

March 18-24, 2024

2 Nephi 31–33

“THIS IS THE WAY”

Summary: *2 Nephi 31. Nephi tells why Christ was baptized—Men must follow Christ, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end to be saved—Repentance and baptism are the gate to the strait and narrow path—Eternal life comes to those who keep the commandments after baptism. [About 559 and 545 B.C.]*

2 Nephi 32. Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost—Men must pray and gain knowledge for themselves from the Holy Ghost. [About 559 and 545 B.C.]

2 Nephi 33. Nephi’s words are true—They testify of Christ—Those who believe in Christ will believe Nephi’s words—They shall stand as a witness before the judgment bar. [About 559 and 545 B.C.]

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What remains among Jews of the ancient Biblical law of immersion?

Even nowadays

religious Jews participate in immersions. A woman, at the conclusion of her monthly cycle, and often for men. “Every place that the Torah speaks of washing of flesh and laundering of clothing [to purify] from the impurities—nothing other than immersion of the entire body in a *mikveh* (immersion font) [is meant] . . . And although all of these things are [known only] from tradition (*mipi hashmuah*, literally, “from an oral transmission”), it is nevertheless said [in the written *Torah*]: “[...] it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the even; then shall it be clean” (**Lev. 11:32**)—a basic principle applying to all that are impure that they should be put into water.”

(<https://www.thetorah.com/article/on-the-origins-of-tevilah-ritual-immersion>)

Immersion for remission of sins is an eternal ordinance, even exemplified by the Sinless One, the Savior, as he came to John, son of Zacharia, a Temple High Priest, “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter

into the kingdom of God.” (**John 3:5**)

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but 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—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.” (**2 Nephi 31:13**)

What does feasting have to do with worship?

The term “feasting” on the word of the Lord has a great Jewish tradition. A religious Jewish family will always engage in discussion of the *Torah* during every meal. You might remember that for them the eating tables must be square or at least have four corners. That is because the sacrificial Altar of the Lord does not exist anymore and the four-cornered tables with food simulate the sacrificial offering. “A feast held in connection with religious acts is called *se’udah shel*

mitzvah (commanded meal) and is the duty of every Jew. Whether to celebrate a joyous family occasion such as a wedding, or to honor a holiday by eating festive meals, a *se'udah shel mitzvah* must be eaten in the spirit of pleasure and enjoyment, blessing and thanksgiving, being particularly careful to avoid overeating.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What is the religious Jewish discussion manner at mealtimes?

“The Talmud describes in detail the various modes of conduct to be observed at meals. For example, persons should engage in a discussion of *Torah* during the meal so that they will be ‘as though they had eaten at the table of God.’

Furthermore, the table is regarded as a substitute for the altar in the Temple, and therefore, it must be treated with reverence. Before any meal, the hands must be washed pronouncing the appropriate blessing over the washing, after which bread is eaten. The meal is concluded with Grace after Meals. When a meal is eaten for the purpose of honoring a festival or rejoicing in the fulfillment of a commandment, it is considered more than an ordinary meal; it is a *se'udah shel mitzvah* (commanded meal). **Psalm 126**, *shir ha- ma'alot* (one of the songs of ascent to the Temple), is recited before Grace after Meals, and in the Grace itself, there is usually an additional paragraph appropriate to the occasion. Such festive meals include the following: The meals eaten on the Sabbath and festivals. *Kiddush* over wine is recited before two of the meals of the Sabbath or holiday (evening and morning) and the third meal which is required on the Sabbath and which is known as *se'udah shelishit*, is often accompanied by a short sermon of *Torah*. All these meals are characterized by the singing of hymns (*zemirot*), the presence of two loaves of bread (*hallot*), and the eating of fish or meat which are considered festive dishes.

In addition, each holiday has its own traditional dishes which are served at its festive meals. A *melavveh malkah*, a festive meal held after the departure of the Sabbath, the *Passover seder*, the *Purim* dinner, the meal before the fast of the Day of Atonement (*se'udah mafseket*), the *siyyum*, a feast made on the completion of the study of a *Talmudic* tractate. Such a feast is usually held on the morning of the eve of Passover so that the firstborn can participate (and thereby be exempt from fasting on that day), and the banquet of the *hevra kaddisha* (the burial brotherhood) held on the Seventh of Adar. (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What are some of the Jewish festive meals?

