

2 Nephi 9

The Great Plan of Our God

2 Nephi 9:1–3

1 And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—

2 That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.

3 Behold, my beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children.

Comments

Jacob makes certain that his audience has understood the reason for the quotations from Isaiah. Yahweh is their god. For some, Yahweh was a new god. Thus, it is important to understand that Yahweh has a covenant with the house of Israel. This is not a distant and capricious god who must be cajoled into helping humankind, this is the Lord of Hosts who has covenanted to help Israel, and whose covenants he does not abandon.

Thus, for Jacob's audience, he speaks these things that they may rejoice, that they may know that they are included in the covenant with Yahweh, and therefore the protection of the covenant is upon them. This is the Yahweh who covenanted with the children of Lehi, and specifically with Nephi, that they would prosper in this land if they obeyed Yahweh's law, of which Isaiah had spoken.

2 Nephi 9:4–5

4 For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, to know of things to come; wherefore I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God.

5 Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

Comments

When we see the phrase “things to come” in the Book of Mormon, it is most often associated with the prophecies of the coming of the atoning Messiah. Thus, the question about what happens after death is not the answer to their question about the things to come, but rather the transition into the answer.

Humankind understands that we must die, and ancient peoples were much more personally acquainted with death than are modern western cultures. In modern western cultures, people die in hospitals, in clinics, in hospices. In the ancient world they died at home. In the modern world we live longer than ever before. In the ancient world, reaching the age of forty meant that one was old, and perhaps older than most. Thus, people died sooner, and closer. Questions about death readily came to mind.

Jacob cannot answer the question of how we shall see God after we are dead without explaining the mortal mission of the Messiah. Therefore, he begins that story.

Modern Christians might see this as an abrupt shift, to move from the declaration of Yahweh, to a question about death, and to the answer in Jesus. For Jacob, however, there was no such shift in understanding. Note that he says: “for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject to man in the flesh, and die.” The god of the Book of Mormon is Yahweh. Yahweh is the being who left the celestial realm to become human, to become Jesus.

2 Nephi 9:6

6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

Comments

Jacob describes the merciful plan of the great Creator. That he uses the title of Creator is meant to show that this is a plan set as part of the original creation. From the origins of the creation of this earth, it was understood that death would come to humankind, and, therefore, it would be required that there be a power of resurrection. Without death, resurrection is unnecessary.

Thus, from the creation of the earth, it was understood that that there would be a fall. Jacob lists two effects of that fall. The first is death, requiring a resurrection. The second is that there was instituted

the possibility (really, the assurance) that there would be transgression. Transgression would cut humankind off from the presence of Yahweh, which is undesirable.

At this point, perhaps Jacob's audience would recall that Isaiah had made pains to show that it was transgression of Yahweh's laws that removed them from Yahweh's protection.

2 Nephi 9:7

7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

Comments

Jacob clearly declares that what is required is an infinite atonement, but what does he mean? The Nephites have been taught the law of Moses. They would have seen the sacrifices that were made, and particularly those for atonement. Israel regularly atoned for communal sin by having a sacrifice made. Thus, they understood the concept of a specific sacrifice to be made for the collective sins of the people. That sacrifice, however, was specific to the communal sins of the time, and future communal sins required a future sacrifice.

Humankind was in a situation where all were subject to sin, in the past, in the present, and in the future. For that type of collective sin, no animal sacrifice would suffice, no matter how often it was made. Therefore, it had to be an infinite atonement, an act of sacrifice once that would cover all humankind through all mortal times.

The first judgment upon humankind, through Adam and Eve, was death. Without a resurrection, death would have been permanent.

Resurrection, Deliverance, and Judgment

2 Nephi 9:8–9

8 O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

9 And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

Comments

The potential doom of a flesh that would rise no more required a quick resolution. Jacob gives it by underscoring God's mercy and grace. However, he does return to painting the dark picture of a world without the Atonement by noting that should we not be resurrected, our souls would be subject to the angel who fell. That angel is separated from God, and so humankind would also remain separated from God. Without Yahweh's laws of light, we would not see our way to become like him.

The mention of the devil in Jacob's sermon is technically anachronistic. There was no devil as was understood in later Christian tradition when Lehi's family lived in Jerusalem. However, since this is a translation, the use of the word that we have come to understand as representing the opposite of God is not inappropriate. Jacob is painting a black and white picture. The devil is black and God white, and that absolute opposite contrast suggests a person opposite God whose realm is also the opposite of God's. Where Isaiah associated Yahweh's laws with light, Jacob associates the devil's realm as one of darkness.

