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Joseph F. McConkie

Jacob
Ancient Witness of a Modern Christ
(Parts 1 & 2)

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Summary:

Joseph McConkie offers a profile of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob and discusses two themes taught by Jacob—the scattering and gathering of Israel and his testimony of the mission of Christ. The current gathering in Israel is temporal, not spiritual. From the Book of Mormon perspective, the gentiles are those who come from the gentile nations, even if they are of Ephraim, and are not Jewish nationals.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Christ

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Jacob: Ancient Witness of a Modern Christ (Part 1)

Joseph McConkie

Class, welcome. It's nice to have the opportunity to be with you. What we are going to do in the course of this and the following class period is talk about a great Book of Mormon prophet, the son of Sariah and Lehi—the first of their two sons born in the wilderness—Jacob.

Now, let me tell you what we have to work with by way of a text. Jacob is the man who gives us all that is in 2 Nephi 6, and he quotes two chapters of Isaiah (50 and 51) in 2 Nephi 7 and 8. If you cut out what he has quoted of Isaiah we have three chapters of Jacob in 2 Nephi. Then we have the book of Jacob, a relatively small book that consists of just seven chapters, probably best known for the chapter that really doesn't come from Jacob—the 5th chapter, or the allegory of Zenos. With our three chapters in 2 Nephi, there are nine chapters of Jacob. That might not sound like a lot, but Jacob is heavyweight, high-content density. He is a great teacher and has much to teach. I think we can assure you that we won't do justice to it because we just cannot do all of that in two hours. That will mean that we will have to isolate some parts to look at and savor, rather than just skim across the top.

Let me give you a little profile of the man Jacob by way of introduction, and then we will isolate the great doctrinal themes that he emphasized. As noted, Jacob is a great Book of Mormon prophet. He is the son of Lehi and Sariah. He was born in the wilderness after they left Jerusalem but before they got to the New World. We can't give you his birth date, but he was born some time between 599 and 595 B.C. His date of death we would place at a good old age—and that is all any of us ask for. You will come to understand that, but when you turn forty, your body starts to fall apart. And as you get closer to the winding up scene, the better the Resurrection starts to look. Maybe that is why Jacob was so good on the doctrine of the Resurrection.

Jacob was consecrated and ordained a priest by his older brother Nephi. Be reminded that in the Book of Mormon, when we talk about a priest, it would be what you and I think of as a high priest today. They did not have, at

least until the time of Christ, the Aaronic, or Levitical, order. When we say he was consecrated a priest, we mean he held the office in the Melchizedek Priesthood that assumed the great burden of teaching in that ancient day.

It would also appear that Jacob's great mentor was Nephi. I think that his growing up years were close enough to his father's death that he wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn a great deal from Lehi, but would have done much of his gospel study in the scriptures—and you will see he is a great student of the scriptures. And then he was taught by and schooled by Nephi. He was, as was the case with his brothers and his father, of the tribe of Manasseh. He would eventually succeed Nephi as the leader of the church, and as the custodian of the plates, which, as our story ends, he will give to his son, Enos. He is a spiritual giant. He received many revelations and had the spirit of prophecy. He entertained angels and—let me have you read this. Turn to 2 Nephi 11. This is where Nephi is going to say something about his kid brother. Begin with the first verse:

And now, Jacob spake many more things to my people at that time; nevertheless only these things have I caused to be written, for the things which I have written sufficeth me.

And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people [and we are going to discover, as we get in, that this likening concept is something that Jacob reflected in his teaching style also], and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. (2 Nephi 11:1–2)

So, Isaiah saw the Christ, and Nephi is testifying that *he* saw the Christ. Then in verse 3, Nephi says:

And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words.

Nephi appeals, here, to the law of witnesses to establish the testimony of Christ. He cites the testimony of Isaiah, who saw Him; [he cites] his own testimony and attests that he saw Him; and [he cites] the testimony of his brother Jacob, who also saw Him. So in the realm of spiritual things, Jacob is a

'competent witness,' if you will. To get a sense and feel of the spiritual power that Jacob had, go over to Jacob 4, and note in verse 6:

Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

So, his spiritual power, or his priesthood power, was such that he had the experience of commanding the elements and watching them obey. If I were to take a single sentence that I think captures the spirit of the man Jacob, I would take you back to 2 Nephi 9:49: "Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God." That, I think, captures, as well as you can in a sentence, the spirit of Jacob. You will remember also that he confronted Sherem, the anti-Christ.

I suppose, again, Jacob is best known for what he quoted from others—e.g., the allegory that he quoted from Zenos, an Old Testament prophet whose writings have since been lost to us. But if we center our attention on what Jacob's major contributions are, I think we get them back in the preface to the Book of Mormon. Let me take you back to the title page, which we got from Moroni himself.

On the title page, where it announces, "The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi," we have two paragraphs. In the second paragraph, we get announcement of the purpose for the book. There are two basic purposes announced—that is, there are two theological threads that have weaved themselves all the way through the book and bind it together. If we went out and took a random sample of students of the Book of Mormon and asked what [these threads] were, I think we can feel pretty confident that people would get the second, but many of them would be unsure of what the first was. Notice what he says: "An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which [now note] is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know

the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever." Now, that is one of those two threads. The purpose of this book is that the remnants of the house of Israel will know about the special covenants that were made with their fathers and they will have the hope of the fulfillment of those covenants. You have a number of prophecies in the Old Testament about the gathering of Israel. Jeremiah, for instance, is one of the prophets who speaks much about that, along with Isaiah. Their writings are sometimes referred to as the books of consolation. It is a consolation to Israel to know the promises that the Lord has given and the fact that the Lord will gather and redeem that people again.

The Book of Mormon is a great book of consolation. It is the book that was ordained in the councils of heaven to be used to gather Israel, so that is one of the great themes. The other theme, which is fairly well known, and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God. When you read these nine chapters of Jacob, they center on two great themes—the theme of consolation, the promise made to Israel about their redemption in the last days. This is the doctrine of the scattering and gathering of Israel. And then the testimony that Jacob bears, of Christ. If we were going to ask the question, Is there something distinctive about Jacob, wherein he teaches us things about Christ, that if it weren't for what he taught us we just wouldn't get to know that? The answer is yes. For the most part what he is teaching is a second witness or a third witness to what others have taught.

