

2 Nephi 6

An Address from Jacob (2 Nephi 6–10)

2 Nephi 6:1

¹ The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, which he spake unto the people of Nephi:

Comments

When the first 116 pages of the translation of Mormon’s record were lost, it was decided to make a backup copy for the printer so there was less of a chance that such a disaster would happen again. This second manuscript, known as the printer’s manuscript, has the full text of the Book of Mormon (missing only three lines), where the original manuscript has had over half of its pages lost or damaged.

The printer’s manuscript was copied from the original in the way the original was given. That is, it was a dictation that was written down as quickly as possible by the various scribes. There was no indication of sentences or paragraphs. There were indications of where chapters began, and indications of the beginnings of new books, but other than that, punctuation was rare.

When the manuscript was presented for publication, the compositor at the Grandin Press was John Gilbert, and it fell to him to discern how to break the nearly continuous text into sentences and paragraphs. He did a remarkable job and made few obvious errors. One of those errors was when he punctuated the header for the book of Alma. Now, the last sentence reads “according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.” Gilbert originally had the comma in a different place. Knowing that Alma was a ruler, he wrote, “Alma the first, and chief judge.”

Because the text was continuous, there was no indication on the printer’s manuscript of where the header should be separated from the text proper. Again, he did a remarkable job. However, in the case of 2 Nephi 6:1, he formatted this sentence as part of the text, and it should have been a chapter header. Mormon will later use chapter headings when he uses a different source, and that is what we have in this section. Nephi is copying a text from his brother, Jacob.

This was the first time that Gilbert had seen a header for a chapter, and he missed this. During Grant Hardy’s work in re-paragraphing the Book of Mormon for a study edition, he recognized that this should be separated as a header.

2 Nephi 6:2–3

2 Behold, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, having been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and having been consecrated by my brother Nephi, unto whom ye look as a king or a protector, and on whom ye depend for safety, behold ye know that I have spoken unto you exceedingly many things.
3 Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, mine anxiety is great for you; and ye yourselves know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world.

Comments

At this point, Nephi is copying Jacob’s record. It is not known from what original source it was copied, but verse 2 clearly presents “I, Jacob,” rather than the “I, Nephi” that has been such a common occurrence in Nephi’s record to this point. This inserted text will cover from our Chapter 6 to the end of Chapter 10. In the 1830 edition, our chapters 6 through 8 were single chapters. Chapters 9 and 10 follow the original chapter breaks.

Jacob begins by stating his authority. He is called of God, ordained, and authorized by Nephi, the king. Jacob notes that while he has spoken before, he is speaking again because he is “desirous for the welfare” of their souls. Jacob declares that he has been diligent in teaching, teaching not only what Lehi had taught, but also “all things which are written, from the creation of the world.” That sentence does not mean that he has taught them everything that has ever been taught, but rather than he has taught from the scriptures.

The plates of brass contained the early books of the Old Testament, and, therefore, described the creation of the world. Jacob taught that which was written, and the writing to which he referred is the plates of brass. Thus, Jacob has taught them from Lehi’s visions, and from the authority of written scripture.

Jacob Quotes and Likens Isaiah

2 Nephi 6:4–5

4 And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

5 And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

Comments

Jacob's introduction is interesting. He says that he will speak of things that are and are to come—and *therefore* will read the words of Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet from one hundred years in the past, and in a different world. Nevertheless, Nephi sees them as relevant because Nephi gave Jacob the assignment to speak these words. Although Isaiah was well in the past, Nephi wants Jacob to read Isaiah because there is an application to those who will hear the sermon. It is “for your sakes.” That is what Jacob means when he says of the things that are. They are things relevant to their current life. That there are aspects which speak of the future is also true, but Nephi doesn't ask Jacob to speak of an esoteric occurrence over a thousand years in their future. It is relevant now.

That current relevance is reiterated when Jacob reminds them that Isaiah spoke to all of the house of Israel. Since they are also of the house of Israel, Isaiah is applicable to them. It will be important to the understanding of these chapters of Isaiah that we remember that the Nephites now consist of the descendants of Lehi, mixed with an undoubtedly larger population of people who are of the house of Israel by adoption, rather than birth. Nevertheless, that adoption placed them as equivalent to the natural born descendants. Isaiah is relevant to them, even though they might be adopted into Israel.

2 Nephi 6:6–7

6 And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

7 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Comments

Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:23 and 24. This is the text that Nephi requested, and it is clearly one that Nephi believed to be important as Nephi himself quoted it in 1 Nephi 21:22 and 23, although, at that time, Nephi inserted the entire chapter.

The Old World context is some future time when the gentiles would be important to the restoration of Israel. Scattered Israel would be gathered through the efforts of Gentiles. When the gentile kings would be nursing fathers, the imagery is of caring parents of young children who are not able to care for themselves. In Isaiah's original context, this was a promise of a distant future when the gentiles would gather Israel. Undoubtedly, those who were scattered after the Babylonian destruction saw a literal fulfillment when the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed those of Judah to return to their homelands.

That event is still in Jacob's future, but it is also a world away. For this people to whom Jacob reads these words, there had to have been a different way to see the application of these verses to their current situation.

2 Nephi 6:8–9

8 And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

9 Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

Comments

Jacob begins with some explanation of things that are and are to come. Isaiah was the prophet of the scattering of the northern kingdom, and the predictor of their gathering. Isaiah is adopted as the prophet of the Babylonian scattering and destruction of Jerusalem, with the gathering remaining in the future. Jacob states that revelation has shown him that the predicted destruction of Jerusalem has occurred, the same revealed information that Lehi had stated in his blessings and lectures to his family at the beginning of 2 Nephi.