As with other absolute dichotomies in the scripture, we are told that we will eventually choose one or the other. Jacob is noting that without the Atonement, we would not have had the choice of God's light of the devil's darkness.

2 Nephi 9:10–12

10 O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.

11 And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

12 And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

Comments

In verse 10 Jacob says that there is an awful monster, which he defines as death and hell. He has quoted Isaiah as saying of Yahweh: "Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" (2 Nephi 8:9). Jacob's use of the monster in this verse is intended to invoke this verse from Isaiah. It is made even more plausible that the fact that while Jacob only mentions one monster, Isaiah has both Rahab—also known as Leviathan, or a primordial ocean monster—and a dragon—presumably an earthbound monster.

When Jacob mentions death and hell, he equates them with mortal death and the death of the spirit. In verse 12 he confirms that his definition of hell is this death of the Spirit. In Isaiah, Yahweh defeats the two monsters, and that becomes the scriptural basis for Jacob's teaching that Yahweh will defeat death and hell.

Death has claim on the body, and hell on the spirit. Through resurrection, both death and hell must release their separate captives, which are restored to one being through the power of the resurrection.

2 Nephi 9:13–15

13 O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

14 Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

15 And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.

Comments

Jacob has spoken mostly of the benefits of resurrection, that the spirit and the body will be united. That is only one of the two “monsters” of which he spoke. It is the release from death. Now, he must explain the conquest over hell. To do this, Jacob creates a problem. With a resurrection, both the bodies of the wicked and the good are risen and reunited with their bodies. However, that reuniting brings back the remembrance of mortality, a remembrance that has now become perfect, perhaps because it is in the celestial realm.

This perfect knowledge of all our guilt and uncleanness if we are wicked, or our goodness if we are righteous, must both come before the Holy One of Israel to be judged. In Jacob’s discussion, that judgment will be the agent of conquering the death of the spirit.

2 Nephi 9:16–17

16 And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end.

17 O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.

Comments

This judgment is a righteous judgment because it is God's judgment. It is one that depends not upon Yahweh's capriciousness, but his judgment based on our lives on earth. When our spirits rise to be united with our bodies, we retain who we are, and who we have become through all of the trials in this life. Thus, if we have learned to be righteous, we will be righteous still. If we learned to be unrighteous, we will be unrighteous still.

Jacob is teaching a dichotomy, that there is Yahweh and the figure opposite Yahweh. There is heaven, and there is the realm of hell. Who we have become defines our entry into heaven or hell, through God's righteous judgment.

There is no indication that Jacob understood our modern comprehension of the time between death and resurrection, and the final judgment. The principle is the same, but there is a time for repentance and change after this earth-life that is required to adjust for the inequities that agency inevitably creates in the world. That understanding may not have been available at that time. Nevertheless, it would not be part of Jacob's discourse even if it were. Jacob's purpose is to enjoin his audience to righteousness, not give them hope that those who might currently fall short might have a future opportunity to change. Jacob wanted to effect a more immediate change in behavior.

2 Nephi 9:18–19

18 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.

19 O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

Comments

Jacob concludes this subsection of his discourse by extolling Yahweh's plan. It is one that will allow the righteous to inherit the kingdom of God. Importantly, that ability to inherit "was prepared for them from the foundation of the world." That is important because it underscores that even the difficulties inherent in earth life due to agency were part of the plan. Perhaps here Jacob is reflecting on Isaiah 51:13, which noted that Yahweh was humankind's "maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth."

There is an interesting word choice in verse 18 as well. Jacob speaks of the those "who have endured the crosses of the world." Clearly, the meaning is that the righteous will be subject to the problems created

by humankind's agency, but the use of the word *cross* is anachronistic. Because the Book of Mormon is a translation, the presence of the term is not problematic, but the plate language would have had some other phrase that conveyed that meaning.

Jacob also reprises the theme of the monster, death and hell. He will repeat this later as well. This continues to touch Isaiah's discussion of Rahab from Isaiah 51:9 (2 Nephi 8:9).

2 Nephi 9:20–22

20 O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

21 And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

22 And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.

Comments

To this point, Jacob has been speaking of the heavenly Yahweh and the plan as set in motion in the heavens. He will now shift to discuss how that plan will become realized on earth. The transition from one theme to another is his declaration of Yahweh's omniscience. That covers Yahweh knowing that the overall plan would work as well as how it would be implemented.

