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Christ's Visit to the Nephites as a Type of His Second Coming

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Source: *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*

Published: Salt Lake City; Cornerstone Publishing, 1999 (1st Edition)

Page(s): 270–274

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And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea. And it came to pass that I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people. And it came to pass that I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them. And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them. (1 Nephi 12:1-6)

SIGNS PRECEDING CHRIST'S VISIT TO THE NEPHITES

Though Nephi saw the great destructions that would accompany Christ's crucifixion before his resurrection and appearance to the Nephites, he was also aware that the prophet Zenos had written about these events (1 Nephi 19:10-12). Nephi also described the events that would precede Christ's coming to the New World in 2 Nephi 26:1-11. He noted that people would cast out and kill the prophets (2 Nephi 26:3, 5), that there would be fire, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquakes (2 Nephi 26:4, 6), that people would be swallowed up by the earth, covered by mountains, carried away in whirlwinds, and buried beneath buildings (2 Nephi 26:5).

But Nephi did not stop there. He went on to describe what would happen "in the last days," noting the "iniquity and all manner of abominations" among the people, who would "be visited of the Lord of Hosts, with thunder and with earthquake, and with a great noise, and with storm, and with tempest, and with the flame of devouring fire" (2 Nephi 27:1-2). From this description, it is clear that the wickedness and destructions found among the Nephites at the time of Christ's appearance in the land of Bountiful will also exist at the time of his second coming.

SIGNS PRECEDING CHRIST'S VISIT TO THE NEPHITES

Samuel the Lamanite also described the events that would precede the coming of Christ to the Nephites (Helaman 14:20-29). He spoke of earthquakes, tempests, thunderings, lightnings, and darkness, saying that "there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley . . . [and] valleys which shall become mountains" (Helaman 14:21-27). He added that "the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light . . . and also the moon and stars" (Helaman 14:20) and prophesied that "many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many" (Helaman 14:25).

All of the signs foreseen by Nephi and Samuel the Lamanite were manifest shortly before Christ came to the temple in

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Bountiful (3 Nephi 8-9). Great wickedness prevailed among many of the people and they cast out and stoned the prophets (3 Nephi 7:14; 8:25; 9:11). At the time of the crucifixion, there were earthquakes, tempests, whirlwinds, lightnings, thunder, and thick darkness. Some cities were burned with fire, others submerged beneath the waters, others covered over by mountains, and still others swallowed up in the earth. Moreover, graves were opened and some of the righteous dead arose and appeared to people (3 Nephi 23:9-11).

SIGNS PRECEDING CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Mormon, who lived four centuries after Christ's post-resurrection appearance in the New World, wrote of the signs of his second coming, which would include the same elements witnessed by the Nephites: fires, tempests, vapors of smoke, and great wickedness (Mormon 8:26-31). He noted that these would "come in a day when the blood of saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and the works of darkness" (Mormon 8:27). This is reminiscent of Nephi's prophecy regarding the coming of Christ among his people: "wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them" (2 Nephi 26:3).

The darkening of the sun and moon, prophesied by Samuel as a sign of Christ's coming to the Nephites, is expected in the last days as well, as is indicated in the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, which was cited by Moroni during his appearance to Joseph Smith in 1823 (Joseph Smith History 1:41).

The great upheavals that took place in the New World at the time of the crucifixion will be repeated in the last days, including earthquakes and great land upheavals (Zechariah 14:1-13). Christ will appear and the righteous dead will rise from the tomb (Isaiah 26:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). Just as his coming to the Nephites signaled an era of peace (4 Nephi 1:15-18), so, too, his second coming will usher in a millennium of peace.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

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We live in circumstances very similar to those of the Nephites prior to Christ's appearing to them. While believers anticipate Christ's second coming, the more skeptical in our day reject the idea. The Nephites had their skeptics, who plotted to kill the believers if the signs prophesied by Samuel did not come to pass (3 Nephi 1:8-21). They said that the time had passed for the prophecies to be fulfilled (3 Nephi 1:5-6).

Even after the signs of his birth were given, there were those who tried to rationalize them away, being deceived by Satan and by their own fallible minds (3 Nephi 1:22; 2:1-3). So, too, we should expect that the signs of Christ's second coming will not convince everyone in our day. Joseph Smith spoke of the signs that will be given

before the Son of Man will make His appearance,
There will be wars and rumors of wars, signs in
the heavens above and on the earth beneath, the
sun turned into darkness and the moon to blood,
earthquakes in divers places, the seas heaving
beyond their bounds; then will appear one grand
sign of the Son of Man in heaven. But what will
the world do? They will say it is a planet, a comet,
&c. But the Son of Man will come as the sign of
the coming of the Son of Man, which will be as
the light of the morning cometh out of the east.
(History of the Church 5:337)

The more righteous among the Nephites gathered at the temple in Bountiful and became witnesses to the coming of Christ. If we wish to stand at Christ's second coming, we should do likewise. "Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord" (D&C 87:8).

CONCLUSION

What, then, can we learn from the parallels between the coming of Christ among the Nephites and his coming in glory to reign on the earth in the last days? First, we learn that some will say that he delays his coming, that the time is past for the fulfillment of the prophecies (3 Nephi 29:2; D&C 45:26). They will not believe the signs even when they see them, and Satan will deceive some. Many will ignore the prophets and even persecute the saints. If we do as the Lord has commanded, it will be said of us as Nephi wrote of his descendants,

the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not, but look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs which are given, notwithstanding all persecution— behold, they are they which shall not perish. But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them. (2 Nephi 26:8-9)