

Comments on 2 Nephi 3

Lehi blesses his youngest son, named Joseph, and discusses covenants he has inherited from his namesake, the ancient Joseph ben Jacob, by virtue of being born into Joseph's lineage.

From the point of view of covenant theology, this chapter is exceptionally important. It informs us the ancient Joseph received a promise from the Lord that a righteous remnant of his lineage would be preserved in the last days. And the Lord would preserve the records of the prophets of Joseph's lineage and bring them to Joseph's lineage in the last days via a chosen spokesman, who was also of Joseph's lineage.

We would have to assume Lehi's various quotes of the ancient Joseph and of the Lord's covenant with Joseph were documented on the Brass Plates, which Nephi obtained from Laban (cf. 1 Ne. 4).

This covenant is the driving force of the entire Book of Mormon, and is the theological reason we have the book today. The Lord makes a promise to the ancient Joseph, and He therefore makes sure it is fulfilled. Without this covenant, it is very unlikely we would have this record of the lineage of Joseph through Lehi. It also implicitly informs us about the message of 1 Ne. 4:13, as the Lord had to get the record of Joseph ben Jacob into the hands of the lineage of Joseph that was faithful and would keep adding to the record and continue to support the covenant. This is reflected in Jarom 1:2, Jarom 1:15, Omni 1:3, Omni 1:9, Omni 1:25, Words of Mormon 1:6-8, Mormon 7, Mormon 9:35-3, Moroni 10:1-2 where all of the authors explicitly identify that they are writing by way of commandment from their fathers and for the benefit of future Lamanites. Contrast this with the case of the Mulekites (cf. Omni 1:14-19), who were not lineage of Joseph, and had no written records, so their language was corrupt and they lapsed into apostasy and conflict.

We tend to focus on the few verses about Joseph Smith, Sr. and Joseph Smith, Jr. and see this as a miracle fulfilled, and testament to Smith's authenticity. But, in doing so, we miss the grand theological picture of this very specific covenant spanning thousands of years from the origin with the ancient Joseph down through the latter-days to the end times. All the prophets from the ancient Joseph through Lehi and Nephi on through Mormon and Moroni knew they were lineage of Joseph and had the responsibility and blessing of keeping the record so it would be brought forward into the last days for the righteous remnants of Joseph. Joseph Smith, Jr. is that special seer-spokesman who will bring the record of Joseph's lineage forth, but it is not primarily for the Gentiles, it is primarily for

the remnant of Joseph who will be introduced the record as a result of the Smith's work, and they will repent and fulfil the promise the Lord made to the ancient Joseph.

That is the point of this covenant, and the purpose of the Book of Mormon.

The text comprising this chapter can be broken up topically as follows:

Opening Address (v. 1-3)

Introductory Summary (v. 4-5)

Statements concerning covenant with Joseph (v. 6-21)

Closing Summary, restate (v. 22-25)

The text is highly structured. Review of Lynn Johnson's [poetical arrangement](#) is recommended.

1 And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee. 2 And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel. 3 And now, Joseph, my last-born, whom I have brought out of the wilderness of mine afflictions, may the Lord bless thee forever, for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed.

v1-3 After blessing Jacob in the previous chapter, Lehi turns his attention to his youngest son Joseph. Joseph was born in the desert, during a time of great trial to the family (v. 1), thus his birth and survival is considered an act of great providence (cp. 1 Ne. 17:1-4). Lehi then blesses Joseph with the blessings promised to his ancestors Abraham and Joseph (cf. Gen. 15), namely that of land (v. 2) and posterity (v. 3).

v1 "wilderness of mine afflictions...the days of my greatest sorrow", referring to his concern over and disappointment with Laman and Lemuel's behavior, cf. 2:1, 1 Ne. 16:20, 1 Ne. 16:35, 1 Ne. 17:6, 1 Ne. 17:20-21, 1 Ne. 18:17-20.

v2 Lehi again invokes the covenant blessing formula from Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

4 For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph. 5 Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of

power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom.

v4-5 Because Joseph ben Lehi is of the lineage of Israel, he is part of that covenant, but also more specifically part of the covenant made with the ancient Joseph (v. 4). The Messiah will not be of the lineage of Joseph, but there will be one who is of the lineage of Joseph who will bring the remnant of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord's covenants and the Messiah in the latter days (v. 5).

v4 "who was carried captive into Egypt", cf. Gen. 37.

v5 "a righteous branch", in general Lehi is making reference to the lineage of Joseph being preserved, cf. 10:1-2. However, Lehi appears to be speaking specifically about an individual, this "choice seer" in v. 7 who is to be of the lineage of Joseph. See also v. 24. The "righteous branch" follows the language of Isa. 11:1, Jer. 23:5, Jer. 33:15 for the specific individual, also cp. Isa. 60:21, Prov. 11:28 for the more general population.

