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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 16—The Words of Jacob Recorded by Nephi

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Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 16—The Words of Jacob Recorded by Nephi

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(Text: The Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi, Chapters 5-10)

For Tuesday, May 5, 1953

Objective: To study the eternal truths taught by Jacob.

ABOUT 570 B.C., Jacob, youngest brother of Nephi, having been called of God, was ordained after the manner of his holy order and consecrated by Nephi as a priest and a teacher to the people (2 Nephi 5:26; 6:2). Because of his interest in teaching his people to glorify the name of God, he read to the people from Isaiah the words which Nephi desired him to speak unto the people, and Jacob taught them much of the history recorded on the plates of brass.

A gathering seems to have been held for two days at least, at which Jacob spoke at great length. He read and expounded parts of Isaiah to them (Isaiah 49:24-26; and chapters 50 and 51). He told the people that he read those parts of Isaiah that they might know the covenants of the Lord to all the house of Israel; the covenants that he had spoken to the Jews through his holy prophets from the beginning down until the time they should be restored to the true Church and to the lands of their inheritance, and the blessings the

Lord had in store for the Nephites as part of Israel (2 Nephi 9:1-3).

In discussing the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the Jews, he informed them that he knew that the Jews in Jerusalem had been slain and carried away captive (2 Nephi 6:8). He told the people, however, that the Jews would return to Jerusalem, and that the Savior would manifest himself to them in the flesh (2 Nephi 6:9). He further said that the Jews living at the time of Christ were the more wicked part of the world. Jacob prophesied that because of the hard hearts of the Jews and their stiff necks, they would scourge and crucify the Messiah. Commenting on this dreadful act, Jacob said: "There is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God" (2 Nephi 10:3).

Jacob predicted that because of their iniquities, the Jews would suffer destruction, famine, and pestilences, and bloodshed would come upon them and those not destroyed should be smitten, scattered, hated, and afflicted (2 Nephi 6:10, 11; 10:3-6).

Jacob informed his people, however, that in the end God would be merciful to them, that he would set his hand a second time to recover them, wherefore he would manifest himself unto them in power and great glory unto the destruction of their enemies (2 Nephi 6:14). This restoration, Jacob said, should come when they would believe in the Lord that he is Christ (2 Nephi 6:14; 10:7). Then they should be gathered in from the isles of the sea and from the four parts of the earth. Finally, Jacob told his people that whoever would oppress the Jews at that time should be fed with their own flesh and drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine (2 Nephi 6:18).

Directing his attention to the prophecies relating to the Gentiles, Jacob taught that the nations of the Gentiles should be great in the eyes of the Lord in carrying the Jews forth to the lands of their inheritance. He said that because of this service to God's covenant people, the Lord would greatly bless the Gentiles that this land would be a land of liberty unto them, that the Lord would fortify it against all other nations (2 Nephi 10:10-12), and that the righteous Gentiles should be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel (2 Nephi 10:18). Jacob also informed his people that whoever fights against Zion, either Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, shall perish (2 Nephi 10:16; 6:13).

Great as these promises were to the Gentiles, Jacob also made great promises to his own descendants. He predicted that his own seed

would be afflicted by the Gentiles, but that the Lord would soften the hearts of the Gentiles. He told his people that the Lord had consecrated the land to their seed and to those who should be numbered with them, and that it was to be an everlasting inheritance (2 Nephi 10:19). Thinking of the fact that his people were a branch of the house of Israel which had been broken off and directed to the land of promise from Jerusalem, Jacob told them to lay aside their sins and not to hang down their heads, for they were not cast off, but that they had been led to a better land. He told his people that the Lord would remember them. He closed his discourse with a prayer, saying, "May God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen." (2 Nephi 10:25)

The Atonement and Resurrection

Not all of Jacob's instructions were in the form of prophecies and expositions. He also explained to his people God's plan for the redemption of mankind.

Jacob's teachings of the atonement and resurrection are clear and convincing. He explained that death came upon all men through the fall when Adam and Eve transgressed the law and partook of the forbidden fruit. "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 corrup-

tion 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 And our spirits must have become like unto him [Satan], and we become devils, angels to a devil" (2 Nephi 9:6ff.).

Jacob exclaimed about the goodness of God who prepared a way for man's escape from the grasp of the awful monsters, death and hell. Because of the way of deliverance of our God this death shall deliver up its dead which death is the grave. And the spiritual death which is hell, shall likewise deliver up its dead, and the bodies and spirits of men will be restored one to the other by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel (2 Nephi 9:6-12).

