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## The Atonement of Jesus Christ: 2 Nephi 9

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# 9

## **The Atonement of Jesus Christ: 2 Nephi 9**

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**Robert J. Matthews**

**T**he principal subject of this paper is the atonement of Jesus Christ. This is a most sacred topic, and I approach it with an awareness of my weaknesses, yet I am very serious about what I am going to say. I also pray for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in presenting these ideas so that it may be done properly. There are several passages in the Book of Mormon that especially contribute to our understanding of the Atonement, and these are found primarily in 2 Nephi chapters 2, 9; Mosiah chapter 3; and Alma chapters 12, 34, and 42. The Atonement is repeatedly taught throughout the entire Book of Mormon, but the noted chapters contain the longest and most extensive explanations as to the need for an atonement, its relation to the fall of Adam, why Jesus was the only one qualified to make the necessary sacrifice, and how the Atonement offers mercy and still satisfies the demands of eternal justice.

I will focus upon Jacob's discourse, recorded in 2 Nephi 9, as the basic text, supplemented with information from other chapters that contain the revelations of God on this subject. Because chapter 9 contains other topics ancillary to the Atonement

but very much connected with it, this paper will also include them, even though the Atonement is the principal topic. Although the scriptures are the source, I alone am responsible for the interpretation in this paper. I believe that what I have written is correct, but I do not speak for the Church or the University.

### Spiritual Greatness of Jacob

Let us first look at who the man Jacob was and why he was particularly qualified to write about the mission of Jesus Christ.

Jacob's writings are found in 2 Nephi chapters 6-10 and in the book of Jacob. He was the son of Lehi and was born sometime between 600 and 592 BC during the eight years the family was traveling in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful (1 Nephi 18:7). Jacob became acquainted with the hardships of the journey to the promised land of America and witnessed the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel. A true believer, he stood firm by his father and his older brother Nephi in defense of the faith and in fulfilling the purposes of the Lord in which his family was engaged.

Jacob was exceptionally sensitive to spiritual things, and even as a youth he was visited by the Savior and "beheld his glory." He was also an eyewitness to the ministry of angels and had "many revelations" and "heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him in very word, from time to time" (2 Nephi 2:4; 10:3; 11:3; Jacob 7:5). He and his father Lehi are two of the greatest doctrinal, theological, and philosophical preachers in the Book of Mormon. It is interesting that the second chapter of 2 Nephi, which presents so much information about Adam, temptation, agency, the devil, the results of the Fall, the power of the Atonement, and the dictum that there must be opposition in all things, is a record of Lehi's blessing upon the youthful Jacob. That blessing fits the mind and disposition of Jacob, for all of Jacob's teachings that are recorded for us to read are doctrinal in content.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the most informative scriptural statements about the Fall and the Atonement is Jacob's colorful discourse found in 2 Nephi 9. This address contains insights relative to the fall of Adam and to the need for the redemption wrought by Jesus that are not stated with such clarity in any other place. It is through Jacob that we obtain the extensive allegory of the scattering and gathering of Israel from the writings of Zenos (Jacob 5), and also many explanations of the writings of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6-8).

Jacob was a preacher of righteousness and a forthright, positive expounder of the scriptures. Nephi was much pleased with Jacob's doctrine and recorded many of his teachings upon the small plates. Perhaps what Nephi liked about Jacob was his plainness and clarity (see 2 Nephi 31:3). Nephi consecrated Jacob a priest and teacher to the people and also appointed him as his successor in keeping the sacred records (Jacob 1:1-3, 18).

At the time of the great discourse recorded in 2 Nephi 9, Jacob would have been 35-45 years of age. We do not know how long he lived nor when he died, but he outlived Nephi by several years. Jacob writes of his final years by saying: "I, Jacob, began to be old, . . . and . . . I saw that I must soon go down to my grave" (Jacob 7:26-27). He then gave the records and the sacred charge to his son Enos.

### Four Major Themes in 2 Nephi 9

Although the atonement of Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of 2 Nephi 9, I have defined four major topics in this chapter as follows:

1. The restoration of Israel, both a physical gathering and also a restoration to the "true church and fold of God" (vv. 1-3). This topic needs no further explanation in this paper, other than to note that the complete restoration of

Israel, including the Jews, will be brought about by their acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and their obedience to the gospel covenants and commandments.