6 For Joseph truly testified, saying: **A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.** 7 Yea, Joseph truly said: **Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers.** 8 And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work.

9 And he shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel. 10 And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt.

11 But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.

12 Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord. 13 And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence among all my people, unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel, saith the Lord. 14 And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: **Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;**

15 And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.

16 Yea, thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing, even as I am sure of the promise of Moses; for the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever. 17 And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him.

18 And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it. 19 And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith. 20 And they shall cry from the dust; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, even after many generations have gone by them. And it shall come to pass that their cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words. 21 Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of my covenant which I made unto thy fathers.

(Lehi in black, Joseph ben Jacob in blue, Lord in red)

v6-21 Lehi states the blessing he just pronounced (v. 1-3) are because of his descent through the lineage of the ancient Joseph ben Jacob, his namesake, and the blessings pronounced upon him are considerable (v. 4). Lehi discusses these blessings in detail by explaining the ancient Joseph saw the future when the Lord would raise up a righteous branch. This branch would not be the Messiah, as predicted in Isa. 11:1, but the Messiah would be manifested to this branch of Joseph (v. 5). Rather than the Messiah, a "choice seer" will be raised up from this branch (v. 6).

Lehi then quotes the ancient Joseph at length (v. 7-21), which includes a series of quotes of the Lord, and states this was prophecy (v. 22). As a result of covenants made to the ancient Joseph, this present Joseph is blessed as well in that his children will believe the words of the Lord when they are manifest (v. 23). And one will arise from among them who will do much to accomplish the restoration of Israel and the lineage of Lehi (v. 24).

The series of quotes is complex, so the text above is presented in different colors to more easily identify the speaker of the quote. Note Lehi's portion in the text is him simply identifying the original source of the quote. Lehi's

comments on this series of quotes both precedes and follow these verses.

v7-21 is a lengthy quotation of Joseph ben Jacob discussing the Lord's promise to deliver his posterity. When simplified, the prophecy is speaking of two deliverers, one named Joseph who will unite the writings of Judah and Joseph to the salvation of the lineage of Joseph (v. 6-8, 11-16). And, one named Moses who will draw all of Israel out of Egypt (v. 9-10, 17-21).

The two promised deliverers are introduced in v. 6-10, one will be a choice seer who will make known the covenants of the Lord to the lineage of Joseph (v. 6-8). The second will lead all of Israel out of captivity from Egypt (v. 9-10).

The missions of these deliverers are then discussed in greater length in v. 11-21. The first, the seer named Joseph, will bring the word of both Joseph and Judah to the lineage of Joseph, and in so doing will establish peace among them by rejecting falsehood (v. 11-12). Out of weakness this seer will be made strong, even to restore the house of Israel (v. 13). Those that seek to destroy him will be confounded, because the Lord will fulfil His promises to the ancient Joseph through this seer (v. 14). This seer and the seer's father will both be named after the ancient Joseph, and the seer will be like him in accomplishing salvation for Israel (v. 15).

Joseph is confident of this seer being provided, just as confident of the second deliverer, named Moses, being provided (v. 16). This Moses will be mighty in writing the Law of the Lord, and a spokesman will be given him to declare it (v. 17-18). The words which Moses will write and which the lineage of Joseph will write will go to the latter lineage of Joseph (v. 19), and call them to repentance (v. 20). This will be according to the faith of the sons of Joseph who write the words to their latter generations, so that the latter generations will learn of the covenant of the Lord to them (v. 21).

This quotation of the ancient Joseph ben Jacob must be documented on the Brass Plates, cf. 4:2. Their being documented there, and not in the Bible as we have it today, is because the Brass Plates are a record maintained specifically by the seed of Joseph, cf. 1 Ne. 5:14-16. Hence the emphasis placed upon Joseph's prophecies. The Hebrew Bible as we have it today is a record maintained largely by the seed of Judah, 1 Ne. 13:23-25. Today's modern rabbinical Judaism is the ancestor of Pharisaical Judaism of the New Testament. Each sect of Judaism maintained their own set of Scripture (e.g., [Dead Sea Scrolls](#)).

v12 This uniting of the writings of Judah and Joseph reads similarly to the prediction of Ezek. 37:15-28.

