
3 NEPHI 8-14

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INTRODUCTION

The whole focus of the Book of Mormon is driving us to these chapters. 3 Nephi 11 is the pivot point, the climax of the book. For 600 years Nephites prophets have been preparing their people for it, and now it is finally here. But before they are ready for that appearance in chapter 11, they have to survive chapters 8-10. Many do not, and are killed in the cataclysmic events that changed Nephite and Lamanite society for hundreds of years.

This greatly helps explain why in our day we will need great and devastating events to prepare the Earth for his second coming.

Then we go through the Sermon at the Temple, similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, but with important changes that reflect not only an improved translation but the specific needs and situation of those at the temple in Bountiful.

A simple outline of the chapters in this lesson is:

| Topic | Reference | 1830 chapter |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| The Death of Jesus | 3 Nephi 8 | Book of Nephi 4 |
| The Voice of Christ | 3 Nephi 9 | |
| | 3 Nephi 10 | |
| The Appearance of Christ | 3 Nephi 11 | Book of Nephi 5 |
| The Sermon at the temple | 3 Nephi 12 | |
| | 3 Nephi 13:1-24 | |
| | 3 Nephi 13:25-34 | |
| | 3 Nephi 14 | Book of Nephi 6 |

3 NEPHI 8 THE DEATH OF JESUS

1 ***we know our record to be true.*** Mormon went to great lengths to express his confidence in Nephi's determination of the date of the next event. This gives us strong confidence in this date.

3 ***began to look with great earnestness for the sign.*** There's no indication that Samuel or anyone else provided an expected date for his death, unlike the sign of his birth. So for all they knew, it could be the next day or it could be 50 years later.

4 *great doubtings and disputations.* Many alive by this time did not remember the sign of his birth—they'd be born after it happened. Others doubted for different reasons. The point—again—is that it is taking a long time for the promised sign to appear, and many have simply reached the point where they don't believe any longer. Also different from the birth sign, there is no record of guidance from the Lord about when it will happen (“on this night” as in 3 Nephi 1:13).

5 *thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day.* Jesus died sometime shortly after the ninth hour (Matthew 27:46), or about 3:00 pm. If the signs of his death began at that same time in the New World, it would be early in the morning, probably just after sunrise. If the signs began with the crucifixion (as the darkness did in Jerusalem—see Matthew 27:45—which parallels the New Testament that has three hours of darkness while he hung on the cross), it would have been about three hours earlier, well before the sun came up. Like the residents of Chile recently, they would have been awakened by the quaking. Unlike Chile, though, there would have been much more than quaking.

Interestingly, the exactness of this day can also tell us how old Jesus was. Since the carefully tracked the sign of his birth, and Mormon is so adamant about the exactness of the record, this would indicate that Jesus was 34 years and 4 days old when he was crucified. It also means that he celebrated his 34th birthday by cursing a fig tree, giving several parables (such as the ten virgins, talents, and wedding feast) and teachings (including the widow giving her mite and the cry of “Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”), and giving the great sermon of the second coming, Matthew 24/Joseph Smith-Matthew.

6-7 *tempest...thunder...shake...lightnings.* Scholars have pointed out that the things recorded here are things that would accompany a volcanic eruption, including the tempests (high winds caused by the eruption), lightning (lightning often accompanies eruptions), and, of course, thunderous noise and shaking (Tvedtnes 1994). A volcanic event could also cause the darkness discussed in the text.

8-10 *Zarahemla...Moroni...Moronihah.* This trio of cities is mentioned twice (again in 9:3-5). They are not near each other, Zarahemla being in the river valley inland and Moroni near the coast. The location of Moronihah is unknown, as it is only mentioned here in these chapters. Why these three? Perhaps they were more prominent cities with larger populations.

12-18 *the whole face of the land was changed.* I have heard some use this scripture to say that even the shape of the continents changed as a result of these events, but Mormon is clear about the meaning of his phrase. He brackets it with 17 and 18, showing that the descriptions between 12 and 18 are what he means: “highways broken up”; “level roads spoiled”; “smooth places became rough”; “cities were sunk” and “burned” and “shaken” causing the building to fall down and the residents to die; people “carried away in the whirlwind”; “rocks were rent” and “seams and cracks” in the ground. None of this sounds like changing the shape of the continent or altering the geography of the land substantially, but rather like what happens during a severe earthquake.

