

February 3 – 9, 2020

2 Nephi 1–5

“WE LIVED AFTER THE MANNER OF HAPPINESS”

Summary: *An account of the death of Lehi. Nephi’s brethren rebel against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness. His journeyings in the wilderness, and so forth.*

Redemption comes through the Holy Messiah—Freedom of choice (agency) is essential to existence and progression—Adam fell that men might be—Men are free to choose liberty and eternal life. About 588–570 B.C.

Joseph in Egypt saw the Nephites in vision—He prophesied of Joseph Smith, the latter-day seer; of Moses, who would deliver Israel; and of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. About 588–570 B.C.

Lehi counsels and blesses his posterity—He dies and is buried—Nephi glories in the goodness of God—Nephi puts his trust in the Lord forever. About 588–570 B.C.

The Nephites separate themselves from the Lamanites, keep the law of Moses, and build a temple—Because of their unbelief, the Lamanites are cut off from the presence of the Lord, are cursed, and become a scourge unto the Nephites. About 588–559 B.C.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What is the traditional “talk before death” in the scriptures?

The Life of Lehi is in itself a type and symbol of the plan of salvation. The long journey from Israel to the new promised land is like our mortal journey from pre-life to after-life. The dialogue, prayer and respect shared before Lehi’s death is very typical in Biblical and Jewish tradition. Consider how many Prophet-fathers gathered their families, taught and blessed them before their mortality ended. Isaac blessing Jacob (instead of Esau), Jacob blessing Joseph, Joseph blessing his sons and Moses transferring his authority to Joshua are just a few examples. “Numbers which describes Moses’ transfer of his authority to Joshua prior to his death. Joshua is told by God, through Moses, that in his capacity as leader of the Israelites, ‘he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who

shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How does one reflect respect to the dying?

“In literary tradition the Jewish People (see Jew) is one large family descended from Jacob, who was given the name ‘Israel’ in honor of his mysterious and victorious struggle with the angel of God. The different branches of this family are descended from the 12 sons born to Israel by his four wives. In biblical times the father was head of the family, the bet av or ‘house of a father,’ and owner of its property; he was its chief authority and was expected to show love and mercy to his family. His blessing carried legal weight in the distribution of family wealth and privilege.” “According to Judaism, great respect must be paid to the dying and the dead, and nothing at all may be done to disturb or anger a dying person. All his wishes must be fulfilled even after he dies, so that he should not become upset because of uncertainty. Also

everything possible must be done to prolong his life even if there is only a slight chance of it succeeding. For this purpose all the prohibitions of Jewish law, such as working on the Sabbath, for example, are suspended.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What is included in the “final blessing,” the final counsel?

“An ancient tradition is to light a candle in the presence of a person nearing his end (known in Hebrew as a *goses*) to symbolize the flickering of the human soul and it is considered to be a great act of piety to stay with the *goses* to reassure him and be present at the departure of his soul. There is an old custom to encourage a dying man to confess his sins; however this should not be done in the presence of women and children in order not to distress them and thus disturb the *goses*. All in all, Judaism does not see death as something to be terrified of; it must be accepted because it is inevitable and everything must be done to enable the dying man to meet his death calmly.” “Before his death Jacob made Joseph swear to bury him in the ancestral vault in Hebron. After blessing his sons and grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and predicting the ultimate return to Canaan, Jacob bestowed on Joseph a parting gift . . .” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) Even at Masada, the zealot leader, Eliezar ben Yair, spoke to his people and reminded them of their “pact” or covenant that they would rather die than serve under the Romans. Their credo was incorrect, yet the “before death speech” was in keeping with a “before death philosophical dialogue” common in Jewish culture. Consider also the numerous attempts to teach the Egyptians preceding the ultimate firstborn deaths and subsequent death in the Red Sea.

How typical is a “final prayer?”

Likewise, the instruction Jesus gave his closest associates, the Twelve, at the “Last Supper” preceded His inevitable death the next day. A religious Jew is taught – what will become a natural instinctive exercise – that his or her last words before death are a prayer. “The *Shema* is the first prayer taught to a Jewish child; it is the last prayer recited by a religious person before death; it has become the prayer which captures and expresses the beliefs and goals of the Jewish religion.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How did Father Lehi invoke his tradition, and use his final moments to teach Justice and Mercy?