Commenting on this need for an infinite atonement which Jacob said was necessary, Elder Orson F. Whitney, the apostle, writes:

Redemption must come, if at all, through some being great enough and powerful enough to make an infinite atonement; one completely covering the far-reaching effects of the original transgression. The scales of Eternal Justice, unbalanced by Adam's act, had to be re-poised, and the equilibrium of right restored. Who could do this? Who was able to mend the broken law, bring good out of evil, mould failure into success, and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat? The life of a God was the price of a world's freedom, and that price was paid by the God of Israel who descended from his glorious throne, became mortal, and by submitting to death broke the bands of death, and made it possible for man to go on in his eternal destiny (Saturday Night Thoughts, page 94).

Why there had to be a fall and redemption, we have not been made fully aware. We do not know why God found it necessary to put Adam and Eve into a position "Where they were commanded not to do the very thing that had to be done" It "is one of those infinite problems that must remain to finite minds a mystery until the All-Wise shall will to make it plain. Man cannot sit in judgment upon his Maker, nor measure, by human standards 'divine dispensations' (Saturday Night Thoughts, page 95).

The atonement of Christ did more than atone for the sin of Adam alone, for Christ suffered the pains of all men, the pains of every living creature, men, women, and children who belong to the family of Adam. "O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace!" Jacob exclaimed (2 Nephi 9:8). Christ showed his mercy as well as justice.

He atoned for our individual sins as well, provided we repent and acknowledge him as the God of this world (2 Nephi 9:21, 23).

The Doctrine and Covenants expands this point of view:

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of the pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit (D. & C. 19:16-18).

This infinite atonement releases the wicked and the righteous from the grave and men become immortal, living souls. They will appear before Christ for judgment. On that occasion, we shall have a

perfect knowledge of all our past actions. The wicked shall remember their guilt, their uncleanness, and their nakedness, "and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness" (2 Nephi 9:14).

The spirit and the body of each person shall be reunited never to be separated again.

At the great judgment bar of God, the righteous shall inherit the kingdom of God, and they will be righteous still (2 Nephi 9:16). The filthy shall remain filthy still, and they must suffer torment as a lake of fire and brimstone. On the other hand, those who died without law shall have claim on the justice and mercy of God, and "they are restored to that God who gave them breath" (2 Nephi 9:26).

In this discussion of this vital doctrine, Jacob, in summary, said there must be an infinite atonement to redeem men from the fall and from their individual sins. He recognized that Christ exemplifies the justice and mercy of God by suffering for Adam's transgression and for the sins of all mankind who will repent. As a result of this justice and mercy, all mankind will go back into the presence of God where each will be judged according to his works and will be rewarded or punished accordingly.

During his dissertation, Jacob told his people that as their teacher it was his duty to teach them the consequences of sin since they were not holy (2 Nephi 9:48). He advised them not to spend their money for that which had no worth, nor to labor for that which cannot

satisfy (2 Nephi 9:51). He warned his people of the state of those who know the law of the gospel and then transgress it. He urged the learned to listen to the counsels of God, and the rich not to despise the poor, not to persecute the meek, and not to center their attention upon their treasures. He warned the deaf who would not hear and the blind who would not see. He told those who had unclean hearts that their iniquities would smite them at the last day. He warned the liar, the murderer, the whoremaster, the idol worshippers, and all who die in their sins of terrible judgments to come. "Remember," Jacob warned, "to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal" (2 Nephi 9:39). He pleaded with his people to come unto the Holy One of Israel (2 Nephi 9:44, 45, 46).

These instructions from Jacob mark him as a prophet who looked into time and saw the important things that should happen to the Jews, to the Gentiles, and to his own people. They establish Jacob in our minds as a humble follower of the Master, a leader-prophet, mighty in righteousness and in a knowledge of the Savior and his eternal plan.

Questions on the Lesson

1. Is part of the prophecy concerning the Jews being fulfilled in our time? See Joseph Fielding Smith, "Restoration of Israel and Judah," *The Signs of the Times*, pages 45-62.

2. What were the prophecies Jacob taught relating to this land?

3. Will all mankind, the wicked and the righteous, be resurrected and stand before the throne of God and be judged according to their works? Explain.