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### The Timing of Christ's Appearance to the Nephites

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## Chapter 38

# THE TIMING OF CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO THE NEPHITES<sup>1</sup>

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*For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world. (Ether 12:7)*

Most casual readers of the Book of Mormon probably conclude that Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites immediately after the great cataclysm accompanying the crucifixion, when the thick vapor dissipated. This is understandable in view of the fact that the appearance of Christ is discussed right after the description of the great destruction. In 1 Nephi 12:4-8 and 2 Nephi 26:1-9 one also has the impression that Christ would appear right after the vapor of darkness dispersed from off the land.

This traditional view has been questioned by LDS scholars Sidney B. Sperry,<sup>2</sup> S. Kent Brown<sup>3</sup> and Jerome Horowitz.<sup>4</sup> Two

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<sup>1</sup> This was presented as a paper at the annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures & Allied Fields, October 1988, sponsored by the Society for Early Historic Archaeology, and was circulated as a preliminary report, with a reprint of S. Kent Brown's article (see below), in John W. Welch (ed.), "When Did Jesus Appear to the Nephites in Bountiful?" (Provo: FARMS Paper BTW-89, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Sidney B. Sperry, *The Book of Mormon Testifies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 294, note 4; repeated in his *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1968), 401, note 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Jesus among the Nephites: When Did It Happen?" in the C.E.S. *Religious Educators' Symposium on the New Testament* (15-17 August, 1984, BYU), which was republished as "When Did Jesus Visit the Americans?" in Brown's book, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo:

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alternatives have been proposed by them. The first is that Christ appeared soon after his ascension, following a forty-day ministry among his original twelve apostles in the Old World. The other is that he came to the Nephites at the end of the thirty-fourth year of the new Nephite calendar.<sup>5</sup>

The passage on which these theories are based reads, in part:

And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that . . . soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them. (3 Nephi 10:18)

Both Brown and Horowitz make a case for Jesus appearing to the Nephites toward the end of the thirty-fourth year of the Nephite calendar. Since the great destruction that accompanied the death of Christ took place “in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month” (3 Nephi 8:5), this theory suggests that his appearance did not occur until almost one year later.

A reexamination of the evidence these scholars provide suggests an alternative view much closer to the traditional one. In hopes of arriving at a correct understanding, each point of evidence

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BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998). Whenever Brown's position is mentioned hereafter, the reference is to the views expressed in that article.

<sup>4</sup> “Some Thoughts on 3 Nephi 10:18 Concerning the Time of Christ's Visit to the Nephites,” a paper submitted to the Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies (FARMS). Whenever Horowitz's position on this issue is mentioned hereafter, the reference is to the views expressed in that paper.

<sup>5</sup> The Nephites employed three different calendars during their history. The first counted years from Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. After the judgeship was instituted by King Mosiah, they reckoned time from that date. A new calendric system was instituted a few years after the signs of Christ's birth were seen in the heavens and was based on when those signs were manifest. Hence, the crucifixion took place in the thirty-fourth year of the new calendar (3 Nephi 8:2, 5).

## THE "ASCENSION"

that has been raised by the scholars who have looked at the question is discussed below.

### *THE "ASCENSION"*

Ascension Day has long been a Christian holy day, celebrating Christ's return to his Father after a forty-day post-resurrection ministry among his twelve apostles. However, it plays a very minor, almost non-existent role in the New Testament. One is led to wonder how much Christ's "ascension" in the Old World could have meant to Mormon (or to Nephi the disciple whose record he abridged).

Luke is our principal source for the "ascension" of Christ. In Luke 24:50-52, he tells how Jesus led the eleven to Bethany, on the eastern spur of the Mount of Olives, and rose to heaven. There can be no doubt from this account that the event took place on the day of Christ's resurrection (see verses 1, 13, 33, 36). Yet in Acts 1:3-12, also attributed to Luke, Christ is said to have risen from the Mount of Olives after spending some forty days with his disciples. Are there, then, two "ascensions" from the Mount of Olives?

