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The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

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Abstract: Chapters 9 through 30 of 3 Nephi are perhaps the most choice part of the entire Book of Mormon because this section chronicles the transcendent visit of the Risen Lord to the Nephite Saints, His profound teachings, and His amazing, compassionate ministry. His recorded actions and utterance during this period offer remarkable scope for a reverent and knowledgeable review such as that done by sixteen scholars in this book. The 3 Nephi text, like that of the entire Book of Mormon, is shown to be “remarkably efficient” and to give “extraordinary unity and coherence to . . . its message.”



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The Book of Mormon:

3 NEPHI 9-30,

This Is
My Gospel

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The Book of Mormon:

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This Is
My Gospel

Papers from the Eighth Annual
Book of Mormon Symposium, 1993

Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.



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“This Is My Gospel”

1

Robert L. Millet

After at least two days of instruction, worship, and intense spiritual experience, the risen Lord appeared once again to his American Hebrews. His Nephite Apostles “were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting.” When Jesus appeared, he inquired as to their desires. “Lord,” they answered, “we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter” (3 Nephi 27:1–3). In this context the living Christ sets forth some of the most straightforward yet profound doctrine to be found in the entire Book of Mormon concerning the name and mission of his Church.

His Name and His Church

Why disputations arose among the Nephites concerning the name of the church is not clear. Since the days of Alma, in which a formal church structure and organization had been established, it appears that the Saints had been called the members of the “church of Christ” or the “church of God” (see Mosiah 18:17; 25:18, 23; Alma 4:5; 3 Nephi 26:21). With the end of the Mosaic dispensation and the initiation of the Messianic, a new day had dawned; it was the meridian or focal point of salvation history, the age in which the Lord Omnipotent, the long-awaited Promised Messiah, would “come down from heaven among the children of men, and . . . dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5). We recall that Jesus had earlier

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bestowed priesthood authority to baptize upon Nephi and the Twelve (3 Nephi 11:22) when in fact they already held authority from God to perform the saving ordinances. Likewise, Jesus baptized those who had previously been baptized (3 Nephi 19:10–12). But it was a new day, a new light, and a new revelation (see Smith 2:336).

Even though the Nephites had held the fulness of the priesthood and had enjoyed the blessings of the everlasting gospel from the days of Lehi and Nephi, they continued to observe the Law of Moses. That is, they offered sacrifice just as Adam had done two and a half millennia before, and they conformed to the Law's "myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions. . . . There is . . . no intimation in the Book of Mormon that the Nephites offered the daily sacrifices required by the law or that they held the various feasts that were part of the religious life of their Old World kinsmen" (McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* 427). Because the faithful among the Nephites accepted and treasured the blessings of the gospel, because they looked forward with an eye of faith to the coming of the Holy One, because they knew full well the central message of the Law and thus comprehended with certainty the Law as a means to Him who was and is the great End, the Law of Moses had become "dead" unto them. They were "alive in Christ because of [their] faith" in him (2 Nephi 25:25) and because they had learned to distinguish tokens from covenants and ritual from religion. It was a new era—the beginning of the Dispensation of the Meridian of Time—and they had only recently been initiated anew into the covenants and ordinances (3 Nephi 11:22). Perhaps for these reasons the people had begun to wonder if there was a new or different name by which the congregation of Christians in this new dispensation was to be called and known.

The Master's words to his Apostles suggest that there may have been some among the Nephites who proposed to name the church something other than The Church of Jesus Christ:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing? Have they not read the scriptures, which say you must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; and whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:4–6)

Our Lord's words are most instructive. The church or body of Christ is a true and living thing only to the degree that it is imbued and animated by Christ. Like an individual, the church must take upon it the name of Christ—meaning his divine influence, attributes, and nature—in order to enjoy his transforming powers. Those who are noble in character, kindly in deed and manner, considerate and compassionate—what the bulk of the Western world would call “Christian” in nature—but who refuse to take upon themselves the name of Christ (and all that such a commitment entails), are not fully Christ's nor are they Christians in the total and complete sense. They remain in a lost and fallen state yielding to the enticings of the spirit of the evil one and to the nature of things in a fallen world and are without God in the world (Alma 41:11) and, as such, are without tie to the family of God. They are spiritual orphans, nameless and familyless, in a lone and dreary world. And what of the Church? It is made up of people, and to the degree that those congregants are as yet unredeemed and unregenerated, the Church cannot be the light that is so desperately needed in a darkened world, cannot make available that life and that energy that flow from its great Head.

From the days of Adam, the divine decree has gone forth: “Thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8). *All* things are to be done in his holy name. *All* things. We are to speak, act, preach, and prophesy in the name of the Son. We are to heal the sick and raise the dead in the name of the Son. We are to conduct the business of the Church and perform the ordinances of salvation in the name of the Son. We are to do what we do in the name of Jesus Christ

and speak and act the way our blessed Master would under similar circumstances. The holy scriptures—as vital an instrument as they are in pointing us to the words and works of the Perfect One—do not provide us with the only pattern by which we gauge our actions and direct our labors. The people of God seek to be led by the power of the Holy Ghost, the oldest and most enduring “book” of living scripture, that sure and certain guide that shows and tells all things that need to be done (2 Nephi 32:3, 5).

Through baptism and rebirth we signify, according to Elder Dallin H. Oaks,

our commitment to do all that we can to achieve eternal life in the kingdom of our Father. We are expressing our candidacy—our determination to strive—for exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

Further, we

take upon us [Christ’s] name as we publicly profess our belief in him, as we fulfill our obligations as members of his Church, and as we do the work of his kingdom. But there is something beyond these familiar meanings, because what we witness [in the sacrament prayers] is not that we *take* upon us his name but that we are *willing* to do so. In this sense, our witness relates to some future event or status whose attainment is not self-assured, but depends on the authority or initiative of the Savior himself. (“Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ” 82–83)

That is, we have presently announced our righteous desires, and have entered into a covenant with God. We have announced our candidacy for exaltation, but have not yet received it. When the time comes that we have received the fulness of the Father, and have qualified for the highest of eternal rewards, we shall have the name of Christ sealed upon us forever. King Benjamin thus pleaded with his people: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, *that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life*” (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added).

Only the children of Christ will be called by the name of Christ. Only those who have by covenant adoption taken upon them the holy name shall receive the rewards of holiness. Alma declared,

Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken to the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd. And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold. (Alma 5:38–39)

In the same way, the Redeemer has taught in a modern revelation:

Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved; wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day; wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 18:23–25)

The Lord's church, with his name upon it, administers his gospel. It teaches his doctrine and makes available his ordinances. The Church of Jesus Christ is a service agency, an auxiliary if you will, established for the blessing and edification of individuals and families. Elder Russell M. Nelson observed:

The Church is the way by which the Master accomplishes His work and bestows His glory. Its ordinances and related covenants are the crowning rewards of our membership. While many organizations can offer fellowship and fine instruction, only His church can provide baptism, confirmation, ordination, the sacrament, patriarchal blessings, and the ordinances of the temple—all bestowed by authorized priesthood power. That power is destined to bless *all* children of our Heavenly Father. (18)

In summary, then, the Savior directed: "Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake" (3 Nephi 27:7). We ever pray for the growth and proliferation of the

Church of Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom of God on earth. We plead mightily for the expansion of the work of the Lord in all nations, and among all kindreds, tongues, and people. We petition the Father in the name of the Son, and, when our prayers meet the divine standard, they are offered under the direction of the Holy Ghost. We pray for the Church that bears the name of his Son, and we pray for special outpourings of light and power "for Christ's sake," meaning because of or on account of what Christ has done for the Church (see Webster's 1828 Dictionary under "sake") and, more particularly, we pray for those who constitute the sheep of his fold. We ask sincerely that the judgments of God may be turned away and the mercies of heaven extended, all because of the mediation and intercession of the Holy One of Israel (see Alma 33:11, 16).

Built upon His Gospel

We learn, however, that although being called after Christ's name is a necessary condition for it to be his church, such is not sufficient. The resurrected Lord stated that "if it be called in my name then it is my church, *if it so be that they are built upon my gospel*" (3 Nephi 27:8; emphasis added). Anyone can organize a church. Anyone can name that church The Church of Jesus Christ. And yet, as the Master affirms, it will not be his church unless it is built upon his gospel. I will note in this brief section when a church is *not* built upon his gospel, and then discuss the principles of Christ's gospel in the next.

We cannot really be built upon Christ's gospel if we do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Those who labor tirelessly to lighten burdens or alleviate human suffering but at the same time deny the fact that Jesus Christ is God cannot have the lasting impact on society that they could have through drawing upon those spiritual forces that center in the Lord Omnipotent. Those in our day who focus endlessly upon the moral teachings of Jesus but downplay the divine Sonship miss

the mark dramatically. C. S. Lewis warned us about saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [the Lord]:

'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (55–56)

In the absence of the real thing—the fulness of the gospel—many ideas and movements seek to occupy center stage. Among the more popular in today's world is a focus upon Jesus as a loving teacher, guide, and moral leader. For some persons, Jesus stands as the preeminent example of kindness, the ultimate illustration of social and interpersonal graciousness and morality. A favorite text for this group is the Sermon on the Mount, and their highest aspiration is to live the Golden Rule. A Roman Catholic philosopher has observed:

According to the theological liberal, [the Sermon on the Mount] is the essence of Christianity, and Christ is the best of human teachers and examples. . . . Christianity is essentially ethics. What's missing here? Simply, the essence of Christianity, which is *not* the Sermon on the Mount. When Christianity was proclaimed throughout the world, the proclamation (*kerygma*) was not "Love your enemies!" but "Christ is risen!" This was not a new *ideal* but a new *event*, that God became man, died, and rose for our salvation. Christianity is first of all not ideal but real, an event, news, the gospel, the "good news." The essence of Christianity is not Christianity; the essence of Christianity is Christ. (Kreeft 83; emphasis in original)

For many, the doctrine of Christ has been replaced by the ethics of Jesus. Those who insist that ethics must be discussed or taught or enforced point toward the declining moral standards of our day, the increase of drug abuse or teenage pregnancy, the prevalence of our inhumanity to each other. They contend that

if Christianity is to make a difference in the world, we must find ways to transform ethereal theology into religious practice in a decaying society. They thus promote a social gospel—a relevant religion. The problem with a social gospel is that it is inherently and forevermore deficient as far as solving the real problems of human beings. It almost always focuses on symptoms rather than causes. Ethics is not the essence of the gospel nor is it necessarily righteousness. The very word *ethics* has come to connote socially acceptable standards based on current consensus, as opposed to absolute truths based on divinely established parameters. Ethics is too often to virtue and righteousness what theology is to religion—a pale and wimpy substitute. Indeed, ethics without the virtue that comes through the cleansing powers of the Redeemer is like religion without God, at least the true and living God.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written,

It is one thing to teach ethical principles, quite another to proclaim the great doctrinal verities, which are the foundation of true Christianity and out of which eternal salvation comes. True it is that salvation is limited to those in whose souls the ethical principles abound, but true it is also that Christian ethics, in the full and saving sense, automatically become a part of the lives of those who first believe Christian doctrines.

In summary,

It is only when gospel ethics are tied to gospel doctrines that they rest on a sure and enduring foundation and gain full operation in the lives of the saints. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* 699–700)

Latter-day Saints are often criticized for expending so much of the Church's resources on missionary work or the construction of temples, indicating that the institutional Church should be more involved in leading or officially supporting a crusade or social cause. Where is your charity? they ask. Of what avail are your noble theological principles? they inquire. I agree with Bruce Hafen, who pointed out that

the ultimate purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cause the sons and daughters of God to become as Christ is. Those who see religious

purpose only in terms of ethical service in the relationship between man and fellowmen may miss that divinely ordained possibility. It is quite possible to render charitable—even “Christian”—service without developing deeply ingrained and permanent Christlike character. Paul understood this when he warned against giving all one’s goods to feed the poor without true charity. . . . *While religious philosophies whose highest aim is social relevance may do much good, they will not ultimately lead people to achieve the highest religious purpose, which is to become as God and Christ are.* (196–97; emphasis added)

The Savior declared to his Nephite followers that “if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it” (3 Nephi 27:10). When the Saints of God have been true to their trusts and live worthy of the gifts and influence of the Holy Ghost, then the works of the Father—the works of righteousness, including deeds of Christian service, manifested in the actions and behavior of the faithful—flow forth from regenerate hearts. Those works are not alone the works of mortals but rather the doings of persons who have become new creatures in Christ. Their works are therefore the works of the Lord, for they have been motivated by the power of the Spirit. “I am crucified with Christ,” the Apostle Paul wrote; “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). To the Philippian Saints he likewise beckoned: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For *it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Philip 2:12–13; emphasis added).

It is true that much of the time we do the works of righteousness simply out of a sense of duty and not always as a result of some overwhelming spiritual motivation within us. Such efforts attest to our willingness to be obedient, but along the way we must strive in prayer for a change of heart, for the Lord through his Spirit to prompt and direct our labors. Otherwise we spend our days operating merely in terms of expectation and requirement when we could be operating in terms of pure love and enjoyment. Without the Spirit and power of God providing impetus, meaning, purpose, and staying power for our poor

efforts, we eventually experience a type of spiritual burnout; we continue to work to exhaustion, but our hearts are not in it. Though for a season we may serve because of good companionship, out of fear of punishment, because of duty or loyalty, and even as a part of a hope for an eternal reward, "if our service is to be most efficacious, it must be accomplished for the love of God and the love of his children." Laboring "with all of our heart and mind is a high challenge for all of us. Such service must be free of selfish ambition. It must be motivated only by the pure love of Christ" (Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 14–15).

The Master warned what would happen if we seek to be his but are not built upon his gospel. If our effort "be not built upon my gospel," he said, "and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return" (3 Nephi 27:11). God's work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Our most noble work will be accomplished and our greatest glory will come to the degree that we are similarly occupied with this overarching objective. The works of the devil obviously pertain to carnality and devilishness, what Paul called "the works of the flesh"—such sins as adultery, fornication, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, and heresy (Gal 5:19–21). They bring pleasure and telestial titillation for a season, but they result inevitably in shrinkage of the soul, followed in time by bitter loneliness and that awful alienation from things of lasting worth. Indeed, "their works do follow them, for it is because of their works that they are hewn down" (3 Nephi 27:12). The works of humankind may refer to what we know as honorable endeavors, worthwhile efforts to improve humanity and society, but labors whose focus are not truly on the Lord or his work and glory. So often the works of humankind bring glory to humankind. More often than not, the works of humankind hack away at the leaves of the inconsequential while ignoring the spiritual roots of attitudes and behavior. The poignant message of the

Savior is that happiness, meaning lasting joy, comes only to those who are built upon his gospel and whose works are really the Lord's works. So many people, as C. S. Lewis observed,

seek to invent some sort of happiness for themselves without God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, slavery—the long terrible story of people trying to find something other than God which will make them happy. The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now *God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.* (53–54; emphasis added)

Because we are so very limited in our vision, we are tempted to envy the financial success of those who spurn at the laws and commandments of God. “They look happy and free,” Bishop Glenn L. Pace remarked, “but don’t mistake telestial pleasure for celestial happiness and joy. Don’t mistake lack of self-control for freedom. Complete freedom without appropriate restraint makes us slaves to our appetites. Don’t envy a lesser and lower life” (40).

“This Is the Gospel”

Some things simply matter more than others. Some topics of discussion, even intellectually stimulating ones, must take a back seat to more fundamental verities. It is so in regard to what the scriptures call the gospel or the doctrine of Christ, those foundational truths associated with the person and powers of Jesus the Messiah. Who he is and what he has done are paramount and central issues; all else, however supplementary, is secondary. The Prophet Joseph Smith was once asked about the basic tenets of Mormonism. “The fundamental principles of our religion,” he answered, “are the testimony of the Apostles and

Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 121; hereafter *TPJS*). This statement by the Prophet highlights our duty as to what we ought to teach and what ought to receive the greatest stress in the Church. It suggests that occasionally it may be helpful, relative to our Church involvement, to ask the question, why are we doing what we are doing? If in fact our efforts do not (directly, or at least indirectly) assist the Saints in their quest to come unto Christ, then perhaps the particular program or activity has no place in the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, in the language of revelation, "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" (D&C 1:30). The true Church administers the gospel; salvation in this day and age will come through the covenants and ordinances administered and made available by the Church or it will come not at all. To speak of coming unto Christ independent of Christ's church or in defiance of his anointed servants is foolishness. It is, however, the gospel that saves (Rom 1:16) and not the Church per se. Auxiliaries and programs and policies and procedures—though inspired from heaven and essential for the everyday operation and continuing expansion of the Lord's kingdom—are of efficacy, virtue, and force only to the degree that they encourage and motivate the Saints to trust in and serve the Lord and thus receive his matchless mercy and grace.

The word *gospel* means, literally, God-news or good news. The gospel is the good news that Christ came, that he lived and died, and that he rose again to immortal glory. The gospel is the good news that through Christ we may be cleansed and renewed, transformed into new creatures. The gospel is the good news that through our Savior and Redeemer we can be delivered from death and sin to the abundant life. In short, the gospel is the "glad tidings, . . . that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world,

and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:40–42). To the Nephites, the risen Lord declared: “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13).

The gospel is a sacred covenant, a two-way promise between God and humankind. Christ does for us what we could never do for ourselves. He offers himself as a ransom for sin; he descends below all things that he and we might have the privilege of ascending to celestial heights; and he dies and rises from the tomb that we—in a way that is completely incomprehensible to the finite mind—might likewise come forth from death into resurrected, immortal glory. On our part, we agree to do those things that we can do for ourselves: we make a solemn promise to accept and receive him as our Lord and Savior; to believe on his name and rely wholly upon his merits, mercy, and grace; to accept and receive the principles and ordinances of his gospel; and to strive all the days of our lives to endure faithfully to the end, meaning keep our covenants and walk in paths of truth and righteousness. “Viewed from our mortal position,” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “the gospel is all that is required to take us back to the Eternal Presence, there to be crowned with glory and honor, immortality and eternal life.” He continued:

To gain these greatest of all rewards, two things are required. The first is the atonement by which all men are raised in immortality, with those who believe and obey ascending also unto eternal life. This atoning sacrifice was the work of our Blessed Lord, and he has done his work. The second requisite is obedience on our part to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Thus *the gospel is, in effect, the atonement. But the gospel is also all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys needed to save and exalt fallen man in the highest heaven hereafter.* (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith 134; emphasis added)

It is probably the case that if one hundred Protestants were asked *where* the atonement of Christ took place, those one hundred persons would answer: At Golgotha, on the cross. It is also no doubt true that if one hundred Latter-day Saints were asked the same question, a large percentage would respond: In Gethsemane, in the garden. In fact, the sufferings of Jesus Christ that began in the Garden of Gethsemane were consummated on the cross. Between noon and 3:00 pm on that fateful Friday, all of the agonies of Gethsemane returned, as the Spirit of our Heavenly Father was once again withdrawn from the Suffering Servant (see Matt 27:46; Talmage 661; McConkie "Purifying Power of Gethsemane" 9–10; *The Mortal Messiah* 4:224, 226; in *Journal of Discourses* 3:205–206; hereafter *JD*). Truly, the lowly Nazarene has trodden the winepress, meaning Gethsemane or the garden of the oilpress, alone (D&C 76:107; 88:106; 133:50; Isa 63:3). In his own words, that awful agony in the Garden "caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink—nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men" (D&C 19:18–19). And as to the final phase of his redemptive labor, his foreordained place on that accursed cross, he explained to the Nephites: "My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me" (3 Nephi 27:14).

The scriptures—especially 3 Nephi 27—clearly and consistently teach that the principles of the gospel are as follows:

1. *Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Those who seek to enjoy the benefits of the atonement of Christ must first learn to exercise faith in Christ. They must believe in him, believe that he is, "that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (Mosiah 4:9). In *Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith taught that three things are necessary in

order for rational and intelligent beings to exercise saving faith in God or Christ (Lecture 3:3, 4, 5). First, they must accept the idea that God actually exists; they must plant the seed of the word of God in their hearts and experiment upon (pray over and labor with) the fact that there actually is a Savior (see Alma 32–33). Second, they must have a correct idea of God’s character, attributes, and perfections; they must, from serious study and personal revelation, seek to understand what God is like. Third, they must gain an actual knowledge that the course of life they are pursuing accords with the will of God; they must know that their lives are worthy of divine approbation and thus of the blessings of heaven. The Prophet explained that the latter requisite for faith—the peaceful assurance that we have pleased God—comes only through our willingness to sacrifice all things for the kingdom’s sake. Faith in Jesus Christ, the first principle of the gospel, is thus based on evidence. And the more evidence we amass—external and internal—the greater our faith. We may, like the Zoramites, begin with the simple hope that there is a Christ and that salvation is available (see Alma 32:27), but in time that hope can, by the power of the Holy Ghost, ripen into the knowledge that one day we will not only be with Christ but *like* him (see Moroni 7:41, 48; 1 John 3:2). The Savior teaches plainly that no person enters into his rest save their garments are washed in his blood, which cleansing comes by faith and repentance (3 Nephi 27:19).

2. *Repentance.* Once we come to know the Lord—of his power and greatness and perfections—we automatically sense our own inadequacies. We feel to shrink before the Lord Omnipotent; we cry out for mercy and pardon from the Holy One of Israel. And thus it is that repentance follows on the heels of faith; as we encounter the Master, we begin to discern the vast chasm between the divine realm and our own unholy state. Repentance is literally an “afterthought,” a “change of mind,” a change in perspective and life-style. Repentance is the process by which we discard the rags of uncleanness and through Christ begin to adorn ourselves in the robes of righteousness. It is the

means by which we incorporate into our lives a power beyond our own, an infinite power that transforms us into new creatures, new creatures in Christ. It is only through "the repentance of all their sins" (3 Nephi 27:19) that the followers of Christ are enabled to go where God and Christ are.

3. *Baptism by Water and by Fire.* Jesus and his prophets have declared in unmistakable terms that salvation comes only to those who have been born again (see John 3:1–5; Mosiah 27:24–26; Alma 7:14). People must be born again or born from above in order to see and enter the kingdom of God. When the Spirit of the Lord brings about a change of heart, takes the veil of darkness and unbelief from our eyes, we are born again to *see*, and are thereby enabled to recognize and acknowledge the Lord's church and his servants. We are born again to *enter* the kingdom only as we subscribe to the "articles of adoption," meaning the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the legal requirements for entrance into Christ's family kingdom (see *TPJS* 328; Pratt 48). Joseph Smith taught,

Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved, and enter into the Kingdom of God, except faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, and any other course is in vain; then you have the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost. (*TPJS* 198)

Baptism becomes the physical token of our acceptance of the atoning graces of our Lord. We go down into the "watery grave" and come forth as initiates, new citizens of the kingdom, even as a sign of our ready acceptance of the Lord's burial in the tomb and his subsequent rise to newness of life in the Resurrection (see Rom 6:3–5). The baptism of fire takes place as the Holy Ghost, who is a sanctifier, takes from our souls the filth and dross of worldliness. Joseph Smith the Prophet explained that "you might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of

the Holy Ghost” (*TPJS* 314). That is to say, “Sins are remitted not in the waters of baptism, as we say in speaking figuratively, but when we receive the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Spirit of God that erases carnality and brings us into a state of righteousness” (McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* 290; see also 239; 2 Nephi 31:17; Moroni 6:4). Men and women who come unto Christ through the appropriate ordinances are in time “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 27:20), meaning they are made pure and holy. Filth and dross—the elements of the natural world—are burned out of their souls as though by fire, thus giving rise to the expression “the baptism of fire.” The Holy Ghost, that *revelator* who is the means by which we come to know the truth, is also a *sanctifier* and thus the means whereby we become people who are true. In time, through being sanctified, members of the Church come to abhor sin and cleave unto righteousness (see Alma 13:12).

4. *Enduring to the End.* Disciples of Christ in all ages are instructed to be baptized of water and of fire and to labor to maintain their worthy standing before God. The scriptures teach that to the degree the Saints of the Most High trust in the will and purposes of God and lean upon his mighty arm, as well as extend themselves in Christian service to the needy, they are able to *retain* that remission of sins from day to day (see Mosiah 4:11–12, 26; Alma 4:13–14). To endure to the end is to remain true to our covenants after baptism, to live the life of a Saint to the best of one’s ability, throughout the remainder of one’s life. The commission is for members of the household of faith to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life” (Mosiah 18:9). To endure to the end is to be “steadfast and immovable”—the scriptural phrase for spiritual maturity—and to press toward the high prize of eternal life (see Mosiah 5:15; 2 Nephi 31:16, 20; 33:4; D&C 6:13; 14:7). The scriptures plainly affirm that “whoso repenteth and is baptized in [Christ’s] name shall be

filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will [the Lord] hold guiltless before [the] Father at that day when [He] shall stand to judge the world" (3 Nephi 27:16).

People of the covenant are able to endure to the end, not just through personal grit and will power, not just by holding white-knuckled-like to the iron rod, but by cultivating the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the Spirit that provides direction while we are encircled by the mists of darkness. It is the Spirit that provides moral courage to proceed along the gospel path while the tauntings and temptations emanating from the great and spacious building ring out loud and clear. And it is the Spirit that brings peace to the weary, hope to the faithful, and the promise of eternal life to those who continue to hunger and thirst after righteousness and are willing to serve God at all hazards (see *TPJS* 150).

5. *Resurrection and Eternal Judgment.* In 1839 Joseph Smith observed that "the Doctrines [sic] of the Resurrection of the Dead and the Eternal Judgment are necessary to preach among the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (*TPJS* 149; see also 365). Through the atonement of Jesus Christ, as an unconditional benefit, all men and women will, in a limited sense, be redeemed from spiritual death. They will be raised from the grave and thereafter brought to stand in the presence of the Almighty to be judged according to the deeds done in the body. This principle of the gospel illustrates both the mercy and justice of God. Samuel the Lamanite testified that Christ "surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord" (Hel 14:15; see also 2 Nephi 9:15, 21–22; Mormon 9:13). Christ reinforced this doctrinal teaching to his Nephite disciples:

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up [that is, raised from the dead] by the Father, to stand

before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—and for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:14–15)

What Gospel Shall We Teach?

The Book of Mormon is said to contain the fulness of the gospel (see D&C 20:9; 27:5; 35:12, 17; 42:12). Some have wondered how the Lord and his prophets could state this, when in fact the Book of Mormon contains no specific reference to such matters as eternal marriage, degrees of glory in the resurrection, vicarious work for the dead, and so forth. Again, let us focus upon what the gospel is. The Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel in the sense that it teaches the doctrine of redemption—that salvation is in Christ and in him alone—and the principles of the gospel (faith, repentance, rebirth, enduring, resurrection, and judgment) more plainly and persuasively than any other book of scripture. The Book of Mormon does not necessarily contain the fulness of gospel doctrine. Rather, it is a sacred repository of eternal truth relative to the most fundamental and far-reaching doctrine of all—the doctrine of Christ (see Benson 18–19).

We have received a divine commission from our Lord to teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom (see D&C 88:77). What is it that we should teach? Above and beyond all that might be said in sermons and lessons and seminars and discussions, what should be the walk and talk of the Latter-day Saints? Simply stated, we are to teach the gospel. Our primary message, like Paul's must be "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). If we have any hope of preserving the faith of our fathers among our people, of building firmly on the rock of revelation and the doctrines Joseph Smith taught, then we must ground and settle ourselves in Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice. We must, of course, teach all the doctrines of the gospel when it is appropriate to do so. But above all, we must

see to it that "we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 Nephi 25:26). Elder Boyd K. Packer testified,

Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator. Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. *This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.* (56; emphasis added)

We frequently hear the mentioned fact that the gospel is universal, that Mormonism welcomes and embodies all that is true and good and ennobling. From this perspective, then, the gospel embraces the truths of the sciences, the arts, and great literature. Would it not follow, then, that no matter what we taught in the meetings of the Church, so long as it were true, was the gospel? If a man should address the congregation in sacrament meeting and speak for twenty minutes on the laws of motion or the process of photosynthesis, would he then be preaching the gospel? If a woman should decide to speak at length to her Spiritual Living class on the laws of genetics or the manner in which sentences may be properly diagrammed, would she then be bearing witness of the gospel? Certainly not. For although in a rather vague sense the gospel may be said to contain all truth, it should be clear to most discerning minds that the constant and consistent witness of the scripture is that only those truths tied to the doctrine of Christ have power to touch and lift and transform human souls. These are those of which the Holy Ghost will bear testimony, those which, when preached by that Spirit, result in mutual edification of both speaker and listener.

In 1984 Commissioner Henry B. Eyring delivered an address to teachers in the Church Educational System. He spoke soberly of the "sea of filth" which today's youth encounter and of the absolute necessity for solid and sound gospel instruction

in the effort to immunize the youth against the waywardness of the world.

Now I would like to say this: There are two views of the gospel—both true. They make a terrific difference in the power of your teaching.

One view is that the gospel is all truth. It is. The gospel is truth. With that view I could teach pretty well anything true in a classroom, and I would be teaching the gospel. The other view is that the gospel is the principles, commandments, and ordinances which, if kept, conformed with, and accepted, will lead to eternal life. That is also true.

When I choose which of these views I will let dominate my teaching, I take a great step. If I take the view that the gospel is all truth, rather than that it is the ordinances and principles and commandments which, if kept, conformed with, and accepted, lead to eternal life, I have already nearly taken myself out of the contest to help a student withstand the sea of filth. Why? Because he needs to have his eyes focused on light, and that means not truth in some abstract sense but the joy of keeping the commandments and conforming with the principles and accepting the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If I decide I will not make that my primary vision of the gospel, I am already out of the contest to help my student with his capacity to see good and to want and desire it in the midst of filth. (11)

Conclusion

The Master summarized the gospel or doctrine of Christ for us and beautifully elucidated each of the principles of that gospel:

And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:19–22)

These matters are sacred. They are among the mysteries of the kingdom, meaning they are to be known and understood only by revelation from God (see Lee 211). I have a personal witness to the effect that other great and marvelous things, further mysteries, are made known unto us, not as we wade in the morass of the unknown or the esoteric, but rather as we ponder upon, teach from, and focus on those plain and precious truths we know as the principles of the gospel. Profundity thus grows naturally out of simplicity.

Just thirteen days before his death, Elder Bruce R. McConkie affirmed the vital importance of teaching the doctrine of atonement. He stated,

Now the atonement of Christ is the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and it is the least understood of all our revealed truths. Many of us have a superficial knowledge and rely upon the Lord and his goodness to see us through the trials and perils of life. But if we are to have faith like Enoch and Elijah we must believe what they believed, know what they knew, and live as they lived. May I invite you to join with me in gaining a sound and sure knowledge of the Atonement. We must cast aside the philosophies of men and the wisdom of the wise and hearken to that Spirit which is given to us to guide us into all truth. We must search the scriptures, accepting them as the mind and will and voice of the Lord and the very power of God unto salvation. ("The Purifying Power of Gethsemane" 10)

The gospel is the glad tidings concerning the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Atonement is central. It is the hub of the wheel; all other matters are spokes at best. The good news is that we can be changed, be converted, become different people in and through Christ. The good news is that we can come to perceive an entirely new realm of reality, a realm unknown to the world at large. It is a new life, a new life in Christ. In a time of stress and great uncertainty, thanks be to God for the peace and joy of the Spirit that can come to us through Christ and his gospel. In a day when we encounter somber and soul stirring headlines on almost every page of the newspaper, God be praised that the good news of

the gospel has been restored in our day through modern witnesses of Christ. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," the Master acknowledged, and then added, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christ our Lord has overcome the world, and he has opened the door and made available to us the power to do the same. And surely there could be no better news, no more joyful tidings, than that.

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Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi

2

Robert J. Matthews

As this dispensation progresses, the Book of Mormon will continue to play an ever-increasing role and multiply its influence in the Church. As developments continue to occur on earth, and more of Israel is gathered, and nations tumble, and governments change, we will understand more perfectly the prophecies in the Book of Mormon and the testimony that it gives of the work of Jesus Christ. I have a testimony and feel good inside when I read the Book of Mormon. What I have written in this paper are my own views, but they are rooted in the contents of 3 Nephi.

President Ezra Taft Benson had this to say about the importance of the Book of Mormon:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon. (51)

Our topic in this chapter is “Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi.” What Jesus says and what he does should be of utmost importance to us. As we read the Book of Mormon from the beginning, we find ourselves becoming eager and excited for the birth of the Savior to occur and for him to visit the Western Hemisphere.

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The prophet Alma, speaking to the members of the church in the valley of Gideon about 83 years before the birth of Jesus, dramatically declared that the Savior would soon make his appearance:

For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people. . . .

And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me. (Alma 7:7, 10–13)

Many of the Nephites wanted to know more about when Jesus would come to them:

And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness. (Alma 16:20)

It would have been a great privilege and blessing to be one of those who literally saw the resurrected Savior make his appearance. Mormon writes of this:

And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—

showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them. (3 Nephi 10:18–19)

Many of these people had seen the signs of Christ's birth 33 years earlier, and everyone had recently seen the signs of his death. They had survived the three hours of fierce storm, the winds, the awful shaking of the earth, the terrible tempest, the lightning, and the noises that would accompany such tumult, the crashing down of buildings, the shearing of great rocks, and the tumbling of mountains and inevitable landslides. With the ground underneath their feet shifting so sharply, all of this would have made it difficult or impossible to stand. And they had also endured three days of a thick vapor of darkness and had heard the fearful moanings, groanings, shriekings, and howlings of hundreds of thousands of human beings, many of whom were being crushed and maimed and broken in body. The animals also must have added to the noise and confusion. And there would have been not only the physical pain, but also an enormous amount of emotional stress.

These same people also heard the voice of the Lord himself speaking to them in the darkness, declaring that all this had happened because of wickedness (3 Nephi 9, 10). They also heard the Father's own marvelous, penetrating voice introducing the Son as he descended from the sky and stood before them (3 Nephi 11:1–7).

Those who survived the tumult and witnessed these events were the more righteous ones. The wicked were slain in the destruction (3 Nephi 9:12–13; 10:12–13). Survivors were conditioned and prepared for the appearance of the Son of God among them. After all these things had happened to them, they could not ever be casual or indifferent about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the true purposes of life. They were ready to see, hear, and participate in the personal ministry of Jesus, their Lord and Redeemer.

This strenuous conditioning reminds us of the time when the Lord descended on Mount Sinai with fire, and smoke, and

thunder, and the shaking of the earth. So frightened were the children of Israel that they fled from the scene:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (Ex 20:18–22)

As startling as this occurrence at Sinai was, it provides only a hint of the far more widespread, extended destruction in America as told in 3 Nephi.

When I read of the Savior's glorious ministry in America, I think of the contrast to his mortal ministry among the Jews in the Holy Land. There the Son of God himself, the Creator of the earth, the God of Israel, walked and talked and ate among the people. But most of those Jewish people were not prepared and conditioned, neither by cataclysmic tumult nor by obedience to the gospel, so they generally did not appreciate who Jesus was or how great their opportunities were in having him among them day by day.

When the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria, in questioning unbelief, asked Jesus if he were greater than the patriarch Jacob, she did not at that moment realize who he was. She thought he might be a prophet. He explained that he was even more than a prophet, he was the Messiah (John 4). The Jewish rulers mockingly asked Jesus if he thought he was greater than Abraham or the old prophets. He replied that he was indeed greater than they, and that, in effect, he had made Abraham's day (John 8). Jesus told the unbelieving Jews that they did not appreciate him, nor did they realize how great their opportunities were to be able to see and hear and talk with him daily. He reminded them that the city of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, but "behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Luke 11:30–32). He reminded

them also that the Queen of Sheba came a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but “behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31). Jesus told them that many righteous prophets for ages past had desired to see and to hear him in person but had not been so blessed (Matt 13:16–17). Yet there he was in the flesh, living among them, and most of the Jews did not understand the importance of the situation.

However, as we have already noted, the Nephites and Lamanites in America who survived the cleansing process because of their righteousness were much more prepared and conditioned and ready to receive their Lord and Savior. As a consequence, the Book of Mormon people received teachings, blessings, and experiences that far exceeded those given the Jews:

And it came to pass that he went again a little way off and prayed unto the Father; and tongue cannot speak the words which he prayed, neither can be written by man the words which he prayed. And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed. Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man. And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief. Verily I say unto you, there are none of them that have seen so great things as ye have seen; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard. (3 Nephi 19:31–36)

This greater ability of the Nephites to receive the gospel is shown also in the fact that in the New Testament there are about forty parables which Jesus used because so many of the Jews were slow to perceive spiritual things, whereas in 3 Nephi Jesus used no parables among the Nephites because he was able to give them the gospel in direct and plainly spoken words. Jesus used parables because of the hard-heartedness of the people. Please note his explanation to the Jewish rulers as to *why* he sometimes spoke in parables to the Jews: “And, again, hear

another parable; for unto you that believe not, I speak in parables; that your unrighteousness may be rewarded unto you” (JST Matt 21:34).

Third Nephi records a public demonstration by Jesus of his actual, physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. The resurrection is taught in the New Testament but on a smaller scale. In America 2,500 persons, one-by-one, saw and felt the resurrected body of the Savior and heard him speak. This is in harmony with a revelation that had been given to Enoch, who 3,000 years before had been told that a record (the Book of Mormon) would come out of the ground in the last days “to bear testimony of [the] Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea and also the resurrection of all men” (Moses 7:62). The Savior’s ministry among the Nephites certainly attests to his bodily resurrection:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him. (3 Nephi 11:10–17)

After visiting the Nephites, Jesus went to another Israelite group, the lost ten tribes, to show them his body (3 Nephi 16:1–3; 17:4). Their record will no doubt contain a “showing” similar to that which is in the Book of Mormon.

The realization of Jesus’ visit to ancient America, ministering among a branch of the house of Israel, broadens our understanding of the work of Jesus Christ. Most of the world knows nothing of Jesus. Many millions of Christians know of his ministry among the Jews as recorded in the New Testament. Only a few million, the Latter-day Saints, know that Jesus also ministered to the ancient Americans, and also to the ten tribes, showing his resurrected body to them in ways that cannot be misunderstood.

Third Nephi offers greater insight into the activity and scope of Jesus’ work than that found in the New Testament alone. When we get the record of the ten tribes, our understanding will expand further, and we will comprehend even better than we do now that Jesus is not an absentee landlord. He is the Savior of the whole world. He commanded that all of these visits be recorded as multiple testaments for future generations to read (2 Nephi 29:11).

