

2 Nephi 31 — The Doctrine of Christ — Baptism, the Holy Ghost, and the Strait Way

Nephi resumes his own words; the Father's voice and the Son's example; the four-fold-gospel-pattern, c. 559–545 BC.

The chapter is the BoM's most-concentrated articulation of the Doctrine of Christ. After thirty chapters of farewell, prophecy, and Isaiah-exposition, Nephi turns to the single doctrine he wants to leave with the rising generation — the doctrine of Christ as the path, not as a topic. Four movements: (1) editorial pivot from prophecy to plain doctrine (vv. 1–3); (2) Christ's example of baptism (vv. 4–9); (3) the Father's audible voice and the Son's invitation (vv. 10–15); (4) press forward, the strait-and-narrow-way, *this is the way* (vv. 16–21). The theological center is v. 20 — press forward + steadfastness in Christ + perfect brightness of hope + love of God and of all men + feast on the word + endure to the end = eternal life.

Ten Insights

- 1. Plainness as accommodation (v. 3).** *The Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding. Lashon u-binah.* Revelation is recipient-adapted (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2; D&C 1:24). Plainness is condescension, not crudeness — don't despise it.
- 2. The Lamb's baptism (v. 5).** *If the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we.* A-fortiori argument echoing Matt. 3:15 (*plurimae enim saepe pasan dikaiosynas*) six centuries before John baptizes the Lamb.
- 3. Baptism as covenant-witness (v. 7).** *According to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient. Anavah + shava.* Baptism is the body's witness of the soul's resolve to obey — the waters become the witness-stones of Joshua 24's oath.
- 4. The Father's voice (v. 11).** *The Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.* Trinitarian baptismal-structure — Father commands, Son models, Holy Ghost witnesses (cf. Matt. 28:19; 1 Jn. 5:7–8).
- 5. The Son's voice (v. 12).** *He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me.* Pre-Pentecostal articulation of the baptism-Holy-Ghost sequence (Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Ghost is the Father's response to baptism in the Son's name.
- 6. The four-fold baptism-disposition (v. 13).** *Full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins. Kavanah + lev shalem.* Heart-condition makes the rite efficacious — Moro. 7:6–9; D&C 20:37. Going down into the water without going down into the heart is going down without baptism.
- 7. Baptism of fire and Holy Ghost (v. 17).** *Then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.* Water-baptism witnesses; Spirit-baptism remits (cf. Matt. 3:11 — *he that cometh after me... shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*).
- 8. Wholly upon the merits (v. 19).** *Ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.* The chapter's clearest grace-dependence verse — paired with 2 Ne. 2:8.
- 9. Press forward — the master endurance-verse (v. 20).** *Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men... feast upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end.* Six-fold practice; three theological virtues — faith, hope, charity — in their endurance-form.
- 10. This is the way; no other name (v. 21).** *This is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved.* Pre-Acts-4:12 articulation; pre-Jn.-14:6 articulation. *The only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which are one God, without end.*