In 2 Nephi, chapter 9, he does a marvelous job of teaching us things about the atonement that are profoundly significant, that I don't think we would have the assurity of the confidence of, if it weren't for what he taught us. It might be that that is an important place for us to begin. Let's take his testimony of Christ and see if we can't develop that. Having done that, we will turn our attention to this other thread that winds itself through all he does and throughout the book and that is the promises made to the fathers, relative to their seed.

Let me introduce Jacob's testimony of Christ in Jacob, chapter 4. We were there just a moment ago. In fact, since we are introducing the man, let's start at the beginning of the chapter.

Now, behold, it came to pass that I, Jacob, having ministered much unto my people in word, (and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates) and we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain;

Now, that suggests that there is some measurably breadth in what he taught. He was something of a Harold B. Lee or a Brigham Young. If you go back and gather what they taught, you have a marvelous library of subjects that have been spoken of.

But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away; but we can write a few words upon plates, which will give our children, and also our beloved brethren, a small degree of knowledge concerning us, or concerning their fathers—

Now, again, that is all we are going to get, a small degree. We are only going to get a small smidgen of what Jacob knew, but it will constitute a wonderful seed that if we nourish it, will grow and bear wonderful fruit for us.

Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.

I think that is the way we want to learn, with joy and not the hard way, with sorrow. Note what he is going to tell us here, in verses 4-5.

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

Now, that kind of statement represents part of the genius of the Book of Mormon. This is part of the plain and precious that is being restored to our

understanding. The name or title of Christ is not found in the Old Testament. The theological position of the traditional Christian world is that the knowledge of Christ begins in the Meridian of Time. There is, for instance, another word that you can find in the Book of Mormon, in fact 191 times before Christ comes to visit, and that is the word church.

Now, the idea that there was a church of Jesus Christ has not been preserved for us in the Old Testament as we presently have it. The idea of Christ, Jesus Christ, as our savior, and the idea of the organization of a church are obviously profoundly fundamental and important. Again, we don't have them in the Old Testament. There are texts that we can argue, that imply them, but to have them in the kind of plain language that we get in the Book of Mormon, we simply don't. And so, what we are doing, is announcing to all the world with the Book of Mormon, with a text like the one we are reading here, that, for instance, Stephen, was not the first Christian martyr.

If you take New Testament class and you get a test question that says, Who was the first Christian martyr? The traditional answer, is, Stephen, but as Latter-day Saints, what would we say? [Abinidi] Well, maybe in the context of the Book of Mormon, but put it in the context of the Bible. [John the Baptist] Well, to go right back to the beginning, and we would put Able. John the Baptist, the first of the meridian dispensation, but what we are saying here is that the first members of the church were Adam and Eve and they were members of the Church of Jesus Christ. When they got together in a testimony meeting, a proper and appropriate testimony, in Adam's day, would be, I testify that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, yet to be born, is indeed our Redeemer, our Savior, and I rejoice in the fact that I am a member of his church and have the privilege of sustaining Adam as his special witness and prophet.

Now, our teaching that kind of doctrine, is very distinctive. It is part of the real genius of the Book of Mormon, of the great revelations. It is so plain and simple that we can pass by it and not catch the importance of it, but don't miss that. It is profoundly important. We are telling a story, and we would use

circles. That is, cycles, of dispensations, and operating with the understanding that these ancient prophets had the fullness of the gospel.

Again, by way of contrast, if we were looking at the theological basis of traditional Christianity, I don't think we would use the circle. We would use some kind of slanted line. The idea that they talk about is an evolution of understanding, a progressive revelation. So you start out with a man, Adam, if you are going to acknowledge that there was literally a man by the name of Adam, which many wouldn't do, but you would say that through the Old Testament we evolved up to a point where we were finally ready to receive the gospel at the time of Christ which was in the meridian of time. We are saying, not so, not so. These principles are everlasting. They were had by father Adam, and they were had by Enoch, and they were had by Noah, and they were had by all of these prophets in the Old Testament. Every prophet, by definition, knew, by revelation, that Jesus was the Christ, and so testified. They knew about the saving principles of the gospel and that concept itself is one of the plain and precious things that were taken.

He [Jacob] is bearing that testimony. We know of Christ, as did those before us. Now, look at verse 5 and see how perfect his understanding is.

Behold, they believed in Christ [that is, those that were before us] and worshipped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name...

That is the system. There is no confusion here, as we find in the traditional Christian world about the separation and distinct nature of the Father and the Son. Our system of worship from the very beginning, from the days of father Adam, has been to pray to God, our Eternal Father, and to do it in the name of the Son. Now, again, very important, and all of this is a part of our understanding, even though we have the law of Moses and so of the law of Moses, he said:

...And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness...

That is, because we keep it for the right reason, we understand it, it works, it is sanctified unto us for righteousness. You can keep the law of Moses,

somehow, without the knowledge of Christ. You leave Christ out. You go through all the ritual and ordinances, but somehow it will not be sanctified unto you for righteousness. That is a little bit like saying what a wonderful Christmas we had, when we are so busy buying gifts, we forget Christ.

...even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

So, we are getting this clear announcement from Jacob that the Old Testament people knew and understood what the similitude was in that experience of Abraham, when he took Isaac and offered him as a sacrifice. Now, again, you see, you have a great people on the earth today, that profess a marvelous love for the writings of the Old Testament prophets, but in it all, somehow miss the heart of what they are trying to teach. That is, to teach and testify of Christ. Now, in the Book of Mormon, what we have, and in the testimony of prophets like Jacob, a very Christ centered book, in fact the most Christ centered book ever written.

With that introduction, let me take you back to 2 Nephi, chapter 9, and center your attention on some marvelous things that he tells us about Christ—again which we really would not know and understand, if it had not been for Jacob. Pick the story up in the fourth verse:

For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, [I guess some came to class unprepared. Can you imagine that?] to know of things to come; wherefore I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God.

That has kind of a familiar ring to it, doesn't it? We are immediately reminded of the beautiful testimony of Job. In more modern translations in the Bible, the text in Job reads, "Out of my body, shall I see God." There is something very interesting going on here. There's a theological war against the notion that neither God nor resurrected beings, have bodies. Again, one of the very remarkable and distinctive things that the Book of Mormon does for us is to restore the knowledge that the resurrection is corporeal—that it is tangible, that it is, by definition, the inseparable union of body and spirit. This

is another of those plain and precious things. You can read the Bible from cover to cover and you will never find a definition of resurrection. We have some marvelous definitions of resurrection here in the Book of Mormon, particularly from Alma.

