

Introduction

In the time of Moses the children of Israel were stiffnecked and hard of heart. As a result, they lost the privilege of living the fulness of the higher law (see Mosiah 13:29–31). Instead, along with portions of the higher law that they were still allowed to live, the law of Moses (the lesser law) was added to help them come to Christ (see D&C 84:18–27). After His Resurrection, Jesus Christ taught the Nephites that the law of Moses was fulfilled in Him (see 3 Nephi 12:17–18). He taught that “old things had passed away” (3 Nephi 15:2–4) and that He is “the law, and the light” to follow (3 Nephi 15:9).

As you read 3 Nephi 15–17, notice the difference between the unbelieving Jews and the teachable Nephites. Contrast truths the Savior withheld from those at Jerusalem with the remarkable revelation given in the Americas. Observe that comprehending His teachings requires faith, pondering, and prayer. You will realize the tremendous worth of paying that price as you read about the indescribable joy experienced by these more faithful disciples and the miraculous experiences of their believing children.

Commentary

3 Nephi 15:1–10. Jesus Christ Gave and Fulfilled the Law of Moses

- Earlier Book of Mormon prophets taught that the law of Moses would eventually be fulfilled. Nephi, Jacob, and Abinadi all prepared their people to eventually accept the ending of the law of Moses. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles identified the reasons the Nephites were able to give up the old law and embrace the new:

“Clearly the Nephite congregation understood this more readily than did the Jewish world, partly because the Nephite prophets had been so careful to teach the transitional nature of the law. Abinadi had said, ‘It is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses *as yet*; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when *it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.*’ [Mosiah 13:27.] In that same spirit Nephi emphasized, ‘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 25:27; italics added.]

“That kind of teaching—a caution against hardening one’s heart against Christ in ignorant defense of the law of Moses—could have served (and saved) so many living in the Old World then and living throughout the world now” (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 156–57).

3 Nephi 15:2–8. The Law of Moses and the Higher Law

- Jesus said that “old things had passed away, and that all things had become new” (3 Nephi 15:3). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained: “It is crucial to understand that the law of Moses was overlaid upon, and thereby included, many basic parts of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which had existed before it. It was never intended to be something apart or separated from, and certainly not something antagonistic to, the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Its purpose was never to have been different from the higher law. Both were to bring people to Christ” (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 147). Thus Jesus could say, “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” (3 Nephi 15:8).

For more information regarding the Nephites and the law of Moses, see commentary for Mosiah 13:27–35 (p. 152).

3 Nephi 15:5–8. The Covenant Is Not All Fulfilled

- For a discussion of what Jesus meant when He said, “I do not destroy the prophets” (3 Nephi 15:6), see commentary for 3 Nephi 12:17–20, 46–47 (p. 305).

What did Jesus mean when He said, “The covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled”? (3 Nephi 15:8). Jehovah made a covenant with Abraham anciently. Abraham was promised (1) eternal posterity, (2) a land that would eventually be the celestial kingdom, and (3) God’s priesthood power. These promises were also made to Abraham’s descendants (see D&C 132:30–31) and will be fulfilled in the future.

3 NEPHI 15:9*What is necessary to receive eternal life?***3 Nephi 15:11–13. “This Is the Land of Your Inheritance”**

- Each of the twelve tribes of Israel was assigned an area of land for their inheritance in the land of Canaan. In addition to what they received in the Holy Land, the descendants of Joseph were also promised the land of the Americas as part of their inheritance. The Savior told the twelve Nephite disciples that they and their people were “a remnant of the house of Joseph” (3 Nephi 15:12) and “this is the land of your inheritance” (v. 13).

- Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the land of inheritance as follows: “Another name for America, authorized by the Book of Mormon, is the Land of Joseph, referred to by the Patriarch Jacob in blessing his twelve sons (Gen. 49:22–26), and by the Prophet Moses in his farewell benediction upon the twelve tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:13–15). Jacob’s allusion to Joseph as ‘a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall, was fulfilled in the migration of Lehi and his companions from Asia to America over the Pacific Ocean. It is hardly necessary to add, that one of the main features of these western continents are those mighty mountain ranges, the Andes and the Rockies, well termed by the Hebrew Patriarch ‘the everlasting hills,’ nature’s depositories for ‘the precious things of the earth’—gold, silver, and other minerals—and for ‘the precious things of heaven’—the sacred records already discovered and others that are yet to come forth” (“The Book of Mormon: Historical and Prophetic Phases,” *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1927, 944–45).

