

2 Nephi 3

Counsel and Teachings to Joseph

2 Nephi 3:1

1 And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee.

Comments

This chapter was originally chapter II in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The whole of our current chapters 1 and 2 were a single chapter before they there thematically divided. This chapter continues the blessings of the sons, and the blessing on Joseph declares that he, like Jacob, was born in the wilderness. The reason that this is a new chapter is not the change of subject, but rather the concluding *amen* at the end of Lehi's discourse directed to Jacob and indirectly directed to his entire family. When the word *amen* is actively testifying to what has been said, it closes a chapter in Nephi's writing. We will later see exactly the same rule in Mormon's writings. Thus, it would appear that Nephi established this literary rule and the tradition continued for the nearly one thousand years separating Nephi and Mormon.

The birth order of the two sons and their respective names, suggest the possibility that they might have been twins. Nephi specifically mentioned that Lehi discovered, or had confirmed, that he was of the house of Joseph. In verse 4 of this chapter, Lehi specifically mentions that his son is named for their illustrious ancestor. By the time these sons were born in the wilderness, Lehi and Sariah were both older, and perhaps having a single child would have been surprising. It is doubtful that they would have expected to have another. In that circumstance, one might expect that the next son born would be named Joseph. He wasn't.

Jacob is also an important ancestor. In the genealogy, he was renamed Israel, and was Joseph's father. Thus, Jacob also bears an important lineage name, but it still might have been expected that Lehi would have used that name for a second son. A possible reason for the order of the names of the sons would be that Lehi knew he would have two sons, because they were twins. Thus, he would know that he had two sons to name after his lineage. The older was Jacob because Jacob preceded Joseph in the lineage. There is, of course, no other evidence for this hypothesis, but it provides the most parsimonious explanation for why Joseph was not the name of the first-born in the wilderness.

2 Nephi 3:2–3

2 And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel.

3 And now, Joseph, my last-born, whom I have brought out of the wilderness of mine afflictions, may the Lord bless thee forever, for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed.

Comments

Lehi bestows upon Joseph the promise of the land. Of course, this is the promise for all his seed. In the beginning of his discourse and blessings, in 2 Nephi 1:5, he had said: “But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever.”

In that introduction, Lehi mentioned their afflictions before stating the promise. To Joseph, he notes their afflictions, and also the promise. This is not a new promise, but rather a reiteration of the promise of the land. Lehi even notes that it is “for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren.”

The promise is once again described as conditional. It will be for their “security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel.” Although Lehi stopped short of prophesying destruction upon the seed of Laman and Lemuel, he did indicate that should they not keep Yahweh’s commandments, that Yahweh “will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. Yea, as one generation passeth to another there shall be bloodsheds, and great visitations among them” (2 Nephi 1:11–12).

With that possible destruction accompanying the promise of the land, Lehi promises Joseph that regardless of the result of future destructions, that his seed would not be utterly destroyed. Jacob will later declare that this prophecy would apply to all of the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 9:53). However, in this context, the reason for the prophecy is to tie Joseph of old to the new Nephite nation.

2 Nephi 3:4–5

4 For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph.

5 Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the

Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom.

Comments

Lehi undoubtedly named his son Joseph after Joseph of Egypt. In this part of his blessings and discourses, he uses that name to bring up the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt. Lehi specifically notes that he, and therefore all his family, are descendants of Joseph of Egypt. That tie allows Lehi to speak of prophecies from Joseph of Egypt. These prophecies must have been contained on the plates of brass, as we do not have them in our current Old Testament.

Lehi declares that Joseph of Egypt had a vision of the future, and that vision included Lehi's time. Joseph of Egypt had prophesied that some of his descendants would be a righteous branch of Israel, but broken off. Jacob will provide an elaborate allegory of the olive tree, but in 1 Nephi 10:12 we saw that Lehi had earlier compared Israel to an "olive tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth." Although Jacob quotes Zenos as his source, Lehi is either suggesting that Joseph of Egypt knew the allegory, or that Lehi had likened the prophecy of Joseph of Egypt to that allegory.

Lehi also appears to suggest that in addition to his prophecy that the Messiah would come six hundred years from the time they left Jerusalem, that the Messiah would be made manifest to his seed. Christ's physical appearance to the remnant of the righteous in Bountiful fulfilled this prophecy. While there is every indication that the Nephites understood that the Messiah would be born and would die, there is less indication that they knew that he would personally appear. If they remembered this prophesy, they did not understand the nature of how "the Messiah would be manifest unto them in the latter days."

Joseph of Egypt Predicts a Future Seer

2 Nephi 3:6–8

6 For Joseph truly testified, saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.

7 Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers.

8 And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work.

Comments

There are two aspects to this part of the prophecy. The first is that God will raise up a seer. Not a prophet, but a seer. The second is that this seer has a specific calling, and “he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him.”

There is no doubt that this seer is Joseph. We not only know Joseph as a prophet, but also as a seer and a revelator. In Mosiah 8:15–16 we learn that “a seer is greater than a prophet . . .” because “a seer is a revelator and a prophet.” We also learn that a seer can use the stones called interpreters and can use them to translate records (Mosiah 8:13). Joseph Smith was functioning as a seer when he dictated this prophecy to his scribe. We can only imagine his feelings as he dictated this prophecy that clearly referred to him and his current task.