At this point, Jacob is testifying to you, that it is going to be a corporeal—that it is going to involve bodies. That is very important. It is important for everything that follows. You have to understand that God is a personal being. Only if he is a personal being can Jesus Christ, actually and literally be his Son. Only then can the resurrection in reality be this inseparable union of body and spirit. Now, all of that has been lost to the theology of the traditional Christian world. All of that is being restored to us here. Some of the implications are going to be dwelled on by Jacob as he starts to give us a feel, if you will, of the breadth of the atonement, and unless you know that, you can't fully appreciate the doctrine of Christ's grace. You don't get to see how far it reaches. Notice, verse 5:

Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, [We are writing about 559 years before Christ. This is a Messianic prophecy] from when we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them, for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

Now, note what we just read. That all men, that is Christ died for all men—that is, his atonement is universal and that because of that all men become subject unto him. Now, this is a very important concept. We are not just saying that Christ is Savior. If we are all subject unto him, we must also say that he is Lord and Master. Our testimony must go beyond, I know that Jesus is my Savior; it must embrace the fact that I know I must bow the knee and follow his command because I am subject unto him. Now, that will become more clear to us as we proceed. But, verse 6, a wonderful text for a funeral discourse:

For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection.

Now think about that. A week ago I was at a funeral of my next door neighbor, a wonderful man who was killed in a very unfortunate accident. It wasn't a dark and sorrowful kind of experience in that everyone who knew him, knew he was faithful. Everyone who knows the family, knows that they are valiant and faithful and that they will pull together and do well, but we didn't think, as we sat there in the funeral, of those terms. This is a manifestation of the mercy of God. But that is precisely what was just read, wasn't it.

For as death hath passed upon all men, he died to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator; that is, death is an absolute essential part of the plan of salvation. In order to be resurrected, in order to be exalted, we must first die. It is a requisite. It is part of the mercy of God. It creates the opportunity for resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall. That is why we have the doctrine of the fall. The Book of Mormon, particularly 2 Nephi, chapter 2, does a better job of teaching the fall than any other scriptural text that we have, and the fall came by reason of transgression. And because man became fallen, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. Notice that we have created two difficulties here. One is death, and the other is, that because of our fallen nature, we are unworthy to stand in the presence of the Lord. "No unclean thing can stand in the presence of the Lord." we read:

Wherefore it must needs be an infinite atonement— [The atonement must be as infinite as the effects of the fall.] save it should be an infinite atonement, this corruption could not put on incorruption...

Corruption means, in the scriptures, that which is subject to death. A corruptible body is a body that has blood flowing in it. It is one that hurts when you hit it. It knows pain and suffering. It is one that ages, so because of the fall we have a corruptible body. Because of the atonement we can put on a body of incorruption.

...Wherefore the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

What Jacob is doing is what we get in trouble sometimes with Sunday School teachers for doing, and that is raising our hand and asking the “what if” questions. He is responding to a “what if” question. What if there hadn’t been a Christ? What if Christ had not worked out his atoning sacrifice? Now, watch him answer this question. He is so excited about the answer to this question, that consistently through this chapter, you have these refrains of praise. Verse 8:

O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! [that is just as if we were shouting, Hallelujah! O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! We are talking about the doctrine of mercy, the doctrine of grace. How?]

For behold, if the flesh should rise no more [that is if there hadn’t been a Christ, then there wouldn’t be a resurrection. The flesh would rise no more. What would our state be then?] our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the eternal God, and become the devil, to rise no more.

And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself;

Now do you see the doctrine we are preaching? What we are saying is this, that no unclean thing can enter the presence of God. The corruptible body can’t be there, if you will. Now, Adam said it well, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” That is, our spirits are tainted with sin, having no way to cleanse themselves of its effect, we would be subject to the author of sin. We would be citizens in his kingdom. Now, if we were citizens in his kingdom we would be without light and we would be without agency and we would be without any true freedom. We would be without freedom. We would be without any of the blessings of the gospel plan.

Now, we are answering this question, “What if there had been no atonement?” We are saying that Satan would have then been our king and would have all power over us. We are saying that we would have been perdition. Now, when that dawns on you, we are talking about the grace of Christ. We are saying, that if he had not worked out an atoning sacrifice, we

would be perdition. We would be devils. Then we say, O, the wisdom of God, his mercy and his grace! You start to get excited about this, like Jacob. Notice verse 10:

O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.

And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; [there we have a definition of resurrection at least in part. We have to say inseparable before we have it perfect, but we are confirming this tangible, corporeal resurrection] and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

Now, again we say, O how great the plan of our God. We are starting to appreciate the importance of the atonement. If you don't know, or don't understand that if it weren't for the atoning sacrifice of Christ, you would be perdition. This is not just a matter of resurrection, or living on, but of getting the body back because all of the blessings of the eternal world flow out of the body. Think about it for a minute. If you don't get a body, then you aren't really you, and if you aren't really you, your husband wouldn't really be him, and you wouldn't really be you to him, and there would be no eternal marriage there, and it is in that love and union and marriage, that all of the other great blessings, all of the fruits from the tree of life that taste or are delicious to the taste of a Latter-day Saint come. Then you can be husband and wife, then you can be father and mother, then you can have eternal increase. You can become as God is. It all grows out of this doctrine.

But not only do you get none of those things, you are a citizen of the kingdom of the devil. He is your king. You must worship him. You have no

choice. All of that is associated with this idea of an understanding of what the resurrection is. Unless you can define resurrection, you cannot fully even begin to appreciate the length and breadth of the grace of Christ, his mercy. You don't get to shout with Jacob, with the excitement that he had, about the plan of God. In fact, even that phrase is interesting. The fact that the plan of our God, the idea of a plan of salvation, is an idea that is peculiar and distinctive to the Book of Mormon. Again, it is just one of those little plain and precious things that got lost. You cannot find the word "plan" in the Bible. You can't find the phrase "plan of salvation." So, we read here:

For the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous. [There would have been no paradise if there hadn't been an atonement.] And the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men [it's universal] become incorruptible and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

So, what we are doing is that we are talking about two deaths—a physical death, which is the separation of body and spirit; and a spiritual death, which is separation from the presence of God, and we are talking about the atonement, which overcomes both. It is the inseparable union of body and spirit, but it also brings everyone back to the presence of God so they can stand there, at least for a period, to be judged. If they have chosen to merit the right to remain there, they can. Verse 14:

Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, ...

