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Christ's Visit to the Western Hemisphere Following His Resurrection

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Abstract: Christ's visit to the American continent brought hope and assurance of eternal life. There had been ample evidence of his crucifixion and death as foretold by Samuel the Lamanite. Mormon considered this story of great importance to Jews and Gentiles of the latter days. The witnesses of the New World testified and supported the New Testament's account of the Savior's crucifixion and resurrection.

Christ's Visit to the Western Hemisphere Following His Resurrection

Elder Delbert L. Stapley

Of the Council of the Twelve

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus and did worship him (3 Nephi 11:16-17).

THE Easter season causes us to meditate the great sacrifice of the Son of God, his resurrection to glory, which accomplishes the resurrection of all mankind. The appearance of the resurrected Savior to the Nephites on this continent, following his ascension into heaven with his body of flesh and bone, brought great joy and happiness to the Nephites, also hope and assurance of eternal life. His glorious manifestation, his divine teachings, the great miracles performed, and the visitation of heavenly hosts led to the conversion and complete faithfulness of both Nephites and Lamanites.

The God of heaven provided evidences of the Savior's crucifixion and death with signs, accompanied by powerful destructive forces of nature, in order that his covenant people would know, understand, and never forget the time or events of his infinite sacrifice and atonement. The Lamanite prophet, Sam-

uel, had earlier announced from the walls of Zarahemla the signs which would occur on this the American continent at Christ's death, for which prophecy the wicked sought his life.

The great happenings prophesied of, took place during the three hours the Savior was on the cross—the unforgettable scenes of destruction and sorrow, with darkness continuing for the space of three days. When this period of terror and destruction had ended, all the inhabitants of the land heard the voice of God speaking from the heavens, explaining the reason for the destruction of cities and multitudes of people. Later, the Book of Mormon account records 2500 people were gathered together about the temple in the land of Bountiful discussing the phenomenal changes and signs that had taken place among them, when they again heard a voice from heaven. The voice spoke three times before they determined its source. Then they heard these words, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7).

Looking toward the heavens, they beheld a man descending earthward

clothed in a white robe, who presently stood in their midst. The people were amazed and frightened, supposing the heavenly Being to be an angel of God. We can imagine their astonishment and joy when he stretched forth his hand and announced to them this startling information:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Nephi 11:10-11).

What a glorious pronouncement! Here, standing before them in the flesh, was the crucified, resurrected Lord, of whom their prophets had spoken. What a marvelous privilege and blessing for them! They had been promised this visit, for they were part of the other sheep, referred to by the Savior while ministering in Jerusalem, whom he must visit, and who were to hear his voice, that there might be one fold and one shepherd.

THIS glorious appearance of the Savior supports scriptures that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation whosoever serves him in righteousness is accepted of him. This assembled group were faithful people of the Lord, called together by their leader Nephi in anticipation of this honored visit by the Son of God. They were actual individual witnesses of the Lord in his resurrected, glorified state, and

thus qualified to bear witness not only among the Nephite and Lamanite people, but also to all people of the world to whom The Book of Mormon testifies. He had such great love for them that he gave them a testimony of himself in such an impressive manner that they would always remember his marvelous appearance with great joy and faith, and be convinced that he was the resurrected Christ, their Redeemer and God. To leave no doubt in their minds he invited them thus:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world (3 Nephi 11:14).

Mormon considered this majestic visit of the Savior important to the sacred record he was abridging to speak from the dust to the Jews and Gentiles of the latter days. The story is beautifully written and given great emphasis. After the Savior's invitation for the people to know for themselves, Mormon records:

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come (3 Nephi 11:15).

The testimony of these New World witnesses supports and confirms the New Testament account

of the Savior's crucifixion and resurrection. The privilege of these 2500 people's individual experience of thrusting their hands into his side and feeling the print of the nails in his hands and feet, was added, convincing proof that the holy personage before them was their risen Lord. This same privilege the Lord had previously granted to Thomas, one of his chosen apostles in Jerusalem. Thomas doubted that the risen Lord had visited the Twelve while he was absent from them. Christ gave him convincing proof of his actual resurrection, and then Thomas became a living witness to the world of this great event.