2. The fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ (vv. 4-27). This constitutes the main body of this paper and will be dealt with at length. We will not be able to touch every aspect of the Fall and the Atonement, but will try to cover a few things well.
3. The wisdom of the world compared to the revelations of God (vv. 28-43). This section deals with the value of truth, particularly the truths of the gospel that are able to save a soul, as contrasted to the learning of the world. Moderate space will be given to this part of the chapter.
4. Leaving the world without excuse—an exhortation to repentance (vv. 44-54). This part of the discourse seems so plain that little space will be given in this paper to a special explanation, beyond the emphasis that one cannot be indifferent to the warnings and teachings of the scriptures and the prophets without suffering a loss of blessings and placing one's own salvation in serious neglect if not in outright jeopardy.

### The Fall of Adam and the Atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Nephi 9:4-27)

Jacob introduces his discussion of the Atonement with these words:

Ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God (v. 4).

Because of the fall of Adam, there is an inevitable approach of death in everyone's life. Decay and death are the literal

inheritance of every human being on this earth. There is no escape and there are no exceptions. Medical science and proper care may postpone death, but nothing can prevent it. If an accident or disease does not cause death, the unremitting march of time and “wasting away” of the flesh will eventually bring it. Even for those who are translated death is only postponed. They too will die and be resurrected (see D&C 133:54-55; 3 Nephi 28:6-8, 17, 36-40; John 21:21-23).

Jacob points out that though death and “wasting away” is the lot of every person, yet “in our bodies we shall see God.” He explains how this will occur in 2 Nephi 9:5-7:

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.

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.

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.

Jacob explains that since the fall of Adam brought death to all mankind, there is a need for a resurrection from the dead for all mankind. This is not a particularly new or unique concept (other prophets have also said it), but Jacob does not stop there. He continues to bring us a very illuminating and informative observation:

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.

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 (vv. 8-9).

Death inherited from the fall of Adam is of two kinds, physical and spiritual. We are acquainted with physical death. It has provided employment for morticians and has been the cause of so many occupants in the cemeteries. The other death, which is also inherited from Adam by all mankind, is alienation from God. None of us reading this has experienced physical death, but all of us have experienced the other. Galatians 5:17-21 gives a detailed listing of the fruits of man's fallen condition. Jacob tells graphically what the effect would be on all mankind because of the fall of Adam, if there were no atonement: (1) There would be no resurrection of the body, and (2) Our spirits would all become devils, forever miserable, shut out from the presence of God, and dwelling everlastingly with the devil. This is the legal and ultimate extension of the Fall if there were no redemption. In Jacob's words, "The first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration" (v. 7). What was the first judgment? It was: "Thou shalt surely die!" (Gen. 2:17; see also Moses 4:17). There are two *kinds* of death, because the Fall affects both the body and the spirit. Jacob explained the situation more pointedly in this chapter than is done in perhaps any other passage of scripture. We could not appreciate why Jesus is called the Savior unless we knew what was lost and what he saved us from, and Jacob certainly tells what that is.

Jacob then praises the Lord for the great plan of salvation that rescues mankind from such an awful and inevitable condition:

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 (v. 10).

Notice the very descriptive expressions of Jacob's joy and thankfulness to the Lord for providing the means of escape from that "awful monster":

O how great the plan of our God! (v. 13)

O the greatness and the justice of our God! (v. 17)

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.

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

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 (vv. 19-21).

Jacob points out that when men have knowledge of the gospel they are required of the Lord to use that knowledge and repent of their sins. Those who do not have knowledge for whatever reason (either because of infancy, lack of mental ability, or perhaps they were never taught) are automatically covered by the Atonement:

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.

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! (vv. 26-27).

“Those who have not the law given unto them” include little children, and Jacob explains that such are rescued by the Atonement. King Benjamin and Mormon also taught the same doctrine regarding children (Mosiah 3:11-16; Moroni 8:5-20). This is a great contrast to the prominent doctrine of original sin held by many Christian denominations.