Mark, after recounting the same basic story told in Luke 24 about the appearances of Jesus on the day of resurrection (Mark 16:9-14), recited Jesus' formal commission to the apostles (verses 15-18), then noted that he was received into heaven (verse 19). Consequently, his story supports the account in Luke 24, which has Christ ascending to heaven on the day of resurrection.

Matthew complicates matters by reciting the same commission noted in Mark, but saying that it was given atop a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). This event, of course, could not have taken place on the day of resurrection, when the apostles were in Jerusalem, not Galilee. Matthew makes no mention of an "ascension." Nor does John, whose account, being designed to show the divinity of Jesus, could have profited from the inclusion of the account of Jesus ascending to his Father.

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Luke, our source for the formal “ascension” of Jesus, is probably the least trustworthy of the gospel writers.<sup>6</sup> He is also our only biblical source for the so-called “forty-day post-resurrection ministry.” Mark implies (as did Luke in his earlier account) that Jesus rose to heaven from near Jerusalem on the day of resurrection. Matthew has him later appearing to his disciples in Galilee, finding agreement in his fellow-disciple John.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to the original question, we must concern ourselves with what “ascension” meant to Nephi the disciple or to Mormon. The “ascension” of Christ was, in fact, an essential doctrine of the pre-Christian Nephites, as we note in Mosiah 15:9; 18:2 and Alma 40:20. All three of these passages refer to Christ's saving power (for example, his role as intercessor before the throne of God), while two of them relate the ascension to his resurrection. This might imply that the event was to take place on the day of resurrection, as noted above.

Four centuries after Christ's visit to the New World, Moroni referred to the “ascension” of Christ (Moro 7:27). And, of course, we have several such references in the “Nephite Gospel,” some of them dealing with his ascension from the city of Bountiful

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<sup>6</sup> Though we cannot discuss the issue fully here, there is evidence that Mark's gospel became one of the primary sources of information for both Luke and Matthew. Luke generally accepted Mark's version without question, though in some cases he added details not found in Mark. Matthew, on the other hand, frequently corrected Mark, implying that he felt that Mark was in error. If we assume that the gospel of Matthew was really written by the apostle of that name, then we must accept his version as more authentic, for he was an eyewitness of most of the events he recorded. Mark and Luke are, at best, second- or third-generation Christians (despite Christian traditions that attempt to identify Mark with the young man in Gethsemane who ran away naked, and Luke with one of the two disciples who met the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus). When the gospels disagree, most Bible readers try to “wrest the scriptures” to bring them into “harmony” one with another. Others, noting that Mark and Luke generally agree in their mutual accounts, while Matthew differs, opt in favor of the majority—two-to-one—so Matthew (the only one to have known Jesus!) loses. The author prefers to treat Matthew as a first-hand account and Mark and Luke as secondary sources.

<sup>7</sup> This assumes that the gospel of John was written by the apostle of that name.

## THE "ASCENSION"

(3 Nephi 11:21; 18:39; 19:1; 26:15). Of particular interest is the note that it had been prophesied that Christ would show himself to the Nephites after his ascension into heaven (3 Nephi 11:12).

Following his delivery of the "sermon on the mount," Christ said that the Nephites had heard the things that he had taught before he ascended to his Father (3 Nephi 15:1). At no point did he mention anything about a 40-day ministry in the Old World preceding that ascension.

Horowitz may be correct in stating that Christ's "ascension" was a process, not an event, referring to his return to the presence of the Father after his sojourn on earth. That is, he returned to the divine throne to become an intercessor and a mediator for mankind after having wrought the atonement, as a number of passages indicate. However, Mormon's reference to the appearance of the Savior to the Nephites "soon after the ascension of Christ" (3 Nephi 10:18-19) implies that this "ascension" was a specific, earlier event. In this case, it likely refers to his return to the Father on the day of his resurrection, and not after a "forty-day" period. This would accord with his instructions (given on the day of resurrection) to Mary Magdalene to inform the apostles that he was ascending to his Father (John 19:17), followed by his appearance to them later that same day.

