; and after depriving them of that which was most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue—
10 And after they had done this thing, they did murder them in a most cruel manner, torturing their bodies even unto death; and after they have done this, they devour their flesh like unto wild beasts, because of the hardness of their hearts; and they do it for a token of bravery.

Comments

Mormon continues with the horrors of war by noting that this new type of warfare is affecting the way Nephites fight the war as well. They, too, are adopting some of these terrible practices. For the Nephite cannibalism, note that “they do it for a token of bravery.” That is a little closer to the religious motivations of ritual cannibalism. The eating of flesh entails not only the body, but also the spirit of the one sacrificed. Thus, there is the statement (verse 10) that the eating of flesh might be for demonstrating bravery, although typically it was the flesh of a warrior, and not of a sacrificed and tortured maiden. If the context of verse 9 really was the Nephite rape and torture of women, Mormon is telling Moroni just how far the Nephites have fallen, and why they will no longer hear the word of God. They are too far gone in their bloodlust.

Moroni 9:11–15

11 O my beloved son, how can a people like this, that are without civilization—
12 (And only a few years have passed away, and they were a civil and a delightsome people)
13 But O my son, how can a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination—
14 How can we expect that God will stay his hand in judgment against us?
15 Behold, my heart cries: Wo unto this people. Come out in judgment, O God, and hide their sins, and wickedness, and abominations from before thy face!

Comments

Mormon's feelings run over onto the letter. Verses 11–14 need to be read as a single idea, a single sentence. The phrase “how can a people like this” is not resolved until verse 14, where the conclusion is: “How can we expect that God will stay his hand in judgment against us?” Verse 12 is marked in parentheses to note that it is an inserted idea into the sentence. It is Mormon noting the contrast between the current state of the people, and a people that only a few years prior were “a civil and a delightsome people,” but are now “without civilization.”

Moroni 9:16–17

16 And again, my son, there are many widows and their daughters who remain in Sherrizah; and that part of the provisions which the Lamanites did not carry away, behold, the army of Zenephi has carried away, and left them to wander whithersoever they can for food; and many old women do faint by the way and die.
17 And the army which is with me is weak; and the armies of the Lamanites are betwixt Sherrizah and me; and as many as have fled to the army of Aaron have fallen victims to their awful brutality.

Comments

Mormon's failures to stir repentance on his people are echoed in his failure to physically protect his people: “The army which is with me is weak; and the armies of the Lamanites are betwixt Sherrizah (where help was needed) and me.”

Moroni 9:18–19

18 O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. Behold, I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands.
19 And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written.

Comments

Mormon concludes this portion of the letter with his personal feelings of failure. “I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands.” Mormon is a leader, but a leader only when those he leads will listen. They are no longer doing that. Mormon sees that the end is coming.

Moroni 9:20–22

20 And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites.

21 Behold, my son, I cannot recommend them unto God lest he should smite me.

22 But behold, my son, I recommend thee unto God, and I trust in Christ that thou wilt be saved; and I pray unto God that he will spare thy life, to witness the return of his people unto him, or their utter destruction; for I know that they must perish except they repent and return unto him.

Comments

Mormon intends to shift the subject. As his final word, he leaves an important parallel: “I cannot recommend them unto God.” That is a contrasting parallel to: “But behold, my son, I recommend thee unto God.”

Moroni 9:23–24

23 And if they perish it will be like unto the Jaredites, because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge.

24 And if it so be that they perish, we know that many of our brethren have deserted over unto the Lamanites, and many more will also desert over unto them; wherefore, write somewhat a few things, if thou art spared and I shall perish and not see thee; but I trust that I may see thee soon; for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee.

Comments

As suggested in the comments on verse 3 in this chapter, the Book of Mormon had not been written at this point. Nevertheless, Mormon’s readings were gelling as to the things that he would write. Therefore, even though the Nephite end does not yet seem sure (“*if* they perish”), Mormon still links it to the demise of the Jaredites. That is a theme that he elaborates clearly in his masterwork.

Verse 24 notes that Mormon has records that he wants to give to Moroni. Modern readers will certainly assume that this means the plates containing the Book of Mormon. However, they had not yet been written. Mormon intended originally for Moroni to have custody of all of the records. Eventually, that would

not happen. The archive would be buried in Cumorah (Mormon 6:6) and Moroni would be entrusted with the record that was predicted to survive and to come forth, as out of the dust.

Moroni 9:25–26

25 My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.

26 And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen.

Comments

Mormon understands that he has written a gloomy letter. His intent was to inform, not to depress, so he desires that rather than let these tidings “weigh [Moroni] down,” that Moroni should allow that “Christ lift [him] up.” He is to take heart and have hope in his faith.

Moroni 10

Moroni's Final Exhortations and Farewell

Moroni 10:1–2

1 Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me good; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites; and I would that they should know that more than four hundred and twenty years have passed away since the sign was given of the coming of Christ.

