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When Did Jesus Appear to the Nephites?

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Abstract: This article argues that the appearance of Christ in America occurred shortly after his ascension from the Mount of Olives into heaven.

YOUR QUESTION

ANSWERED BY
PRESIDENT
JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE TWELVE

WHEN DID JESUS

QUESTION:

“Several years ago I was asked to make a talk on the events which took place on the American continent at the first Easter. In studying for the talk I discovered that it was almost a year from the time that Christ was crucified until he showed himself to the Nephite multitude at the temple in the land Bountiful. ‘And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, there arose a great storm,’ (3 Nephi 8:5.) ‘And it came to pass in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared. . . .’ (Ibid., 10:18.)

“There is still a misconception of the event—or these events—in the minds of many of our members. Perhaps it doesn’t really matter, will you please discuss it?”

ANSWER:

It is true that there has been a misconception in the minds of many members of the Church, but a careful reading of the account will clear up these misconceptions. It is true that a hasty examination will leave the impression that there was a delay of about a year after the resurrection of the Lord before he visited the Nephites and Lamanites who were spared; but more careful attention to what is written shows that it was but a very short time after his resurrection that the Lord appeared to the people who were assembled near the temple in Bountiful. This false conclusion that practically a year had passed from the time of the resurrection until the Lord appeared on this hemisphere has been published and circulated

throughout the Church. Therefore we are justified in asking our brethren and sisters, and all who read the Book of Mormon, to pay close attention to the details of the story.

In 3 Nephi 8:5, we discovered that in the “thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.” The succeeding verses give much of the detail of the destruction which followed. This, evidently was at the time when Jesus was on the cross. Chapter 9 continues this story of destruction, and during this storm the voice of Jesus was heard in which he gave reasons for the great destruction, and he said:

“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? . . .

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning, I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.” (Ibid., 9:13, 15.)

All of this was while the great darkness covered the earth, and Mormon then through the ninth and tenth chapters commented upon the terrible destructions which had taken place. He closes the tenth chapter in these words:

“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

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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; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter. Therefore for this time I make an end of my sayings.” (*Ibid.*, 10:18-19; italics added.)

Here he declares that it was soon after the Savior's ascension into heaven that he appeared to the Nephites and Lamanites on this continent. And his ascension was the day of his resurrection after his appearance to Mary at the tomb, and before his appearance to the disciples that same day.

The reason why Mormon discontinued his account at this point is not stated. Evidently he was writing during the days of the great struggle with the Lamanites for the Nephite existence, and it is very possible that some sudden emergency had arisen so that he had temporarily to close his record. However, he continued his story where he broke off and states that there was a great multitude gathered together round about the temple in Bountiful. It seems perfectly clear that this great gathering was immediately after the close of the dreadful period of darkness. We read that the people were “marveling and wondering one with another,” and “were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.” (*Ibid.*, 11:1.) While they were marveling and pointing out to each other these changes, and conversing, they heard a voice. “It was

not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.” (*Ibid.*, 11:3.)

“And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.” (*Ibid.*, 11:8.)

The fact that the multitude had gathered at the temple and were pointing out to each other the great changes that had occurred is evidence that this was an event immediately following the resurrection of our Lord. If this event had occurred one year later, the multitude would have been perfectly familiar with these great changes, and they would not have been so awed by them. It was in great astonishment and wonder that they had gathered and were pointing out to each other what had occurred.

Moreover it is contrary to reason that Jesus would make the Nephites and Lamanites, who had been faithful, wait for one whole year before he would make his appearance and give them instruction in relation to the closing of the period in which the law of Moses was in force, and the period when the fulness of the gospel was ushered in.