

Jesus Christ, the Lamb Slain from the Foundation of the World

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There is a Biblical statement related to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that is an enigma to many Christians. They have not understood the mystery of Revelation 13:7-8 of both the King James Bible and the Inspired Version. Here, the prophet declares that all the people of the earth shall worship Satan "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." They identify the Lamb as Jesus Christ, but how the sacrifice of our Lord could reach back into time and be effective before the time of His birth and death, they have not understood. Many deny that it could possibly be, and condemn The Book of Mormon for its testimony that its people trusted Jesus Christ for their salvation long before His death on the cross.

Although The Book of Mormon never uses the term "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," it explains the principle so clearly that none question its meaning or its truthfulness. As Nephi prophesied in 2 Nephi 2:20-21 (RLDS) [2 Nephi 3:12 LDS], that which is written in The Book of Mormon and that which is written in the Holy Bible will "grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines, and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace..."

There are many references in The Book of Mormon to the way that has been "prepared from the foundation of the world." Mosiah 2:10-11 (RLDS) [Mosiah 4:4:7-8] spells out clearly what that way is. King Benjamin has just declared (Mosiah 1:94-2:9 RLDS) [Mosiah 3:2-4:6 LDS] an angel awakened him and told him to listen because he, the angel, had brought him "tidings of great joy," which he was to share with the people so they, too, could be filled with joy.

The angel told King Benjamin to tell his people that the time was not far distant when,

...with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven, among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, And shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases; And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; For behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith, on his name; And even after all this, they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him. And

he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world. And behold, all these things are done, that a righteous judgement might come upon the children of men. For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned. But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God; for salvation cometh to none such, except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

When King Benjamin finished delivering the angel's message, the people were praying for mercy and forgiveness of their sins, declaring that they believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, creator of all things.

...the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy,

Having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which King Benjamin had spoken unto them.

King Benjamin again began to speak to his people, and it was he who explained:

...this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world, for all mankind, which ever were, ever since the fall of Adam, or who are or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world; and this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation, save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved, except the conditions which I have told you.

Mosiah followed his father Benjamin as king and reigned for 33 years. After Mosiah, judges reigned over the land, and the faithfulness of the people surged and waned in spite of the faithful leadership of such great men as Alma, Alma's son, Helaman and Helaman's son, Nephi. All of this time, the prophecy of the coming of Christ was kept before the people by these righteous rulers, who were also priesthood in the church. Still, so many of the people continued to do wickedly that Nephi gave over his judgeship to Cezoram so he could join his brother Lehi in full-time ministry.

Lehi and Nephi remembered the words of their father, Helaman (Helaman 2:67-75 RLDS[Helaman 5:5-12 LDS] who, along with other good counsel, had charged them:

O remember, remember, my sons, the words which King Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world. And remember also, the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him, that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people; but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins. And he hath power given unto him from the Father, to redeem them from their sins, because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of

the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.

Nephi and Lehi were charged by their father to build their foundation on their Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, so that when the devil unleashed his fury on them, they could not fall. The ministry of Lehi and Nephi was so richly blessed that not only did many Nephites return to the faith, but 8,000 Lamanites were converted at one time and were baptized unto repentance.

It was on this missionary journey that they were imprisoned in the very prison in which Ammon and his brethren had been cast by the servants of Lemhi. When their captors came to kill them, they were encircled by fire that frightened the Lamanites but did not burn Nephi and Lehi. Encouraged by the protection of the fire, Lehi and Nephi began to bear witness of the God who had come to their rescue, and the earth shook so hard that it seemed the walls would fall. A dark cloud came over the Lamanites and the dissenting Nephites who were their tormentors, and a voice from the cloud spoke to them (Helaman 2:93 RLDS) [Helaman 5:29 LDS] saying, "Repent ye; repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings."

Nephi and Lehi's captors were unable to move because of the darkness, the fear that came upon them and the continued shaking of the earth. Aminadab, a Nephite captor who had been a member of the church, was able to see through the darkness and saw the faces of Lehi and Nephi, shining as though they were angels, uplifted and talking to someone they could see.