3 Nephi 15:17. “One Shepherd”

- Jesus Christ is often called the Good Shepherd (see D&C 50:44; John 10:7–18; Alma 5:38–60; Helaman 7:18). The metaphor of the shepherd and his relationship to his sheep connotes personal care

and concern. One modern commentator spoke of the personal care involved in the work of the shepherd:



“By day and by night the shepherd is always with his sheep. . . . This was necessary on account of the exposed nature of the land, and the presence of danger from wild animals and robbers. One of the most familiar and beautiful sights of the East is that of the shepherd leading his sheep to the pasture. . . . He depends upon the sheep to follow, and they in turn expect him never to leave them. . . .

“. . . As he is always with them, and so deeply interested in them, the shepherd comes to know his sheep very intimately. . . . One day a missionary, meeting a shepherd on one of the wildest parts of the Lebanon, asked him various questions about his sheep, and among others if he counted them every night. On answering that he did not, he was asked how he knew if they were all there or not. His reply was, ‘Master, if you were to put a cloth over my eyes, and bring me any sheep and only let me put my hands on its face, I could tell in a moment if it was mine or not’” (George M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs* [n.d.], 33, 35).

• Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking about this personal care said:

“Jesus is so personal in His shepherding and tutoring! . . .

“. . . Jesus knows and cares for each individual; He watches carefully over the seemingly smallest of things” (*That Ye May Believe* [1992], 204–5).

3 NEPHI 15:18

What is the relationship between belief and understanding? How does this apply to your study of the gospel?

3 Nephi 16:1–3. Other Sheep

• Verses 1–3 of 3 Nephi 16 make it clear that there are “other sheep” besides the Nephites and that the Savior planned to visit them. We are told in 3 Nephi 17:4 that these other sheep are the “lost tribes of Israel.” The Good Shepherd watches over all His flocks, caring for them as needed.

3 Nephi 16:3–13. The Gathering of Israel

• For more information on the gathering of Israel, refer to “The Gathering of Israel” in the appendix (p. 416).

3 Nephi 16:4–7. The Book of Mormon Will Bring Us to a Knowledge of Christ

• President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained that a major purpose of the Book of Mormon is to help bring us to a knowledge of Jesus as the Christ:

“The central purpose of the Book of Mormon is its testament of Jesus Christ. Of more than 6,000 verses in the Book of Mormon, far more than half refer directly to Him.

“So, ‘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’ (2 Nephi 25:26)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 8; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 8–9).

3 Nephi 16:4–13. Who Are the Gentiles?

• The majority of references in the Book of Mormon to the word *gentile* are references to anyone who is not a Jew. A Jew was anyone who was a descendant of Judah and anyone from the land of Jerusalem—like the children of Lehi. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained that by this definition many Gentiles did have the blood of Israel: “In this Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, the gospel came first to the Gentiles and then is to go to the Jews. [See D&C 19:27.] However, the Gentiles who receive the gospel are in the greater part, Gentiles who have the blood of Israel in their veins” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 4:39).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described this as well: “We have heretofore identified the Jews as both the nationals of the kingdom of Judah and as their lineal descendants, all this without reference to tribal affiliation. And we have said, within this usage of terms, that all other people are Gentiles, including the lost and scattered remnants of the kingdom of Israel in whose veins the precious blood of him whose name was Israel does in fact flow. Thus Joseph Smith, of the tribe of Ephraim, the chief and foremost tribe of Israel itself, was the Gentile by whose hand the Book of Mormon came forth, and the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who have the gospel and who are of Israel by blood descent, are the Gentiles who carry salvation to the Lamanites and to the Jews” (*The Millennial Messiah* [1982], 233).

3 Nephi 17:1–3. “Ponder upon the Things Which I Have Said”

• Some students of the gospel may feel that simply reading the scriptures or listening to the words of the prophets is adequate. The Savior, however, directed the Nephites to not only listen to His words but to “go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said” (3 Nephi 17:3). This, He taught, would help them understand and prepare their “minds for the morrow” when He would return (v. 3). This is in harmony with other passages of scriptures that command us to ponder what we read, see, and hear. Moroni listed pondering as one of the essential

features in gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon (see Moroni 10:3). Nephi told his readers, “My soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard” (2 Nephi 4:16).

- President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) of the First Presidency described the power of pondering:

“As I have read the scriptures, I have been challenged by the word *ponder*, so frequently used in the Book of Mormon. The dictionary says that *ponder* means ‘to weigh mentally, think deeply about, deliberate, meditate.’ . . .

“*Pondering* is, in my feeling, a form of prayer. It has, at least, been an approach to the Spirit of the Lord on many occasions. Nephi tells us of one such occasion:

“‘For it came to pass,’ he wrote, ‘after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat *pondering* in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceeding high mountain. . . .’ (1 Ne. 11:1. Italics added.)

“Then follows Nephi’s account of the great vision he was given by the Spirit of the Lord, because he believed the words of his prophet father and had such a great desire to know more that he pondered and prayed about them” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1973, 117–18; or *Ensign*, July 1973, 90).