## *THE "ENDING" OF THE YEAR*

If Jesus appeared in the city Bountiful immediately after the three days of darkness, this would have occurred in the first month of the thirty-fourth year, not at the end of that year. Is Mormon then incorrect in 3 Nephi 10:18? This possibility has not been seriously considered, despite the fact that Mormon himself admitted that the records from which he made the abridgement may have been in error concerning their chronology:

And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record

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. . . And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away. (3 Nephi 8:1-2)

While Mormon refused the possibility of error in the recording of events, he did imply that the "reckoning of our time" may be incorrect.

In citing the passage in 3 Nephi 10:18, some scholars fail to note all the words from Mormon (e.g., "I will show unto you") and do not quote verse 19, in which Mormon promised that he would give "an account" of the ministry of Christ "hereafter." The two verses should be read in context:

And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you 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. (3 Nephi 10:18-19)<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that Mormon was about to conclude his work for a time when he promised to show how Jesus appeared to the Nephites. Some have believed that this has a bearing on the promise to show "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year" the appearance of Christ. Horowitz has noted two ways in which people have read this passage; there are those who believe that Christ appeared in the New World "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year," while others see this timing as indicative of when the historical entry was made. Horowitz supports the first of these

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<sup>8</sup> These verses are immediately followed by the preface to the Nephite "Gospel," which Mormon wrote when he took up the record again.

## THE "ENDING" OF THE YEAR

views. In response to the second, he wrote, "This part of the Book of Mormon is not the record written at the time or nearly a year later but is an abridgment written by Mormon centuries later."

But that is precisely the point. It is apparent from a study of Mormon's methodology that he took his material from *dated* Nephite annals. As evidence, note the following recitations of "years" for which he records no events:

And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth. (4 Nephi 1:1)

And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away. (4 Nephi 1:6)

And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away. (4 Nephi 1:14; see also Helaman 3:2)

There is no logical reason for Mormon to have listed year-numbers without recording events for them unless he was keeping a running tally of the annals he consulted. Third Nephi 10:18-19 may be just such an entry, one in which Mormon tells his readers that he will be recording the events through the end of the thirty-fourth year.

There are only two other Book of Mormon passages in which the expression "in the ending of the year" occurs. One of



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these is Helaman 3:1:<sup>9</sup>

And now it came to pass in the forty and third year of the reign of the judges . . . which affairs were settled in the ending of the forty and third year.

It is suggested that the meaning of this passage is that the “affairs” were settled “before the end” or “by the end” of the forty-third year. (The same meaning could be given to Alma 52:14.) If the Hebrew behind the passage reads *b<sup>e</sup>-sôp*, literally, “in the ending” (preposition *b* + infinitive of the root *spp*, “to come to an end”), it would be akin to the passage found in 2 Kings 2:1, where we have *b<sup>e</sup>-ha<sup>a</sup>lot YHWH <sup>et</sup> <sup>’</sup>elyāhū*, literally, “in the Lord’s bringing up Elijah.

Obviously, the events described after 2 Kings 2:1 did not take place “at the time” (or “when”) Elijah was taken to heaven, but prior to that event. This led the KJV translators to render it “when the Lord *would* take up Elijah.” But the text does not contain the grammatical elements to justify that translation. In view of the fact that the text then goes on to recount events which took place *prior* to his ascension, it appears that 2 Kings 2:1 uses an idiom that could be more correctly translated to read, “by the time the Lord took Elijah up” or “before the time the Lord took Elijah up.”

By the same token, 3 Nephi 10:18, where it reads “in the ending of the thirty and fourth year,” may have been using the same Hebrew idiom. In that case, Mormon would have meant “by the end of the thirty-fourth year” or “before the end of the thirty-fourth year” the events regarding Christ’s appearance to the Nephites occurred.

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<sup>9</sup> The other is in Alma 52:14.

## THE “SETTLED CONDITION” OF THE NEPHITES

### *THE “SETTLED CONDITION” OF THE NEPHITES*

Those who assert that Christ’s appearance to the Nephites was much later than his resurrection make certain basic assumptions about the “settled condition” of the Nephites that are not wholly supported by the textual evidence. These are:

1. The extent of the destruction was such that the people would have spent many months cleaning up and burying the dead.
2. The necessity of rescuing people from the rubble of destroyed buildings would have made it unlikely that the survivors could have been visited by Christ immediately after the destruction.
3. After the destruction, bread and wine, used in the sacrament when Jesus appeared, would not have been available.
4. Ether 12:7 clearly states “that Christ showed himself” unto the people only “after they had faith in him.” This requires a lapse of time after the destruction for faith to be established in the hearts of the people.