Joseph knew the term *seer* from his environment and childhood. It was a term applied to those who used implements to see what was not naturally seen. Seers used implements that were often called *seer stones*. Joseph had used a couple of stones prior to receiving the plates. While he did receive the interpreters that Mosiah mentioned, he appears to have translated the majority of the Book of Mormon, as we have it, with a chocolate-colored stone. Photographs of that seer stone are printed in the volume of the Joseph Smith Papers which publishes the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

When the prophecy says that Joseph Smith should do no other work, it was a reference to the translation of the Book of Mormon, and not an indication that he should never work, nor ever do any other task. The focus of the prophecy is on Lehi’s seed, and it is the translation of the record of Lehi’s seed that was of greatest importance in the prophecy.

2 Nephi 3:9–12

9 And he shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel.

10 And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt.

11 But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.

12 Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.

Comments

The result of the work of the seer will be the translation of what the fruit of Joseph of Egypt’s loins will write. That work is the Book of Mormon. It will come not only to bring forth those writings, but to convince

the world of the other writings. Verse 12 speaks of two records, the Book of Mormon and the Bible, which come from two different branches of the house of Israel, but which will eventually “grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions.” The Book of Mormon is never understood as a replacement for the Bible, nor as its superior, but rather its companion. It is a second testament of Yahweh’s covenants with his people. Having two statements of those covenants and principles of the Gospel makes it is easier to understand each.

2 Nephi 3:13–16

13 And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence among all my people, unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.

14 And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;

15 And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.

16 Yea, thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing, even as I am sure of the promise of Moses; for the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever.

Comments

If there were any possibility of confusion over who this prophesied seer was, it is eliminated in verse 15, which declares that he would be named after Joseph of Egypt. Thus, the seer’s name would be Joseph, and his father’s name would be Joseph. This prophecy obviously identifies Joseph Smith as the seer, but it also has a subtle emphasis on the continuation of the importance of Joseph of Egypt. The connection to Joseph of Egypt is implied in the both the name, and the repeating of the name.

That emphasis is made clear in verse 16, which specifically notes that Yahweh promised Joseph of Egypt that his seed would be preserved forever. Without worrying about genetic inheritance, the names declare that Joseph Smith, Sr., and Joseph Smith, Jr., are symbolic continuations of the lineage of Joseph of Egypt. Lehi is declaring the future seer as the inheritor of the lineage of Joseph.

2 Nephi 3:17–18

17 And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not

make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him.

18 And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it.

Comments

Lehi attributes this prophecy to Joseph. Therefore, it is possible that it first referred to Moses himself, who was foretold in verse 10 above. However, it is also clear that this is meant to be a parallel prophecy. That is, it refers simultaneously to two fulfillments. The first is to Moses who led Israel out of Egypt. The second is to Joseph Smith. This dual explanation helps us interpret the idea that Moses was given power in a rod. We know that Moses' rod was an example of Yahweh's power, transforming it into a serpent and being used to extract water from a stone. Joseph Smith did not have a rod, but rather a stone. The parallel was to an instrument through which God would demonstrate his power.

The second parallel is between Moses and Aaron, and between Joseph Smith and his "Aaron." There would be, for Joseph Smith, one who would fulfill the function of being a mouthpiece. It is probable that when this was dictated, Joseph Smith would have assumed that Oliver Cowdery would be that spokesperson. However, later, it was Sidney Rigdon who more completely fulfilled this prophecy.

2 Nephi 3:19–21

19 And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith.

20 And they shall cry from the dust; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, even after many generations have gone by them. And it shall come to pass that their cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words.

21 Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of my covenant which I made unto thy fathers.

Comments

The phrase "cried unto them from the dust" is an image of the record of a people who have died, but were still able to speak. It is a more modern phrasing that is perhaps based on Isaiah 29:4 "And thou shalt be brought down, *and* shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the

dust.” The Book of Mormon usage pulls the basic phrase and meaning of the dust as equivalent to the grave. When “it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust,” the image is that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will be as though the Nephites themselves were speaking. The testimony of that people will speak to a modern time, even though the Nephites themselves had passed to the dust.

The idea that the things of God are simple things that will become strong is repeated several times in the Book of Mormon, and the intended meaning is that human means will provide divine instruction. Humankind may be simple and weak, but God is strong and may use humankind to further his eternal purposes.

Lehi Builds upon Joseph’s Prophecy

2 Nephi 3:22–25

22 And now, behold, my son Joseph, after this manner did my father of old prophesy.

23 Wherefore, because of this covenant thou art blessed; for thy seed shall not be destroyed, for they shall hearken unto the words of the book.

24 And there shall rise up one mighty among them, who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.

25 And now, blessed art thou, Joseph. Behold, thou art little; wherefore hearken unto the words of thy brother, Nephi, and it shall be done unto thee even according to the words which I have spoken. Remember the words of thy dying father. Amen.

Comments

Lehi ends his references to the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt, and returns to direct instruction to his son, Joseph. The result of the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt is that there will be a record of Lehi’s seed that will preserve their testimony of Yahweh, both as the father of heaven and earth and as the mortal Messiah. That testimony will come to light through one that Yahweh would raise to the task. In 2 Nephi 3:5 Lehi spoke of his seed as a branch of Israel which was broken off. Through his seed would come a record that would be instrumental in restoring that broken-off branch to Israel. In Lehi’s words, “unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.”

Lehi ends with the admonition to listen to Nephi, an admonition Lehi specifically gave to Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and “my sons who are the sons of Ishmael” in 2 Nephi 1:28.

The phrase “thou art little” reminds us that neither Joseph nor Jacob could be very old at this time. Had they been born at the beginning of the sojourn in the wilderness, they would only have been around eight years old when they arrived in Bountiful. There is no indication of when Lehi gave this admonition. But it appears to have been sooner than later after their arrival in the New World. Thus, the brothers might have been ten years old at this time. Little, indeed, to have such an important charge.