A preliminary scanning of Jesus’ teachings in 3 Nephi reveals at least the following 19 subjects: (1) he died and was resurrected; (2) he is the God of Israel and of the whole earth; (3) he delivered a Sermon at Bountiful similar to the Sermon on the Mount; (4) he emphatically declared that he was sent by the Father, who told him what to teach and what not to teach; (5) he taught baptism by water and reception of the Holy Ghost; (6) he had fulfilled the law of Moses; (7) he said that all the prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled; (8) he reaffirmed the covenant made with Abraham and talked of the gathering of Israel in the last days, including the Jews, ten tribes and the Nephites/Lamanites; (9) he said that the Jews will gather

to Jerusalem; (10) the Western Hemisphere is for the descendants of Joseph; (11) a New Jerusalem will be built on this land; (12) he instituted the sacrament and taught that we must endure to the end; (13) he quoted two chapters of Malachi; (14) he quoted numerous passages from Isaiah and commanded the people to search the words of Isaiah; (15) he explained what the name of the Church should be; (16) he commanded that an omission in the record be filled in; (17) he declared that he is the prophet spoken of by Moses; (18) he gave a detailed definition of the “gospel”; (19) and he expounded all scripture “in one,” (that is, he put it all together, the “big picture”) declaring that he is the law, the light, and the life of the world. In addition, he performed many miracles, including raising a man from the dead.

I now want to discuss some important doctrinal topics that Jesus presented to the Nephites that far exceed in plainness and clarity anything that is found in the New Testament on these topics. The first has to do with some particular privileges that are associated with the house of Israel. I mean the literal lineage of Israel—those who are of Israel by blood descent—direct offspring, genealogically, according to the flesh.

We are all familiar with Jesus’ statement to the Jews, recorded in John 10:16, in which he made reference to “other sheep” who were not Jews. These “other sheep” are generally identified today by non-LDS scholars as referring to the Gentiles. Many commentaries produced by Catholic and Protestant writers identify the “other sheep” as Gentiles (Anchor Bible 29:396; Bruce 200; Dummelow 792; Interpreter’s Bible 8:626–27).

The Jews to whom Jesus spoke also thought he was referring to the Gentiles. It seems as though no one, not even his disciples, understood. Jesus gave a detailed explanation of this to the Twelve whom he has chosen in America:

And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you.

And not at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell it unto your brethren at Jerusalem.

Neither at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell unto them concerning the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father hath led away out of the land.

This much did the Father command me, that I should tell unto them:

That other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

And now, because of stiffneckedness and unbelief they understood not my word; therefore I was commanded to say no more of the Father concerning this thing unto them.

But, verily, I say unto you that the Father hath commanded me, and I tell it unto you, that ye were separated from among them because of their iniquity; therefore it is because of their iniquity that they know not of you.

And verily, I say unto you again that the other tribes hath the Father separated from them; and it is because of their iniquity that they know not of them.

And verily I say unto you that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

And they understood me not for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching.

And they [the Jews] understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost.

But behold, ye have both heard my voice, and seen me; and ye are my sheep, and ye are numbered among those whom the Father hath given me. (3 Nephi 15:13–24)

In addition to stating that the Nephites were the “other sheep” (v 21), Jesus explains why the “other sheep” could not be Gentiles. He indicates that if the Jews, or anyone else, including those who write commentaries, knew the rules, they would know that the other sheep must of necessity be Israelites, for “the Gentiles should not at any time hear [his] voice” or see the resurrected Christ in person as a group. I take that explanation to mean that an experience such as is recorded in 3 Nephi where the resurrected Savior ministers among multitudes, and

personally teaches them, *will* only, and *can* only occur among those who are Israelites.

This explanation comes directly from the mouth of Jesus and was intended to teach both them and us something we need to know about the importance of Israel. The Savior's explanation also clarifies such statements as Matthew 15:24, wherein Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and also 1 Nephi 10:11, which reads that after his resurrection, Jesus would "make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles." That is, he would visit them through the Holy Ghost only, not personally.

In March 1978, a prominent Lutheran minister participated in a symposium on the Brigham Young University campus. He had accepted the task of comparing the Savior's sermon in 3 Nephi with the Sermon on the Mount found in the book of Matthew. By the tools and procedures of textual criticism, he discovered several interesting differences between these two sermons. He gave an astute and perceptive analysis. He said that compared to the New Testament, 3 Nephi is much clearer, the Savior's teachings are more precise; they are stronger, bolder, and offer considerably more information than can be gained from the New Testament. He found also that the personality of Jesus is more commanding in 3 Nephi than in the New Testament. He noted that in the New Testament Jesus speaks as a teacher, but in 3 Nephi he speaks as a god.

As I listened, I thought it was remarkable that he had recognized these things, and I supposed that he was speaking with favor toward the Nephite account. However, as he continued, he tried to discredit the Book of Mormon by saying that new religions and cults always have an insatiable thirst for answers and for knowledge, whereas spiritual maturity brings a more ascetic view. He preferred the New Testament to 3 Nephi because it was not so definitive and allowed him more choice of interpretation. He acknowledged that the New Testament was less clear, and less dramatic, but felt that was the beauty of it. It did not seem to occur to him that the New Testament had

suffered at the hands of copyists, translators, and textual critics and so was now only a shadow of its former self.

It was a rewarding experience for the minister himself to visit the campus of BYU and to make this careful study of 3 Nephi. It was also a valuable experience for us to listen to him. He brought to our attention some points of comparison that many of us had not noticed in such detail before. My feeling then was the same as it is now: because he approached the study of scripture intellectually, and not by the Spirit, he found the details but missed the message. Some prefer uncertainty and lack of clarity to light, knowledge, and information, but I am thankful for the Spirit, and style, and conviction of the Book of Mormon (see Stendahl 139–54).

The teachings of Jesus in 3 Nephi leave no doubt as to who Jesus is and what he requires of us if we want to be saved. Jesus said plainly that he is the God of Israel and the God of the whole earth. He demonstrated unmistakably that he had been slain and had risen from the dead and that he had the body with the wounds from the nails and the spear to prove it.

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, Matthew added the comment that “the people were astonished” because Jesus had spoken “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:28–29). A corresponding sentence is not found in 3 Nephi. However, there is, right at that point, a lengthy statement by Jesus himself about his authority:

Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold I am he that gave the law and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end. Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled. And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come. For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life. Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore

keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me. (3 Nephi 15:4–10)

As we read through 3 Nephi, we find many definite statements from Jesus declaring his authority and his godhood. He has authority from the Father to speak, to give commandments, to choose officers in the Church, and to give salvation to whom he will. He speaks of “my” commandments, “my” church, “my” gospel, “my” covenant, and “my” people. Jesus requires that everyone who wants to be saved be baptized in water, by immersion, and he wants no disputes about it (11:22–28). He instituted the sacrament among the Nephites and explained what it represents and who should partake and who should not (3 Nephi 18). He said that he himself is the light and the example that we should look to and which we should hold up unto the world (v 24).

In 3 Nephi Jesus specifically discusses the future of the house of Israel. He commanded that we search and study the words of Isaiah, so as to come to an understanding of the plans and purposes of God in this earth, because Isaiah said a great deal about the house of Israel and the Gentiles. Here is Jesus’ statement:

And now, behold I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah. For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel; therefore it must needs be that he must speak also to the Gentiles. And all things that he spake have been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake. (3 Nephi 23:1–3)

Jesus spent considerable time teaching the Nephites about the importance of the covenants that had been made with Abraham, and with Israel, and the future developments that will come among the house of Israel because of those covenants. He spoke in 3 Nephi about the Jews, the lost tribes, and also about the promises that have been given the Nephites and Lamanites because they are descendants of Joseph. He said that these promises will be fulfilled and come to fruition in the last days.

The teachings of Jesus that focus on the house of Israel are found in 3 Nephi chapters 15–17 and 20–23, about eleven pages of text. We can assume, from the volume of instruction, that Jesus considers this subject a very important one. In these chapters Jesus says things such as: the Nephites “are a remnant of the house of Joseph” (15:12); “and behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers . . . with Abraham” (20:25–27); “I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people” (v 29); and “my people shall know my name” (v 39).

Jesus prophesied that when the Book of Mormon would come forth in the last days, it would be a sign that the covenants to Israel are being literally fulfilled. He said:

And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem. Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name. Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby this people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance. (3 Nephi 21:26–28)

The prophet Mormon adds these words of explanation and summary:

And now behold, I say unto you that when the Lord shall see fit, in his wisdom, that these sayings [the Book of Mormon] shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel, concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance, is already beginning to be fulfilled.

And ye may know that the words of the Lord, which have been spoken by the holy prophets, shall all be fulfilled; and ye need not say that the Lord delays his coming unto the children of Israel.

And ye need not imagine in your hearts that the words which have been spoken are vain, for behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.

Yea, and ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn.

Therefore ye need not suppose that ye can turn the right hand of the Lord unto the left, that he may not execute judgment unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 29:1–3, 8–9)

I have emphasized these things about the house of Israel for three reasons. First, such emphasis is given to this subject in 3 Nephi. These statements are actually there, spoken by Jesus. And there are more of them than I have quoted here. Second, there seems to be a tendency today to neglect the importance of the covenant of Abraham and the role of the house of Israel. We often teach the gospel without mentioning the covenant of Abraham or the house of Israel, as though these covenants did not even exist. In the Book of Mormon, Jesus teaches us that the ancient covenants are as valid today as they were 4,000 years ago. I believe that they have something to do with the political events occurring in the world and also with our children and grandchildren traveling to various places of the earth, among war and revolution, to tell of the restoration of the gospel and of the Book of Mormon. These events are occurring before our very eyes. According to Jesus' own words, the covenants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are still important to the Father and to Jesus and should also be important to us. We cannot ignore eleven pages of 3 Nephi. And the third reason is that I have a conviction of the Spirit that the things which are said in the Book of Mormon about the house of Israel are true.

Isaiah and Nephi say that the Book of Mormon will whisper out of the ground as one "that hath a familiar spirit" (Isa 29:4; 2 Nephi 26:16). Certain Hebraisms and other old-world traces give the Book of Mormon a familiar echo to the Old Testament. But there is more than just language forms. When Jesus declares the restoration of Israel in the last days, and the building of the New Jerusalem, and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as he does in 3 Nephi, it carries a familiar spirit and ring of truth

into the hearts of those who are conversant with the promises which God has given to Israel and to the Gentiles and that are found in the Bible.

In closing, we turn again to President Ezra Taft Benson:

It is clear that Third Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture. It testifies of Jesus Christ, His prophets, and the doctrines of salvation. . . . What a blessing it would be if every family would read together Third Nephi, discuss its sacred contents, and then determine how they can liken it unto themselves and apply its teachings in their lives. Third Nephi is a book that should be read and read again. (60)

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The Designations Jesus Gives Himself in 3 Nephi

3

Monte S. Nyman

In the October 1987 General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Ezra Taft Benson stated:

Over one-half of all the verses in the Book of Mormon refer to our Lord. Some form of Christ's name is mentioned more frequently per verse in the Book of Mormon than even in the New Testament. He is given over one hundred different names in the Book of Mormon. Those names have a particular significance in describing His divine nature. (56)

In the topical guide of the Bible published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there are 18.5 pages of references to Jesus Christ in 57 different subcategories. The indexes in the Triple Combination (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price) have 11 pages of references and 24 categories of subtitles. The quantity of scriptural references to Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon justifies its new subtitle, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," added in 1982. Furthermore, the variety of subtitles given to Jesus Christ in all the above references illustrates the breadth of the testimony that is borne of him in the LDS scriptures.

To examine all of the references associated with Jesus Christ is too large a task for the purpose of this paper, which is to explore only those titles that he gives himself in the book of

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3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. As it contains the account of the resurrected Jesus Christ's ministry among the people in the Americas, the record is basically an account of his own words as he ministered to his "other sheep" of the house of Israel (see John 10:16; compare 3 Nephi 15:17). Consequently, the designations Jesus gives of himself are authentic declarations of his role in ministering among the children of men upon the earth. While there are many other important titles given him in other parts of the Book of Mormon and in other scriptures, the names within 3 Nephi form a nucleus that validates the claim that the Book of Mormon is indeed another testimony of Jesus Christ to the world.

An analysis of Jesus' self-designations shows 11 different titles with a twelfth one implied. Three of these 12 titles are supported by the references of others also in the 3 Nephi record. These three references by others will be noted to support the 12 designations. I will discuss the 12 names Jesus gave himself in the order of their initial appearance in the text of 3 Nephi.

"I Am Jesus Christ the Son of God"

Following the great three-hour destructive storm on the American Continent at the time of Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem (3 Nephi 8:5–19), a voice was heard among the surviving inhabitants announcing that the person speaking had caused the terrible changes to come upon the whole face of the land because of the wickedness and the abominations of the people (9:1–12). Those who were spared were "the more righteous" and were invited to return unto the speaker "and repent of [their] sins, and be converted, that [he] may heal [them]" (v 13). The speaker further promised them eternal life and the arm of mercy as a blessing for their coming unto him (v 14). He then identified himself for the first time declaring "Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God" (v 15).

Jesus is the English translation of the earthly name of the Son of God (1 Nephi 11:18–21; Luke 2:1–7, 21). The name *Jesus* had been selected for him hundreds of years prior to his

birth and was announced to prophets by an angel (2 Nephi 25:19; Luke 2:21).¹

Jesus' designation of himself as the "Christ" verifies his being the Messiah or "holy anointed one" with the power to grant eternal life and redemption as he had just promised the Nephites (vv 13–14). *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*.² The identification of the person speaking to the Nephites as Jesus Christ is thus a declaration of his Messiahship. He further identified himself as "the Son of God," an acknowledgment of where he had obtained the power to become the Christ, the Messiah. From his Father, God, he obtained the divine ability to make the Atonement, to provide for the redemption of humanity, and to bring about the Resurrection by breaking the power of death and the grave. He identified himself to the Nephites as the mortal Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, who had received his divinity from his Father in Heaven, the father of his earthly body.

At the beginning of his personal ministry on the American continents, the Nephites were given a second witness by the Father that Jesus was indeed his Son. As they were gathered around the temple in the land of Bountiful, they heard a voice speak to them from heaven three times. The third time that they heard the voice, they were able to understand that it declared: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7).

The Father was pleased with his Son's having done his will and wrought out the Atonement for all humankind (see 3 Nephi 27:13–14), thus glorifying the Father's name in bringing the

¹ Although the references for an angel announcing the birth and name of Jesus are from the Book of Mormon, the New Testament Luke account notes that an angel had foretold the name to be Jesus "before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21). That the Nephite prophets knew of his birth and name is a part of the restoration of plain and precious parts lost from the Bible as shown to Nephi in vision nearly 600 years before the birth of Christ (1 Nephi 13:39–40).

² An angel announced to Jacob, brother of the prophet Nephi, that Christ would be the name of the Redeemer and the God who would come among the Jews and be crucified (2 Nephi 10:2–3). Earlier an angel had identified Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God (1 Nephi 12:18 1st Edition). Later editions changed the words *Jesus Christ* to the *Messiah*.

opportunity for salvation to his children (see D&C 132:31). The Nephites were invited by the Father to hear his Son so that they might obtain the blessings of that atonement.

The prophet Mormon, who abridged the Nephite records, prophesied that in the latter days all of the house of Jacob will be restored to a knowledge of their covenant with the Lord their God and will come to “know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed” (3 Nephi 5:24–26). As a remnant of the house of Jacob, we Latter-day Saints are part of the fulfillment of that promise made possible through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Before the crucifixion of Christ, Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, had boldly testified to the Nephite people of the ministry of Christ and the remission of their sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 7:15–16). The prophets among the Nephites had known of the Savior’s mission, and they knew his future appearance to their descendants was a verification that he was indeed Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

“I Created the Heavens and the Earth”

Having told the Nephites who he was, Jesus then informed them of what he had done: “I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” (3 Nephi 9:15).³ His creating the heavens probably has a dual meaning. The heavens are occupied by the sun, and the moon, and the stars. The placing of these heavenly objects in their various positions was done to govern the earth and other planets in the same order. This verse seems to be telling us that the organization of the sun, moon, and stars was thus carried out by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

³ The prophet patriarch Abraham was shown, through the Urim and Thummim, the organization of the stars in this order of the universe. This paper will not discuss the organization of these stars, but those interested should carefully study the third chapter and facsimile no. 2 of the book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price.

The second possible meaning of Jesus' creating of the heavens is that of his being the actual creator. It has reference to Jesus' being the creator of the other planets that are in the order of the heavens that govern this earth and possibly other orders as well, since the word *heavens* is plural. When Moses stood in the presence of God and talked with him face to face, he was informed that worlds without number had been created by the Son, "but only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof" were given to him (Moses 1:31–35).⁴ For our purpose here, suffice it to say that Jesus Christ was the creator of many other worlds, as he testified to the Nephites.

The creation of this earth (and other worlds) by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a doctrine clearly taught in the New Testament but often overlooked (see John 1:10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). The Book of Mormon calls the Son of God "the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth" (Mosiah 15:4; Alma 11:39). A father is a creator of life. As the Eternal Father of the earth, Jesus gave it life. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained:

The word create came from the [Hebrew] word *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 350–52)

The Nephites knew that Jesus Christ was the God who supervised the organization of the earth upon which we live.

The creation of "all things that in them are" (3 Nephi 9:15) would include reference to the inhabitants of the earth. Moroni, in finishing his father Mormon's record, recorded:

⁴ The concept that "the Lord God" who spoke to Moses and "the Lord" who showed Abraham the creation of the heavens was Jesus Christ speaking by divine investiture of authority will be discussed below under "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me."

But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. Behold, he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man. (Mormon 9:11–12)

The Book of Mormon testifies that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 19:10). As shown above by Moroni, he is “that same God who created the heavens and the earth.” Moroni’s statement that “[Jesus] created Adam” needs an explanation. One explanation could be that Jesus Christ is the executor of the plan of salvation to prove humankind “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr 3:24–25). It seems to be in this context that Moroni calls Jesus Christ the creator of Adam. The following verses recorded by Moroni explain the redemption of humanity through the mission of Jesus Christ (Mormon 9:12–13). The declaration to the Nephites by Jesus that he created all things that are in the heavens and the earth is consistent with the concept that the earth is a proving ground and the program for that proving ground is administered by Jesus Christ. The concept that Jesus established a similar program on the other earths he created is verified by latter-day revelation:

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father. That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (D&C 76:23–24)

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was indeed the creator of the heavens through organizing the various planets to govern this order of the universe. He has organized those planets from the eternal elements that existed just as he did this earth. The inhabitants of this earth and other inhabited planets were given opportunity for salvation through his administration.

“I Was with the Father from the Beginning”

The Book of Mormon does not give us very much information about the premortal life. One of the few statements concerning this phase of life is Christ’s declaration that he “was with the Father from the beginning” (3 Nephi 9:15). The word *beginning* is used in other scriptures to designate the premortal life (Gen 1:1; John 1:1). In the Book of Mormon, that stage of existence is also referred to as “the first place” (Alma 13:3). Although Christ did not expand on what his work was with the Father in “the beginning,” there are two places in the Book of Mormon that indirectly shed more light on the Savior’s declaration.

King Limhi testified to his subjects that a prophet of the Lord (Abinadi) was slain

because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth. (Mosiah 7:27)

Limhi’s interpretation of Abinadi’s words that man was created in the image of Christ, the God who was to “come down among the children of men,” shows us that Christ was a God in the premortal state and that man was created in his image. This interpretation also clarifies the Genesis account of “let us make man in our image” (1:26). The plural pronouns *us* and *our* in Genesis must refer to Christ being with his Father from the beginning and being involved in the plan to people the earth with humankind. The designation of his being with the Father from the beginning is significant in understanding the overall role of Christ in the plan of salvation.

The second reference from the Book of Mormon to indirectly confirm Christ’s role with the Father “in the beginning” is Alma’s great discourse on the foreordination of priesthood

holders. The high priesthood which Alma declares the faithful in “the first place” were foreordained to receive in this life was “after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world” (Alma 13:7). This eternal priesthood, “without beginning or end,” being called after Christ’s holy order is another witness that Christ “was with the Father from the beginning” (3 Nephi 9:15). The priesthood, the right to officiate in the name of God, was a right granted to the faithful in the premortal life. The order of the priesthood granted to them was called after the Son of God who was with the Father in the beginning.

The Joseph Smith Translation (hereafter JST) of the Bible gives us a third function of Christ with his Father in the beginning.

In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God. (JST John 1:1–2)

In summary then, Christ’s role with the Father in the beginning had at least three dimensions: (1) humans were created in his image and a plan instituted for their salvation; (2) he foreordained men to bear the eternal priesthood; and (3) he directed the preaching of the gospel to others in his premortal state. All three of these assignments illustrate a co-rule with his Father.

“I Am in the Father, and the Father in Me”

Jesus declared, “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (3 Nephi 9:15). This seems to be an expression of the unity that exists between them in carrying out the mission of the Son upon the earth. Furthermore, it is an expression of the divine investiture of authority that the Father has bestowed upon the Son. Both of these concepts are illustrated repeatedly in 3 Nephi.

At the time of the prophesied birth of Christ, great persecution was heaped upon the Nephites, and “a day was set apart

by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions [prophesied signs] should be put to death except the sign should come to pass” (3 Nephi 1:9). In response to mighty prayer by Nephi₃, the son of Nephi₂, the voice of the Lord declared that on the morrow he would come into the world “to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh” (3 Nephi 1:14). It seems that Christ is stating that he would fulfill the will of the Father through the divine nature he had obtained from having been sired by Eloheim. Having that nature would enable him to pay the demands of justice and thus atone for humanity. On the other hand, he was willing to lay down his life of flesh and take it up again that he might break the bands of death and bring about the Resurrection. Thus he was in the Father, in doing the will of the Father, and the divine nature of the Father that was in him enabled him to carry out this dual assignment.

When he appeared to the Nephites, after having completed his mission, he testified that he had taken upon him “the sins of the world, in the which [he] . . . suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11). He then invited those privileged Nephites to feel the wound in his side and the nail prints in his hands and feet as a witness that he had “been slain for the sins of the world” (v 14) or had laid down his life to break the bands of death. He had done the Father’s will as well as his own.

The unity of the Father and Son was illustrated to the Nephites in Jesus’ prayer to his Father: “And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who believe on their [the Twelve’s] words, that they may believe in [me], that [I] may be [unified] in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23). He then prayed again for a similar oneness for those who would believe in the words of the Twelve.

Christ again declared the unity of the Father and the Son as he spoke to the Nephites about the redemption of those in Jerusalem: “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of

the Father; and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 20:35). Another testament of this unity was given to the Three Nephites who were allowed to remain on the earth and bring souls to Christ. These three were promised, “Your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one” (28:10). Thus, a complete unity does exist between the Father and the Son and all those who attain a fulness of joy in the kingdom of the Father.

“In Me Hath the Father Glorified His Name”

We read in the Pearl of Great Price that the Lord God told Moses that there was no end to his works: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Although it appears that this is Christ who is speaking to Moses, the work is the unified effort of both the Father and the Son. The Father brings glory to his own name by having the Son come to earth and provide a plan of salvation for the earth’s inhabitants. The Savior’s voice declared this to the Nephites: “And in me hath the Father glorified his name” (3 Nephi 9:15). Later he confirmed that he had “glorified the Father in taking upon [himself] the sins of the world” (11:11). That Christ would share in this glory is exemplified in his prayer for the believers: “Father, I pray . . . that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them” (19:29). This doctrine of the work of the Father and the Son being one, of glorifying themselves by bringing similar glory to others, is also taught in the Old Testament (Isa 53:12), the New Testament (Luke 22:29), and the Doctrine and Covenants (132:31). Thus all four of the LDS standard works teach this eternal principle.

“[I Am] Their Redeemer”

Although Jesus speaks to the Nephites many times about redemption, he calls himself the Redeemer only once, occurring in the context that the record of the Nephites would bring the scattered remnant of Israel “to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer” (3 Nephi 16:4).⁵ Other references speak of the results of his redemption mission.

When Jesus spoke to the Nephites, he acknowledged that his own received him not, but said, “As many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh” (3 Nephi 9:17). He does not enlarge upon this doctrine here, but the rest of the Book of Mormon and other standard works teach it often.⁶ The same voice declared to the Nephites that Christ came “unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin” (v 21). Earlier in the book of 3 Nephi, Mormon had inserted an editorial comment, prophesying that all the house of Jacob would come to know the Redeemer, the Son of God “and [be] gathered . . . unto their own lands” (5:24–26). Other testimonies that Christ is the Redeemer in other parts of the Book of Mormon will not be discussed here.

“I Am the Light and Life of the World”

Both when Jesus spoke to the Nephites following the destructive storm in America and when he initially appeared to them as a glorified, resurrected being, he identified himself as

⁵ In quoting Isaiah 54 to the Nephites (3 Nephi 22), reference is made to “thy Redeemer” (v 5). However, he does not comment on the passage, and thus I do not count it as a self-designation.

⁶ King Benjamin taught his subjects that those who enter into a righteous covenant (baptism) become spiritually begotten sons and daughters of Christ, taking upon themselves his name (Mosiah 5:7–8). Emma Smith was told that all “who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom” (D&C 25:1). Adam was told by the Lord—for having been baptized and born of the Spirit—“Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:65–68). Paul taught the Romans that those who received the “Spirit of adoption” were “the children of God” (Rom 8:15–17). Thus, all the standard works teach of the doctrine of spiritual redemption bringing adoption as sons and daughters of God.

“the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11). On another occasion he referred to himself as “the law, and the light” (15:9). During his three-day ministry among the Nephites, he expanded on his being the light for the Nephites (18:16, 24), but he did not expand on his being their life. In his mortal ministry in the land of Jerusalem he had referred to himself as the light of the world (John 8:12), but he used the combination title of “light and life” among the Nephites.

The Gospel of John testifies that “in him was life; and the life was the light of men” (1:4). The JST expands John’s testimony to explain that “in him was *the gospel*, and *the gospel was the life*, and the life was the light of men” (JST John 1:4; italics designate additions). Jesus’ explanation to the Nephites supports the JST concept. He testified to them that the law of Moses had an end in him: “Behold, I am the law, and the light” (3 Nephi 15:9). Thus, the law is equated with the higher law of the gospel that he had just finished teaching them and compared to the law of Moses (3 Nephi 12–13). In speaking further on that great sermon that he had also given in Jerusalem (15:1) he admonished the Nephites to follow the example of prayer he had taught them (13:5–15) and later added, “Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you” (18:16). After expounding more concerning prayer, he admonished them further: “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (v 24). Thus, Jesus was the light of men through his teachings and his example that he had given to the Nephites.

The Book of Mormon further explains what he meant by his being the *life* of men. In the same statement he made of his being the law and the light, he counseled, “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9). His being the life of men declares him to be the source of eternal life. If humankind will follow the gospel, which is the light of men, we can obtain eternal life. Jesus Christ is the light and the life of us all.

“I Am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End”

Christ’s use of the Greek *Alpha* and *Omega* to identify himself to the Nephites was probably intended as a confirmation of the New Testament designation for the latter-day reader (see Rev 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13). *Alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and *Omega* is the last letter, thus verifying that Christ was the member of the Godhead who began the work of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life” of humankind upon this mortal earth (Moses 1:39) and will be the member of the Godhead who will conclude the events of this earth’s plan of salvation (see 3 Nephi 9:18). The Lord used the same Greek word designations in modern revelation (D&C 19:1; 38:1; 45:7).

“I Am the God of Israel”

Jesus used all of the above designations of himself during the period of darkness that followed the destruction among the Nephites at the time of his crucifixion. He used the designation of his being “the God of Israel” after he descended from the heavens and spoke among the Israelites in the Americas (3 Nephi 11:14). At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, Israel was divided into three major branches: the Nephites, the Jews, and the lost tribes. Others of Israel were, at that time, scattered among the nations of the earth. Those scattered Israelites are not considered in this designation but will be considered under the next heading.

Before Christ’s appearance to the Nephites, he spoke to them twice following the period of darkness. During his first speech, he spoke to the inhabitants upon the face of the land (America) and, referring to the terrible destruction that they had just experienced, repeatedly stated that he had caused those calamities to come upon the various cities because of their iniquities (3 Nephi 9:2–12). This clearly illustrates that Christ

had the power of a god and that the Nephites were subject to this power.

In his second speech to all the people of the land following a period of silence “for the space of many hours” (3 Nephi 10:1–3), Christ spoke of his previous gatherings of these “descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel,” and of how oft he would have gathered them if they had responded to his invitation. He further spoke of how often he would yet gather them if they would repent (vv 4–7). As their God, he had directed their activities, offered them other opportunities which they had rejected, and would yet give them other opportunities to gather. He was indeed the God of the Nephites.

Jesus was born a Jew, thus enabling him to declare, “I came unto my own, and my own received me not” (3 Nephi 9:16). Earlier, just prior to his birth, he had declared to Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, “I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world” (1:14). During his speeches to the Nephites following the period of darkness at the time of his crucifixion, he referred to how oft he would have gathered those at Jerusalem but they would not heed him (10:5).

During the second day of Christ’s three-day ministry among the Nephites, he spoke of the covenant to gather his people to Jerusalem, the land of their inheritance, the land promised to them forever (3 Nephi 20:29). After enlarging upon the sequence of this gathering, he spoke of the covenant of the Father to *his* people (Israel) and of Jerusalem’s being “inhabited again with [*his*] people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance” (v 46; emphasis added). The message of the Book of Mormon is that Christ was indeed the God of his own people, the Jews. He also administered the plan of salvation for the Father’s people, the rest of the house of Israel, and was thus the God of all Israel by divine investiture of authority. A careful reading of 3 Nephi chapters 20 and 21 illustrates a consistent distinction between the whole house of Israel as the Father’s people and the people of Judah as Christ’s people, and it must

be ascertained in this careful reading when the Savior is speaking and when he is quoting the Father.

In ministering to the Nephites, Jesus spoke of other sheep of the house of Israel to whom he would minister following the Nephite ministry (3 Nephi 16:1–3; 17:4). He ministered to each branch of Israel separately so that they would know that he was their God, and someday we will have the record of his other ministries (2 Nephi 29:12–14).

Before Israel was broken into separate branches, Christ had ministered to them collectively. To the Nephites, he announced that he had fulfilled the law that was given unto Moses. He then proclaimed, “I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:4–8; see also 9:17). It verily was Jesus as Jehovah who led the children of Israel in Old Testament times (see 1 Cor 10:1–4; 1 Nephi 19:7–10). He is indeed the God of all of the house of Israel.

“I Am the God of the Whole Earth”

The designation “God of the whole earth” (3 Nephi 11:14) makes Jesus the God of all of the people of the earth. In the words of Nephi son of Lehi, Christ “inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God [Christ], both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). Latter-day revelation says he holds the destinies of all the armies of the earth (D&C 117:6).

As the God of the whole world, Christ is a God of law. Thus, he cannot bless people unless they keep the commandments (see Hel 12:3; D&C 82:10; 130:20–21). In warning the Nephites of their need to repent, he extended that warning to all “the inhabitants of the whole earth except they repent” (3 Nephi 9:2). One of the purposes of scattering the house of Israel among all the nations of the earth was to fulfill the covenant made to Abraham to bless all the kindreds of the earth (1 Nephi 22:9;

Gen 12:3). In fulfilling the covenant to gather Israel from among the nations, Gentile and other, those nations are given the opportunity to gather with Israel and receive the blessings of the gospel (see 3 Nephi 16:6–7, 13). Those Gentiles who reject the gospel will have the covenant people of the Lord gathered from among them and the gospel will be taken out of their midst (vv 8–12).⁷

Christ reigns over all the earth: “The heaven is [his] throne, and the earth is [his] footstool” (Isa 66:1). All of the prophets had prophesied of Jesus (see Jacob 4:4–5; 7:11; Luke 24:27, 44). Just prior to his birth, Christ told Nephi₃, son of Nephi₂, “On the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets” (3 Nephi 1:13).

“I Am [He] Whom the Prophets Testified Shall Come into the World”

When speaking to the Nephites following the destruction and darkness of the crucifixion, Christ said, “The scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:16). In appearing to the Nephites as a resurrected being, Jesus announced: “I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (11:10). After teaching his higher law to the Nephites (chapters 12–14), he admonished: “Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me” (3 Nephi 15:10). On the second day of his ministry among the Nephites, Jesus testified:

Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people. Verily I say unto you, yea, and all

⁷ For a fuller treatise of this principle see Monte S. Nyman, *An Ensign to All People*, chapter 5, “An Ensign to the Gentiles,” Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 1987.

the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me. (3 Nephi 20:23–24)

Five recorded statements by Jesus in the Book of Mormon verify that he was fulfilling or had fulfilled all that the prophets had foretold. It was Christ to come to whom they looked, and it is Christ come to whom we look.

“I Am the Good Shepherd”

The last of the twelve designations Jesus made to himself to the Nephites is an indirect one. To the Jews he had proclaimed, “I am the good shepherd . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14–15). He then announced that he had other sheep that were not of that fold that were to hear his voice (v 16; compare 3 Nephi 15:17). He testified to the Nephites that they were those other sheep that he must bring and they would hear his voice (3 Nephi 15:21–24). Then he declared that there were still other sheep (the lost tribes) that he was commanded to visit after he left the Nephites (16:1–3). Referring to the house of Israel as a sheep fold, Christ is designating himself as their shepherd. The Nephites heard his voice as he called them to be one fold under one shepherd.

Conclusion

The twelve designations of Jesus given by himself in 3 Nephi certainly are significant in describing his divine nature as President Benson said the Book of Mormon names of Christ would do. They should convince us that the Book of Mormon is “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” and authenticate his role as the God of the Nephites, of the tribes of Israel, and of the whole world. Our continual study of 3 Nephi will deepen our understanding of him as the Son of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth who was with the Father from the beginning and who was one with the Father in ministering upon earth to bring glory to the Father’s name. He is “the Redeemer,” “the

light and life of the world,” and “the beginning and the end.” May we become one fold when the Good Shepherd soon comes again to reign on earth.

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Geological Upheaval and Darkness in 3 Nephi 8–10

4

Alvin K. Benson

Prophets repeatedly warned the Nephites and Lamanites of judgments that would come at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Hundreds of years earlier, Zenos and Nephi had foreseen the great calamities that befell the Nephite nation in AD 34 (1 Nephi 12:4–6, 19:10–14; 2 Nephi 26:3–4). Some of Zenos' writings—which were preserved on the brass plates of Laban—prophesy of the destructions that would attend the Lord's death:

The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up. . . . And the rocks of the earth must rend. (1 Nephi 19:11–12)

Furthermore, Zenos “spake concerning the three days of darkness, which would be a sign given of his [Christ's] death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:10). Apparently, portions of the house of Israel far removed from Jerusalem were destined to receive special signs as a witness of the Savior's death.

Nephi also foresaw in a vision the events which would occur among the Nephites when the Messiah died:

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And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. (1 Nephi 12:4–5)

Just forty years prior to the crucifixion of the Savior, another prophet of God, Samuel the Lamanite, also enumerated in glorious prophecy the calamities and destructions that would occur on the American continent at the time Christ would voluntarily give up his life:

But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead.

Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;

Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.

And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.

And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate. (Hel 14:20–24)

As the time of the Savior's death grew near and these prophecies began to be fulfilled, an underlying current of wickedness produced great instability in the Nephite society. The

prevailing conditions included political unrest, terrorist activities, separation of society into classes, destruction of life and property, riots and wars, and political movements to overthrow righteous institutions (3 Nephi 6–7). Under these conditions, the more righteous Nephites were looking forward to seeing the signs associated with Christ’s crucifixion (Hel 14:20–28). But it had been thirty-three years since the birth of the Savior, and doubtings and disputations began to arise among the wicked despite the many signs that had been previously given (3 Nephi 8:1–4).

Geological Changes and Foreboding Darkness

As with all prophecies of the Lord, fulfillment of the Nephite prophecies came with total and unerring certainty. When the Master—hanging on the cross just outside Jerusalem—gave up his life, the American continent experienced great calamities. Speaking about the events recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10, Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated: “No single historical event in the whole Book of Mormon account is recorded in so great detail or such extended length as the fulfillment of the signs signifying that Jesus had been lifted up upon the cross and had voluntarily laid down his life for the world” (542).

For the Nephites, the subsequent disaster was ushered in by “a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land” (3 Nephi 8:5). That storm was so ferocious that thunder shook the ground, earthquakes rumbled, and lightning set cities on fire (8:6–8; 9:3). Other cities sank into the depths of the sea, and still others were buried in the earth (8:9–15; 9:4–10). The surface of the ground was generally broken up as open fissures developed and new hills and valleys were formed (8:12–13, 17). And people were carried away by the whirlwinds and never heard of again (v 16). Intense cataclysmic events raged throughout the land.

Nephi summarizes the tremendous geological changes that occurred: “And thus the face of the whole earth became

deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth. And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land” (3 Nephi 8:17–18). *Whole earth* is an interesting phrase. What does it mean? Does it mean that the catastrophic events experienced by the Nephites were global, or were they a more localized phenomena? That phrase is used numerous times in describing the calamities (see vv 6, 12, 17, and 18). If these tremendous geological changes and the ensuing three days of darkness had been global, we would expect to find accounts of them in the literature of other contemporary societies, such as the Romans, Greeks, Chinese, Persians. But since it is found only in Nephite writings, the phrase *whole earth* must mean the *whole land* of the Nephites. For example, this phrase is used there in a localized rather than global setting: “And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth” (1:17). This illustrates the point that the context and the audience for which a scripture is directed are very important in the interpretation of it.

The devastating events described in 3 Nephi lasted for about three hours and were followed by a foreboding darkness that the people could “feel”:

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness. (3 Nephi 8:19–20)

The Americas were engulfed in darkness while the Lord's body lay in the tomb and his eternal spirit taught the righteous dead (1 Peter 3:18–20; D&C 138; see also McConkie 540). Not a glimmer of light could be seen for three days, and attempts to kindle fires with their “fine and exceedingly dry wood” were futile:

And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all; And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen. (3 Nephi 8:21–23)

How appropriate it is that at the Savior's birth *light* shown for a day and a night and a day (3 Nephi 1:19); whereas at his death, *darkness* prevailed among the Nephites for three days. It appears that the earth was symbolically manifesting its gloom over the death of its creator (9:15). As Professor Sidney B. Sperry pointed out, the darkness “may possibly be accounted for on the basis that the Spirit of Christ was withdrawn in part from the land (cf D&C 84:45–46; 88:7–13)” (400).