21 *neither could there be fire kindled.* The darkness was so thick that they could not even light a fire. This has been noted with volcanic events where gasses from the eruption, such as sulfur or carbon dioxide (Ball 1993), deplete oxygen to the point that a fire cannot be lit.

24-25 *O that we had repented.* The mourning and wailing in the darkness included the regret that they had not repented sooner and thus perhaps spared the darkness and destruction.

3 NEPHI 9 THE VOICE OF CHRIST

1 ***there was a voice heard.*** During the dark three days, the people were astonished to hear a voice. It was the voice of Jesus Christ (v. 15) speaking after his crucifixion and before his resurrection—in essence, from the spirit world. This is the same time period that Peter speaks of, saying Jesus was preaching the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:18-20). Was the experience in spirit prison like the Nephites, where they heard his voice but didn't (yet) see him? Jesus' words comprise the remainder of the chapter.

3-10 Various cities were mentioned in these verses, some known from other Book of Mormon texts, most only mentioned here:

| V. | City | Location | Fate |
|----|------------|--|--|
| 3 | Zarahemla | On the Sidon river, the Nephite capital for many years | "burned with fire" |
| 4 | Moroni | By the east sea | "sunk in the depths of the sea" |
| 5 | Moronihah | ? | "covered with earth" |
| 6 | Gilgal | ? | "sunk...buried up in the depths of the earth" |
| 7 | Onihah | ? | "waters...come up in the stead thereof" |
| 7 | Mocum | ? | "waters...come up in the stead thereof" |
| 7 | Jerusalem | Near the waters of Mormon | "waters...come up in the stead thereof" |
| 8 | Gadiandi | ? | "sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof" |
| 8 | Gadiomnah | ? | "sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof" |
| 8 | Jacob | ? | "sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof" |
| 8 | Gimgimno | ? | "sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof" |
| 9 | Jacobugath | North | "burned with fire" |
| 10 | Laman | ? | "burned with fire" |
| 10 | Josh | ? | "burned with fire" |
| 10 | Gad | ? | "burned with fire" |
| 10 | Kishkumen | ? | "burned with fire" |

Many of these cities were destroyed because to "hide their iniquities and their abominations" from the Lord, and that "the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them." They cast out prophets and stoned them, which solicited the major destruction at this time.

Notice that Jesus himself claims the responsibility for their destruction: "I burned...I caused to be sunk...I covered...I caused to come up...I did send down fire." Even though he was either hanging on the cross thousands of miles away or leaving his mortal body to transition to the world of the spirits, he was in control of these events and claiming them as the ultimate judge of Israel.

13 ***return unto me, and repent...and be converted, that I may heal you.*** The call to return shows that they were there already once before. They need to repent—turn around and face a new direction—and be converted to the message of Christ. Doing this allows Christ to heal us, both

physically and mentally. The result of this interaction is healing. Many of the Nephites, in the middle of this destruction, certainly needed physical healing. But most of them needed even more to be healed in their souls. Christ heals us by taking away guilt, pain, and suffering as we rely on him, trust in him, make covenants with him, and strive to conform our lives to his will—yield to him.

15 ***Behold, I am Jesus Christ.*** We might note that he first said, “I am...” which could refer to pronouncements on the brass plates that his name was I AM (Exodus 3:14). So punctuated differently (and with one clarification), this could read, “Behold, [my name is] I AM, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

I created the heavens and the earth. Jesus is the creator, under the direction of the Father (see John 1:3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Mosiah 3:8; D&C 93:10; McConkie 1991, 4:41).

16 ***the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.*** Reading the New Testament, it’s clear that Jesus was acutely aware of Messianic prophecies in the scriptures, and did things very deliberately to fulfill them. Even so, he clearly orchestrated these events to fulfill the prophesies of Samuel and others so no one could be mistaken about the meaning of the signs. Every scripture concerning the coming of Christ was fulfilled.

17 ***to become the sons of God.*** Not speaking of our pre-mortal parentage but of the invitation to come unto Christ and become his begotten sons and daughters (Mosiah 5:7), to be reborn spiritually (1 Peter 1:23), changed to a new person as if we were new people (Mosiah 27:25).

19 ***burnt offerings shall be done away.*** Now the law of Moses was fulfilled. Now the people were to cease the sacrifices of that ancient code and follow a new law.

20 ***a broken heart and a contrite spirit.*** The new law is the old law, in a sense (Psalm 34:18; 51:17; 2 Nephi 2:7). From the beginning, the Lord required humility and submission. The difference now is that the sacrifice of animals was ended and the focus is solely on our hearts and desires.