Note the laying down of contention and establishing of peace is among the lineage of Joseph, and not the Gentiles. The publication of the words of the lineage of Joseph among the Gentiles has been and is anything but noncontentious and peaceful, cp. 2 Ne. 29:1-10.

v15 When the ancient Joseph says the seer Joseph "shall be like unto me" it is in reference to both of them bringing salvation to Israel. In the case of the ancient Joseph, he preserved Israel by bringing them to Egypt to survive the great famine (cf. Gen. 45-47). In the case of the seer-spokesman Joseph, he will preserve Israel by restoring the natural lineage of Israel to the Lord their God.

The verse is obviously referring to Joseph Smith, Jr. An interesting side note is the existence of an obscure tradition within Judaism of one "[Messiah ben Joseph](#)", who is separate from the Messiah ben Judah through David.

On this subject is a discussion from Rabbi Stephen M. Wylen's Settings of Silver, printed 1989 by Paulist Press, pages 97-98, from the chapter entitled "The World to Come", as follows:

There is a rich folklore of apocalyptic. Every sect had its own version of how the end would come and what would occur before and after it. Despite the variations it is possible to give a general outline of the apocalypse with all the elements that became widely accepted among Jewish believers.

Following the prediction of the prophet Malachi, the prophet Elijah would come to the earth to pave the way for the coming of the Messiah. According to rabbinic folklore Elijah will answer all the difficult questions of the law which the rabbis were unable to decide upon, so that the law will be complete for the Messiah.

The end is preceded by times of terrible upheaval in the world. The forces of lawlessness and evil will become more powerful, and the Jews will suffer terrible oppression, Many people will be killed or will fall away from the Torah during that time.

The forces of evil will gather together into a great army, the army of Gog and Magog. The forces of good, few in number, will be led by Messiah ben Joseph, the Messiah descended from Joseph the son of Jacob.

The two armies will fight six indecisive battles. The seventh and final battle is called Armageddon. The forces of evil will have the upper hand in the final battle and the Messiah ben Joseph will be mortally wounded. Then God will send the Messiah ben David, the Messiah descended of King David, who will miraculously turn the tide of battle and bring utter defeat to the forces of evil.

After the battle all who ever lived will be resurrected to bodily life in the Valley of Jehosaphat, east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Those Jews who are buried in the Land of Israel will arise from the grave where they are buried, but other Jews will have to painfully burrow underground in order to rise up in the Land of Israel. After the resurrection comes the Last Judgement in which all who ever lived are judged on the scales of justice, with the Messiah presiding. Those judged to be evil go to eternal destruction, while those judged to be good are granted eternal life. They climb up from the Valley of Jehosaphat to the Temple Mount where they rebuild the Temple, the Third Temple which will last forever. God prepares a meal from the body of the primaeval monster Leviathan for the Feast of the Righteous. Thus begins the Time of the Messiah, a time of peace, tranquility and material plenty on earth.

This is one of the approaches to the Messiah ben Yosef. The traditions vary widely. Naturally, we would see Joseph Smith, Jr. as the fulfillment of this tradition, per Lehi's prediction.

v16 I would assume the confidence statement here is given because the prediction of this seer-spokesman is to come a long time in the future, in the "latter days" (v. 12). This is in contrast to the deliverer Moses, who's necessity would be much more obvious and immediate to the ancient Joseph given the political situation with Egypt, one which he was intimately acquainted with.

v17 That Moses is granted a spokesman appears to be part of the Lord's purpose in making him mighty in writing. Perhaps in leaving Moses inelegant in speech (cf. Exod. 4:10), the Lord is encouraging him to develop his writing skills so as to communicate through those means instead. In the long run, this would be more desirable to the Lord as the audience to Moses' written word would be much larger to the audience to his spoken word.

It is a popular notion among contemporary religionists the Law of Moses was written hundreds, if not thousands, of years after the man Moses lived from an oral tradition which was later written down and then edited a great deal over time. These verses make it plain Moses really did write the Law of Moses.

Now, this is not to say that what we have is exactly what Moses wrote, as that is plainly not the case. However, it is clear the supposition that an oral tradition was written down at some considerably later date is incorrect.

This position is maintained throughout the Scriptures. All of the Old Testament and Book of Mormon authors attribute authorship of the Law to Moses, as does Jesus and the other New Testament authors.