### *EXTENT OF THE DESTRUCTION*

The great destruction in 3 Nephi 8:12-18 occurred only in the “land northward,” while the events in verses 8-11 were in the “land southward.” Hence, it would be incorrect to assume that the following items relate to *all* of the land occupied by the Nephites (and Lamanites):

There were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceedingly great, and there were many of them who were slain. (3 Nephi 8:15)

And thus the face of the whole earth became

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deformed. (3 Nephi 8:17; this is the same statement made in verse 12 in reference to the "land northward": "the whole face of the land was changed.")

The highways were broken up (3 Nephi 8:13).

Samuel the Lamanite specifically named Zarahemla and Gideon as cities that would be destroyed unless the people repented (Helaman 13:12-15), adding, "Yea, and wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the *Nephites*, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in them" (Helaman 13:16).

At the time of the crucifixion, the voice announced the destruction of the cities of Zarahemla, Moroni, Moronihah, Gilgal, Onihah, Mocum, Jerusalem, Gadiandi, Gadiomnah, Jacob, Gimgimno, Jacobugath, Laman, Josh, Gad, and Kishkumen (3 Nephi 9:1-12). Note that several of the destroyed cities have Jaredite-sounding names and are hence probably to be associated with the robbers of the Gadianton band (compare Gadiandi, Gadiomnah),<sup>10</sup> whose first leader was, significantly, Kishkumen.<sup>11</sup> Verse 9 specifically states that the city of Jacobugath had been settled by the secret combination headed by Jacob, who had sought to become king.<sup>12</sup> Any tie to a Jaredite site implies that it was in the "land northward."

The voice from heaven declared to the survivors that they were being spared because they were "more righteous than" the people in the cities which were destroyed (3 Nephi 8:13). This is confirmed in other Book of Mormon passages. For example, the

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<sup>10</sup> There is evidence that the secret combinations may have continued from Jaredite times via the Mulekites, but the details are too lengthy to discuss here.

<sup>11</sup> The names Kishkumen, Gadianton, etc., are clearly Jaredite in form, as unpublished studies of Jaredite names have demonstrated.

<sup>12</sup> Robert F. Smith has, in private discourse with the author, suggested that the name of the city is a combination of "Jacob" and the Jaredite place-name "Ogath."

## EXTENT OF THE DESTRUCTION

Lord had told Nephi that he would not destroy those who believed in him, while the unbelievers would be destroyed by fire, tempest, earthquakes, and such, which are the very means by which the people died at the time of Christ's crucifixion (2 Nephi 6:14-15).

In 2 Nephi 26:1-9, Nephi tied the appearance of Christ to the destructions which, from their description, are the very ones that later took place at the time of the crucifixion. He stressed that it was the wicked who would perish in these cataclysms (verses 4-6) because they will have cast out the prophets and stoned and slain them (verses 3), which is precisely the reason Christ gave for the destruction of the wicked at the time of the crucifixion (3 Nephi 9:5, 7-11). The righteous, on the other hand, would obey the prophets and look for the signs; Christ would appear to them and heal them (2 Nephi 6:8-9).

And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved . . . And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness. (3 Nephi 10:12-13)

Since the destruction did not occur throughout all of the Nephite lands, there would be no necessity of rebuilding the temple and houses, or of rescuing people from the rubble. Indeed, the idea of such rescue efforts may be a modern concept related to earthquakes in which four- and five-story buildings (and taller) collapse and trap people beneath tons of rubble. It is much more likely that the Nephites lived in small houses, built with materials convenient to the geographical location of the city. Rescue efforts would probably have been minimal.

Brown notes that the Nephites from Bountiful knew to which cities they should go to bring others back to see the risen

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Savior on the second day of his visit. This, he suggests, is evidence that enough time had passed for them to learn which cities were destroyed and which survived. We need not so presume, however. The text makes it clear that the heavenly voice told them which cities had been destroyed and in what manner (3 Nephi 19:1-3). Moreover, in the short time remaining before the visit of the next day, the people of Bountiful could only have gone to *nearby* towns or villages, where there was more likelihood that they had relatives and friends.

