

General Comments on 3 Nephi 17-18

Jesus' intent is to leave, but the people want Him to stay. He relents and manifests the Messianic characteristic of intercession. In the Old Testament the Messiah is presented as one who protects and spares his people from pain and suffering (cf. Isa. 10:1-10), as well as one who takes other's pain, suffering, and sin upon himself (cf. Isa. 53). Here we see Jesus healing the sick and lame (17:7-10) and obtaining particular blessings for the little children (17:11-25).

Note Jesus' attention is turned to the most vulnerable people present, the physically infirm and small children. These inspire the most compassion in him. The Lord has always had compassion on the vulnerable and downtrodden in society, cf. Exod. 22:22, Deut. 14:29, Ps. 68:5, Prov. 22:22, Isa. 1:17, Isa. 35:6, Isa. 49:13, Matt. 11:5, James 1:27, D&C 58:11.

Comments on 3 Nephi 17

1 BEHOLD, now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked round about again on the multitude, and he said unto them: Behold, my time is at hand. 2 I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time. 3 Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again. 4 But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

v1-4 Jesus announces it is time for him to leave (v. 1) because he has to go and visit the other remnants of Israel to teach them as well (v. 4). He recognizes the people cannot grasp all of what he has just taught them (cf. 15:11-16:20) concerning the redemption of Israel (v. 2). So, he tells them to think about what he has taught them so far and to pray for understanding, so that when he comes tomorrow, they will be prepared (v. 3).

When Jesus returns the next day he gives an even longer and more complicated discourse on the redemption of Israel, cf. 20:10-26:5.

5 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them. 6 And he said

unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. 7 Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. 8 For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.

9 And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him. 10 And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.

v5-10 After Jesus tells them he needs to leave, the people don't want him to go, so much so they are weeping (v. 5). Jesus is touched with compassion for the people (v. 6), and offers to stay a little longer to heal their sick and lame (v. 7) because he perceives they want him to perform those miracles which were predicted the Messiah would perform (v. 8, cp. Mosiah 3:5).

The healthy people, presumably family members, assist the sick and lame so they can approach Christ and he heals them (v. 9). After they are healed those healed as well as those who assisted them fall down and worship Christ in gratitude for the healings performed (v. 10).

11 And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought. 12 So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him. 13 And it came to pass that when they had all been brought, and Jesus stood in the midst, he commanded the multitude that they should kneel down upon the ground.

14 And it came to pass that when they had knelt upon the ground, Jesus groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel. 15 And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him. 16 And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; 17 And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard

Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father. 18 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome. 19 And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.

20 And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full. 21 And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. 22 And when he had done this he wept again; 23 And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones. 24 And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

25 And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children.

v11-25 Jesus next turns his attention to the little children among the crowd by summoning all of them to him (v. 11). The crowds make way for the children, and those who cannot make it up on their own are carried up and set down in his presence (v. 12).

After all of the children are with him he tells the surrounding adults to all kneel (v. 13). After they all kneel, Jesus expresses his concern over the wickedness of the people of Israel (v. 14), and then kneels down and prays to the Father for these people in words so great and overwhelming they cannot be written down (v. 15-17).

After praying Jesus rises up, but the people cannot because they are overpowered by his prayer and their joy overcomes them (v. 18). Jesus tells them to stand (v. 19), and they are presumably given divine support and strength so they may stand, and they do. Jesus then praises them for their faith, and tells them his joy is full (v. 20). His emotions are so strong He weeps. He picks up and blesses the children individually, and afterwards is again overcome with joy and weeps (v. 21-22).

He then speaks to the adults, and tells them to witness the little children (v. 23) as the heavens open and angels come down to minister to the little children (v. 24). All present, some 2500 people, witness the event (v. 25).

In this section of text Jesus goes from being "troubled because of the wickedness...of Israel" (v. 14) to saying "my joy is full" (v. 20) after praying for this Nephite remnant. His general concern over Israel's present scattered and apostate condition is allayed by the good condition of this small branch of Josephites.

After so much work and effort on his part to arrange a special covenant with Israel in a pre-mortal setting and then to accomplish the Atonement in a mortal setting, it is understandable why he is upset. Jesus has invested so much time, effort, pain, and suffering into something the very people he did it for are generally choosing not to take advantage of. This is why this smaller branch of righteous Josephites would be of great solace to him.

v14 "I am troubled", cp. 27:32 for why he is troubled.

"because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel", Jesus is probably not referring to the people present, as he elsewhere remarks their faith is considerable, cf. v. 8, v. 20, 19:35. He is probably referring to the scattered and disbelieving condition of Israel in general.

However, the prayer occurs in the midst of the context of blessing the little children as he summons them to him in v. 11-13 and then blesses them in v. 21. So, the complaint against the wickedness of Israel must be connected to the children. I would assume the complaint follows the standard OT line, which is picked up in the Book of Mormon, that parents can lead their children on to do wickedness (cf. Exod., 34:6-7, Deut. 5:9-10, 2 Ne. 4:3-6, D&C 98:45-47). The Lord's grief would then be over the innocent children being corrupted by their wicked parents.

This reading is supported by Jesus' statement regarding his joy in v. 20 and the parallel statement in 27:30-32 where he has joy over the current generation because none of them are lost, but laments the future ones who abandon him paralleling his lament in v. 14.

v15-17 We are left uninformed in the present text what it is Jesus prays to the Father about. It is so stunning and overwhelming the people are overpowered by it and cannot even stand afterwards per v. 18. However, we are informed later in 27:30-31 that this entire generation will be saved in the Kingdom. It seems likely that his concern over Israel in general, as expressed in v. 14, motivated him to obtain a

promise or reassurance from the Father that this remnant of righteous Lehites will be saved in the Kingdom. As this remnant is the more righteous remnant of the Lehites (cf. 9:13), obtaining such a promise or this kind of reassurance from the Father wouldn't have been unreasonable. If this is the case, then it certainly is something that would inspire overwhelming joy in them as seen in v. 18.

Additionally, note v. 16-17 is Mormon taking a direct quote from the written record of a first-person account. In that account in v. 17 the person writes that Jesus prayed "for us unto the Father". This prayer which Jesus offered up may have been a very personal one wherein he singled out individuals and prayed for them in their specific needs. Given the "for us" and the reaction of those present, it is likely Jesus' was praying specifically for those present.

v20 "my joy is full", cp. 27:30-31 for why he is filled with joy.

v24 "encircled about with fire", if we compare this event with the others in the Book of Mormon where people are encircled with light (cp. 19:25, Hela. 5:23-24, Hela. 5:44-45) it is plain what the meaning is: the little children are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

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