

3 NEPHI

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

3 Nephi is widely considered the spiritual pinnacle of the Book of Mormon. It begins with the fulfillment of prophecies regarding Christ's birth and the subsequent destruction of Nephite civilization via natural disasters at the time of His crucifixion. The narrative culminates in the physical appearance of the resurrected Jesus Christ at the temple in the land Bountiful. During this visitation, Jesus invites the multitude to feel the wound marks in His hands and side, establishing His identity as the God of Israel. He selects twelve disciples, gives them authority to baptize, and delivers a discourse that mirrors Matthew 5-7, with specific modifications adapting it to a post-resurrection American setting. The text establishes the 'Doctrine of Christ'-defined here as faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end-as the absolute prerequisite for salvation. Jesus also institutes the sacrament (communion), heals the sick, blesses children, and prophesies regarding the gathering of Israel, the role of the Gentiles, and the future New Jerusalem in the Americas. The book asserts itself as a second witness to the divinity of Christ and a necessary record for the latter-day gathering of the Covenant people.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Nephi (Son of Nephi), The Twelve Nephite Disciples, Lachoneus, Gidgiddoni, The Three Nephites, Mormon (Narrator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST (RITUAL NECESSITY)

Assertion: Salvation is contingent upon a specific sequence: faith, repentance, baptism by authority, reception of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.

"And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved... And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. (3 Nephi 11:33-34)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic act of God received by faith alone (Sola Fide), with baptism serving as an outward sign of an inward grace. 3 Nephi 11 and 27 elevate baptism to an absolute salvific necessity. The text explicitly states that those who do not believe *and* are not baptized are damned, effectively adding a work (ritual ordinance) as a gatekeeper to eternal life. This shifts the locus of salvation from Christ's finished work to the believer's compliance with ordinances.

2. AMERICAN COVENANT / NEW JERUSALEM

Assertion: The Americas are a promised land given to the remnant of Joseph, where the New Jerusalem will be built.

"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. (3 Nephi 20:22)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical eschatology generally anticipates a New Jerusalem coming down from heaven (Revelation 21) or a restoration of the earthly Jerusalem. 3 Nephi introduces a distinct geo-political prophecy: that the Americas are the inheritance of Joseph's seed (Nephites/Lamanites) and that a literal city of Zion (New Jerusalem) must be built there by them, assisted by converted Gentiles. This creates a dual-center geography of salvation (Jerusalem and America) unknown to the Bible.

3. TRANSLATION OF THE THREE NEPHITES

Assertion: Three of the twelve disciples were granted to never taste death until the Second Coming.

"Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father... (3 Nephi 28:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible mentions Enoch and Elijah being taken up, the New Testament explicitly corrects the rumor that the Apostle John would not die (John 21:23). 3 Nephi asserts that three disciples were actually granted this state-'translated' beings who roam the earth performing miracles, immune to pain and

death. This introduces a class of beings and a continuing apostolic presence on earth that Evangelicalism rejects.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While 3 Nephi presents a high Christology, it fundamentally alters the mechanism of salvation. In Evangelicalism, the 'Gospel' is the news of what Christ **did**. In 3 Nephi 27, Jesus defines His gospel as a hybrid of His work (the cross) and the believer's obligation (repentance, baptism, enduring). This introduces a semi-Pelagian or Arminian-leaning soteriology where grace is made effective through ritual obedience. Furthermore, the text claims that the Bible is insufficient, asserting that Jesus's statement about 'other sheep' (John 10:16) referred specifically to Native Americans, a hermeneutic rejected by historical Christian exegesis.

Shared Values:

Jesus is the Christ and Savior; Necessity of Repentance; Ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (meekness, purity, peacemaking); Resurrection of the dead

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text presents itself as new, binding scripture that contains words of Jesus not found in the Bible, claiming the Bible is incomplete.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Explicitly mandates baptism as a condition for salvation/avoiding damnation (3 Nephi 11:33-34).
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where only specific men (the Twelve) have power to baptize and confer the Holy Ghost.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: The combination of Christ's atonement AND the requirements of repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end (3 Nephi 27:13-21).