In connection with the messengers sent from Bountiful to other towns, Brown notes that "the roads must have been repaired." Assuming that there was extensive damage to the earth in the area of Bountiful, the roads could have been destroyed. But since automobiles were not in use by the Nephites and there is no evidence that they used carts, we can assume that their principal mode of travel was on foot, which wouldn't have been severely affected by damaged roads.<sup>13</sup>

### *BURYING THE DEAD*

To assume that there was mourning for the loss of "loved ones" after the disaster presumes that some of the inhabitants of Bountiful were killed, which is, of course, possible. But there is evidence that the Book of Mormon peoples had clan and tribal structures.<sup>14</sup> Hence, people from Bountiful would not have had relatives scattered throughout the various Nephite/Lamanite settlements. Moreover, the Book of Mormon specifically states that the people stopped mourning soon after the destruction.

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<sup>13</sup> Only once in the Book of Mormon do we encounter a "chariot," in the story of Ammon and Lamoni. There is no evidence in the text or in archaeology to indicate that there was widespread use of such vehicles. Kings may have been the only ones to possess them.

<sup>14</sup> See the author's article, "Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Caste," in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (eds.), *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1990).

## BURYING THE DEAD

Upon hearing the voice of Jesus speaking through the thick darkness, “so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain” (3 Nephi 10:2). After three days, the darkness and trembling and noises disappeared (3 Nephi 10:9), and “the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy” (3 Nephi 10:10).

Horowitz suggests that the people could not have assembled at the temple until after a long period of burying the dead and mourning. That view fails to take into account some very important facts. First, the cities destroyed in the great cataclysm are mentioned by name (3 Nephi 8:10, 24-25; 9:3-10), but Bountiful, where Jesus appeared, is not among them. Significantly, its temple was spared. When Mormon tells us that the “more righteous” were saved, he specifically notes that these were the people who were not buried in the earth, drowned in the sea or burned by fire (3 Nephi 10:12-13). Since these fates are precisely what happened to the destroyed cities, the implication is that those cities were wicked, while the city of Bountiful and perhaps other places were righteous. It may therefore be presumed that it was only the people living in Bountiful who were gathered on the day of Jesus’ first visit, while others from nearby towns were invited to come the next day.

With this scenario in mind, it is unlikely that the people in Bountiful went out burying the dead of other cities. If clan or family members lived within close geographical proximity, the Nephites and Lamanites did not, as we moderns, have dead relatives to bury in various parts of the country. Moreover, if the cities listed were really swallowed up by the sea or the earth or destroyed by fire, it is unlikely that there were any remains to be buried. Even so, there are other examples in the Book of Mormon where the Nephites did not take time to bury their dead because of the vast numbers slain in war (Al 16:11; 28:11). It seems unreasonable, therefore, to expect that they would do so in the face of an even greater catastrophe.

***AVAILABILITY OF BREAD AND WINE.***

Horowitz and Brown argue that bread and wine could not have been available for the sacrament immediately after the destruction. Wine containers, they surmise, would have been destroyed in the cataclysm, and no one would have had time to make bread which, in most cultures, is made daily. But there are several reasons to think otherwise.

It has been assumed that their "kilns and ovens" were destroyed by the earthquakes, making it impossible to have fresh bread immediately after the crucifixion. This, however, presumes that the Nephites made bread in loaves as we do. The evidence is quite to the contrary. The bread of the ancient Near East (as among the Bedouin today) is a flat round bread, often unleavened, which is not baked, but cooked atop a flat piece of metal placed on rocks over an open fire. Its Mesoamerican equivalent is the tortilla. No ovens are needed for such bread. Even if they were used, the bread need not have been fresh; it could have been three days old and used out of necessity.

Furthermore, since there appears to have been less destruction in the city of Bountiful, we have no reason to believe that ovens and wine containers were destroyed.

