

# 2 Nephi 4

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## Nephi's Testimony of Joseph

### **2 Nephi 4:1–2**

1 And now, I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.

2 For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations; and they are written upon the plates of brass.

### *Comments*

The last chapter ended the same way that chapter 3 ended. Each ended as Nephi testified *amen* to what had been said. As noted in the commentary on 2 Nephi 2:25, when the speaker or writer testifies to what has been written with *amen*, the chapter ends. This happens even when the events of the chapter have not been concluded. Although this will be more obvious when we examine Mormon's writings, we see it here. Verses 1 and 2 are Nephi's conclusion to what has gone before, rather than his introduction to the topic of this chapter.

Specifically, Nephi notes that the prophecies that Lehi pronounced were those that were on the plates of brass; therefore, the reference is to the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt that Lehi discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the focus will turn to Lehi's grandchildren, and prophecies and promises for them.

Nephi concludes the themes that Lehi had presented by noting that Joseph of Egypt had prophesied about Lehi's seed. This references the branch broken off from Israel that Lehi referenced in 2 Nephi 3:5. Nevertheless, the reiteration that Joseph of Egypt spoke of Lehi's future generations does allow Nephi to move smoothly into Lehi's blessings upon his grandchildren.

## Brief Counsel to Lehi's Remaining Posterity

### **2 Nephi 4:3–7**

3 Wherefore, after my father had made an end of speaking concerning the prophecies of Joseph, he called the children of Laman, his sons, and his daughters, and said unto them: Behold, my sons, and

my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my firstborn, I would that ye should give ear unto my words.

4 For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

5 But behold, my sons and my daughters, I cannot go down to my grave save I should leave a blessing upon you; for behold, I know that if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it.

6 Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents.

7 Wherefore, because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish; wherefore, he will be merciful unto you and unto your seed forever.

### *Comments*

Lehi calls Laman's family to him and pronounces a blessing on them. This is a difficult blessing because Lehi has seen the possibility, and perhaps the inevitability, that Laman's seed would not keep the commandments. Lehi, therefore, reiterates the promise of the land, that they would prosper if they kept the commandments.

Lehi teaches them from the scriptures, referencing Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Right after that reference, Lehi says "if ye are cursed." Lehi, as a prophet, understands that it is their destiny to be cursed, and cursed because of their father, Laman. Hence, he cites Proverbs to suggest that the lack of being brought up "in the way" would be laid at Laman's feet and not theirs. The curse is to be taken from them and "answered upon the heads of your parents."

The ultimate blessing is that their seed will continue.

## ***2 Nephi 4:8–10***

8 And it came to pass that after my father had made an end of speaking to the sons and daughters of Laman, he caused the sons and daughters of Lemuel to be brought before him.

9 And he spake unto them, saying: Behold, my sons and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my second son; behold I leave unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of Laman; wherefore, thou shalt not utterly be destroyed; but in the end thy seed shall be blessed.

10 And it came to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them, behold, he spake unto the sons of Ishmael, yea, and even all his household.

### *Comments*

After the blessing to Laman's family, Lehi turns to Lemuel's family. As was proper, he was following the birth order for the blessings. Lemuel continues to be part of a set with Laman. Here, Lehi tells his family

that Lehi leaves “unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of Laman. They will not be utterly destroyed, and in the end their seed will be blessed.

At this point, Nephi writes of the blessing to Ismael’s family. While Lehi certainly pronounced a blessing upon them, Nephi doesn’t include it. It is probable that the placement of this statement after the blessings to Laman and Lemuel suggests that they would share in the future that is foreseen for Laman and Lemuel. Indeed, in verse 13, the sons of Ishmael side with Laman and Lemuel against Nephi.

## **Lehi’s Death and Its Aftermath**

### ***2 Nephi 4:11–13***

11 And after he had made an end of speaking unto them, he spake unto Sam, saying: Blessed art thou, and thy seed; for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed; and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother, and thy seed like unto his seed; and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days.

12 And it came to pass after my father, Lehi, had spoken unto all his household, according to the feelings of his heart and the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, he waxed old. And it came to pass that he died, and was buried.

13 And it came to pass that not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord.

### ***Comments***

Just as Lemuel is always associated with Laman, Sam is always faithfully linked with Nephi. His loyalty to God’s commandment appears to parallel Nephi’s, and Sam’s descendants share the same blessing as Nephi’s descendants. Although we hear very little of Sam, Lehi declares that “thou shalt be even like unto thy brother.” That places Sam in very good company and underscores his individual righteousness, even though the stories that Nephi tells only involve Sam peripherally.

Lehi has blessed his entire household. That ends the story of Lehi as the head of the family. At some point thereafter, Lehi dies. Nephi declares that he “waxed old.” That phrase is often used in the Book of Mormon for those who are on their deathbed.

In Israel, the patriarch of the family was to be honored, and while Lehi lived, Laman and Lemuel acquiesced to their father. When Lehi died, the last thread that held the family together was severed as well. This is the beginning of the separation into Lamanites and Nephites, though no groups were yet known by those names.

## **2 Nephi 4:14–16**

14 For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them, according to his word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates.

15 And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.

16 Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

### *Comments*

Nephi's probable intended conclusion to the story of Lehi blessing his children is found in the first phrase of verse 14: "For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them, according to his word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death." When Nephi wrote that, however, he began to think on the task of writing, and he moves from his intended outline into a spontaneous addition to his text, similar to what we saw in the commentary on 1 Nephi 19:5–6, where Nephi similarly departed from his outline, based on what he had just written that triggered the aside.

