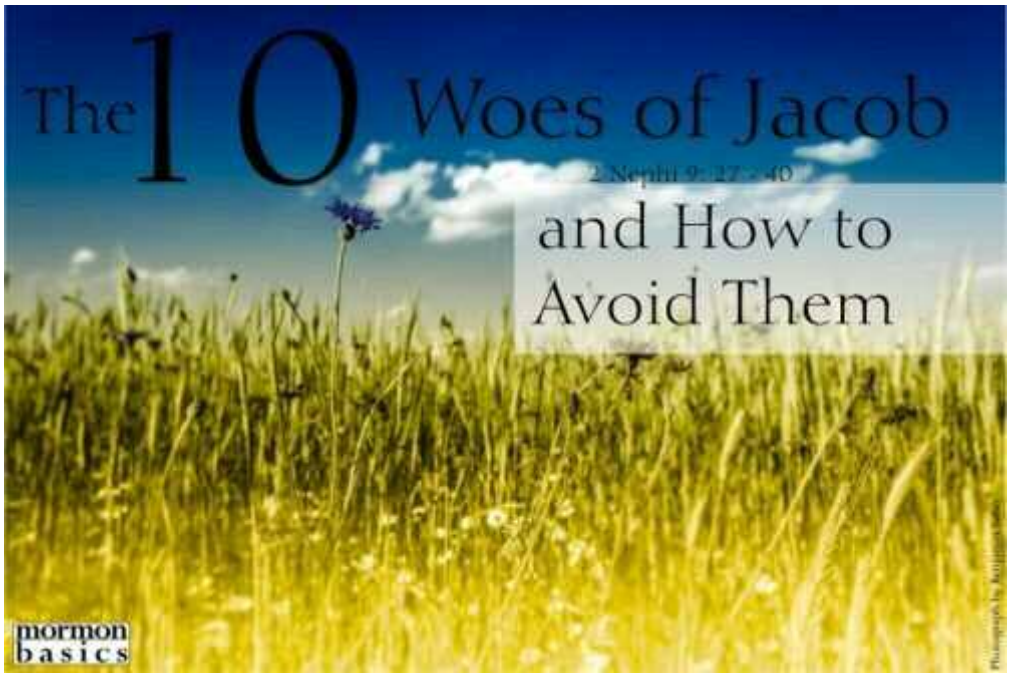

The Second Book of Nephi probably has as much heavy doctrine in it as any book of scripture we have. In chapter nine Jacob is giving the people of the church what is tantamount to a loving hellfire and damnation speech. His intention is to make sure they understand the results of their behavior so their sins don't come back to be answered on his own head at the last day. He wants them to clearly understand the consequences of their own behavior. He pronounces 10 woes or expressions of sorrow or lamentation, followed by warnings. The pronouncement of a woe (or wo) is a way of getting their attention to let the people know his next point is really serious.

The verses in question run from 2 Nephi 9:27 - 38, though the next two verses, 39 and 40 are also important to include in this study.

Woe #1

27 But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

29 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

Jacob had already established that where there is no law given there can be no punishment. But these are members of the Church. They have the law, so there is no excuse for wrongdoing. To have the laws of God and ignore them or deliberately violate them is a waste of our short time of probation in mortality. If we deliberately ignore or violate the commandments our state in the hereafter will indeed be awful, for we knew better, yet squandered our opportunities to be better.

So why do people sometimes blow off the commands of God when they know better? Sometimes it is because they have become learned, educated, and they have been deceived into thinking that they are smarter than God. If you ask any well educated sinner they will probably not come out and say they are smarter than God, but when they set God's counsel aside in favor of their own beliefs, is this not what they are declaring? Are they not, in essence saying that they know better than the Almighty?

The Lord does not condemn education. He actually promotes it. His prophets have always promoted it. But it is only valuable to us when we take what we learn and use it in the service of God and our fellow men.

> **Woe #2**
>
> 30 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.

It is an easy thing to forget that the goods of this world belong only in this world. No matter how much we acquire in this life, upon death we lose it all. The only thing we can take with us through the veil into the eternities is our knowledge and our character.

Jacob pronounces a wo upon the rich who have set their hearts, their devotion, on the things of this world. Because they have become short sighted and only look out for their wealth, they forget that the Lord expects them to use their wealth to bless the lives of others, to care for the poor and needy, and to further His work during their time in mortality. We cannot worship God and also have our heart devoted to our wealth. We choose one or the other, because we cannot be fully devoted to two masters at one time. One master or love will always win out when a choice has to be made between the two.

Woe #3

31 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.

Have you ever read a passage of scripture and thought to yourself, hey, I'm sure that wasn't there before? When we are focusing on other things we don't hear what is not convenient to us. If you have ever had children, or dealt with people in general, you know of the act of selective hearing. Anciently Israel was guilty of selective hearing all the time. They only heard what they wanted to hear, not what the prophets tried to get them to hear. It wasn't that they couldn't understand the message, it was that they didn't want to understand the message. This is why the Lord told them they were deliberately deaf, because they would not hear.

When we choose not to listen to the counsel of the prophets we also choose to accept the loss of the blessings that counsel would bring us. Sometimes we don't think in terms of reason like that. Instead we just want to continue doing what we are already doing, not wanting to be bothered with the process of change required by listening to the prophets. We forget for the time being that we are not helping our own pursuit of happiness by selectively listening to the voice of warning from the Lord's servants.

Woe #4

32 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.

