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Chapter LXXIII

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CHAPTER LXXIII.

RELIGION OF THE NEPHITES—IT IS STATED BY NEPHI—
THE PRIESTHOOD AND ORDINANCES THEREOF—BAP-
TISM—CONFIRMATION—ORDINATION—THE SACRAMENT
—SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

THE RELIGION of the Nephites was the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It embraced, before his advent, those offerings and sacrifices typical of his life and death, the observance of which was enjoined upon the house of Israel by the law of Moses. As soon as he was offered upon the cross at Calvary these sacrifices ceased, as the law was fulfilled and its intent and purpose was accomplished.

Nephi epitomizes the religious faith of his people in the following graphic and comprehensive language:

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;

For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ, because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments:

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy 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.

Wherefore, we speak concerning the law, that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law was fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him, when the law ought to be done away.

Here are a hundred sermons in a few sentences, and every sentence is pregnant with the force and glory of God's eternal truth. Again, how concisely the plan of salvation is explained in the following passages:

O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not any thing, save he knows it.

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men, if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men; yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

And he suffereth this, that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.

And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

The priesthood of the Nephites was the same as ours. We read of High Priests, Elders, Priests and Teachers, in their church, but Evangelists, Bishops and

Deacons are not mentioned. They also had numerous Prophets minister to them the pleasing or awful word of God, as their condition warranted or their lives deserved. But the spirit of prophecy is not confined to any particular grade of the priesthood, those holding none of its powers being frequently endowed with this most precious gift.

The Twelve special witnesses whom Jesus chose on this continent, of whom Nephi was the first, are never called Apostles in the Book of Mormon, but always disciples; the word apostles is only used in that book when applied to the Twelve who ministered with the Savior in the land of Jerusalem.

The Nephite church when fully organized in the ages before the visit of the Redeemer, was always presided over by a High Priest. He held to them the keys of the Holy Priesthood. Whether these keys remained with the Nephites at all times is doubtful. But many of their presidents were undoubtedly thus empowered. The Lord made covenant with Nephi, the son of Helaman, with his own voice as follows:

Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but have sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

And now because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.

Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth, shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people.

And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple, it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.

And if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.

And behold, if ye shall say, that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.

And now behold, I command you that ye shall go and declare unto this people, That thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty, except ye repent ye shall be smitten even unto destruction.

What greater powers than these has God ever given to man?

The churches in the various lands or districts appear to have each been presided over locally by a High Priest, as the different stakes of Zion are in these days. In this and other respects a close resemblance can be perceived between the organization and government of the ancient Nephite church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As an example of these local High Priests we refer to the case of Ammon, the son of king Mosiah, who held this office among the Christian Lamanites in the land of Jershon at the time

that Alma was the presiding High Priest over the whole church.

The duties, responsibilities and powers of the various orders of the priesthood were evidently identical with those possessed by the same officers in the church of God in these latter days. Were we arguing from a doctrinal standpoint we should claim that this must necessarily be so because of the unity of the church of the Lamb in all ages; but we are now simply affirming that which appears from the statements, historical and otherwise, that are to be found in the Book of Mormon. The fact of this identity of duties and powers is apparent in the instructions which are recorded as being given regarding the ordinance of baptism, the bestowal of the Holy Ghost, the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, the ordination of priests and teachers, etc.

Not only was the priesthood identical but the ordinances of the church were the same. The same words were spoken in the baptism of converts as are used now. The same mode of baptism was observed. The same persons—the penitent believers—were baptized. The baptism of little children was forbidden in the most energetic language.* When Jesus instructed his disciples on the subject of baptism he said: On this

* And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

Little children cannot repent; wherefore it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy.

And he that saith, That little children need baptism, denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.—MORMON.

wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you.

Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them: behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying,

Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

The words spoken by the Elder or Priest who blessed the bread or the wine in the administration of the sacrament, were word for word, identical with those that we use; and the officers who officiated in the blessing of the emblems, Elders and Priests, were the same.

In ordinations to the priesthood a similar form was employed to that used in this dispensation, and men were ordained to the same calling. It is written:

The manner which the disciples, who were called the Elders of the church, ordained Priests and Teachers.

After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them, and said,

In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a Priest: (or, if he be a Teacher,) I ordain you to be a Teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

It must be remembered that their various ordinances, so far as we have the record, were all performed in the name of Jesus Christ, except that of baptism, which was done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

With regard to the manner of conducting their meetings we are told, And their meetings were conducted by the church, after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done.

The same parallel between the two churches can also be found when we consider the subject of spiritual gifts. The Savior, when giving his charge to the Twelve Nephite disciples, said: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,

And he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned.

And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.

And whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth.

Moroni, treating on this same subject, states:

For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom;

And to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

And to another, exceeding great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.

And again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles;

And again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things;

And again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits;

And again, to another, all kinds of tongues;

And again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.

And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.

And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

From these two quotations all can perceive that the gifts of the Spirit were the same in the Nephitic church as among the ancient saints in Jerusalem and the people of God in these days.