As Father Lehi reviews the Plan of Salvation, he teaches about the atonement. Two words are emphasized, Justice and Mercy. In Judaism, “Elohim” stands for justice and “YHWH” (Jehovah - I Am) stands for mercy. “The exercise of mercy is an obligation for all Jews. By this it is meant that they must act with compassion and forgiveness towards all mankind, and perform deeds of charity and kindness. This quality is an essential characteristic of God who is known as Rahum (‘Merciful’) and, in accordance with the tradition which sets as man's goal the imitation of God: ‘As He is merciful, so be you merciful.’ Just as God is bound by His covenant of mercy with His people, so is the Jew bound by specific commandments to act mercifully to the oppressed, the alien, the orphan, the widow, and indeed, every living creature.” “The stress placed upon this quality is evident both in the many charitable institutions existing in Jewish communal life, and in the daily prayers which implore God to deal compassionately even with the undeserving man. Human beings are frail, imperfect creatures constantly open to error, and so they are totally dependent on God's mercy.” “But God, as depicted by the rabbis, embodies a combination of justice and mercy, of strict judgment and

lenient compassion. This combination of justice and mercy in God is represented by the two names of God --- Elohim and YHWH. The former stands for justice and the latter for mercy. Though they may seem contradictory, one actually complements the other and, when there is a conflict between the two, God usually favors mercy.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What are the Biblical lessons on justice and mercy?

“Judaism demands of its judges this same balance, and the principle of mercy thus assumes extreme importance in the administration of Jewish law. The prophet (Zechariah 7:9) put it: ‘. . . execute the judgment and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother.’”

“The Hebrew word for justice is *zedek*, and indicative of Judaism’s attitude is the fact that another form of the same root *zedakah*, means ‘charity.’ For justice must be tempered with mercy and indeed the main attribute of God is His integration of justice and mercy. Yet another Hebrew word derived from the same root is *zaddik*, which means ‘righteous.’ The righteous man is one who is both just and merciful.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How does “going back” help us on life’s path?

Lehi well understands the principle of repentance, (in Hebrew, “going back”). Reflective on how every temple endowment begins, he takes his family “back” to the creation. In Judaism, some of the “learning of the Fathers” has been lost. However, there is a Jewish tradition (Agaddah) of a conflict in the creation process: “When the first man was to be created, says the Aggadah, God consulted the angels. Some favored his creation, because of the love and mercy he would show; others were opposed -- because of the falsehood and strife he would stir up. In the end, for reasons best known to Himself, the Holy One decided

to create man.” “In their search for lessons on man’s place in God’s universe, the rabbis discussed at great length the biblical account of the creation of Adam, which is outlined above. Thus, for example, the Midrash observes that each newly created form of life ruled over what preceded it in the order of creation. Adam and Eve were thus created last in order that they should rule over all creation, and in order that they should be able to enter a banqueting hall that was waiting ready for them. In the words of the Midrash, ‘The matter may be likened to an emperor’s building a palace, consecrating it, preparing the feast, and only then inviting the guests.’ On the other hand, (with a bit of humor), the rabbis taught that Adam was created last, so that if he should become conceited, he could be told: ‘The gnat was created before you.’” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How did Satan’s real identity begin to fade?

Along with losing a clear personal identity of God (see next lesson February 10-16, 2 Nephi 6–10), references to Satan as a personage have also largely disappeared from Jewish thought. Talmudic teachings include the following description: “In the Talmud, Satan is at times identified with the yezer ha-rah (the evil inclination), but he also assumes certain aspects of a fully personalized entity. Thus, he is the angel of death, or he is the tempter lying in ambush not only for Job but also for Abraham and all the biblical personalities. Or he is the accuser, ha-mekatreg, constantly waiting for man to sin so as to bring down upon him the wrath of God.” “Several references to Satan have found their way into the liturgy, for example the plea in the hashkivenu prayer of the evening service to ‘remove from us the enemy, pestilence . . . and Satan.’” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How did ancient Joseph life prefigure the Savior's life?