### *The Atonement Automatically Covers Original Sin*

One of the paramount doctrines that has persisted for centuries in much of Christendom is what is popularly called “original sin.” This is the concept that since Adam’s fall brought



death and alienation to all of the human family, little children are born in sin, or under the penalty of sin, and are out of favor with God. Therefore, should they die in their infancy without baptism, they would be forever shut out from the presence and face of God. This belief stems from an awareness of the effects of the *Fall*, but not an awareness of the results of the *Atonement*. It is indeed the devil's doctrine, because it recognizes the Fall and death and sin, but fails to recognize the work of the Savior in redeeming little children from the Fall. As we have learned from Jacob, the doctrine of original sin would be partly true if there were no atonement by Jesus Christ, and would apply not only to children, but to the whole human family. But there is an atonement and it does redeem little children. To hold that little children are born in sin is a denial of the atonement of Christ.

The doctrine of original sin as taught by portions of Christianity is based on incorrect reasoning by various philosophers of the early apostasy in the second and third centuries AD, and more fully developed by Augustine in the fourth century. This reasoning held that the fall of Adam brought both spiritual and physical death to the whole human family (so far so good), but the idea was added that the posterity of Adam actually sinned by Adam's transgression (this is not so good). Proponents of this concept cite Romans 5:12, 15, 20, which they interpret to say that through Adam sin entered into the world and so in the trespass of Adam all men sinned themselves. We should note at this point that there is a huge difference between whether a child actually inherits the sin itself or only the *consequences* of the sin. It appears that the apostate Christian philosophers of the second to fourth centuries AD taught that children actually sinned in Adam.

Since children were regarded as actual sinners from birth, it was but a short intellectual journey for these falsely inspired philosophers to decide that children would therefore be denied a place in heaven if they died before receiving Christian baptism.

The concept of infant baptism was developed as an accommodation to this particular view of the fall of Adam.

It was because of this mistaken view of original sin, holding that little children are born in sin, that the doctrine of the “immaculate conception” was developed in Catholic theology. This doctrine is not, as many have supposed, a reference to Jesus’ own conception, but is the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was herself conceived miraculously in her mother’s womb, so that she (Mary) would be born without original sin, and thus could be free to conceive the holy child Jesus. One false concept led to another, and another, and another.

There is nothing in our present Bible that clearly and unequivocally explains just how the fall of Adam applies to children, and whether every person actually *sinned* in Adam, or only suffers the *consequences* of Adam’s fall. Nor is there any statement that clearly defines how the Atonement specifically relates to children. There *is* just such a statement, however, in the book of Moses, which was revealed as part of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible.

In this circumstance the prophet Enoch is teaching his people about Adam, and how death and sin came into the world. Enoch reminds his hearers that the plan of salvation was taught to Adam. This is Enoch speaking:

And he [God] called upon our father Adam by his own voice, saying: I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh.

And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son . . . ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world (Moses 6:51-54; JST Gen. 6:52-56).

Please note two important details of this passage. First, Adam was told to repent of all his transgressions (plural—more than one). In no other place in the scriptures is there any reference to Adam having more than the original transgression in the Garden of Eden. This is a unique passage. The intent is clear: Adam must repent of any transgressions that he committed after he became mortal, but he was automatically forgiven of his transgression in the Garden—the transgression that caused the fall of mankind. This very clear distinction between the two categories is unequaled by any other passage of scripture. Second, the point is also made that “the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sin of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world.”

We are not aware of any transgressions Adam committed after becoming mortal, but being mortal, he must have had some, ever so small ones, or else why is this statement in the scripture? We are fully assured by this passage that Adam stands, as do all of his posterity, forgiven of all responsibility for that transgression in the Garden, but held fully responsible for any committed in mortality.

If this passage had remained in the book of Genesis, or if the correct doctrine had survived in our present New Testament, the whole mistaken concept of original sin and infant baptism as practiced by much of Christianity for the past 1800 years could have been avoided.

I have often noticed that the Bible generally tells *what* happened, but it takes latter-day revelation to tell us *why*. For example, the Bible teaches of a fall of Adam, but it does not adequately explain the results and effects of that fall on all mankind in its present condition. The Bible tells us there was an atonement by Jesus Christ, but it does not adequately explain how that atonement affects every one of us and especially little children. The ancient biblical prophets and apostles understood the doctrine and wrote of it, but many plain and precious parts

have been removed from the Bible. Consequently, only latter-day revelation can give us the right information.