Joyous family occasions also have various *se'udot shel mitzvah* connected with them:(1) the circumcision feast, (2) the meal at the ceremony of the redemption of the firstborn (*pidyon haben*), (3) the festive meal celebrating a bar mitzvah, (4) the betrothal and wedding feasts, and the (4) occasion of dedicating a new home (*se'udat hanukkat ha-bayit*).” “The Fast of *Tammuz* is also traditionally associated with the fast mentioned by the prophet Zechariah as the ‘Fast of the Fourth Month.’ According to the prophet, this fast in messianic times will be transformed into ‘joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah.” “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.” (Zecharia 8:19) (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How does fasting pair with feasting?

Remember that for the religious Jew there is a fasting day each month. It stands to reason that the meal afterwards is a “feast” of sorts – with prayers. It is the

custom among religious Jews to pray before and after every meal. Each prayer is preceded by a ritual washing of hands in “living water” that is naturally flowing. Over time, these and other prayers have come to be pre-written. Yet that was not the biblical custom or instruction. “In general, biblical prayer was spontaneous and personal; the more formal aspect of worship probably consisted of bringing sacrifices at set times and with a fixed ritual. It seems, however, that even during the period of the First Temple there were already some prayers whose wording was set and which were always recited on certain specific occasions. Some scholars, basing themselves on **Psalms 55:18** and **Daniel 6:11**, believe that the practice of worshiping at least three times a day may be traced back to the biblical period.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How are my prayers intended?

There is an effort in Judaism to at least say the pre-written prayers with real intent. This is called *Kavvanah* (direction, intention or concentration). “Because the times of the services and even the words which were to be recited, were fixed, there was a danger that prayer would lose its vitality and become mere routine. In order to overcome this danger, the rabbis urged the worshiper to meditate before he began to worship, to think of ‘before Whom he was standing’ in prayer, and to create a new prayer every time he worshiped. They placed great emphasis on the emotional aspect of prayer, calling it ‘service of the heart’ and stressing that God appreciates most the pure intentions of the worshiper. Later authorities sought to embellish the fixed prayers with original poems (*piyyutim*), or with short introductions (*kavvanot*) whose purpose was to direct the heart and mind of the worshiper. Melodic chanting was used as a means of increasing *kavvanah* and

worshippers were taught to sway as they prayed, thus throwing their entire body into the worship.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

When did written prayers become the accepted form?

“Books containing the texts of the customary daily and festival prayers did not exist in ancient times. The reader would pray aloud and the congregants would chant the words along with him, or they would simply say ‘amen’ to the blessings. Only after the completion of the *Talmud*, when many of the components of the Oral Tradition were first compiled in written form, were the prayers written down. Thus, the very first ‘prayer book’ was produced only in the ninth century.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Nephi speaks to the Jews as a Jew and to the Gentiles as he is in the diaspora of his day. “I have charity for the Jew--I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came. I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation.” (**2 Nephi 33:8-9**) The ancient prophet Nephi kindly counsels us, “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.” (**2 Nephi 33:9**)

How accepting am I of other people's faith and devotion?

I remember when Rabbi Stanley Wagner (1932-2013), who was Chairman of a Denver Inter-Faith-Committee, was telling me after we became friends and associating with other members of the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that he wanted them, the Latter-day Saints, to be part of that committee as well. Another of Rabbi Wagner's personal friends, a Pastor and an associate member of that committee objected strenuously to the Latter-day Saints being included. He even threatened to leave the Inter-Faith-Committee and challenged the friendship. The Rabbi told me, "I have seen and heard this kind of thing before." At short length, due to Rabbi Wagner's insistence, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were included on the committee – the Pastor resigned – however, their friendship

continued. In Wagner's words, "It takes two to make or break a friendship."

How should I react to other peoples' Biblical quotes?

The Book of Mormon Prophet, Nephi, prays for acceptance or, at least, respect for his and the Lords words, wherever they come from. "And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day." (2 Nephi 33:14)