The implementation required that Yahweh leave his celestial realm and become mortal. He will be sufficiently mortal that "he suffereth the pains of all men." This echoes Jacob's statement that mortals must bear the crosses of the world. Yahweh, as a mortal, will suffer the pains that all men suffer. Perhaps here Jacob is alluding to Isaiah 50:6 (2 Nephi 7:6): "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

Yahweh will suffer as man suffers so that the resurrection might be for all, including the ability to repent and stand before Yahweh at the final day of judgment.

2 Nephi 9:23–24

23 And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

24 And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

Comments

Right after concluding in the previous verse that Yahweh will come to earth so that all men might stand before him at the final day of judgment, Jacob discusses how that will happen. It will not require the kind of universal victory over physical death, but a different type of victory over spiritual death. It will require repentance and baptism. Those who repent and are baptized will be saved. Those who do not must be damned. We should understand the dichotomy of being saved or damned as an intentional use of opposites. It is the same dichotomy we have seen between Yahweh and the devil who embodies the opposite of Yahweh.

Christians are familiar with the paired concepts of repentance and baptism. Israel was familiar with the concept of repentance and immersion for purification. The Nephite visions of the earthly mission of the Messiah will include information about Jesus's baptism, and it appears that the Hebrew immersion for ritual purity had already been adapted for an immersion for spiritual purity in Nephite culture.

2 Nephi 9:25–27

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

26 For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

27 But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!

Comments

Jacob's teaching on the relationship between law and punishment clearly reflect his father, Lehi's, teachings. In 2 Nephi 2:10 Lehi declared that there is a law given to which a punishment is affixed. Jacob reprises that idea but shifts to the way mercy and punishment are justified. His first argument is that the law sets up the conditions requiring the atonement. If there were no law, then there would be no punishment. If there were no punishment, there would be nothing for the atonement to do. Therefore the "mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim" upon a person who had no law.

For Jacob, the Atonement creates that situation for one who has the law. Without law there is no condemnation. With law there is condemnation, but through the Atonement that condemnation and punishment

are satisfied, or made to be as though they did not exist. Therefore, those who are righteous can be saved through the mercies of the Holy One of Israel. The Atonement makes it possible to be delivered from the monster of death and hell.

Jacob's sermon is using several oppositions to make his point, and therefore he also notes that death and hell are endless torment as opposed to Yahweh, who gives the breath of life.

Jacob emphasizes, however, that the law does have consequences if we have the law and do not do what we need to do to avail ourselves of the Atonement. Although Jacob does not describe at this point what the awful state is, it is intended to be seen as an opposition to God, and therefore the same opposition as in the previous verse. The awful state is that they are not delivered from hell, or from the endless torment that is the opposite of God.

2 Nephi 9:28–29

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

29 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

Comments

Verse 28 begins a set of parallels that will conclude in verse 39. They are a literary set, but we will break them up to make comments on the sets. Verses 28 and 29 set the pattern, although verse 28 is longer than most of the beginning phrases that will come.

Jacob has spoken of the function of the Atonement to satisfy the requirements of condemnation. He has also spoken of our mortal requirement to understand and follow the law. Then he declared that there will be those who, having the law, do not follow it. This brings him to the mortal condition. How is it that one might have the way to God, and reject it to follow the way to the devil?

The answer lies in those who are wise in their own eyes. This reprises Isaiah 50:11 (2 Nephi 8:11): “Behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.” Isaiah spoke of those who promised light, but produced only sparks. So too does Jacob note the wisdom of the worldly wise will not profit them. Isaiah said they would “lie down in sorrow.” Jacob says that they will perish.

Jacob does add the opposition to this sad state, however. The problem is not wisdom, but the source of wisdom. Those who are truly wise “hearken unto the counsels of God,” or to the law that is given.

2 Nephi 9:30–32

30 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.

31 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.

32 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.

Comments

Verse 30 sets up a contrast between those who have much and those who have little. One of the undercurrents of the ideal Nephi community is egalitarianism, and Jacob is decrying this inequality. He will say more in the book of Jacob. At this point, Jacob is careful not to condemn the things of the world. The condemnation is for those who allow the things of this world to alter the way they behave toward others.

The next two verses are a doubled pair. The mention of the deaf in verse 31 is paired with the blind in verse 32. In both cases, the problem is not deafness or blindness, but a willingness to turn a deaf ear and blind eye to others. It is, in different words, a continuation of the condemnation of riches.