In our “enlightened” age many religious people reject the idea of original sin and the guilt of little children. But they do it for the wrong reasons. It is not because they have a clearer understanding of the atonement of Jesus Christ, but because they have rejected the fall of Adam and the fall of mankind. Taking a humanistic approach, they have discarded the story of Adam and thus have removed the necessity for an atonement. Instead of being theologians, they are sociologists and teachers of ethics. The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only correct answers to the great questions and problems of life and death, and sin and innocence. This is done with the true doctrine of the fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

We thus can see the power and importance of the Book of Mormon and the other revelations on doctrine that were given to us through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Furthermore, we come to appreciate the energy with which Mormon testified against the baptism of little children, as recorded in Moroni 8:8-9, 12, 19-20:

Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. . . . 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.

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 (vv. 8-9; emphasis added).

But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world (v. 12).

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.

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 (vv. 19-20).

Early apostate Christians (both among the Nephites and also among those in the Mediterranean area) were not the only

ones who thought little children were born in sin. There is evidence from D&C 74:6-7 that the Jews in the first century AD had the same incorrect notion.

When we reflect on how extensively millions of the human family are affected, all because they fail to understand what the Savior has done for mankind, we can see why the devil (the arch-enemy of Christ) wanted such a condition to exist and therefore influenced corrupt persons to remove from the Bible the plain and precious explanations of the Atonement. We can likewise see why the Lord has in his mercy restored the true doctrine of the Fall and the Atonement through the Prophet Joseph Smith in this dispensation. How fortunate we are to have these truths available in the latter-day scriptures.

### *Only a God Could Make the Atonement*

Before continuing with the remainder of Jacob's discourse, I want to make some additional observations about what we have already read. You remember that Jacob said there would be an "infinite atonement" and it would be made by the "great Creator" himself. Jacob does not expand on these two ideas, but other prophets have. It is important for us to understand why the Atonement had to be "infinite" and therefore why only Jesus could accomplish it.

In this chapter I have endeavored to establish the fact that the fall of Adam—involving both physical and spiritual death—has been inherited by all of Adam's posterity and that no human being can do anything to change it. The Atonement needed to be two-fold—a payment for the fall of Adam and also for our individual sins. It had to be made by someone not dominated by the Fall the way the rest of mankind is, and also by one who had not committed any sins. Therefore, the plan of salvation called for a god to do it—one who had not inherited either of the two deaths through Adam. Only in this way could one person's

suffering apply to forgiveness and payment for another's sins, and thus become a savior to him.

How could a god come to the earth to suffer and die? Celestial gods neither suffer nor die. This is at least a major reason why Jesus came into the world as a child, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, born of Mary who conceived him by the direct intervention of God the Father. Jesus inherited life from his Father just as the rest of us inherit death from our fathers. He was able to die because he had a mortal mother, but he was not dominated by death. Jesus voluntarily laid down his life—died both a physical and a spiritual death—for others.

When we begin to understand this doctrine, we begin to know why Jesus had to be the literal son of God in the flesh—the *Only Begotten*. He alone has this unique status: a celestial father, a mortal mother! It was by this means that a god became a man on earth, able to die, but not inevitably subject to death. The beautiful story of Jesus' birth recorded in the New Testament tells the outside facts of the matter, giving an account of the crowded inn, visits of angels, the new star, and the manger, and affirms that Jesus was the Son of God and not of any mortal man; but it does not explain *why* it had to be so. Latter-day revelation clearly identifies the only way the debt could be paid.

We read in the words of Amulek recorded in Alma 34:8-16 that the Atonement would not be “a sacrifice of man, neither of beast . . . for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (v. 10). Amulek continues: “There is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. . . . Therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (vv. 11-12). An infinite atonement is an atonement by an infinite being—a god!