The account of ancient Joseph is truly a chiasm paralleled by the modern story of Joseph. It is a prefiguring of the Savior's mission. The lesson comes from Joseph's life as he is chosen by his father and then rejected by his brothers. In slavery, his identity is really unknown, yet he serves and saves those around him. Later, he serves and saves his brothers before identifying himself. The Book of Mormon connects the symbolism of the ancient Joseph with a latter-day Joseph. Ancient Joseph was blessed and authorized by his father Jacob when Jacob laid his hands on Joseph's head. "In the same way that priests lift their hands in blessing, so parents place their hands on the heads of their children when they bless them. (For example, in the Bible, Jacob blessed his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, by placing his hands on their heads.) Placing the hands on another person is symbolic not only of transferring blessing but also of passing on authority. In talmudic times, scholars received their rabbinic ordination through the symbolic act of placing of the hands (known as semikhah)." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What are Jews saying about a "Latter-day Joseph?"

In modern Judaism, there is a powerful traditional and legendary history of Joseph and his future role. Some of these excerpts can give "modern Joseph" a little insight into what the Jews are still anticipating. "Based on the famous story of Joseph and his brothers, the Talmud warns against favoring one child over another . . . Jealousy is considered such a serious evil that it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments where the tenth commandment is an outright prohibition of envy: . . . the rabbis of the Talmud developed the philosophy that a truly rich man is one who is happy with his portion

in life and does not envy others." "According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph . . ." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) When the Chief Rabbi, Avraham HaKohen Kook (1865-1935), was appointed in Palestine (1919-1935), he was asked if the Jews could now build the Temple (destroyed since year 70 A.D.). His response was that the priestly rights were gone and referred to the great 11th and 12th century rabbis, Rashi (1040-1105) as well as Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), they said, in effect, "We are waiting for a Messiah Ben-Joseph, to him will be given the keys of the gathering of Israel, he will restore Temple worship."

What does the "saving aspect" of Joseph's life teach us today?

The chiasm shows that ancient Joseph saved his family, and they did not know who he was. Latter-day Joseph is saving his brothers again, (more foreign aid goes to Israel from the U.S.A., the land of Joseph, than from all other countries combined) and they don't know that it is "Joseph." In the meridian of times there was "One" who saved us all - and still most people don't know it.

How does the restoration help us understand the "echoes" of ancient temple worship?

There is an abundant amount of imagery still existing in Judaism that can be interpreted as referring to a personal shield or protector. Jews wear garments that have four markings, the knotted strings, on each corner of the *Tallith*. One of the fascinating things in Judaism is the repetitive keeping of customs even long after their meanings have faded. For example, when visiting the Western (Wailing) Wall, you will see reminders of ancient temple worship. Men are on one

side, women on the other. Head covering is used and robes (Talith) are placed on one shoulder and then another while certain words are recited. There is a sash (or "girdle") tied with the bow on one side. Levites wear aprons. Some Jews still remove their shoes when approaching the Wall. Small pieces of paper are placed between the cracks of the old temple wall stones with names written on them, names of people who require special prayers and blessings. There is a minimum of ten who form a prayer circle (Minyan) so that prayers, readings of the scriptures and instructions can be done. Someone is always at hand to assist the person reading or reciting to use correct intonations and to follow proper clothing and recitation procedures.

What can I learn from the Jewish practice of "sure nails?"

Some practices have ceased, even though they were still in use just a hundred years ago. One of those practices is reflected in the thousands of old nails protruding slightly out of the cracks in the wall. An old Rabbi described them as the "sure nails" pounded into the wall to fasten their sins so that people could leave their burdens and get on with life. Isaiah speaks clearly about this in five powerful verses in his twenty-second chapter. The term "house of David" honors him who purchased "Temple Square" and gathered the materials to build the "House of the Lord." The sealing powers of the Lord are

referred to as "he shall open" and "he shall shut." The Lord will be nailed surely (there is written and archaeological evidence that the Romans nailed in the hands and in the wrists to make the crucifixion stronger). The "Glorious throne of His Father's House" means the Lord was willing to take the sins of all mankind

upon Himself. We are blessed in that we can "fasten our sins" upon him. Apparently, in ancient times these sins were symbolically collected, small sins in cups, larger ones in flagons, so that they could be disposed of. Sometimes this was done by placing them on a goat and letting it escape out the Gate of Mercy, also known as the Gate of Forgiveness and the Gate Beautiful, to die on its own.

What does Isaiah teach us about "sure nails?"

"And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken it." (Isaiah 22:21-25)