

Ir-BoM-6
Free to Choose Liberty and Eternal Life
(2 Nephi 1-2)
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(Reasons why Lehi's dying testimony is so powerful)

I. Lehi, as an aged, "trembling parent," recognizes he must "soon go down into the cold and silent grave" so leaves a final, pleading testimony to his sons.

A. Since the Middle Ages, **dying testimonies have been given special consideration in courts of law. This is because of a strong feeling that, "one who believes in God would not want to die with a lie on their lips."**

B. This special recognition allows dying words to be admitted as "evidence," even though ordinarily they would be considered "hearsay:" For the one who has died cannot take an oath to speak "the truth and nothing but the truth." They cannot be cross-examined. Nor can the penalty of perjury be used as threat to elicit truth. Nevertheless, statements made by a dying person are allowed in courts as evidence because it is felt the "sense of impending death is presumed to remove all temptation to falsehood."

C. So **Lehi's words, as a dying testimony, should receive particular respect.**

II. Lehi implied the Promised Land is a symbol of Eternal Life (see confirmation in Alma 37:45), so he presents **parallels between obtaining it and obtaining Eternal Life.**

A. As with Heaven, the Lord "consecrates" the land to those whom he shall purposely bring here (2 Nephi 1:7).

B. It will *remain* a land of liberty to them as long as they are obedient (1 Nephi 1:7-12).

C. As unrighteousness will bring captivity on the earthly land; so unrighteousness will lead **to a far greater captivity** --- to the "**eternal destruction** of both soul and body," thus failure to inherit Eternal Life (2 Nephi 1:14-22, especially v. 22).

III. Lehi also testified of **The Way** to Eternal Life, and the Land which witnesses of it.

B. He uses the role of Nephi to bear witness of Jesus Christ.

1. Lehi points to Nephi as "**the instrument in the hands of God, in bringing [us] into the land of promise.**"

2. Further, if they hearken to Nephi's words they will not perish in the future (v. 28).

3. **Nephi's bringing them to the Promised Land thus teaches of Christ who can bring everyone to Eternal Life** (2 Nephi 1:24- 28).

IV. Lehi clarifies that Liberty in the new Promised Land **teaches of Christ's Atonement.**

A. In blessing Jacob, Lehi speaks clearly of how Christ's atonement frees us from captivity to death and to Satan (2 Ne. 2:6-30).

1. "Redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit;" (v. 6-7).

"There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah..." (v. 8).

B. Living in a land of liberty will also facilitate man's obtaining Eternal Life, **for men must have moral agency in order to reach what God intends.**

V. But man must still face opposing forces (God's promises vs. Satan's temptations) in order to truly exercise this moral agency (v. 16).

A. Thus opposition was introduced into the world through the Fall, and if had not occurred, man could not truly progress.

1. Lehi tells of Satan falling and then tempting mankind, who had also fallen (v. 18-21]. But this fit God's overall plan.

"And if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the Garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end" (v. 22). "They would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin"

VI. The ultimate purpose of God is that man might have Eternal Joy.

A. "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (v. 25).

B. We should recognize this thought encompasses the **whole** plan of salvation. It is for the purpose of **Eternal Joy** that man fell, not just for the sake of earthly joys.

VII. The Atonement allows man to exercise moral agency **forever**, if they are free.

A. "And Messiah cometh... that he may redeem [men] from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the **fall they have become free forever, knowing good and evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day,**" (v. 26).

B. "Wherefore, **men are free according to the flesh;** and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil;" (v. 27).

C. "... **look to the great mediator** and hearken unto his great commandments; **... and choose eternal life,... And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh ... which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom**" (v. 29). (All emphasis is added)

VIII. Christ's atoning grace was never meant to allow "licentiousness."

A. **The power of the atonement is meant to change us**, to make us sufficiently worthy to dwell in the presence of a Holy God where we will automatically continue to use our moral agency for righteousness, just as God does.

B. This is not likely to happen overnight. But through our continued efforts and daily reliance on His grace, we can gradually grow more like Christ.

C. **Heaven can only be a Heaven if men there act under their own agency and are righteous. It would not be Heaven if men did not have moral agency. Similarly it would not be Heaven if men used their moral agency for unrighteousness purposes there.**

IX. It is marvelous that Lehi teaches all these things as he draws near his death. He sets a pattern for powerful "dying testimonies" throughout the Book of Mormon.

A. Lehi said “I have spoken these ... words unto you all, my sons, **in the last days of my probation**; ... And I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls. Amen.” (2 Nephi 2:30).

B. Lehi’s words thus carry heavy weight and impact **because his impending death made them void of any pride or selfishness.**

C. Subsequently, many Book of Mormon prophets follow this same pattern. Below are just a few. [Note that not only can it be assumed that these prophets are not afraid to face God with their last words, but **they express full confidence that at the Judgment Bar, God will testify that they spoke the truth**]!

1. Nephi closes his life saying, “And now, my beloved brethren... and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ;... And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye --- **for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words...**; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things....

“Farewell until that great day shall come.... Amen” (2 Nephi 33:3, 10, 11, 13).

2. Enos’ final testimony rings with resounding spiritual hope. “And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and **shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed...** Amen” (Enos 1:26-7).

3. Moroni buries the golden plates with his own lonely, future death in mind:

“And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, **to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge** of both quick and dead. Amen” (Moroni 10: 32, 34).

D. Lehi and these other prophets see the searing reality of Death and Judgment and give their last, final testimonies because of it. Their minds and hearts have been turned to the weightiest matters of eternity. They strongly warn that this reality lies just beyond the distractions of our lives, and someday we must face it too.

E. **Students of the Book of Mormon will be blessed to watch for these and all other powerful dying testimonies as they read The Book of Mormon.**

1. For additional insights about dying testimonies and The Book of Mormon, see Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Safety for the Soul,” October 2009 General Conference.