

General Comments on 3 Nephi 20-26

These chapters are a continuation of the redemption of Israel theme mentioned in 15:5-8 and discussed in ch. 16. In ch. 20 Jesus discusses the role of the Gentiles (cf. 20:10-28) and the fulfilment of various Old Testament prophecies concerning the gathering of Israel (cf. 20:29-46). In ch. 21 Jesus gives the sign of the start of the gathering of Israel (cf. 21:1-7), and ties it to the determining factor on which of the Gentiles and which of Israel are gathered in and which are cast off and destroyed (cf. 21:8-29).

Jesus quotes from Isaiah and Malachi and comments considerably on the text. The chapters rely heavily on the rhetorical style of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah. Familiarity with Old Testament prophetic writings will aid in understanding the present text.

The core message is found in 21:3-5, namely that the gospel should come to the Gentiles first, so that it would be carried to the remnants of Israel, who had fallen into disbelief, because of sin.

Comments on 3 Nephi 20

In reading this chapter we cannot take the events describe herein as occurring sequentially or as a linear series of events. Reading it as though v. 10-19 happens, then v. 20-28 happens, then v. 29-46 happens will leave the reader terribly confused as they really are all talking about the same single event. What each portion does is address the same event from a different viewpoint to emphasize a specific point, each section addressing a different point.

Verses 10-19 emphasize Israel will be gathered and made the Lord's people and the Gentiles will be under Israel's heel, a reversal of Israel's general history. Verses 20-28 then expound upon this theme to emphasize this reversal is because Israel is the Lord's covenant people where the Gentiles have no covenant. And, v. 29-46 emphasize that Israel's return to the Lord will be when the remnants receive the fulness of the gospel and accept Christ. All three sections address the gathering of Israel, each emphasizing a particular point thereof.

1 AND it came to pass that he commanded the multitude that they should cease to pray, and also his disciples. And he commanded them that they should not cease to pray in their hearts.

2 And he commanded them that they should arise and stand up upon their feet. And they arose up and stood upon their feet.

3 And it came to pass that he brake bread again and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat. 4 And when they had eaten he commanded them that they should break bread, and give unto the multitude. 5 And when they had given unto the multitude he also gave them wine to drink, and commanded them that they should give unto the multitude.

6 Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude; 7 But he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink. 8 And he said unto them: 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.

9 Now, when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.

v1-9 Jesus administers the sacrament to the enlarged audience. He initially administered it the day before (cf. 18:1-11) using the same pattern of administration (v. 2-7) and explanation (v. 8). The noteworthy differences here are Jesus providing bread and wine miraculously (v. 6-7) and the people being filled with the Spirit afterwards (v. 9).

v1 Ending the prayers of the preceding chapter, Jesus tells them to continue to pray in their hearts. To the Western mind this is somewhat baffling as we consider prayer a formalized act, so how could they keep praying when they are watching Jesus administer the sacrament? The Semitic notion of prayer is less formal. The Hebrew term "palal" (which term also serves as the root for the Hebrew "tephillah" [Strong's 08605] which is commonly translated to "prayer") is defined in Strong's as follows:

06419 palal {paw-lal'}
a primitive root; TWOT - 1776; v
AV - pray 74, made 3, judge 2, intreat 1, judgment 1,
prayer 1, supplication 1, thought 1; 84
1) to intervene, interpose, pray
1a) (Piel) to mediate, judge
1b) (Hithpael)
1b1) to intercede
1b2) to pray

The term applies to considerably more than just the formal act of praying and carries a meaning of entreaty, supplication and thought (see the KJV on Gen. 48:11 for the translation to "thought"). Thus, Jesus' command for them to continue to pray

in their hearts, the heart being the seat of one's desires to the Semitic mind, means he is telling them to keep the same thoughts and desires continuing with them even though they stop the formal act of prayer to participate in the sacrament. v3 "bread", the previous day the bread was provided by the disciples at Jesus' request. Here, Jesus provides the bread. As the people were probably observing the Passover the bread provided by the disciples would have been unleavened.

In this case with Jesus providing the bread and teaching them concerning the end of the Law (cf. 15:1-10), it would have been a particularly poignant symbol for him to provide his own bread and it be leavened. If he did, then the Lamb of God, the ultimate symbol of the old Passover, supersedes the disciple's unleavened bread of the old Passover with his own leavened bread of the Sacrament as a transformation of the old Passover Seder.

Unfortunately, Mormon doesn't give us any details concerning the bread itself which would indicate such symbolism, only that it was produced miraculously. But, it does stand to reason that if Jesus was teaching them to no longer observe the old Passover that the bread he would provide would be leavened. v10-28 Jesus reviews the material covered the preceding day (v. 10-19, cp. 16:4-20), and then expands upon the subject (v. 20-28).

