

2 NEPHI 31–33

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 31

2 Nephi 31:1–2 — Nephi Writes His Last Words of Prophecy

Beginning in 2 Nephi 31:1, Nephi says that he will now make an end of his prophesying, and he can only write a few select things. Indeed, chapters 31, 32, and 33 are relatively short, only 45 verses in total. But here Nephi chooses to speak about the main elements in the all-important doctrine of Christ. The basic outline of Nephi's farewell testimony deals with baptism, the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end on the way to eternal life, praying always, and giving Christ place in your soul.

It is interesting how often in the Book of Mormon, a person will say something like, "I am about to die, or I think I might be leaving soon, or someone is now the new king, and so this will be the last thing I have to say to you." Whether these words come in an actual address or in their final writings, when it is the final time they believe these inspired leaders will be speaking (especially when they have a prophetic worldview as Nephi did), it is important to pay close attention. One can almost imagine red flashing lights around these parts of the scriptures.

2 Nephi 31:3 — The Lord Speaks to People in Their Own Language

Nephi chooses his words carefully in these three final chapters. He talks again about the plainness he had discussed before in 1 Nephi 13 and 2 Nephi 25. How many times does he say, in effect, that he is trying to deliver his message as plainly as he possible can so that people will not misunderstand?

For example, in 2 Nephi 31:3 he states: “For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.” This is good counsel for everyone teaching the gospel. This is also why missionaries are given the gift of tongues, and why it is possible that even when they struggle, somehow everyone understands what they are truly saying.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does the Lord Speak to Men “According to Their Language”? (2 Nephi 31:3),” *KnoWhy* 258 (January 6, 2017).

2 Nephi 31:5 — Why Are We Baptized?

What is the purpose of baptism, and what does Nephi say will cause the remission of sins? Latter-day Saint scholar Noel B. Reynolds has written an exhaustive analysis of the language that is used to describe the baptismal covenant throughout the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, he found that the Book of Mormon never talks about baptism as *washing* away our sins.

The purpose of baptism is not so much to wash something away, and that especially makes sense when we baptize eight-year-old children who have no sins. After all, why would we baptize them to wash away non-existent sins? More fundamentally, this ordinance is mainly about the commitment to keep the commandments and witnessing to Heavenly Father, that you will keep the covenants that you have made. And then, when the baptismal covenant is renewed with the partaking of the sacrament, the remembrance of the forgiveness of sins is also relived.

The Holy Ghost is then what purges and washes impure things away, the baptism of fire that brings forth the remission of sins. It is much like the sacrifices of the temple in Israel, where burnt offerings were the offerings of atonement that would bring one back into good standing with the Lord. It was the fire that was able to remove impurities.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “What is the Purpose of Baptism in the Book of Mormon? (2 Nephi 31:6–7),” *KnoWhy* 59 (March 22, 2016).

Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 3–37.

2 Nephi 31:6–7 — Christ Will Humble Himself before the Father by Being Baptized

Nephi is the only one who will call Jesus the “Son of the Most High God”, the “Son of the Everlasting Father”, or the “Son of Righteousness.” He will call him “the Christ”, “the Beloved Son”, and the “Very God of Israel.” What stands out is how many times Nephi refers to Jesus specifically as a very devoted, beloved son.

If Nephi came and introduced himself to us, and we asked him, “So, Nephi, tell us a little bit about yourself,” he would begin by saying, “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” Nephi’s identity as the loyal son, as the one who would always do the will of his father, Lehi, and the will of God was a very important part of his personality and character. Unlike Laman, Lemuel, and others, Nephi was the quintessential, obedient son. It is not at all surprising that he would see Jesus’ submission to the will of His Father in much the same way.

2 Nephi 31:10, 13–14 — Covenants Are about Being Willing to Obey

The word *willing* shows up three times in Nephi’s discussion of the baptismal covenant. Later, this word will also appear in the sacramental prayers. What do we promise when we partake of the sacrament? Do we promise that we will remember him always? No. Do we promise that we will keep every commandment? If we do, that’s not a promise that we’re likely to keep.