2 And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.

Comments

The last time Moroni gave us a date was in Mormon 8:6, when it was four hundred years since the coming of Christ. At that time, he had said, “I have not friends or whither to do; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not” (Mormon 8:5). Now, twenty years later, Moroni is sure of the fact that it is time to “seal up these records.” Only at the very end of the record do we see that perhaps Moroni is nearing the end of his days (see verse 34 in this chapter).

After twenty years of being surprised that he was still alive and adding more text to his father's book, the time has come to close it. While it is still his father's book, he has cared for it for longer than it was in Mormon's care (based on reconstruction of events). Mormon ended his work with a plea to future Lamanites (Mormon 7), and Moroni fittingly does the same.

Ask God

Moroni 10:3–7

3 Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

4 And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

6 And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is.

7 And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever.

Comments

Verses 4 and 5 are clearly the ones that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have heard most often, but they are part of this longer thought. The connection, in the beginning, is the “I would exhort you,” which we see in both verses 3 and 4. While we are exhorted to ask “if these things are not true,” we are also asked to remember “how merciful the Lord hat been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things.”

Verse 3 sets the context for the asking in verse 4. The Lord has done prodigious works among his children, and Moroni exhorts us to see the Book of Mormon in that light, as yet another demonstration of the love of God for his children on earth.

Verse 5 invokes the Holy Ghost to know truth, and verse 6 reminds us that “nothing that is good denieth the Christ.” Moroni intentionally references his father’s sermon which Moroni included in Moroni 7 (verses 19–25). Finally, verse 7 declares that understanding the message of the Book of Mormon is equivalent to understanding that Jesus is the Christ.

Some have questioned the phrase “if these things are not true” as an awkward way to ask for truth. This is simply a different way of saying the same thing as “Ask if these things are true.” However, the “not” seems to act as an intensifier, suggesting of course they are true. It is like asking: “Is it not so?” That short interrogatory sentence is another example of this use of “not”; it really doesn’t mean a negation.

Deny Not the Gifts of God

Moroni 10:8

8 And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them.

Comments

Moroni will enter a section that discusses the gifts of God, a discussion that clearly follows the lead of 1 Corinthians 12:4–10. In 1 Corinthians, they are gifts of the Spirit, while here they are the gifts of God. There is nothing theologically different between which personage of the Godhead is referenced.

These gifts have been discussed often in the Book of Mormon, though not always following 1 Corinthians as closely as Moroni 10:8–17 does. We see them recognizably in Omni 1:25; Alma 9:21; 3 Nephi 29:6; and Mormon 9:7.

Moroni 10:9–10

9 For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom;
10 And to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

Comments

The verification that there is no significant difference between the gifts of God stated in Moroni 10:8–17 comes in verse 9, where it is declared that the gifts are given by the Spirit.

These may, or may not, have been intended to work in sets of two, but it seems profitable to examine them as if that was the intention.

In this case, the first two gifts deal with teaching. The first is to teach the “word of wisdom,” and the second to “teach the word of knowledge.” The repetition of “word of” verifies that we should not be sidetracked by the similarity in words to the *Word of Wisdom*. That is entirely different, and not intended here.

In this case, the two phrases are parallel expressions that there is a gift to teach. The gift, however, is not to teach mathematics or economics, but the things of God; hence, wisdom. In that parallel context, the knowledge is similarly knowledge of Godly things.

Moroni 10:11

11 And to another, exceedingly great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

Comments

The parallels are created by the repeated phrase “and to another.” The shortness of these two phrases had them placed in the same sentence, even though they are two separate gifts.

These gifts parallel “great faith,” and “gifts of healing.” Acts 14:8–9 speaks of a cripple: “The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith the be healed.” Faith and healing are linked, and certainly “great faith” could include the faith to heal, or to be healed. Faith operates for both the giver and the recipient.

Moroni 10:12–14

12 And again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles;

13 And again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things;

14 And again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits;

Comments

These three verses go together, rather than just verses 12 and 13. Nevertheless, they all cover the same concepts. The three gifts mentioned deal with the connections between the heavens and the heart. Miracles come from God, and Moroni has used the connection between a constant God and miracles to demonstrate that miracles continue if God continues (Mormon 9:15). Through the gift of prophecy, the understanding of the heavens is delivered to one on earth.

The beholding, and the ministration of angels, are similarly blessings from heaven to one on earth. There is no indication that there is a particular person to whom these blessings come. While there is a single prophet for the whole of the church, all have the opportunity to have the gift of prophecy for their own sphere of responsibility. Similarly, there is no indication that it takes some special person to receive angels, only that the gift can be given (upon worthiness, certainly).

Moroni 10:15–16

15 And again, to another, all kinds of tongues;

16 And again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.

Comments

“All kinds of tongues” and “divers kinds of tongues” are really the same statement with a different word that conveys the meaning of “several.” In the early Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there was a greater emphasis on the tradition of speaking in tongues, a practice which has faded. The modern meaning relies on the phrase “the interpretation of languages.” Rather than as a sign of God’s communication, the modern gift of tongues is a gift of understanding, or communicating with, each other.

Moroni 10:17–19

17 And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.

18 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

19 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.