Since Jesus had not inherited spiritual death from Adam, and since he committed no sins himself, he was spiritually alive, experiencing no alienation from God, until he took upon himself

our sins. He suffered spiritual agony and spiritual death in the Garden of Gethsemane, and shed his blood, which dropped like sweat, on our behalf. Later he suffered physical death on the cross in our behalf. By suffering these two deaths, he paid the debt legally and completely. He atoned for Adam's transgressions unconditionally for all men; and he atoned for our sins on conditions of our repentance.

This is the true doctrine of the Atonement taught in the scriptures. With his blood Jesus paid a debt to satisfy a broken law—a law that he himself was neither beholden to nor dominated by—a debt that we were and are unable to pay ourselves. That kind of redemption is beyond the power or ability of any mortal man. It is absolutely essential to our faith that we know that Jesus is the Only Begotten, born of a special divine lineage. The reason for this lineage is made clear to us only if we understand the effects of the fall of Adam. If we do not accept the fall of Adam we undermine and undercut the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and we devitalize the whole Christian message.

Jacob and Amulek are not alone in declaring this doctrine. We read in Alma 42:15, "Therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world." And Abinadi said, "Were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, they must unavoidably perish" (Mosiah 13:28, 32).

This exclusive ability of Jesus Christ to make the required atonement is also reflected in other passages of scripture. There are numerous places that declare that salvation comes only through the "merits" of Jesus (2 Nephi 2:8; 31:19; Alma 24:10; Hel. 14:13; Moroni 6:4; D&C 3:20). These "merits" are his sinlessness, his obedience, and his power over death. There are also many passages declaring that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (see Acts 4:12; 2 Nephi 25:20; 31:21; D&C 18:23; 109:4; Moses 6:52; etc.). These all attest to Christ's exclusive ability to atone.

### *Redemption's Grand Design*

Because the Atonement is made by a god, all mankind is rescued from both kinds of death—redeemed from the grave and also saved from becoming devils in never-ending misery. Therefore, children are born in innocence, all mankind will be resurrected with their physical bodies, and every person will be restored to the presence of God long enough for a judgment. Those who have obeyed the gospel will be able to remain in his presence; all others will be subject to a degree of alienation caused by their unrepented sins. The plan of redemption makes it possible for mercy to be given to man without robbing justice; for justice is paid by the sufferings of a god. The interplay between law, justice, mercy, repentance, love and atonement is a system that exhibits the work and the wisdom of God himself. We sing of this in one of our hymns, #195: “How great, how glorious, how complete, / Redemption’s grand design, / Where justice, love and mercy meet / In harmony divine” (*Hymns*).

### *Atonement is Understood Only Through Study and Experience*

I first read the Book of Mormon over forty years ago. I remember reading about the Atonement, particularly those chapters that explain how mercy becomes available without robbing justice. How I struggled and wrestled as an 18-year-old boy to try to understand that. It was beyond me. I knew it was important. I also knew that I didn’t understand it, but I wanted to. I have never forgotten the effort I made to try to understand the Atonement, and it has been of keen interest and importance to me ever since. I know a little more about it now, but not yet enough. The Atonement is the most significant thing that a person ought to know. It can only be understood by experience (we cannot comprehend the depth of the Atonement just by reading a book). I expect knowledge and appreciation of the



Atonement will continue to expand until one becomes exalted in the celestial kingdom. It therefore follows that they who do not reach exaltation may never really appreciate exactly what the Lord did for them.

### *The Fall and the Atonement are Historical Events*

In order to be of value, it is essential that the fall of Adam and the atonement by Jesus Christ be historical events that actually happened at a time and at a place. We accept Adam and Eve as real persons who lived, transgressed and brought about their own fall and the consequent fall of all mankind. If we had a complete record, it would be possible to mark on the calendar the time when the Fall occurred. Likewise, if we had an adequate map, and someday I expect we will, it would be possible to mark the exact spot where the Fall occurred. The Fall is just that real and absolute. A real man and a real woman did at a specific time and in a specific geographical location bring about the fall of man, which has affected all of mankind.

In like manner, the birth of Jesus Christ, his miracles, the shedding of his blood in Gethsemane, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the tomb could be, each one, marked on a calendar and also on a map with perfect accuracy if we but had the detailed information. These are historical facts, absolute truths, not simply philosophical, moral, or so-called “religious” truths. We will now continue with Jacob’s discourse.

