

February 5-11, 2024

2 Nephi 1–2

“FREE TO CHOOSE LIBERTY AND ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH THE GREAT MEDIATOR”

Summary: *2 Nephi 1. Lehi prophesies of a land of liberty—His seed will be scattered and smitten if they reject the Holy One of Israel—He exhorts his sons to put on the armor of righteousness. About 588–570 B.C.*

2 Nephi 2. 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.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

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. Abraham blessing Jacob (preceeding Esau), Jacob blessing Joseph, Joseph blessing his sons and Moses transferring his authority to Joshua are just a few examples.

What can I learn about fatherly authority?

“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 (seer tool) before the Lord.’ “In literary tradition the Jewish People 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

How typical is a final blessing of the father?

The Life of Lehi is a type and symbol of

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.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What can I do to respect father’s wishes?

“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.” “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.**)

What is a Jew's first and last religious utterance?

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. Also consider the numerous attempts to teach the Egyptians preceding the ultimate firstborn deaths and subsequent death in the Red Sea. 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. As the *Shema* is the first prayer taught to a Jewish child; so 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. The *Shema Yisrael*, or the *Shema*, is the central declaration of Judaism. It has become the prayer that expresses belief in the "singularity" of God, that is, in God's oneness and incomparability. It is traditionally recited

twice a day, as part of the morning (*Shacharit*) and evening (*Arvit* or *Ma'ariv*) services.

What words help to describe the Atonement?

As Father Lehi reviews the Plan of Salvation, he teaches about atonement. In Jewish philosophy two words are emphasized, Justice and Mercy. In Judaism it is often explained as "Elohim" standing for justice and "YHWH" (Jehovah - I Am) standing 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.**)

How important are Mercy and Justice?

“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 significant is “going back?”

Lehi well understands the principles of “going back.” The Hebrew word is *La-shuv* (to turn – or repent). He takes his family “back” to the creation. In Judaism, some of the “learning of the Fathers” has been lost. 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, 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.**)

God and Satan – real persons?

Along with losing a clear personal identity of God, 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 can I sense the fullness of the “Great Mediator?”

There to help us, sustain us, and bless us to return to our Father in Heaven are laws and ordinances planting covenants in our hearts that ultimately bind us to our Father in Heaven. The ancient Ark of the Covenant dating to Moses' time at Mount Sinai, contains the laws written by the hand of God and reminds of His Firstborn Son, the Messiah. When he communed with the Prophet he stood or was seated between two “cherubim.” Jewish thought

describes them as being named “Justice” and “Mercy.” (<https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-cherubim-their-role-on-the-ark-in-the-holy-of-holies>)