

1 Nephi 22: Nephi on the Future of Israel

From time to time I have reflected on the tone of some of the writings of Isaiah or Ezekiel, as opposed to what I perceive to be the tone of the Book of Mormon. About the best way to characterize what I see is that the Old Testament prophets seem to have a very fiery, almost apocalyptic manner of address, where the Book of Mormon prophets seemed to present things in more moderate terms. This chapter of 1 Nephi, along with the words of Abinidi, seemed to me to be the exceptions in the Book of Mormon. So it may be worth noting that the words of Christ to the Nephites are also in the more “apocalyptic” style. Whatever my initial reaction to these things may be, they are obviously still the voice of the Lord, and should be heeded.

This sermon was directed to Laman and Lemuel; who, at least for the moment, were in a fairly teachable frame of mind. Nephi had read to them from the book of Isaiah, and Laman and Lemuel had questions about what they had heard. Specifically, they wanted to know if the revelations had to do with temporal or spiritual realities.

Nephi responds by saying that the prophecies pertain to both areas – spiritual and temporal. He describes how many of the Israelites had already been scattered (referring to the ten tribes) and says that this prophecy says that the remainder of the Israelites will soon also be scattered.

The cause of the scattering of Israel is, according to Nephi, the old familiar story – because they harden their hearts against their God. Nonetheless, Nephi goes on to emphasize that the Lord will still look over Israel, even after their transgressions. Nephi foresees that the Lord will use the Gentiles to care for Israel. In particular, Nephi mentions a mighty Gentile nation on the Americas which scatter Israel.

It is instructive to pause here and consider this prophecy. Many claim that any prophecy is not of divine origin, because we only seem to get specifics about events that are in the past. However, even if we ignore the fact that Nephi wrote these words hundreds of years in the past, consider the time when Joseph Smith brought them to light. The United States, which is a candidate for the mighty Gentile nation, was not at the time of his writing a mighty nation. In the late 1820's the United States was still a fairly new and untried nation – it did not aspire to greatness until many years after that time. The scattering of the American Indians by the United States, which fits this prophecy very well, took place in the next few decades after this prophecy was

translated.

Why is the United States seen as a Gentile nation? Although the blood of Israel was well represented in the individuals who founded this country, the country itself is based on secular grounds, and so in the eyes of the ancient prophets it is a secular, or Gentile, country.

The marvelous work and a wonder which the Lord would bring to pass through the Gentiles would benefit not only the house of Israel, but also the Gentiles themselves, which Nephi saw as a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Abraham. This work, Nephi said, would require a great demonstration of the Lord's power, and would result in a restoration of the covenants to the house of Israel. This restoration would lead the Israelites to believe in Jesus Christ as their redeemer, so that they could worship in truth.

Subsequently the great and abominable church will begin to suffer the wrath of God, which is the natural consequence of fighting against the people of God. With what should we associate the great and abominable church? I am well familiar with the comparisons to a predominant modern-day church, and also with arguments that Communism is the correct organization. However, I do not think that the great and abominable church is to be identified with a formal human organization; rather, I think it refers to any person or group that fights against the work of God. By that definition, even members of the Lord's church are not exempted from membership in the great and abominable church, unless they are careful to obey the word of the Lord.

Nephi foresees the destructions that will come upon the world in the latter days, but emphasizes that the righteous need not fear, for the Lord will protect them by any means necessary, even by fire. The savior will be sent as a fulfillment of Moses' prophecy, and he will be the Lord's instrument to protect his people. Over and over Nephi points out that obedience is the key to receiving the Lord's protection.

In Verse 26 Nephi makes a very interesting observation:

And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.

The secret to binding Satan and to allowing Christ to reign is the

righteousness which exists in the hearts of the people. Neither Christ nor Satan has more power than that which we give them.

Nephi concludes the sermon with the explanation that obedience is the key to the Lord's protection. Anyone, whether of the house of Israel or of the Gentiles, is accepted of the Lord only on conditions of repentance. The message was directly to Laman and Lemuel, but it should resonate with every reader of this sermon.