Evangelical: The good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: In 3 Nephi 27:21, Jesus says '*this is my gospel... that ye must be baptized.*' In Evangelicalism, baptism is a response to the gospel, not the gospel itself.

"Fulfilled"

In Text: The Law of Moses is fulfilled, but the Covenant with Israel regarding land and gathering is not yet fulfilled.

Evangelical: Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (Romans 10:4); all promises are 'Yes' in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Example: 3 Nephi 20 distinguishes between the Law (*fulfilled*) and the Covenant (*future land inheritance in America*).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being raised up at the last day, held guiltless, and entering the kingdom of God.

How Attained: Through the 'Doctrine of Christ': Faith + Repentance + Baptism + Holy Ghost + Enduring to the End.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to 'enduring to the end' and maintaining the companionship of the Spirit through obedience.

Comparison to Sola Fide: 3 Nephi 11:33-34 ('whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned') stands in contrast to John 3:18 ('he that believeth on him is not condemned'). The addition of baptism as a condemning factor violates Sola Fide.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent and be baptized (3 Nephi 11:33)
2. Cease all disputation regarding doctrine (3 Nephi 11:28)

3. Call the church in the name of Christ (3 Nephi 27:7)
4. Pay tithes and offerings (3 Nephi 24:10)
5. Search the words of Isaiah diligently (3 Nephi 23:1)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the Book of Mormon as the sign of the gathering of Israel
2. Submit to the authority of the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus
3. Build the New Jerusalem in the Americas

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion by one holding authority (3 Nephi 11:23-26)
2. Partaking of bread and wine (Sacrament) in remembrance of Christ's body and blood (3 Nephi 18:1-11)
3. Confirmation/Reception of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 18:37)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In 3 Nephi 11, Jesus gives the Nephites authority to baptize. Why was this necessary if they were already keeping the Law of Moses and had a priesthood?
2. 3 Nephi 12:48 says 'be ye perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.' In Matthew 5:48, Jesus only mentions the Father. How does adding Jesus (who was now resurrected) to this standard change the pressure you feel to be perfect?
3. When you read the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi, it matches the King James Bible almost word for word. How do you understand that, given that the KJV was translated in 1611?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for Presence – The text captures a deep human longing for God's physical presence and compassion. This longing is ultimately satisfied not by a temporary visitation, but by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the future hope of the Beatific Vision. [Revelation 21:3 - 'God himself shall be with them, and be their God.']}
2. Healing of the Broken – Jesus's heart for the broken is consistent. The Gospel offers spiritual healing that exceeds physical restoration. [Isaiah 53:5 - 'With his stripes we are healed.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Performance [Severe] – 3 Nephi 12:48 commands 'Be ye perfect even as I... am perfect.' By including Himself (the resurrected, glorified Christ) as the standard, the text raises the bar from moral maturity to divine flawlessness, creating an impossible burden for the believer.
2. Uncertainty of Standing [Moderate] – Because the Spirit's presence is conditional on 'always remembering' and keeping commandments (3 Nephi 18:7), a believer can never be certain of their standing if they have a moment of forgetfulness or sin.
3. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – Access to God's ordinances is strictly gated by the twelve disciples and their successors. The believer cannot approach God sacramentally without the authorized intermediary.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Empirical experience (touching the wounds), Testimony of the Father (audible voice), and Spiritual witness.

Verification Method: Adherents are encouraged to 'ponder' and 'ask of the Father' (3 Nephi 17:3).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective revelation of God in the closed canon of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), illuminated by the Spirit. 3 Nephi relies on subjective spiritual experience and the authority of extra-biblical records.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1830; Narrative setting 34 A.D.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Claimed translation of ancient plates by Mormon)

Textual Issues: The 'KJV Problem': 3 Nephi 12-14 reproduces the KJV Matthew 5-7, including the doxology in the Lord's Prayer (3 Nephi 13:13) which most textual scholars agree was a later liturgical addition to Matthew and not in the original autographs. 3 Nephi also quotes Malachi 3-4 (KJV phrasing) and Isaiah 54.