

Jacob 1—Prophetic and Priesthood Responsibility

We owe much to faithful Jacob. He and his direct posterity preserved for us a crucial portion of the Book of Mormon, the Small Plates of Nephi (1 Nephi – Omni), which include all of the key doctrines and principles of the Gospel essential for happiness in this life and eternal life in the hereafter. In Jacob's own words he describes his zeal to teach and record the truth for his people and posterity's sake.

[Nephi] gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious...and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people. (1:2-4)

Jacob truly laid up treasures in heaven by making the treasures of the Gospel accessible to all. Of all the verses of scripture which speak of faithful Jacob, the one that I believe to be most important for understanding his drive for righteousness is the following:

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (1:19)

If we read Jacob's sermons, writings, scriptural quotations and scriptural interpretations with this verse in mind our hearts will be enlightened to feel his fervent testimony and commitment to fulfilling his priesthood responsibility to share the message of truth. Perhaps our own testimonies will grow all the brighter as we observe and hear the ways that Jacob sought to "magnify [his] office unto the Lord." Let us look carefully again at this defining verse for Jacob and learn how we might seek the kingdom of God, following Jacob's example.

One key aspect of Jacob's faithfulness was his commitment to *magnify his God given responsibilities*. We will see more of this when we read his two chapter sermon in Jacob 2-3. Jacob understood that part of magnifying his office unto God meant he was responsible for the sins and wickedness of his people, *unless* he taught them the truth. In language that we seldom use today Jacob declared that the blood and sins of his generation would be upon his garments if he did not fulfill his responsibilities with faithfulness. Is it really true that one person could be held accountable for another's misdeeds? Must one suffer because of the wrongs of another? Will the Lord withhold salvation from a soul because his brother did evil? How can we believe such doctrine? Do not the scriptures verify that "We believe that men will be punished *for their own sins*" (Articles of Faith 2, emphasis added)?

It is true that as agents unto ourselves, we are responsible for our own thoughts, words, and deeds. Yet, those upon whom the Lord has placed the heavy and solemn mantel of authority *must* preach the truth so that each agent (all of us) can be put in a state of full choice between truth and error. We are only responsible for our own sins insofar as we have truth, light, and knowledge about the gospel; those who sin in "ignorance" will not be held to such a high standard as those who sin against the light. But before we begin desiring such ignorance to avoid the responsibility of living within the light, let us remember that those who truly are ignorant of the gospel cannot partake freely and fully of the waters of life. The doors of salvation are shut unto them...until the voice of gospel gladness is spoken in their ears.

Returning again to the original question, how can one person be responsible for another's sins? Consider this. If the tools of salvation are in the hands of one who does not share with others, how can that tool-bearer-of-salvation justifiably avoid the burden of responsibility for those who fall ignorantly? He cannot. In spiritual terms, the blood

of transgression is placed upon the person who had the light and knowledge to share with others but withheld it from them.

Why does Jacob, and other prophets, use the metaphor of blood? Blood has always been a symbol of responsibility. Thus to say that the blood of another's sins is upon your garments, is to say that you are responsible for the wrongs and evils committed by another because you failed to warn them with the principles of truth. Hence, by lifting the warning voice of salvation through faith and repentance, one is cleansed through Christ's atonement of the staining blood of another's sins.

A similar concept is taught in the New Testament book of James: "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

Similarly we hear the promise in the Doctrine & Covenants 62:3: "Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you."

Ultimately, and significantly, only those with pure garments are invited into the kingdom of God.

Though he was reluctant to have to preach such stern admonitions to his people, Jacob well understood this principle—that God promises spiritual cleansing to those who preach the truth. Not only are the stains of others removed from one's garments but so are one's own stains removed through the blood of Christ. And miraculously, we must stain our garments with the pure blood of Jesus Christ in order that the blood on our garments be purged and removed.

Jacob longed to share the healing and consoling words to the pure and the innocent, to lift up the hearts of those who hung down. But understanding his responsibility to make the truth known to his people, he did not shrink from his duty, though it weighed him down with desire and anxiety for the welfare of their souls. In 2:4, Jacob confessed that the people had kept the commandments that he had delivered unto them. He was free of the responsibility of their guilt. And those who had kept the commands were also free from blood stained garments. But the Lord had spoken again unto Jacob (1:16-17), requesting that he warn the people of new forms of sin that were besieging their spirits: pride and immorality. If Jacob did not continue to heed the voice of the Lord, warning his people as directed, telling them the reality of truths and the consequences of sins, then he would be spotted with responsibility. It was a heavy and serious responsibility that Jacob bore. We see in his writings that he felt the weight of his calling:

Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi. (1:7-8)

Jacob 2—Sermon against Pride and Sexual Immorality

Jacob commenced his sermon explaining the purposes for preaching to the people: to fulfill his responsibility to God, to rid his garments of the sins of the people, and to preach the word of God (vs. 2). We hear Jacob's anguished voice having to preach so sternly in the presences of the tender, delicate, and chaste in the audience (2:6-9). In particular, the imagery of verse 9 is evocative: "dagger," "wound," and "pierce," contrast with "healing," "consoling," and "delicate." Again, the theme of blood and sins is repeated, albeit with different terminology. Jacob used the word "wound" five times in reference to those delicate and tender souls who had suffered because of the sins of others. These tender individuals had come to the temple for healing and

consolation, but Jacob lamented that his strong words against sin would be like placing daggers to enlarge the wounds of their souls.

Such stark language of death and dying makes us wonder what manner of terrible wickedness existed. The Nephite atrocities were no different than our own day—pride and sexual immorality. Let us listen to Jacob's words and hear them apply to our own day:

Pride

This land...is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, [it] doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts. (2:12-13)

How detestable it would be to use the gifts and riches of God to hurt, oppress, and persecute others, especially those who have not. What wickedness it would be that if instead of supporting the needy with our riches, we turn and persecute them with the very tools of their deliverance God has given us.