20 ***and they knew it not.*** All of us have to go through the experience of being baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost, which transforms us, sanctifies us, and changes us. The Book of Mormon is full of examples where this happens quickly, sometimes in a single event or experience. But that is not typical. Here the Lord highlights what is surely more common—that the Lamanites went through this very transformation because of their faith in Christ, but “they knew it not.” Perhaps because the change was over time or not immediately perceptible, they didn’t see that they had actually been changed. But they had, and looking back 10 or 20 years can often help us see just how much we have changed and grown. This is a doctrine of patience but also one of encouragement; we are sometimes saved by God even though we don’t know it yet.

3 NEPHI 10 THE VOICE OF CHRIST, PART 2

2 ***silence in all the land for the space of many hours.*** As we can imagine, after the tremendous destruction, there was loud lamenting and weeping. But after Jesus’ voice, there was only astonished silence. Every person was caught up in contemplation of what they had just heard.

3 ***there came a voice again.*** After a break of several hours of continued darkness and silence, the voice was heard again, addressing what was surely the questions of many hearts.

4-7 The recorded words of the second speech are much shorter and focused on the topic of gathering, using the metaphor of a mother hen pulling her chickens under her broad wings for protection and nurturing. The verb tenses are worth noting:

- 4: “how oft have I gathered you” – he spoke first of his past efforts.
- 5: “how oft would I have gathered you” – he spoke next of his desire toward them.
- 6: “how oft will I gather you” – finally, he spoke of his future and ongoing efforts.

9 ***thus did the three days pass away***. It’s hard to imagine the situation: utter darkness, dead people all around you in the dark, not knowing where anyone else is, the earth continuing to shake, and the ‘tumultuous noises’ going on.

10 ***mourning was turned into joy***. As the light finally dawned on the third day and people realized that their lives were truly spared, they gave thanks to the Lord.

14 ***the fulfilling of the prophecies***. After the second coming of Christ, it will likely be quite obvious to read the words of ancient and modern prophets and see their fulfillment in the events of the last days. Some may even see that in the middle of the events. But the full impact and understanding of the experience will surely be in retrospect, after Jesus sits on the throne and rules the world as King of Kings.

18 ***the ending of the thirty and fourth year***. The visit of the resurrected Lord to the Nephites was not an immediate event. The signs of his death began on the fourth day of the first month. His visit, described in the next chapter, was not until the end of that same year. Thus it may have been nearly a year between the signs of his death and his appearance at Bountiful.

19 ***I make an end of my sayings***. Mormon appears to pause here, perhaps even take a longer break as he gears up for the next section of the text—the visit of Christ to the land of the Nephites, the fulfillment of prophecy, the climax of the book.

3 NEPHI 11 THE APPEARANCE OF CHRIST

Heading ***Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi***. Part historical account, part testimony, this short heading affirms what prophets for years have said and anticipated, and which Mormon knew to be true, not because he had been there but because he knew at least four of them who were.

1 ***a great multitude gathered together...in the land Bountiful***. After the destruction, people began to rebuild and resettle. Perhaps Bountiful was an area where the destruction was less, for some reason and so was a good place to gather. Bountiful also included a temple, and Welch suggested that this was perhaps a formal convocation, a gathering at the temple as in the days of Benjamin (Mosiah 2-6) for a feast or celebration.

2 ***conversing about this Jesus Christ***. The signs of his death and his voice heard throughout the land were still the main topics of conversation even after many months.

3 ***they heard a voice***. Quiet at first and not understandable until the third time, this voice was different than last time. It was not Jesus lamenting the destruction. Instead it was the voice of the Father, introducing his Son.

7 **Behold, my Beloved Son.** Jesus is beloved, he pleases the Father, and he has glorified the Father's name—the first time the Father makes that pronouncement, now that Christ has fulfilled his mission. The Father gives us a critical commandment: “hear ye him.”

10-11 **I am Jesus Christ.** The Savior introduced himself to the crowd just as he had in the days of darkness. Then he added to the introduction: he is “the light and the life of the world”; he has “glorified the Father,” a second witness to the Father's words in v. 7; he has “suffered the will of the Father” in accomplishing that for which he was foreordained from the beginning of time.