- Pondering the things of God helps to keep us from becoming complacent in our approach to Him. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained the dangers of not regularly internalizing the gospel in our lives: “The worshipers at Rameumptom so ritualized their religion that they never spoke of their God ‘again until they had assembled themselves together’ a week later at the holy stand. (Alma 31:23.) Note the contrast in how Jesus instructed His followers on this hemisphere: [3 Nephi 17:3.] See how the Master focuses on the family—on pondering, praying, preparing together! It should not surprise us, if we routinize our religion and do not assign the highest priority to the kingdom, that our hearts and minds will quite naturally drift to other things” (*Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* [1977], 30–31).

3 NEPHI 17:2–3

What did the Savior send the Nephites home to do? What are some of the benefits that come to us as we pray and ponder?

3 Nephi 17:4. Scattered Israel Is Not Lost unto the Father

- Although the scattered tribes of Israel are lost to the knowledge of man, they are not lost to God. He knows where they are, “for he knoweth whither he hath taken them” (3 Nephi 17:4). His knowledge of them and the Savior’s visit to the lost tribes of Israel suggests the possibility that we will someday have access to other accounts of Jesus’s visits to His sheep.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: “Lost books are among the treasures yet to come forth. Over twenty of these are mentioned in the existing scriptures. Perhaps most startling and voluminous will be the records of the lost tribes of Israel (see 2 Nephi 29:13). We would not even know of the impending third witness for Christ except through the precious Book of Mormon, the second witness for Christ! This third set of sacred records will thus complete a triad of truth. Then, just as the Perfect Shepherd has said, ‘My word also shall be gathered in one’ (v. 14). There will be ‘one fold and one shepherd’ (1 Nephi 22:25) in a welding together of all the Christian dispensations of human history (see D&C 128:18)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 70; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 52).

3 Nephi 17:5–10. Jesus Healed and Blessed the People

- Evidence of the great compassion Jesus felt for the people, His brothers and sisters, is shown in 3 Nephi 17:5–10. He asked for the sick to be brought to Him, and He healed them all. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland focused on the power of this spiritual moment: “Calling for the sick and the blind, the halt and the maimed, the leprous and the withered, those that were ‘afflicted in any manner,’ Christ asked that they be brought forward that he might heal them. . . . Sensing with divine insight that these people desired to behold the miracles he had

performed for their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, and recognizing instantly that their faith was sufficient for them to be healed, Christ responded to each need within the multitude, ‘and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.’ In response to such an outpouring of compassion and mercy, all of the congregation, the healed as well as the whole, did ‘bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come . . . did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.’ [3 Nephi 17:5–7, 9–10.]” (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 268–69).

3 Nephi 17:11–24. “Behold Your Little Ones”

- While serving as the general president of the Primary, Sister Michaelene P. Grassli referred to the capacity of children for spiritual experiences:

“It’s significant to me that . . . the Savior gave the most sacred teachings only to the children, then loosed their tongues so they could teach the multitude. (See 3 Ne. 26:14.)

“Is it any wonder that following the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, they lived in peace and righteousness for two hundred years? Because of miraculous instructions, blessings, and attention they and their children received, righteousness was perpetuated by their children’s children for many generations.



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“Let us not underestimate the capacity and potential power of today’s children to perpetuate righteousness. No group of people in the Church is as receptive to the truth” (“Behold Your Little Ones,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 92–94).


- Church members in Chile had a similar experience when President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) visited them: “One of the greatest expressions

of love for children that I have seen occurred when I was serving as a stake president in Chile. President Spencer W. Kimball visited Chile for an area conference. Members of the Church from four countries met together in a stadium that held about fifteen thousand people. We asked President Kimball what he would like to do after the conference. His eyes full of tears, he said, ‘I would like to see the children.’ One of the priesthood leaders announced over the microphone that President Kimball would like to shake the hands or bless each of the children in the stadium. The people were astounded—there was a great silence. President Kimball greeted about two thousand children one by one, crying as he shook their hands or kissed them or put his hands on their heads and blessed them. The children were very reverent and looked at him and cried too. He said he’d never felt this kind of spirit in his life. It was a tremendous moment in the lives of all the Church members there” (Janet Peterson and Eduardo Ayala, “Friend to Friend,” *Friend*, Mar. 1996, 6–7).

Points to Ponder

- What do you think is meant by the Savior’s statement, “Behold, I am the law, and the light”? (3 Nephi 15:9).
- Why do you think Jesus Christ told the people to ponder the things that He taught and to ask Heavenly Father for understanding? Why was this process important in preparing them for His next visit?
- What importance have you placed upon understanding the covenants in the Book of Mormon?

Suggested Assignments

- Share with a friend or family member an explanation of what the “other sheep” mentioned in John 10:16  refers to.
- Discuss with a friend what it might have been like to be one of those who witnessed the marvelous miracles and events described in 3 Nephi 15–17.