Mormon expresses the exquisite joy of the people who beheld the glorious personage of the Savior by saying:

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him (3 Nephi 11:16-17).

THE effects of this and subsequent visits of the risen Lord resulted in the entire Nephite and Lamanite nation accepting the gospel and being baptized into the Church, and afterwards living together in peace and happiness for many generations. It would seem impossible for any group of people, or nation, to deny the testimony of 2500 individual faithful and devoted witnesses to the appearance of such a glorious and hallowed resurrected personage as the Son of God. In all sacred history no other group has been so favored. In Jerusalem, Christ, following his resurrection

and before his final ascension into heaven, appeared to about 500 brethren at once. However, in this the promised land of America, Christ not only appeared this one time but many times, and to multitudes of men, women, and children. His second appearance was to a much larger group than on the occasion of his first visit, for the first group had spread the word generally among the people of Christ's promised visit to them the following day.

After teaching them many things and commissioning Twelve Apostles, he said to the multitude:

Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am.

And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins (3 Nephi 12:1, 2).

He perceived their desire for him to heal their sick, even as he had done for the people of Jerusalem. At his request people brought forth their sick, blind, deaf, lepers, or those with withered limbs and, because of their great faith and his compassion for them, he healed all brought to him. He then com-

manded that their little children should be brought unto him and required the multitude to kneel. He also knelt upon the earth with them and prayed so great and marvelous things to the Father that the tongue of man could not speak his words nor could men write them, nor had man heard before so great and marvelous things as the Savior spoke to the Father. The people were overcome with joy and happiness.

THE Savior then took the children one by one and blessed them and prayed unto the Father for them. Then he said to the multitude, "Behold your little ones."

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.

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 (3 Nephi 17:24, 25).

The Savior was touched by the great faith of the people, for Mormon observes:

And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief (3 Nephi 19:35).

Mormon also records the following interesting information of the

Lord's teachings and activities among the Nephites:

Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them (3 Nephi 26:13).

And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away (3 Nephi 26:3).

When Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, prophesied of the risen Lord's visit to the people of the Western Hemisphere, he announced this glorious event would also take place:

And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many (Helaman 14:25).

With all these great and marvelous things accomplished by the risen, resurrected Lord among the Nephite people, it is no wonder that the fourth book of Nephi records:

And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about. And as many as did come unto them, and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they did also receive the Holy Ghost.

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputa-

tions among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God (4 Nephi 1:1-3, 16).

NEPHI'S powerful and convincing teachings before the fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ's death converted and brought many people into the Church, and prepared them against the destructive elements and convulsive forces of nature, and also prepared them to receive and accept the Savior when he did appear. Because of their faith he performed mighty miracles among them. His kingdom was wholeheartedly received and honored.

It was not so in Jerusalem. He was not accepted there as the Son of God, the Savior of the world, nor did his many appearances among the Jews as the risen, resur-

rected Lord, produce such a glorious state of faithfulness and devotion as obtained among the Nephites and the Lamanites on this continent. For the multitude of the Nephite people to see the risen Lord often, to hear him speak and pray—such great and marvelous things never before heard by man, and to have the heavens opened to them—must have been impressive and of tremendous moral and spiritual uplift to the people. Of all that was written concerning his visit, Mormon has only given us a small abridgment or account, but how glorious and inspirational it is!

This Easter time the world, if willing to heed the counsel of God through his servants, can find hope, comfort, and faith in the atonement of Christ and also in the actuality of his resurrection, the reuniting of body and spirit. Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection and establishes the pattern for all mankind. One reading Mormon's account of the risen Lord's visit to the Western Hemisphere cannot help but be impressed not only with the beauty of the story, but also with the profound truthfulness of it.

Blind Woman

Gene Romolo

She cannot see the stars . . . her eyes are blind;
 The lilting voice of birds, she does not hear.
 She cannot sing because her lips are mute,
 But from the treasure hidden in her mind
 Is penned rare wisdom to diminish fear.
 Beyond her curtained eyes her soul must see
 The qualities of courage, faith, and cheer,
 And loveliness of life's immensity.