Comments

With the missionary emphasis on Moroni 10:4–5, it might be excused if we think that Moroni was writing so that people would believe in the Book of Mormon. There is certainly an element of that, but Moroni understood the Book of Mormon as a book. We are not to believe in *the book*, but rather in *the theme* of the book, which is to testify of Christ. Why did Moroni depart from the exhortation of seeing if “these things are not true” and then turn to discussion of the gifts of the Spirit? In fact, he didn’t change course at all.

When Moroni exhorts us to ask God if “these things are not true,” Moroni was speaking of the things of Christ. He did not intend that verse to be as exclusively applied as our missionary efforts make it. Therefore, right after he exhorts us to ask, he declares that “whatsoever thing is good is just and true, wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is” (see verse 6 of this chapter).

Right after speaking of the good that comes from Christ, Moroni speaks of some of the good things that come from Christ, the gifts of the Spirit. Thus, verse 18 confirms that “I would exhort you . . . that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.”

Moroni’s message to future generations is contained in the Book of Mormon, but the message reflects the purpose of the book, not simply the existence of the book.

The Need for Faith

Moroni 10:20–23

20 Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity.

21 And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope.

22 And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity.

23 And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me.

Comments

Moroni’s love for, and understanding of, the principles of faith, hope, and charity, is demonstrated in the long explanation his father gave in the sermon that Moroni included as Moroni 7. These verses restate that understanding without any further explanation. The emphasis here is to point to the end of our earthly

existence, to being saved in the kingdom of God. Since Moroni is clearly writing to the future, it is both the temporal and spiritual future that hold his interest.

Moroni exhorts his future readers to have faith, and to have hope in the correct goal. That is the type of faith which changes us, and can exalt us.

Moroni 10:24–26

24 And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth—that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.

25 And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God.

26 And wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God; and I speak it according to the words of Christ; and I lie not.

Comments

As Moroni approaches the end of his task, he turns not only to his brethren, the Lamanites, but also to “all the ends of the earth.” Moroni has declared that God is constant, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If we are therefore constant in our faith in God and Christ, then the blessings and the gifts can be ours.

However, if there should come a “day . . . that the power and gifts of God shall be done away,” it will be “because of unbelief.” It will not be God who leaves us, but we who leave God.

Moroni’s declaration in verse 25, that “if this be the case. . . there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one.” That seems like a harsh assessment. However, it follows logically according to both Book of Mormon precedent and the way Moroni has built his argument. In the Book of Mormon there are two opposing poles: God and Satan. There is nothing between. Therefore, if believing in Christ leads to laying hold upon all good things (see Moroni 7:19–25), not believing in Christ leads to the opposite. If all good comes from Christ, not believing in Christ leaves only the opposite possibility. Therefore, Moroni declares, “if [that] be the case, . . . there shall be none that doeth good among you.” It is almost a definition for Moroni’s use of the concept of laying hold upon all good things.

Moroni 10:27–29

27 And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?

28 I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation.

29 And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true.

Comments

Even though we have powerful words from Moroni, he nevertheless wrote often in insecurity. He worried that men would mock his words. He makes certain that any mistakes be accounted to men and not to God. It is under that concern that Moroni writes in verses 27–29.

Perhaps there will be some who will not believe what he has written. Therefore, he provides the final proof of the truth of what he has written. There will be a time when both Moroni and future readers will stand before God. At that time, it will be impossible to deny, for God himself “shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true.”

Come unto Christ

Moroni 10:30–31

30 And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.

31 And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

Comments

In verses 27–29 of this chapter, Moroni had indicated that there will come a time when God himself would testify that Moroni wrote the truth. In the meantime, Moroni returns the voice of God through prophets to establish his words.

He refers to his father’s sermon in Moroni 7 with the repetition of the command to “lay hold upon every good gift.”

The language “touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” borrows, and expands on, language from 2 Corinthians 6:17, where it was only “Touch not the unclean thing.”

Verse 31 echoes the language of Isaiah 52:1–2, although this particular version is more closely aligned with the translation as it appears in 2 Nephi 8:24–25.

Moroni 10:32–34

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

34 And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Yahweh, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen.

Comments

We do not know when in Moroni’s life he wrote the Title Page of the Book of Mormon. It was certainly after he had edited Ether. Although there is no indication that it was written after Moroni 10, it would seem a fitting ending. Moroni, chapter 10, is Moroni’s personal testimony to future generations, and the Title Page gives the Book of Mormon’s orientation to them.

Regardless of the timing of the Title Page, this is Moroni’s final testimony. It is not a testimony of the book, but a testimony of Christ. His exhortation is not focused on believing the book, *per se*, but on believing *the purpose* of the book: to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him.”

Verse 34 indicates that Moroni is finally arriving at a time when he can see the end of his days. Therefore, he can write no more. Therefore, it is time to seal up his work and commit it to the future.

As he noted in verses 27–29 of this chapter, there will come a time when Moroni will stand with God to meet us and discharge his final task as witness to the Book of Mormon, and to Christ.