Geological Phenomena: A Possible Analysis of the Events in 3 Nephi 8–10

Both Zenos and Nephi prophesied that the events described in 3 Nephi 8–10 would be accompanied by fire (1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:6); and indeed 3 Nephi 9:11 states that the Lord “did send down fire.” It is quite probable that this may refer to lightning accompanying volcanic activity triggered by the quaking earth (3 Nephi 8:17). Photos of erupting volcanoes, such as Mount Vesuvius in 1944 (Fodor 15) and Sakura-jima in 1987 (Kemp 40–41), show hundreds of lightning bolts in the ash clouds above those volcanoes. The friction between fine volcanic ash particles in the atmosphere is very effective in

generating severe lightning without any attending rain, leaving the ground and wood very dry. It is interesting that after hours of thunderstorm activity of unprecedented fury and violent earthquakes, the Nephites' wood was still referred to as being "exceedingly dry" (3 Nephi 8:21).

Furthermore, if volcanic eruptions lasted for several hours, as indicated in 3 Nephi 8, an enormous amount of ash would have been discharged into the atmosphere. The ash from a volcano can rise to great heights (many thousands of feet) and then spread out in the stratosphere to cover a large region with an impenetrable cloud of dust (Goldner and Vogel 37–43; Warren and Ferguson 42). Volcanic ash, smoke, and gases, along with dust and debris rising into the air from a large earthquake, could have produced the "vapor of darkness" spoken of in 3 Nephi 8:20 and 10:13. Professor Hugh Nibley also suggests that the vapor of darkness may have resulted from volcanic activity (267). Furthermore, volcanic ash and lava can be carried *up* to bury cities (Berger 57–61), and Nephi records that the earth was carried *up* on the city Moronihah (3 Nephi 8:10) and not down, as one would expect in a landslide.

Also, in 3 Nephi 10:13, inference can be drawn that people died from suffocation from "the vapor of smoke and of darkness." Warren and Ferguson record that when the ash from a volcanic eruption "begins to fall back toward the earth, it is accompanied by many gases, including hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, carbonic acid, carbon dioxide, and ammonia. If the ash fall is heavy, people will naturally suffocate, not only from the ash content itself but from these gases, which are lethal in large quantities" (42). In several modern cases, volcanic gases have collected in low spots after an eruption, killing people, animals, and vegetation (Montgomery 105–106; Macdonald 251–52, 257). The fate of a particular city would depend on its location relative to fault lines and volcanoes, and upon the direction of the wind carrying volcanic ash and gases. In the regions of the surviving Nephites, the concentration of volcanic gases may have been sufficient to prevent the ignition

of fires but not high enough to suffocate people. Because most volcanic gases are heavier than air, they tend to hug the ground; hence, at ground level, concentrations could have been high enough to prevent ignition of the Nephites' dry tinder. However, in the more righteous cities, lethal concentrations may not have been present a few feet above the ground allowing the more righteous to survive.

As the period of darkness ended, Nephi records:

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away. (3 Nephi 10:9)

Since the verb *disperse* implies breaking up and scattering, the terminology in verse 9 could refer to the eventual dispersion of a volcanic ash cloud. That verse also indicates that the trembling of the earth continued throughout the three-day period of the Savior's entombment, suggesting continued volcanic activity and many aftershocks. Also, volcanic ash may have been coming forth all that time to sustain the thick darkness.

If volcanic eruptions were the source of the tremendous darkness, what initiated that activity? Modern models, examples, and descriptions of earthquake and volcanic activity provide many helpful insights. As an example, let us consider some of the recorded events associated with the Mount St. Helen's volcanic eruption on 18 May 1980, which contain many descriptions similar to those in 3 Nephi 8–10.

Investigations suggest that an earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale may have triggered the eruption, and as the side of the mountain slid down and the top was blown away, the resulting shock wave blew down all the timber and vegetation within 15 miles. Some survivors referred to the noise and shaking as like being next to ground zero in an atomic bomb blast (Aylesworth 15–17; Berger 57–59). Visibility dropped to zero; and as the thick volcanic dust hid the sun, day became

night as far away as 500 miles. Spokane, Washington, located just 250 miles east of the blast site, was in complete darkness at 3:00 pm. Bolts of lightning flashed from Mount St. Helens, sparking numerous forest fires, and the air was so full of smoke and pumice that people could not survive outside. Volcanic ash and gases irritated skin, eyes, and lungs, making breathing extremely difficult and fires impossible to ignite. Many earthquakes and/or aftershocks accompanied the eruption, and mud and debris flows changed the surrounding landscape for miles around (Goldner and Vogel 10–13, 27–29, 37–43; Aylesworth 15–17, 25–35; Berger 57–63; Fodor 11–15; Montgomery 99–102; Palmer 82–88; Rosenfeld 494–509). The similarities in these descriptions to the events in 3 Nephi 8–10 are striking: earthquake(s) (3 Nephi 8:6, 17–18), fire (9:11; 10:14), tumultuous noises (10:9), sharp lightning (8:7), darkness (8:19), suffocating vapors of smoke (10:13), aftershocks (10:9), and geological upheaval over large areas (8:17–18).

As with the Mount St. Helens catastrophe, the volcanic activity reported in the Nephite disaster most probably was initiated by earthquake activity. The main earthquake must have been gigantic since the “face of the whole earth became deformed. . . . And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth” (3 Nephi 8:17–18), and “tumultuous noises” accompanied the quaking for three days (10:9). At appropriate locations on the earth, this quaking can trigger erupting volcanoes, showing that the ordering of events in 3 Nephi 8:6–7 would be correct: “There was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder. And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings.” The first arrival of energy from an earthquake is the compressional wave that produces “noise,” which could sound like “thunder.” This energy is then followed by the arrival of shear and surface waves, which typically produce most of the shaking and damage along with more deafening noises. The “tumultuous noises” could be generated by the breaking of rock strata, the opening of cracks in the earth, the collapse of

buildings, etc., followed by the noise of volcanic eruptions and associated lightning and thunder (Fodor 11–15).

Generally, earthquakes occur in well-defined belts or zones in the earth located at the junctions of lithospheric plates, which are large pieces of the earth's brittle crust. According to the theory of plate tectonics, as these plates move slowly over the surface of the earth, they either (a) collide with each other, (b) pull away from one another, or (c) slide over and beneath each other creating subduction zones. These zones are characterized by (a) large-scale fault movement; (b) periodic, severe earthquakes; (c) volcanic activity; and (d) typically, a deep ocean trench (Montgomery 46–59).

One of the more active subduction zones of the world is located along the western coasts of Central and South America. The mountainous areas there extend oceanward to a long, linear ocean trench. This trench exceeds 20,000 feet in depth and is bordered along the shore by mountains over 22,000 feet high. This large elevation difference of over 40,000 feet is a likely site for large-scale fault development, allowing blocks of earth to slip oceanward (Montgomery 55–59; Baer 130). Such movement could occur during a large earthquake, which could explain the loss of the city of Moroni into the depths of the sea (3 Nephi 8:9).

It is common for areas that have frequent, severe earthquakes to have a high incidence of volcanic activity. Two devastating Guatemalan earthquakes (23 December 1586 and 29–30 September 1717) were accompanied by severe and violent eruptions of the volcano Fuego (Espinosa 87–90). Earthquake activity and active volcanoes are common along the west coast of South America and, particularly, Central America (Warren and Ferguson 40–45).

The earthquake activity described in 3 Nephi 8–10, including the main quake and the aftershocks, could well have occurred in three hours (3 Nephi 8:19) or lasted for three days (10:9–10). Many earthquakes in Guatemala, for example, have had a main shock followed by several aftershocks for as long

as five weeks afterward (Espinosa 87–90). Similarly, the emission of volcanic dust and gas to sustain the darkness could easily have lasted for three days (3 Nephi 10:9).

Consequently, it is very feasible that a large earthquake and attendant volcanic activity could account for the geological catastrophies recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10, and it is also very feasible that this occurred along the west coast of Central and/or South America. Interestingly, as pointed out by Baer (131–32), the theory of plate tectonics describing subduction zones, etc. was not developed for well over a hundred years after Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, and it is significant that this modern geophysical model of how the earth works supports the feasibility of the events described in 3 Nephi 8–10.

Why the Disaster?

In the Book of Mormon the thick darkness lasted for “the space of three days,” and there was “great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them” (3 Nephi 8:23). The Lord told the Nephites that all of these physical changes—geological upheaval and associated destruction—came as a just judgment upon the wicked: “It is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! . . . to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them. . . . And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (3 Nephi 9:2, 5, 12). As the Lord describes why particular cities and their inhabitants were destroyed in 3 Nephi 9:2–12, he repeats the word *wickedness* eight times, *abominations* seven times, *iniquity* two times, and the phrase “that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them” five times. He leaves no suggestion as to the reason for the

destruction: it was their own wickedness. The Lord also states that all these things were done “unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets” (3 Nephi 10:14).

In addition to destroying the wicked, the geological upheaval and associated devastation also served as a sign and a witness to the remaining righteous people that the atonement, death, and resurrection of the Savior had taken place on the opposite side of the world. The Lord explained this to the surviving Nephites, as he declared his messiahship (3 Nephi 9:15) and extended an invitation for all to come unto him: “Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin. Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (vv 21–22). Although the remaining Nephites are referred to as “the more righteous” in a comparative sense to those who had been destroyed, they still needed to repent:

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. . . . And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled. (3 Nephi 9:13–14, 17)

Thus, God uses his power to fulfill all of his purposes and promises; and even in times of great destruction, upheaval, darkness, and sorrow, the Savior will bring peace, joy, and great blessings into the lives of the “more righteous” through the gospel plan (10:10, 12, 18).

Conclusions

Both the scriptural prophecies concerning the birth of Christ and those which foretold the events associated with his death were fulfilled in unerring detail:

And thus far were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets. . . . And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. (3 Nephi 10:11, 14)

The Lord “created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” (9:15), and “though the heavens and the earth pass away” (D&C 1:38), all the prophecies and promises of the Lord will be fulfilled (Mormon 8:22). Chapters 8–10 of 3 Nephi clearly demonstrate that a nation cannot wilfully sin and rebel against the Lord’s commandments without upsetting the balance of nature and incurring the wrath of God through natural catastrophes which discipline his children and destroy the wicked (3 Nephi 9:5, 7–12). As pointed out by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “It is perfectly clear that these destructions came as a just judgment upon the wicked, and that they are in similitude of the outpourings of wrath that shall come upon the whole world at the Second Coming” (McConkie 541).

The geological upheaval and physical changes described in 3 Nephi 8–10, which destroyed much of the Nephite nation, could easily have been caused by a gigantic earthquake with attendant storms, volcanic activity, and aftershocks of incredible proportions. The similarities in the descriptions of other documented catastrophies, such as the Mount St. Helen’s disaster in 1980, to the geological upheaval and darkness recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10 are striking. Most aspects of the geological changes in 3 Nephi can be accomodated by modern earthquake models through the theory of plate tectonics, and the very nature of earthquake and volcanic activity typical of the South and

Central America is consistent with the whole set of phenomena recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10. Modern geophysical and geological theories support the 3 Nephi events as realities and not—as some critics report—fabricated myths.

Although the geological changes in the earth were very spectacular and of such magnitude that “the face of the whole earth became deformed . . . [and] the rocks were rent in twain” (3 Nephi 8:17–18), they pointed to events of much greater importance. They were signs to signify that the greatest events in the history of this earth were now in place—the atonement, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Because of their vast importance, “no single historical event in the whole Book of Mormon account is recorded in so great detail or at such extended length as the fulfillment of the signs signifying that Jesus had been lifted up upon the cross and had voluntarily laid down his life for the world” (McConkie 542).

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Repentance: The Gift of Love

5

Mae Blanch

The book of 3 Nephi is essentially a story of repentance. The first seven chapters show the need for it, the eighth tells of the destruction which comes when the people refuse to repent, and the remaining chapters recount the Savior's call for repentance and the response of the remnant who were "more righteous" than those who were destroyed.

The Lord emphasizes the importance of repentance in the first words he utters when he appears to the survivors of the Nephite people. He proclaims woe to all the people of the earth unless they repent and then relates the fate of all those Nephite cities whose inhabitants had refused his warning. His plea shows his love for his children. In fact, his call to repentance indicates the true nature of repentance: a gift of love from God to his people.

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:13–14)

Clearly, love and the longing to rescue his children from destruction are the essence of Christ's plea for repentance.

But the definition of repentance used by many people today involves two extremes which distort its true meaning. On the one hand are those who say Jesus loves us and will forgive us

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for whatever we do that is “only human,” thus echoing the philosophy of Nehor, the anti-Christ who, with his false teachings, confronted Alma. This attitude reflects Nephi’s prophecy about the last days:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28:8)

This is the “man upstairs” view of God as a kind of personal genie who can be ignored until something is wanted and then called upon to fulfill whatever desire, righteous or not, may be current with the petitioner. Repentance, if ever it should be needed, is taken care of with an “I’m sorry” and if it is something serious with an, “I’m really sorry and I’ll never do it again . . . unless circumstances demand it.”

The other false view of repentance sees God as an arbitrary taskmaster who sets up laws which violate all natural instincts and who eagerly awaits the opportunity to punish those who break his rules. In this view, God’s laws are a test of obedience; breaking the law demonstrates humanity’s evil nature and arouses God’s wrath. Punishment is the expression of God’s anger, and his desire is to prevent further disobedience by instilling fear in the sinners and helping them forsake sin to avoid further punishment. Repentance mollifies God and frees the offenders from further pain. This attitude reflects the philosophy of Job’s comforters: God is a god of exact justice and the trick is to learn all the ways which offend God and avoid them. Thus, repentance becomes unnecessary. Those who fail in this endeavor are consigned to the everlasting fires of hell, a fate which supposedly satisfies God. Granted, my description of these two views is overstated, but these basic attitudes can be seen in the way many people respond to the concept of repentance.

In the first view, God is only a god of mercy, and repentance is a mere slap on the hand. The mixture of truth and error in this view, the mark of all false doctrine, is apparent. God *is* a god of mercy; he does love us and desires our eternal joy and the fulfillment of all our righteous desires. But the truth that no unclean thing can exist in the presence of God is ignored: the all important distinction between being saved *from* our sins rather than *in* our sins is never considered.

In the second view, God is only a god of justice, and repentance is motivated by God's anger and humankind's fear. Again, the mixture of truth and error is evident. God *is* a god of justice; mercy cannot rob justice or God would not be God. But he takes no pleasure in the punishment which is the inevitable, although not always the immediate, consequence of sin.

The history of God's dealings with humanity shows the errors in both of these views. The scriptures emphasize the Lord's continuous appeal for his sinful children to repent, to return to him, to choose life and not death. God never destroys the wicked without first sending and resending his prophets to call them to repentance (Alma 5:49ff). The prayers of even a handful of the righteous have been enough to preserve a society steeped in sin if there has been the least possibility for repentance (10:22–23). Thus repentance is truly a gift of love given to all humankind by a Father whose love is beyond human understanding. This view of repentance is established by the scriptures in two ways: first, by correcting the errors involved in the other two views, and second, by giving many examples of the Savior's love in teaching his people to repent.

Perhaps the first error that should be examined in establishing the falsehood in these two views is the misunderstanding of the nature of God's laws. The commandments God gives us are directions by which we may achieve happiness in this life and develop the qualities which will enable us to become like him and be with him in eternity. Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of the Light of Christ "which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is *the law* by which all

things are governed” (D&C 88:13; emphasis added). Thus, the scriptures connect life and law; obedience to God’s law brings life, the abundant life that Christ promised. His commandments give us access to that abundant life. As section 130 reminds us, “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (vv 20–21). Law gives us access to God’s blessings; obedience to law assures us of them (3 Nephi 10:12). The underlying assumption in these scriptures suggests that the laws of God reflect his omniscient knowledge of us, his children, and the world he created. They are expressions of his love and concern for us; they are designed to protect us, to uplift us, to enlighten our minds and enlarge our souls until we can become “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). God’s laws then are not arbitrary rules given to test humankind; neither are they helpful suggestions which can be disregarded at will. The Lord defines his purpose in law-giving thus: “And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same” (D&C 88:34).

A simple analogy will illustrate our relationship to God’s laws. I am a diabetic; my doctor gives me certain laws—do’s and don’t’s—which I must obey to control my illness. I must avoid excessive fats and sugars in my diet and eat only moderate amounts of other foods. I must exercise regularly. I must take insulin injections twice a day and test my blood sugar three times a day. I must avoid undue exertion, get proper rest, and watch carefully for any minor infections, especially on my feet. I need to check in with my doctor on a regular basis to monitor the progress of my disease. If I follow these “commandments,” I may control my illness and receive the blessing of health. If, however, I yield to the temptation of a hot fudge sundae or a Kara chocolate truffle, or decide to stay in bed an extra hour rather than rise and jog, I do not say my doctor is punishing me when my blood sugar climbs to unacceptable levels. And if I

continue to ignore his instructions and wind up in the hospital, I don't expect to say, "I'm sorry; please forgive me" and have my health immediately restored. My repentance must involve both ceasing to break the doctor's "laws" and changing my attitude, not resenting the restrictions placed on my license to do as I please, nor expecting to avoid the inevitable consequences of my foolish actions. Thus, obedience is required to the laws which the doctor understands are required for me to live and be healthy, and they are given to me for my well-being and to help me achieve my goals, not to complicate my life or deny me pleasure.

Section 88 gives a clear description of the spiritual consequences of breaking God's laws: "That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still" (v 35). Notice that the law breakers cannot be sanctified by mercy even though God loves them. Neither can they be sanctified by law nor justice since both require punishment for breaking the law. Sanctification can come only through the atonement of the Savior, made by him in mercy to fulfill the law of justice. Our role in sanctification is to repent, to cease breaking the law so that through his forgiveness we may receive the great gift the Savior has offered us—eternal life with him. Since that which is filthy cannot be in the presence of God, we must get rid of our filthiness through the atonement and qualify for that gift through repentance. Thus, if it were not for law, God's purpose for us would be frustrated. Each step in the process of salvation must be worked out in keeping with eternal law. The law does indeed preserve, protect, and sanctify us.

Another error common in the false view of repentance is that of a stern god who enjoys punishing his wayward children. But all the scriptures show the exact opposite (3 Nephi 17:14). The prophet Jeremiah reports that the Lord pled with wicked Israel, promising to take one of a city or two of a family who

would repent and bring them to Zion. Rather than God taking pleasure or even satisfaction in condemning them, Jeremiah records: “A voice was heard upon the high places, *weeping* and [supplicating] . . . Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer 3:21–22; emphasis added). In Ezekiel 18:23 the Lord says, “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die . . . and not that he should return from his ways and live?” Throughout the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, the Lord pleads with his children to choose righteousness and life rather than wickedness and death, always sending his prophets to warn them of their fate unless they repent. In perhaps the greatest scene of destruction ever recorded in the scriptures, that in 3 Nephi of sixteen cities and all their inhabitants destroyed by fire, flood, earthquake and other natural disasters brought upon the people by their iniquity, Mormon records that the first words spoken by the Lord were a call to repentance: “O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?” (3 Nephi 9:13). The Lord abhors the destruction that the people have brought upon themselves, but he notes that “the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people” (v 2). Thus, it is Satan, not God, who rejoices in the punishment of the wicked. God weeps and offers that gift of his love: repentance.

The Lord’s love for all his children, even those who reject him, is suggested by the metaphor he uses in 3 Nephi to describe his willingness to accept the penitent:

O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you. And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not. O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will

I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart. (3 Nephi 10:4–6)

The image of the hen calling after her chickens to come to the shelter and safety of her wings portrays the love of the Savior, his desire to nourish his children, to keep them safe from their common enemy, Satan, to shelter them from the storms of life, to give them the opportunity to grow and fulfill the promise of their nature.

The image suggests other ideas as well. The chickens have strayed away from the hen. They have been lured from safety by their desire for adventure or rebellion, out into the tempting world where danger lurks beside every step. The hen calls to her chickens, but they must come of their own volition. They are not forced under her wings; they are invited, even urged, but they must exercise their own agency. In using this metaphor, the Lord designates his call to those of the fallen cities, who are descendants of Jacob, and to those of the house of Israel, who live at Jerusalem, establishing the right of the Savior to issue the call to repentance—they are his people who owe him obedience. And his use of the three verbs: “how oft have I gathered you; . . . how oft would I have gathered you; . . . how oft will I gather you” emphasizes his timeless call to repentance—past, present, and future. The Savior’s love is always there. His arms are always extended in mercy as long as there is any hope for his children to return to him. The true nature of repentance is not a test, not an indulgence, but a gift of love. It is one that we must take—it cannot be forced upon us.

Another misunderstanding about the nature of repentance may stem from the words used in the scriptures to describe God’s punishment. Although the Savior’s love for the sinner is unqualified, the punishment resulting from sin is often spoken of as expressing the wrath of God. Many scriptures note the total destruction of a city or a people as an expression of God’s anger. The first episode of total destruction is recorded in the story of the flood from which only Noah, his family, and the plants and

animals on the ark were saved. The next account is that given of Sodom and Gomorrah. After removing the one righteous family from these cities, God rained fire and brimstone on them, destroying not only the cities but all life—plant, animal, and human—within them. The history of Israel in the promised land contains other incidents of God punishing the wicked with total destruction. During the reign of Zedekiah, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took most of the people into captivity. Lehi and his family left Jerusalem because the Lord warned him of the impending destruction of the city. After the crucifixion of the Savior, Jerusalem was again leveled by the Romans.

Each incident clearly shows the wrath of God, but each also shows his love. In every instance the destruction comes as a result of evil which has moved beyond the always-offered repentance. The time of Noah is described thus: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). If the thought of every heart was continual evil, what would have been the possibility of repentance, of humanity returning to Christ “as chickens to the hen”? The law of justice demanded the annihilation of the whole earth, and the floods came.

The story of Lot details the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah more specifically. It was not just ordinary men who visited Lot, but three angelic messengers who came to lead Lot and his family from the wicked cities to safety (JST Gen 19:1). However, the sacred character of the visitors did not protect them against the perverted lust of the men who gathered at Lot’s door. Even Lot’s pleading to spare his virgin daughters to their evil desires did not deter the citizens of Sodom (19:9–15), described in the Old Testament as “both old and young, all the people from every quarter” (Gen 19:4). Only when the angels struck them blind did they stop, and then only because “they wearied themselves to find the door” (v 11). Any possibility of repentant souls in this crowd? Once Lot and his wife and daughters were removed, leaving the unbelieving sons-in-law behind, the in-

habitants of Sodom and Gomorrah reaped the consequences of their choice of lifestyle—death. And in this case, through fire and brimstone from heaven.

The various destructions of Jerusalem followed a similar pattern: of four kings who reigned in Jerusalem at the time Babylon destroyed the city, the scriptures say of each one, “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done” (2 Kings 23:32). The evil included worshiping idols, serving Baal by sacrificing their children to this god, sometimes killing the prophets, but always rejecting them and the covenants made with the Lord. Still the Lord called them to repent:

Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. (17:13–14)

In every instance, the people refused to repent and destruction eventually followed.

The Book of Mormon repeats the same pattern: great wickedness followed by great destruction. Three examples will suffice. King Noah and his court were overcome by the Lamanites and fled the land of Nephi with all their people. Those who refused to leave wives and children behind when the Lamanites overtook them were eventually restored to their own country, but only as semi-slaves, paying half their income as tribute to their captors (Mosiah 19). Later the great city of Ammonihah and all her people were destroyed in one day as punishment for their great evil as the prophet Alma² had prophesied. But these instances pale compared to the massive destruction visited upon most of the existing cities at the time of Christ’s visit to the Nephites. After his crucifixion, these cities were wiped from the face of the earth, not by a hostile army which could be resisted, but by a variety of natural disasters against which the people

were powerless and which therefore must have been more terrifying than any Lamanite army would have been (3 Nephi 8).

The Book of Mormon accounts also show a people who rejected the prophets and refused repentance. King Noah yielded to the counsel of his wicked priests and condemned Abinadi to the fire. And when Alma, who believed God's prophet, began to convert other souls, baptizing them in secret, the king sent his army against them and they fled for their lives (Mosiah 17–18). The people of Ammonihah were so proud they could not even conceive that the warning of Alma², and Amulek could be true—that their mighty city could be destroyed (Alma 9:4). They imprisoned the two prophets but could not kill them because God protected them. But the citizens of Ammonihah were able to seal their doom by burning the few righteous who still lived in the city (14:3–28). Even the idea of repentance was far from Ammonihah; the people refused to acknowledge that they had any sins (15:15).

Finally, the extensive destruction which occurred in conjunction with Christ's crucifixion came as a result of willful rebellion against God. In the thirtieth year after the birth of Christ, wickedness had reached a zenith. Mormon says of the Nephites: "Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God" (3 Nephi 6:18).

In the face of such wickedness, the Lord again sent his prophets to reprove the people for their sins, to call them to repentance, and to testify of Christ's death, suffering, and resurrection. Not only did the people reject the prophets, but these servants of the Lord were secretly seized and put to death by corrupt judges, violating the law that required the governor's signature in order to condemn anyone to death. When called to account for their actions, the judges, their friends and kindred, entered into the covenant with Satan which had existed since the days of Cain, to "combine against all righteousness" (3 Nephi 6:20–28). They murdered the governor, overthrew the

government, and elected Jacob, an anti-Christ, as their king. Nephi was called by God to gather in the few who would hear the call to repentance before the terrible destruction came in the thirty-third year, the time when the Savior was crucified.

The disasters which destroyed the Nephite cities were the natural result of the wickedness of the people. President Joseph Fielding Smith has equated such calamities as earthquakes, pestilence, drought, and devouring fire, with wickedness. Speaking of the dust bowl which occurred in the 1930's and a terrible earthquake in a far off land which had taken thousands of lives, President Joseph Fielding Smith declared, "It is because men violate the commandments of God and refuse to hearken unto his word; . . . It is not the will of the Lord that there should come upon the people disaster, trouble, calamity, and depression . . . but because man himself will violate the commandments of God and will not walk in righteousness, the Lord permits all of these evils to come upon him" (3:27-28).

Throughout the history of humankind the pattern remains the same. The people fall from righteousness to wickedness, the Lord sends his prophets to offer his gift of love—repentance—and sometimes it is accepted. But when it is not, when the prophets and the righteous are banished or killed, then the law of justice demands that those responsible be punished, the blood of the prophets and the saints cry out and the Lord hears. Not only do the wicked refuse to repent, but they create a society that works against righteousness in anyone. How could a child in Ammonihah or Sodom learn to obey God? By allowing such societies to continue, the Lord would condemn generations to the power of Satan. And in an ironic way, destruction, per se, can be seen as evidence of God's love. Since those who fail to repent will be consigned to spirit prison after death and must suffer for their sins since they have not accepted Christ's atonement, to cut short their sinning is an act of mercy. Death may be the beginning of wisdom for the wicked.

If repentance is the gift of love, then sin must be the failure of love. This interpretation of sin is suggested by the answer

Jesus gave to his questioners when they asked him to state the great commandment. Jesus replied: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt 22:37–40). If all law hangs on love for God and humanity, then breaking the law, sin, must be a failure of love.

Even a cursory glance at some major, and even minor sins, reveals the truth of this statement. Murder, the most serious crime, is certainly never committed by a heart filled with love. Anger, hatred, a coldly evil seeking of personal advantage motivates murder. Adultery occurs when a husband or wife fails to love the other enough to resist temptation, and does not love the partner in sin enough to resist damaging his or her spiritual well-being. In idolatry, the sin of the moderns as well as of the Israelites, one loves some other god or some other thing more than the Lord. Thieves love the things they steal, but not God nor those they steal from. Backbiters delight in injuring the object of their gossip, in giving tongue to their hatred. They who dig a pit for their neighbors certainly do not labor for love. Even pride, which might be called the original sin of Satan, President Ezra Taft Benson has defined as “enmity toward God and man.” As he said, quoting C. S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man” (Benson 4). Whatever sin we can think of—bearing false witness, failing to honor father and mother, bowing down before other gods, coveting what belongs to others, lying, refusing aid to those in need, having a contentious spirit—all spring from a failure to love humankind and the Lord.

How then does repentance remove the sin, the failure to love? How does it operate? It must begin with a change of heart from hostility or indifference toward God and humankind to love unfeigned for both. When we realize that we have injured someone we love, we automatically feel sorrow. Thus when we

recognize our sin, when we know that we have injured someone else and by so doing have injured the Lord, we feel a godly sorrow, not just a sorrow that we made a mistake, but a genuine remorse that someone else has suffered because of us.

With that attitude it goes without saying that we will cease doing what has caused the injury and seek pardon from the injured parties, both God and man or woman. This involves confession—the acknowledgement that we are responsible for the injury and that we accept the blame without equivocation. If possible, we will restore what those injured have lost by our action. If it is something physical, money or land or other property, a generous restoration may resolve the problem and restore good feeling between us and the victim of our sin. But if it is something more difficult to restore—trust, self-esteem, reputation, virtue, or even life itself—then we must patiently endure the suffering which will be ours until trust can be rebuilt, self-esteem mended, reputation cleared. The impossibility of restoring virtue or life once they have been taken explains why these are such serious sins. President Joseph F. Smith has explained, “When we cannot make restitution for the wrong we have done, then we must apply for the grace and mercy of God to cleanse us from that iniquity” (98).

But in all instances, repentance requires suffering, an emotion often associated with love. President Spencer W. Kimball has said, “Suffering is a very important part of repentance. One has not begun to repent until he has suffered intensely for his sins” (88). And that suffering grows out of love; we will not knowingly injure those we love, and when we come to love the Lord and our neighbor and realize that we have injured them, sorrow is inevitable. We must replace hostility or indifference with love that strives to emulate Christ’s love. That is why repentance is so difficult.

We must make love for our fellow beings and God motivate all our actions. If we have cheated our neighbors, repentance not only demands that we stop cheating them and restore what we have taken, but that we henceforth look out for their welfare,

help them when they have need, become our neighbor's keeper, treat them with a Christlike love and concern. If we have betrayed friend or family, then we must confess and make every effort to show our love and devotion in small ways and large. Sacrifice and service do much to restore trust and confidence when given from a loving heart and with no thought of what the giver might gain. When these changes have been accomplished, we may then receive the Lord's forgiveness and mercy.

Thus, a true understanding of repentance shows us that God's laws are an expression of his love for us, that even his punishments come from this love and fulfill the law of justice which lack of repentance demands. Repentance is an eternal expression of the Savior's love: he has gathered, he would gather, and he will gather his repentant children to the shelter of his outstretched arms. As President Joseph F. Smith said:

Men cannot forgive their own sins; they cannot cleanse themselves from the consequences of their sins. Men can stop sinning and can do right in the future, and so far their acts are acceptable before the Lord and worthy of consideration. But who shall repair the wrongs they have done to themselves and to others, which it seems impossible for them to repair themselves? By the atonement of Jesus Christ the sins of the repentant shall be washed away; though they be crimson they shall be made white as wool. This is the promise given to you. . . . That is generous and kind [and loving], and I feel grateful for it. (98–99)

The Lord offers us his grace; our love for him expressed in repentance allows us to fully accept it. His beautiful promise is recorded in 3 Nephi 22:8: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

The result of the repentance Christ calls for in the last verse of the last chapter of 3 Nephi is depicted in 4 Nephi which recounts the history of the people after Christ visited them. The year following his visit, his disciples organized his church in all the lands about them and the rule of love prevailed. Mormon describes the society of the repentant:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. . . . And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. . . . (4 Nephi 1:2–3, 15)

And the heavenly gift lasted two hundred years because their repentance was continual. Their love for God and their fellowbeing created a society which heeded the Lord's call to repent, which accepted the gift of his love, a society which knew peace and joy—the fruits of repentance.

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Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New

6

S. Kent Brown

Reading the pages of 3 Nephi leads one naturally to conclude that the resurrected Jesus regularly and consciously drew the attention of his hearers to Moses. But Jesus' attention was not intended merely to tell us what an important and wonderful prophet Moses had been. Rather, it is evident that Jesus' chief intent was to say that the ministry of Moses had foreshadowed or anticipated his own. Indeed, Jesus quoted an important prophecy of Moses and applied it to himself. The prophecy is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, and speaks of a future prophet, like Moses, whom the Lord would raise up among his people. In 3 Nephi 20:23, the resurrected Savior says: "Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people" (see also Deut 18:15, 18–19).

With these words, Jesus established the connection between Moses and himself. Moses had prophesied that a notable prophet would arise among his people. Moreover, that prophet would be like Moses himself. By quoting this passage, Jesus made it clear that Moses had been speaking of him. Thus, there exists an obvious prophetic connection between the two,

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including the fact that Jesus would somehow be like Moses. Hence, we are justified in speaking of Moses as a type of the Savior.¹

In a related vein, ancient authors, including the New Testament gospel writers, have noticed the resemblances between Jesus' ministry and that of Moses. For instance, Matthew recounts that like Moses, who ascended the mount to receive the law, Jesus ascended a mount where he dealt with the law (Matt 5:1). But in contrast to Moses who went up *to receive* the law, Jesus went up *to give* a new law, a law which is incorporated into his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). In addition, in his gospel account Matthew seems to have consciously divided the teachings of Jesus into five segments, thus emphasizing the similarity between Jesus' teachings and the five books of Moses, which are the repository of the Mosaic law. To achieve this purpose, at five key points in his narrative Matthew has used the following phrase, or a similar one, "And . . . when Jesus had ended these sayings," thus arranging Jesus' teachings into five sections (see 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

Having said this much, I would like to point out a subtle distinction between the treatment of Jesus' ministry and teachings in the New Testament and that which we find in the Book of Mormon. In the case of Matthew's gospel, to which I have made brief reference, Jesus himself is partly responsible for making the connection between Moses and himself. After all, it was Jesus who went up on the mount to deliver his sermon that is recorded in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, an action

¹ Because Jesus does not quote the passage precisely as it reads in the present text of Deuteronomy, the question arises: Was Jesus quoting the passage verbatim from the version preserved on the plates of brass or was he merely citing the passage as he knew it from the Hebrew Bible and then adjusting it to suit his present purposes? The issue, of course, is impossible to resolve. However, for an example of Jesus' use of the latter technique, see his composite quotation of passages from Isa 61:1–2 and 58:6 in Luke 4:18–19.

The issue naturally arises whether Deuteronomy, or a version of it, was part of the collection of scripture on the plates of brass. The answer has to be affirmative. Jesus here quotes a passage as if it were already known to his hearers. Moreover, in connection with the disappearance of Alma (Alma 45:18–19) there is discussion of the account of the death of Moses, an account that appears only at the end of Deuteronomy (34:5–7).

which consciously imitated the act of Moses ascending Mount Sinai. Moreover, we can recall that Jesus specifically addressed issues in his Sermon on the Mount that are subjects of the Mosaic law, subjects such as how one responds to one's enemies, what the definition of adultery is, and under what circumstances one properly swears an oath. For drawing these connections to Moses and to the Mosaic law, Jesus himself was responsible. However, Jesus did not write the gospel of Matthew. Matthew did. And it is Matthew who was responsible for making the further comparison between Moses and Jesus in his gospel by arranging the teachings of Jesus into five segments in imitation of the five books of Moses. As a result, we can conclude that not only Jesus, but also those who wrote about him in the New Testament drew analogies between him and Moses. And, using the Sermon on the Mount as an example, the intent of those analogies seems to have been to underscore the notion that in the person of Jesus one greater than Moses had come.

Let us now leave the New Testament and return to 3 Nephi. I believe that we have said enough in these brief examples from the New Testament to grasp the point that both Jesus and the authors of the New Testament were interested in making comparisons between Jesus and Moses. In the Book of Mormon the case is different. In every instance that I have found in 3 Nephi, it was the resurrected Jesus, either by word or action, who drew attention to connections between Moses and himself. Certainly Mormon, the compiler of the work, did not. We have already seen in the prophecy Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy concerning the prophet God would raise up "like unto" Moses that the resurrected Jesus consciously linked himself to Moses (3 Nephi 20:23). But there is much more.

I shall next draw attention to prophecies about the last days that were uttered by Isaiah, specifically those found in chapter 52, a chapter from which the resurrected Jesus quoted lavishly when he was speaking of the house of Israel and the Gentiles in

the last days (3 Nephi 16, 20–21).² Isaiah 52 is known as a chapter dealing with the so-called “new exodus” or “second exodus,” that is, the gathering of the house of Israel in the last days. In its own way, the new exodus of Israel is to resemble the old exodus under Moses because of its miraculous character and because the results will be the same: a return to the land promised to Israel’s forefathers and a return of the covenants that the Lord had made with them. If one were to read Isaiah 52 with care, one would see allusions in almost every verse to the exodus that took place in the days of Moses.³

A third ingredient, in addition to the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 and the quotations from Isaiah on the new exodus, consists of Jesus’ role as lawgiver in his sermon at the temple in the land of Bountiful. Clearly his words disclose a close connection between himself and Moses. But they also communicate the fact that he is greater than Moses. Let us consider the following: “Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end” (3 Nephi 15:5). Moses was chiefly the transmitter of the Law, its recipient. Jesus on the other hand was its giver, its author. Further, it was only the divine Jesus who could fulfil the law which he himself had given, a task that Moses could not perform as the bearer of the law, carrying it as he did from the premortal Jesus—known as Jehovah—to his people who were

² In addition, Jesus quoted from the fourth and fifth chapters of Micah, chapters that also speak of the “second exodus” or “new exodus.”

³ For instance, verse 2 of Isaiah 52 speaks of “the bands of thy neck,” clearly a reference to enslavement. Verse 3 continues the same imagery of slavery by reference to selling oneself “for nought,” a condition of servitude that poor people frequently faced when they were unable to pay their debts. Moreover, the reference to redemption “without money” in the same verse echoes the rescue of the Hebrew slaves by the Lord. The command to depart in verse 11 recalls the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. Further allusions could be multiplied. The only verses not quoted by the resurrected Jesus are Isaiah 52:4–5, verses wherein the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt is described. While not all of the following match exactly our present Old Testament texts, the passages quoted by Jesus in 3 Nephi chapters 16, 20 and 21 are Isa 52:8–10; Micah 5:8–9; 4:12–13; Deut 18:15; Isa 52:1–3, 6–8, 9–10, 11–15; 3 Nephi 16:18–20; 20:16–19; 20:23, 32, 34–35; 20:36–38; 20:39–40; 20:41–45; 21:8.

camped at the base of the Mount Sinai (a summary of this topic can be found in Seely 2:720–21).