***APPEARANCE AFTER THE PEOPLE HAD FAITH***

Citing Ether 12:7 as evidence that sufficient time to develop faith had passed between the crucifixion and Christ's appearance in Bountiful is also unwarranted. The passage in question is part of a discussion of faith:

For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, *it must needs be that some had faith in him*, for he showed himself not unto the world. (Ether 12:7, emphasis added.)

## APPEARANCE AFTER THE PEOPLE HAD FAITH

Read in its entirety, this passage can be seen as evidence that some, indeed, had faith in Christ. The Lord had told Nephi that he would not destroy those who believed in him, in a passage clearly referring to the destruction that would occur at the time of the crucifixion (2 Nephi 6:14-15). In another revelation, he noted that while the wicked would perish in the cataclysm, the righteous who obeyed the prophets would look for the signs and Christ would appear to them and heal them (1 Nephi 26:1-9). From these, it is evident that the survivors in Bountiful already had faith in Christ and had no necessity to wait until the end of the year for it to develop.

This is further demonstrated by events leading up to the time of Christ's coming. In year sixteen of the new (Christian) era, the Gadianton leader demanded the surrender of the government. The Nephites assembled to Zarahemla and Bountiful to defend themselves (3 Nephi 3). They defeated the Gadianton band (3 Nephi 1:4) and acknowledged that their victory resulted from their *repentance and humility* (3 Nephi 4:30-33). In the twenty-second year, *all* of the people came to have *faith in Christ* and the prophets (3 Nephi 5:1-3, 7). Four years later, all of the Nephites returned to their own lands with their families (3 Nephi 6:1).

In the twenty-ninth year, divisions began among the people because of riches (3 Nephi 6:10-13f). The next year, the Church was broken up in all the land except among a few Lamanites (3 Nephi 6:14). Prophets were sent to testify of several things, including the resurrection of Christ (3 Nephi 6:20). The judges secretly slew many of the prophets who testified of Christ (3 Nephi 6:23) (Christ mentions this as a reason for destroying the people caught in the cataclysm.) The wicked judges' friends and kindred gathered themselves together (3 Nephi 6:27) and entered into the covenants of the secret combinations (3 Nephi 6:28), wanting to establish a king over the land (3 Nephi 6:30). The chief judge was murdered (3 Nephi 7:1) and the people were divided into tribes by family, kindred and friends (3 Nephi 7:2), each tribe



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appointing its own leaders (3 Nephi 7:3, 14). Even the “more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked; yea, there were *but few righteous* among them” (3 Nephi 7:7). The secret combination named one Jacob as king, he having spoken against the prophets who testified of Jesus (3 Nephi 7:9-10). They fled to “the northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12), which is the area most affected by the destruction at the time of the crucifixion.

In the thirty-first year, Nephi preached repentance and *faith on Jesus Christ* (3 Nephi 7:16). *A few converted and believed in Jesus* (3 Nephi 7:21). In the beginning of the thirty-third year (verse 23), *many were baptized* (3 Nephi 7:26). It would appear, then, that by the time of the crucifixion, there was a new core of believers in Christ.

We can conclude, therefore, that the “high spirituality” of the people (noted by Horowitz) does not necessarily imply that a lengthy time for repentance had passed since the great cataclysm. After all, we read that only the more righteous were spared (3 Nephi 10:12-13). Moreover, it is generally accepted that in times of crisis people turn to God.<sup>15</sup>

## GATHERING AT THE TEMPLE

All twelve of those chosen as disciples were present in Bountiful at the time Jesus first appeared. Some see this as evidence that the people had gathered at the temple (such as for Passover) a year after the crucifixion. Indeed, the fact that the multitude is said to have “gathered” in the land of Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1; preface to 3 Nephi) implies that they had, in fact, assembled from nearby towns. But they could just as well have been celebrating the Passover at the time of Jesus’ death when they were caught by the cataclysms of nature and were, after three days, visited by the Savior.

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<sup>15</sup> During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, virtually all Israeli soldiers became “religious” overnight and there was a severe shortage of religious paraphernalia such as the *tallith*, *tefillin*, and prayer books.