12 **they remembered that is had been prophesied.** They seemed to have forgotten the prophecies that Jesus was going to appear to them for whatever reason. Perhaps the tremendous effort required to rebuild their cities and get their lives back in order, or perhaps the experience they already had in the first month seemed sufficient as a manifestation, and they did not expect a personal appearance. Whatever the reason, seeing him there caused at least some of them to suddenly remember what the prophets had said.

14 **Arise and come forth.** Jesus invited them personally to bear testimony of his identity by seeing and touching the signs of his death and sacrifice in his resurrected body.

15 **going forth one by one.** We learn later that the size of the crowd was about 2,500 (3 Nephi 17:25), yet he ministered unto them one at a time. If each person only took 5 seconds with Jesus, this activity would take about 3-1/2 hours.

17 **Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!** ‘Save us now, we pray!’ This is similar to the cry of the people after they were saved from the Gadiantons in 3 Nephi 4:31-33. Only this time they are pleading for salvation and praising God with the man in front of them that caused it to happen.

18 **he spake unto Nephi.** This is the first time we have heard specifically of Nephi for several chapters. The verse says a lot about him. He was not at the front of the line, nor was he promoting himself in anyway as the prophet and leader of the people. Rather, he was “among the multitude,” waiting his turn like everyone else. But Jesus knew him and called him out specifically.

19 **did kiss his feet.** In a great sign of devotion and humility that was surely not lost on the crowd who looked to Nephi as their leader, he bowed himself to the ground and kissed the scarred feet of his Savior.

21 **I give unto you power.** In the hearing of everyone, the risen Lord commissions Nephi to act in his name.

22 **the Lord called others.** Eleven other men were likewise called out of the crowd by him who knows our hearts, and given the same commission as Nephi.

23 **On this wise shall ye baptize.** There had apparently been “disputations” among the people previously about baptism or the method of baptism and other doctrines (v. 28). The Lord carefully described everything about the ordinance of baptism so those disputations will end. They were to take those who are repentant, stand in the water with them (v. 23), call them by name (v. 24) and then say a prayer very similar (but not identical) to the one we use in the Church today (v. 25). Then they were to immerse them (v. 26).

32-39 **this is my doctrine.** Jesus declared that his doctrine was that of the Father, and it was to call everyone to repent, to be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. His disciples were to “become as a little child” at the time of baptism. To become as a little child is to fully submit ourselves to the Father (see Mosiah 3:19). When we become the sons and daughters of God, we are adopted by him and are no longer slaves to sin and Satan, but heirs to all that the Father has (Galatians 4:1-7; Romans 8: 14-17).

39 **buildeth upon my rock.** Jesus taught that those who accept this teaching are built on a solid foundation—a rock, while those who do not are built on sand. This saying introduces the next three chapters which end with the same theme—building on the rock.

3 NEPHI 12 SERMON AT THE TEMPLE I

The next three chapters constitute what has been named ‘The Sermon at the Temple’ (Welch). Similar but different in important ways to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Savior gave this remarkable sermon to the Nephites at the temple. The themes in the Sermon are temple themes, involving covenants, ordinances, obedience, sacrifice, change of behavior, prayer, and entering into the presence of God. It is interesting to note that we break the text into chapters and verses that match Matthew 5-7, thanks to the efforts of Orson Pratt. But in the original text, our 3 Nephi 11-14 is just two chapters, and the break is not where you would expect, but in the middle of chapter 13, though at a place that makes perfect sense in the context of the Sermon.

A comparison of this Sermon with Matthew 5-7, the Joseph Smith Translation of the same chapters, and the parallel passages in Luke is a valuable exercise to appreciate the unique parts of the message to each audience and in each setting. This commentary will thus concentrate (but not only discuss) those aspects that are unique in 3 Nephi.

1 **he stretched for his hand unto the multitude.** More than in Matthew, 3 Nephi gives us direct information about the audience of various parts of the Sermon. The material at the end of chapter 11 was clearly directed to Nephi and the other ordained leaders. Now at the beginning of 12, he turned his attention to the crowd to teach them. He will redirect to the leaders in 13:25, then back to the multitude in 14:1.

Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed. Jesus endorsed his ordained ministers to the entire group, adding a new beatitude to the ones in Matthew.

2 **blessed are they who shall believe.** Adding another new one, Jesus says that those who believe the words of the crowd who are witnesses, and who are baptized and forgiven of sins shall also be blessed.

3 **the poor in spirit who come unto me.** It’s not enough just to be humble; that humility needs to drive us to the Savior to be truly blessed.