As if this were not enough, the resurrected Jesus said more: “Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9). The connections here to Moses and the exodus of the children of Israel are compelling. First, Jesus identified himself as the law. But he was and is much more. He is also the light. What does this recall to our minds from the exodus? Does it not remind us of the pillar of fire that was visible at night above the sacred tabernacle during the years of Israel’s wandering and camping in the wilderness? (see Ex 13:21; 14:24; Num 14:14; compare Ex 14:20). Further, Jesus says that we are to look to him and, if we endure well, we shall live. What do these concepts recall? On one level, they recall the brass serpent on a pole that was lifted up for all who had been bitten by serpents to see. Moreover, it was the Lord’s promise through Moses that those who looked to the raised serpent would live and not die (Num 21:4–9; 1 Nephi 17:41; 2 Nephi 25:20; compare the following passages in which the brass serpent on the pole is likened to Jesus on the cross: John 3:14–15; Alma 33:19–22; Hel 8:14–15). We can see, therefore, that virtually every word that Jesus said in this verse recalls a dimension of Israel’s experience while under the leadership of Moses.

A fourth element arises from Jesus’ miraculous provision of bread and wine to the multitude on the second day of his visit. This event is thrown into relief by the fact that on day one he had asked the disciples to bring bread and wine to feed the multitude (3 Nephi 18:1–3). On the second day it was different. The scriptural record recounts that “there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude; but he [Jesus] truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink” (20:6–7). Can one miss the connection back to the experience of Moses and the children of Israel? We first note that the Lord had preserved the lives of the Israelites by mirac-

ulously providing water for them when Moses struck a rock in the desert. Actually, a similar miracle took place three times (see Ex 15:22–25 for the healing of the waters of Marah; 17:1–7 and Num 20:2–11 for instances of Moses striking a rock in order to bring forth water). Second, the book of Exodus informs us that after the Israelites had spent two weeks in the desert and had run out of food, the Lord generously provided bread, or manna, in the desert for the entire period that they wandered and camped there (see 16:1–6). Third, if we are not convinced that the bread and wine exhibit a link backwards in time to the period of the exodus, then we should consider the New Testament account of Jesus breaking the bread and blessing the wine during the Last Supper with his twelve apostles, an event during which Jesus instituted the emblems of the sacrament among his followers in the Old World. At this point, two questions are in order. Was not the Last Supper a Passover meal? Although the gospel of John seems to hold that the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, the Synoptic gospels are unanimous in affirming that it was (see Matt 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13). Further, does not the Passover meal celebrate the deliverance of Moses and the children of Israel from bondage? The answers to these questions, of course, are affirmative. In this light, then, we readily see the connections between Jesus' actions among the Nephites and Lamanites and the earlier actions of the Lord for the children of Israel in preserving them from thirsting and starving in the desert.

A final, and perhaps the most intriguing component of our comparison, is grounded in an important and rather common legal function in the ancient world, that of one person sending an envoy or representative to recover a third person who has been enslaved in a distant place. The opening of the exodus account brims with the legal essentials required in cases wherein one seeks the release of another. In this instance, it was the Lord who sought the release of the children of Israel through his agent Moses.

In all such cases, the agent had to bear credentials from the sender in order to prove who he was and whom he represented. The reasons were twofold. First, the captor had to be convinced that the agent had authority to negotiate the release of the one held captive. Second, the captive too had to be reassured that the agent represented the person who was seeking the release, particularly if the agent was not known to the captive. Hence, we see the need for the agent to bear credentials which prove that he or she is an authorized representative of the one seeking the release of the captive. In the case of Moses, it is clear that he understood the need for such credentials. On the Lord's part, he willingly provided them. For as soon as Moses had been called at the burning bush to "deliver [the Israelites] out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex 3:8), he asked to know the Lord's name, a name that would be recognized by the Hebrew slaves. As the account says, the Lord revealed to him the name "I AM THAT I AM." Then the Lord instructed Moses, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (3:14). But the Lord gave to Moses more than his name, because the name would only serve to convince the Hebrew slaves of Moses' authority, and Pharaoh certainly would not accept the name as an indicator of legal or divine prerogatives. Hence, Moses was given power to cast down his staff, turning the staff into a snake. This miraculous power was exhibited both to the children of Israel (4:1-4, 30) and later to Pharaoh (7:9-12). For the enslaved Israelites, however, Moses received other powers or credentials from the Lord that were designed to convince them of his authority, namely, the power to make his hand leprous and the power to turn water to blood (4:6-9). This latter, of course, was subsequently exhibited to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (7:19-21). In the end, then, Moses bore credentials both to Pharaoh—the captor—and to the Hebrews—the captives—in the form of extraordinary powers from the Lord, who sought the release of the captives.

When we turn to the scene described for us in 3 Nephi, we are able to see rather quickly that all of the required elements

are present. We first must ask who the envoy was. In one sense, there was none. In another sense, we find the most important envoy ever to come to this world. In the first sense, the resurrected Jesus came for himself. He sent no one as his representative or ambassador. In the second sense, it was the Father who sent the Savior as envoy on his errand to the Nephites and Lamanites (see 3 Nephi 11:11; 17:4; 18:27).

A second question concerns the identity of the captor in 3 Nephi. Two possible answers appear. One consists of the devil and his angels. In this connection, one should contemplate the following passage: “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people” (3 Nephi 9:2). These words were spoken by the voice that was heard throughout the land during the terrifying three days of darkness that followed the three hours of devastating storm and earthquakes. If one is looking for a living captor, one need look no further than the devil himself. But there is a second answer, and, in a way, it may make more sense. A hint of it is found in the words that we have just read. When the voice used the verb *repent*, it brought its hearers to the other captor, namely, their sins. For in the same passage, speaking of those who had been slain, the voice went on to say, “And it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen.” In this light, perhaps a better way to ask the question is, *what* is the captor? As a partial response and for more light on this subject, we should examine a passage which the Savior quoted from Isaiah 52. It reads, “For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money” (3 Nephi 20:38; see also Isa 52:3). Here it becomes clear that those who are to be “redeemed without money” had “sold” themselves for nothing of value. Knowing the general tenor of Isaiah 52 to be that of the second or new exodus, one chief meaning would be that such persons had sold themselves into bondage, a bondage not unlike that of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. On a spiritual level, the reference

would be to persons who had sold themselves into spiritual bondage, or sin.

The case is clinched by Jesus' words spoken on day two of his visit and recorded in 3 Nephi 20:26. The resurrected Lord declared that the reason the Father had sent him was "to bless you [Nephites and Lamanites] in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." In light of this understanding and the earlier one about the devil and his angels, one must conclude that the captor or captors consisted of the devil and one's sins. It is from these that Jesus came to deliver his Nephite and Lamanite brothers and sisters.

If, then, Jesus was the envoy or representative who came in his own name and in that of the Father and if his purpose was to rescue his people from both Satan and their own sinful state, what, we might ask, did he bring as his credentials? We need not look far. He bore the proofs of his rescue mission in his own body. One need only repeat his words of invitation to the spellbound crowd who had gathered at the temple in Bountiful on the first day of his visit: "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet" (3 Nephi 11:14). It is important to notice that it was the scars of the wounds inflicted during his crucifixion that the resurrected Jesus wanted the crowd to feel. Why? There was a reason, and he spelled it out in his next words: "That ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world" (v 14). Let me suggest that what the crowd would learn when they touched his old wounds, if the spirit of testimony were not present, would be that he had some deep scars. Nothing more. However, because of the spiritual dimension of the experience, Jesus' hearers would gain the testimony that he was who he said he was, namely, "the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth" and that he had "been slain for the sins of the world." From the account in 3 Nephi we learn that it happened as he said it would. For after "they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their

hands,” they “did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come” (3 Nephi 11:15). It therefore becomes clear that Jesus carried two sets of credentials, as it were. One set was embedded in his body and consisted of the scars of his crucifixion. The other was evidently the power of the Spirit that brought testimonies to those who went forward and touched him—who “witnessed for themselves” (v 16). As I read the narrative, the overwhelming character of this physical and spiritual experience led those in the crowd to do the only thing that they could do in such a sacred setting: to sing. Now I realize that verse 16 says that “they did cry out with one accord.” Why do I conclude, then, that they sang? I do so for two reasons, context and unison. In my view, the sacred moment described here would invite song, even if it were loud singing, rather than calling out in a loud voice. Hebrew verbs of speech, even of loud speech, can be translated as references to singing, depending on the context. And I personally believe that the context warrants this understanding. Further, the context is defined by the implication that the crowd spoke in unison, for we are told that it was “with one accord” that they voiced their feelings. While it is possible that they simply recited aloud the words recorded in verse 17, it seems just as likely that they sang them. Perhaps significantly, indicators exist in the Book of Mormon that songs and hymns formed an important part of Nephite worship (see Brown 1:163–80).

The credentials of the resurrected Jesus included more than the physical and spiritual dimensions that his hearers experienced that day. They also included a name, the same name that Moses carried from the holy mount into the Hebrew slave camps. It was the name I AM. Please notice the words with which Jesus began his visit in the New World: “Behold, I AM” (3 Nephi 11:10; emphasis added). Of course, the fuller statement is, “Behold, I AM Jesus Christ” (emphasis added). Lest one say to me that I have made this up, please observe a few statements of Jesus about himself in 3 Nephi that sound very

much like what we read in the gospel of John: “And behold, I am the light and the life of the world” (11:11); “I am the God of Israel” (11:14); “Behold I am the law, and the light” (15:9); “Behold, I am the light” (18:16); “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake” (20:23; see also 12:1–2; 18:24; 20:19, 31, 39; 27:27). Let me observe that scholars of John’s gospel are agreed that the so-called “I am” sayings of Jesus, which are quoted in that gospel, are all references back to the divine name that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush. That is to say, whenever Jesus used the “I am” clause of himself—whether to say that he was the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, or the true bread come down from heaven—he was consciously recalling the divine name and applying it to himself. He was therefore saying that one of his names is I AM and that he was the same person who had called Moses to be a prophet at the burning bush. In this light, I suggest that the same concepts apply in what Jesus said to his Nephite and Lamanite hearers (see Harris). In my view, the case is clinched by Jesus’ words in 3 Nephi 15:5: “Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel.” Who else could this have been except Jehovah, the great I AM, the premortal Jesus?

Conclusion

Let me offer some concluding remarks. As a person who grew up on the Bible, so to speak, I have been deeply impressed—even astonished at times—by what I have found in the pages of the Book of Mormon. By focusing on a single thread, that of the connections between Moses and Jesus, we have been able to explore the meaning of a number of passages whose depth and richness continue to unfold. The broad ties with the Old Testament, particularly with those of the era of Moses and the continuities with Jesus’ ministry in Palestine, form a luxurious tapestry which portrays the spiritual strength and consistency that the resurrected Jesus brought to his Nephite and Lamanite brothers and sisters. Perhaps the best reward of

all for studying 3 Nephi is that we are permitted to see the resurrected Lord and hear his words in a firsthand, personal manner. For me, in 3 Nephi, more than in any other scriptural source, Jesus becomes alive, real, complete with his wondrous quality of divine love, a love which brought him to rescue all of us from the grasp of Satan and from our own sinfulness, a rescue mission which we all desperately need. And the power of the resurrected Savior to deliver us from all bondage, physical or spiritual, is real.

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The Commandment to Be Perfect

7

Gary R. Whiting

When Jesus Christ descended out of the clouds over Bountiful, it must have been a dramatic contrast to the days the Nephites had just experienced. They had seen the awful destruction of their cities, the upheaval and change in the land, and had known the loss of many friends and loved ones. Now, after the days of destruction, darkness, and mourning, the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared from heaven in majesty and brightness. He was the Light, and his brief visit to Bountiful changed forever the lives of the people who met him.

In many ways, the conditions in Bountiful were much different from those in Judea and Galilee. In Judea, everyone was bombarded by the legalism and self-righteous piety of the Pharisees and Scribes. There were also the zealots seeking to overthrow the Roman occupation forces and liberate the Jewish nation. Jesus appeared quietly among the Jews and was almost unnoticed by them. His humble birth, his upbringing, and his hometown all tended to make those who looked at him consider him to be of no importance. In Bountiful, however, everybody knew Jesus was there. First, the voice of the Father, inviting them to hear the words of the Son of God, came from the heavens and pierced each heart (3 Nephi 11:3–7). Then, Jesus descended out of the sky and invited each person, individually, to see and touch the wounds on his body (vv 13–15). These events focused the Nephites' attention directly on Jesus. No one could question who he was, and apparently none did.

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Yet, despite the obvious differences in the environments and people to whom Jesus came, there are several remarkable similarities. Both groups of people were children of Israel and shared a common heritage and the covenant promises of the Lord through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Both groups had a multitude of prophetic witnesses about the coming Christ given over hundreds of years. Perhaps the most striking similarity of all, contrary to much of what modern thought proposes, is that they were taught almost the same message from the lips of the Savior. This message is what we commonly call the Sermon on the Mount.

In 3 Nephi, it is written that not even one percent of what happened in the labor of Jesus was recorded (3 Nephi 26:6). Yet the separate testimonies of both nations recorded the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gave, with some exceptions, the same sermon to both groups of people. Among the Jews, two or three witnesses were needed to establish the truth of anything (Deut 19:15; Heb 10:28). The Sermon on the Mount has two written witnesses. They are found in the record of the Jews (the Bible) and the record of the Nephite/Lamanite nation (The Book of Mormon). Together, they testify that the Sermon on the Mount is true and vital. The Book of Mormon account of this sermon is very useful because it has an extended introduction and explanation given by Christ.

There is more in the Sermon on the Mount than can be addressed here. I have chosen to focus on what I see as the two key phrases in the discourse. First, Jesus begins and ends the Bountiful account by saying that the words are given so that his disciples will know that they must be built upon the rock (3 Nephi 11:39–40; 14:24–27). Second, the Savior commands his disciples to “be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (12:48).

Built upon the Rock

There was apparently an active dispute among the Nephites when Jesus appeared concerning the manner of baptism. When Jesus called Nephi and the other eleven disciples, his first instruction to them was concerning baptism. He told them how to baptize and said that they were not to dispute over this or any other doctrine.

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away. (3 Nephi 11:29–30)

Jesus then began to teach them the doctrine that the Father had given him to declare, the only doctrine he wanted them to practice and teach:

And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me, believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them. (3 Nephi 11:32–40)

The one thing that shines most brilliantly out of this teaching is its simplicity. The Father's doctrine is simple enough that even an eight-year-old child can understand it. Yet it is broad and deep enough to catch up all of life, and not even a lifetime of study and application can appreciate all that it encompasses.

What did Jesus teach that the Father requires of us? First, we are to believe in Jesus Christ, then repent and become as little children, and then we are to be baptized and we will be saved, otherwise we will be damned. The Father promises to visit those so baptized with the witness and power of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:32–36). We should pay particular attention to the admonition to become as a little child. King Benjamin spoke on the necessity of becoming childlike during his last speech:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

Repentance is the recognition and confession of our sins and our sinful or fallen nature and is predicated upon the belief that Jesus is able to remove both the curses of sin and the desire to sin from us. We sin because by nature we are sinners (Mosiah 3:19) and because we like sinning (JST Gen 4:13; Moses 5:13). By ourselves we are helpless to make the necessary changes. We cannot overcome our own nature. When we come unto Christ, we need cleansing from all our unrighteousness. This includes the changing of our hearts to teach us to pursue the things of the spirit rather than the things of the flesh.

This leads us, then, to believe in Jesus. When we become convinced of the corruptness of our flesh, we realize that we need a deliverer, a Savior. Believing in Christ is trusting that the sacrifice Jesus made, his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, is sufficient to deliver us from death to eternal life (Rom 6:23). Jesus said to the Pharisees that it was not enough to put new wine in old bottles, but that everything had to be made new (Matt 9:17; verse 23 in JST). To Nicodemus, Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This is accomplished through the new birth of water and the Spirit.

Placing our confidence in the wisdom and power of God, we willingly submit to baptism as a public witness of the change which Jesus Christ has made and is still making in our hearts. From the beginning, God has required humankind to confess their sins and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (JST Gen 6:51–65; Moses 6:50–62). Restoration scriptures reveal that baptism is a commandment and is to be administered by men given authority to baptize (see D&C 20:37ff). But if we are baptized only because the scripture commands it, without first having repented of our sins, developed faith in Jesus Christ, and brought forth “fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15), baptism is as much a dead work as the sacrifice of the Jews in the days of Isaiah when he wrote:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (1:11–15)

Baptism must be received by faith, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

At the waters of Mormon, the men and women who gathered to hear Alma had already committed themselves to live the Christian life before they were baptized. It was the desire of their hearts to serve Jesus. They entered the waters of Mormon to be baptized as a witness of their allegiance to Christ and as a confession of their faith in him (Mosiah 18:8–16).

Baptism is a public witness of our willingness to obey God in all things. We die to ourselves and are raised to new life in Jesus Christ. By obeying the commandment to be baptized, we remove the penalty of death for our transgressions of the law of God. Our obedience also declares our determination to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:43–44; see also Deut 8:3).

To those who believe and are baptized according to the commandment, the Father sends the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:35). This is the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost and is the sign given to us from the Father that he has committed all his resources to bringing us into the fulness of his glory. Paul writes that it is the “earnest of our inheritance until the redemption” (Eph 1:13–14). The Holy Spirit is the means by which we receive and understand “every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (see D&C 84:43–48; 88:66). Christ taught that God speaks to each of us by the Spirit: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Jesus taught these things as the doctrine of the Father, and he taught that those who build upon these things build upon the rock. The souls built on the rock are the only ones who will survive the storms of this life and the judgment to come (3 Nephi 14:24–25). The rock here certainly includes the doctrine, but I believe it more fully represents the one of whom the doctrine bears witness, that is, Jesus Christ. He is our rock, our redeemer (Ps 78:35), our refuge and hiding place (32:7). We are saved

not by believing in the doctrine, but by believing in Christ. The doctrine points the sinner to Jesus. And Jesus saves those who believe and obey.

Before we move on, note also that the text does not say *if* storms come, but rather it says *when* they come. Some of these storms are the mists of darkness that Lehi saw in the vision of the tree of life. Nephi was told that the mists of darkness that covered the narrow path were the temptations of the devil (1 Nephi 12:17). Satan is allowed to tempt us so that God may teach us the value of prizing the good and despising the bitter (JST Gen 6:57; Moses 6:55; 2 Nephi 2:15; D&C 29:39). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorted them to take the shield of faith and use it to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph 6:16). Other storms that are a part of this life are allowed to prove who and what we love the most (D&C 98:11–12). If the storms are able to discourage us or move us off the narrow way that leads to the tree of eternal life, then we know that we were not built on the rock. At this point the Holy Ghost teaches us to call on the Lord, confess and repent of our sins, and then Jesus, our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1; D&C 45:3–4), “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The sermon spoken by Jesus both to the Nephites at Bountiful and to his disciples on the mount in Judea ends with the same note. Storms are coming, and those who hear and do the things of which Jesus speaks build on the rock. They will be able to withstand, not because of their righteousness, but by virtue of the strength and power resident in the rock, who is Christ Jesus, the Eternal Son of God (see Alma 37:33–37; Hel 5:12).

Be Perfect, Even as I

Having discussed the foundational principles, we must now learn how to obey the Father’s doctrine. The remainder of Christ’s sermon is a series of examples of how to fulfill the

gospel law. Jesus describes the qualities of the person who lives by the doctrine of God, and the examples he gives all point to the central theme of the whole discourse: “*Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect*” (3 Nephi 12:48; emphasis added).

We are all familiar with this oft-quoted verse, but it seems difficult to understand and apply because it appears to be calling us to a standard that is above our ability to attain. The Lord gave this admonition as a commandment, and true disciples of Jesus Christ want to keep all of God’s commandments and do not want to fail the Master. Striving to attain the high standard of this commandment could lead to discouragement, but there is no need for this. The words of Nephi to his father regarding the Lord’s command to return to Jerusalem for the brass plates offer hope: “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth” (1 Nephi 3:7).

The way to understand and obey the commandment to be perfect becomes clear when we examine it in the context in which Jesus gave it. The first words Jesus spoke to the multitude after he explained his doctrine to the twelve disciples were the Beatitudes (3 Nephi 12:2–12). Then he spoke of giving all believers to be the salt of the earth and lights to the world (vv 13–16). Following this, Jesus exhorted the people to have confidence in the commandments of the Father, saying that every word of them would be fulfilled down to the smallest part of a letter (vv 17–18). Note that Jesus said that the law was fulfilled, therefore “come unto me and be ye saved” (v 20).

Beginning with 3 Nephi 12:19 is a series of commandments and sayings that Jesus uses to typify the difference between the old covenant of the Mosaic law and the new covenant of the gospel. These verses begin the section of the sermon that culminates in the commandment to be perfect. Jesus employs a definite pattern in these verses. First, he quotes the law (or in some cases, the proverb) and the old understanding of it. Then

he says, in essence, that is how the law has been understood or obeyed, but listen, this is how he wants and has always wanted us to obey it. Through the contrast of the old and the new, Jesus reveals truth.

In all of these contrasts, the interpretation and application that Jesus makes is characterized by one new thing—love. The Jews had developed a system of laws. They were strict and unbending because they were designed to protect the “holiness” of the individual performing the act. However, this kind of holiness often ignored other people and even God. This can be illustrated by briefly looking at the teachings of the Savior in the following cases.

Thou shalt not kill (Ex 20:13). This law is as well known to us as today as it was to the Jews and the Nephites. In the Jewish mindset, we would not kill because killing is a sin that would mar our own holiness. As long as we resist the urge to commit the act of murder, we consider ourselves to be righteous. But this kind of “righteousness” allows us to tolerate anger, hatred, and bitterness as long as these feelings don’t lead to violence. Therefore, Jesus said that even if we are angry with a brother we have sinned before God, and if we speak an angry word toward a brother we are in danger of hellfire. Why? Because the righteousness of God is purer than the righteousness of human wisdom. Anger and a hateful tongue bring injury to others and are uncharitable. Charity is kind, is not easily provoked and thinks no evil (see Moroni 7:45). Therefore, Christ taught that we should search our hearts and reconcile ourselves with our brothers before worshipping God so that our worship will be acceptable and we can escape God’s judgment (see 3 Nephi 12:22–24).

Thou shalt not commit adultery (Ex 20:14). Jacob condemned the Nephite men who committed the sin of adultery. It is a gross sin against God, but its grossness is also because of the injury it causes others. Jacob said, “Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence

of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you” (Jacob 2:35).

The sin of adultery must be stringently avoided and the marriage covenant should be kept out of love for one’s partner and children, as well as out of obedience to God. Infidelity undoubtedly injures the parties involved, but deeper damage is done to the spouse and children whose hearts are torn asunder and trampled by this uncharitable act. It is a sin against the hearts of the family, and God hates it. Therefore, Jesus taught that if we lust in our heart we are guilty of the sin (D&C 42:22–23; 63:16). It is better to deny ourselves these things than to be cast into hell. Lust is the seed from which adultery springs.

Jesus said that fornication is the only justifiable reason for divorce in the eyes of God, and even this God hates (3 Nephi 12:32; see also Matt 19:8). Divorce for any other reason puts the marriage partners in the position of committing adultery if they marry again. Is there anything more honored by God than a pure marriage where the husband and wife love and honor one another and the Lord? Is there any other place where the love of God is more represented than in a godly marriage? Paul has written that the marriage of a man and woman is a symbol of Jesus’ relationship to the Church (Eph 5:22–32).

Thou shalt not forswear thyself (Num 30). To forswear is to make and break an oath. Thus, this commandment deals with keeping our word, or our oaths. All oaths that we speak are considered to be made and kept to the Lord. While we are to keep our word to God, often our oaths involve things we will do for others. An oath can be seen as a promise, the giving of our word. All of us have broken a promise, or at least have had someone break a promise to us. It is uncharitable to break promises because it injures others. Someone is trusting us to help them or to get something done. If we fail, at the least we have hurt them by violating their trust. How awful it is when our forswearing opens the door for a brother to be tempted by the sin of anger (see Mosiah 4:28).

Jesus counseled the Nephites to limit their spoken words to the minimum and not to make an oath unless they meant to keep it. In another place Jesus said, “I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt 12:36). Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel wrote:

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. (Eccl 5:2–4)

Satan tempts us to speak words which he can use to accuse us before the Father. Believers, the sons of God, are described as those who are “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14). These are they who “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:44). Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are to live by the truth which the Spirit gives us so that we may live wisely before God. Our very life is from God and that which he gives us comes from above. Of these things the Lord has said, “Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit; and in this there is no condemnation” (63:64; see also 63:58; Prov 10:19–20). The point that Jesus was making is that we must be careful to speak only that which is truth or by the Spirit. What the Spirit provides is sacred and must be cared for in wisdom and holiness. Therefore, if we speak or make an oath under any influence other than the Spirit of God, it is sin. The wise will not multiply many words, but will open their mouths only as the Spirit gives them utterance (see D&C 88:137). If we speak by any other means, these things will judge us at the last day.

An eye for an eye (Ex 21:23–24; Lev 24:20). This is a commandment given in the Mosaic law, and its purpose was to give guidance to authorized judges in the land by which they

could make the punishment fit the crime. This is the principle which the Lord revealed to Alma when transgressors were brought before him for judgment (Mosiah 29:11, 25). If a person was unrepentant and unwilling to make amends with his neighbor, the law dictated the severity of the judgment against him. It was recompense for the loss on the basis of equity according to the damage done. The Jews, however, had come to believe that every man had the right to exact judgment on an offender without a court decision. If someone hit you in the face, you hit him back. If someone cursed you, you cursed back at him. But charity does not think evil and is long suffering (Moroni 7:45). Christ taught that if a man hits you on one side of the face, turn to him the other, and do not revile again (3 Nephi 12:39). Jesus also applied this to our response regarding lawsuits and borrowing (12:40–42). The unspoken side of this law is that if we have charity we will not envy (want to steal or sue) and we will not think evil or rejoice in iniquity (no need to strike anyone or compel them to do anything).

Why does the Lord ask us to suffer these things? Because the disciples of Jesus, by demonstrating charity when evil is shown to them, bring a witness of the glory of God to those bringing the evil. This witness may turn a heart to love God, as it did for Saul (Acts 7:58; 9:4–5), or it may only serve as a witness of judgment against the offender (D&C 98:26–27). It shows that God really is Lord in our life because we submit the whole case to him and trust him to settle it fairly. God promises to execute vengeance against those to whom vengeance is due (Rom 12:19), and we have shown love and have not done injury to one who is loved by God as deeply as we ourselves are loved by him.

Love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. This saying is not a part of our written scripture. It probably developed out of the self-righteousness and self-justification that marks legalism. In contrast, Jesus said that we must love our enemies, bless them who curse us, do good to them who despitefully use us and persecute us (3 Nephi 12:43–44). Why should we behave this

way towards others? Because as disciples of Jesus Christ we will begin to love others as God who first loved us (1 John 4:10–11). While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, yet not only for us, but also for the sins of the whole world (Rom 5:6–10). Does God find pleasure in the death of the wicked? No, but he rejoices with the angels over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10; see also Ezek 18:23, 32; D&C 18:10–15).

Why did Jesus come into the world? To save sinners from the curse of the law. Are not disciples supposed to follow their Master? Yes! Those who do evil towards us are deceived by the devil into sinning as we were before we turned to Jesus. Such people need Jesus also, and to revile against them or return evil for evil will drive them farther from the truth than they were before. How shall they know the love of God if they do not see it in those who profess to know God? Some, like Saul of Tarsus, will only first see the love of God in the response of Christians to persecution. Therefore, we must pray for and love our enemies. Yes, it will help us, but even more importantly, it may help save a lost soul.

After all of that, Jesus said to the Nephites that all the old things were done away and everything was now new. What did Jesus mean by this phrase? He meant that in him the curse of the law and the animosity it engendered were done away. He revealed that the true purpose of the principles of the law had always been to teach people to love one another. Therefore, he taught, “I would that ye should be perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48). The law taught people to be perfect in their outward acts and appearances, but Jesus had just said that that was done away. So what did Jesus mean when he said that we are to be perfect? He had been speaking about how to behave in love towards others in many situations. Apparently, the commandment that Jesus gave was not to be perfect in performance and outward acts, but to have perfect love. Perfect love is the same love that Jesus and his Father have. This is charity, and it is defined as “the pure love of Christ, and it endureth for ever; and whoso is found

possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

Jesus continued his sermon after the commandment to be perfect by talking about the qualities of true worship. The worship of God is an act of love towards God. Jesus emphasized that in praying, giving of alms, and fasting, true disciples do not make a big scene about their worship. They know that God sees all and is aware of the intent of their hearts. Worship acts that are dressed up to impress others are offered out of self-love and not as loving acts to God. This is emphasized by Jesus’ statement that a man cannot serve two masters (3 Nephi 13:24). Either we serve God out of love or we are serving the devil, the author of vanity and pride. If we love God, we will serve him and trust in his ability to support us. Therefore, Jesus said, “Seek not the things of this world, but seek ye first the kingdom of God and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (JST Matt 6:38).

With the fact established that Jesus was commanding us to have charity or perfect love, how can we have this perfect and pure love of Jesus Christ in us? Moroni has recorded the answer written by his father, Mormon. Beginning with Moroni 7:44, Mormon writes that it is by faith in Christ, which arises from a meekness or humility before God and a hope of being raised to eternal life through the atonement of Jesus Christ, that charity is found. The possession of the three characteristics of faith, meekness, and hope, plus the testimony that Jesus is the Christ as declared by the power of the Holy Ghost, equals charity.

In Moroni 7:48, Mormon writes that charity, the pure love of Christ, is bestowed upon all who are true followers of Jesus Christ and is given to us by God the Father. It is also the power which helps us “to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). When Jesus spoke to his disciples in Jerusalem, he said that when he left he would pray and the Father would send the Comforter, or the Holy Ghost, to them (14:16–18). The Holy Ghost is given to us so that we may have the testimony that Jesus is the Christ

and so that through the presence of the Holy Ghost, we may develop charity.

At another time Mormon wrote this to his son concerning the baptism of infants:

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. (Moroni 8:25–26)

Thus, charity is a gift given by God to those who are humble and obedient. It is a gift which follows the reception of the Holy Ghost. A believer, by giving diligence to the Holy Ghost and to prayer, maintains this perfect love until the end comes. Charity coexists by the Spirit with the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

By Their Fruit Ye Shall Know Them

One of the most enlightening discoveries about the Book of Mormon in recent years has been the discovery of chiasms. Most of us are familiar with this style of Hebrew poetic writing. I have found that the chiasmic pattern is more than simply a marvelous method of writing. We can see chiasm-like patterns in the way God works and reveals himself. For example, God has said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Another example is that Jesus came in the meridian of time. All of history before pointed to his coming in the flesh, and all of history after him looks back on his coming in the flesh. For the chiasm “purist” this may seem like stretching the point. However, I’ve found that visualizing the principles of the Sermon on the Mount in this way has opened a door to understanding the sermon more completely.

The doctrine that Jesus presented in the Sermon on the Mount can be loosely organized into a pattern similar to a chiasm. At the beginning and the end of his message, the Master declares that if we hear and obey the Father's doctrine we will be built on the rock. Those built on the rock will escape the fury of life's storms and ultimately the judgment that is coming on the world at the second coming of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 11:39–41; 14:24–27). The center point of this sermon is the phrase, "be ye perfect," which I have stated is a commandment to have charity or perfect love (12:48). If this is true, then the Nephites, who not only heard but obeyed every word spoken by Jesus, should show fruit that supports this conclusion. Can we find charity in the Nephite people as a result of their obedience to the teachings of Christ?

The history of the Nephites after Christ's visit shows that the Church was established—people repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus and received the Holy Ghost (4 Nephi 1). What fruit did their obedience bring? As we read on we find that there were no disputations or contentions in all the land. Everyone treated each other with justice: "And they had all things common among them; therefore they were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (v 3). There was peace. There were many miracles. In verse 15, we read that all this transpired "because of *the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people*" (emphasis added). The fruit of their obedience was the presence of the Holy Ghost and charity. By this testimony of the Nephites comes evidence that Jesus' intent in the Sermon on the Mount was to call every man, woman, and child to have charity.

When the scribe asked Jesus which of all the commandments was the greatest, Jesus quoted a law from Deuteronomy 6:5 and followed with one from Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:35–39).

Jesus said that all of the law (of Moses) and the prophets hang on these two commandments. Love is the foundation of the two commandments that Jesus said were chief of all. Paul also wrote, “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart” (1 Tim 1:5; see also Rom 10:4; 13:8–10).

In the very beginning, God gave this commandment of love to humanity. Adam received the commandment from the Lord and taught it to his offspring. In Genesis (JST), as given by inspiration, God explained it to Enoch: “In the garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another; and that they should choose me their Father” (JST Gen 7:40; see also Moses 7:33).

From the beginning of this world, God, through Jesus Christ, has sought people who would love him as their Father and who would love one another. To live by charity is to fulfill the measure or reason for our creation. Sin and the judgment of death pronounced on all sinners would have prevented us from learning to love God. To overcome this, Jesus came into the world to atone for sin and give each of us the opportunity to learn to love God as we have been commanded (1 John 5:1–3). This probation, as the Book of Mormon so plainly testifies (see Mormon 9:27–28), grants us the opportunity to learn to love and trust God.

The Sermon on the Mount is not simply a listing of a new set of rules to replace the old rules of the Mosaic law. It is both a call to believe and obey the doctrine of Christ and to develop charity. Believing and obeying is faith in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s atonement for sin. Charity develops by the reception of the Holy Ghost and faith (see Moroni 8:25–26).

This sermon by the Master states the commandment, gives the application, and describes the expected fruit of obeying the commandment. It is the appeal of God, the Everlasting Father, to his wayward children to come to the tree of life and partake of the fruit which is most precious (1 Nephi 15:36). This fruit is the love of God (11:25) which is found in Jesus Christ, the

Only Begotten Son of the Father. It is the invitation to plant the word of God in our hearts as a seed and nourish it through the wisdom of the Holy Ghost and to rejoice in its fruit (Alma 32:28). The word is provided to us by God, and if it is received by faith in Jesus Christ it will yield the precious and holy fruit of salvation—charity. Charity grows in our hearts until it is perfected, and once it is perfected, “as he [God] is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

The Lord God spoke to Moses and said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The law of Moses had been misunderstood and viewed as a set of rules which brought drudgery, defeat, and death to the lives of those who tried to keep them (see Rom 7:7–13). Jesus came into the world to bring deliverance to the captives and bring them into the kingdom of the Father. Paul wrote, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (14:17). Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). When we obey the words of Jesus Christ to be perfect even as he and the Father are, we come under his protecting arm. What a glorious thing it is to be in the light!

The Savior's Missionary Training Sermon in 3 Nephi

8

Robert A. Cloward

Several years ago, as I sat at my desk at the Knoxville Tennessee Institute of Religion, I heard a knock at the front door. This seemed odd, since students regularly entered and exited the building as they pleased. Answering the knock, I found on the porch a man with shoulder-length brown hair and a flowing white robe. He asked if he could come in to share a message with me. Curious, I invited him in and offered him a seat. The man told me the world needed people who were willing to pattern their lives exactly after Jesus' example. He nodded when I asked if that were the reason for the hair and the robe. I inquired what church he represented. Uncomfortable with the question, he said he was simply a follower of Jesus Christ. I asked more pointedly, "Who feeds you?" He replied, "You do."

The visitor justified his response by quoting two verses from the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:31, 33). Apparently, he wasn't supposed to take thought for his needs, but I was!

I relate this experience to emphasize the simple truth that it *matters* how we interpret the words of scripture. As I looked

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at that man, I saw a life profoundly affected by the Sermon on the Mount—*in the wrong way*.

The words of the Sermon on the Mount are among the most familiar and beloved in the Bible. The Book of Mormon counterpart, which I call the Sermon in Bountiful, blesses us with a second scriptural context for these holy words. Many Latter-day Saints have been uplifted and edified by the Savior's teachings and have found applications for them in their lives. Not all interpret or apply the same, however, and some find parts of the sermon difficult to understand. On several occasions I have heard Church members remark that the sermon is perplexing because of its wide variety of topics. They find themselves groping for a thread to tie the diverse parts together. It is my hope in this paper to show that the scriptures reveal this thread. Once discovered, it ties the sermon together into a coherent and lucid whole, as seemingly unrelated topics take their proper places, and already familiar words reveal the fulness of their meaning.

Alternative Approaches to the Sermon's Unity

Any attempt to tie the Savior's sermon into a whole presents important implications for the interpretation of the parts. We must carefully judge each suggested unifying theory to be sure it properly guides our interpretations. A few examples from the variety of approaches to the sermon will suffice for illustration. (See Bauman for an extensive history of interpretations.)

Many non-LDS and a few LDS commentators claim that chapters 3–5 of Matthew contain a collection of pericopes or sayings of Jesus originally delivered separately over the extended time span of his earthly ministry. They claim that Matthew reconstructed them as if they were spoken together. One author states: "No proper exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount can ignore the results of more than two hundred years of historical-critical research into the New Testament. One of these results is the determination that the Sermon on the Mount

in the First Gospel is not a speech made by Jesus but the literary work of the Evangelist Matthew” (Strecker 11).

Those who propound this view credit Matthew with the sermon frame, editing teachings taken from Mark’s gospel, the sayings source (Q^{Matt}), and other isolated special material (Strecker 14). The standard argument begins with the observation that Matthew cited many teachings which appear in very different settings in the other synoptic gospels. Luke, for example, whose abbreviated version of the Sermon appears in chapter 6, introduces the Lord’s prayer and the teachings on the eye single and asking/seeking/knocking in chapter 11; the teachings on judging, alms, and seeking first the kingdom of God in chapter 12; the teaching on the strait gate in chapter 13; on salt in chapter 14; on divorce, the tittle of the law, and God versus mammon in chapter 16. The argument continues that perhaps Luke placed these teachings in their correct chronological order and historical settings, while Matthew artificially redacted them into a hortative sermon.

Although Jesus did repeat some of his teachings on several different occasions during his ministry (see Matt 13:31; Luke 13:19; 17:6), the Book of Mormon provides a much more significant counterargument to the claim that Matthew 3–5 is a concocted collection of Jesus’ teachings. After delivering the Sermon in Bountiful, the risen Lord told his Nephite audience, “Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father” (3 Nephi 15:1). This indicates that the Sermon in Bountiful was an intentional repetition and that both the teachings and their frame were the Savior’s own and not the literary work of the evangelist Matthew.