Jacob pleaded with his people: seek ye for the kingdom of God before ye seek for riches (2:18); do not let pride destroy your souls (2:16); do not think yourselves better than others because you have more abundantly (2:13-14); what greater abomination could exist than to persecute another because you have and they do not (2:20-21); the purpose of this life is to glorify God not to seek for riches (2:21). And these riches could be any form of wealth such as education, learning, power, prestige, accolades, titles, position, money, shelter, opportunities, freedoms, etc.

But Jacob's blistering words did not end there. He spoke of grosser (or greater) crimes that his people were committing. Now, before we discuss these greater crimes we must see how the Nephites justified themselves in their wickedness (and we should give the benefit of the doubt that some were acting in ignorance, hence the need for Jacob to teach). Like us, the Nephites had access to scriptures. But they used the scriptures to justify their unrighteous lifestyle and actions. We should pause for self-inventory. Do we ever justify ourselves because of the traditions of our fathers/mothers or because of things written in the scriptures? Just because scriptures record that a prophet was burned at the stake for preaching Jesus Christ, is no justification for us to follow suit. Obviously we must not imitate every word of scripture that we read perchance we find ourselves practicing wickedness.

Sexual Immorality

The grosser sins of the Nephites that Jacob deplored were those of sexual immorality, specifically infidelity in the marriage relationship. The Nephite men had wounded the souls of their wives and destroyed the confidence of their children because of their bad examples in seeking after wives and concubines outside the bonds of sacred marriage, just as David and Solomon of the Bible had done. The Lord has spoken plainly:

There shall not any man among you have save it be one wife.... I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women.... [T]his people shall keep my commandments [of covenant fidelity] or cursed be the land for their sakes. (2:27-29)

Jacob 3—Words to the Pure and “Filthy”

Having preached the strict word that caused wounds to be enlarged, Jacob turned to healing:

But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart.... O all ye that are pure in heart, look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith.... [L]ift up your heads

and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever. (3:1-2)

What is significant are the promises to the pure in heart who look unto God:

Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8);

But blessed are the poor who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs (D&C 56:18);

Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God (D&C 97:16).

On the opposite spectrum are those who have dark hearts, who are spiritually filthy—filthy because of sin and wickedness. Jacob addressed them again as well. He told them to repent of the false notion that they are somehow more righteous than those they judge to be “physically filthy,” as if physical appearance was the judge of spiritual fitness:

Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against [the Lamanites who practice marital fidelity], because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers. (3:9)

Jacob closed his sermon with a rousing call of resurrection from deep spiritual sleep.

Jacob 4—Knowing and Truth

Ever vigilant in his calling, Jacob opened this new chapter by again citing his responsibility in the ministry. This falls into the pattern established by the thesis statement of Jacob 1:19, “And we did magnify our office unto the Lord...laboring with our might.” Chapter 4 is full of Jacob’s testimony of Christ and the everlasting atonement. But it is more than that. It is an exposition on knowing and truth. Without explicitly saying so, Jacob made bold statements to answer such questions as, “What is truth?” and “How do we know the truth?” “How is truth preserved, transmitted, and conveyed?” Just consider some of the rich vocabulary and phrases culled from the verses of this chapter. Ask yourself if they do not lend answer to the questions just posed (whether in the negative or affirmative):

Word or Phrase	Verse
Ministered in word	1
We know	1
We write records	1
Some records perish & vanish	2
Knowledge	2
Receive	3
Look	3
Learn	3
We have written	4

Word or Phrase	Verse
They may know	4
We knew	4
Believed in Christ	5
Search	6
Revelation	6
Spirit of prophecy	6
Hope	6
Faith unshaken	6
God showeth us	7
By his grace and condescensions we know	7
His mysteries are unsearchable	8
Impossible to find out all his ways	8
No man knoweth his ways but by revelation	8
Despise not revelations	8
Take counsel from the Lord	10
He counsels in wisdom	10
Be reconciled to God	11
Attain a perfect knowledge of Christ	12
Attain knowledge of the resurrection and the world to come	12
Prophesy to the understanding of men	13
Spirit speaks the truth	13
Spirit does not lie	13
Truth = things are they are, as they will be	13
Truth is manifested plainly	13
We are witnesses	13
Prophets of old are witnesses	13
Stiffneckedness of Jews	14
Despised the words of plainness	14
Killed the prophets	14
Sought for things they could not understand	14
Blindness	14
Looking beyond the mark (brought blindness)	14
God took away plainness	14
God gave them things they could not understand	14
We receive what we desire	14
Led by Spirit of prophesying	15

Word or Phrase	Verse
Perceive by the workings of the spirit	15
Jews will reject the stone of safe foundation	15
I will unfold this mystery	18

If we seek truth and knowledge there is one sure way to receive it—revelation! “No man knoweth of [God’s] ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God” (4:8). If we despise the revelations of God then we are cut off from all knowledge of God. No amount of thinking or reasoning will reveal God to us. We cannot discover God through thinking. No, he must reveal himself unto us and we must open our hearts to receive. If not, we are in utter darkness concerning the points of truth that lead to eternal happiness and salvation.

And God has sent us revelation! There are prophets in our midst today engaging in the cleansing work of preaching truth. We too may know as surely as they, by the spirit of prophecy, that these things are true. And when we do, our garments will be cleansed in Christ as we press forward in faith, hope, and charity making these great things known unto the inhabitants of the earth (2 Nephi 2:8).

May we follow the ways of knowing that lead to eternal truth.