6 **they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.** The Matthew text makes it sound like the hungry will be fed, but Jesus is clear here that they are fed spiritually.

13 **I give unto you to be the salt of the earth.** This is a commandment—to be like salt which is useful in its pure form, but completely useless in a corrupted or contaminated form. The JST

account of this teaching in Luke points to the salt as a metaphor for those who believe the prophets and are thus confirming the fulfillment of the prophecies.

14 ***I give unto you to be the light of this people.*** Not “a” light but “the” light. This group of 2,500 souls who are personal witnesses of the resurrection are to bear that testimony broadly and to live according to the covenants he is giving them, thus lighting the way for the rest of the people.

19 ***I have given you the law and the commandments.*** This unique verse teaches that Jesus is the giver of the law which he has now fulfilled, and that he calls on us to believe, repent, and be humble before him.

20 ***keep my commandments.*** To be saved in Jesus’ kingdom, obedience is required, an key part of the covenant.

22 ***whosoever is angry with his brother.*** Jesus did not include the KJV phrase “without a cause.” This is a late addition to NT manuscripts and is generally excluded from modern translations, a practice which began long after Joseph Smith’s day.

24 ***come unto me with full purpose of heart.*** Jesus taught that we cannot come to him “with full purpose of heart” unless we are also forgiving of others and are fully reconciled to them.

26 ***paid the uttermost senine.*** Changed to Nephite money (or weight of money).

29 ***suffer none of these things to enter into your heart.*** The higher law includes acts of obedience but focuses more on the root cause of disobedience—the state of our heart. This is reflected in the next several verses and examples.

deny yourselves of these things. Discipleship to Christ is about denying the world and accepting the blessings of God promised to those who are willing to “take up your cross.”

31 ***It hath been written.*** In most of the examples given, the Matthew language (“it hath been said”) is changed in 3 Nephi to “it hath been written.” This may reflect the great feeling the Nephites had toward the written word, with the brass plates and other scriptures.

46-47 ***Old things are done away, and all things have become new.*** Post-resurrection, this declaration can be definitively made. In Matthew 5-7, that fulfillment was still future and the law of Moses still in effect.

48 ***I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father.*** Another post-resurrection opportunity—during his mortal life, he was not yet ‘perfect’ or complete because he had not fully completed his mission. Now he can be the example of perfection like the Father.

3 NEPHI 13 THE SERMON AT THE TEMPLE II

1 ***he should do alms unto the poor.*** Clarifying what the giving of alms is for, Jesus advocated for generosity toward the poor but in a private way, not for personal attention.

7 ***use not vain repetitions.*** In the New Testament context, this phrase may sometimes be misunderstood. Jesus was not condemning so much the repetition of certain phrases in our prayers—though certainly absent-mindedly saying the same phrases again and again does not

reflect a sincerity or thoughtful approach to prayerful communication. But the phrase “vain repetitions” relates to the practice of people in that day going from temple to temple, asking for the same blessing from all the various gods. They did this because they could never be sure which of the many gods would actually bless them, if any. Thus they were in vain repeating the same request to empty sources who could not hear nor answer them. In contrast, Jesus counseled his disciples to pray simply and sincerely to one God, the Father, in Jesus’ name.

25 **he looked upon the twelve.** Having taught the multitude, Jesus turned now just to the chose twelve, though the rest of the group could apparently still hear him giving them this counsel. As noted above, this was a chapter break in the original manuscript and the 1830 Book of Mormon. The counsel he gave them was thus directed at those fully engaged in ministry. The rest of us need to continue to toil and labor and worry about the morrow.

28 **why take ye thought for raiment?** John Welch sees this comment in a temple context, noting that the clothing needed to serve in the kingdom is provided. There are many layers to this meaning even beyond the temple. For example, the word ‘atonement’ in the Old Testament is related to ‘covering’ our sins.

3 NEPHI 14 THE SERMON AT THE TEMPLE III

1 **he turned again to the multitude.** Clarifying the audience, this verse lets us know that Jesus had concluded speaking only to the twelve and now spoke to the larger group.

24 **a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.** Looping back to 3 Nephi 11:39-40, Jesus concludes this first section of his sermon to the Nephites with the story of the wise and the foolish men, admonishing us to build on the rock, the foundation of Christ himself who calls us to repent, make sacred covenants, live according to those covenants, and thus be justified—forgiven—and sanctified—changed to a new person—through his Atonement.

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