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## Nephite-Christian Experience

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**Abstract:** There is no greater Christian experience than that of Nephi as recorded in 2 Nephi 4. Nephi traverses from the agony of spiritual battle with the hosts of darkness through various levels of assurance, obtaining relief, gratitude, then victory. Nephi's conflict provides an example to missionaries who must look to God.

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*"I have lived to know that the secret of happiness is never to allow your energies to stagnate."*—ADAM CLARKE.

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**NEPHITE-CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.**

WHEN we seek sincerely for rational evidences of the truth of "Mormonism," so-called, they can be found to a greater or less extent in almost every feature of this work, and also in others that are more or less intimately connected with it, but which form no integral part of the system itself. Its constitutional principles, comprehending all the greater and the lesser ones of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their fulness, is a testimony that in this respect it is above and beyond mere human accomplishment. The numerous, imperfect, sectarian systems of religion in Christendom, though founded by able and God-fearing men, are barely comparable in completeness with the "Mormon" system, and thus verify the statement just uttered. Their lack of comprehensiveness manifests what uninspired man, at his best, can do when he attempts to gather in one all the gospel principles of eternal life and salvation.

The prophecies uttered by Joseph Smith, the human agent in founding this Church, have either been, or are being fulfilled as fast as the flight of time, and the Divinely ordained course of events in this world, permit. Its superb organization, confessedly inconceivable as the product of a young, "unlearned" man, such as Joseph Smith was when he developed it in all its perfection, without any practical change afterwards in any of its features, is an irrefutable testimony of its Divine source. The inspiration of the Almighty poured upon him in copious measures was

necessary for the accomplishment of such a perfect work by first effort. The gathering of the saints from the ends of the earth in fulfillment of ancient prophecy; the gifts of the Spirit enjoyed by them; their union; the willingness to sacrifice all temporal comforts and prospects, when circumstances require it, for the testimony of Jesus; their knowledge of divine principles, whereby the plan of eternal life and salvation is made plain to their understanding; the preaching of the gospel already, practically, to all the nations of the earth; the alliance of opposing religious peoples in many instances with false-witness bearers and "lewd fellows of the baser sort," for the purpose of crushing "Mormonism," and the leanness of the fruits obtained in these efforts, do all, with a large number of unmentioned matters, unite in testifying that this work is no man-made imposture, but truly has a divine origin.

Testimonies, however, of the character to which reference is made in the foregoing remarks, are not those to which the reader's attention is specially requested on the present occasion. The Book of Mormon has many distinguishing features, and one of them is the profound insight into, and the faithfulness with which it depicts human character, either in its corrupt or moral, or in its exalted state when assisted and developed by the elevating influences of the Holy Spirit. An example of a beautiful and inspiring experience of a true saint of God, and one which points out the way for us all to follow when responsibilities are placed upon us which seem weighty enough to crush us—to follow in times of gloom and evil forebodings; and which will, if followed on such occasions, bring back joy and courage to our wearied souls, and inspire our faith for the accomplishment of any work that God requires at our hands, is now to be particularly considered. Nothing better than the Book of Mormon text in which the relation of the experience in question occurs, can be produced; and it is therefore copied in full as follows:

O wretched man, that I am: yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. \* \* \* Rejoice O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say, O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies?

Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road? O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness? O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies? Wilt thou make my path straight before me?

Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way? But that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemies?

O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. \* \* \* Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee; my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.

So reads the latter portion of the fourth chapter of II. Nephi. It is proper now to recall the circumstances under which Nephi had the experience which is therein represented. Turning to verse twelve of the same chapter, we find there a brief notice of the death and burial of the aged patriarch, Lehi. The first portion of chapter five shows that Nephi's life was in constant danger from members of his own family—from Laman and his associates. Nephi had been nominally the head of the people, but the charges made against him on this occasion show that he was such previously in name only. But be this as it may, up to this time he had always had by his side as a wise and faithful counselor, his aged and pious father to whom he could turn on all occasions for advice and sympathy when in the discharge of his numerous and arduous duties; but at last the man of all men around him who could best hold up his hands, and whose righteousness entitled him to the constant inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was dead and buried. Deprived of the valuable assistance and fatherly sympathy that he had always enjoyed in the fullest measure, the very first view that Nephi took of his lonely condition and increased responsibilities, while surrounded by enemies who were determined to destroy him, was sufficient to plunge him for once into the depths of despondency—the only occasion, we believe, in his whole life, according to his

history, when such feelings were allowed to find even a temporary lodgment in his courageous soul. The struggle that he was now to engage in was a mighty one; for Satan seems to have determined on his destruction as the spiritual leader of God's people on the western "land of promise." But he finally won victory, complete and glorious, over the weakness of the flesh, and the temptations of the devil.