In this case, he notes that many of the things that Lehi spoke were written on his other set of plates, the ones we call the large plates of Nephi. That note triggers Nephi to think on the division of the plates, something he has already discussed in 1 Nephi 9 and 1 Nephi 19. Both of those occasions were also asides inserted into the planned text. Both of those also emphasized the sacred purpose of the small plates, and that happens again here.

Nephi reiterates that upon the small plates he writes the things of his soul. As he ponders the things which mean the most to him, it will lead to the spontaneously poetic expressions that close out this chapter.

## **Psalm of Nephi**

### **2 Nephi 4:17–19**

17 Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

18 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.

19 And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

### *Comments*

The emotional outpouring of these verses, and those which follow through the end of the chapter, have been called the Psalm of Nephi. While the language is highly emotional and is constructed of multiple sets of parallel concepts, there is no overarching composition. This outpouring is a spontaneous expression that was not part of Nephi's plan for writing, but we are the better for its inclusion.

Nephi begins with contrasts. He starts with the great goodness of Yahweh and offsets that goodness with Nephi's personal foibles. Nephi understands that he is subject to human frailty, and that he falls short of the qualities embodied in the goodness of God.

While this contrast begins with Nephi seeing himself as a sinner, it will turn to a positive message, and that positive message will come because he does know in whom he has trusted.

### **2 Nephi 4:20–22**

20 My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

21 He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

22 He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

### *Comments*

The God in whom Nephi has trusted has been the support through the times when he has felt like a wretched soul. Nephi presents the evidence that he has that Yahweh has supported him by reiterating aspects of his history that demonstrate the hand of God in his life.

He was supported through afflictions in the wilderness. Of course, this applies to the whole family, but this is personal. Nephi has personally felt God's love.

When Nephi says that Yahweh has confounded his enemies, he is referring to Laman and Lemuel. Those two form the basis for the ancestral enemies that Near Eastern ethnogenetic stories typically describe. That they are the enemies is clear in that Nephi says that they did quake before him, and we know from incidents he recounted in 1 Nephi that his brothers did, at times, literally quake before him.

### **2 Nephi 4:23–24**

23 Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night-time.

24 And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me.

## *Comments*

The parallels here are set up by the repetition of the word *day*. The idea that Yahweh has heard Nephi's cry by day is parallel to his waxing bold in prayer during the day. Both of these phrases have the same meaning and the same intent, but the repetition with different words intensifies the meaning.

The second part of the parallel is what happens because of the cry by day, or the mighty prayer by day. The first is that Nephi received revelation. The idea that visions in the night are equivalent to revelation is also shown in Genesis 46:2, which says that "God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night."

The result of the mighty prayers sets up an antithetical parallel. The prayers are sent up on high, and angels come down to minister to Nephi.

## **2 Nephi 4:25–27**

25 And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore, I was bidden that I should not write them.

26 O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

27 And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?

## *Comments*

The theme of revelation continues with Nephi declaring that the Spirit hath carried him away upon exceedingly high mountaintops. Not only are mountaintops a common symbol for a meeting place between man and Yahweh, but Nephi's vision of the Tree of Life was part of just such a meeting with the Spirit in the mountaintops.

Nephi, therefore, asks the rhetorical question. Why, if he has had such marvelous experiences, does he sometimes still feel sad? It is a question that has been asked by so many of God's children, both before and since. Nephi is not denying that he has those feelings, only that they are balancing, or even potentially overpowering experiences, that should provide him the hope to recover from the depths of sadness.

Nephi declares that his knowledge should keep him from sin, but it does not. Again, all who read his words understand that feeling. We too know better, and do not always do the good that we know we should do.

## **2 Nephi 4:28–30**

28 Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

29 Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

30 Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

### *Comments*

At this point Nephi turns his thoughts to the positive side. He has lamented his human nature in spite of the times Yahweh had supported him. Now he pleads for the continuation of that support. It is perhaps a poetic borrowing that has Nephi speak of awakening his soul. Lehi had admonished Laman and Lemuel to awake (2 Nephi 1:13 and 23). Nephi exhorts himself to follow that admonition.

Specifically, he mentions enemies again. At this point in the storyline, Laman and Lemuel have not yet become the enemies of his people, but by the time he writes, they have been enemies for some time. We learn in the next chapter that they once again sought his life.

Nephi had mentioned that Yahweh had blessed him, yet he felt sorrow for the times he fell from his righteous expectations. Now he rejoices in Yahweh.

## **2 Nephi 4:31–32**

31 O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?

32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!

### *Comments*

In the previous verses Nephi rejoiced in Yahweh, who was the rock of his salvation. Lest we misunderstand, that “salvation” is the same as the Messiah’s redemption. In the context of redemption, when Nephi asks to be delivered from his enemies, he has shifted from the enemies in the world, and turned to the enemies to his spirit. Thus, right after asking deliverance from his enemies, he asks to be delivered from even the appearance of sin. This tells us that he has now poetically shifted to an enemy that is sin itself.

Nephi declares that he is worthy of redemption. In Psalms 34:18 we hear: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Nephi declares that he is one of those who qualify. Thus, he can be redeemed from the separation from God’s presence, which is hell. The gates of hell represent the barrier that the soul cannot pass in and of itself. A redeemer is required.

## 2 Nephi 4:33–35

33 O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.

34 O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

35 Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.

### Comments

Nephi, being who he was, references Isaiah 40:4: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.” It is possible that when Nephi references trusting in the arm of flesh, he intends the reader to reflect on 2 Chronicles 32:8: “With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles.”

Verse 35 references James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally.” Clearly, that verse in James was not on the plates, and this particular reference must be ascribed to the translation rather than the original text.

Nephi ends this poetic excursion noting that “my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God.” That is a plea that is punctuated with his final *amen*.