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We Labor Diligently to Persuade Our Children to Believe in Christ: 2 Nephi 25:21 to 26:11

Rex C. Reeve, Jr.

The Lehi colony was blessed both physically and spiritually in the promised land. The earth produced abundantly, there were beasts of every kind for the benefit of man, and gold, silver, and copper abounded (1 Nephi 18:24-25). Spiritually, the heavens were open, and inspiration, revelation, testimony, and visions provided a sure and true knowledge of Jesus Christ. These Lehites¹ knew Christ and preached clearly the details of his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. By revelation they knew that in the future their seed would at times receive and at times reject their testimony of Christ. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob and others labored diligently to persuade their children as well as generations yet unborn to come unto Christ and enter into his rest (2 Nephi 25:23; Jacob 1:5-7). These Lehites knew that, after his resurrection, Christ would personally visit their seed in the promised land,

¹ The name *Lehites* refers to Lehi and his children and grandchildren and others such as Zoram, who had a testimony of Christ in that first generation. This group would later be called Nephites, but for the purposes of this paper *Lehites* refers to the original group to distinguish them from Nephites in later generations.

and their seed would have peace with him for more than three generations (2 Nephi 16:9). They were pained by the knowledge that their seed would eventually turn from the testimony of Christ and suffer in darkness for many generations (2 Nephi 26:10). They were grateful, however, to know that through their testimony their seed in the last days would again come to believe in Christ and deny him not (2 Nephi 30:5-6).

Near the close of his earthly ministry, Nephi testified that the only means of salvation was in and through Jesus Christ. He said, "Yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved" (2 Nephi 25:20).

In fulfillment of an ancient promise the Lord made to Joseph in Egypt, Nephi knew that his testimony would be preserved and would pass among his seed from generation to generation as long as the earth should stand (2 Nephi 25:21). Nephi was also promised that other nations would receive his testimony and would be judged according to his written words (2 Nephi 25:22).

The Lehites Had a True Knowledge of Christ

The Lehites had a true knowledge and understanding of Christ. They kept the law of Moses, which through their faith made them alive in Christ. They also had the testimonies of their prophets who had actually seen the Savior. Most importantly, they had personal testimonies through personal revelation from the Holy Ghost.

For many Lehites the law of Moses had fulfilled its ultimate purpose, that of bringing them to Christ. They had not been deceived into believing that the law of Moses was an end in itself or that salvation came through the law. In the proper spirit of faith and obedience, they observed the law of Moses, allowing

it to bring them to a knowledge of the true Christ. Although they knew that the law of Moses would be fulfilled by the future ministry of Christ, they were still anxious for their seed to keep the law as long as it was required.

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. . . . And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophecy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. . . . And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the holy one of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast off (2 Nephi 25:23-24, 26, 29).

This sure knowledge of Christ, had by the Lehites, was tied to the bedrock of the personal testimonies of at least four prophets who had actually seen the Savior. Father Lehi the heavens open and “he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day” (1 Nephi 1:9). Nephi said he quoted much from Isaiah, “for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2-3). Through the years others would see the Lord and testify that he lives, but the original knowledge and understanding of Christ was rooted in the personal testimonies of these early prophets.

In addition to the law of Moses and the prophetic testimonies, each believer had available the sure witness of Christ obtainable only from the Holy Ghost. Unlike the Israelites in the Old World among whom they had lived, the Lehites had the Melchizedek Priesthood which gave them the authority to confer the Holy Ghost following proper baptism (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957-66; 1:123). Faithful individuals who had

received the gift of the Holy Ghost obtained a sure witness of Christ. Nephi taught,

And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son, and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive (2 Nephi 31:18).

It is clear from the Book of Mormon that the Nephites held the higher priesthood after the order of the Son of God. Jacob said, "Behold, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, [have] been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and [have] been consecrated by my brother Nephi . . ." (2 Nephi 6:2). Later, Alma said, "I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people" (Alma 13:1). The Aaronic Priesthood under the law of Moses was held only by the tribe of Levi. As far as we know, there were no Levites in the Lehi colony. The Melchizedek Priesthood gave Nephi the authority to confer the Holy Ghost upon those willing to follow the example of the Son of God (2 Nephi 31:12). In addition to having a knowledge of Christ, these Lehighes knew the doctrines and teachings of Christ. They knew that forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life would come only by obedience to the fulness of the gospel of Christ. We have already noted Nephi's teachings on this subject. His brother Jacob also taught this doctrine: "Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest" (Jacob 1:7).

Nephi knew that his testimony of Christ would be preserved and handed down from generation to generation as the standard by which men would be judged. It would be expected that all his seed, as well as any others who received his words, would come to know Christ as he and his followers had done. He

labored diligently to write in plainness so that all who would read his words could understand the process of coming to Christ. He noted that “the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not” (2 Nephi 25:22, 28).