10 And it came to pass that when they had all given glory unto Jesus, he said unto them: Behold now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel. 11 Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled--behold they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them-- 12 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel. 13 And then shall the remnants, which shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west, and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them.

14 And the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance. 15 And I say unto you, that if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people-- 16 Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; and ye shall be in the midst of them who shall be many; and ye shall be among them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. 17 Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. 18 And I will gather my people together as a man gathereth his sheaves into the floor. 19 For I will make my people with whom the Father hath covenanted, yea, I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass. And thou shalt beat in pieces many people;

and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth. And behold, I am he who doeth it.

v10-19 Jesus informs them that when all of the words of Isaiah concerning Israel are fulfilled (v. 11), only then is the Father's covenant with them fulfilled (v. 12). When it is fulfilled all of the scattered remnants of Israel will know that Jesus is the Christ (v. 13) and be gathered to their ancestral lands (v. 14). Those Gentiles who do not repent and accept the gospel that was granted to them (v. 15) will be punished by Israel (v. 16-19).

Given the considerably larger size of the crowd today over the day before, Jesus would recap yesterday's material for the benefit of the majority who were not present the day before.

v10 "now I finish the commandment", cp. 16:3-4, 18:27.

v11-12 Jesus' intent is to keep the remnants of natural Israel focused on their enduring covenant status until it is completely fulfilled, cp. 15:6-7.

v11 "ye remember that I spake unto you", cf. 15:5-8.

"the words of Isaiah...search them", the words of Isaiah are recommended by Nephi (cf. 2 Ne. 25:5-7), Jesus (cp. 23:1), and Moroni (cf. Mormon 8:23).

v16-19 are a composite paraphrase of a series of Micah passages, cp. v. 16-17 with Micah 5:8-9 and v. 18-19 with Micah 4:12-13. Jesus is invoking the Messianic and Redemptive themes of Micah 4-5 and saying that when Israel does chose to return to him they will be made great and powerful and overthrow the nations that afflicted them.

20 And it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent it shall fall upon them, saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the Gentiles. 21 And it shall come to pass that I will establish my people, O house of Israel. 22 And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you.

23 Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall

be cut off from among the people. 24 Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me.

25 And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 26 The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant-- 27 And after that ye were blessed then fulfilleth the Father the covenant which he made with Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed--unto the pouring out of the Holy Ghost through me upon the Gentiles, which blessing upon the Gentiles shall make them mighty above all, unto the scattering of my people, O house of Israel. 28 And they shall be a scourge unto the people of this land. Nevertheless, when they shall have received the fulness of my gospel, then if they shall harden their hearts against me I will return their iniquities upon their own heads, saith the Father.

v20-28 Jesus expands upon the subject of v. 10-19 by contrasting the perilous situation the Gentiles are in (v. 20, 28) with the elect condition of Israel (v. 21-27).

The underlying premise is that while there are promises to Abraham and all the subsequent patriarchs (v. 24-27) to preserve at least a remnant of their lineage, there is no such promise for the Gentiles. When the Lord says His sword is hanging over them in Judgement, it means there is no covenant there to prevent Him from annihilating them utterly if they deserve it. In the case of Israel, the Lord is bound by covenants such that he cannot utterly annihilate them, even if they deserve it. The Gentiles have nothing of the sort to protect them, and when they rebel against Him and reject His gospel they will be annihilated even as were the Jaredites.

Naturally, the condition for Israel being restored to her full glory and is the acceptance of Christ (v. 23-24).

v20 "the sword of my justice shall hang over them", cp. Ether 8:23, Isa. 34:1-8, D&C 87:6-8.

v23 "cut off", i.e., from the covenant with Abraham, cf. 21:11.

v28 "I will return their iniquities upon their own heads", cp. Isa. 51:23, D&C 45:25-31.

29 And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father. 30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; 31 And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

32 Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye. 33 Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance. 34 Then shall they break forth into joy--Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. 35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

36 And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. 37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. 38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak. 40 And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth! 41 And then shall a cry go forth: Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. 42 For ye shall not go out with haste nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rearward. 43 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 44 As many were astonished at thee--his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men-- 45 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

46 Verily, verily, I say unto you, all these things shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance.

v29-46 Jesus expands upon the subject of v. 23-24 to explain that when scattered Israel receives the fulness of the gospel and accepts Him as Christ (v. 30-31) then they will be gathered and established upon her ancestral lands (v. 29). And when this occurs, all of the predictions of the Old Testament Prophets will be fulfilled and Zion will be founded and her people rejoice (v. 32-45). Jesus then closes the quotations by stating plainly all the predictions he just quoted will come to pass and Israel will be established on her ancestral lands (v. 46).

v32-45 are a compounded quotation of selections from Isa. 52 and Isa. 54.

v40-45 Note these verses quote Isa. 52:7 and Isa. 52:11-15 in the context of the marred servant being Israel, and not the Messiah as Christians generally read it, cp. 21:10.

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