Some have said that the main purpose of the sermon was Jesus’ announcement of the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the coming of a new and higher law. Because Latter-day Saints have access to unique truths about the relationship between the old and the new laws, some have emphasized this in their interpretations (Monson, preface). This emphasis can lead to over-generalization, however. The fulfillment of the old law

and its augmentation with the new is a prominent theme in Jesus' sermon, but to make this concept the centerpiece is to misinterpret the second chapter (Matt 6 and 3 Nephi 13) and to lose the meaning of much of the first and third of the three chapters as well.

Many who quote the Sermon on the Mount tacitly assume that its wide array of topics is available for whatever a person might wish to mine. They pull out this piece or that piece without regard to the original context. This approach presupposes by default that the sermon is a diverse series of topics of advice or counsel addressed to the general membership of the Church. Such a view is hazardous. Ignoring context may lead one to misconstrue or even wrest the intent of the Savior's words.

Another approach is elaborated in a recent book which suggests that the sermon is "a temple text" or "a sacred temple experience" (Welch 14). This new interpretation requires the reader to draw "possible inferences" from background information, since proof of the theory is obscure or nonexistent in the scriptures. Latter-day Saints love the ceremonies of the temple and are fascinated with the unfathomable implications of temple ordinances, but portraying the sermon as a veiled synopsis of the temple endowment seems to look beyond the mark.

If the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful are not a literary collection of Jesus' sayings, or the inaugural presentation of the new law, or a catalog of general advice, or a sacred temple experience, what might they be? Two sources of evidence motivate another approach to the Savior's words. I believe they indicate that Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–14 are best interpreted as *missionary training sermons*. The first source of evidence for this interpretation is the settings of the sermons in the Bible and the Book of Mormon; the second is the witness of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

A Missionary Training Approach

1. Both sermons have missionary training settings.

It is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful share similar settings and a common purpose. Three observations make this clear.

First, Jesus himself said his Sermon in Bountiful was the same as his earlier Sermon on the Mount (see 3 Nephi 15:1). The Lord's own linking of the second presentation to the first justifies direct comparisons of their words and purposes. It does not seem reasonable to suppose that he used so many of the same words on two different occasions for different purposes.

Second, we note that both sermons were delivered prior to the labor of missionaries. This is very clear in Luke's account. Sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, Luke 6:17–49 is undoubtedly Luke's version of the same sermon as Matthew 5–7, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie concludes in *The Mortal Messiah* (2:115–18). In Luke, the sermon is prefaced by the call of the Twelve (Luke 6:13–16). In the sermon itself, these disciples are trained in the presence of a great multitude. Jesus then trained them further by personally modeling what he had taught them to do. He returned to Capernaum, healed the centurion's servant, went to Nain and healed the widow's son, counseled the disciples sent from John the Baptist, chided the Pharisees who had rejected John's baptism, and ate and taught in the house of a Pharisee. Then, "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him" (8:1). He told the parables of the soils and of the candle on a candlestick; he taught that his mother and his brethren were those who hear and do the word of God; he calmed the storm on Galilee; he cast an evil spirit out of a man into a herd of swine in Gadara; he returned to Capernaum and healed Jairus' daughter and the woman with a twelve-year flow of blood. All these demonstrations had their root in the teachings of the sermon. Jesus was modeling missionary ministry.

After watching Jesus do these things, the Twelve were ready to serve on their own. Note the opening of Luke, chapter 9:

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. (vv 1–5)

Jesus chose the Twelve, taught them what he expected of them in their missionary labors, and showed them what they were to do. When they had been trained, he gave them power and dispatched them on missionary journeys of their own. The two phases of this training were (1) the sermon and (2) their observation of his example. Scripture records that the Twelve enjoyed outstanding success and returned to give their report (Luke 9:6, 10).

Similarly, the Sermon in Bountiful serves as a prelude to missionary work by those whom the Savior trained there. After the first day of Jesus' teaching in Bountiful, the multitude immediately responded to his command to testify of him. Initially, they gathered all their acquaintances from round about to hear the Savior's words:

And it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had ministered unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude. Yea, and even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and insomuch did they send forth unto the people that there were many, yea, an exceedingly great number, did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude. (3 Nephi 19:2–3)

The multitude of righteous Nephites and Lamanites recognized the importance of the Savior's command to come unto him. They made no delay in spreading the word of his visit. When

they had gathered as many as they could, Jesus' Nephite Twelve organized the larger multitude into teaching groups (3 Nephi 19:5) and proceeded to share with them all the Savior's words of the previous day (v 8). The disciples taught as Jesus had taught. Receiving the words with joy and desiring to receive the Holy Ghost, the people went down to the water and were baptized, after which they received the promised, sublime gift of the Holy Ghost and were "encircled about as if it were by fire" (vv 9–14).

But this first night's effort was only the beginning of the disciples' missionary response to the Sermon in Bountiful. Chapter 26 of 3 Nephi reports that after the Savior ascended for the last time from his personal ministry among them, the disciples launched an intensive missionary thrust:

And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost. And many of them saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written. And they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another. And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them. And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. (vv 17–21)

The labors of these missionaries culminated in the conversion of all the people in the land and the establishment of a church which enjoyed nearly two hundred years of peace (4 Nephi 1:1–3). It is clear that the two presentations of Jesus' sermon, the first in Galilee and the second in Bountiful, preceded great outpourings of missionary labor which met with powerful success.

Third, the audiences of both sermons consisted of disciples who were to serve as missionaries, and who were selected for their attendance at this missionary training. In Matthew's account, Jesus' audience consisted of his Twelve, additional disciples and a curious multitude. Jesus was not teaching the multitude, however. In fact, Matthew specifically states that he

left the multitude before beginning the training: “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them” (Matt 5:1–2).

Luke’s record shows that many of the multitude followed Jesus and heard his words. Luke distinguishes between the disciples, to whom the sermon was directed (6:20), and the multitudes, who came to hear him and to be healed (vv 17–19). He explains that Jesus taught the disciples “in the audience of the people” (7:1). However, the missionary call was extended only to the disciples.

In the Sermon in Bountiful, Jesus called his Nephite Twelve to missionary labors: “Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 11:41). Thereafter, he exhorted the multitude, “about two thousand and five hundred souls” (17:25), to heed the words of the Twelve and to be baptized by them.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. (12:1)

But Jesus didn’t stop there. He then extended a missionary call to *the entire multitude*, promising great blessings to those to whom they testified, who would receive baptism and the Holy Ghost. Addressing the multitude, he said:

And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall

be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 12:2)

In both the Bible and the Book of Mormon contexts, the sermons were directed to a group of people especially selected by Jesus Christ to be his missionary witnesses.

To summarize point one, Jesus overtly linked the two presentations of his sermon. They share a common purpose. Both preceded heaven-blessed missionary labors, and both were given to groups the Savior had selected for missionary service.

2. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible restores the missionary training purpose to the biblical account and supports that interpretation of the Sermon in Bountiful.

One of the great contributions of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) is its restoration of the reason—the “why”—for certain passages of scripture. This is certainly the case for the Sermon on the Mount. Since the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful are much the same in wording and purpose, we cannot ignore the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible in our search for the meaning of 3 Nephi 12–14 in the Book of Mormon.

For each of the three chapters of the Sermon, the JST independently specifies and illuminates its missionary training purpose. In JST Matthew, Jesus began by promising the blessings of the Holy Ghost and the remission of sins to those who would believe the testimony of the disciples and accept baptism (5:3–4). In chapter 6, he commissioned the disciples, saying, “Go ye into the world,” and “ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people” (vv 25–26). In chapter 7, he taught them the very words they were to say to their hearers: “Now these are the words which Jesus taught his disciples that they should say unto the people” (v 1; see also vv 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16). These precious restorations are found only in the JST. They are not in the King James Version. They supply the much sought “why” of the Sermon on the Mount.

To summarize point two, Jesus was training missionaries in the Sermon on the Mount. The JST makes this plain. This is the thread that ties together the Savior's biblical sermon. Latter-day Saints have access to this thread; the rest of the world does not. We must not ignore or downplay what has been vouchsafed to our dispensation by revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The JST restorations suggest that the Sermon in Bountiful was also a missionary training sermon. The same thread of unity can enlighten our understanding of the book of Mormon context for the Savior's teachings.

Interpreting the Sermon in Bountiful According to its Missionary Training Purpose

I will now discuss the significance of the missionary training frame for the interpretation of the Sermon in Bountiful in 3 Nephi 12–14. For the purposes of this discussion, I have divided the sermon into seven sections as follows: (1) the Beatitudes (12:1–12); (2) the teachings on salt and light (vv 13–16); (3) the fulfillment of the law of Moses (vv 17–18); (4) the new commandments and their relationship to the old law and the new law (vv 19–48); (5) the warnings on hypocritical behavior (13:1–24); (6) the requirements of full and part-time ministers (vv 25–34); and (7) the admonitions to the multitude on doing his will in their missionary ministries (chapter 14). As will be seen, each part of the sermon finds its place in the unified whole. Each is relevant and intended. No part is superfluous—none extraneous to the central purpose. Armed with the Savior's divine training, the Nephite and Lamanite witnesses were well prepared for their call to serve.

1. The Book of Mormon “beatitudes” (3 Nephi 12:1–12) are descriptions of the effect of the gospel on people the missionaries would encounter in their labors.

The “blessed” statements, or “beatitudes,” which open the sermon are not so sterile of context in 3 Nephi as they are in

Matthew in the King James Version. In Bountiful, Jesus explicitly stated his purpose for this list of benedictions. This purpose is found in the Beatitudes which precede the familiar eight of Matthew chapter 5 in the King James Version. Before speaking of the poor in spirit, the risen Lord had already pronounced blessed those of the multitude who would give heed to the Twelve and who would believe in him and be baptized. Thereafter, he pronounced blessed those who would respond to the preaching of the multitude by humbling themselves and being baptized (3 Nephi 12:2). From the beginning of the Sermon in Bountiful, therefore, blessedness resulted from *response* to the preaching of the gospel.

Elaborating on the forthcoming missionary experience of these witnesses, the Savior then listed eight characteristics they would encounter in their investigators. Some, he said, would be poor in spirit. That means exactly what it says: *poor* in spirit, *lacking* in spirit. All too often, the phrase is equated with humility. Such distortion is born of the misinterpretation that the Beatitudes define qualities we should *seek* in order to obtain blessedness. Blessedness comes from responding to the gospel and being baptized, not from the initial characteristics of the hearer. Jesus taught, “Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 12:3; emphasis added). No one who is poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. The blessed ones who inherit that kingdom are those who *come unto Christ* through the waters of baptism when his gospel is preached to them.

Similarly, the Beatitudes do not teach us to seek mourning or meekness, or to hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to be blessed. Only by actually coming unto Christ do such people achieve blessedness. Being merciful, pure in heart, or a peacemaker seems advisable, but it would be inaccurate to say that Jesus taught us in the sermon to *seek* these traits, and he certainly didn’t intend that we *seek* to be persecuted for his name’s sake! The reward of the persecuted, be they investiga-

tors or missionaries, comes in heaven and only if they do what is necessary to get there (3 Nephi 12:10–12).

2. “I give unto you to be the salt” or “the light” (3 Nephi 12:13–16) was a charge to the missionaries for the work of their ministry.

As Jesus’ missionary witnesses, the Twelve and the multitude were to be as salt to the earth and light to the people. In Galilee, Jesus taught that Moses and the prophets had been as salt and likened their writings to salt which is good (see JST Luke 14:35–38). In Bountiful, the salt of scriptural witnesses, which had previously brought responsive Nephites and Lamanites to Christ, was now to be supplemented with newly trained witnesses. They must let their light shine “before this people” (3 Nephi 12:16). Jesus again commanded the Nephite and Lamanite multitude to hold up their light so that it could shine “unto the world.” “Behold, I am the light which ye shall hold up,” he said, “that which ye have seen me do” (18:24).

3. The fulfilled law would have to be carefully taught to Nephite and Lamanite investigators (3 Nephi 12:17–18), including those who may have recalled the heresy of 3 Nephi 1:24.

Shortly after the appearance in the Western Hemisphere of the predicted sign of Jesus’ birth in the land of Jerusalem, some began to preach that “it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses” (3 Nephi 1:24). This heresy showed a partial but erroneous understanding of the scriptures. Its proponents understood that the law of Moses would be fulfilled in Christ, but they misunderstood the timing and nature of that fulfillment. In his sermon, Jesus gave an unmistakable timing signal to his missionary witnesses: “For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled” (12:18). The law had remained intact until the time of Christ’s resurrection. Now it was fulfilled.

4. The new “commandments” and their relationship to the old law and the new law, if correctly taught by missionaries, would establish the fact of the completed Atonement for Nephites and Lamanites (3 Nephi 12:19–48), many of whom had been aware of its significance for generations.

The relationship between the performances and ordinances and the commandments of the law of Moses and the way to look to Christ for a remission of sins was not new to righteous Nephites. Their scriptures contained Nephi’s enlightening explanation:

And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away. (2 Nephi 25:24–27)

In 3 Nephi 12:19–20, Jesus spoke of the law and the commandments which he had given to the people. The law, mentioned at the end of verse 19, had been given by him long before and was now fulfilled. The commandments, however, were the new commandments he had just given: to believe in Christ and repent of sin, to come unto him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and (as seen in verse 1 of the same chapter) to be baptized in order to receive the visitation of the Holy Ghost. He continued, “Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, *which I have commanded you at this time*, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (v 20).

Jesus was reemphasizing that through repentance the people could take advantage of his accomplished atonement and go on to perfection (JST Heb 6:1–3). Nevertheless, he knew that the transition to a new system of law would not be easy. In fact, the first question asked him when he finished his missionary training involved a lack of understanding of the change to a new law (see 3 Nephi 15:2).

Jesus knew the importance of training his missionary witnesses and taught the spirit of the new law with illustrative examples. When viewed as six illustrations of a single principle rather than as six new laws, Jesus' sayings in 3 Nephi 12:21–45 make much more sense. In fact, three of the illustrations commend and expand the existing Mosaic law rather than replace it. Jesus gave the guiding principle at the end in verses 46–47: “Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new.” The focus of the new law is the perfection of the heart. This is sufficiently demonstrated so that the Savior's missionaries would have ample means to explain the new orientation to their hearers.

5. Hypocrisy had stood between those who had the old law and their coming unto perfection. Missionaries were given specific training for setting a proper example in true versus hypocritical giving, prayer, fasting, and use of wealth (3 Nephi 13:1–24).

In Jesus' new commandments, inward worship was more important than outward form. He therefore taught his missionary witnesses how to set the example in their religious acts. In his teaching on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, he specifically mentioned that they were to avoid hypocritical patterns. Acting in religious ways to be “seen of men” (3 Nephi 13:1, 5, 16) was contrary to the inner perfection he adjured. Moreover, the Savior warned the missionary multitude against the lure of worldly wealth: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (3 Nephi 13:24).

6. The Savior clearly differentiated between requirements for full-time and part-time missionaries (3 Nephi 13:25–34).

An important transition statement in 3 Nephi 13:25 sets off the next section of Jesus' sermon in Bountiful from the previous sections. From 3 Nephi 12:1, we know that all the sermon to this point had been addressed to the multitude. Now, in 3 Nephi 13:25, he switches his focus to the Twelve. If we, as readers, fail to notice this change, we might incorrectly apply to ourselves the Savior's directives to take no thought about food or drink or clothing. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (v 33), though often quoted out of context to apply to everyone, is actually counsel directed only to those involved in full-time ministry. Jesus promised his Twelve that their needs would be met if they would build his kingdom as their first priority. For the rest of us, whose ministry is only part-time, we must indeed take thought for our physical upkeep and not expect that God or others will take care of all our needs.

7. Stern admonitions were given to the multitude that they must do more than just come unto Christ; they must do his will in their missionary ministries (3 Nephi 14).

Judging others equitably, maintaining high personal standards, setting a proper example, selecting carefully those with whom they should share sacred things, learning to righteously seek the gifts of God, living the Golden Rule, discerning false prophets—these were the final matters of training Jesus offered to his missionaries for their ministry. As with earlier topics discussed by the Savior, these are only properly understood when seen in a missionary context. Consider, for example, 3 Nephi 14:6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." The Savior is commanding that his missionaries withhold from unworthy hearers the holy and sacred things. He has given a similar command in our dispensation. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord

instructed the Church: “For it is not meet that the things which belong to the children of the kingdom should be given to them that are not worthy, or to dogs, or the pearls to be cast before swine” (D&C 41:6). Like the missionary witnesses in Bountiful, the early Saints were to refrain from sharing certain sacred things with those who were unworthy and would misuse them.

The Savior ended his sermon to the Nephite and Lamanite multitude just as he had ended his initial earlier commission to the Twelve (3 Nephi 11:39–41)—with the parable of the wise and foolish builders. To receive the call to serve and then not to do the will of the Father would be to emulate the false prophets, to whom the Lord would say, “I never knew you” (14:23). To serve righteously would be to build upon the rock and thereby survive the storm and be raised up at the last day (vv 24–25; 15:1).

After completing the Sermon in Bountiful, the Savior began a very different kind of teaching. The fourteen subsequent Book of Mormon chapters (3 Nephi 15–28) contain answers to questions, priesthood leadership training, patterns for ordinances and prayer, healing of the sick and blessing of children, scriptural exposition and prophecy, and a broad range of additional instruction not found in Matthew or Luke. The three chapters in 3 Nephi 12–14 and their New Testament counterparts therefore stand apart in their missionary training purpose from the remainder of Jesus’ personal ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites.

Conclusion

Missionary work has always been a primary and essential aspect of gospel dispensations, and the dispensation opened by the Savior among the Book of Mormon peoples in the first century AD is no exception. Spreading the invitation to come unto Christ to receive the ordinances and blessings of the gospel was vital to the Church Jesus organized among the Nephites and Lamanites. Just as he had previously done in Galilee, Jesus

selected, commissioned, and trained twelve to be his leading ministers in missionary service.

The Sermon in Bountiful, like the Sermon on the Mount, seems intended to train these ministers. Its diversity of topics are bound together by a missionary training thread. Commentators and students of the scriptures who fail to recognize this framework have misinterpreted the Beatitudes, misapplied Jesus' teachings about salt and light, missed the intent of the "take no thought" command, the Golden Rule, the injunction against casting pearls before swine, and many other such passages. Recognizing the missionary training context presents the teachings of the Savior in a different, and I think, proper light.

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“Pray Always”: Learning to Pray as Jesus Prayed

9

Donald W. Parry

Speaking to an Area Conference in Taiwan in 1975, President Marion G. Romney stated that “there isn’t any commandment from the Lord that is repeated more often than the commandment to pray to the Lord” (*Area Conference 7*). Approximately forty years ago a Mormon scholar noted that the Book of Mormon is “a unique record of a praying people” and that “perhaps none of our scriptures are so full of instructions to mankind regarding prayer as is the Book of Mormon. The first page relates a prayer of the Prophet Lehi for his people, and the last chapter contains the admonition of the Prophet Moroni to test the truthfulness of the book by prayer” (Berrett 192).

Nowhere in all of the Book of Mormon is the subject of prayer taught and emphasized in such a concentrated fashion as it is in 3 Nephi 11–20, wherein approximately sixty verses are dedicated to the subject of prayer and some eleven prayers are offered. Noteworthy is the central role that Jesus Christ plays in teaching the concept of prayer to the Nephite multitude. During his stay with the Nephites, Christ gives the Sermon at the Temple (very similar to the Sermon on the Mount) in which he instructs the people how to pray. Later he also gives them the baptismal and sacramental prayers. In addition to teaching the Nephites to pray, Jesus offers numerous prayers to the Father in their behalf. Considering the emphasis on prayer in

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this section of the Book of Mormon, I have focused this paper on two aspects of prayer: first, I examine Jesus' teachings, instructions, and commandments regarding prayer during this period; second, I show that Latter-day Saints are required to make Jesus' teachings on prayer applicable in their personal lives.

Definition of Prayer

Prayer is the goal of an individual to place him or herself in spiritual harmony with God the Father and Creator of all. According to latter-day prophets and apostles, prayer consists of much more than directing "mere words" or thoughts towards deity, but represents "the pulsation of a yearning, loving heart in tune with the Infinite." Prayer is "a message of the soul sent directly to a loving Father. . . [it is] spirit vibration" (McKay 308). Prayer is having "a consciousness that there is something within us which is divine, which is part of the Infinite, which is the offspring of God, and until we can feel that harmony with that Infinite, we have not sensed the power of prayer" (302). Prayer, accompanied by works, "is the invisible switch to tune us with the infinite" (Kimball 62), it is placing ourselves "in harmony with divine forces" (Widtsoe, "The Articles of Faith" 288), it is attuning ourselves "with the spirit or light which 'proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space' (D&C 88:12). In that light is to be found sure answers to all our needs" (Romney, "Prayer and Revelation" 50). Further, "prayer is the passport to spiritual power" (Kimball 115). To "live without prayer is to live a mere animal existence. It is to leave the best part of our natures in a starving condition; for without prayer the spirit is starved, and men dwindle in their feelings and die in their faith" (Cannon 2:170).

Jesus delivered specific instructions to the Nephite community outlining proper approaches to prayer. On one occasion he instructed "after this manner therefore pray ye" (3 Nephi 13:9–13). He had already told them not to pray as the hypocrites,

standing in synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men (3 Nephi 13:5), and not to use vain repetitions.

It is certain that prayer consists of much more than simple words “that may have no deeper source than the physical organs of speech,” but “prayer is made up of heart throbs and the righteous yearnings of the soul” (Talmage 238). The mention of “heart throbs” here recalls the fact that many prophetic writers have connected the term “heart” with prayer. For instance, Lehi prayed “with all his heart” (1 Nephi 1:5). An effective prayer is one in which an individual prays with “real intent of heart” (Moroni 7:9), with “all the energy of heart” (Moroni 7:48), and with “the sincerity of his heart” (D&C 5:24). In these passages, the heart represents the spiritual and inner emotive aspect of ourselves.

Posture of Prayer

Given the emphasis placed upon the posture of an individual during prayers in 3 Nephi 11–20, it may be concluded that prayer posture is important. Jesus provided instructions regarding the posture of prayer, and then showed the Nephite Saints at Bountiful how to pray. Twice Jesus commanded them to “kneel” in prayer (3 Nephi 17:13–14; 19:16–17). Once the twelve disciples instructed the multitude to “kneel down upon the face of the earth” and to pray “unto the Father in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:6). They also knelt down upon the earth and prayed with the multitude (3 Nephi 19:6–8). Jesus Christ himself showed them what to do as he knelt in prayer and “prayed unto the

During private formal prayers, individuals should both bow and kneel down before God. Such a posture evidences humility, submission, and meekness. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has explained that “our Father is glorified and exalted; he is an omnipotent being. We are as the dust of the earth in comparison, and yet we are his children with access, through prayer, to his presence. . . . Almost by instinct, therefore, we do such things

as bow our heads and close our eyes; fold our arms, or kneel, or fall on our faces” (12).

Language of Prayer

Although the Book of Mormon Saints had been praying to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ before the resurrected Jesus ministered to the Nephites (see for example 2 Nephi 33:12), the Savior reinforced this practice among the Nephites during this three-day post-resurrection visit. His command to pray unto the Father was explicit—on eight occasions Jesus taught the multitude to pray to the Father in his name (3 Nephi 17:3; 18:19, 21, 23, 30; 20:31; 27:28; 28:30). The twelve disciples, heeding his instructions regarding prayer, also instructed the multitude to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name (3 Nephi 19:6). Similarly, they “did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:7–8). Jesus himself followed this pattern. On one occasion he “knelt upon the ground, . . . groaned within himself, and said: Father . . .” (3 Nephi 17:14). On another occasion he walked “a little way off from” the multitude and “bowed himself to the earth, and he said: Father . . .” (3 Nephi 19:19–20). On two other occasions Jesus “prayed unto the Father” (3 Nephi 19:27, 31).

Individuals should approach God in prayer similar to the way they approach their earthly fathers. Joseph Smith once said that “it is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with Him as one man converses with another” (*History of the Church* 6:305). While using the appropriate prayer pronouns (*thy, thee, thou, thine*) individuals should converse with Heavenly Father as they converse with friends and family members. Joseph Smith’s admonition regarding prayer is helpful: “Be plain and simple and ask for what you want, just like you would go to a neighbor and say, I want to borrow a horse and go to mill” (qtd in “Recollections” 151–52).

The command to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ has been accepted without reservation by the Latter-day

Saints in this dispensation. In 1916, Joseph F. Smith declared that “we . . . accept without any question the doctrines we have been taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith and by the Son of God Himself that we pray to God, the Eternal Father, in the name of His Only Begotten Son” (*Conference Report* [Oct 1916] 6). It is therefore not appropriate to pray to any other being than the Father.

If the instructions are crystal clear concerning to whom we must address our prayers, then why did the Nephites pray directly to Jesus, as recorded in 3 Nephi 19:18? The answer in part lies in the fact that Jesus is a resurrected deity. “And they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God.” A second explanation for the multitude’s praying to Jesus is found in his words to Heavenly Father, “they pray unto me because I am with them” (3 Nephi 19:22). It is also possible that the Saints began praying to Jesus as a natural reaction to and an acknowledgement of his glory.

Formal and Informal Prayer

Two types of prayers are identified in 3 Nephi 11–20—formal and informal prayers. Formal prayers consist of specific styles and conventions. Such prayers include giving thanks for one’s meals, family and individual prayers, the invocation and benediction at church meetings, and the baptism and sacrament prayers. Informal prayers portray a spiritual attitude, a constant sense of the presence of divinity that an individual has within him or herself and which the individual knows is found within God.

It is understood that many formal prayers may be offered at set times and in established places by disciples of Christ as they are prompted by the Holy Ghost. The question may be asked, however, how often is an individual obligated to offer formal prayers to Heavenly Father? The Prophet Joseph Smith provided guidance in this area, teaching us that we must pray three times a day. “You must make yourselves acquainted with

those men who like Daniel pray three times a day toward the House of the Lord" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 161). Evidently, Joseph Smith was making reference to Daniel 6:10: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God." The teaching regarding praying three times per day is found also in the Book of Mormon, where Amulek taught that the individuals should "cry unto [God] in your houses . . . both morning, mid-day, and evening" (Alma 34:21).

There is evidence that Joseph Smith and his family practiced this teaching. Eliza R. Snow recorded that "three times a day he had family worship; and these precious seasons of sacred household service truly seemed a foretaste of celestial happiness" (qtd in Payne 65). Hyrum Smith, the Prophet's brother, also learned the principle regarding daily prayers. According to Eliza Ann Carter, "When I was living at Hyrum Smith's I thought that he was the best man I ever saw, he was so kind to his family and he prayed in his family three times a day" (qtd in Snow 134).

Family prayers are perhaps as essential to one's spiritual progress during mortality as are individual prayers. President Hinckley advances several thoughts on the matter:

I know of no single practice that will have a more salutary effect upon your lives than the practice of kneeling together as you begin and close each day. Somehow the little storms that seem to afflict every marriage are dissipated when, kneeling before the Lord, you thank him for one another, in the presence of one another, and then together invoke his blessings upon your lives, your home, your loved ones, and your dreams.

God then will be your partner, and your daily conversations with him will bring peace into your hearts and a joy into your lives that can come from no other source. Your companionship will sweeten through the years; your love will strengthen. Your appreciation for one another will grow. (72)

Regarding informal prayers, the divine dictum from Jesus among the righteous Nephites was to “pray always.” This command was directed both to the twelve disciples and to the multitude (3 Nephi 18:15, 18). The multitude was told that “they should not cease to pray in their hearts” (20:1). The parallel commandment found in the law of Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. The children of Israel are commanded to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” “These words,” says Moses, “shall be in thine heart,” teach them to your children, and “talk of them” when you sit “in thine house, . . . and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” In other words, prayers must be given because of the love of God.

In this dispensation, the prophets and apostles have continued the plea that the Saints should pray always. Joseph F. Smith taught that “we should carry with us the spirit of prayer throughout every duty that we have to perform in life” (*Conference Report* [Oct 1914] 6). Reed Smoot admonished, “Let us pray early and late, and let the prayer not only be by the lips but from the heart” (78). George Q. Cannon felt that “when they do not bow the knee, it is still their duty to pray in their hearts” (2:166–67). John A. Widtsoe taught that “a man should pray always; his heart should be full of prayer; he should walk in prayer. . . . Prayer may be said to be the soul’s whole desire” (*A Rational Theology* 76–77).

How does one pray always? One way to pray always is to think of Christ at every moment, on every occasion. “Look unto me in every thought” (D&C 6:36) is the divine command. As Alma notes, individuals should look to God during every activity, at all times, and in all places:

Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections

of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 37:36–37)

The central thesis of the passage is to see that all of our thoughts and doings are unto the Lord—the exact meaning of the expression “pray always.”

Praying always entails constantly being conscious of God and his plan of salvation. It consists of having a continual attitude which directs us during every waking moment of mortality, of maintaining a spiritual posture of thankfulness and reliance on the Lord, of desiring the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Brigham Young noted that to pray always is to live as we pray: “I do not know any other way for the Latter-day Saints than for every breath to be virtually a prayer for God to guide and direct his people. . . . Every breath should virtually be a prayer that God will preserve us from sin and from the effects of sin” (43–44).

The scriptures repeatedly state that we can receive blessings from the Lord by praying always: “Pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him” (3 Nephi 18:15); pray always that God, “through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (Moroni 8:3); “pray always, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing” (D&C 19:38); “pray always that I may unfold [truth] to [your] understanding” (32:4); “[pray] always . . . that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom” (33:17). In sum, Latter-day Saints who pray always will have power over the devil and temptation, strength through Christ to endure to the end, the presence of the Holy Ghost, higher knowledge from God, and the comfort of being prepared for Jesus’ second coming.

Seeking the Holy Ghost through Prayer

One essential item that individuals should pray for is the companionship of the Holy Ghost as 3 Nephi 19:9 instructs: “And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them.” Further, Jesus prayed, “Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in [the disciples’] words” (v 21). In our day we are told that “the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith” (D&C 42:14). We are commanded to pray for the companionship of the Holy Ghost; Heber J. Grant promised that “if we earnestly and honestly seek the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, I can assure you that we will receive it” (26).

Praying *to receive* the Holy Ghost, and praying *by the power* of the Holy Ghost are two different things. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “we know not what we should pray for as we ought,” but with this divine aid “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; . . . the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). The Holy Ghost will actually provide whoever is praying with precise particulars of what to pray for. Such was the state of the Nephite multitude who, while praying, “did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire” (3 Nephi 19:24).

Why is it necessary to pray with the power of the Holy Ghost? President Benson explains that “with the help of the Holy Ghost, we will know about what we should pray” (112). When we utter the things that God wants us to utter, then we are asking “in the Spirit,” which is akin to asking “according to the will of God.” When this occurs, our prayers will be answered, even as we ask (see D&C 46:30). Having the Holy Ghost dictate God’s will concerning us should be the goal of all Latter-day Saints, knowing that “the time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask. Then everything for which we pray will be right. That will be when, as a result of

righteous living, we shall so enjoy the companionship of the Spirit that he will dictate to us what we should ask” (Romney, *Learning for the Eternities* 117–18).

Individuals who ask for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and pray by the power of the Spirit will discover marvelous things happening in their lives. Spiritually, their lives will become transformed through Christ into a new creation. God will give them temporal and spiritual directions dealing with all aspects of their mortal lives. The time will come when the Saint will be “purified and cleansed from all sin,” and then the righteous souls will “ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask” (D&C 50:29–30).

After Jesus’ ascension, the disciples divided the large multitude into twelve groups and “did teach the multitude; and behold, they did cause that the multitude should kneel down upon the face of the earth, and should pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus. And the disciples did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:5–7). Jesus’ instructions and examples of prayer among the Nephite community have equal application for followers of Christ today. We follow Jesus’ commands to direct our prayers to our Heavenly Father and to terminate our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. We accept, with Joseph Smith, the challenge to offer up three formal prayers daily, and when we are not praying formally, we must pray always in our hearts. We are able, like the Nephite Saints, to pray anywhere—at home with our families, in private in our closets, with the Saints in church meetings, at work or at school, in the deserts, mountains, or green places, and so on. Following the instruction in 3 Nephi enables us to apply Jesus’ words regarding what to include in our prayers. Through praying as Jesus prayed, we come closer to him and become worthy to receive his direction in our lives.

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The Twelve: A Light unto This People

10

Kenneth W. Anderson

In the meridian of time, Christ was assigned to go only to the House of Israel (Matt 15:24). As he began his ministry in the Holy Land, he chose twelve from among his followers, ordained them apostles, taught them, and sent them out to find the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matt 10:5–6). They became his special witnesses and the conduit through which he would send his light into the world. These men would lead the Church after the Savior had completed his mortal ministry.

In his visit to the American Continent following his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven from the Holy Land, Jesus showed himself to the Nephites, a branch of Israel, and invited them individually to “thrust their hands into his side” and “feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet,” and they “did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he”—Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 11:12–15).

From those present at his appearance in Bountiful, Christ chose twelve disciples, who were also apostles, to lead his Church as he had done in the Holy Land. Some six hundred years before Christ come to earth, the Book of Mormon prophets saw in vision that he would call twelve men in both lands. These men would be responsible for proclaiming the gospel among their people and for judging all of Israel (see 1 Nephi 12:10). The term “Israel” refers to those “who prevail with God”

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or to Church members (LDS Bible Dictionary 708). Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

The concept of a chosen and favored people, a concept scarcely known in the world and but little understood even by the saints of God, is one of the most marvelous systems ever devised for administering salvation to all men in all nations in all ages. . . . In large measure, the spirit children of the Father who acquired a talent for spirituality, who chose to heed the divine word then given, and who sought, above their fellows to do good and work righteousness—all these were foreordained to be born in the house of Israel. They were chosen before they were born. . . .

Israel are the seed of Abraham; they are the children of the prophets; and they associate with the Lord's seers. Israel are the friends of apostles and revelators. (*Millennial Messiah* 182–83)

Through twelve apostles in various dispensations, Christ has led and will continue to lead all Israel to a reunion with the Father. By following the light that Jesus has given to the Twelve, we, like the Nephites, can unify with the Twelve and prepare to become one with God.

The Twelve Are a Light to Israel

Both the Jerusalem apostles and the Nephite disciples were to be the channel of light through which Israel would receive Christ's true doctrinal word and the ordinances of his gospel. Lehi literally sees the light of the Twelve in his vision (1 Nephi 1:9–10); he experienced the light of the Twelve through his sense of sight. As Christ taught the Nephite Twelve, he expanded their physical light into a metaphor of a guiding light: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people" (3 Nephi 12:14). Again he "said unto those twelve whom he had chosen: Ye are my disciples; and ye are a light unto this people" (15:11–12). Thus Jesus extends the physical light of the Twelve that Lehi experienced into a directional light which the Nephite multitude would follow.

For today's technological world, the light of the Twelve might be thought of as something like a laser. The Light of

Christ through the Twelve emits a coherent beam of one color directed on a salvational path. This light is emitted so precisely that it marks a glowing course of safety for Israel. In the hierarchy of available lights of this life, that light from the Twelve stands supreme next to Christ's. Hence, his words: "Behold, I am the light" and "ye are a light unto this people" (3 Nephi 18:16; 15:12).

As a channel of Christ's light, the Twelve teach true doctrine and ordinances. Elder Boyd K. Packer notes the importance of true doctrine in our spiritual progression: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel" (17). Similarly, ordinances are equally important in furthering our spiritual growth, for "in the ordinances thereof, the power of Godliness is manifest" (D&C 84:20). Ordinances are the means of transmitting the power of God, line upon line, to worthy men and women who have made covenants with Christ.

One of the first opportunities for us to make covenants with God, to follow the Light of Christ presented to us by the Twelve, is through baptism. Because this ordinance is primary to our salvation, Jesus Christ immediately gave the authority to baptize to his Nephite disciples with specific instruction and a precisely worded prayer. The person to be baptized is to be called by name saying: "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." This is followed by a total and complete immersion of the person in water (3 Nephi 11:25–26); "For by the water ye keep the commandment" (Moses 6:60). By using *his* authority and *his* specific instruction in this first ordinance, the circle of the Twelve was drawn into oneness with Christ; his light became their light. There were to be no dispu-

tations on this sacred, powerful and potentially sin remitting ordinance as the disciples administered it to the people.

Next Jesus instructed these Twelve personally in his true doctrine. He taught them to believe in him, repent, be baptized, and be visited with fire and the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:32–34). Some may argue that these teachings, these doctrines, are merely the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel and then pass them off as only for the elementary student in the Church. But doing so denies the power of these principles and ordinances. True doctrines practiced in daily living bring personal—and private—spiritual experiences so people can “bear record” of the truth. They witness that God is our Father and that Jesus is the Christ. This witness comes as a recording fire from the Holy Ghost. Standing firm for and with these first principles and ordinances will document in the cleansed soul “the record of heaven” (Moses 6:61). Jesus stated: “This is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39). He also said that to declare more or less than this and establish it for doctrine was to build upon a sandy foundation and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when floods come and winds beat upon them. He then instructed the Twelve disciples to “go forth unto this people and declare the word which I have spoken” (vv 40–41). They were now prepared to teach the first principles of true doctrine and administer the first ordinance of the gospel; they were ready to be a light to their people.

The Twelve Lead Us to Unity with Christ

Thereafter, Jesus establishes the position of the Twelve among the people. He opens his discourse of “the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father” (3 Nephi 15:1), the Sermon on the Mount, by stretching forth his hand toward the multitude and saying not “Blessed are the poor in spirit” as recorded in the gospel of Matthew, but “Blessed are ye if ye

shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost.” Then to these same people Christ said: “Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 12:1–2). Clearly, our oneness with the Twelve is a factor in our salvation.

Paul taught the Ephesians that Christ gave apostles and prophets to the Church “for the perfecting of the saints, . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith . . . that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:11–14). The Twelve are a unifying channel of light as Jesus had proclaimed. Immaturity in the gospel and shallowness of soul can create a lack of unity with the Twelve. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “And Jesus dwells in the Father, because they are one; the Twelve dwell in Jesus, because they are one; and all the saints dwell in the Twelve, because the same perfect unity prevails in their hearts. ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut 6:4), and his command to all his disciples is: ‘Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine’ (D&C 38:27)” (*Mortal Messiah* 4:115).