"power unto him in a rod", the rod was a symbol of leadership among the Semites. In this case, the Lord gave Moses both the literal rod he used to perform miracles with, and this symbolically represented his right to lead Israel.

"a spokesman", i.e., Aaron, Moses' older brother, cf. Exod. 4:16.

v18 The ambiguous pronoun of "him" in the phrase "I will make for him a spokesman" is the confusing. The "him" refers to "the fruit of thy loins" that occurs just before the "him". It is confusing because the immediately preceding example of Moses and Aaron (cf. v. 17) is two people. The singular pronoun of "him" doesn't clearly convey the plural "fruit of they loins". We would expect a "they", not a "him", on the assumption "fruit of thy loins" is plural. But, in this case, there is a lot of implied meaning that is left ambiguous, hence all of the paraphrased insertions into the text below.

The spokesman is the same person as the seer earlier in the chapter (cf. v. 11-13). This spokesman in v. 18 both writes and declares the writings of the past fruit of the loins to the future fruit of the loins. Below, I call this person the seer-spokesman, who is clearly Smith.

The example of Moses and Aaron in v. 17 is used in v. 18 to be in parallel with the past "fruit of thy loins" and Smith. Moses wrote the Torah, and the past "fruit of thy loin" wrote the Book of Mormon. Aaron was Moses' spokesman, and Smith is the spokesman for the past "fruit of thy loin", meaning Nephi, Jacob, ...Mormon, Moroni.

So, here is a paraphrased version of the Book of Mormon text that clarifies what is intended in the text:

18 And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise [a seer-spokesman] up unto the [past and future] fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him[, the past fruit of thy loins], a [seer-]spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him[, the seer-spokesman] that he shall write the writing of the [past] fruit of thy loins, unto the [future] fruit of thy loins; and the [seer-]spokesman of thy loins shall declare it.

19 And the words which he[, the seer-spokesman,] shall write shall be the words [written by the past fruit of thy loins] which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the [future] fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the [past] fruit of thy loins had cried unto them[, the future fruit of thy loins] from the dust; for I know their[, the past fruit of thy loins,] faith.

20 And they[, the past fruit of thy loins,] shall cry from the dust; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, [the future fruit of thy loins,] even after many generations have gone by them[, the past fruit of thy loins,]. And it shall come to pass that their[, the past fruit of thy loins,] cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words.

21 Because of their[, the past fruit of thy loins,] faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their [future] brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their[, the past fruit of thy loins,] words will I make strong in their[, the past fruit of thy loins,] faith, unto the remembering of my covenant which I made unto thy fathers[, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob].

22 And now, behold, my son Joseph, after this manner did my father of old prophesy. 23 Wherefore, because of this covenant thou art blessed; for thy seed shall not be destroyed, for they shall hearken unto the words of the book. 24 And there shall rise up one mighty among them, who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.

v22-24 Lehi again turns his attention to his son Joseph (v. 22), telling him he is protected by the covenant his ancient ancestor Joseph ben Jacob received, as his own children will receive the writings of Joseph and his lineage (v. 23). One will be brought up by the Lord who will help fulfill the covenants the Lord made with Israel (v. 24).

v23 "the book", it is not clear which book in specific Lehi is referring to here. The preceding quotes mentioned both the book of Judah, and the book of Joseph, and a combination of the two. Given the promises of the lineage of Joseph receiving the writings of his lineage, it is safe to assume the prediction here at least includes those writings from the lineage of Joseph to the lineage of Joseph, and probably the writings of Judah as well.

Taking "the book" in a modern sense as an exclusive printed volume misses the point of v. 6-21. It is more contextual to take Lehi's reference of "the book" to mean the collection of writings spoken of in the preceding prophecies of v. 6-21.

v24 This verse is clearly speaking of Joseph Smith, Jr., given the connection to v. 18.

"one mighty among them", cp. D&C 85:7 for a similar statement. It is clear from the context the person, Smith, is mighty in the sense that he does much in way of the Lord's work in maintaining the covenant with Israel. We have to set aside the worldly notion of "mighty" when reading a Scriptural text.

25 And now, blessed art thou, Joseph. Behold, thou art little; wherefore hearken unto the words of thy brother, Nephi, and it shall be done unto thee even according to the words which I have spoken. Remember the words of thy dying father. Amen.

v25 Lehi closes his blessing on Joseph with an admonition to follow after his older brother Nephi's example.

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