## GATHERING AT THE TEMPLE

It is likely that the Nephites were, indeed, assembled for Passover, but the gathering of the people at the temple is not evidence that it was festival-time. The temple could have been a place of refuge from the storm. On the other hand, it is likely that only the truly righteous would be at the temple anyway. It is important to note that there were only 2,500 people at the temple on the first day of Jesus' visit (3 Nephi 17:25). It was not until these people had spread the word to other towns that the larger "multitude" is said to have assembled (3 Nephi 19:1-5). On the second day, they were so numerous that they had to divide into twelve groups.

### *SAMUEL'S PROPHECY*

Jerome Horowitz notes that Nephi forgot to add the fulfillment of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite to the Nephite record.<sup>16</sup> He reasons, with Brown, that Christ would not have chided him for his failure to "remember that this thing had not been written" (3 Nephi 23:12) if the event were only a day old.

A different interpretation, however, appears from the text of 3 Nephi. It was the day after his first appearance to the Nephites that Christ asked Nephi to bring their records to him for review (3 Nephi 23:7-8; see 3 Nephi 19:1-2). Third Nephi 19:2-3 indicates that, after Christ's first appearance, the events of the day were "noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark" and "even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus." As a competent scribe, Nephi most likely made a complete record of all that transpired that day while it was yet fresh in his

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<sup>16</sup> 3 Nephi 23:7-13 states that it was the *fulfillment* of Samuel's prophecy about the resurrection of others at the time Christ rose from the dead that had not been recorded. The modern summary of chapter 23 indicates that it was "the words of Samuel the Lamanite concerning the resurrection" that were added to the record. This implies that the words in Helaman 14:25 reflect the portion Nephi added to the record at that time. This implication is not consistent with 3 Nephi 23:11, which specifically identifies the words that were not recorded.

## THE TIMING OF CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO THE NEPHITES

memory and was being widely "noised abroad." That record would have been part of what Christ reviewed the next day. Finding that Nephi had missed one important point, namely the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy, the record was corrected. Given all that happened, it is not surprising that, in recording the events culminating in the first appearance of Christ to the Nephites, Nephi forgot this one thing. Had it been a longer period of time, as Brown and Horowitz suggest, it is likely that Nephi would have forgotten a greater number of things.<sup>17</sup>

### *ARGUMENTS FOR AN EARLY APPEARANCE*

Among the evidence sometimes elicited to indicate an appearance immediately after the three days of darkness the following statement should be included:

They were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place. And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death. (3 Nephi 11:2)

It seems likely that the people would not have been pointing out changes that had taken place if this event occurred nearly a year after the cataclysms following the crucifixion. The objection offered to this is that people had gathered from great distances for the first time in a year and hence the changes in the land of Bountiful were new to them. This is refuted by the fact that only 2,500 people were in Bountiful on the first day of Christ's appearance among them. Nor were people gathered in from "great distances" the next day, for it would have been impossible for them to have traveled so far overnight.

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<sup>17</sup> The author is indebted to Richard R. Hopkins for this insight.

## ARGUMENTS FOR AN EARLY APPEARANCE

The “calm” that prevailed at the temple in Bountiful is more likely attributable to the fact that this city did not suffer the fate of other wicked cities. (The very existence of the temple implies that the people were more righteous.) Changes in the land had been noted, to be sure. But here the text supports the view that the cataclysmic events had only recently taken place. Otherwise, why would the people be discussing a year-old event as though it were fresh and new?

After Christ’s appearances in Bountiful, he appeared once more to the disciples as they were traveling (3 Nephi 27:1-28:17). They then went about preaching, during which time there were various attempts to imprison and slay them. Notwithstanding, they were successful in establishing the Church. It is only *after* telling of these events that Mormon notes, “And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth” (4 Nephi 1:1). Hence, Christ’s appearance would seem to have been much earlier than the “ending” of the thirty-fourth year, since there was time for the disciples to begin their travels and preaching.

## CONCLUSION

The possibility remains that Jesus appeared to the people in Bountiful “soon” after his resurrection, possibly as early as the same or very next day. It is also possible that the appearance was as much as 40 to 50 days later, but there seems to be no basis for that argument and even less for the suggestion that it did not occur until as much as a year after his resurrection.