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Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness

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HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost. (3 Nephi 12:6)

Jesus uttered the words in 3 Nephi 12:6 to the Nephites assembled in the land of Bountiful when he appeared to them after his resurrection. One of the beatitudes from his sermon at the temple, they differ from the version of the sermon on the mount recorded in Matthew 5:6 by the addition of the words “for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

One critic of the Book of Mormon noted that this addition of the Holy Ghost makes no sense because the Greek word used in Matthew 5:6 refers to being “filled” or “satisfied” as when one eats food. (Ironically, the critic didn’t find it strange that Jesus should speak of eating “righteousness.”) But the Greek term is only a translation equivalent, since Jesus would have addressed his Jewish disciples in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew that had been adopted by the Jews in the fifth century B.C.

The Old Testament uses two different Hebrew verbs to denote being “filled” by eating. One of these is the root *ʕ*, which means to be satiated.¹ But the normal Hebrew word meaning “to fill” (root *ml*) is often used to denote being filled after eating.² Indeed, the two verbs are used in poetic parallelism in Ezekiel 7:19:

¹ Exodus 16:12; Leviticus 25:19; Deuteronomy 23:24; 26:12; 31:20; Nehemiah 9:25; Psalms 78:29; Proverbs 1:31; 25:16; 30:22; Lamentations 3:15; Ezekiel 39:20; Hosea 13:6; Haggai 1:6.

² Exodus 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Job 15:21; 20:23; 38:39; Psalms 17:14; 81:10; 107:9; Ecclesiastes 6:7; Isaiah 56:12; Jeremiah 51:34; Ezekiel 3:3; 23:33-34.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

“they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels.”

Explaining the emblems of the sacrament to the Nephites, Jesus said, “He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Nephi 20:8). But “when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit,” not with bread and wine (3 Nephi 20:9). This seems appropriate, since the promise to those who worthily partake of the sacrament is that they will “have his Spirit to be with them” (Moroni 4:3; 5:2).

On the first occasion when Jesus had blessed bread for the Nephites in the land of Bountiful, we read that “when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 18:5). He then specified that those who partook “shall have my Spirit” (3 Nephi 18:7). He blessed the wine “and [the disciples] did drink of it and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled” (3 Nephi 18:9). Jesus again stressed that the emblem of his blood was reserved for “those who repent and are baptized in my name,” who, by partaking, shall have my Spirit” (3 Nephi 18:11).

From this, we can see not only that the people were “filled” when partaking of the sacrament, but that Christ promised them his Spirit. The fact that he specified that the sacrament was to be administered to those who had been baptized stresses the fact that the ordinance is a renewal of the baptismal covenant by which we also have access to the Spirit (3 Nephi 19:13; 26:17). Alma the elder explained this in terms very reminiscent of the sacramental prayers when he asked his people,

Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of
your hearts, what have you against being baptized
in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

that ye have entered into a covenant with him,
that ye will serve him and keep his
commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit
more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:10)

Jesus told his Nephite disciples “that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled” (3 Nephi 27:16). He later specified what he meant by the word “filled”: “come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 30:2).

CONCLUSION

From this, we can see that there is a high degree of consistency in the Book of Mormon accounts of baptism and partaking of the sacrament. Hungering after righteousness, one must repent and participate in the covenantal rite, whereupon one can be “filled with the Holy Ghost.”