This is perfect recall, what you always wanted and never had on a test, and then when they hand the test paper back, it comes back to you. This is how it is going to work on the day of judgment. It is all going to come back to you.

...and out nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

Now, we are not going to have the time to get all the way through 2 Nephi 9. You read it on your own. As you read it you are going to see a lot of veiled

illusions, if you will, to the temple ceremony. They are particularly abundant in this chapter. Now, notice this doctrine.

And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.

Now, keep this story straight. I have seen several depictions of the plan of salvation in which we haven't had the order straight. We are saying resurrection precedes judgment. But we have defined resurrection as inseparable union of body and spirit. Now, if we had the time to really develop this, we would go to section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where we learn about a telestial resurrection and a terrestrial resurrection and a celestial resurrection.

Now, if you come forth in the afternoon of the first resurrection, you come forth in a terrestrial resurrection. By definition resurrection is that inseparable union and then you go before the judgment bar and you see there isn't a whole lot you can do there. You can get some high priced attorneys and a well-chosen and intimidated jury if you want and you can have some fun things and some strange things happen that everybody would say, "Hey, that's not the way this jury should have ruled." But, no one is going to be able to change anything. If you are standing there with a telestial body and a telestial spirit and they are inseparably united, the decision is already made. You can't separate that which is inseparable. See what that tells you about the judgment. That is telling you that the resurrection, itself, is really the great judgment. Standing before the bar is somewhat a formality, a little bit like walking across the stage at graduation to pick up your diploma, all the grades are in, the work is done, the decision is made. You can't change it. It's too late. That is really kind of an interesting thing. Then in verse 16 he tells us:

And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, [so you reap as you have sown] and they who are filthy shall

be filthy still; [In scriptural language, in the resurrection, when we talk about someone who is filthy still, means someone who we couldn't even send to hell and have them pay for their own sins. We are talking about something outside the veil of the atonement. This is perdition. They are they of whom we speak when we say that in the resurrected state, they are filthy still.] wherefore they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone...

Now you get a little help there. I had a minister come to see me once and he asked if I believed that hell was literally a fire. I said, "No, no, that is figurative." He was very relieved to hear me say that. He said that many of his colleagues wanted it to be literal and he couldn't accept that. He would be helped to have the Book of Mormon and have it identify for us, in this instance, that the language is figurative—and their torment is as. This is just a little phrase that gives us that interpretation. Verse 17, again the refrain:

O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.

But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.

O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! [Again, the refrain] for he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

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

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if [now notice, if] they 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.

That last phrase is instructive. It is the kind of thing you find frequently in the Book of Mormon—who belong to the family of Adam. Frankly, what it does, it causes a problem if someone wants to theorize that you have pre-Adamites. The atonement of Christ comes to answer the ends of Adam's fall. It comes to give these blessings to those who belong to the family of Adam. If you have pre-Adamites, you have a difficult problem.

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.

Now, the doctrine that you are getting there is this, then. We have done a marvelous job of testifying about the grace of Christ and we have expanded our understanding about the grace of Christ and we have shown that because of his grace, we don't have to be perdition. And that because of his grace, not only do we get our bodies back, but we can be brought back into the presence of God and we can enjoy the fullness of all the Father has. But also because of his grace, as we read first at the end of verse 5, where we read this phrase, "and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him," we are also learning that not only is he Savior, but he is Lord and Master; that it is his right to command the servants, if you will, and that he has given commandments and that the commandment is that we repent and be baptized.

So now, what Jacob does is give us this perfect balance that has been lost in some instances where the light of the gospel has been lost and the plan of salvation has become out of balance. But now we have this perfect balance between what Christ does for us and that which he expects us to do for ourselves. And the great principle here is that if you want someone to grow up, if you want them to be all that they should be, you don't do for them what

they can do for themselves. You don't create dependency relationships, in that sense. You let them learn to stand. You learn to let them do.

Well, the gospel embraces that and the heavens don't interfere and do for us what we ought to be doing for ourselves. We don't get our homework done. They don't send an angel to do it for us if we have been sufficiently righteous. We still have to do our own homework. I think that is the way it is. It used to be that way. Here you have it, that beautiful balance. But then to expand that thought further, what about someone who didn't learn, who didn't get taught, that didn't know that. Verse 25: "Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment."

So a just God isn't going to hold you accountable for what you didn't have the opportunity to do. I get accused once in a while of asking a question or two on tests that I didn't teach the answer to. Well, professors are entitled to be a little unjust, but God is not. He will not hold you accountable for what he has not taught you.

So, . . . where there is no law given, there is no punishment, and where there is no punishment, there is no condemnation. And where there is no condemnation, the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given unto them...

This is some marvelous doctrine. Now, sit back and think about it. Make sure you have got it. Let's do it in the form of a couple of questions. What if we had a child who dies before they arrive at the age of accountability? Let's suppose that happens and let's suppose that Christ didn't work out an atoning sacrifice? What becomes of the child? [It is lost because there is no resurrection, so they can't be one with their body and they can't return to the presence of our Heavenly Father.] Right, see how that dramatizes the doctrine of grace. It doesn't matter if you came and lived and did so without sin, had never committed any kind of sin, yet still the plan of salvation requires because you were born into fallen earth and you have a fallen body, and you

have been cut off from the presence of God, you can only be saved by the grace of God.

Or if we want to ask the question, what if—well, let's suppose there was a man other than Christ, obviously one of us, who lived without sin? Could they be saved without Christ? Again, the answer is, no. We are totally dependent upon the grace of Christ, and yet there is a perfect fairness in this and there is that demand also that we do all that we can do on our own for ourselves. The balance of those principles is perfect and the perfection of them stand as a great witness of their truth and the fact that Jacob is a preacher or teacher of truth. The authority of the spirit bears witness that the principles are true.

I am honored, as we all are honored, to add our own testimonies to that, that these principles are indeed true, and of that I would testify to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jacob: Ancient Witness of a Modern Christ (Part 2)

Joseph McConkie

Welcome, its good to meet with you again. In our last class period we were talking about one of the great teachings, particularly of Jacob. That is, the marvelous testimony that he bore of Christ, particularly in relationship to the grace of Christ and the blessings that come to us because of it and then our responsibility because he is both Lord and Master.

