

# 2 Nephi 8

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## The Lord Will Comfort Zion

### *2 Nephi 8:1–3*

1 Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness. Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him.

3 For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

### *Comments*

Second Nephi 8 is the text of Isaiah 51 and includes the first two verses of Isaiah 52. One of the interesting aspects of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is that the 1830 verses which replicate the text of various Isaiah chapters do not always follow the chapter divisions as they appear in the Bible. Although our current edition created chapters between Isaiah 50 and 51 to follow the way they appear in the Bible, Jacob did not make a separation.

The quotation of Isaiah 50 addressed Israel in distress and emphasized that it was they who had left their God. The quotation of Isaiah 51 (and the first two verses of 52) are the admonition to look to their God for redemption.

In the midst of affliction, Yahweh admonishes Israel to look to their history. The image of the rock from whence they were hewn and the pit from which they were dug suggest that they are going back to their founding. Thus, Abraham is mentioned next. The bedrock on which they were built was Abraham, and Yahweh made covenants with Abraham that apply to his descendants.

Verse 3 is a reversal of the conditions described in the previous chapter. Through Yahweh's redemption, their waste places will become as the Garden in Eden.

For Jacob's audience, the emphasis is on the covenants with Yahweh that promise redemption. This would be a reinforcement of what had been the introduction of a new god to the previous inhabitants. While Abraham was not their literal ancestor, their adoption into Israel availed them of the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants.

## **2 Nephi 8:4–6**

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner. But my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

### *Comments*

Isaiah has Yahweh repeat the call, “hearken unto me.” This is the second occurrence in a set of three. In this second call, Yahweh begins to tell Israel how they are to be redeemed. They have a god who is powerful, but one who acts on covenants. Thus, the redemption of Israel is linked to Yahweh’s laws. At the end of Isaiah 50 (2 Nephi 7), Yahweh had spoken of those who walked in their own light, with only sparks to see in the darkness. Yahweh’s laws provide a true light for his people.

Yahweh reminds his people that he exists above and beyond this world. He is constant in his laws and judgments. Thus, heaven and earth might pass away, but Yahweh will yet remain, and therefore his covenants will remain.

For Jacob’s congregation of a mixed people, this may serve as much for instruction as remembrance. Doubtless it was taught before, but the conditions are such that it required reinforcing. Not only those who came from Jerusalem would benefit from the reminder of their god, but also those new Nephites who were learning how to understand this new god. One of those important points to understand was that Yahweh had laws and consistency, an important difference from the many capricious gods which existed in both the Old and New Worlds.

## **2 Nephi 8:7–10**

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law, fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool. But my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

9 Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days. Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

10 Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

## *Comments*

This is the third “hearken” statement. That there were three in a row suggests that this was an intentional set that was to be taken together, and as an escalating idea. This is a poetic technique that underscores the words with a structure that emphasizes them.

In this set we have the culmination of the set of ideas. The first address was to those who “follow after righteousness.” The second was addressed to “my people.” This defines his people as those “that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law.”

Yahweh tells his people not to fear their enemies, for they shall be destroyed as moths destroy garments.

Verses 9 and 10 are references to very old Israelite stories of Yahweh taming the deep and Rahab, the monster of the deep. The stories are only referenced in the Bible here and in Psalm 89:11–13. Clearly those stories were known to Isaiah’s audience, but it is doubtful that they were among the teaching to the New World, although they would have fit well with the New World mythology. The verses are to indicate Yahweh’s power over all the earth, and that is the intended message for Jacob’s audience, whether they understood the stories behind these verses or not.

## **2 Nephi 8:11–15**

11 Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads; and they shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

12 I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you. Behold, who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man, who shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass?

13 And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?

14 The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.

15 But I am the Lord thy God, whose waves roared; the Lord of Hosts is my name.

## *Comments*

The strength of Yahweh over the earth will extend to Israel’s enemies, and they will be redeemed. In this case the redemption is from exile, and they will be gathered in. When they do, their righteousness will bring gladness and joy, contrasting with the conditions of their exile.

For Jacob, this is an important repetition of the theme of the gathering. Both Nephi and Jacob preach this gathering, something that doubtless was very important to them as they had been physically separated

from Israel. For later prophets who had known no other home, the idea that they were in exile and would be gathered will fade from Nephite religious language.

Verses 12 through 15 return to the definition of who this god is. In verse 12 we have the phrase “son of man” which at times is applied to the Messiah. That is not the meaning here. Very clearly, the emphasis here is on the contrast between the permanence of Yahweh and the mortality of their enemies. It is a two-phase repetition of emphasis: “man, who shall die, and the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass.” The image of being made like unto grass refers to the grave. Hence, eternally constant Yahweh is contrasted with mortal enemies who will die, regardless of how powerful they are in this life.

Thus, in verse 13 Yahweh scolds Israel for fearing powerful enemies, when (in verse 14) Yahweh will release the captives.

In verse 15, the roaring of the waves poetically returns to the Yahweh who defeated Rahab and calmed the seas. Lord of Hosts is a way of saying that he is a god over all.

## The Lord’s Anger Pours over the Wicked

### **2 Nephi 8:16–20**

16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people.

17 Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury—thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out—

18 And none to guide her among all the sons she hath brought forth; neither that taketh her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up.

19 These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee—thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword—and by whom shall I comfort thee?

20 Thy sons have fainted, save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net, they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God.

### *Comments*

Verse 16 stands as a contrast to verses 17 through 20 which follow. In verse 16, the Lord declares that he is still, is always, the God of his people. Yahweh has made covenants and has not abandoned them.

Because Yahweh is their God, Yahweh admonishes Israel in its defeated state. The dregs of the cup are the devastations of war. Although the northern kingdom was dispersed by the Assyrians and Jerusalem survived, the southern kingdom of Judah had been conquered, all save Jerusalem itself.

Verses 18 through 20 speak of Israel's sons. The word son is used to describe the people of Israel themselves. The devastation from the invading army is such that Israel's people "lie at the head of all the streets." There have been many killed in the invasion.

Isaiah also uses the idea of "sons", as descendants of the parents, to refer to the results of Israel's actions, or in this case, unfaithfulness to Yahweh. There will be two metaphorical sons who survive desolation and destruction, and famine and the sword. Of course, those are four things, but this is a poetic form. Desolation and destruction are seen as two words for the same thing, as are famine and the sword. Thus, there are two metaphorical sons, but their metaphorical meaning is intensified by the poetic doubling.

Nephi has not recorded any conflicts with other peoples, though perhaps the making of swords recorded in 2 Nephi 5:14 suggests that. Had there been external conflict, these verses would have had greater impact on Jacob's audience.

## **2 Nephi 8:21–25**

21 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, and not with wine:

22 Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God pleadeth the cause of his people; behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.

23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over.

24 Awake, awake, 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.

25 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

### *Comments*

Israel is afflicted. They are reeling, "drunken, and not with wine." Yahweh allowed the affliction, but now calls upon Israel to awake and "put on thy strength." That strength is in the covenants with Yahweh, and in following the laws that Yahweh laid out as humankind's part of the covenant that Yahweh made with his people.

For the Nephites, this is a call to remember the promise of the land. Rather than just the old covenants, there is a refreshed and personal covenant with the people of Nephi, that they would prosper in the land according to their righteousness. The opposite is also part of the promise. If they, as Israel in Isaiah's time, moved away from Yahweh, the protection would be lost.

Jacob is repeating the exhortation to awaken and put on their strength, which comes through obeying Yahweh's laws. Remember in verse 4 of this chapter that Yahweh declared that "a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people."