Aminadab cried for the others to look, and they were permitted to see through the darkness. They asked with whom these prisoners were talking. Aminadab told them they were talking with the angels of God. Their next question was how to get the cloud of darkness to lift. Again, it was Aminadab who reminded them of the teachings of Alma, Amulek and Zeezrom and told them they must repent and have faith in Christ as they had taught them. When they repented, they found that each of them was also encircled by fire that did not burn, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. A pleasant voice, almost like a whisper, said to them, (Helaman 2:112 RLDS) [Helaman 5:46-47 LDS] "Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my well beloved, who was from the foundation of the world."

This was the 62nd year of the reign of the judges, about 95 years from the time King Benjamin said it would not be long until the coming of Jesus Christ through his mother Mary. The men who experienced this great conversion went out and told their story to a receptive people, and peace and prosperity for both Nephites and Lamanites followed until the Gadianton robbers surfaced among them. Many Nephites supported the Gadiantons. The larger portion of the Lamanites fought against them and continued to preach about Christ, as did Nephi and Lehi.

The burden of the rebellion of the Nephites became very heavy for Nephi and, on one occasion, he was on his tower praying when a crowd assembled to see what he was doing. He gave a lengthy and scathing denunciation of their wickedness that brought the wrath of the officials down upon him. He would have been prosecuted except that he told them of the murder of their judge and correctly informed them of the way in which they would identify his killer. After the ordeal, he was grieving for his people when the Lord spoke to him (Helaman 3:115-117

RLDS) [Helaman 10:4-5 LDS], commending him for his faithfulness and courage. God made Nephi a promise that he would be made mighty in faith, words and deeds and that whatever he asked would be granted because, the Lord said, He knew Nephi would not ask anything contrary to the Lord's will.

This was now the 71st year of the reign of the judges, 104 years since King Benjamin prophesied that it would not be long before the coming into the world of the Christ child. The Nephites had become so wicked that, at one point, Nephi had to be lifted out of the midst of them by the Spirit of God just to save his life. Grieving for their wickedness, he asked God to send famine upon them in the hope it would bring them to repentance. A devastating famine did occur, and many repented. Many of the Nephites soon returned to their rebellion, but the larger part of the Lamanites strictly followed the commandments of God according to the Law of Moses. The Lord sent Samuel, the Lamanite, into the land of Zarahemla to preach to the Nephites.

Samuel's ministry was rejected, not only because of his denunciation of their wickedness, but also because he was a Lamanite. He was cast out of the city, but the Lord told him to return and prophesy whatever came into his heart. He was not allowed to enter the city, so he climbed up onto the wall, stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice warning the people of their impending destruction if they did not repent. In fact, he said, the only reason they had not already been destroyed was because of the righteousness of a few among them. He particularly singled out their love of money and warned them of a time when they would hide their riches in the earth and never be able to find them again. One particularly significant statement is recorded in Helaman 5:52 (RLDS) [Helaman 13:38 LDS]:

Yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain. Ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.

Angered by his brashness, the people threw stones and shot arrows at Samuel and tried to kill him or remove him from the wall. He stood firm and declared that they were going to hear him for the Lord had sent him not only to warn them but to let them know the conditions of repentance and the source of their salvation. Samuel pled with the people to turn to the only way they could be saved from total destruction. That way, he declared, was by repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ of whom he had come to bring them "tidings of great joy." He said,

"Behold, I give unto you a sign: for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name."
(Helaman 5:55-67 RLDS) [Helaman 14:2-13 LDS]

As a sign of His coming, Samuel said,

...there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh, there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day; Therefore there shall be one day and a night, and a day, as if it were one day, and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall

know of the rising of the sun, and also of its setting; Therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.

Then Samuel gave a prophecy that is not recorded in any other scripture, not even in the Bible,

And behold there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven. And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth. And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.