This woe falls under the same category as the last one. The difference is that instead of listening (or not listening) we sometimes refuse to see what is in front of us. We refuse to acknowledge the obvious, and choose instead to continue to believe what is convenient for us to believe.

Woe #5

33 Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.

Circumcision was a covenant carved into the flesh of the house of Israel to give them a visual reminder of their covenant status with their God. When they refer to those who are uncircumcised they are referring to those who have not made covenants, and therefore are not entitled to the blessings available to those who have made the covenants.

If someone is uncircumcised of heart it refers to someone who refuses to place his/her loyalties and love on the Savior of mankind. This is someone who refuses to be obedient to the commandments and loves not the things of the Lord. A person can be technically (physically) circumcised, but still be uncircumcised of heart. If anyone should have had their hearts set on the things of God, it should have been the children of Israel. Yet they were repeatedly told they were uncircumcised of heart.

Jacob is telling the members of the Church that if they don't become circumcised of heart, just like they have already physically been circumcised, when it comes to the day of judgment they will find that their own knowledge of their sins will basically slap them upside the head. They will not be ignorant of what they have done to themselves by refusing to obey the Lord.

Woe #6

34 Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.

The liar is a child of the devil. Satan is the master of lies. His children will be with him in hell. Those who insist on living their lives dealing out misdirected statements, half truths, mis-statements, falsehoods, etc. will find themselves with their true master in the hereafter.

Woe #7

35 Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die.

Jacob was talking to a people who all went to war and killed people in hand-to-hand combat. They were accustomed to butchering people in battle. So he states here that it is he who "deliberately killeth" who will die. The death he refers to is the second death, eternal separation from God. Deliberate murder is the second most serious of all sins, and the only one of those two that anyone can commit. This means that we need to make sure that we always have our passions under control and that we seek to rule our lives with the love of God, rather than the anger Satan would seek to have us use against one another.

Woe #8

36 Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell.

The third most serious sin is sexual impurity. Things like adultery, fornication, and rape fall under this category. Sometimes a people hardened by constant war become

unfeeling in their compassion for others. Among these sexual improprieties tend to run rampant. Jacob warns them to keep their thoughts clean for the sake of their own souls.

Woe #9

37 Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.

Why would Satan delight in those who worship idols? Perhaps it is because he has gotten them to not worship the God would could save them from his grasp. If we can be tricked into focusing our time and attention on our possessions, our activities, our games, our recreation, our "anything" that replaces God as our true center of attention then Satan has won the day. He has prevented us from seeking safety in the salvation Christ offers us. This is why the Lord comes down so hard on those who focus on anything but Him. It is because we are only damaging ourselves when we turn aside from the Lord.

Woe #10

38 And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

How many times do we hear that today is the day to prepare to meet God? How many times are we told that this life is a probationary period? If we mess up our one and only chance at mortality - yes, there are no do overs - then when we die and have to face the final judgment we will find that we are completely unprepared and have not yet repented of our sins. By that time it will be everlastingly too late, and we will have to settle for a lesser reward for eternity. That is sad, considering what greater blessings we might have enjoyed if we had taken our opportunities to repent in mortality a little more seriously.

Once Jacob had given his list of woes to the members of the Church he gave them some sound counsel in the next two verses.

39 O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

40 O, my beloved brethren, give ear to my words. Remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel. Do not say that I have spoken hard things against you; for if ye do, ye will

> revile against the truth; for I have spoken the words of your Maker. I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken.

Remember that the woes pronounce awful consequences to disobedience. They only happen when we listen to Satan over the voice of our Savior. As long as we are willing to choose to follow Christ over Satan then none of these woes will have any affect on us. As Jacob says, "the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken."

So how do we avoid the woes of Jacob? We avoid them by doing the opposite of that which brings on the woe. We need to:

1. Keep the commandments we have been given

2. Learn to be generous to those who stand in need. This includes our time, talent, and all physical resources. The Lord expects us to be willing to give our all in His service. If we are holding back on any part of it then we have invited the consequences of that woe into our life.

3. Listen to and obey the counsel of the prophet

4. Pray to the Lord to help us see where we stand in obeying the counsel of our leaders. Sometimes it takes the Spirit to open our eyes and help us understand where we have been deliberately blind.

5. It is not enough to be baptized or go to the temple. Our covenants need to be etched into our hearts and souls. Do a self evaluation and see if you are fully committed or still are a little uncircumcised of heart.

6. Be honest in all your dealings. This is a temple recommend question, so you will hear it regularly. Can you answer yes honestly?

7. Don't willfully murder. For most of us this is not a normal problem, but we are counseled by the Brethren to even avoid activities and games that imitate such behavior. These things rob us of portions of the Spirit that could be ours if we refrained from such activities.

8. Sexual purity extends beyond not committing adultery or fornication. Real purity includes keeping our mind clean in the entertainment we seek out, which includes movies and television, books, and magazines, as well as what we choose to look at on the Internet. If we are seeking to look at people doing things we won't do because of covenants made, are we really any different from those who are actually doing those things? After all, if we seek to be in their company when they transgress the laws of God, how different are we really?

9. Where is our love, our heart? Is it focused on the Lord and His work or on our entertainment, our income, our worldly projects or honors, or any one of a million other things? Unless the Lord is number one in our life then we have a problem with idol worship.

10. Are we seeking to make sure that when we leave mortality we are like Jacob who made sure his garments had no one else's blood on them? Jacob wanted to make sure that when he showed up at the bar of God his garments were spotless and free from the sins of him or anyone else who depended on him. Can we say the same?

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The 10 Woes of Jacob, and How to Avoid Them