This afternoon I would invite you to turn to II Nephi, chapter 6. We are going to take one of the other two great threads that we identified last time of Jacob's teaching—the first being the great testimony of Christ, the second being the promises made to the fathers, if you will. Let's begin in verse 3:

Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, mine anxiety is great for you; and ye yourselves know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world.

So the breadth of his teachings was quite impressive.

And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. [As I think we noted briefly in the last class period, what he will do is quote Isaiah, chapter 51 and the first two verses of 52. Those are chapters that deal with promises that were made to the children of Israel and their redemption in the last days.] And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; [It is important that you remember that. In his prophecies Isaiah was not speaking of the tribe of Judah alone or of the tribe of Ephraim alone, he was speaking to all of the house of Israel. Because of that, what Nephi did and what Jacob is going to do, is, if you turn over the page—] wherefore, they may be likened unto you, [that is, we are going to apply those prophecies that were made to all of the house of Israel to us, because we are a remnant of Israel, and that is what he says] for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, [perhaps not everything, but most] because ye are of the house of Israel.

And so, in verses 6 and 7 that immediately follow, we have an Isaiah quotation:

And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

That is our Isaiah quotation. It comes from Isaiah, chapter 49, verses 22-23. Now, what is interesting is, as far as the Book of Mormon story is concerned, that Nephi quoted the entirety of Isaiah 48 and 49 in his discourse. He gave his own commentary on them. And now he is asking Jacob to also give a commentary on the same verses. This becomes one of these illustrations that the best commentary on scripture is scripture and that most scripture is commentary on scripture. Let me take you back for just a moment and show you what Nephi had to say about these verses. Go back to the last chapter in I Nephi. It is chapter 22.

Nephi has again quoted to his brothers chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah. How he got away with that I don't know. It would be a little hard for you or me to stand up in sacrament meeting and quote two full chapters of Isaiah, and still expect people to be paying attention. But his brothers were, bless their hearts, and when he got through, they had an important question to ask him about what he had read, which indicates that not only did he read it, but they were paying attention. Here's what they say. We will just start with the first verse:

And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?

Do you catch the question? This is a key question that you ask when you are interpreting any scriptural text. Are we to understand this literally, or is it a figurative kind of thing? Is this supposed to be physical and actual or is this some kind of a metaphor? Now the answer you give to that question is obviously going to be very important. It is so important that this is what I call

the grand key of mischief. Anytime you want to get away with anything, this is the first principle that they teach all the devils at the university of hell; that is, they prepare them to go out.

Well, the first principle is they say to be sure to quote plenty of scriptures, but the second is, after you have quoted it, take anything that is supposed to be literal and tell them that it is figurative. Take anything that is figurative and tell them that it is to be literal. That way you are claiming to believe and sustain the scripture, but you have turned the meaning upside down. Very clever little trick. That is why they quickly teach the devils that and they have a lot of fun doing it. Frankly, devils are better at quoting scripture than any of us. In fact, they might have more fun with it. I don't know. They make a real mess out of things.

Well, his brothers ask him that question. What is it? How are we to understand it? Is it physical or is it spiritual? Is it temporal or is it literal? Notice his answer, verse 3:

Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual:

So his answer to is it temporal or spiritual is, yes. It is all of the above, which also means that what you have in Isaiah, and this is almost always the case, is something that has dual meaning. It has a fulfillment that was intended to be temporal and it has another fulfillment that was intended to be spiritual. Illustration, the very text that Jacob just quoted. Notice what Nephi does with it in his commentary. He quotes the text here in verse 6 and then commences commentary on it in verse 7. He says:

And it meaneth that the time cometh that after al the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this; and by them shall our seed be scattered.

And after our seed is scattered, the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

Now, that is to say that there is going to be a literal fulfillment of this. The Gentiles are going to literally scatter our seed. They are literally going to be nursing fathers and mothers. You have some understanding of the literal part of this. The first time you got a pay check at your job and you looked at it and discovered that there were all of these withholdings that had been taken

out of it and you didn't get to take home nearly as much as you had anticipated. Remember your reaction. You said, O isn't that wonderful. I have been able to contribute to other people. I get to be a nursing father and mother. I get to finance this with my own hard earned money. Isn't that wonderful? I am fulfilling prophecy. Do you remember feeling that way and how excited you were to share your hard earned efforts with other people. That was very mundane. That was very temporal. Well, you were doing it. You were contributing to aid scattered Israel, either in your own land or in other lands so that we could support other nations or people who are doing things to expedite the gathering of Israel. So, it is very real. If you don't believe it is real, look at that check stub again, and see. You will be convinced in a hurry that it is real.

But it doesn't end there. In verse 8, he says we are also going to be involved in a marvelous work and then he starts to talk about the marvelous work and the marvelous work is the carrying forth of the gospel. And you have also been involved in that as you have served, for instance, as missionaries. You, in a temporal sense, went from here to there, this nation to that nation. You were able to go because a great Gentile nation gave you a passport and as soon as you arrived in that other nation, your mission president wrote a letter to the US Embassy and notified them that you were there, so that you got all the protection that goes with the flag of the United States and being a citizen. They knew you were there and they looked after you and you had certain protections because of that. But you were there for spiritual purposes in this instance. You were there to teach the gospel. Notice how he explains it here in verse 8:

And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

Now that is the Abraham at covenant, promised Abraham that his descendants would be missionaries. They would go to all nations. They would take the blessings of the gospel to them. Verse 10.

And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that al the kindred of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.

Now, that is figurative language when we say, make bare his arm. What does he mean?

Wherefore the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

So you went forth and you taught baptism. You taught the gospel and were making known that covenants and the gospel.

Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

They shall know that because you have taught them. Now, we are going to this a little faster than maybe we should to let it really distill. But, real quickly, what is taking place is that Nephi has taken this text from Isaiah that talks about us in the last days being nursing fathers and nursing mothers; that is, those of us who are part of a great Gentile nation. And he said that it is going to be fulfilled both temporally and literally and we are involved in both.