Samuel continued to tell of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to explain how significant those events would be in their lives here and in eternity, cautioning them in words appropriate for us in this day (Helaman 5:85-87 RLDS) [Helaman 14:30-15:1 LDS]:

And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge, and he hath made you free; He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death, and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you. And now my beloved brethren, behold, I declare unto you that except ye shall repent, your houses shall be left unto you desolate; yea, except ye repent, your women shall have great cause to mourn in the day they shall give suck;

There were many who, when they saw that their stones and arrows could not touch Samuel, repented and ran in search of Nephi. Nephi was likewise preaching, prophesying and baptizing those who repented, confessed their sins and asked to be baptized. Most of them declared that Samuel had a devil and ordered that he be bound and cast out. Instead, he let himself down from the wall, went to preach and prophesy in his own country and was never heard of again in the land of the Nephites.

Conditions in Zarahemla didn't change much in the next three years. Most of those who were baptized remained faithful, and those who chose wickedness continued in their lifestyle. But at the fourth year, great signs and wonders began to appear. "And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tiding of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled." (Helaman 5:126 RLDS) [Helaman 16:14 LDS]

It was now 600 years since Lehi and his people left Jerusalem. Nephi, the son of Helaman, who had been faithful and to whom God had promised that anything he asked he could have because he would not ask anything contrary to God's will, had left the land. Before going,

he had given his eldest son, Nephi, charge of the plates of brass and all the sacred things and records. And, the record says, no one knew where he went.

Signs and wonders increased, but those who persisted in disbelief attributed them to the workings of Satan to keep them in ignorance of the truth. It was not reasonable to believe that such a person as Christ would come down from heaven with power to save them! While the believers began to rejoice, looking to the fulfillment of the prophecies from the time they left Jerusalem, through King Benjamin's prophecy so many years later and Samuel's prophecy of almost five years before, the unbelievers taunted them, saying the time had passed and their faith was in vain.

Finally, a day was set that all those who believed in what their enemies called "traditions" should be put to death except the sign which Samuel had given should come to pass. Nephi, son of the Nephi who had left for places unknown, saw the wickedness of the people and went out, bowed himself to the earth and prayed mightily to his God all that day in behalf of his people who were about to be destroyed because of their faith (3 Nephi 1:12-14 RLDS) [3 Nephi 1:13-14].

...and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, Lift up your head and be of good cheer, for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, And on the morrow come I into the world, to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets."

It was the voice of Jesus, the One who was to be born a child on the morrow-on the morrow in the land of Nephi, during the night in Bethlehem! He went ahead to explain that it was He who had sent His prophets to tell of His coming and of the mission that was His since the foundation of the world. Again He repeated the reassuring message for Nephi to take back to his anxious people; "the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given!"

And it happened just as Jesus said it would (3 Nephi 1:16-26 RLDS) [3 Nephi 1:15-22 LDS]. The sun went down, but there was no darkness; and the people were astonished. Many of those who had not believed the prophets fell to the earth as though they were dead, for their plans to destroy the believers had been frustrated, and they "began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear" and to "fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief."

All that night it was as light as at midday. The sun came up the next morning just as it always did, "and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given." A new star appeared, just as Samuel had prophesied. In spite of the fact that some still believed Satan's lies and deceptions, most of the people were converted to the Lord, and many were baptized.

There were some in the church who did not understand that they were to continue obeying the Law of Moses until the prophecy of Jesus' death and resurrection should also be fulfilled. Until His death and resurrection, the work of redemption for which He was "slain from the foundation of the world" would not be complete. They soon learned their error and repented.

It was now 125 years since King Benjamin explained how it was that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross could bring salvation to people of all times since the creation of Adam as well as those who trusted Him after the cross. The way was prepared before there was man on the earth. He was the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world."

Nine years after the day the night and the day that were as one day without any darkness, and after the new star did arise, people were still looking for Nephi (the father of Nephi), the present leader of the church. The elder Nephi had left the land some time before the signs of the birth of Jesus had come-not long after angels had brought tidings of great joy to wise men in the land-and still no one seemed to know where he had gone.

Is it possible that subsequent happenings in the Land of Jerusalem, where the Nephite records said the Christ child would be born, may have been related to Nephi's disappearance? And what of Samuel? Those who kept the record did not hear of him again either. It was "wise men" in the land of the Americas to whom the angels appeared with "tidings of great joy" long before that night when the shepherds heard the angel message on Bethlehem's hills. And it was wise men who came from the east, who first told of a new star appearing at the time of Jesus' birth. No one in Jerusalem or in Bethlehem seems to have noticed.