The blessing on the bread states that those who participate in the sacramental ordinance witness unto “God, the Eternal Father, that they are *willing*” to do the following three things:

1. “take upon them the name of thy Son,”
2. “and always remember him”
3. “and keep his commandments which he has given them”

To be *willing* to remember him always is a promise that we can all make, and that is what God wants—a *willing heart*. But that means we *really* must be willing. This is a willful commitment. It is voluntary. We must be submissive. This factor of willingness will later be reflected in King Benjamin’s speech. In Mosiah 5:5 as the Nephites have fallen down and felt the mighty change in their hearts, they say, “And we are *willing* to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will.” One might well assume that Benjamin had his people use this word in entering into their covenant on his occasion precisely because that language and understanding had become a traditional part of Nephite covenant making and theology.

2 Nephi 31:11–15 — The Voices of the Father and Son Command All to Be Baptized

In 2 Nephi 31:13, Nephi says that people must act “with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism.” How is baptism a way of witnessing to God that we are willing to keep his commandments? Why is that an act of covenant making? It is because it is a symbolic reenactment of the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is also symbolic of our own spiritual rebirth as sons and daughters unto Christ.

Today, most people are baptized in a domesticated font in a stake center where it is tiled, perfectly safe, and the water is still and usually warm. In ancient Israel, however, when you were immersed for purification purposes, the water had to be *living water*—running water—and it was cold, sometimes very cold. Standing water was, by definition, impure. Moreover, Lehi had taught that Jesus would be baptized in the flowing water at Bethabara, the place of crossing the Jordan River (1 Nephi 10:9). That place would also have symbolized risking your life in the river’s current as well as crossing over from one place in life into a new covenant land of promise. Likewise, the early pioneers were all baptized in rivers or oceans or places like that. Most of these people, in ancient or in more recent times, did not know how to swim very well. For them, going into the water could be a frightening thing. In fact, in ancient law submitting yourself to the “river ordeal” was one way of establishing in court that you were telling the truth. Thus, witnessing to God that you are willing to risk your life by going into the water seems to have been a symbol of serious commitment, much more than we usually think of it as today.

This is especially powerful when one considers the universal ancient belief, that under the waters were all types of evil spirits. In the ocean you have the death monster that swallows Jonah, and all of these evil, unknown creatures that are there. The waters, rivers, and lakes were thought to be orifices entering into the underworld. With this understanding, the ordinance of baptism by immersion profoundly showed that you were willing to go down even into the depths of the underworld, and there, through the power of Christ, be brought up out of that water, thereby overcoming all of the evil in the world. By being baptized, you descend below all things and go beneath the world so that you may ascend up above the world. It is a very powerful symbol.

2 Nephi 31:14 — Ordeals and Covenants

In the ancient world, it was common for the parties entering into a contract to go through some type of ceremonial ordeal. Sometimes, this would take the form of invoking a curse upon themselves. In the Hittite world, they would “cut” a deal,

contract, or covenant by taking a small animal and killing it. The first party would essentially say, “If I don’t keep my agreement, may this happen to me!” The other party or parties would then invoke that same curse upon themselves. We see a glimpse of this later when the Nephites rend their clothing upon accepting the Title of Liberty and covenant that if they do not fight valiantly, the same thing should happen to them, being torn to shreds and trampled upon. These ordeals showed that people really meant what they were saying.

2 Nephi 31:17 — Baptism Is a Covenant of Admittance and Entrance

The Book of Mormon very clearly teaches about the covenant of baptism (31:7, 10, 13, 14). Nephi frames the doctrine of Christ—the gospel, with baptism at the center—as an important gateway. It is “the gate” (31:17). People in the ancient world would rarely have thought of just wandering into a gated city without permission, authority, and an agreement to abide by the laws of that city. When we compare our mode of baptism to the forms of baptism used in other faiths, however, what do we typically emphasize? Immersion, of course, and also that it is performed by authority. But also, we should make it clear that baptism is a *covenant* of admittance and entrance. Sometimes we don’t mention that covenantal aspect of baptism as prominently as we might.

2 Nephi 31:18 – The Difference between ‘Straight’ and ‘Strait’

In several places, Nephi uses the word *strait*. Spelled in that way, *strait* means *narrow*. So, the strait and narrow pass is actually a narrow, narrow pass. When it is spelled *straight*, it means not crooked. Sometimes it may feel crooked, especially as we are pulled in unexpected directions. In life, we get taken places we don’t expect, even though it always leads us to Him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is the Path to Eternal Life ‘Strait’ or ‘Straight’?](#) (1 Nephi 8:20),” *KnoWhy* 456 (August 7, 2018).