Later that first day, after the celestial fire encircled the Nephite multitude and angels ministered to them, Jesus instituted another unifying ordinance—the sacrament. He told the disciples to administer the broken bread and wine of the cup to the multitude, “in remembrance of [his] body” and “of [his] blood” (3 Nephi 18:7–11). This new ordinance of the gospel provided, “in the mouth of” (2 Cor 13:1) two separate lawful acts, a testimony and a witness to the Father that Israel would always remember Jesus. This renewing and rehabilitative remembrance of him generated companionship with the Holy Ghost, which unified Christ, the Twelve, and the multitude

(3 Nephi 19:9). And again, Jesus instructed them: “If ye do these things [ordinances] . . . ye are built upon my rock.” Doing more or less than these ordinances causes one to be built upon a sandy foundation. Storms easily blow and beat upon those members, and “the gates of hell are ready open to receive them” (3 Nephi 18:12–13).

So powerful and sacred were these renewing ordinances that Jesus commanded the disciples: “Ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily when ye shall minister it” (3 Nephi 18:28). The moral maintenance of Church membership is a command to the Twelve of any dispensation. A person’s unworthy participation in these ordinances brings damnation instead of renewal and rehabilitation to the soul; it ultimately disrupts the unity of the community. However, in an attempt to preserve that unity, Christ directed the Twelve, “ye shall not cast him [the unworthy] out of your . . . places of worship” but “continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them.” Condemnation was mentioned for not keeping this command (vv 30–33).

In the closing moments of that first day of his visit to the Nephites and before he reascended into heaven, Jesus gave these special Twelve Disciples a supernal and matchless power. It was a gift above gifts; it was the means by which they would maintain a unity of the Saints and invite more people to join the community. He touched with his hand the disciples “one by one . . . and spake unto them as he touched them. And the multitude heard not the words which he spake; the disciples bear record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 18:36–37). We are indebted to Moroni for recording the exact words of Jesus’s instruction on the proper manner of bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost: “Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands,

ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles” (Moroni 2:2).

And what the Twelve taught the people after they were empowered follows an exact doctrinal pattern of what we are taught. Specifically to “. . . kneel down upon the face of the earth, and . . . pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:6). The Twelve ministered to the people, speaking the same words that Jesus had spoken. Through ministering to the multitude as Jesus had done, they lead the multitude toward unity with Him.

When Christ returned to minister to them the next day, he offered three separate prayers to his Father, two of which are recorded. His words explain the value of the words of the Twelve:

Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; . . . Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe *in their words* . . . And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe *on their words*, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one. (3 Nephi 19:20–21, 23; emphasis added)

A factor in receiving the Holy Ghost is believing in the words of the Twelve. Believing “in the words” of the Twelve leads us to becoming one with the Father and with Christ.

In his second prayer among the Nephites, Jesus’ words verify that the doctrine of purification, becoming clean from the sins of this world, is also dependent upon our “faith on the words” of the Twelve. He prayed: “Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and I pray for them, and also for them who shall *believe on their words*, that they may be purified in me, through *faith on their words*, even as they are purified in me” (3 Nephi 19:28; emphasis added). True doctrine, correct baptism, the renewing sacrament, the gift of the Holy Ghost, a remission of sin, purification—these doctrines and ordinances of the gospel were made available to Nephite Israel through the Twelve Disciples

Jesus called from among them, and they were integral in creating and maintaining the unified Nephite Zion.

The Latter-day Twelve Light and Unify the Church

If we are to liken these scriptures unto ourselves, it seems appropriate to ask: In what light do we see the Twelve whom Jesus has called today? Like the Nephites in Bountiful, do we see them as the channel of light through which modern Israel receives true doctrine, ordinances of the gospel, and the hope of eternal rest? Is there any rebellion on our part to cut off or diminish this light from our lives? At the October 1992 General Conference, Elder Neal A. Maxwell said:

Remember how, with Pharaoh's angry army in hot pursuit, ancient Israel aligned themselves with the Lord's instructions? Moses stretched forth his hand and the Red Sea parted. With towering walls of water on each side, Israel walked through the narrow passage obediently, and no doubt quickly! There were no warnings about conforming on that day! There are passages ahead which will require similar obedience, as prophets lead the 'men [and women] of Christ' in a straight and narrow course. (67)

By following the course set by the Lord's apostles, we too can become one with each other and with him.

In accordance with Christ's admonition that the chief among us become the servant of all (Matt 20:27), despite the benefits of being called as an apostle of Jesus Christ, our modern-day apostles focus on serving and leading those in the Church rather than on their own self-aggrandizement. At the October 1992 General Conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

I wish now to say a few words about the men who are members of the Quorum of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. . . . I am confident that no one of them ever aspired to office. No one campaigned for it. I think none ever thought himself worthy of it. This is a singular and remarkable thing. . . . I say for each and all that we have no personal agenda. We have only the

Lord's agenda. There are those who criticize when we issue a statement of counsel or warning. Please know that our pleadings are not motivated by any selfish desire. Please know that our warnings are not without substance and reason. Please know that the decisions to speak out on various matters are not reached without deliberation, discussion, and prayer. Please know that our only ambition is to help each of you with your problems, your struggles, your families, your lives. . . . I know that there is no desire to teach anything other than what the Lord would have taught. (54, 59)

Our Latter-day Twelve are constantly aware of their responsibility to be a light to the members of the Church. They desire to lead us to unity with God.

Conclusion

At the close of 3 Nephi, Mormon gives a solemn warning to Israel in particular and to all people in general:

And wo be unto him that will not hearken unto the words of Jesus, and also to them whom he hath chosen and sent among them; for whoso receiveth not the words of Jesus and the words of those whom he hath sent receiveth not him; and therefore he will not receive them at the last day; and it would be better for them if they had not been born. For do ye suppose that ye can get rid of the justice of an offended God, who hath been trampled under feet of men? (28:34–35)

It is an offense to God when we refuse to receive the words of the Twelve he has called to lead us. We are thankful to John the Revelator for his teaching the truth about “. . . the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; . . . for the accuser of our brethren [Satan] is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:9–11). Despite Satan's attempts to darken our perception of the light of the Twelve, we must watch and follow that light.

A central message from Christ in 3 Nephi is clear: our Heavenly Father gave his glorious gospel plan to his Son. Jesus

gave that same gospel plan, with its true doctrine and ordinances to the twelve disciples; and the twelve disciples, in turn, made the same eternal fulness available to all the Nephite Saints. Through the Twelve all of Israel (Church members) may become one with the God of heaven. This unity and oneness of the Saints is an evidence of the truth of the Lord's work.

Finally, no greater truth or source of happiness has been revealed than that given to Nephite Israel. It is a supernal truth. The oneness of the Father and the Son and the Twelve provides the light channel through which men and women of Israel may access Christ's true doctrinal word and his ordinances of the gospel including rest in mortal life and in eternal life. It comes only through oneness with the Twelve. While there are thousands of bishops and even thousands of stake presidents today, there are still only Twelve Apostles of the Lamb who, with power, serve as did the Nephite Twelve as the "light unto this people." May we keep our eyes on the safe salvational path they light and thereby achieve unity with God.

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The Doctrine of a Covenant People

11

Joseph Fielding McConkie

According to holy writ, whenever the Lord has a people that He acknowledges as his own, that acknowledgment comes in the form of a covenant. In our day we hear much about “making a commitment for Christ.” But it is covenants of which we speak, not commitments. The word *commitment* is not found in the scriptures. The word *covenant* is found a multitude of times. A commitment is a personal pledge and may be quite serious, while a covenant is a two-way promise. God is its author and the guarantor of its terms. Angels are its witnesses. It is, in the realms of spiritual things, a legal and binding agreement between God and the individual.

It is the concept of a covenant that binds all the books of the Bible and all the generations of faithful Saints together. The two divisions of the Bible, the Old Testament and New Testament, could have been more properly denominated the Old Covenant and New Covenant. The Bible story is like the popular historical novels of our day in which the saga of a family is traced from generation to generation. In order to study the Bible we divide its books into chapters and verses. We rarely get the whole thing pieced back together so that we see it as the epic family saga that it is. In so doing, we could be compared to people so busy collecting pebbles on the beach that they fail to see the ocean.

One problem with this kind of Bible study is that all too often those who are busily collecting scriptural pebbles are

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doing so primarily to have something to throw at those whose interpretation differs from their own. Meanwhile they lose sight of the book's most plain and precious parts. Among the precious things lost is the concept of the eternal family unit. Forgotten is the fact that salvation is a family affair, that God made covenants with our ancient fathers, and that those covenants center in blessings that were also promised to us. We become theological and spiritual orphans. We are, in the words of Malachi, left without "root nor branch" (Mal 4:1). We suppose we can have salvation independent of family responsibilities. The whole thing is akin to going through life without really knowing your parents or family.

The readers of the Book of Mormon, if they have a Bible background, will immediately be aware that it purports to be a continuation of the Bible story. It is a part of the same great family saga. Perhaps what we have been insensitive to is how tightly the visit and teachings of the Savior as recorded in 3 Nephi fit with the biblical account.

Definitions

Before we analyze that story, it will be helpful for us to briefly define some key words and phrases. We will define terms as the Book of Mormon writers used them.

Jew: Lehi, a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh (Alma 10:3), considered himself to be a Jew because he was a citizen of the kingdom of Judah. He was a Jewish national. Thus, the Book of Mormon writers speak of themselves and their posterity as descendants of the Jews (see 2 Nephi 30:4; D&C 19:27).

Gentile: As used in the Bible the word *Gentile* means nation—i.e., a collective body. It is used in a similar manner in the Book of Mormon. As a Jew is a Jewish national, so a Gentile is a citizen of a Gentile nation. Thus Joseph Smith, a pure-blooded Israelite, is referred to as a Gentile, and the gospel, it is prophesied, will be restored in a Gentile nation. Any nation

that does not have prophets at its head, revelation as its constitution, and the Messiah as its king is a Gentile nation.

Remnant of Jacob: The remnant of Jacob is the twelve tribes collectively. A remnant of Jacob could be any of the various scattered parts of Jacob's family. For instance, Lehi's descendants are a remnant of Jacob.

Times of the Gentiles: This is the period between the destruction of the kingdom of Israel after the earthly ministry of Christ and the re-establishment of that nation with Christ as its king in the Millennium. At the beginning of the Millennium, all Gentile or man-made governments will be superseded by the law of the gospel with Christ as king.

Redemption of Jerusalem: To be redeemed is to be freed from the dominion and power of Satan. Jerusalem will be redeemed when the law of the gospel again becomes the law of its citizens. Christ will be their king, and the citizens of that kingdom will have taken upon themselves his name in the waters of baptism and be again a covenant people.

Salvation of Our God: This phrase, which is commonly found in prophetic descriptions of the winding up scene of earth's history, refers to the ultimate triumph of Christ. The word *salvation* as used in the Bible is a translation of the Hebrew word *yeshooaw* and could also have been translated "deliverance" or "victory." To see the salvation of our God is to see the triumph of Christ over all his enemies. It will include the gathering of all the tribes of Israel into one fold with the Lord's sanctuary in their midst.

With this background we turn to the account of Christ's visit to the Nephites as recorded in 3 Nephi. In doing so, it is a panoramic view that we seek—not the pebbles on the beach. Our interest is to see the relationship Christ establishes between the doctrine of covenants and the promise of salvation.

A Voice to Those in Darkness

Twice during that terrible night of darkness that attested to the death of Christ in the Old World, the voice of the Redeemer spoke to those in the New World. I do not think I overstate the matter in suggesting that the world has never known a more dramatic teaching moment. The audible voice of the Lord had been heard speaking from the heavens before, but never to such an extensive and numerous audience. May I suggest that we have not given sufficient attention to what was said on those two occasions. We will begin this study at that point.

First came a voice of warning: “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!” (3 Nephi 9:2). Note the language used to describe those who had been slain. They were the “fair sons and daughters of [his] people”—the seed of those with whom he had covenanted.

The recitation of the destruction of great cities followed: Zarahemla, Moroni, Moronihah, Gilgal, Onihah, Mocum, Jerusalem, Gadiandi, Gadiomnah, Jacob, Gimgimno, Jacobugath, Laman, Josh, Gad, and Kishkumen. Their destruction came because there were no righteous among them and because they had soiled themselves with the blood of the Lord’s prophets and saints. Then came the testimony: “I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. . . . I came unto my own, and my own received me not.” Of those who had received him he said, “I [have] given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:1–17).

The Mosaic dispensation had now ended. The old covenant had been fulfilled. Thus the instruction: “Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.” Foreshadowing the

new order or covenant he said: “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:17–20). So great was the astonishment caused by this most unique communication from heaven that there was silence in the land for the space of many hours. Even the wailing over the loss of kindred and loved ones ceased.

A second time, from the midst of the darkness, the voice of the Lord was heard:

O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you. And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not. O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart. But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers. (3 Nephi 10:4–7)

This lament is familiar to the New Testament reader though this is an expanded version of it. It has meaning only in the context of the covenant made to the fathers. It certifies the speaker as the Messiah. No one else has power to gather Israel, and no one else is under covenant to do so. The burden of the message is that because of their family ties and because their fathers were the children of Jacob, they were gathered and nourished. Had other branches of the family been equally willing, they too would have been gathered and blessed in a like manner. The refrain then switches from a past to a future tense with a rhetorical question—“How oft will I gather you” if you will repent and return to me? Then the warning, a very believable warning, to those to whom the Lord spoke: If you refuse spiritual fidelity, if you are not my children according to the

terms of the covenant, if you have no claim to an inheritance either temporally or spiritually, your dwelling places will be desolate, a desolation which will continue, as the JST states, “until ye have received from the hand of the Lord a just recompense for all your sins” (JST Luke 13:36). Following these words, the weeping and howling for those who had been lost again filled the darkness of the night.

Mormon, who is writing the account of these things, observes at this point that Jacob had prophesied concerning a remnant of Joseph. He asks, “Are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph? And these things which testify of us, are they not written upon the plates of brass . . . ?” (3 Nephi 10:17).

Christ Appears at the Temple

The third occasion in which a voice from heaven was heard in 3 Nephi was that of the Father introducing his son to those assembled at the temple in the land Bountiful. In my judgment, the best reading of the text places this a year later (see 3 Nephi 8:5; 10:18). A group of about 2,500 people—men, women, and children—were assembled “conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death” (3 Nephi 17:25; 11:2). They were there as families. The nature of temple worship either anciently or in our own dispensation is not such that we would normally expect a family congregation of this size to be present. I wonder if this was not a meeting being held for the purpose of commemorating the events of the terrible night of darkness?

The unannounced and unanticipated appearance of Christ fits the pattern of Malachi’s prophecy that the messenger of the covenant would “suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1). In so saying, I am not suggesting that this constitutes the fulfillment of that prophecy, only that it fits the pattern, a pattern that I anticipate would have been duplicated in Christ’s visits among the other scattered remnants of Israel.

The voice from heaven attested that the glorious being descending from heaven was his Beloved Son and all were commanded to hear him. The heavenly visitor announced himself to be the Christ, the light and life of the world. The multitude fell to the earth in a reverent awe. They were then invited to come forth, each in turn, to feel the prints in his hands and in his feet that they might know that this was indeed the “God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and [that he had] been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14).

Calling the Twelve to Head the New Dispensation

Following this matchless experience in which each of those present became special witnesses of the reality of Christ’s suffering and triumph over death, Nephi was called and given the authority to baptize. Eleven others were also called and given the same authority. Instructions then followed relative to the manner in which that ordinance was to be performed. All capable of repentance were to be baptized (see 3 Nephi 11:21–27).

The reader of the Book of Mormon will be aware that the ordinance of baptism was not new to the nation of the Nephites. Easily the greatest discourse on the subject in holy writ was penned by Nephi, the son of Lehi, nearly six hundred years earlier (see 2 Nephi 31). Why then would a second baptism be necessary? The text does not answer this question. It is obvious, however, that the old covenant, namely the law of Moses, had come to an end. This was a new day, and a new order of things was now being introduced. The appearance of Christ, with his renewal of authority, formally constituted a new gospel dispensation among the Nephites. It was a time of new beginnings and all were invited to claim anew their birthright in the household of faith.

Thus the Twelve were called to stand at the head of the new covenant or dispensation. Again the Old World pattern was

followed. Their number is significant and that significance would not have been lost on either the Twelve or the multitude. The action is both symbolic and prophetic. Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed:

As there are twelve tribes in Israel, so there are twelve apostles for all Israel and the world; as Jehovah gave his saving truths to the twelve sons of Jacob and their seed, throughout their generations, so Jesus is placing in the hands of his twelve friends the saving truths and powers for their day; and as the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the twelve gates of the Holy Jerusalem, which shall descend from God out of heaven, so are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb written on the twelve foundations of the walls of that celestial city. (*Mortal Messiah* 2:102)

Calling a quorum of twelve would also have been understood as a prophecy of an ultimate day when Israel, all twelve of its tribes, would again be united as one nation under their true Messiah. As long as we have twelve apostles, the promise exists that Israel will be gathered and the promises made to the fathers will be fulfilled.¹

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the Quorum of the Twelve in the destiny of the Church and kingdom of God. We have it in the mouths of three witnesses—the organization instituted by Christ in Palestine, among the Nephites, and in our own dispensation. In each instance the foundation of the Church is the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

There are always those would-be leaders and self-ordained prophets who break with the order instituted by the Savior. Their claim is predictable enough—the Brethren are in a state of apostasy, while they just happen to be the “one mighty and strong” (D&C 85:7), who will, according to prophecy (Isaiah

¹ I was interested to find the following: “The number twelve was recommended by obvious symbolic reasons. It happily expressed in figures what Jesus claimed to be, and what He had come to do, and thus furnished a support to the faith and a stimulus to the devotion of His followers. It significantly hinted that Jesus was the divine Messianic King of Israel, come to set up the kingdom whose advent was foretold by prophets in glowing language, suggested by the balmy days of Israel’s history, when the theocratic community existed in its integrity, and all the tribes of the chosen nation were united under the royal house of David” (Bruce 32).

is usually the source), enter the scene just in time to save us all. What ought not be lost on us is that such claims violate the covenant made to the fathers in both a symbolic and a literal sense. The Twelve have the authority to perform the ordinance of baptism whereby all others become heirs of the covenant of salvation. True ministers always come with the ordinances of salvation. They are always covenant spokesmen.

The New World version of the sermon at the temple in Bountiful identifies the first beatitude, the one upon which all the others rest, as the sustaining of the Twelve. The second is the covenant of baptism by the authority given to the Twelve. The revelations of our dispensation build on this pattern—note the following language from the Doctrine and Covenants:

The Twelve shall be my disciples, and they shall take upon them my name; and the Twelve are they who shall desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart. And if they desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart, they are called to go into all the world to preach my gospel unto every creature. And they are they who are ordained of me to baptize in my name, according to that which is written; and you have that which is written before you [having reference to the very things we are reading in 3 Nephi]; wherefore, you must perform it according to the words which are written. (18:27–30)

This places the remainder of Christ’s discourse to the Nephites in the context of covenant worthiness.

Some have tripped over the fact that those called in the New World were referred to as “disciples” rather than “apostles.” Note that in the revelation just cited, the emphasis is similar to that in the Book of Mormon. It centers on the idea of “the Twelve” rather than on that of disciples or apostles. *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* observes:

They were twelve, and were accordingly known as “the Twelve.” It is doubtful whether it is proper to supply such a substantive as “disciples” or “apostles.” There is authority in the NT for the use of both of these phrases, but it does not follow that the name first given to this inmost circle of our Lord’s adherents was “the twelve disciples” or “the twelve apostles” rather than “the Twelve.” (1:105)

Joseph Smith assured us, however, that those in the New World were “apostles” in the full sense of the word. He taught that the order on this continent was the same, the offices the same, the priesthood the same, the ordinances the same, and the gifts and powers the same as were enjoyed on the Eastern continent (*History of the Church* 4:538).

The Old World version of this sermon has been interpreted as an ethical discourse by a great teacher in the community. The Book of Mormon counterpart makes it plain that these are the words of the Messiah spelling out the great doctrines of the kingdom or the conditions of the covenant. This stands as a classical illustration of the plain and precious things that have been taken from the Bible.

In the New World beatitudes, those who “give heed” to the words of the Twelve and are baptized by their authority are promised that they will receive the companionship of the Holy Ghost. More blessed still, we are told, are those who will accept the testimony of the apostles without having seen Christ. These too are promised a remission of sins and the companionship of the Holy Ghost after their baptism (3 Nephi 12:1–2). The doctrine of baptism and sustaining the Twelve places what follows in the context of a covenant between Christ and those who bear his name.

The Covenant Sermon

All who have so covenanted are charged with being the salt of the earth. The symbolism and imagery of this metaphor is poignant. Salt, we assume, would have been used among the Nephites, as it was in the Old World, to preserve the meat used in the sacrificial offerings and also as a purifying agent. Such is the role of the covenant people. They are to preserve and purify all that is acceptable to the Lord. Salt loses its savor only through mixture and contamination; so it is with Israel, they lose their chosen role by compromising their actions or their faith. In so doing, they break the terms of their covenant and are, in

the words of the Master, “good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men” (3 Nephi 12:13).

Further emphasizing the idea of a new day and a new covenant, the Savior said: “Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new” (3 Nephi 12:46–47). Notwithstanding this statement, some were still unclear as to the fulfillment of the law of Moses, and the Savior said to them:

Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new. Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore it hath an end. (3 Nephi 15:3–5)

Then comes the assurance:

I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled. And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come. For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life. Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me. (vv 6–10)

Turning his attention again to the Twelve, Jesus said: “Ye are my disciples; and ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph. And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you” (3 Nephi 15:12–13).

Other Sheep

It was at this point in his discourse that Christ linked those of the New World with their counterparts in the Old: “Ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this

fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (3 Nephi 15:21). The Savior explained that people in the Old World had not understood what he meant when he spoke of “other sheep.” Their failure to understand, he said, was the result of “stiffneckedness,” “unbelief,” and “iniquity” (vv 18–19). (This is an instructive note explaining why so many are not able to understand the words of the Savior today.) As to those in the Old World, the Savior indicated that if they were to ask, having made the proper spiritual preparations to receive, they could obtain by the Holy Ghost a knowledge of the lost remnants of their family. In either case, the Nephites were commanded to make a record of those sayings that they might go forth to the believing among the Gentiles in a future day (see 16:3–4).

Those of the Old World supposed that Christ was referring to the Gentiles in his reference to “other sheep.” This indicates that they did not fully understand the implications of the Abrahamic covenant. In the divine economy of things, those of Israel were to be accorded the privilege of his personal appearance while others were to obtain their assurance of saving truths by and through the Holy Ghost. This favored status, Christ said, came by the will of the Father (see 3 Nephi 15:15–24). This is a strong and not particularly popular doctrine. Singularly of the synoptic writers, Matthew is virtually alone in referring to it. This accords with the idea that he was writing to those of his own lineage who knew the scriptural promises. John also makes some references to Israel’s favored status in the verses that surround the “other sheep” text. Let us briefly consider the words of both men.

In recording the commission given to the Twelve, Matthew notes that they were directed to limit their preaching and healing ministry to Israel (see Matt 10:5–6). Both he and Mark record the occasion when the Savior cast a devil out of a Gentile girl because of the faith of her mother. Matthew’s language, however, is more emphatic in emphasizing the status of Israel. Matthew has the woman addressing Jesus as both “Lord” and

“the Son of David” (Matt 15:22). Mark records neither. Matthew also recounts that Jesus turned a deaf ear to her plea for help until the Twelve encouraged him to hear her. He then took the teaching moment stating, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v 24). Again she plead for his help and he responded, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs [to share it with Gentiles]” (v 26). Undaunted, the Gentile woman responded, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the masters’ table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (vv 27–28).

Initially, Jesus declined not only to heal the woman’s daughter, but not even to give courteous response to her for no reason other than that she was a Gentile. Though perhaps less dramatic, the feel of these words recorded by John in the context of the “other sheep” discourse carry much the same spirit:

Ye believed not . . . because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. (John 10:25–29)

A knowledge of premortal existence worthiness is essential to understanding such actions. Independent of such understanding, God becomes capricious and grossly unjust. But, when this concept is understood we see him as both just and wise. Just as whatever degree of intelligence one obtained in the first estate is so much the advantage in mortal probation, likewise the first to be gathered or brought into the gospel fold are those prepared to listen, those born with faith and a propensity to be obedient, those whom he can send forth to declare the saving truths of the gospel to all the nations of the earth. These are the spirits that God promised Abraham would be born as his seed (see McConkie, *Mortal Messiah* 3:218–19).

The Covenant Meal and the Sacrament

What we have traditionally supposed to be the ordinance of sacrament is recorded in both chapters 18 and 20 of 3 Nephi. A careful reading suggests that something more is taking place. First, the purpose of the sacrament is the renewal of the covenant of baptism. Earlier in the day's activities the Savior had called the Twelve and commissioned them to baptize, or rebaptize as the case might be, all who sought membership in the Church and kingdom of God. At this point, however, none of them had been baptized. Their baptisms would have to wait until after the three-day ministry of the Savior. (The Twelve were baptized between his first and second visit, but there is no indication that anyone else was.) Second, it should also be noted that the administration of the sacrament preceded the formal conferral of authority on the newly called Twelve by the Savior.

The third peculiarity of these two sacrament services is the emphasis given to the fact that all present made a meal of the bread and wine. This is particularly clear in the first instance. Following Christ's breaking and blessing the bread, we read: "And when they [the Twelve] had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude. And when the multitude had eaten and were filled. . . ." (3 Nephi 18:4-5). In like manner, following his administering of the wine, we read that after the Twelve were "filled," they "gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled" (v 9).

When I have asked classes what the implications of this are, they have been quick to respond that it means that the multitude were filled with the Spirit. Yet, they had already heard the audible voice of God introduce his Son from heaven, witnessed the descent of the Son of Man, heard him testify of his divine Sonship, witnessed the appearance of angels and a circling flame of fire, witnessed mass healings, and had their children blessed. To suppose that they had not yet been filled with the Spirit is inconceivable.

In the instance of the first sacrament service the Savior sent the Twelve to get bread and wine. In the second instance he miraculously provided it. This second instance is obviously a New World counterpart of his feeding of the multitude in the Old World. The number present on this occasion is unknown but was far in excess of the 2,500 who had been in attendance the previous day.

It should also be noted that there would have been a need for physical nourishment, if not for the adults, then certainly for the children. Consider the time it would take for approximately 2,500 people to personally handle and feel the wounds in his hands and his feet. For each of them to have shared ten seconds with the Savior would have consumed nearly seven hours.

In the context of the covenant traditions of Israel, it seems a natural thing to suppose that this was a covenant meal after the pattern of the one recorded in Exodus 24 where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy princes or elders of Israel went up on the side of Sinai (symbolically the holy place) and there saw God and “did eat and drink” (Ex 24:11). This text is almost universally understood as referring to the eating of a covenant meal by the representatives of Israel in the presence of God on the Holy Mountain (Nicholson 84). One commentary notes: “By means of the meal, Yahweh takes the whole community, represented by the clan elders, into his family. The meal is the assurance and support given by the superior, Yahweh, to the inferior, Israel” (Bergant and Karris 104). The idea of two parties eating and drinking together to formally ratify a covenant is common to both the Bible and the customs of the ancient Near East.² To eat together was to be bound together by mutual

² See *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 2:146. Examples would include the covenant made between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26:26–31); the statement in Gen 31:54: “Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount.”; and the meeting in the king’s dale between Melchizedek and Abraham. The JST account of this reads “and he *break bread and blest it; and he blest the wine*, he being the priest of the most high God (JST Gen 14:17; emphasis added).

obligation (Achte-meier 616). The meal was a seal of the alliance whereby “the weaker is taken into the family of the stronger” who provides the meal (McCarthy 254).

The Old Testament and the Book of Mormon occasions have obvious similarities. The place of the meal in both cases is the temple or the holy mount (which represents the temple). Both meals are in the presence of the God of Israel. The occasion in both instances is the introduction of a new gospel dispensation. Symbolically, both represent a ratifying seal of the covenant they have made.

After the three-day ministry it appears that the more traditional sacrament observance became the order of the day. Indeed, we read that Christ continued to appear on many occasions to break bread and bless it for them (see 3 Nephi 26:13).

The Day of the Gentiles

Perhaps no part of Christ’s instruction to the Nephites, relative to the promises of the covenant and the events of the last days, has been more misunderstood than those things he said relative to the days of the Gentiles. This section will attempt to unravel that misunderstanding.

Taking the meridian of time as a starting point, the gospel was preached first to the Jews and thereafter to the Gentiles. In our dispensation, the dispensation of the fulness of times, the gospel was, according to prophecy, brought forth by Gentiles who in turn will take it to all the nations of the earth. After the Gentiles have had ample opportunity to receive it and then turn on it in wickedness, it will be taken from them and given back to its original stewards. Thus, the first shall be last and the last first (see 1 Nephi 13:42.)

When we speak of the day of the Gentiles being fulfilled, we are speaking of that time when “the consumption decreed” will make “a full end of all nations” (D&C 87:6), and a messianic kingdom established in their stead. Thus, the day of the

Gentile will end—its power, authority, and influence will be no more. With the millennial kingdom established, the great work of the gathering of all the tribes of Israel will continue until Jacob’s sons enjoy that glory and power of which king David’s and king Solomon’s days were but a type and shadow (3 Nephi 21:13–18; 22).

Three times the Savior refers to the words of Micah relative to the remnant of Jacob, who are to be “among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver” (Micah 5:8; see also 3 Nephi 16:15; 20:16; 21:12). Interpretations of this are plentiful. Typically, they center in a censuring labor of the Lamanites within the Church. In fact, the prophecy was directed to *all* the remnants of Israel, not just one. Furthermore, the censuring is to be among “all the nations of the Gentiles” not just those in the New World. This is not a matter of someone posing as one mighty and strong coming forward to purge the Church.

This warning, as it is given in chapter 16, may be directed at the United States and those who were members of the Church and who have drifted from it. It invites the Gentiles to “return” to the Lord and speaks of those who fail to do so as “salt that hath lost its savor,” thus intimating that a covenant had once been made. The twentieth chapter speaks in the broader context of all the house of Israel and all the nations of the earth. It then speaks of the New Jerusalem that is to be built in the Americas. It intimates that all the land will be a New Zion or New Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 20:22; see also McConkie, *Millennial Messiah* 301). In this chapter, the Savior reminds the Nephites that they are the children of the prophets, that they are of Israel, and are rightful heirs of the covenant. It further notes that in and through them all the families of the earth are to receive the blessings of the gospel (3 Nephi 20:27).

In chapter 21 of 3 Nephi, the Lord promises a sign whereby the things he has promised might be confirmed. The sign is the

establishment of a free people in the United States of America, the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his eternal triumph. It declares that those who reject the testimony of the Book of Mormon will, as Moses promised, “be cut off” from the Lord’s people, meaning they will be left without root or branch in the eternities to come (3 Nephi 11:1–26).

Again the passages from Micah are quoted, and this time the announcement is made that those who repent will be members of Christ’s church and numbered among those of the covenant. These, the Lord said, will be called on to assist the remnant of Jacob in building the New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 21:12–24). Then, in what is clearly a millennial context, the announcement is made that the work of the Father in gathering Israel will commence. Four times the word *commence* is used relative to the gathering of Israel in the context of the Millennium (see vv 26–28).

Seeing the Salvation of Our God

Third Nephi could be seen as a type for the second coming of Christ. It establishes the pattern. First will come the destruction of the wicked, those who have rejected the prophets and who have the blood of the Saints on their hands. Then, the Savior will come suddenly, as Malachi prophesied, to his temple, where he will greet his covenant people. Here the assurance will again be given that the promises made to the fathers will all be fulfilled and the ancient covenant renewed. At this time, all Gentile governments will end and the day of the Israelite will begin. In the Millennium, the gathering of Israel will begin in earnest as the lost tribes are gathered into the fold, and those waiting to join the Church will far outnumber those who have already embraced the covenant of salvation. Thus, it will be necessary to enlarge the place of Israel’s tent, to lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes (see 3 Nephi 21:23–29; 22).

Guidelines for Interpreting and Understanding the Promises Given to the Covenant People in 3 Nephi

Third Nephi contains some key passages relative to the promises of the Lord to the house of Israel. I have particular reference to chapters 16, 20, and 21. These passages have been misunderstood and misused. Often this happens innocently, sometimes not. Unstable views frequently strain the meaning of these texts to justify speculative or personally aggrandizing views. To that end, perhaps these observations ought be made:

1. The Book of Mormon came forth to gather Israel—all Israel, not a particular or exclusive part of Israel. On the title page Moroni states that the purpose of the book is “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Note that the emphasis is on *the* remnant of Israel, not *a* remnant. Long before Christ visited the Nephites, Israel had been scattered throughout the earth (see 1 Nephi 22:4), thus, Christ’s announcement to the Nephites that there were still others that he had been commanded of the Father to visit. All these scattered remnants of Jacob have claim on the promises made to their fathers. Each is “a remnant of Jacob,” and collectively, they are “the remnant.” We can be confident that the same promises given to the remnant of Jacob in the Americas were also given to the rest of Jacob’s children, wherever they may have been when the resurrected Christ visited them.

2. These chapters cannot be properly understood in isolation from the rest of the covenant sermon. They assume an understanding of the call and ordination of the Twelve (see 3 Nephi 18:36; Moroni 2:2). The whole idea of there being “twelve” instead of some other number is their symbolic representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. The unity with which they stand at the head of the Church was and is to be a constant

reminder of the Lord's promise to unite all of Israel in his millennial kingdom. The gathering of Israel and building of Zion must take place under their direction. Any doctrine that holds that some remnant of Israel can do some portion of the gathering or the building of Zion independent of the direction of the Twelve, or likewise, any leader who comes on the scene to do some marvelous thing independent of their direction is out of harmony with the covenant of baptism and the covenant to sustain the Twelve, with which the Savior began his instruction to the Nephites (3 Nephi 12:1).

It ought also to be observed that the same pattern and principle exists in our dispensation. The keys of the gathering of Israel and the building of Zion rest with the First Presidency, the Twelve, and none others. The Church is governed by modern revelation, not the writings of ancient prophets. Isaiah may have stood at the head of the Church in his day. He does not stand at the head of the Church in our day. The Book of Mormon unlocks the book of Isaiah, not the other way around.

3. Spiritual stability and sound understanding are not found in strained phrases. We ought to be inherently suspicious of interpretations that aggrandize a particular group or some marvelous or mighty leader that is going to come onto the scene to straighten out the Church. The Twelve are in place. I have read where it is argued that the phrase "the arm of the Lord" has reference to a special servant of the Lord who is to come on the scene and save the day when present leaders fall short of their calling. It rather strains the idea of "the arm of the Lord" to suppose that it no longer needs to be attached to the body. In the realm of my experience, arms are always an appendage to a body and not something that operate without it. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that the keys given the Twelve will be taken from them or surrendered by them to some individual who supposes himself to be the one mighty and strong called to set the Church in order.

4. Wisdom suggests moderation and caution in scriptural interpretation. In discussing chapters 16, 20, and 21, Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that there were things contained therein that the Lord had not chosen to make plain at the present time. It would be unwise for us to attempt to clarify what the Lord or his covenant spokesmen have not. In writing on these chapters Elder McConkie observed: “It is not always possible for us in our present state of spiritual enlightenment to put every event into an exact category or time frame.” He also noted that some of these texts “apply to both pre- and post-millennial events; some have an initial and partial fulfillment in our day and shall have a second and grander completion in the days ahead” (*Millennial Messiah* 251).

5. In a past General Conference we were warned about false views relative to the gathering. The warning was specifically against “cults” and “colonies” (Packer 73). The caution was to beware of those who think themselves a part of some inner circle, who think their understanding is ahead of those called to hold the keys of the gathering of Israel, and thus, who think they are to preside over all that takes place relative to it.

Conclusion

Moroni told Joseph Smith that the “fulness of the everlasting Gospel” was to be found in the instruction given by the Savior to the Nephites (see JS-H 1:34). The message of Christ recorded there centers on the blessings and obligations of a covenant people. “Ye are the children of the prophets,” Christ told them, “and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (3 Nephi 20:25).

The chosen seed of Abraham have the promise that they will be endowed with the fulness of all gospel blessings. Such is their right by birth. It is the obligation of those so endowed

to carry those same blessings of salvation to all others that all the kindreds of the earth might be blessed. According to the Abrahamic covenant, Christ endowed the Nephites with the fulness of his gospel and the promise that in and through them all nations of the earth would be blessed. This becomes literally so as their testament, or record of Christ, in the form of the Book of Mormon, goes forth in these the last days to gather the honest in heart out of all nations. That gathering, as the Book of Mormon attests, will be to the covenants of salvation which bring with them the fulness of all gospel blessings.

We, too, are the seed of Abraham and as such are heirs of the same promises and thus recipients of the same obligations as have been the faithful Saints in all ages. Like our ancient counterparts we have been blessed with the fulness of the gospel and the obligation to declare it among all nations and peoples. As ours is the God of our fathers, so ours is the gospel of our fathers. Their hearts were turned to us and ours turn to them. Their covenant is our covenant and their testimony becomes our testimony as we boldly declare the message of the Book of Mormon to all the nations of the earth.

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One by One: The Fifth Gospel's Model of Service

12

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

The New Testament portrays Jesus Christ's mortal work as a mission not only to large groups, but also to individuals. The Gospel narratives indicate that in many cases there was direct physical contact between Jesus and individuals as he ministered among the people. For example, when he healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, Jesus "*touched* her hand" (Matt 8:14–15; emphasis added; see also Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39); Jesus again "put forth his hand, and *touched*" a man with leprosy to make him whole (Matt 8:1–4; emphasis added); and he touched the eyes of two blind men as he healed them (Matt 9:27–31). He healed deafness and a speech impediment when he put his fingers "into" a man's ears (Mark 7:32–37); he "put his hands upon" a blind man (Mark 8:22–26); he healed a demoniac child when he "took him by the hand and lifted him up" (Mark 9:14–29; see also Matt 17:14–21; Luke 9:37–43); the Savior healed Jarius' daughter when he "took her by the hand" and raised her from the dead (Matt 9:23–26; see also Mark 5:35–42; Luke 8:49–55). The New Testament Gospels record many more miracles in which direct physical contact may have been possible (see Matt 8:28–34; 9:2–8; 20:29–34; Mark 1:21–28; 5:1–20; 10:46–52; Luke 4:31–37; 6:6–11; 7:11–17; 8:6–29; 11:14; 13:11–13; 14:1–4; 18:35–42; 22:50–51; John 5; and 9:1–17).

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Occasionally individuals reached out to touch the Savior, as was the case when the woman with an issue “*touched* the border of his garment” (see Luke 8:43–46; emphasis added). In some instances, however, there was more involved than the simple act of touching. In the case of the woman just cited, Jesus said that he knew “that virtue had gone out of him” (v 46). Joseph Smith explained that “the virtue here referred to is the spirit of life” and we sometimes become weakened when giving blessings (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 280–81; hereafter *TPJS*). These remarks by Jesus and Joseph Smith imply a transfer of power in such ministrations.