Read the first portion of the quoted text in close order with the latter part, and note the wonderful change in feeling and sentiment. Observe how this saint of God has emerged from Egyptian darkness into the light and warmth of Divine grace once more. Note that he has come up through the slippery sands of Satan's soul-destroying pits till his feet are again planted firmly on the rock of temporal and eternal salvation—that his trembling heart has given place to one that is filled with a courage no danger can daunt—that the turmoil and strife which rent with anguish a sorely distressed soul, have fled, and in their stead there have come a great calm, a Christian peace and joy, which we share with Nephi as we read his closing words. Note all this, and then let us trace the clearly defined steps by which his victory was won. There is a lesson here that we can all learn with great profit to ourselves when times of personal distress overtake us. Military strategists study the plans of the world's great battles with unwearied zeal, and why should we not study the plan of Nephi's spiritual battle with the hosts of darkness, and profit by it.

As Nephi enters the conflict, complete discouragement seems to have possessed his soul. His chief earthly helper is gone; and yet additional responsibilities have to be assumed. His weaknesses are augmented and transformed by the suggestions of the devil into iniquities which make him appear to himself like the "chief of sinners"; and he knows what little help there is for real characters of that sort from God. Enemies encompass him round about, who will not scruple at any means to destroy him. The difficulties and dangers of his situation are numerous and alarming. His frailties stare him in the face, and he would fly from his responsibilities, doubtless, if he could. Rejoice he would, if there were a single ray of light that penetrated the darkness which wraps him in its shroud; but, instead of songs, he can utter only the groaning of his distressed heart. It is a picture well calculated to arouse our deepest sympathy, for Satan's triumph seems to have been almost in sight. But God never did, He never will desert one of His children, who, when all was fair, served Him faithfully; and so Nephi's thoughts are turned to what the Lord had done for him in days that were gone. He sets himself to reflecting on the Divine favors that he has experienced:—one, two, three, they begin to flock to his mind like a troop.

This is a splendid beginning of the fight for deliverance. From this higher vantage ground he progresses another step, and con-



siders the means personally employed to secure knowledge, power, and deliverance on the occasions just brought to his attention. He finds it in prayer to God. Courage is now fast coming back to his heart. He reasons that as God has helped him in times of trouble before, He will do so again. His soul is rousing to its accustomed vigor. The fires of hope are kindling, and as they burn brighter still, he summons his soul once more to rejoice. At this stage of the conflict—the psychological moment, we believe they call it now, he throws himself upon his knees, and wrestles with God in mighty prayer, and with a contrite heart, for the requisite blessings in all circumstances attending the discharge of his duties as leader of his people. The answer comes quickly from heaven, not giving strength to-day for the duties of to-morrow; but the Divine assurance of ever present help as occasion demands; and Nephi rises from his knees resting in sweet peace again on the rock of the salvation of God.

These were the various steps which brought victory to Nephi, and in marking them out we should not overlook the feature of thanksgiving, which some of us too often pass by as of comparatively less importance than others. Gratitude to God for His many great blessings to us is a duty, and its expression is in no way a recompense to Him for them; but it serves to show that we are not insensible of His goodness. Neither should contrition of heart for our feeble trust in God be neglected as one of the proper steps for us to take.

Dear brethren, you who are laboring in the mission field among strangers, often in the midst of enemies, have all, doubtless, at times had experiences that remind you of Nephi's conflict with "spiritual powers in high places." In such times of trial I pray God that the remembrance of these feeble words may prove a blessing to you, as well as to every other reader, when the powers of darkness shall, perchance, seek their overthrow from the faith of the latter-day work, founded by the prophet of God, Joseph Smith.

This fine example of Christian experience is submitted as evidence that no impostor, seeking to deceive his fellow-men, ever wrote the Book of Mormon.

Flagstaff, Arizona.

THOMAS W. BROOKBANK,

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"THANK God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done, whether you like it or not. Being forced to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance and self-control, diligence and strength of will, cheerfulness and content, and a hundred virtues which the idle never know."—CHARLES KINGSLEY.