2 Nephi 31:19–20 — Nephi Tells Us What We Need to Do to Gain Eternal Life

What do we commit to do and need to do? We must “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ,” being, as Lehi said, “steadfast and immoveable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:10). We must obey the first two commandments—the two great commandments, to love God and our neighbor—as well as all the others. We must feast upon the word of Christ (31:20). There is an important distinction between eating and feasting. As we make daily scripture study an important part of our lives, we are able to do more than just occasionally nibble at the scriptures. We work towards learning to feast on the spiritual banquet spread before us in the words of God and thereby be filled.

We find a “perfect brightness of hope” somewhere along this journey. Nephi’s phrase here brings to mind his comment in 1 Nephi 1:1 where he says, “having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days.” Seeing the hand of the Lord sustaining you even in trials and troubles is the essence of a brightness of hope.

A brightness of hope is not divorced from reality but fully immersed in reality. When you have the gospel in your life, you are optimistic. There is no doubt that it helps you just see things differently. You can have the spirit to be with you no matter how rough things are. You just are more optimistic, and we are counseled to be so. If we’re not feeling that optimism, the Lord can help us to be so. That is part of our covenant relationship with him. He will help us to be of good cheer, won’t he?

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can One ‘Feast upon the Words of Christ’? \(2 Nephi 32:3\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 306 (April 28, 2017).

2 Nephi 31:21 — What Is the Difference between the Doctrine and Gospel of Christ?

The Doctrine of Christ and the Gospel of Christ are similar, but how do they relate to each other? The *doctrine* is faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end—those five points. And the Savior says, “And there will be no more doctrine.” In other words, that is the *doctrine* of Christ. (See 3 Nephi 11:28–39).

But in 3 Nephi 27:21, the Savior says, “And this is my *gospel*.” A few verses earlier, He stated, “This is the *gospel* which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross.” So, one might say that when Book of Mormon writers use the word *gospel*, they may be speaking a little more broadly, referring to something we more often would call the Plan of Salvation. The specific *doctrine* of Christ is part of and wholly consistent with the Plan of Redemption, the Plan of Happiness. The great plan goes by several names, emphasizing parts of that plan. The terms *doctrine* of Christ and *gospel* of Christ, while overlapping considerably, may evoke somewhat different aspects of the same great Eternal Plan of the Father.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is the Doctrine of Christ?](#) (2 Nephi 31:21),” *KnoWhy* 58 (March 21, 2016).

Noel B. Reynolds, “[The True Points of My Doctrine](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56.

Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1991): 31–50.

2 Nephi 32

2 Nephi 32:2–3 — What Does It Mean to Speak with the Tongue of Angels?

What do angels do when they come? They are mostly messengers, teachers, and ministers. New converts, for instance, sometimes bear their testimonies after baptism about how two “angels” came to their door or stopped them on the street. The word for angel in Greek or Hebrew actually means *messenger*. And angels are God’s messengers. They deliver the message with utmost accuracy, and we must feast on each word, so that we can get the whole message right.

In April General Conference 2007, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland spoke on the tongue of angels, and he brought in a dimension of it that is not often considered. Speaking of Nephi in this part of the Book of Mormon, he said:

So, brothers and sisters, in this long eternal quest to be more like our Savior, may we try to be “perfect” men and women in at least this one way now—by offending not in word, or more positively put, by speaking with a new tongue, the tongue of angels. Our words, like our deeds, should be filled with faith and hope and charity, the three great Christian imperatives so desperately needed in the world today. With such words, spoken under the influence of the Spirit, tears can be dried, hearts can be healed, lives can be elevated, hope can return, confidence can prevail.

Because we are members of Jesus Christ’s Church who have been baptized and have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, if we are living righteously, we actually have that gift of having the tongue of angels. That makes me consider, “What am I doing with this tongue of an angel that I have?” We do not want to desecrate that gift by having something come out of our mouth that is unworthy of the Lord, whose messengers we are. It should give us pause in all of our doings: “Am I speaking with the tongue of angels?”