The temporal way is where we help them. We help educate them. We help build hospitals for them. We help them establish a national defense so they can protect themselves. More importantly, there is a marvelous work that has to be forth and that is the declaration of the gospel, the making bare of his arm, and that centers in the teaching of the covenants of salvation and of the gospel. In that we start to gather—and this will fit together more tightly as we go back to Jacob, because Nephi has asked Jacob to give commentary on the same text. He is not going to repeat what Nephi said, but develop it in his own way. He is going to be saying in effect the same things, but with a sufficiently different slant that you will get a more complete picture of what is involved.

We are now back in chapter 6 again. We are getting Jacob's commentary on Isaiah's words, verse 8:

And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

That is their substitute for the evening news. They had to use the spirit of revelation, but they now have had confirmed for them that it was a pretty good idea that they go with their father and mother and flee Jerusalem. Verse 9:

Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. . . .

So, they are going to get hauled off into the Babylonian captivity, but the spirit attests that they will return again. There will be a gathering again in Jerusalem.

...And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh;...

Again, we are back into marvelous Messianic prophecy. Jacob talks with great plainness. You will find no plainness of language to match this in the Old Testament.

...and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, [he prophecies the crucifixion of Christ] according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

So, his source, an angel. A pretty good source as these kind of things go.

And after they have hardened their hearts, and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel [that is after they have rejected Christ and his mortal ministry] behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

You are familiar, I think with the history that attests to those events that finally end when Titus destroys the city of Jerusalem.

Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

Now, notice what is happening. The doctrine is that in righteousness the Lord's people gather. Now, they gather temporally or spiritually. Yes. Both. First, spiritually. The gathering is always first spiritual. We gather around the principles of truth. We gather to Christ. We become one with him in covenant. We take upon ourselves his name, symbolically representing the fact that we are a part of the family. We have emotionally, spiritually, mentally gathered to be one with him. We are in the process of learning to think the way he thinks. To feel the way he feels. To act the way he acts. To teach the way he would teach. To do what he would do. That is all part of gathering in a spiritual sense.

In many instances that gathering is also literal. It is physical. We go from this point to that point, that we can be together. Most often, it is for the purpose of building temples or that type thing, to facilitate the system of covenants and worship.

Now when Israel gets scattered—what causes Israel to get scattered? Exactly the opposite of what caused them to gather. That is, when we dishonor the name we took upon ourselves in the waters of baptism, when we start to embarrass the family of which we are supposed to be a part, by our behavior. When we cease to obey Christ or when we reject Christ, the Holy One of Israel, when our actions cease to imitate his and we cease to be holy, then emotionally and spiritually we are starting to divide. That will be followed by a physical scattering. It is at that point the Lord allows the enemies to come in and scourge and to haul you off into captivity.

So we go off into captivity. How long are we going to remain in captivity? Until we are gathered. When are we gathered? Look again in verse 11 at the end: when. What is the key to the gathering? "When they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered again to the lands of their inheritance." That is to say, the gathering is always first spiritual. It is always first to Christ and then, as is necessary and appropriate, we will be directed by his prophets to gather to various lands of inheritance. So, there is a system and you see it. He is going to teach it repetitiously here. Let's pick up the story in verse 12:

And blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet...

That would be Isaiah. Little footnote here, we do Isaiah an honor here. We refer to him not as a prophet, but as THE prophet. My father told me once about being in a meeting once where someone got up and testified that Harold B. Lee was THE prophet. Harold B. Lee got up and said, "No, no. I am not THE prophet, I am a prophet. For our dispensation, Joseph Smith is THE prophet. When we read this idea of THE prophet, we are honoring a prophet and talking in terms of a prophet's prophet. I think in the Book of Mormon, when you see THE prophet, it is either going to be Isaiah or Zenos—the great prophets that everyone quoted. In our dispensation, obviously it is Joseph Smith. We echo what he taught. Notice again:

...has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God

will fulfill his covenants unto his children, and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

That verse is a little unusual because again we have to ask the question, temporal or spiritual, when we talk about "they shall be saved." Can you be saved simply by not uniting yourself with the great and abominable? Well, yes, because you won't be destroyed, but not in a spiritual sense. Verse 13:

Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah.

And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them;...

So, at the time of Lehi, they were scattered. They were gathered again and were in a gathered state when Christ came among them. They rejected Christ again, a second time. They got scattered. The promise is that they will be gathered yet again. We haven't given up hope. We are going to gather them yet again. This really becomes the key to understanding the allegory in Jacob 5. So he is going to set himself again the second time to recover them.

...wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies; [and note again] when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will be destroyed that believe in him.

Now, the key to this whole concept of gathering is always that it must be, first, spiritual, and then, temporal. It must always be first to him, and then it is temporal.

And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodshed, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.

So, they are going to find out the hard way. And then what he does here is to quote the two verses that immediately follow our text about nursing fathers and nursing mothers and licking up dust of the feet from the Book of Isaiah.

Question: This talks about them believing in the Messiah. Does this mean that they will believe in him as the Messiah or only believe in a Messiah and it happens to be Christ?

I think that when we put together all the things Jacob has to say on it and we add to it all the rest of the Book of Mormon prophets have to say on it, it becomes very very clear, that they will believe in Jesus, the Christ, as their Redeemer and Savior, as the man they take upon themselves in the waters of

baptism. In fact, let me give you the classic illustration. He is starting to quote Isaiah again here. He quotes Isaiah chapters 51 and 52, and then when you get over to chapter 9, where we were in our last class period.

We were learning there about the role of Christ as the source of mercy and grace, but when we started reading that we started in the fourth verse. Now I will invite you to read the first two verses, which are the immediate link between his Isaiah chapters. This will, in part, constitute an answer to your question.

And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with al the house of Israel—

Again, remember. I am likening this unto you, but they were originally made to everybody who was a part of the house of Israel.

That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God;...

Now, that kind of catches it, doesn't it?

...when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.

So, when we talk about their accepting Christ, we mean, their being restored to the true church. That language is pretty plain. We have stumbled over that kind of thing sometimes because of that figurative or literal issue. But when we mean true church and true fold, we have focused in real sharply. We know what he is talking about. This is, I think Nephi's language was the true point of his doctrine. To really come to know the truth about who Christ is.

Now you can step back and put this in a bigger picture. Remember where the story starts? In the sacred grove the first thing that takes place is, "Joseph, This is my Beloved Son. Hear him." The first thing we do is introduce Christ. We introduce him as the Beloved Son. We see them there as separate and distinct. We see them as having body and parts. We see them and hear them as having speech. Everything that is taking place is to help define all of the concepts of Christ out there in the traditional Christian world. We are in the light of heaven now. We are surrounded by darkness, but we are in the light of heaven and remarkable things are happening.