Those who are rich as to the things of the world may have acquired those things by ignoring their figurative brothers and sisters. They are deaf and blind to the needs of others, not because of a physical impairment, but a spiritual one.

Just as Jacob noted that those who have the law and do not follow it will perish, those who do not truly see or hear what Yahweh wishes them to do will likewise perish.

2 Nephi 9:33–36

33 Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.

34 Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.

35 Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die.

36 Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell.

Comments

It is possible that the reference to the uncircumcised of heart reflects Leviticus 26:41, which speaks of the iniquities of those who are uncircumcised of heart. As circumcision is a sign of the covenant with Yahweh, these would be those who are part of the covenant in flesh—that is, in their circumcision—but not in their heart, or in their spiritual desires.

In line with Jacob's use of polar opposites, the liar is thrust to hell. The unstated opposite is that truth is God's domain, and the truthful reside with God.

The reference to the murderer is probably an echo of the commandment that we know as “thou shalt not kill.” The better translation would be “thou shalt not murder,” and Jacob’s discussion is expanding slightly on that theme. It is not the death, but the intent to kill that is prohibited. The literary irony matches one who kills as the one who dies.

Not committing whoredoms would be the same as “thou shalt not commit adultery.” However, there may be some cultural background that is coming into play that has Jacob alter the concept to expand it to something larger than implied in the ten commandments. That will become more important in Jacob’s sermon at the temple, as recorded in the book of Jacob.

Remember and Repent

2 Nephi 9:37–39

37 Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.

38 And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

39 O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

Comments

The prohibition against worshipping idols is also in the ten commandments. Here, Jacob adds that the “devil of all devils” delights in the worship of idols. Jacob appears to be referencing a real possibility and temptation for his New World audience. Assuming that they followed the broad outlines of pan-Mesoamerican religion, they would have believed in a number of deities, all of whom are here classified as demons—much the same way early Christians similarly classified the gods of the peoples surrounding them. The devil of all devils is that personification of the opposite of God. Jacob is declaring that Yahweh is not only the God of all, but his personified opposite is also the head of the deities of the land.

Jacob now moves from referencing scripture—Isaiah, perhaps Leviticus and the ten commandments—and references his own sermon. He has been speaking of the opposition between life and death, but spiritual and eternal life, as opposed to spiritual and eternal death. The summation is that those who do not do according to the law that they have been given will die in their sins and remain without atonement.

The final opposition is between carnally minded and spiritually minded. Webster’s 1828 dictionary has an entry for carnally minded. It is worldly minded. The opposition reprises those who seek after the things of the world, versus those who seek after the things of God.

2 Nephi 9:40–41

40 O, my beloved brethren, give ear to my words. Remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel. Do not say that I have spoken hard things against you; for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth; for I have spoken the words of your Maker. I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken.

41 O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

Comments

Jacob knows that he has been hard on his congregation. While he has promised salvation, he has just specifically noted ways in which they might be condemned. His reminders in the series of woe-statements were probably references to things that were actually happening in the community. This was not a hypothetical sermon, but one designed to alter behaviors. We should remember that Nephi the king suggested that Jacob speak on this topic. It was not a question of theology that concerned Nephi, nor Jacob.

Jacob declares that the way out of the conditions of the woe-statements is to follow the ways of the Holy One. Jacob’s language about the way of the Lord ultimately comes from a reference to Isaiah 40:3–4, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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.” The specific language, however, borrows from Matthew 7:11, “Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

It is not uncommon in the Book of Mormon’s translation to see places where there is a reference to a scripture from the plates of brass that is expressed in the way the New Testament couches the reference.

The concept of the straight course conveys that there is a clear way to follow God. God has given his law, and if we follow that law, we will ultimately have eternal life. The narrow gate suggests that it is only through God’s law that this may occur. There may be other available paths, but God’s law will winnow out the unrighteous who cannot enter at the narrow gate of his law.

2 Nephi 9:42–43

42 And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

43 But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints.

Comments

The image of having the door opened when one knocks is a cultural understanding. The phrase is mostly likely due to Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” The concept is certainly earlier, as it appears in the Song of Solomon, 5:2. It is a question of how well this particular image survived in the New World, as the custom is not clearly known. However, some form of petition to open a closed door or entryway was certainly in place.

Jacob continues to reflect on his own discourse. Here he reprises those who are wise in their own learning, and those who are rich according to the world. Jacob notes that these are things that should be discarded in order to enter into the narrow gate. It is probable that this was not hypothetical. It is very likely that this was directed at particular members of the congregation. Unless they repent of those two sins, they will be precluded from God’s kingdom.