### **The Wisdom of the World Compared to the Revelations of God (2 Nephi 9:28-43)**

Jacob stoutly denounces trusting in the wisdom and the learning of the world, especially if it prevents a person from coming to the gospel or distracts those who already have the gospel. It is a frequent topic in the Book of Mormon that there

is an antagonism between the learning of the world and the things of God (see for example vv. 28-29 and Jacob 4:14). Jacob is not shy in perpetuating such a distinction. It is not the worldly learning alone, but also man's pride in his learning, trusting in the arm of flesh, that makes the barrier. A specific contribution of the Book of Mormon is that it explains what the gospel *is*, but more than that, it tells what the gospel of Christ *is not*. No one who understands the Book of Mormon could miss this point, because the Book of Mormon draws a wide distinction between the secular and the spiritual, and exposes the false concepts so prevalent in the world in the form of secularism, humanism, materialism, organic evolution, and the like.

The scriptures place a high premium on the acquisition of truth, but they also show that certain kinds of learning are more important than other kinds. Since Jacob deals with this subject, we will pursue this theme briefly.

### *Truths Vary in Value and Nature*

In one sense, all truth is of the same nature, for "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). Jacob defines truth as "things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13). However, not all truths are of the same worth. Knowing that a bare wire six inches from your foot is carrying 200,000 volts of electricity is a far more important truth at that moment than knowing that Australian white rabbits have pink eyes. Truths that cause people to change their lifestyles are more significant to society than truths that are mere facts, such as knowing that your shoe laces are tied in bows.

But there is an even more marked, pronounced, and significant difference between various types or levels of truth than simply their relative importance. There is a difference as to how truths are comprehended by the mind of man. Most truths we

deal with in mortality are perceived through our natural senses, but there are certain truths necessary to the redemption of one's soul that are perceived only by revelation through the Holy Ghost. These truths are not perceived by intellectual activity alone, but are spiritually discerned. They are, in the language of the Lord, "hidden treasures" of knowledge (D&C 89:19). Or as Paul said, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost"; i.e., hidden to those without the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:3).

And again in the words of Paul, speaking of spiritual truths:

God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . Even so the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (JST 1 Cor. 2:10-11, 14).

Note that Paul does not say that the natural man simply *does not* know the things of God, he says that the natural man *cannot* know them. The things of the Spirit are just as real as are the things of the earth, but they are in a different sphere, and fallen man's ability to perceive and understand them is so limited that only by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can he perceive them.

This same principle is taught in Doctrine and Covenants 76:115-117, wherein Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon explain why they did not write more of what they saw in the vision. In the first place, they said they were forbidden to do so (v. 115). Second, they explained:

Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him;

To whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves (vv. 116-17).

This principle is also illustrated in the Savior's words to Peter. When Jesus asked the Twelve who men said that he was, they replied that some said he was Elijah or John or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, etc. But in answer to "whom say ye that I

am?” Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus’ response illustrates both these two categories of truth: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-17). These passages of scripture seem to create a hierarchy of truths, and seem to say not all truth is available to all persons just for the asking. This stratification may be the meaning of D&C 93:30, wherein the Lord says: “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself.” Does this passage suggest that there are different categories (spheres) of truth, and that each is independent of the other? In other words, are there truths common to our mortal fallen world, and other truths peculiar to spiritual things? We have already learned that there are some areas of truth that the natural man cannot know because he does not have the mechanism for acquiring them. Spiritual truth is only made known by the Spirit to those who believe, repent, and prepare themselves to obtain it.

Gaining the particular knowledge that saves is so important that “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). Consequently, “a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge” of these special truths (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 217; see also 301, 305, 331). The knowledge that a person possesses is fundamental to his thinking and his state of mind. What he doesn’t know can’t *help* him. And contrary to a popular saying, what he doesn’t know *can* hurt him. Without knowledge he lacks the conviction and the determination that the right knowledge would have given to him. Even the approach of great danger, if it is not perceived, has no effect on the consciousness or emotion of the individual. We see millions of people in the world today unaware and unconcerned about their relationship to God. We read that it is impossible for a person without a correct knowledge of God and his attributes to exercise the degree of faith necessary for life and salvation (*Lectures on Faith* 3:1-4, 19). A person cannot have perfect faith in something he doesn’t know anything about. Since this is true, and the

scriptures say it is, we are all obliged to learn some spiritual truths if we want to be saved in the celestial kingdom. We cannot even have a testimony that Jesus is the Christ, except by the revelation of the Holy Ghost. Saving truths are divine, not natural, knowledge.