According to Mark and Luke, Jesus often healed not merely by touching the individual but through a more formal laying on of hands (Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:22–26; Luke 4:40; 13:13), and he enjoined the disciples to do the same (see Mark 16:18). Healing was also often conveyed through this laying on of hands in the post-resurrection Church (see for example Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8). Jesus also blessed children by laying hands on them (see Mark 10:13–16). *Laying on of hands* has a distinct meaning and purpose in the Bible. Authority or power was not passed literally through the arms and hands to the individual, but laying on of hands was a symbolic representation of who or what was the focus of the ritual action. The Old Testament usage of laying on of hands related to sacrifice and succession in office. In the New Testament it was associated with healing and with baptism with the Holy Spirit, and with assignment to specific administrative tasks in the Church. All the examples mentioned in the New Testament of the laying on of hands have the following underlying unifying characteristics: the context is always sacred, as frequent mention of prayer shows, and in each instance something is achieved through the practice, even though the laying on of hands is a symbolic action.

Third Nephi — the Fifth Gospel

Third Nephi, sometimes referred to as the fifth Gospel in LDS circles, describes Christ's post-resurrection ministry to the Nephites in terms similar to those used in the four New Testament Gospels. It emphasizes the individual experiences of the Nephite people with the resurrected Messiah, noting their direct physical contact with him as well as his laying on of hands as the symbolic act of transmitting authority and power. In addition, the use of the word *minister* in various forms is used in connection with these experiences. In his introduction to the appearance narrative Mormon states: "Behold, I will show unto you that the people . . . did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—showing his body unto them, and *ministering* unto them; and an account of his *ministry* shall be given hereafter" (3 Nephi 10:18–19; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon account of Jesus' ministry among the Nephites sharpens our understanding of the principle of service by showing how true disciples should minister to others. That account is clearer and more precise than the New Testament one on many points relating to the Gospel. It focuses not only on the words of Jesus (doctrine), but also on his actions (application of the doctrines). By the power of Christ, Mormon saw into the future—our day (Mormon 3:16–22). It therefore seems fair to assume that he carefully selected material to provide lessons rooted in our own situation. After Jesus revealed himself to the Nephites, he taught by word and example the correlation between individual experience, touching (laying on of hands in many cases) and ministry. The Book of Mormon uses the term *minister* and its variants to mean both giving individual attention and symbolically transferring power through touching or the laying on of hands.

When Christ appeared to the ancient inhabitants of America, he invited them to "thrust your hands into my side, and also

that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). All the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful “went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet” (v 15), and when they had brought their sick and afflicted and their children there were as many as 2,500 people (see 17:25). To emphasize the experience, Mormon states, “and this they did do, going forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth [until they all saw] with their eyes and did feel with their hands” (11:15; emphasis added). The cumulative effect of the personal experience left them all worshiping Jesus and crying, “Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” (v 17).

Ordinances — One by One

The resurrected Savior then taught that holy ordinances were to be performed individually. He detailed the procedure for performing the ordinance of baptism:

Verily I say unto you that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling him by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. (3 Nephi 11:23–26)

It is significant that each person was to be specifically called by name and then immersed individually in the water by the one performing the ordinance.

Nephi baptized the disciples in the manner prescribed—one by one. The record states, “And it came to pass that Nephi went down into the water and was baptized. And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen” (3 Nephi 19:11–12). The Book of

Mormon confirms that those baptized were ministered to further:

And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did *minister* unto them. And it came to pass that while the angels were *ministering* unto the disciples, behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and *ministered* unto them. (3 Nephi 19:13–15; emphasis added)

Like the New Testament paradigm (see for example Mark 1:31; 15:41; Luke 8:3), ministry in the Book of Mormon appears to be something spontaneous. As the disciples baptized others, each believer received the gift of the Holy Spirit and was further ministered unto.

Christ also blessed the sick among the Nephites as he had done during his mortal ministry in the Holy Land: “For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you” (3 Nephi 17:8). The sacred record continues, “And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought unto him” (v 9). It seems reasonable to assume that the Savior had power to heal all present among the Nephites without their being brought forth to him. Even before his resurrection the Savior healed people in groups without touching them and was able to heal those not within a specific proximity to himself (see Luke 7:1–19; Mark 7:24–30). The Lord chose among the Nephites, however, to have the sick brought close to him, and as the record implies, he touched each one personally.

Following this great healing occasion, Jesus commanded the people to bring “their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him.” Then

he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept again; And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones and as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did *minister* unto them. (3 Nephi 17:11–24; emphasis added)

The book of 3 Nephi continues to record the words and deeds of Christ as he instructed the disciples regarding the sacrament. “And this shall ye do, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7). He gave similar instructions regarding the cup of wine (vv 8–9). A day later, Jesus provided bread and wine miraculously and again administered the sacrament unto the people (20:1–9). Both sacramental experiences included the giving of bread and wine to each individual.

After Jesus instituted the sacrament among the Nephites, he gave the disciples power to confer the Holy Ghost: “And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he *touched* with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, *one by one*, even until he had *touched* them all, and spake unto them as he *touched* them” (3 Nephi 18:36; emphasis added). While the multitude did not hear what Jesus said, the disciples “bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” (v 37).

While it is probable that Jesus ordained the New Testament apostles through the laying on of hands, the present New Testament text does not allude to that event, nor is there evidence that Matthias was assigned Judas’ place among the Twelve through the laying on of hands. Here again, the fifth Gospel highlights Jesus’ actions and clarifies New Testament procedure of calling and ordaining the Twelve to minister. Moroni adds to our understanding of their calling:

The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them—And he called them by name, saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles. Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 2:1–3)

The Nephite Disciples' Ministry

In the New Testament period, Jesus chose his own disciples (see John 6:70; 15:16, 19). Likewise in the Book of Mormon account, it is Christ who initiated the call to ministry (3 Nephi 11:18–22; 12:1; 18:36, 38). This point is also emphasized when Jesus said, “He looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them . . . For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to *minister* unto these people” (13:25; emphasis added). Once called, the Lord touched the disciples individually as they began a ministry similar to what Jesus had already done among them:

And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he *touched* with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had *touched* them all, and spake unto them as he *touched* them. . . . And it came to pass that when Jesus had *touched* them all, there came a cloud and overshadowed the multitude. (18:36, 38; emphasis added).

Thus a conceptual thread weaves together the themes of calling, touching, and laying on of hands (see 17:24; 19:14).

The disciples' ministry was not limited to the righteous; but a ministry to the “unworthy” was also enjoined by the Savior. While strict commandments were given to those administering the holy ordinances regarding the need for holiness in receiving such blessings, concerning the unworthy, the Lord stated, “Ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall *minister* unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name.”

When the individual came forward with a broken heart and contrite spirit, then the true disciple was to “*minister* unto him of my flesh and blood” (3 Nephi 18:30; emphasis added). Even if a person continued in an unrepentant state, Christ commanded, “ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to *minister* for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and can come unto me with full purpose of heart” (v 32; emphasis added). Taking the model of ministering to the physically infirm, the Lord applied the same principle to the spiritually infirm; the disciples should bring them to Jesus and “I will heal them” (v 32).

Almost immediately Jesus “departed from them, and ascended into heaven” (3 Nephi 18:39). When the people left for their homes, “it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had *ministered* unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude” (19:2; emphasis added). On the following day, the numbers grew “so great that [the disciples] did cause that they should be separated into twelve bodies” (v 5). Mormon summarizes the experience:

Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them.

And it came to pass that he did teach and *minister* unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken.

. . . And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them . . . after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, . . .

Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together. . . .

And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost. . . .

And they taught, and did *minister* one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another.

And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them.

And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. (3 Nephi 26:13–17, 19–21; emphasis added)

On a later visit with the Nephite disciples, the Savior “spake unto” them “*one by one*” and asked each one, “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father” (3 Nephi 28:1; emphasis added). Nine of them responded, “We desire that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our *ministry*, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom” (v 2; emphasis added). The remaining three desired to stay on the earth and continue their labors until Jesus would come again. Then he “*touched* every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed” (v 12; emphasis added). These three were then miraculously “caught up into heaven,” but when they returned to earth they “did again *minister* upon the face of the earth” (v 16; emphasis added).

These special disciples, Mormon indicates, “did go forth upon the face of the land, and did *minister* unto all people” (3 Nephi 28:18; emphasis added). Nearly 400 years later, Mormon testified that he knew they were still on earth: “I have seen them, and they have *ministered* unto me” (v 26; emphasis added). He notes that their mission would be among Jews and Gentiles, and “they shall *minister* unto all the scattered tribes of Israel, and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people” (v 29; emphasis added).

That the disciples of Jesus were to duplicate the experiences they had shared with Christ is stated in 3 Nephi 27: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the thing that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (v 21).

Mormon introduces the entire appearance narrative (see the introduction to 3 Nephi) with these words, “*Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did minister unto them*” (emphasis in the original). According to Mormon’s introduction, Jesus did two things: first, he showed himself to the people, and second, he ministered unto them. Ministry was obviously an essential element of the visit of Christ among the Nephites.

Conclusion

During his New Testament labors, Jesus often addressed multitudes and performed miracles among them. On many occasions he spoke directly to individuals, and in several cases he touched them and healed them. But in several instances, he layed his hand on people symbolizing the action taken to the individual. The 3 Nephi record replicates and emphasizes Christ’s New Testament model of ministry by the words and deeds.

According to the Book of Mormon model, ministry often occurs “one by one” as disciples come in contact with the Savior and with one another. In many cases a personal “touch” is a symbolic means of transmitting God’s love and power to an individual. In several instances, however, the touch is another way of expressing that hands were laid upon an individual. The context of these several examples among the Nephites seems to indicate that an ordinance is being performed by the *laying on of hands* (see 3 Nephi 18:36, 38). Being chosen to minister is also a call to serve innocent and pure children and the faithful Saints, just as Jesus and the angels did during the his appearance among the Nephites.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, it is important that we recognize that in another setting and probably serving a different purpose, Jesus swept away the legalistic regulations of the Mosaic code and he touched those who had been considered

“untouchable” under the Law (see 3 Nephi 17:7, see also Lev 13; 3 Nephi 15:2–9). He commanded the Nephite disciples to do the same and encouraged them to invite everyone to join with them in worship as they ministered to one another. Likewise, for the modern believer, a call to discipleship is more than just joining a study class. It is a call to perform the work of the Lord and his angels spontaneously—to minister as a servant among mortals. In particular, it is a call to serve the physically, mentally, emotionally, economically, and spiritually infirm—modern society’s “untouchables.” These individuals should not be “cast out from among” us, but should be ministered to and touched by the true disciples as Jesus demonstrated during his ministry among the Nephites. Through the ordinances of the gospel performed individually, and as prescribed by the resurrected Savior by his chosen disciples, “the power of Godliness is manifest” (see D&C 84:19–21).

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The Symbolic Unity of Christ's Ministry in 3 Nephi

13

Neal E. Lambert

Any study of the Book of Mormon must acknowledge the remarkable complexity and sophistication of this unique book. We must assume that the selection and arrangement of the words and events are not random or accidental, but rather ordered and intentional, giving to the text an integrity that invites careful consideration and analysis, even when it may not follow our usual expectations. Careful textual analysis helps the reader in the ongoing process of having the pages reveal their remarkable directions. To put the matter in other words: the book is not only remarkably complex, but also remarkably efficient. There are patterns of words and events throughout the book which are intentional and purposeful, and which give extraordinary unity and coherence to it and its message.

Let me illustrate this design and coherence with some examples. One of the most oft-quoted verses in the Church is Nephi's response to his father when given the difficult task of returning to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them (1 Nephi 3:7).

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But these familiar words do not stand alone, rather they are echoed and re-echoed throughout Nephi's writings. For instance, Nephi's mother, rejoicing over her sons' return, reiterates that she knew "of a surety . . . that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them" (1 Nephi 5:8). And Nephi himself, recounting the reasoning behind the commandment to make a second set of plates, repeats: "But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; . . . And thus it is. Amen" (9:6). And again as the family journeys through the wilderness, Nephi repeats the theme: "And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness" (17:3). The effect is, of course, to reinforce the idea that obedience enables and empowers the obedient. But it is not enough simply to say it once; rather, the repetition draws our attention, underlines the significance, and impresses upon the reader that the Lord does "provide means."

Examples of this sort of repetition and patterning are multiplied many, many times in the pages of the Book of Mormon, not only in the ordering of words and ideas, but also in the selection and arrangement of events. And this unity is especially striking in 3 Nephi, where we can speak of an impressive architecture in the details of the account of the Savior's ministry on this continent. For instance, Christ's first day's visit may be subdivided in three major segments: first, his appearing and establishing his doctrine; second, his preaching, in which he articulates the application of that doctrine; and third, his demonstrating the blessings of his gospel. It is interesting to note that Christ concludes each of these three major sections of

his first day's visit with essentially the same rhetorical figure—building upon the rock.

At the end of his initial appearance and instruction on baptism and doctrine, he says: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock. . . . And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation” (3 Nephi 11:39–40). Then again, almost like a punctuation mark, he concludes his sermon at Bountiful with: “Therefore, whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock . . .” (14:24–27).

And then finally, as that first day rises to its spiritual conclusion, Jesus finishes with essentially the same metaphor:

And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things. And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock. But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall, and the gates of hell are ready open to receive them. (3 Nephi 18:12–13)

While these parallel statements suggest the possible sections or divisions of the day, they also invite us to look for other parallels and patterns in the material itself. A careful reading suggests that parallels and patterns are clearly there.

Let me demonstrate my point further with one rather limited example: Christ's use of the metaphor of children and childlike submission to describe the Christian convert. Third Nephi is replete with references to children: “children of the covenant,” “children of the prophets,” “children of Israel,” and especially “children of men” to describe the particular group or company Christ or his prophet is addressing. And in his earliest words to the surviving Nephites, the Savior makes special emphasis of this childlike relationship with his thrice-repeated metaphor of himself as being like a hen willing to gather her

“chickens” under her wing (3 Nephi 10:3–6). But even more pointed is his direct, unequivocal, and repeated promise: “Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (9:22). Then again: “And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (11:37–38).

What does that mean—that “a little child” is to “inherit the kingdom”? As Nephi said to the Spirit when queried about the meaning of Lehi’s tree of life and the condescension of God, “I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17). The answer in many places in the Book of Mormon is simply to *look*. In 3 Nephi the Lord shows us a vivid demonstration of the appropriate consequences of that verbal injunction to become like a little child in one of the most moving scenes of the whole book—the children’s communion with heaven.

Following a swelling crescendo of spiritual experiences, one building upon another, we come to those climactic moments of a fulness of joy, for the Savior and for the converts:

And he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones. And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them. (3 Nephi 17:21–24)

In that dramatic experience we learn the meaning of the Savior’s earlier instructions. We literally see what it means to “receive these things,” to “inherit the kingdom of God” as heaven and children become, for a few brief mortal moments, one.

This is one of many strands and patterns that inform and give coherence and unity to 3 Nephi. Of course there are many more complex and continuing designs and patterns: moving from death to life, from darkness to light, chaos to order, laments to hosannahs, sickness and suffering to health and wholeness, dispersion and anxiety to order and peace, and so on. By listing and examining the details this way, we can perhaps see better that the whole account of 3 Nephi is a complex pattern of metaphors detailing the progress of the conversion which everyone must go through as they come unto Christ. As we watch the events of the Christian community in 3 Nephi, we see reflections of our own individual experience as well, even to the destruction of our old carnal world in preparation for the new one to come.

This is not a new pattern. Indeed it almost seems as though the account in 3 Nephi reflects in important ways a much older text, Psalm 60:1–5:

O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh. Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. That thy beloved may be delivered; save with thy right hand, and hear me.

One could also argue that the familiar (to us at least) patterns of 3 Nephi informed and shaped religious instructions years *after* the events as well. Consider the particularities, for instance, of Mormon's prayerful list of benedictions pronounced upon his son. After recounting the chaos and destruction that has its parallels only in the events of 3 Nephi, Mormon writes to Moroni,

My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may His sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever. (Moroni 9:25)

The key words are there: (1) *suffering and death*, ended by being lifted up by Christ; (2) the *showing His body* followed by the mercy and hope of his ministry; and (3) suggestions of *glory and eternal life*. Again it is a familiar pattern.

We can see just how strong this pattern is as we examine the actual presentation of these dominant experiences. For instance, the movement from darkness to light is a representation of individual change. The account in 3 Nephi 8 is very specific and comprehensive; the darkness was palpable, total, and complete:

All these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all; And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. (3 Nephi 8:19–23)

This total, thorough, tangible darkness on the one hand marks the nadir of sinful humanity's experience—a physical type of the utter darkness alluded to so often in scripture. It is contrasted with joy and rejoicing, the experience of fire and light associated with the ministrations of Christ. I have already mentioned the angelic fires of the first day. Let me mention also the similar and familiar experiences of the second day:

And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them. And it came

to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof. (3 Nephi 19:13–14, 25)

A similar bracketing can be found in the balance between the lament and mourning with which the destruction ends and the shout of Hosanna with which their first testimony of Christ culminates:

And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible. (3 Nephi 8:25)

* * * * *

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him. (11:16–17)

Of course, all of this culminates in the figure of the risen Christ himself. For instance, it is not just that the Savior's visit is bracketed by darkness changing to light: he *is* the light! As he tells the people: "Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you. . . . Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up" (3 Nephi 18:16, 24). It is his physical presence among the people which gathers up all of these figures into one great typological representation of the experience of salvation. As Nephi taught us "all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4). And if all things are a typifying of him, then he is a type of all things. The meanings move both ways. As the light of the sun should remind us of the light of the Savior, so

the light of his countenance should remind us of the light of the sun for which he is the source.

So Christ is not only the source of our salvation, but in his physical body he is the figure of our salvation. Our own salvic history as Christians is not only explained by him, but it is also imaged forth in his very flesh and bones—that body that was baptized, violated by cruelty, subjected to rulers and magistrates, its spirit disjoined finally on the cross, then subjected to the darkness of the tomb, then reborn out of darkness into the light of a new life of ministering. All of this represents and repeats the path which every convert must tread. As Christ says, “I am the way” (John 14:6). Such is the hopeful history of all true Christians.

But as Jesus figures forth our individual histories, he also makes possible that history, for he is the source of our salvation. He was wounded for our transgressions, and suffered death in the flesh, that he might bring us life and heal us—the physical and the spiritual coming together in one great emblem. This is perhaps why the spiritual healing of the Atonement itself is so often associated with the physical healing of the body. This helps us understand the appropriateness of Christ’s physical ministrations and healings coming as they do in the process of the spiritual healings and transformations of his first appearance. Thus he could say to the Nephites: “O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?” (3 Nephi 9:13).

Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you. (3 Nephi 17:7–8)

This is neither a matter of satisfying curiosity nor a display of power for entertainment or wonder. This manifestation is—and this is the point I am trying to make—intimately connected with faith and salvation. The physical healing means nothing except as it is literally connected to the spiritual healing that the Savior has also brought about. This is certainly the sense in which the Savior instructs the leaders of his Nephite church regarding sinning and healing, as it applies to the unworthy member: “Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and *I shall heal them*; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them” (3 Nephi 18:32; emphasis added).

All of this complex pattern of meaning comes together most dramatically in the physical act of stepping forward and kneeling before the Savior, the experience of literally coming unto Christ, of touching and being touched. That the physical and the spiritual are intertwined should come as no surprise to members of a church that places extraordinary emphasis on ordinances—those small occasions and gestures that allow all of us to participate in the great drama of salvation. To collapse the whole matter of our purpose in this life into one symbolic act would bring us an experience very close to that of the Nephites’: “And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears” (3 Nephi 17:10). Isn’t this truly what it means to come unto Christ, to “close with him” (as the Puritans used to say), to be invited to come forth, and, because of the preparations of both the Savior and the saved, to be accepted, literally and completely *doing*—acting out what the words themselves describe?

Given the nature of ordinances and the ceremony-like experience of the Nephites, it seems to me such actions as these

are not just an experience for a privileged few, but a necessary part of the process of salvation. Touching the Savior and kissing his feet are succinct dramas of life, ceremonies that rehearse for us in a compact gesture the whole plan of salvation. They carry profound meanings and are meant as part of the process of engaging the gospel. That is why the body of Christ is so important to all believing Christians, why it became so central to the Nephites, and why it is so important, protected, and sacred for us now as represented in our observances and ordinances.

Given all this, it is especially interesting to catch echoes of several important words from the early part of Christ's first visit which are repeated near the end of the first day. Earlier he had invited the Nephites to

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may . . . *feel* the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel. . . . And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and . . . did *feel* the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did *see* with their eyes and did *feel* with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come. (3 Nephi 11:14–15; emphasis added)

But this experience is something more than an empirical demonstration of the Resurrection. For at the end of that first day's ministry, the Savior—after presenting and explaining the sacrament—repeats several of those key words, but this time generalizing the experience: “I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might *feel and see*; even so shall ye do unto the world.” (3 Nephi 18:25; emphasis added). Those words, “feel and see,” of course allude to the marvelous experience earlier that day when these people had come forward one by one. But clearly the implication of this repetition is that this experience is not exclusive to that first encounter, that just as those present had been commanded to come to the Savior and feel and see and know, even so should all the world have the opportunity to feel and see and know. And certainly, since God

is no respecter of persons, such experiences should indeed be available to all who observe the same protocols of faith and obedience that those Nephites did.

The question that comes to mind, however, is how can *the world* feel and see the resurrected Savior as did those whom Christ was addressing? We can understand that the world is to remember and obey the Savior, but how is it to have not only the intellectual, but also the physical experience implied in “feel and see”?

The answer lies in what was happening at the moment these words were spoken. The Savior had just administered the bread and wine to the multitude. When taken in the context of the occasion, in the presentation of the sacrament and the serious instruction from the Savior about the protocols of worthiness surrounding that ordinance, one senses the extraordinary significance that he intended the experience of the sacrament itself to be. Besides the elements of recollection, the ordinance also inferred an element of intimacy and fellowship with the Savior that went beyond a mere intellectual process. Indeed, it would seem that the Savior intended in *feel and see* the notion that, at least for those who are prepared, imbedded in that sacramental experience are the means of sensing and knowing, of feeling and seeing almost exactly the same as those physical means of knowing with which the Nephite faithful were first privileged earlier that day. Indeed the central focus and the grand pattern of 3 Nephi is the testament that Christ lives and that we can come unto him.

So the grand pattern that pertains here focuses on the resurrected Christ’s body—the physical presentation of that body. It is the factually and typologically *present* Christ that begins and ends that first day, beginning with the tactual sensing of the broken flesh of his hands and feet and side, and ending with the broken bread given in typological reference to that flesh. The dramatic actions and events put the present Christ at the center of all teachings and events so that in both small ways and large we are taught by precept and by dramatic example

what it means to come unto Christ, to confront and experience in actuality the physical emblems of the Atonement. Thus the experiencing of the body of Christ frames the day, encloses the dramatic action of those initial teachings and events in an impressive way, and focuses and dramatizes the doctrine that all are to come unto Christ and be saved.

The point is that 3 Nephi both teaches and shows; it presents us with precepts and doctrines which are also illustrated and elaborated in experiences, practices, ceremonies, and ordinances which compliment, fulfill, and complete the verbal presentations and teachings. There is a remarkable connectedness in both the events and teachings of 3 Nephi. This central book in this Book of Books functions like a grand tapestry—a creation of extraordinarily beautiful and complex design that connects, reiterates, amplifies, and reflects over and over again the great messages of Christ's gospel: "Come unto me and be saved." These are not just a miscellaneous set of events in random order, but a logical sequence of experience that teaches us by precept, as in the Sermon on the Mount, and shows us by example how to enter the gate and move along the way to Christ. It is a reenactment of the *Pilgrim's Progress* in coming from the destruction, darkness, and chaos of the world to the peace, light, and order that emanate from the presence of the physical Savior. In many ways this is the fulfillment of the type of the Christian journey, as those present both metaphorically and literally came "unto Christ," making the occasion an ordinance-like dramatization of their own relationship with the risen Lord.

I can't help but wonder if those fortunate Nephites, as they approached the risen Lord, thrilled as they perhaps consciously realized the coming together of the metaphorical and the literal. They had read the figure of speech in their own prophet Amaleki's injunction, "I would that ye should *come unto Christ*, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him" (Omni 1:26;

emphasis added). Now they were in fact invited to “Come forth unto me” (3 Nephi 11:14). The Savior’s sacrifice was visibly represented in his wounded body. And touching those marks with their hands, surely they pledged “their whole souls as an offering unto Him,” their sacrifice of the heart and spirit and bowed body—their whole self—literally conjoined in that moment of touching with his sacrifice of his whole godly self for them.

But to return to the beginning question, if this intimate engagement with the Savior is so significant, how is that done? For the Nephites it was obvious and spontaneous: he was there, they could “close with him” by seeing, feeling, knowing. But what about us? What *did* Christ intend when he said “that they may feel and see” for other generations of worshippers? What ceremonial means are available to us that we too might participate? The answer, of course, lies in the experience of the sacrament.

Two things help us understand that this was the Savior’s intent. First is the location of the sacramental experience at the very end of this crescendo of spiritual outpouring of that initial day’s worship. We have already discussed framing experiences and the ordering of events in 3 Nephi. It would not be unreasonable then to expect that the dramatic presentation of Christ’s physical self at the beginning of the day should have some parallel event at the conclusion of that day, some culminating experience which could gather up and reflect all that had taken place. The order and organization of the chapters would suggest that this is exactly what the Savior intended. We can see too why he would be so careful that the unworthy not misunderstand the profound significance of that ceremony and why it should be kept sacred. In addition, we can see why beginning the next day the sacrament should stand at a point of time generally parallel with his appearance on the first day.

But even more important is the Savior’s clear association of his body with the sacramental bread and wine. The level of experience inferred here is certainly not to be confused with

transubstantiation, but neither is it a mere reminder. Christ obviously has something more in mind than that. What Christ is doing here is offering to all his Church, then and now, the same opportunity for spiritual experiences. He intended the experience of the sacramental emblems to carry every bit of the spiritual potentiality of his own presence. As the Apostle John records, this is what gives such disturbing potency to Christ's teachings to the recently fed multitude regarding the experiential intention of his own flesh (John 6:28–41).

Let me quote at length a passage from John's Gospel which reminds us of the Lord's conflation of his own body with the emblematic bread:

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. . . .

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. (6:28, 35, 40–41)

The point of all this is that feeling and seeing are essential elements of the Christian experience, that the ordinance of the sacrament is in many ways a confirming experience that can bring the true worshipper into an intimate relationship with the Savior. Thus we can in that process put behind us chaos,

darkness, destruction, separation, doubt, and death, and act out in important ceremonial representations our own coming into the divine presence and the concomitant experience of order, light, unity, peace, and the true love of Christ.

The invitation is still there, each time we approach the sacramental experience. If we will in fact remember the real blood and the real body as we partake of the real emblems, we can, if we too are worthy, have the same real spiritual blessings those surviving Nephites enjoyed. That is at least the implication of the Lord's promise to the struggling believers who opened our own dispensation:

Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you. Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Amen. (D&C 6:34–37)

Gathering to the Temple: Teachings of the Second Day

14

Gerald Hansen, Jr.

Only faithful and righteous individuals could have been privileged to witness the events of the first day of the Lord's visit to the Nephites. On that day the 2,500 people who were gathered at the temple in Bountiful heard the Father bear witness of the Son and touched the Savior's wounds. They listened to his teachings on his doctrine, the lost sheep, and the Sermon at Bountiful. They saw him heal their sick and afflicted and heard him pray things that could not be recorded. They watched the Lord weep and angels minister to their little children. And finally they partook of the sacrament as Jesus administered it, and they received instructions from him concerning that ordinance.

The spiritual intensity of the experiences of the first day required a people prepared by their faith and righteousness to receive them. The people in 3 Nephi had lived through persecution, had survived the great destruction, and were gathered at the temple conversing and pondering about God. Moroni tells us these Nephites saw Christ because of their faith (Ether 12:7). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains that they "were qualified by personal righteousness to see the face of their God" (*Promised Messiah* 609).

If it is a fact that the Nephites who saw Christ were spiritually prepared and mature in their righteousness in the

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gospel, then, in some ways, an intriguing aspect of the Savior's visit is that in spite of their preparation they were not taught all of the doctrine of the gathering of Israel until the second day. As he began to explain this doctrine (3 Nephi 16), Jesus perceived they could not understand all his words and admonished them to go home to ponder what he had taught them and prepare to be given even more:

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time. Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again. (17:2–3)

The need for additional preparation is obviously not because they were spiritually slow, because before they went home Jesus shared with them some high-level spiritual experiences: he healed their sick, prayed unutterable prayers, had angels minister to the children, and gave them the sacrament (3 Nephi 17–18). Their difficulty in understanding the gathering seems to have had more to do with their lack of intellectual understanding of the doctrine itself. The gathering of Israel is a profound doctrine filled with implications about God, his plan, and our place in it. It reminds members of the kingdom of God that they are a covenant people and implies that they will be saved only by keeping those covenants.

Basic Principles of the Gathering

One of the things that makes the gathering difficult to grasp as a teaching is its subtlety. The simple part of the gathering—that certain peoples gather to certain lands—can, if we are not careful, camouflage its deeper implications. The gospel principle of the gathering of Israel goes far beyond where we will live. Among other things, it teaches Latter-day Saints about their responsibilities in the Lord's plan, and it emphasizes that exaltation requires temple ordinances. It is a joyful doctrine taught

repeatedly by both Old Testament and Nephite prophets to lift up the downtrodden and to bear witness to God's eventual victory. Or, as Jacob says in the Book of Mormon, he teaches concerning the gathering so that we will "not hang down our heads," but "cheer up [our] hearts" (2 Nephi 10:20, 23).

A further difficulty for us today in understanding the gathering is a lack of some historical perspective and background knowledge. When the Savior taught the Nephites the doctrine of the gathering, he assumed that they had read their scriptures and already knew concerning such things as the scatterings of Israel and, most importantly, the Abrahamic covenant. As for the scatterings, Jesus mentioned them (3 Nephi 20:13, 27) but did not emphasize them. The Nephites had been taught that God generally scattered Israel after the Israelites had broken their covenants (Hel 7:17–19). Similarly, with the Nephites, Christ only alluded to the Abrahamic covenant without explaining it in detail (3 Nephi 20:25, 27). However, as Latter-day Saints we cannot neglect the covenant God made with Abraham if we have even the least desire to understand the gathering of Israel. Unless we understand what the covenant of Abraham promises to us today, we will probably see the gathering of Israel as nothing more than certain peoples going to certain lands. In reality, the blessings of Abraham—not land—are the central promise of the gathering. We gather to the blessings of Abraham. They are the keys that open the door to salvation. And, understanding these blessings is the key that opens the door to comprehending the doctrine of the gathering.

Scripture tells us that Abraham "sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right to be ordained to administer the same" (Abr 1:2). He was not seeking land, and he was not seeking priesthood office, as we sometimes hear. He was seeking, as President Ezra Taft Benson says, priesthood blessings, meaning temple blessings (8). The most important part of the Abrahamic covenant, both for Abraham and for us, is the gift of temple covenants and blessings.

Gathering for Temple Blessings

“Gathering,” in the highest sense of the word, means to receive the same temple blessings that Abraham received. Gathering to “lands” is primarily for the purpose of gathering to locations where we have or will build temples. As Joseph Smith said, the main object of gathering the people of God in any age to certain places is “to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 307–308; hereafter *TPJS*). Early in this dispensation God told the members of the Church to gather to Kirtland so, among other things, they could be “endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32). The endowment of power came with the restoration in the Kirtland temple of some of the ordinances and all of the keys to temple blessings (see D&C 110). When we left Kirtland the place of gathering changed. For much of this dispensation we gathered to Utah. Today the place of gathering is to the stakes of Zion in our native lands (see Lee 5). The place is relatively unimportant. The real gathering occurs when we make the same covenants and receive the same blessings as Abraham.

As Latter-day Saints, we understand that many other churches and philosophies can make us moral and good and that the Lord expects from us a more complete level of discipleship. We understand that being honest and chaste, keeping the word of wisdom, and paying tithing are things we do as part of our preparation for going to the temple; but we cannot be exalted without temple blessings. We understand that there are pseudo-gospels like the gospel of positive thinking, the gospel of self-esteem, and the gospel of winning friends and influencing people, to name a few, that can, if we are not careful, become substitutes for Christ’s gospel and cause us to lose sight of God’s higher expectations. We understand, as Professor Hugh Nibley reminds us, that “the gospel is more than a catalogue of moral platitudes” (59). If we do not understand, or if we forget

these things, we have God's servants to remind us of our covenants, as when Elder Neal A. Maxwell warns of "'honorable' members who are skimming over the surface" who "may even pass through our temples but, alas, they do not let the temples pass through them" ("Hearts" 65). God expects not just goodness but consecration and sanctification through covenant.

Through the ordinances and covenants of the temple, we learn what we have to do to be saved. The scriptures say, "It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131:6). Ignorance of what? *The Lectures on Faith* says ignorance of what God is like (see Lecture 7:99–104). This knowledge, ultimately, can only be received after reception of the temple ordinances. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the temple blessings make us eligible to learn "the mysteries of the kingdom, even . . . the knowledge of God. . . . And without the ordinances . . . the power of godliness is not manifest to men in the flesh" (D&C 84:19–21). Through the temple ordinances, we make covenants that, if kept, show to God that we can be trusted with his knowledge and his power. The covenants of the temple ordinances are, therefore, the keys that open the doors to the revelations of godliness if we desire them, ask for them, and are worthy. Without the temple covenants we do not get this kind of knowledge. Without this kind of knowledge and its proper use, we will not be exalted, because "this is eternal lives—to know God, and Jesus Christ" (D&C 132:24). Given this understanding, Jesus' reason for the gathering, as explained to the Nephites, that Israel "shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God" (3 Nephi 20:13) comes as no great surprise. Israel will gather so that Israel can receive the blessings of Abraham (the temple blessings), so that Israel can receive the mysteries of godliness that will save them. These are the blessings, or "the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" that Abraham and his posterity were to make available to the world (Abr 2:11).

Having assumed a background knowledge, the Savior begins his sermon to the Nephites with the basic message of the

gathering: that scattered Israel will be gathered from among the nations of the world, come to a knowledge of God, and be gathered to the lands of their inheritance; also, that the Gentiles who have been blessed by God and who have scattered Israel must repent or be cut off from among God's people (3 Nephi 20:11–21). This basic message is always meant to give to the righteous hope of eventual victory and vindication. But both parts of the message also presuppose a pre-earth life, a plan of conversion developed and established by God for the nations of the earth, and God's omniscience in that plan. In short, the message presupposes a deep love by God for his children and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Gathering and the Premortal Existence

The plan for the gathering is based on our premortal existence and God's knowledge of it. Abraham tells us that some of the spirits in the premortal existence were noble and great ones (Abr 3:23). Obviously, if some spirits were noble and great, other spirits were less noble in developing their spiritual capabilities. However, the Father loves all his children and desires to save them all. In his omniscience he devised a plan by which each of his children would come to the earth at the time and place and with the right amount of opportunities that would maximize their ability to accept the plan of salvation. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explains this principle in these terms: "It does no violence even to our frail human logic to observe that there cannot be a grand plan of salvation for all mankind, unless there is also a plan for each individual. The salvational sum will reflect all its parts" ("Determined Discipleship" 71).

For some spirits this meant they would receive an opportunity to have the gospel in this life, while for others it meant they would wait until the spirit world for that opportunity. For some it meant the extra responsibility of serving in the government in God's kingdom and bearing the message of salvation to the world (*TPJS* 365). For others it meant coming to earth at

a time when and in a place where the gospel was not available but coming to prepare a people with a certain portion of the light. Such were the missions of Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, and Plato according to Orson F. Whitney. Speaking of these individuals he said, “They were servants of the Lord in a lesser sense, and were sent to those pagan or heathen nations to give them the measure of truth that a wise Providence had allotted to them” (33). This concept is supported by the First Presidency statement of 15 February 1978. The Father’s plan means these things and many more—some that are difficult if not impossible for us to understand without the omniscience of God. We are not, for instance, generally given a knowledge of the relationship between other people’s premortal existence and their earthly circumstances.

The Gathering Testifies of God’s Plan

What we can understand is that the gathering testifies to a plan of God, that he does not gather all his children all the time, that there are periods of time meant for the gathering of Israel and periods for the Gentiles, and that there are periods of apostasy as prophesied, and all of this is in God’s plan. He knows the right time and means for sending the gospel to each of us. Alma teaches this principle in these terms: “The Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8). The temple is the great equalizer in this plan. Whether the time to hear the gospel is in this life or in the next, if it is accepted, the reward is the same, exaltation (see the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1-16). Work for the dead in the temple makes that possible. Our challenge is to not concern ourselves with why a person’s mortal circumstances are what they are (we cannot know that anyway), but to figure out our part in God’s plan and do it, to render service in the truest sense of the word: bring souls to Christ through the

ordinances by preaching the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead.

To believe these principles requires trust, or faith, in God. To those who have this faith, the doctrine of the gathering becomes a powerful support, knowing as they do that in eternal ways righteousness is rewarded. The explanation in 3 Nephi of the gathering provides this support to the Nephites. It includes them within the walls of the house of Israel and promises them the attendant blessings. Jesus said to them, “Ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers” (3 Nephi 20:25). He promised them that their descendants would be established in this land and it would be a New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:22). However, those descendants who fell away from the covenants would first be scattered by Gentiles. Christ also stated that the Gentiles of this land will be held accountable if they reject the fulness of the gospel when it is preached to them (3 Nephi 20:22–31).

The good news-bad news part of the message, blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, still testifies of God’s love (D&C 130:20–21). Alma suggests earlier in the Book of Mormon that being compelled to be humble can be a blessing when it leads to repentance (Alma 32:13). What matters most is that we are brought to repentance, and eventually to salvation, whether the reason for the repentance be our own humility or God’s chastisement.