Jacob is not heavy handed with the process of likening. Undoubtedly the people have been taught more than once that they are included in the scattering of Israel, since we have seen that as an important theme in 1 Nephi. Thus, Jacob does not spell out that his audience should see themselves as among those to be gathered. They know that and are using that understanding as part of the way they will liken the information about the future to their current state.

We discover at the end of Jacob's sermon that this is not being given as encouragement to the faithful, but as an important call to repentance. Some type of communal sin is occurring, and Jacob sees the solution as a proper understanding of the gospel. Therefore, he reiterates the prophecies of the future that Lehi and Nephi had seen. It is virtually certain that Nephi has taught them of this future, particularly the future mission of the atoning Messiah. Jacob reiterates that Yahweh himself would come in the flesh, and that the reception would be that he would be scourged and crucified.

As the audience listened, they had been told to liken this sermon to themselves, and hence they are being obliquely told that in some way, they too have scourged and crucified their God.

2 Nephi 6:10–11

10 And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

11 Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

Comments

Jacob is still speaking of things that are to come, but the subtext continues to be that they have application to things that are. Thus, when future Israel hardens their hearts against Yahweh, they will be smitten and afflicted. The promise of the land is that the Nephites will prosper, but only if they keep the commandments. If they harden their hearts, they lose that protection. They too will face being smitten and afflicted.

The point of the story of the future is that there is hope in repentance, and that a final gathering to the full benefits of the house of Israel lies in the future. Nevertheless, the key to the final gathering is coming to the knowledge of their Redeemer, or the atoning mission of the mortal incarnation of Yahweh himself.

The likening to Jacob's audience would have been clear. They too were on a path of rejection of their God, and that rejection would deny them Yahweh's protection. Their ultimate gathering would be upon principles of repentance.

How did this happen so quickly in Nephite society? The answer is the large number of indigenous peoples who had joined with them. This is not a sermon preached to Sam, or Joseph. They were faithful. It is a sermon pointed to those who had converted to Yahweh's religion, and perhaps had either not fully converted, nor had brought with them beliefs that were difficult to jettison. It was that larger population that would be at the heart of this issue.

However, that would also place them in conflict with the faithful who descended from Lehi. Thus, this population consists of the lineal house of Israel, and gentiles adopted in. Jacob is preaching a sermon to unify those two factions.

2 Nephi 6:12–13

12 And blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

13 Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah.

Comments

Now Jacob gets to the part of Isaiah which spoke of the assistance of the gentiles. The definition of this type of gentile who would be the salvation of Israel is that they “repent and fight not against Zion.” While still using the imagery of the things which are to come, Jacob is focusing on the requirements of the things that are.

There are those in his congregation that are gentiles by birth. If they repent, and if they do not fight against Yahweh’s commandments, by implication they will be the salvation of Israel, or the salvation of the Old World lineage which is a much smaller part of their population. Jacob issues a thinly veiled call to repentance.

What is important for those who arrived with Lehi is that they accept the assistance of these indigenous gentiles. Thus, Jacob notes that “the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed.” It would be natural for those who were lineal descendants of Israel to assume a superior position to the newly converted. Jacob reminds them that this is not the correct relationship to those who could be their literal saviors. Jacob has niftily recast Isaiah’s words to have the covenant people licking the dust of the feet of their saviors and not being ashamed. That is a reversal of Isaiah who indicates that it would be the gentiles licking the dust of the feet of Israel. It is an intentional reversal, a reversal pointed at the things which are, the social interactions in the current Nephite community.

Jacob closes with Isaiah’s affirmation that none need be ashamed to wait for Yahweh. This is another slight shift in meaning, as Jacob’s context does not have the people attending, or waiting upon Yahweh, but awaiting his coming. Jacob’s context is the coming Messiah, and he notes that all who accept the Nephite religion and believe in the coming of the atoning Messiah need not be ashamed of their unified belief in Yahweh.

2 Nephi 6:14–15

14 And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

15 And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.

Comments

In verses 10 and 11, Jacob had emphasized that not following Yahweh's commandments would result in destruction. In verses 14 and 15 the destruction is again predicted, but not upon those who oppose Yahweh. The current population will prosper if they keep the commandments, and in the future, their enemies will be finally defeated as the Messiah comes to destroy all those who do not believe in him.

Thus, Jacob presents two pictures. Both emphasize destruction, but the first is to his people if they do not repent. The second is upon their enemies, should his people repent and remain faithful. That is one of the things that is to come. The timing is unknown, but the promise is sure.

Nephi had seen a vision of the future that saw fire, tempests, and destructions associated with the coming of the Messiah. While the context of Nephi's vision was the coming of the Savior to Bountiful, it is not likely that at this time, which was so much earlier than those events, that they would have been clearly separated. Indeed, we still expect destructions to precede Christ's second coming.

Israel Is Not Cast Off Forever

2 Nephi 6:16–18

16 For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?

17 But thus saith the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—

18 And I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Comments

Without any introduction, Jacob quotes the next lines, Isaiah 49:24–26. In chapters 7 and 8 he will quote the full chapters of Isaiah 50 and 51. The fact that these verses come without introduction suggests that Jacob's audience was sufficiently rehearsed in Isaiah that they recognized this as a quotation without having been so informed. This is evidence for Jacob's earlier assertion that he has already taught them the scriptures.

These verses are used as the conclusion to Jacob's discussion of the destruction of the wicked that will accompany the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah was discussing the return of the captives from the powerful nations that held them. Thus, this is part of the promise of the gathering. It is not only the gathering, but the defeat of the enemies. The Mighty One of Jacob will ultimately be victorious, even over the mightiest of mortal nations.