Since all truths are not of equal value, and since those truths most necessary in the process of salvation are gained only through the Holy Spirit of God, one obviously stands in jeopardy if he does not gain those particular truths through that particular Spirit while in this life. Job said that the things of God are “past finding out” (Job 9:10), and his “friend” Zophar asks, “Canst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7). Obviously, the correct answer to Zophar’s question is, “No! The things of God do not yield themselves to searching alone.” No one can obtain the things of God except by revelation, and God must reveal himself or else he remains forever unknown. Jacob wrote: “How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him. . . . And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God” (Jacob 4:8).

A description of the different kinds of truth could be placed in a paraphrase of the words used by Paul when he was writing about the different kinds of flesh and the different degrees of glory (see 1 Cor. 15:39-44). Hence, we could say,

All truth is not the same truth, for there is one kind of truth common among men, and another kind that pertains to God. There is also a truth that is gained through the mortal senses, and another that is gained only through the Spirit. There is one kind of truth that comes from God, and another kind that comes from men, for one truth differeth from another truth in glory. So also is the truth that is had in the earth. There is a natural truth and there is a spiritual truth.

But truth of a spiritual nature is also different in yet another way. Spiritual truth is not simply bare fact or mere information. The scriptures speak of light *and* truth as companions. The glory of God, which is intelligence, is spoken of as both light *and* truth, and not just truth alone (D&C 93:36). The presence of light in

company with knowledge seems to be an essential quality that distinguishes God's truth (i.e. the knowledge that saves) from the type of truth that is mere fact, and that even a natural or a wicked man could gain by research and study.

### *The Miraculous is Essential to the Gospel*

There has to be a miraculous character to the gospel or it will be only an earthly philosophy. The ideas, concepts, doctrines, and truths thereof need to have come from a source beyond mortality, or the gospel would only be earthbound. It could not rise above the power and capability of its source. Divine truth has to come from the other side of the veil, or it could not exceed the knowledge and powers that exist on this side of the veil.

In short, based on the scriptures, we see at least five distinctions between what we call natural (or secular) truth and spiritual truth: (1) Spiritual truth is essential for redemption of the soul; secular truth is an aid, but not a necessity; (2) Spiritual truth is perceived only by revelation through the Holy Ghost, Spirit to spirit, whereas natural truth is learned through the five senses; (3) Spiritual truth is revealed only to those who seek to obey the commandments of God, whereas secular truth can be gained without regard to moral status; (4) Spiritual truth does not consist of fact alone, but is accompanied by light, whereas secular truth might lack such light; (5) Spiritual truth is ultimately more important than any other truth.

We shall now examine what Jacob said about the conflict between the revelations of God and the philosophies of man.

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.

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God (vv. 28-29).

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.

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.

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.

But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints (vv. 40-43).

## Leaving the World Without Excuse (2 Nephi 9:44-54)

The importance of obeying the gospel when it is taught to us by an authorized servant of the Lord is underscored by Jacob in these 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 (v. 44).

By declaring the message, the prophet clears his skirts of the responsibility of other men's sins and leaves the hearer without excuse. Jacob then calls his hearers (and his readers) to repentance:

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 trans-

gressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

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.

Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy (vv. 46, 50-51).

With these words Jacob brings to a close this most informative and impressive discourse. He tells his audience that he has more to say, but it will have to wait for tomorrow (v. 54). This promised continuation is evidently the material in 2 Nephi chapter 10.

### Summary

I have long been edified and thrilled with this great discourse of Jacob that I have examined in this chapter. To me it is one of the outstanding sources of information not only on spiritual things, but also on the danger of embracing worldly philosophy. I am so glad that Jacob delivered such a discourse, and that Nephi included it on the small plates, and that the Lord enabled the Prophet Joseph Smith to translate it for our benefit. I would never want to be without it. It is the literal truth of God. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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