Place of the Gentiles in the Gathering

After Christ applies his teachings to the Nephites and Lamanites, he introduces a broadened explanation of the place of the Gentiles in the gathering by quoting Isaiah (3 Nephi 20:27–28). Much confusion exists over the definition of Gentile. In the Book of Mormon, the Gentiles are those who believed in Jesus Christ “in and of the Holy Ghost” (16:6) and not by a personal visit of Christ, since he was not sent but to the

house of Israel (Matt 10:5; 15:24). Those of the house of Israel who had been scattered among the Gentiles are also identified with the Gentiles (D&C 109:60). As Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains, “This [definition] classifies Ephraim and the rest of scattered Israel as Gentiles” (*Millennial Messiah* 221–22). Under this definition the Nephites are part of Israel while Joseph Smith is a Gentile (see 1 Nephi 13:33–42; 15:13–20; 2 Nephi 30:3). But this definition is only one of several ways to look at the matter. In fact, in one sense of the word, everyone is a Gentile until he or she receives the ordinances and becomes spiritually born again, a spiritually begotten son or daughter of God. In this way we become sons and daughters of Abraham, no longer Gentiles (see 2 Nephi 30:2; 3 Nephi 16:6–13; Abr 2:10; D&C 84:33–34).

In 3 Nephi, Christ stays consistent with the normal Book of Mormon definition. He prophesies, expounding on Isaiah’s poetry, of the restoration of the gospel among the Gentiles through Joseph Smith, and of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 21:1–11). He testifies that the descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites would hear of Christ through these means and be gathered through acceptance of the restored gospel (v 26). He warns the Gentiles of our day that if they reject the gospel they will be cut off from his people (v 20). Yet he also witnesses that if they stay true to the kingdom of God they will assist Israel in building New Jerusalem (vv 22–23).

For Latter-day Saints this material is especially significant. We are those identified with the Gentiles who must take the gospel to the descendants of the Nephites. We have an obligation to preach the gospel and build Zion. We learn that there is a penalty for not fulfilling our obligation, but that the kingdom is ours if we keep our covenants.

Christ Quotes Isaiah on the Gathering

At this point in his sermon, Christ follows up his quotation and explanation of Isaiah with another quote from Isaiah that

emphasizes the coming of the kingdom and the eventual victory of Israel in the scattering and gathering (3 Nephi 22). Like much of the rest of Isaiah this gives hope and encouragement to those sometimes lonely and sometimes persecuted members of the Church who strive with all their might, mind, and strength to further the kingdom of God, yet are ridiculed, accused of self-righteousness, and taunted by others, even by others within the Church who should know better. Isaiah promises them that the gathering will mean victory for Christ and relief for those who are reproached and afflicted (22:4, 11).

After quoting Isaiah, Christ does something that seems out of place in a discourse on the gathering: he insists that the Nephites include in their scripture a prophecy of the resurrection made earlier by Samuel (3 Nephi 23:6–14). But if we try to view the total picture of the Savior's teachings, we may see that there is reason to include this prophecy in this sermon. The blessings of the covenants that we gather to receive, the temple blessings, are blessings to be given, for the most part, in the resurrection. The prophecy of Samuel stands as a firm witness of the reality of the resurrection and, therefore, also witnesses that we can have faith in the promises of the covenant.

Christ Quotes Malachi on Gathering to Temples

The finale to the recorded portion of Christ's discourse, the capstone of his sermon, is his quotation of Malachi 3–4 (3 Nephi 24–25). In these chapters, Malachi testifies that the Lord will come again: the punishment of the wicked and the triumph of the righteous are a reality. He tells us to hold on, that the Lord is coming to right all wrongs. These chapters also show why some people will not abide the coming of the Lord: they are sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers; they oppress the hireling in his wages, the downtrodden and the stranger, and do not fear God; they do not pay their tithes and offerings; and they think it is in vain to serve God. In short, Malachi says, they have not been true to their ordinances (24:5, 7–8, 14). Finally, these

chapters tell us we must gather to do our temple ordinances or there is no exaltation. Few verses of scripture would be more appropriate to complete our understanding of the gathering than those in these two chapters.

They begin: “Behold, I will send you my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant” (3 Nephi 24:1). The messenger of these verses is the everlasting covenant of the gospel as restored by Joseph Smith (D&C 45:9), and it was at least partially fulfilled when the Lord appeared in the temple in Kirtland in 1836, where the keys to his covenant were restored (D&C 110). After this announcement, Malachi asks who it is that will abide the presence of the Lord at the second coming and then gives a long list, as already noted, of non-tithe payers, adulterers, oppressors, and others who will not keep their covenants and who will, therefore, be destroyed. Finally, the prophet ends with those oft-quoted verses concerning Elijah and the hearts of the children (3 Nephi 25:5–6).

Moroni gave a plainer translation of these verses to Joseph Smith centuries later that for us greatly clarifies their meaning (see JS-H 1:38–39). In Moroni’s version we learn that Elijah’s task is to reveal the patriarchal priesthood, or as Joseph Smith explained, “the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood”—the highest of temple blessings (*TPJS* 322–23, 337). We also learn that this revelation through Elijah will turn the hearts of the children to the promises of the fathers, which means they will seek after the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which blessings are the temple covenants. In other words, they will desire to gather to the family of God by receiving and keeping the blessings of the fathers. The Malachi quotation as used by the Savior effectively places the gathering in its spiritual context and is therefore an essential element in the Savior’s overall teachings on the gathering.

This spiritual context means that the scattering and gathering of Israel does not apply only to ancient peoples. Each Saint

of the latter days can be scattered and gathered on an individual basis. By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and receiving the temple ordinances and covenants we gather to the family of God. By sin and disobedience, particularly disobedience to the temple covenants, we scatter ourselves from the blessings of God and ultimately from his presence. As a symbol of repentance the gathering of Israel bears witness of Christ and the necessity of his atonement.

Conclusion

The rest of what Christ taught on the second day of his visit is not recorded. What is said is that he expounded all things from the beginning to the end (3 Nephi 26:3–5). Though the account does not elaborate on what was said, these teachings could well be part of Christ’s efforts to explain the full context of the gathering within the plan of redemption known to God.

It will not be enough for us to be good, honorable individuals—that only makes us eligible for the terrestrial kingdom (D&C 76:75, 79). Neither will it be enough to bribe God by simply being busy in the Church, nor can we buy our way into heaven by doing good deeds; we will have to know God and be like him (JST Matt 7:33). As Joseph Smith said, “If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses” (*TPJS* 216). This means receiving the temple ordinances and covenants that make us eligible for the knowledge of God, keeping our covenants, asking to know his will for us, and then doing it. Exaltation depends on how well we learn this process (D&C 121:34–36).

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The Church Shall Bear My Name and Be Built upon My Gospel

15

Richard O. Cowan

Near the end of his visit with his “other sheep” in ancient America, the Lord specified that his church must meet at least two requirements: (1) it should be called after his name, and (2) it should be built on the foundation of his gospel. The Savior instructed: “And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel” (3 Nephi 27:8). The Restored Church has met both of these requirements.

The Church’s Name

As individuals join the Church through baptism, they covenant to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ (D&C 20:37) and regularly renew this covenant as they partake of the sacrament (20:77). It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that the Church they join should bear that same name. This was the case with the New Testament Church, whose members became known as “Christians” (see Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The Apostle Paul chastised some of the Corinthian Saints who professed, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ.” He lamented that there should be such

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divisions or “contentions” among members of the Church: “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:10–13; compare 3 Nephi 27:3). Peter had earlier made the same point when he testified that he had healed a lame man in “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” and then affirmed that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:10–12).

The Book of Mormon similarly records that the faithful took upon themselves the Lord’s name. The first mention of an organized church among the Nephites was nearly a century and a half before the time of Christ’s earthly mission. Alma baptized over two hundred converts, “and they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward” (Mosiah 18:17). Later, when Alma and his people reached the land of Zarahemla, king Mosiah authorized him to “establish churches throughout all the land. . . . notwithstanding there being many churches [local congregations] they were all one church, yea, even the church of God” (25:19–22).

When the kingdom of God was once again organized on earth in 1830, it was known as “the Church of Christ” (D&C 20:1). The early members commonly referred to it by this name or sometimes as “The Church of Jesus Christ.” By 1834 however, the *Evening and Morning Star* observed, “As the members of this church profess a belief in the truth of the book of Mormon, the world, either out of contempt and ridicule, or to distinguish us from others, have been very lavish in bestowing the title of ‘Mormonite.’” The *Star*’s editor was convinced that this “stigma” was the result of a “bitterness of feeling” and emphatically insisted, “**WE** do not accept the above title [Mormonite], nor shall we wear it as **OUR** name, though it may be lavished upon **US** double to what it has heretofore been” (“*The Saints*,” [May 1840] 2:158; also in *History of the Church* 2:62–63; hereafter *HC*).

Church members did not want to be guilty of being called by “the name of a man.” Consequently, on 3 May 1834, the First Presidency and other Church leaders convened to seek inspira-

tion in selecting a label or designation that could replace “Mormonite.” “After prayer, the conference proceeded to discuss the subject of names and appellations, when a motion was made by Sidney Rigdon, and seconded by Newel K. Whitney, that this Church be known hereafter by the name of ‘The Church of the Latter-day Saints’” (*HC* 2:62–63). This name was consistent with the New Testament practice of referring to the early Christians as “saints” (see for example Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 1:1–2; Eph 1:1). This title suggests one who is holy—the word *saint* coming from the same root as *sanctified*. Nevertheless, one may be called a saint without being perfect; Paul explained that the central purpose of the Church is “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

While compiling the history of the 1834 conference, Elder B. H. Roberts noted that the record of this council was headed “Minutes of a Conference of the Elders of the Church of Christ.” “It will be observed from the heading that the Elders assembled in the conference are called *the Elders of the Church of Christ*. This is pointed out in order that it may be seen that while the conference adopted the title ‘The Church of the Latter-day Saints,’ and the Church was for some years called by that name, it was not the intention to regard the Church as any other than the Church of Christ” (*HC* 2:62f). It seems clear that these early Saints were not trying to abandon the name “Church of Jesus Christ,” but rather were inspired to adopt a readily understandable means of referring to themselves other than by the unwanted label of “Mormonites.”

A revelation given in 1838 clarified what the Church’s true and complete name was to be: “For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 115:4). Thus the inspired description “Latter-day Saints” was added as a suffix to the essential designation “Church of Jesus Christ.” The capitalized *The* affirms the Church’s unique standing among all other organizations (compare 1:30). “The name thus conferred,” explained

Elder James E. Talmage, “is a self-explanatory and exclusive title of distinction and authority. It is an epitome of the cardinal truths and of the philosophical basis of the system commonly called ‘Mormonism’” (40–41). Elder B. H. Roberts added:

The appropriateness of this title is self-evident, and in it there is a beautiful recognition of the relationship both of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Saints to the organization. It is ‘The Church of Jesus Christ.’ It is the Lord’s; He owns it, He organized it. . . . [B]ut it is an institution which also belongs to the Saints. . . . They have a conjoint ownership in it with Jesus Christ, which ownership is beautifully recognized in the latter part of the title. (*HC* 3:24f)

Still, the practice of calling the Church by a name other than the Savior’s has persisted. From time to time, the Saints have been cautioned not to overuse such phrases as “the Mormon Church” or “the LDS Church” because those names obscure our faith that Christ is truly the head of his Church (see Nelson). “I suppose that regardless of our efforts, we may never convert the world to general use of the full and correct name of the Church,” conceded President Gordon B. Hinkley. He continued, “Because of the shortness of the word *Mormon* and the ease with which it is spoken and written, they will continue to call us the *Mormons*, the *Mormon Church*, and so forth.” President Hinkley recalled the Prophet Joseph Smith’s comment that the name “*Mormon* means *more good*,” and therefore suggested we should not be ashamed of this nickname (52; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 299–300; hereafter *TPJS*).

“This is My Gospel”

The Savior’s second requirement for a church to be his church was that it must be “built upon [his] gospel” (3 Nephi 27:8). The roots of the word *gospel* shed light on its meaning. This word is derived from the Old English *godspel* which is a combination of *god* (meaning “good”) and *spel* (meaning “story”). *Godspel* was a translation of the Latin *evangelium*,

which in turn was derived from the Greek *euangelion* meaning “well,” or “beautiful news.” It is related to the Greek word *angelos* (meaning “messenger”). Hence, the English words *gospel* and *angel* are closely related in meaning even though in our language they have taken on rather different forms. The gospel of Jesus Christ truly is “good news”—the best we could hope to receive.

Christian theologians have identified what they call the *kerygma* of the gospel, which is not just the heart of its message, but is actually the proclamation of a key event. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* declares: “At the heart of the NT *kerygma* stands the lordship of God. . . . The summons to repentance (M[at]t 3:1 f.; M[at]t 4:17) stands in closest relationship to the preaching of God’s kingdom.” The *Dictionary* explains that “repentance does not bring in the kingdom,” but rather it makes possible our individual participation in it. “As the herald goes before the chariot of the king and announces the approach of the ruler, so the preacher hastens through the world and cries: Make ready, the [kingdom] is already near,” and proclaims Jesus as the Son of God, and as the Christ, the Messiah. Those who repent and come unto him are assured a remission of their sins (Acts 2:37–38). “The reality of the resurrection constitutes the fulness of the early Christian *kerygma*,” the *Dictionary* concludes. Hence, “stories about Jesus, however edifying, are of themselves empty, 1 Cor 15:14. If they are not understood in the light of faith in the risen Lord, they are simply stories of things that happened in the past and are more or less valueless for the present” (Kittel 3:710–711). Paul summed up the *kerygma* when he declared:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:1, 2, 4)

The Lord himself has provided his own definitions of what the gospel includes. Three of these are found in the Doctrine and Covenants. As the Lord called brethren to go forth as missionaries, he instructed them to proclaim this message:

Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; Yea, repent and be baptized, every one of you, for a remission of your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and remember that they shall have faith in me or they can in nowise be saved. (D&C 33:10–12)

A briefer definition followed a few months later: “And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom” (D&C 39:6).

The great vision of post-earthly kingdoms emphasized what makes gospel principles efficacious: “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:40–42).

The most complete definition of the gospel is recorded in the Book of Mormon—in the same chapter where the Master specified that his Church must be built upon it. He declared:

Behold, I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. . . .

And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their

garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do. (3 Nephi 27:13–14, 19–21)

Based on the foregoing, the gospel plan might be summarized under the following ten statements. Notice how the Book of Mormon significantly adds to our understanding of these gospel principles.

1. All will be judged according to their works. “I [will] draw all men unto me, . . . to be judged of their works (3 Nephi 27:14). Amulek taught that this judgment will hold no surprises: “We shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt” (Alma 11:43). Alma explained that more than just our deeds will be involved: “For our words will condemn us, yea, our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us” (12:14). Alma told his wayward son Corianton that even our desires will be taken into account (41:5).

2. No unclean thing can enter God’s presence. “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom” (3 Nephi 27:19). Nephi learned in a vision, “The kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy” (1 Nephi 15:34). In fact, Moroni asserted that the wicked would be “more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of [their] filthiness before him, than [they] would to dwell with the damned souls in hell” (Mormon 9:4).

3. God sent Christ to be crucified for the sins of the world. “My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the

cross” (3 Nephi 27:14; see also John 3:16). The Savior used the phrase “lifted up” when referring to his atoning sacrifice on the cross. Clearly, the Savior’s atoning sacrifice is at the heart of the gospel. Amulek declared:

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made . . . or else all mankind must unavoidably perish. . . . For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. (Alma 34:9–10)

Even though we often refer to the Savior’s atonement as a great gift from God the Father, Jesus himself was a willing participant. In a latter-day revelation he explained that he “so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God” (D&C 34:3).

4. Only through Christ’s atoning blood can we become clean. “Therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood” (3 Nephi 27:19). Both Nephi and Moroni explained that we must look to the redeemer for salvation, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19) and “relying alone upon the merits of Christ” (Moroni 6:4). Moroni concluded the entire Book of Mormon with the invitation to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (10:32).

5. In the light of point number four, faith in the Savior is the logical and obvious first principle of the gospel. The righteous will be cleansed “because of their faith” (3 Nephi 27:19).

6. We must repent of all our sins. “Repent, all ye ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 27:20). Because sins are the reason for our being unclean, certainly we must abandon them if we hope to return to God’s presence. Furthermore, overcoming sins is an essential step to developing faith in God. When the sons of Mosiah preached the gospel to the Lamanites, the king expressed a deep desire to know for himself that there was a God:

“I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:18). The promise to those who repent is remarkable: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43; compare Isa 1:18).

7. Baptism continues the cleansing process. “Come unto me and be baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 27:20). Immersion in water brings remission or forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Paul explained that we may “wash away [our] sins” (Acts 22:16) through baptism and then come forth “in newness of life” (Rom 6:3–6). Nephi explained that even Christ needed to be baptized to “fulfil all righteousness”—setting the example of obedience to his Father. “And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfill all righteousness,” Nephi concluded, “O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized” (2 Nephi 31:5).

8. We are sanctified through receiving the Holy Ghost. We are to be “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that [we] may stand spotless before [him] at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

By the power of the Holy Ghost—who is the Sanctifier, dress, iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every evil thing is burned out of the repentant soul as if by fire. . . . The baptism of fire is not something in addition to the receipt of the Holy Ghost; rather, it is the actual enjoyment of the gift which is offered by the laying on of hands at the time of baptism. (73)

The Lord explained that this “sanctification” is the means by which we “may stand spotless before [him] at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Furthermore, “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in [Christ’s] name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26; compare Moroni 10:5).

9. We must remain faithful to the end. Salvation comes only to those who continue in “faithfulness unto the end”

(3 Nephi 27:19). Note how in this verse the Lord employs both “faith” (referring to our trust in him) and “faithfulness” (referring to our resulting good works). Nephi reflected both elements when he declared that “it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; compare James 2:14–26). Perhaps the greatest exhortation to endure is found near the end of Nephi’s writings. After explaining that repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost constitute the “gate” which places us on the path to eternal life, Nephi inquired:

After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; . . . Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:19–20)

10. By following the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will be exalted in the celestial kingdom. “Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:22). Interestingly, the phrase “lifted up” is used not only in reference to the Savior’s crucifixion, but it also refers to our ultimate exaltation (D&C 5:35).

The Church is “built” upon the gospel as it teaches these principles and administers necessary ordinances to implement them. It teaches us to do good works, to be clean and pure both physically and spiritually, and to live lives worthy of the high standards the Lord has set. Its leaders repeatedly bear witness of the Savior’s atonement and testify that through faith in him can we hope to return to our Father’s presence. They help us to qualify for eventual exaltation by constantly admonishing us to repent of our sins and endure faithful to the end.

Having examined the Lord’s appearing to and teaching his other sheep in ancient America, we can see that they knew that he had literally been resurrected and that they understood the principles of his gospel that they must live. Consequently, we

can more fully appreciate why the true church must bear his name and teach the principles of his gospel.

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The Three Nephites and the Doctrine of Translation

16

Clyde J. Williams

In September of 1842 the Prophet Joseph Smith declared that there were many “things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, [that] shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 128:18). The doctrine of translation is one of those mysteries that has eluded humankind. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “the doctrine of translation is a power which belongs to this [the Melchizedek] Priesthood. There are many things which belong to the powers of the Priesthood and the keys thereof, that have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world; they are hid from the wise and prudent to be revealed in the last times” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 170; hereafter *TPJS*).

Most protestant theologians make no specific reference to the doctrine of translation or translated beings in their Bible dictionaries. For example, neither the *New Bible Dictionary*, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, nor *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* makes any specific heading for translated beings or the doctrine of translation. The extent to which the idea of translation is referred to is typified by one simple sentence found under the heading of Enoch in the *New Bible Dictionary*: “Like Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), he [Enoch] was received into the

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presence of God without dying (Gen 5:24)” (333). It appears to be a commonly held belief by many theologians that to be translated is to be taken into God’s kingdom without experiencing death. Concerning this belief the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Many have supposed that the doctrine of translation was a doctrine whereby men were taken immediately into the presence of God, and into an eternal fullness, but this is a mistaken idea. Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters He [God] held in reserve to be ministering angels” (*TPJS* 170).

One significant reason for the misunderstanding by most scholars is the lack of scriptural information which they have. With the exception of the account of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and Enoch (Gen 5:24; also Heb 11:5), there are no other biblical passages which are generally interpreted as describing those who have been translated or that explain their circumstances after being translated. Some scholars acknowledge the possibility that the phrase in John 21:22—“If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?”—has reference to John being translated (see *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* 812).

Early historical and apocryphal writings provide few additional insights on the doctrine of translation or translated beings. There are possible allusions to the translation of Moses and others who may have been translated (see Josephus 2:285 and Wintermute 1:512). Ultimately, the message which has come through to me is that the understanding and role of translated beings is one of the plain and precious truths which has been kept from the world until this the dispensation of the fulness of times.

Unfolding the Doctrine

One of the first indications we have in Latter-day Saint Church history that the Prophet Joseph Smith was aware and interested in the concept of translated beings was in April 1829. We learn from the *History of the Church* that the Prophet and

Oliver Cowdery had a difference of opinion as to whether John the Beloved remained in the flesh upon the earth or had died (1:35–36). While it is uncertain what led Joseph and Oliver to depart from translating the Book of Mormon and seek understanding about the status of John, the two determined to resolve the question by inquiring of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim. The result was the Lord revealed to them a record made on parchment and hidden up by John (see D&C 7). From this revelation the Prophet learned that John the Beloved had been permitted to remain on the earth to do “a greater work yet among men than what he [had] before done” (v 5).

Sometime during the late spring of 1829, the Prophet Joseph Smith would have come across accounts in the Book of Mormon that relate to the doctrine of translation. His curiosity must have been aroused as he translated the narrative of the mysterious disappearance of the prophet Alma the Younger and the suggestion that “he was taken up by the Spirit . . . even as Moses” (Alma 45:18–19). Once again, Joseph and his scribe must have pondered the similar disappearance of Nephi, son of Helaman as they continued the work of translating the book (see 3 Nephi 1:2–3; 2:9). It is unlikely that they could have anticipated the flood of knowledge they would shortly receive on the doctrine of translated beings.

One of the most intriguing and compelling accounts in the Book of Mormon is recorded in 3 Nephi 28. The setting is the final day of the Savior’s formal three-day ministry among the more righteous part of the people, who had been spared. Mormon informs us that he could not even record a “hundredth part of the things” which Jesus taught unto those people (3 Nephi 26:6). We are told that what we have is the “lesser part” and that “greater things” would be made known to those who believe the things the Lord has given us (see vv 8–10). In light of these restrictions, it is even more remarkable that the Lord permitted Mormon to record such a wonderful event as is found in chapter 28 (see 26:12).

What Is It That Ye Desire?

Among the Nephites, only the twelve disciples were granted the same privilege as that afforded the twelve Apostles in Jerusalem. It stimulates one's mind to consider the prospect of having the Son of God grant unto us whatever we might desire. The possibilities seem overwhelming. The condition of our heart would be manifest by the gift or blessing we desire. Ultimately, the choices are more limited than we might at first assume. The Savior offered this great blessing to those whom he knew would not ask amiss. We know he knew the thoughts of three of the Nephite twelve even before they expressed their desire, and thus he likely knew the desires of the other nine as well (see 3 Nephi 28:6).

Even at this righteous level of decision-making there are choices which are better than others. The request of the nine, to come immediately into the kingdom of God upon death, is a worthy and proper one. But the desire of the three to remain on the earth that they "might bring the souls of men unto [Christ], while the world shall stand" is a "greater work" (see 3 Nephi 28:9; D&C 7:5). The Lord can and will grant unto us righteous requests if they are right and timely in his eyes (see 2 Nephi 4:35).

At one point Mormon was about to write the names of the Three Disciples, but the Lord forbade it (3 Nephi 28:24–25). We have the names of the twelve Nephite Disciples recorded in 3 Nephi 19:4, but as to the identity of the specific three, the Lord has yet to make them known.

Characteristics of the Three Nephites

The events which follow and the instruction given in 3 Nephi 28 are unparalleled. The Lord unfolds for us in a clear and precise manner the circumstances and the capabilities of the Three Nephite Apostles who have been given such a grand and

glorious promise. I have identified ten major characteristics which Mormon records concerning these translated Nephites.

1. They, like John the Revelator, will “never taste of death” (3 Nephi 28:7). This is not to say that they can escape the process of death, but they will not experience the “pains of death” (v 8). In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Translated bodies cannot enter into rest until they have undergone a change equivalent to death” (*TPJS* 191). They will be spared the agony, the lingering suffering, the exquisite pain so often associated with death. It should be noted that the scriptures record that the Three Disciples “obtained not [this] promise until *after* their faith” had been shown (Ether 12:17; emphasis added).

2. They will “be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality” (3 Nephi 28:8). All must die, for “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). However, for translated beings death is particularly sweet: “This change from mortality to immortality, though almost instantaneous, is both a death and a resurrection” (McConkie, *Mortal Messiah* 4:390). There is no funeral, no mourning, no grave. For translated beings, their death is more like an ordinance than a time of parting and separation. The Lord’s words describing millennial conditions seem appropriate here:

There shall be no sorrow because there is no death. In that day an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree; and when he dies he shall not sleep, that is to say in the earth, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and shall be caught up, and his rest shall be glorious. (D&C 101:29–31)

For clarification, it should be noted that there are at least three major differences between the translated state of the Three Nephites and the translated-like condition of those who live during the Millennium. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

Millennial man will live in a state akin to translation. . . . He will, however, *have children*, and mortal life of a millennial kind will

continue. . . . There will be those who are on probation, for whom earth *life is a probationary estate*, and who are thus working out their own salvation. . . . Isaiah's description of life and death during the Millennium seems to preserve the concept that even then—even in that blessed day when Satan is bound and righteousness overflows—even then men are *free to come out in open rebellion* and, as sinners, suffer the fate reserved for the sons of perdition. Manifestly they, being accursed, would die the death with which we are familiar. (*Millennial Messiah* 644, 646; emphasis added; see also Isa 65:20)

3. The Three Nephites were told they would experience no pain while they dwelt in the flesh. They are not subject to disease or suffering that commonly afflict man. However, like God, they do experience sorrow “for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 28:9). Theirs is not a life devoid of feeling or understanding, but neither are they hindered by the frailties of the human body. Unfortunately, because of the wickedness which covers the land, there must be numerous times when their souls are full of sorrow because of the course so many of humankind have chosen to take. Sometime between AD 245 and 300 the wickedness among the Lamanites and Nephites became so widespread that “the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world” (4 Nephi 1:44). By AD 326 the wickedness had become so prevalent that the Lord took the Three Nephites away from openly ministering among the people (Mormon 1:13; 8:10).

4. For the twelve Nephite disciples, the glorious final day the Savior spent among the Nephites was in effect a Judgment Day. They were given the promise of entering with the Savior into his kingdom. For the Three however, the recorded promise was more specific. Theirs was to receive a fulness of joy as the Father had given to the Savior. They were promised that they would be even as the Savior is. The Lord reminded them that he and his Father are one. This means that to be like the Savior is also to be like the Father (3 Nephi 28:10). It was a sure promise to mortal men that they could become gods. In short, these Nephite Apostles had their callings and

election made sure. Such is the case with all who have been found worthy to be translated.

5. Translated beings have knowledge and wisdom given unto them that exceed human perspective. The Three Nephites were “caught up into heaven, and saw and heard unspeakable things” (3 Nephi 28:13; see also 13:36). We do not know what wisdom and glory they received, what future visions they beheld, as they were forbidden to speak of what they saw and heard, even being denied the “*power* that they could utter the things which they saw and heard” (28:14; emphasis added). It may well be that the things they saw and heard were so far beyond our mortal comprehension that “no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as [they] both saw and heard” (17:17).

Contrasting the level of our understanding with that of chosen prophets, Elder McConkie declared:

Mortal man—shackled as it were in a tabernacle of clay; imprisoned on a single planet that is itself but a speck of dust in an endless universe; bound by time and space, and living for only a few brief moments—mortal man, a spirit son of God, dwells in the depths of ignorance, away from his Father, without a knowledge of eternal things. We are born, we live, we die, and in the process we are privileged—some of us—to receive a few little glimmerings of eternal truth by revelation. And there are few among us, even in sober moments, who ponder the wonders of eternity and seek to know what lies beyond the ken of humankind. What of creation itself, of worlds without number, all inhabited, all crowned with an infinite variety of life? How did Gods begin to be, and whence came the order and system in a universe whose outer limits we shall never see? How little we know of premortal existence, both ours and that of all forms of life; or of death and the world of waiting spirits; or of the resurrection which raises sleeping dust to glorious life. What are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob doing today? How can Moroni hie to Kolob in the twinkling of an eye? Where are Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate, and what kind of a life are they living? How little we know about creation, about redemption, about immortal glory.

And yet there are those—a favored few—who break the time-bound bands, who see beyond the veil, who come to know the things of

eternity. Portions of what they learn they are permitted to reveal to the rest of us. . . . [They] have seen and heard and felt and known far more than has come to us in any of our scriptures. Among these are the Three Nephite Disciples. (*Mortal Messiah* 4:392–93)

Perhaps one additional idea is worth our consideration at this point. The Lord entrusted this sacred knowledge with the Three Nephites because he knew they could be trusted. He knew they would keep confidential those things revealed to them. Mormon was careful to let us know that while these three began to minister upon the face of the earth, “they did not minister of the things which they had heard and seen because of the commandment which was given them in heaven” (3 Nephi 28:16).

This principle is important to all who would desire to know about the mysteries of God. President Brigham Young elaborated:

If a person understands God and godliness, the principles of heaven, the principle of integrity, and the Lord reveals anything to that individual no matter what, unless He gives permission to disclose it, it is locked up in eternal silence. And when persons have proven to their messengers that their bosoms are like the lock-ups of eternity, then the Lord says, I can reveal anything to them, because they never will disclose it until I tell them to. Take persons of any other character, and they sap the foundation of the confidence they ought to have in themselves and in their God. (*Journal of Discourses* 4:288)

6. As Mormon began writing and editing this portion of the Nephite history, he was uncertain as to the actual condition or state of the Three Nephites. Were they mortal or immortal (3 Nephi 28:15, 17)? Only after inquiring of the Lord did he come to the knowledge that they had experienced a change in their bodies. While they were no longer subject to pain and sickness, “this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day [the resurrection]” (vv 38–39).

Mormon uses the word *transfiguration* to describe the condition the Three were in while beholding the glorious things of God (3 Nephi 28:15, 17). The scriptures are not clear on the exact differences between transfigured beings and translated

beings. However, the scriptural use of these terms seems to indicate “that transfiguration is more temporary, as in Matthew 17:1–9 and Moses 1:11, occurring primarily to permit one to behold spiritual things not possible in the mortal condition” (Mark McConkie 4:1486). Conversely, “translated beings experience a long-term change” that culminates at the time of their resurrection (Mouritsen 4:1485). It appears that these Nephite disciples were first transfigured and then translated.

7. Another blessing enjoyed by translated beings is that wicked or evil men and women have no power over them. During the third century AD, while the Three Nephites still ministered openly among their people, increased wickedness led to the establishment of many false Christian churches and then “another church which denied the Christ” and persecuted the true church (4 Nephi 1:26–29). It was apparently this false church which imprisoned the Three Disciples and cast them into deep pits. Furthermore, these apostate children of Lehi continued to harden their hearts and eventually sought to kill the disciples just as “the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus” (4 Nephi 1:31). Three times they cast these chosen servants into fiery furnaces and twice into dens of wild beasts. However, as with the young Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel, the Lord delivered them each time without harm (see 3 Nephi 28:21–22; 4 Nephi 1:32–33; Dan 3:25–27; 6:16–27).

The scriptures indicate that these three disciples were able to use “the power of the word of God” to destroy the prison walls and to deliver themselves out of the depths of the earth (4 Nephi 1:30). Like Enoch of old and Nephi, the son of Helaman, these translated Nephites had such power that all things were done according to their word (see Hel 10:5–10; Moses 7:13).

It can be troubling to contemplate how a people so blessed could have become so hardened as to reject such mighty miracles and witnesses as were provided through the lives of these Three Nephites. One thing that helps is the teaching in the book

of Alma: “After a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30; see also 47:36).

8. They have the power to show themselves to whomsoever they desire. And the converse is true. They can keep themselves from being seen by anyone they do not want to see them. The only stipulation required for them to show themselves is that they must pray to the Father in the name of Jesus for that power.

Mormon declares, “They are as the angels of God” (3 Nephi 28:30). This would seem to mean that travel and distances are of no consequence to them. We would suppose that walls and other mortal barriers are also insignificant. Because of their extraordinary powers and the prophetic words of the Savior himself, which we do not yet possess, Mormon prophesied that “great and marvelous works shall be wrought by them, before the great and coming day” of the Lord (v 31).

9. One of the most significant characteristics of the Three Nephites is that Satan can “have no power over them” (3 Nephi 28:39). This blessing was not given by drawing them out of the mire of sin and wickedness and placing them beyond Satan’s reach. Rather, these Nephite faithful had already bound Satan in their lives or they could not have received their request. Like some in king Benjamin’s day, they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Their disposition is to do good continually, and that surely would have led them to request to remain on the earth and continue to labor to bring souls unto Christ.

The fact that Satan could no longer tempt these three is further evidence that for them the day of judgment had been moved up. Their calling and election was made sure.

10. Mormon concluded his revealing treatise on the Three Nephites by reminding us that they were to remain in this translated state until the “judgment day of Christ,” or in the words of the Savior until “I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven” (3 Nephi 28:7, 40). At the second coming of Christ, they will receive a glorious resurrection and enter celestial glory to dwell with God and Christ eternally.

The Ministry of the Three Nephites

We now turn from an examination of the characteristics of the Three Nephite disciples to a discussion of their ministry. From the Doctrine and Covenants we learn that “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5). “Translated bodies are designed for future missions,” taught the Prophet Joseph Smith (*TPJS* 191). Thus, all who minister on this earth have been or will be mortals here. This certainly applies to John the Beloved and the Three Nephites.

Mormon identifies five major groups these Three Nephites would minister to. First, they would labor among the faithful Nephites and Lamanites who remained after the appearance of Christ on the American continent. To these people, they were Apostles just as the Twelve at Jerusalem were to the Jews. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith declared: “While in every instance the Nephite Twelve are spoken of *as disciples*, the fact remains that *they had been endowed with divine authority to be special witnesses for Christ among their own people*. Therefore, they were *virtually apostles to the Nephite race*, although their jurisdiction was, as revealed to Nephi, eventually to be subject to the authority and jurisdiction of Peter and the Twelve chosen in Palestine” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 3:158; italics in original).

Among these descendants of Lehi, the Three Nephites experienced the spiritual high of seeing the conversion of all who survived the destruction at Christ’s coming to this continent (see 4 Nephi 1:2, 14). Unfortunately, it was among the

descendants of these same people that the Three experienced so much sorrow and had to be withdrawn because of the wickedness of the people (see 4 Nephi 1:30–33, 44; Mormon 1:13). Following their formal withdrawal in about AD 326, we know the Three still continued to minister to Mormon and Moroni from time to time. Moroni revealed, “My father and I have seen them, and they have ministered unto us” (Mormon 8:11; see also 3 Nephi 28:26).

The four other groups that the Three Nephites would minister to are the Gentiles, the Jews, the scattered tribes of Israel, and all nations kindreds, tongues, and people (3 Nephi 28:27–29). We do not know the specifics of their labors among these groups, but we do know that those among whom they labor will not know them (vv 27–28). We know they have performed and will yet perform many great and marvelous works among these nations and people (vv 31–32). We know that these Three Disciples will bring many souls unto Christ “because of the convincing power of God which is in them” (v 29). We also know, from latter-day prophets, that one of their purposes for remaining upon the earth has been to help hold Satan and his followers in check. “The Lord has never withdrawn or permitted his authority to be withdrawn absolutely from this earth,” President Joseph Fielding Smith affirmed. He continued,

And so down through the years and through the great apostasy, which developed until the so-called Christian era, there have been individuals on the face of the earth holding divine authority. . . . We understand that John the Revelator asked for the privilege of remaining on earth until the coming of Christ, and that was granted to him. Three Nephites asked for the same privilege and it was granted. They have been here on the face of the earth—advocates of righteousness and contending against Satan and his adversaries. (*Seek Ye Earnestly* 419–20; see also Lee 161–62)

For nearly two thousand years the Three Nephite disciples and John have been ministering upon this earth. The record of their labors would fill volumes. Surely, this will be one of the most interesting sagas unfolded by the Savior when he reveals

the mighty works of God for the fifth and sixth thousand year periods of earth's history (see D&C 88:108–110).¹

What then can we say concerning the mission of the Three Nephites? We can say, with faith, as Elder John W. Taylor did:

You will find that many districts where the Elders of Israel cannot reach will be penetrated by these men who have power over death; . . . My testimony is that these men are going abroad in the nations of the earth before the face of your sons, and they are preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive the Gospel. They are administering to those who are heirs of salvation, and preparing their hearts to receive the truth, just as the farmer prepares the soil to receive the seed. The Lord has promised that He would send His angels before the face of His servants, and He does so. (75)

Conclusion

People often wonder whether there are people being translated today, and if not, why? This same question may have come to the mind of Joseph Smith as he translated the Book of Mormon. Even more likely, the question could have come as he worked on the inspired revision of the book of Genesis in late 1830 and early 1831. As he read of Enoch and his people being caught up into heaven and later of others who developed the faith of Enoch who were taken up into Zion even down to the days of Melchizedek, the question must have come (see Moses 7:21, 27; JST Gen 14:32–35). We have no record of any response by the Prophet as to why people are not translated today, and his silence on the question may be answer enough. However, on this issue Elder McConkie has written:

[After the days of Melchizedek] except in a few isolated instances—those of Moses, Elijah, Alma the son of Alma, John the Beloved, and the Three Nephites are the only ones of which we know—except in

¹ Thousands of stories abound concerning possible encounters with the Three Nephites. Although many of these accounts are true, a great many are not. We can safely assume that translated beings are not interested in making national headlines or in contributing to a collection of apocryphal faith-promoting stories. Mormon says that the people they will be among “shall know them not” and that their specific mission is to bring souls to Jesus (3 Nephi 28:27, 29; see also Wilson 1477–78).

these cases, each involving a *special purpose*, the Lord ceased translating faithful people. Rather, they were permitted to die and go into the spirit world, there to perform the ever-increasing work needed in that sphere. (*Millennial Messiah* 285; emphasis added)

There is much yet which we do not know, but for that which we do understand we should be most grateful. What personal lesson can we learn from the lives the Nephite Disciples? Of the many ideas that could be given, I list only two. First, it should be our desire and design to strive to bind Satan in our lives, for “when Satan is bound in a single home—when Satan is bound in a single life—the Millennium has already begun in that home, in that life” (Kimball 172). Second, we can and must do all that we can to help bring souls unto Christ. This is the work of the translated Nephites, and it is our work too.

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