

Come Follow Me Podcast
Elo Viz Production
Week 7
2 Nephi 3-5

We are going to come across a very controversial scriptures this week. One that I sure you have struggled with at some point in your life and maybe even found yourself defending with those not of our faith. It is a major attack point for those who oppose the Church.

I do not want to spend our entire time together discussing it, But I would like to touch on it briefly before we get into some great doctrines in these chapters.

In 2 Nephi 5 there comes a separation between the brothers. Lamoni and Lemuel since the death of their Father have no more restraint for their wickedness and the situation is becoming hostile towards Nephi and his family, they were planning to kill Nephi. But, the Lord warns Nephi to take his family and leave. So He did, along with Zoram, Sam, Jacob, Joseph and his sisters and all of their families. And they traveled for several days into the wilderness.

But, then we learn that the Lamanites did rebel against God and they were cut off from His presents. Then this part right here: This is in verse 21
“And he had caused the **cursing** to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and **delightful**, that they might not be **enticing** unto my people the Lord God did cause a **skin of blackness** to come upon them.” (2 Nephi 5:20-25)

There are some both inside the church and outside the church that believe that this is about race. And even though we quote directly from the church handbook that says:

“Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>

Yet, some still struggle with this belief that somehow this verse in 2 Nephi and events in church history prove that the church as a whole and those involved in it are in most part racist.

Well, today is your lucky day because I get to introduce you to an amazing man by the name of T.J. Uriona. TJ is a BYU scholar that just released a study on this very topic.

In this article that is linked in our transcript that you can find at CFMpodcast.org, He shows in this study that the basis of this verse has nothing to do with race or even the color of skin as we know it today. Here are some highlights:

“In many ways, Nephi seems to relate the record of his family’s journey to Moses guiding the Israelites.⁵ When Nephi references those who “hearken[ed]” to his word and who “ke[pt] the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord,” he mirrors language found in Moses’s request to the Israelites before they entered the land the Lord had prepared for them: (Deut. 30:10, 15–16, 19)

According to this passage in Deuteronomy, blessings come from “hearken[ing]” to the voice of the Lord and obeying his commandments “in the land whither [one goes] to possess.” Thus, if Nephi’s prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah were indeed the word of the Lord, then (a) blessings should have followed those who hearkened to Nephi’s words, and (b) curses should have followed those who did not.

He then goes on to explain that sometimes we tend to put our modern day lens over the top of ancient records. Which does not give us an accurate view of what it was they were dealing with back then and what the culture was like in that day. T.J. is pointing out that there was a history of this type of curse that was common in that day. One being known as the time of the Suzerain-Vassal Covenant formula that we have evidence of Nephi and Lehi being submerged in this very culture of that day. In the article he compares side by side what this Vassal covenant states and what the people of Lehi were living at that time. He also goes on to show that in our day a statement like that made in 2 Nephi would seem to be racist and refer to their black skin. But it is obvious that they are speaking about something totally different.

He gives many biblical examples of this same phrase “skin of Blackness” and proves how they are not speaking of a change of race but instead a disease or deathly look that is the curse that they received for their wickedness:

“One of the earliest examples is in the book of Job: “For I know that thou wilt bring me to death. . . . My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat” (Job 30:23, 30). In these verses, Job describes the deathly appearance of his diseased body by indicating that his “skin is black.” In another example, the prophet Nahum foretells the fate of the Neo-Assyrian empire, describing the people of Nineveh: “the heart melteth, and the knees

smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the face of them all gather blackness” (Nahum 2:10). This particular example can be understood to be a subversive reversal of the “skin . . . black as pitch” curse found in Esarhaddon’s treaty. According to Johnston, Nahum uses the language of Esarhaddon’s Treaty to describe how the faces of the Ninevites went “dark at death.”⁵⁸ In another example, the Israelites in Jerusalem would suffer a similar fate to that of the people of Nineveh at the hands of the Babylonians. Around the same time Nephi made his record, the book of Lamentations describes a devastating famine that came as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem: “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. . . . Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine” (Lam. 5:7, 10). All these examples depict the approach of death—from disease, war, or terrible famine—as a “skin of blackness.” This sampling from the Bible helps provide context for Nephi’s statement that a “skin of blackness” came upon his brothers and suggests that Nephi was using a well-documented motif for death in the ancient Near East, rather than referring to phenotypic skin color.⁵⁹”

Which would make more sense why the Nephites were commanded not to intermarry or mingle with the Lamanites. Not because they would be mixing with a different race but because they would get the same diseases that the lamanites had if they did, spreading the curse to themselves.

It is a great article and I hope you will take the time to read it. Also there is an interesting youtube channel that illustrates some highlights of this same article that is entertaining and informative. Both links will be in the transcript.

<https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/life-and-death-blessing-and-cursing/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47505nN7n00>

In regards to some spiritual things in these chapters. Nephi gives a masterful discourse of the essence of human existence in a spiritual mindset.

“**16** Behold, my **soul** delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my **heart** pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

17 Notwithstanding the great **goodness** of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O **wretched** man that I am! Yea, my heart **sorroweth** because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

18 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily **beset** me.

19 And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have **trusted**.

20 My God hath been my **support**; he hath led me through mine **afflictions** in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

21 He hath filled me with his **love**, even unto the **consuming** of my flesh.

22 He hath confounded mine **enemies**, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

23 Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me **knowledge** by **visions** in the night-time.

24 And by day have I waxed bold in mighty **prayer** before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me.

25 And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been **carried away** upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them.

26 O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath **visited** men in so much **mercy**, **why** should my **heart** weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

27 And why should I **yield** to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to **temptations**, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my **peace** and afflict my soul? Why am I **angry** because of mine enemy?

28 Awake, my soul! No longer **droop** in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the **enemy** of my soul.

29 Do not **anger** again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

30 Rejoice, O my **heart**, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the **rock** of my salvation.

31 O Lord, wilt thou **redeem** my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of **sin**?

32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my **heart** is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy

righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!

33 O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.

34 O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

35 Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.” (2 Nephi 4:16-35)

What a prayer from a mighty man. When we read this we begin to realize how normal Nephi is. How he is just like us, how he struggles with the same things that we struggle with. It gives me courage to realize that a man who was so great, who experienced such incredible things was just as mortal and flawed as you and me. Perhaps the only real difference is the level of Nephi's faith. Which is something that we can improve. I testify that the blessings that come with increasing our faith will astound you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.