Cross-References

Gen. 1:2 (Spirit moved upon the waters); Ex. 24:7 (covenant-witness); Deut. 6:5 (love with all heart); Deut. 18:15 (prophet like Moses); Ps. 24:3–6 (who shall ascend); Ps. 51:6 (truth in inward parts); Isa. 11:2 (sevenfold spirit); Isa. 35:8 (highway of holiness — direct parallel v. 9); Isa. 40:3 (prepare the way); Mal. 3:1–4 (refiner's fire — direct background v. 17); Matt. 3:11 (baptize with Holy Ghost and fire — direct parallel v. 17); Matt. 3:13–17 (Christ's baptism — direct background vv. 5–9); Matt. 3:15 (fulfil all righteousness — direct parallel v. 5); Matt. 7:13–14 (strait gate — direct parallel vv. 9, 18); Matt. 22:37–39 (love God and neighbor — direct parallel v. 20); Matt. 24:13 (endure to the end — direct parallel v. 20); Matt. 28:18–20 (Great Commission — direct parallel v. 21); Mk. 1:9–11 (Christ's baptism); Jn. 1:29 (Lamb of God — direct parallel v. 4); Jn. 3:5 (born of water and Spirit); Jn. 8:29 (always do those things that please him — direct parallel v. 10); Jn. 14:6 (I am the way — direct parallel v. 21); Jn. 14:15 (if ye love me keep my commandments — direct parallel v. 10); Acts 2:38 (repent and be baptized — direct parallel vv. 11–13); Acts 4:12 (none other name — direct parallel v. 21); Rom. 5:5 (hope maketh not ashamed); Rom. 6:3–4 (buried with him by baptism); 1 Cor. 3:1–2 (milk not meat — direct parallel v. 3); 1 Cor. 13:13 (faith, hope, charity); 1 Cor. 15:58 (steadfast unmoveable — direct parallel v. 20); Phil. 2:7–8 (humbled himself — direct parallel v. 7); Phil. 3:13–14 (press toward the mark — direct parallel v. 20); Heb. 5:8 (Son yet learned obedience — direct parallel v. 7); Heb. 6:1 (doctrine of Christ — direct parallel v. 2); Jas. 1:8 (double-minded — direct parallel v. 13); 1 Pet. 3:21 (baptism doth also now save us); 2 Jn. 9 (abide in doctrine — direct parallel v. 2); Rev. 2:10 (faithful unto death — direct parallel v. 20); 1 Ne. 11:27 (Lamb baptized — direct parallel v. 4); 2 Ne. 2:8 (merits of Holy Messiah — direct parallel v. 19); 2 Ne. 9:23–24 (must be baptized); 2 Ne. 25:23 (saved by grace); 2 Ne. 32 (Holy Ghost teaches all — direct sequel); 2 Ne. 33 (Nephi's farewell — direct sequel); Mosiah 18:8–10 (Alma's baptismal covenant); Alma 5:14 (born again); Alma 7:14 (baptized unto repentance); 3 Ne. 11:32–40 (Christ's articulation of doctrine of Christ — direct parallel); 3 Ne. 27:13–22 (this is my gospel); Moro. 6:1–4 (baptism conditions — direct parallel v. 13); Moro. 7:6–9 (real intent — direct parallel v. 13); Moro. 8:25–26 (remission of sins by humble baptism); D&C 1:24 (after the manner of their language — direct parallel v. 3); D&C 20:37 (baptism conditions — direct parallel v. 13); D&C 22:1 (new and everlasting covenant); D&C 33:16 (gospel summary — direct parallel v. 21); D&C 39:6 (doctrine of my gospel); Moses 6:52–68 (Adam's baptism — direct parallel vv. 4–13); Articles of Faith 4 (faith, repentance, baptism, gift of Holy Ghost — direct parallel chapter-structure).

Apocryphal Correlations

Sirach 1:11–20. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom — direct v. 3 binah-and-revelation parallel.

4 Ezra 7:21–25. Two ways — life and death — direct vv. 16–21 strait-and-narrow parallel.

2 Baruch 51:7–13. The righteous walk in the path of the Most High — direct v. 18 path-grammar parallel.

1 Enoch 81:9–82:4. Enoch instructs his sons in the path of righteousness — direct v. 3 catechetical parallel.

Damascus Document (CD) 15:5–17. Initiation into the covenant by oath and immersion — direct vv. 7, 13 baptism-as-oath parallel.

1QS 3:6–9. Cleansing by the spirit of holiness — direct v. 17 baptism-of-fire-and-Holy-Ghost parallel.

Testament of Levi 18:6–7. Heavens opened, Most High utters glory, spirit of understanding rests — direct v. 11 Father's-voice parallel.

Didache 7:1–4 (early Christian). Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — direct v. 21 Trinitarian-formula parallel.

Hebrew Word Studies

lashon (לִשָּׁן, *tongue, language*) — v. 3. The medium of revelation; the Lord accommodates revelation to the disciple's tongue.

binah (בִּינָה, *understanding*) — v. 3. The discernment-faculty (Prov. 2:3); revelation is binah-conditioned.

anavah (אַנָּוָה, *humility*) — v. 7. The priestly-virtue of Num. 12:3 (Moses); the disposition baptism enacts.

shava (שָׁוָה, *to swear an oath, to witness*) — v. 7. The covenant-verb (Gen. 21:31 — Beersheba's well-of-oath); baptism as body's-oath.

kavanah (כַּוָּנָה, *intention, direction of heart*) — v. 13. The rabbinic-noun for the disposition that makes a ritual valid.

lev shalem (לֵב שָׁלֵם, *whole, undivided heart*) — v. 13. 1 Ki. 8:61's let your heart be perfect (shalem) with the Lord our God.

Personal Application

Three practices. First, witness obedience by baptism, then live obedience daily. If you have been baptized, recall the witness each Sabbath at sacrament — the bread and the water are the weekly-renewal of the baptism-oath (D&C 20:77). Second, feast upon the word of Christ — daily. Read scripture daily; do not skim; chew; taste; receive (Jer. 15:16). Third, practice the four-fold-baptism-disposition. Each day, examine the heart for hypocrisy, deception, divided-purpose; bring the heart to full-purpose, real-intent, no-hypocrisy (Ps. 51:6's truth in the inward parts; Moro. 7:6–9).