Then we get this commentary on the creeds of men. What are the purposes of the creeds? To describe the nature of God. And what do we say of them?

They are all corrupt and an abomination in my sight. We are going to restore the knowledge of the truth of Christ to you. We are going to restore the priesthood to you. We are going to gather people to the true church.

Now, leave chapter 6 and come with me over to chapter 10. Here Jacob is going to return to this same subject. In fact, notice the little chapter preface.

Jews shall crucify their God—They shall be scattered until they begin to believe him—

Now, note, verse 1:

And now I, Jacob, speak unto you again, my beloved brethren, concerning this righteous branch of which I have spoken.

For behold, the promises which we have obtained are promises unto us according to the flesh; wherefore, as it has been shown unto me that many of our children shall perish in the flesh because of unbelief, nevertheless, God will be merciful unto many; and our children shall be restored, that they may come [and notice why they are being restored] to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer.

Now, he is going to develop that, but in the process, he gives us again a very explicit Messianic prophecy. Verse 3: In fact to the extent that it is a little uncomfortable.

Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.

So, they have rejected the Holy One of Israel, their Savior. Now note what is going to happen. You can predict it. You know the pattern. You could write it yourself.

For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God.

But because of priest crafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.

Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all the nations.

You see, the gathering, the land of inheritance, is just a tangible symbol of the covenant. You can get down and sift the soil in your hand. This is my land. This is the symbol of my covenant. Now the covenant and promise is an everlasting covenant. We are serious about that. When the Lord said to Abraham I am going to give you this land as an everlasting covenant, we learn

again from section 88, this earth in its celestial form will be the Celestial kingdom and we will actually lay claim to that turf, if you will. So it is a symbol that this land and eternal rewards are ours if we keep our covenants. So if we break the covenant, we lose the symbol. We lose the land. We get scattered. This is what is taking place here. Verse 7:

But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance.

Again, there is the pattern. First spiritual, then physical. Now, you can put this in the context of things that you have witnessed. You may have gone to some kind of pizzazzy last day's fireside, where the speaker told you how close we were to the final winding up scene and that Christ was about to come. This kind of thing has to increase between now and the year 2000. There will be a lot of wacko things happen between now and then. There will be some great garage sales on New Year's Eve 1999. Everybody will be expecting Christ to be there the next morning. Well, what we are saying here is, to be a little careful about what people are telling you about how close we are.

You can say, look, there is the nation of Israel, and we have 4,000,000 Jews that are gathered there, but we have to say, that according to Book of Mormon prophets, the gathering must first be to Christ—to the waters of Judah, to the taking upon themselves his name. What we have there is a political gathering, and though we could present a very convincing case, and I would feel comfortable with it. It could be a precursor, it is to the restoration what the reformation was. It is not, however, the fulfillment of what we are reading. If you go over to the semester abroad, and study there at the center, you go over with the understanding that under no circumstances do you bear your testimony, answer questions, or teach anything about the gospel to people in that land. That is the condition we are there on, isn't it. You may have been there or talked to students that have been. The tabernacle choir goes over. We are honored to be there, we love to go, and we are well received, but they sit down and go through the music. They tell them what they can sing and what they can't, and references to Jesus Christ are out. We don't sing those hymns.

Again, what has taken place to this point is political, temporal, physical. We are telling a story that is first spiritual. It is first to Christ, then to lands of inheritance. Verse 8.

And it shall come to pass that they shall be gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth; and the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance.

That is a flashback again, to our key text that nursing fathers and nursing mothers—

Yea, the kings of the Gentiles shall be nursing fathers unto them and their queens shall become nursing mothers; wherefore, the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute?

But behold this land [and we are talking about the Americas] said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance [as we apply this now to the descendants of Lehi] and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land.

And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, ...

And maybe we need to stop for just a moment and define Gentiles. The Book of Mormon frustrates a lot of readers there, because on one hand, it says, for instance in II Ne, chapter 3, we have this marvelous prophecy that initially came from Joseph of Egypt, where he talked about the choice seer of the latter days and said it would be his descendant. He said he would be like unto me. That he would be the man who would bring forth the Book of Mormon, and yet on the other hand, for instance in the preface of the Book of Mormon, and in other places, we say that the Book of Mormon will come forth at the hand of a Gentile.

So on one hand, we say its going to come forth from a direct literal descendant of Joseph of Egypt, obviously of the house of Israel. On the other hand, we are saying it will come forth by a Gentile. And it says that the Gentiles will carry this message to the ends of the earth, but we also read that they must be the descendants of Abraham because the promise was made to Abraham that it would be his seed that did it. Sometimes that has our heads spinning and confuses us.

Well, when we use the word Gentile from the perspective of the Book of Mormon writer we are just talking about those who are not Jewish nationals. We are saying that you happen to be a citizen of a great Gentile nation. That isn't as if you would go to Washington and find a prophet presiding over congress and legislation coming by way of revelation. There is something quite different than that happening back there, and when a Book of Mormon prophet looked down through the corridors of time and saw your nation, he

said, Yes, that is Gentile. That has no prophet at the head and its constitution did not come by revelation. So you are citizens of a Gentile nation. Joseph Smith was a citizen of a Gentile nation, but your patriarchal blessing declares you to be of Israel, so you have that dual citizenship. The great Gentile nation give you the passport, that is the temporal part. The endowment of the spirit of the Lord and by birth, you are of Israel, and that is the spiritual part. So, we combine those two to go forth. Verse 11:

And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles [but many of those Gentiles will be you and your family, and they are pure blooded Israelites so declared in your patriarchal blessings] and there shall be no kings upon the land [monarchies don't work well for religious freedom] who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.

And I will fortify this land against all other nations. [I have to preserve this isle of the sea, so there can be freedom of religion.]

And he that fighteth against Zion [that is, he who fights against my people] shall perish, saith God.

For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their kind, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words.

Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, [This is literal, I must gather them.] I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations.

Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God.

For I will fulfill my promises which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh—

So you have the tenth article of faith and Joseph Smith says, "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel." Now, literal in the sense that it is going to be spiritual. We are going to teach them the gospel and give them both a literal and spiritual baptism, but literal in the sense that there is going to be marching back to the lands of inheritance.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, thus saith our God: I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles; [Nephi talked a lot about that, about particularly in his dream, he saw the people would come from Europe and would scatter the Lamanites.] nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel.