Are not priesthood blessings spoken by the tongue of angels? By the words of righteous ministers, I learn. I feel comforted. I feel instructed. Sometimes I feel reprov'd. I feel led. I think it is a very specific and marvelous gift to have the tongue of an angel.

The same can be said for any ordinance. Several years ago, one of my young home teachers blessed the sacrament for the first time and I cried. I went up to him afterwards,

and I just hugged him. “How did you learn to do that?” I asked him. He spoke so slowly and so carefully with all his heart, and I was deeply impressed by that. That was the power of a good father, mother, and quorum leader who had taught him what this is all about.

Are we teaching our children about this blessing? Do they know what they have? We are starting to get it, but we can do better. Even a newly baptized child has been given the gift of the Holy Ghost and is on the road back to the Lord’s presence. Our children need to know what they have and need to know what they are capable of. They need to understand the power that comes with these covenants, enabling them to speak with the tongue of angels. There is power in these words of Nephi. This is the doctrine of Christ, and this is what “the gift of the Holy Ghost” affords. This is one of the main things everyone can do with this gift, and this is why families get up early and stay up late to read their scriptures.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is it to Speak with the Tongue of Angels?](#) (2 Nephi 32:2),” *KnoWhy* 60 (March 23, 2016).

Neal Rappleye, “[‘With the Tongue of Angels’: Angelic Speech as a Form of Deification](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 21 (2016): 303–323.

Jeffrey R. Holland, “[The Tongue of Angels](#),” *Ensign*, May 2007, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

2 Nephi 32:3–4 — Nephi Invites Us to Feast upon the Words of Christ

As Gerald Lund once commented, the difference between *reading* the scriptures and *studying* the gospel is the same as the difference between eating and dining. The middle of 2 Nephi 32:3 states, “Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.” Not *know* but *do*. When we begin to feast upon the words of Christ, we learn more about what to do, how to apply the principles taught in the scriptures, and how to move forward.

2 Nephi 32:4 is the other side of that two-sided coin of duty. We are being told that the second that we have been given a gift or power, we have a duty to get to work and put that gift and power to work. It is the continuation of and obliging of receiving the benefits of the feasting, and it begins with the asking and the knocking. What should I be doing next? Where have we heard Nephi talk about this principle before? Clear back in 1 Nephi 15, when Nephi basically said, “Why don’t you ask the Lord? He will explain it to you and tell you what it should mean in your life, but have you even asked?” What

is their reply? “No. He won’t tell us. It doesn’t do any good, he only talks to you.” (1 Nephi 15:8–9).

Nephi learned as a very young man the whole essence of 2 Nephi 32:2–4. As a young man, Nephi feasted upon the words of Christ, and when people feast upon the words of Christ, the quality of their prayers change. Their ability to get answers to those prayers change. And their resolve to thus “go and do the things that the Lord has commanded” turns to action.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can One ‘Feast upon the Words of Christ’?](#) (2 Nephi 32:3),” *KnoWhy* 306 (April 28, 2017).

2 Nephi 32:8–9 — Nephi Teaches Us to Pray Always

Nephi says, in effect, “I perceive that you’re still pondering these things in your heart and you really haven’t bought into all of this, you’re still worried or wondering or puzzling about it, and this grieves me.” Pondering usually involves some kind of weighing and balancing, or halting between two opinions. Pondering can be a good thing, if it doesn’t become paralyzing. Moroni 10:3 invites people to ponder when they receive the Book of Mormon. But Moroni and Nephi both expect that pondering will lead to prayer and to asking God (Moroni 10:4). The solution for Nephi is also to pray. He wants his people to pray more often, so apparently this has become a problem in their little community. It is reminiscent of what the Lord says to the Brother of Jared, “Hey, it’s been a while since you’ve checked in with me.”

So Nephi says, “For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.” Prayer is crucial for what we do. Nephi emphasizes that with what he says next, that we must pray before we perform anything to the Lord. “But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.”

We need to stop, pause, and pray. If we do not do this, our actions cannot be elevated to the level of being consecrated to the Lord, and that is something that will bless us deliberately. There is no limit on the occasions when we need to do this, for anything that we do unto the Lord needs to be dedicated unto him. Otherwise, we are just doing it, and that action will not have the same effect or yield the same results.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Must One Pray Always to Endure to the End? \(2 Nephi 32:8-9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 298 (April 10, 2017).