It was the wise men who went to Jerusalem to inquire where to go to find the child born the "King of the Jews" that they had traveled for months to worship and to whom they wished to give gifts. It was the wise men who followed the star until it stood right over the house, not a stable, where they found the child, not a baby, with his mother. It was the wise men who were warned by God in a dream not to report their finding to the king. They recognized the message as coming from God and departed another way. As soon as they had departed, an angel of the Lord told Joseph to take the child and Mary to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. They left by night, fleeing as the angel had instructed them. Joseph and Mary were poor. How do you suppose they financed a trip to Egypt with such sudden notice?

During the nine years after the signs of the birth were given, the Gadianton robbers became very strong in the land, and many, especially the young, adopted their pernicious ways. It was not until their brash threatenings were clearly bent on bringing destruction to the whole Nephite society that the righteous prophet-chief judge of the land, Lachoneus, was able to convince the people of their sure destruction if they did not repent and return to the way of the Lord. Prosperity followed and, as so often happens, a return to pride and injustice occurred, led by a group of unjust judges. By the 30th year after the birth of the Lamb of God, there was a definite division of the people between the wicked and the righteous. Although they had agreed not to fight each other, the ones whose hearts were turned from the Lord stoned the prophets and cast them out.

But they could not cast Nephi out. Neither could they disbelieve what he said, for angels ministered to him daily, and he spoke with power and authority. His ministry brought healing to the sick, cast out devils from those possessed, and even raised his brother from the dead after he was killed, having been stoned by the people. Fearlessly, Nephi testified boldly of repentance and remission of sins through faith on Jesus Christ. Instead of being converted, most of the

people were angry with him because of his power. Those who received his ministry testified of Jesus, and all those who repented were baptized. By the end of the 33rd year after the signs of the birth of the Savior had been experienced, those who were faithful began to look earnestly for the three days of darkness over the land that Samuel the Lamanite had prophesied would accompany his death. There were many doubtings and disputations among the people in spite of the many signs that had been given.

It was on the fourth day of the first month of the 34th year that a great storm, such as had never before been known in the land began. There was a great and terrible tempest (wind storm or hurricane), terrible thunder that shook the earth as though it was about to break asunder and exceeding sharp lightning that had never been known before in the land. Earthquakes leveled cities, killing the inhabitants. The city of Zarahemla caught fire. The city of Moroni sank into the ocean, and the inhabitants were drowned. Where the city of Moronihah had once stood, there was a great mountain. Roads were broken up. The whole face of the land was changed. People were carried away by the wind and never heard of again.

The storm lasted about three hours, and then there was darkness over the land—such intense darkness that the inhabitants who were left could feel the vapor of darkness. No light nor fire of any kind could be kindled. There was not a glimmer of sun, moon or stars. The sounds of howling and mourning and weeping among the people was all that penetrated the darkness until they heard a voice out of heaven.

It was the voice of Jesus calling them and all the peoples of the earth to repentance. He recounted the sins of those in the cities that had been destroyed and said that the devils laughed and Satan's angels rejoiced at the death and destruction they had brought on themselves by their iniquity and abominations. He pled with those who remained who were more righteous than those destroyed to return unto Him, repent and be converted so He could heal them. His pleading and instruction filled the three days of darkness (3 Nephi 4:41-52 RLDS) (3 Nephi 9:13-22 LDS]. He stated again who He was and the mission for which He came to earth and explained that portion of that mission He had now completed.

Behold I am Jesus Christ, the son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures, concerning my coming, are fulfilled. And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the Law of Moses fulfilled. I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end... Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin: therefore whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive; for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

The people were gathered at the temple sharing their stories of the wonderful and terrible things they had witnessed when they again heard a voice out of heaven. A man descended (3 Nephi 5:11-14 RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:9- 13 LDS], testifying that He was Jesus Christ, of whom the prophets testified should come into the world. He invited the people to "thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands, and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world." Truly, the way that was prepared from the foundation of the world had prevailed in the lives of those who chose that way from the beginning of time because of the Lamb who was "slain from the foundation of the world!"