Christ Would Visit Nephi’s People

Nephi knew that Christ would be born in the land of Jerusalem six hundred years from the time Lehi’s colony left (1 Nephi 19:8). With prophetic accuracy and anguish of soul, Nephi foresaw and foretold that during those years many of his seed and the seed of his brethren would reject the testimony of Christ. He called them a “stiffnecked people” and foresaw that there would be great wars and contentions among them for many generations. He also knew that the resurrected Christ would visit his people and establish his law among them (2 Nephi 26:1). Nephi also prophesied that “after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth” (v. 3). The anguish of Nephi’s soul came from knowing that neither his testimony nor even the signs of the Savior’s birth would be sufficient to bring all of his seed to Christ.

For those who did not kill the prophets but received their testimonies and were looking steadfastly for the coming of Christ, the appearance of the risen Lord would be glorious and beautiful. Nephi said:

But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness (2 Nephi 26:9).

Nephi’s joy was full as he saw the righteous part of his seed preserved to welcome the Savior of the world. He knew that they would “all come forth, and . . . see with their eyes and feel with

their hands and know of a surety that this was Jesus Christ, the light and life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:10-15). This great event would highlight and underscore his own testimony of Christ and would stand as a witness to his words for all future generations.

Nephi’s People Would Reject Christ

Nephi’s joy was short lived. With pain of soul he prophesied that

when these things have passed away a speedy destruction cometh unto my people; . . . they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell (2 Nephi 26:10).

They sell themselves for naught. Webster’s dictionary defines the word *naught* as “nothing, worthless; useless.” What a tragedy! Nephi’s people would give up knowledge, humility, wisdom, peace, and prosperity in exchange for pride, foolishness, and destruction. What his people eventually received was useless, worthless, and as nothing compared to what they gave up. Pride can be defined as taking the credit to oneself for things that are.

They yield unto the devil. By not giving the Lord the credit and by following foolishness, Nephi’s seed “did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe” (4 Nephi 1:38). King Benjamin had earlier taught that when people know Christ and then transgress his laws, they withdraw themselves from the Spirit of the Lord. They lose the guidance of the Lord, make unwise decisions, and will not be blessed, prospered, or preserved. Choosing to follow evil rather than to obey the Lord amounts to coming out in open rebellion against God (Mosiah 2:36-37).

The Spirit of the Lord ceased to be with them. By rejecting the gospel of Christ, the seed of Nephi rejected their own testimonies, as well as those preserved by their ancestors, of the reality of the risen Savior. Nephi was grieved to see the Spirit of the Lord withdraw and leave his seed exposed to the buffetings of Satan, for “when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” (2 Nephi 26:11).

Mormon, describing what actually happened, said,

For behold, the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind. They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father. But now, behold, they are led about by Satan (Mormon 5:16-18).

The destruction of the Nephites was in direct fulfillment of the prophecies of Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets. The Lord had given many warnings and had clearly spelled out the consequences of their wickedness, and yet Nephi knew that his words would be preserved and handed down to his seed, “that the promise [would] be fulfilled unto Joseph [of Egypt] that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand” (2 Nephi 25:21).

The Gentiles Will Take the Gospel to the Lamanites

Nephi also knew that in the last days the true gospel of Christ would be brought back to the Lamanites, or the seed of Lehi, through the Gentiles by way of his words.² He said, “In the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, . . . then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed” (1 Nephi 15:13). Also,

² The modern day Lamanites are descendants from all the sons of Lehi and also Zoram, not just Laman and Lemuel.

in explaining the words of Isaiah, he said, “And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed” (1 Nephi 22:8). This marvelous work would be the coming forth of their records as the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon Written to the Lamanites

In a special way, the Book of Mormon was written to the Lamanites, the descendants of Lehi, as a major tool to restore them to Christ. It seems that the righteous Nephite prophets, knowing the destruction of their own people, wrote with special feelings to the future Lamanites. Mormon in his final chapter said, “And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared” (7:1); and Moroni in his last chapter said, “Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me good; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites” (10:1).

In 1829, about a year before the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Lord spoke plainly to Joseph Smith after the 116 pages of manuscript had been lost. While reproving young Joseph, the Lord impressed upon him the sacred character and purpose of the Book of Mormon and hence the great importance of his work.

Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquities of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their wickedness and abominations. *And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to a knowledge of their fathers* (D&C 3:16-20; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon was written to all the world as another testament of Jesus Christ. In a special way, however, it was written and preserved to restore the Lamanites to the knowledge and testimony of Christ once had by their fathers and also to convince the Jew and Gentile that “JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD” (title page, Book of Mormon).

The Lehites had a knowledge and testimony of Christ. They knew that there was no other name given whereby man could be saved. They labored diligently to teach their own people and to write their testimony so that all future generations would know how to come unto Christ. The Lehites saw that from generation to generation their seed would have access to their written testimony and the invitation to come unto Christ. They rejoiced when their seed responded and thrilled to see the visit of the risen Savior. They sorrowed when they saw their seed eventually turn from the testimony of Christ and within a few generations face almost total destruction. They rejoiced in the promise of the Lord that a remnant of their seed would again receive and respond to their testimony and be restored to righteousness and come to a true knowledge and testimony of Christ in the last days.

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God. . . . And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers (2 Nephi 25:23; 30:5).