

“Free to Choose Liberty and Eternal Life”

2 Nephi 1– 2

Scripture Summary:

Lehi prophesies of a land of liberty—His seed shall be scattered and smitten if they reject the Holy One of Israel—He exhorts his sons to put on the arm or of righteousness.

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

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

Life of Lehi – a Type and Symbol of the Plan of Salvation: The long journey from Israel to the new promised land is like our mortal journey from pre life to afterlife. The dialogue, prayer and respect shared before Lehi’s death is very typical in Biblical and Jewish tradition. Consider how many Prophet-fathers gathered their families, taught and blessed them before their mortality ended. Abraham blessing Jacob (instead of Esau),

Jacob blessing Joseph, Joseph blessing his sons and Moses transferring his authority to Joshua are just a few examples.

Transfer of Authority: “Numbers which describes Moses' transfer of his authority to Joshua prior to his death. Joshua is told by God, through Moses, that in his capacity as leader of the Israelites, ‘he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord.’ “In literary tradition the Jewish People is one large family descended from Jacob, who was given the name ‘Israel’ in honor of his . . . struggle with the angel of God. In biblical times the father was head of the family . . . and owner of its property; he was its chief authority and was expected to show love and mercy to his family. His blessing carried legal weight in the distribution of family wealth and privilege.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Respect Given to the Dying and the Dead: “. . . nothing at all may be done to disturb or anger a dying person. All his wishes must be fulfilled even after he dies . . . everything possible must be done to prolong his life even if there is only a slight chance of it succeeding. For this purpose all the prohibitions of Jewish law, such as working on the Sabbath, for example, are suspended.” “An ancient tradition is to light a candle in the presence of a person nearing his end (known in Hebrew as a *goses*) to symbolize the flickering of the human soul and it is considered to be a great act of piety to stay with the *goses* to reassure him and be present at the departure of his soul. All in all, Judaism does not see death as something to be terrified of; it must be accepted because it is inevitable and everything must be done to enable the dying man to meet his death calmly.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Last Instructions – a Jewish Custom: “Before his death Jacob made Joseph swear to bury him in the ancestral vault in Hebron. After blessing his sons and grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and predicting the ultimate return to Canaan, Jacob bestowed on Joseph a parting gift . . .” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) Even though the Jews at Masada were religiously incorrect, the zealot leader, Eliezar ben Yair, made a “before death speech” in keeping with Jewish culture. Consider also the numerous attempts to teach the Egyptians preceding the ultimate firstborn deaths and subsequent death in the Red Sea. Likewise, the instruction Jesus gave his closest associates, the Twelve, at the “Last Supper” preceded His inevitable death the next day.

Last Words – a Prayer: A religious Jew is taught – what will become a natural instinctive exercise – that his or her last words before death are a prayer. “The *Shema* is the first prayer taught to a Jewish child; it is the last prayer recited by a religious person before death; it has become the prayer which captures and expresses the beliefs and goals of the Jewish religion.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Father Lehi's Last Instructions: As Father Lehi reviews the Plan of Salvation, he teaches about the atonement. Two words are emphasized, Justice and Mercy. In Judaism, "Elohim" stands for justice and "YHWH" (Jehovah - I Am) stands for mercy. "The exercise of mercy is an obligation for all Jews. By this it is meant that they must act with compassion and forgiveness towards all mankind, and perform deeds of charity and kindness. This quality is an essential characteristic of God who is known as Rahum ('Merciful') and, in accordance with the tradition which sets as man's goal the imitation of God: 'As He is merciful, so be you merciful.' Just as God is bound by His covenant of mercy with His people, so is the Jew bound by specific commandments to act mercifully to the oppressed, the alien, the orphan, the widow, and indeed, every living creature." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

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

In Hebrew, "Going Back" Also Means to Repent: Lehi well understands the principles of "going back." He takes his family "back" to the creation. In Judaism, some of the "learning of the Fathers" has been lost. There is, however, an interesting Jewish creation tradition. "In their search for lessons on man's place in God's universe, the rabbis discussed at great length the biblical account of the creation of Adam, which is outlined above. Thus, for example, the Midrash observes that each newly created form of life ruled over what preceded it in the order of creation. Adam and Eve were thus created last in order that they should rule over all creation, and in order that they should be able to enter a banqueting hall that was waiting ready for them. In the words of the Midrash, 'The matter may be likened to an emperor's building a palace, consecrating it, preparing the feast, and only then inviting the guests.' On the other hand, the rabbis taught that Adam was created last, so that if he should become conceited, he could be told: 'The gnat was created before you.'" (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

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

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