Again, that is the nursing father and nursing mother.

Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God.

I don't know if I know entirely what that is supposed to mean, when we say all the men thereon shall worship me. I would think in the full sense of the word that would have to be millennium and that would be everlasting possession, because obviously that isn't entirely the case today. But, concluding his testimony:

And now, my beloved brethren seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea.

It is interesting that, by definition, he calls this great continent an island.

But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

For behold, the Lord God has led away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also.

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.

Well, there is the big picture then. We have had Jacob teach it to us twice—teach us the doctrine of scattering, teach us the doctrine of gathering. Now, that gives greater meaning when we understand that the doctrine of gathering is spiritual, first to Christ. Then that gives greater meaning to what he has taught us or restored to us a more complete and pure understanding of the mission of Christ. Remember when we began we talked about his two great messages were the same two threads that would weave themselves all the way through the Book of Mormon and bind it together. The messages bind together, too, as they weave through, because the knowledge of Christ and the gathering are inseparable.

So, you have this marvelous book. and Jacob is the personification of a Book of Mormon prophet, because his major doctrines are its major doctrines.

His testimony echoes and reflects the testimony of the whole book. Israel got scattered because she rejected Christ, but don't have your head hanging down. Cheer up. Lift up your head. We have this great promise of consolation. How it has likened these scriptures unto us just as Israel did that our people are going to do that. But in the last days there is going to be this marvelous gathering both of all the house of Israel and both of our family and both instances the system will be the same, to Christ, to the covenants of salvation and then it is necessary to lands of inheritance. It all centers first in getting the truth about who Jesus Christ is, that he is actually and literally the Son of God, that we are saved by his grace, that we must be obedient to his commandments.

He really does a beautiful job of weaving that all together. He has some really interesting things to say about that. Let me take you back where we were in the last class period. Jacob, chapter 4 and show you some challenging things that he says as he amplifies this theme. Notice, for instance, verse 14:

But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, [That is a pretty good summary statement of the Old Testament.] and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it, God hath done it, that they may stumble.

Now, wrestle with that for a moment. This is an interesting concept. People stumble—they are blessed with the ability to stumble because they desired it. How did they stumble? They made it difficult. They made it hard. They took away the plainness. Can you figure out what's happening here? There's a lot of really interesting things here. Go back for just a moment to verse 8. It helps unlock what is taking place here.

Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.

Now, historically what happened was, for instance, around that word mystery. If you took the occasion to read every reference in the scriptures to the word mystery, you would discover that it is used in one of two ways—either to give description to those things that can only be known by

revelation, or it is used to be descriptive of those things that can only be known through participation in sacred ritual or rite. In historical Christianity, what happened was they decided they would prefer to have the word mean something else. They would like it to be like a murder mystery, a who done it, where nobody gets to know who did it. That is, they totally changed the meaning of the word and they described God as a transcendent being, meaning someone who transcends your ability to comprehend. He is the ultimate mystery. He is so complex and so far beyond your ability to understand, he is described as a mystery. They don't want plainness. They don't want father to mean father and son to be son and begotten to mean begotten. They want to have this be something that is mysterious so that a fellow by the name of Athenacious who is the great power behind the great creed says where the doctrine of the trinity is concerned, reason must bow to the mystery. It is incomprehensible. That is the beauty of it, you can't comprehend it.

Now, notice what is taking place and how perfectly it fits this verse. It is a repeat of the cycle. The Jews did exactly the same thing. They just did it earlier. When we make everything a mystery so that it is incomprehensible, as long as no one can really comprehend, everybody can do their own thing. So you are doing something that is really wacko. But who can be critical? Maybe the answer is in being wacko. And the only thing that would ruin this game for everybody is if someone came on the scene and said, Hey look! It is not an indecipherable incomprehensible mystery. You can ask of God and he will speak and the answers are plain and precious. God does speak. There is that privilege we have to communicate with him. He does answer prayers. We can know what to do and what the truths of salvation are in plainness. As soon as somebody comes on the scene and puts it back in our grasp and makes it plain and understandable, they have ruined the game for everybody else who wanted to think it was different strokes for different folks. No longer can you do your own thing. Now you have to do God's thing. Now repentance comes back. Commandments come back. Obedience comes back. Bowing the knee comes back. Well, you could be the skunk at the party here. You are going to ruin the game for everybody. Try to anticipate what the reaction to this book is going to be.

It isn't too hard to figure out that statements like this and a message like this that mark out a clear path, establish again a prophetic voice, and tell us

right and wrong, put us in communication with God again—the theme of it being from beginning to end to ask God, I think you can guess it won't be too well received. You can see why. Isn't it interesting the way that they erred anciently and you have this cycle of events that happened with the Jews. It is repeated in the early history of traditional Christianity, where we describe the apostasy as taking place. What took place? Here's the pattern.

They despised the words of plainness. What we did is turn everything upside down. We played that figurative versus literal game. Words don't mean what they say or what is supposed to be literal we make figurative. What is figurative we make literal. They despised the words of plainness and killed the prophets and sought for things that they could not understand. Now, God has given you agency. If you really want to make a mess of things, he will bless you with the opportunity to make a mess of things. So we read: "Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came from looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall. For God hath taken away his plainness from them and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand." Why? Because they desired it. And because they desired it, God hath done it that they may stumble.

Now, the reverse of that has to be true. If you and I have a hunger and thirst and desire for that which is plain and precious, we can have it. It will be restored to us. That is what the Book of Mormon is. And it's marvelous when we get in there and start to read it and start to feel it, how all of these parts of the story fit together. Again, we see those cycles of history and we can see where we are in that cycle. We can see the dangers that beset us. But we can also see the marvelous blessings that are ours if we can catch the spirit of it. We can follow the Savior and be true to that name that we have taken upon us. Well, that is what it is all about. That is what we are trying to do. That is our testimony—that God has spoken. He speaks to us so eloquently through prophets like Jacob. He speaks with equal eloquence through modern day prophets. He speaks also to us personally, through the Holy Ghost, through witnesses—the message is the same in these plain and simple and precious truths a marvelous story unfolds and the claim to marvelous blessings becomes ours.

Now, there is something good and sweet and pure about it. My testimony to you once again is that it is true. I bear you that testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.