2 Nephi 9:44–46

44 O, my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood.

45 O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation.

46 Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

Comments

To underscore the current importance of this sermon, Jacob performs a visual action that they could all observe. When he took off an article of clothing to shake them before the congregation, he was symbolically enacting Isaiah 52:2, which was included with Jacob’s quotation of Isaiah 51 (in 2 Nephi 8:25): “Shake thyself from the dust; arise, *and* sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.” Jacob enacts that shaking of the dust before them. He declares that he has done

so, visually enjoining them to do the same. At the same time, because they share the same city, shaking off their dust also visually symbolizes his separation from their sins.

Jacob entreats his audience to repent and “turn away from your sins,” to “shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast.” The final exclamation that “I know my guilt; I transgressed they law,” is not Jacob speaking of himself, but is rhetorically quoting of what his audience must say at that great judgment day.

2 Nephi 9:47–49

47 But behold, my brethren, is it expedient that I should awake you to an awful reality of these things? Would I harrow up your souls if your minds were pure? Would I be plain unto you according to the plainness of the truth if ye were freed from sin?

48 Behold, if ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but as ye are not holy, and ye look upon me as a teacher, it must needs be expedient that I teach you the consequences of sin.

49 Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God.

Comments

Jacob emphasizes that his sermon is not theoretical. It is pointed directly at members of the community. He says: “Would I be plain unto you according to the plainness of the truth if ye were freed from sin?” The obvious answer is no, and it is also clear that he has done so in this sermon because they are in that sinful condition.

If we step back from the sermon for a moment, it is important to note how unusual this sermon would be had only the faithful members of Lehi’s family been in the audience. That was a family which had already been tried and come through the furnace of affliction. How are there so many that Jacob would need to preach such a strong sermon to them? How could they so soon need to be told not to worship idols, as Jacob did in verse 37 of this chapter?

The presence of a combined audience which included large numbers of converts, who had previous ways of learning and previous gods, is the explanatory backdrop for this sermon. Those new members, who were adopted into Israel, brought with them their own learning, their own wisdom, and their own desires for a social system based on accumulated goods. Those imported ideas are those that Jacob condemns here and will do so again after Nephi has died.

2 Nephi 9:50–52

50 Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

51 Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness.

52 Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice.

Comments

Without introduction, Jacob quotes Isaiah 55:1–2: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which* is not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which* is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

Jacob does not quote it exactly, however. One of the things that happens in the translation of King James Version verses is that places where there are italics in the King James Version have been eliminated in the Book of Mormon, and at times this occasions changes to the text. In this case, a whole section is removed and replaced with a similar idea using different words.

One of the other reasons for the change is that Joseph apparently did not understand the old use of “wherefore” as a question—where we would use “why” today. Thus Isaiah’s “wherefore do ye spend money” could be “why do ye spend money . . . ?” In this case, the translation say “wherefore” as equivalent to “therefore” (the two terms are interchangeable most of the time in the Book of Mormon). Thus, we have “wherefore, *do not* spend money.” The concept is the same, but the language changed from that in the King James Version because the use of the word “wherefore” was in a meaning not familiar to Joseph.

Of course, this suggests that Joseph somehow interacted with the King James Version when he was translating. The evidence is very strong that he did so. How it happened is much less certain.

2 Nephi 9:53–54

53 And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel.

54 And now, my brethren, I would speak unto you more; but on the morrow I will declare unto you the remainder of my words. Amen.

Comments

An angel had asked Nephi if he understood the condescension of God as part of Nephi's vision of the Tree of Life (see 1 Nephi 11:16). Then, as now in Jacob, the condescension of God is in leaving the heavens in order to be incarnated as a mortal and to make the Atonement. This statement reprises the essentials of Jacob's sermon about the ability of the Atonement to save us all from death and hell. However, Jacob has more to say on the next day of his sermon, and he makes a brief transition into the topic for the next day.

The Atonement saves us from being ultimately destroyed, but the image of their seed not being destroyed invokes the covenant of the land. Thus, Jacob pivots from the universal effect of the Atonement to the specific salvation of their branch of Israel.

Perhaps there would be a chapter break at this point simply because the sermon continued the following day, and there would be a logical break. While that is possible, logical topical divisions are rarely behind the chapter breaks in the original Book of Mormon. This one is occasioned by the testificatory *amen* which always forces a chapter break in Nephi's writings.