2 Nephi 33

2 Nephi 33:3 — Nephi Has Loved His People All of His Life

One of Nephi's great characteristics is his love and concern for his people. As I read through this chapter, I thought, "We know our current Church Presidents so well." If we only had one speech from President Monson or from President Nelson, we would know part of him, but not nearly as much as having had him as our leader for so many years. We knew President Hinckley so well; we knew President McKay so well. What would it be like to be one of Nephi's people, to have had him as a leader for thirty or forty years? To get to know Nephi, we have to read between the lines. As we do, we can see a lot of depth and admirable aspects of his character that we can only regret that we haven't been able to get to know him better.

2 Nephi 33:6 — Nephi Glories in That Which Brings Him Closer to Jesus

Elder David A. Bednar has said that the standard is clear. If something distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. That is Elder Bednar's "I glory in plainness" moment. If that which is intended to entertain, for example, alienates us from the Holy Spirit, then certainly that type of entertainment is not for us.

As we become ever more immersed in the Spirit of the Lord, we should strive to recognize impressions when they come, and conversely turn away from the influences or events that cause us to withdraw ourselves from the Spirit of the Lord. Our accountability is to figure out what makes that happen, to be vigilant about that, and be constantly eliminating it. That is one part of what the sacrament process is, namely identifying those things that trip us up spiritually, getting rid of them, and asking for the Lord's help. This is the role of the grace of Christ; it is the divine, enabling power that helps us to have his spirit to be with us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi End His Sacred Record with His Testimony of the Redeemer? \(2 Nephi 33:6\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 61 (March 24, 2016).

2 Nephi 33:7–9 — Nephi Has Charity for All Men

Something that recurs often with Nephi is his discussion of the importance of having charity for the Jew and Gentile, for his family and for his brethren, for both those who are obedient and those who are not. There are many places in the Book of Mormon where someone has an incredibly powerful, personal witness from the Lord, and then you see their heart carry them further to go beyond themselves. They realize, “it’s not about me.” It is about them, until they make and know how to keep covenants with the Lord. And then it is no longer about them, but it is about, “what can I do to help the next person I can?” I believe that when we arrive at the gates of heaven, the Lord will say, “It’s nice to see you. Whom did you bring with you?” The Lord is happy to see us, but his joy is greater with every soul that repents. As President Russell M. Nelson has said, “Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.” And we are all God’s family.

2 Nephi 33:12–15 — Nephi Makes His Final Farewell

Nephi has spoken about his tears watering his pillow by night, praying over his people, he is greatly concerned for them. “And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day.” Salvation is open for all people, “And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come.” And, of course, to those who will not partake, “I bid you an everlasting farewell.” But Nephi is very optimistic that “if ye believe not in these words, believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.”

Those are Nephi’s final words of testimony, encouragement and optimism. He is realistic; he is plain that we have got to do the things that we are now clearly instructed to do, but if we do so, he is confident that many people will be there together in the Kingdom of God.

I love this man Nephi. He is one of the great souls raised up to stand at the head of this very important group of Israelites who have been led out of Jerusalem, protected and brought to the New World, so that they could be a righteous group of people to whom the resurrected Lord could appear. This group of people had a very unique and important mission to perform. Even if Nephi knew that his people would ultimately be destroyed, he knew that that would not happen until the Savior Himself had appeared to them. That was their special blessing and mission, so that they could be a people of witness, witnessing to all the world, to members of the House of Israel, to Gentiles, to

everyone, that Jesus is the Christ. Without a man like Nephi standing at the head of that tradition, it may not have happened. But Nephi was called, he magnified his calling, and we are the beneficiaries of all that he did.

2 Nephi 33:15 — Nephi Seals His Words at the End of His Record

“For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar.” What is Nephi talking about? He is putting his personal seal on the truthfulness of his words and of those contained in his record. These words will then come forth and be part of what we all will be judged by. Knowing the words of this record, we are now accountable.

“For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen.” That is just typical, reliable Nephi. “I will go and do the things which the Lord has commanded.” From the very beginning to the very end, obedience has to be one of Nephi’s great qualities.

Further Reading

H. Dean Garrett, “*Nephi’s Farewell*,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 377–390.