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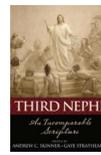


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3 NEPHI 9:19-20: THE OFFERING OF A BROKEN HEART

Dana M. Pike

As recorded in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 8), the atoning death of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem brought prophesied destruction and darkness in the Americas. Following approximately three hours of terrible devastation (8:19), a “thick darkness” engulfed the land for three days (8:20, 23; 10:9). During this period of darkness the voice of Jesus was “heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land” (9:1).

Third Nephi 9 recounts Christ’s first comments to the survivors. A dominant theme in this chapter is the repeated occurrence of the personal pronoun *I*—thirty-one times in the twenty-one verses of reported speech. Speaking in first person, Jesus powerfully indicated to them that *he* had caused the devastating destruction (9:3-12). He overviewed the tragic events (which none of the survivors could then have completely known firsthand) and explained that “great destructions have *I* caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (9:12; emphasis added).

At this point Christ specifically addressed the survivors, explaining that they were “more righteous” than those who had died

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and inviting them to come to him, that he might heal and save them (3 Nephi 9:13-14). He then fully testified of his identity: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning . . . and in me hath the Father glorified his name. I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” (9:15-17). (There is intense irony in this passage since Jesus testified that he is the creator [9:15] in the context of the massive destruction he caused, and he testified that he is “the light and the life of the world” [9:18] to survivors sitting in darkness, surrounded by corpses.)

As the Lord continued his discourse in the darkness, he announced the instructions that are the focus of this study: “And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:19-20).

Questions about 3 Nephi 9:19-20

As straightforward as the command in 3 Nephi 9:19-20 sounds, it invites several questions and has produced various interpretations and applications. One question that arises is, since the first phrase of 9:19 instructs that there should be “no more the shedding of blood,” does this mean that “your sacrifices and your burnt offerings” in the next phrase only refers to animal offerings? Or were grain offerings and wine libations to be terminated as well (for example, Leviticus 23:13)? The scriptures are emphatic that Jesus’s mission and sacrifice fulfilled the law, prophecies, and typologies of previous dispensations, including every aspect of the law of Moses, suggesting that all types of previously authorized sacrificial offerings were concluded

now that he had offered his infinite, atoning sacrifice.¹ And Christian practice reported in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon demonstrates that animal, grain, wine, and other sacrificially symbolic substances were no longer offered at altars.²

Another question that arises in reading 3 Nephi 9:19–20 is whether the instruction to offer “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” is something new or not. Many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints assume that Jesus began requesting the offering of a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” *after* his atoning sacrifice fulfilled the practice of offering sacrifice at altars, as if Christ had said, you *used* to offer animals, *but now* I want you to stop animal sacrifices and

1. The Savior himself declared to his disciples in Israel: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17). And he reminded those in the Americas that “by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:17). Christ’s emphasis on fulfilling the law of Moses in these statements is understandable since his sacrifice and resurrection concluded the dispensation that began with Moses. Additionally, see 2 Nephi 25:27; Alma 34:13; 3 Nephi 12:17–19, 46; 15:4–5, 8.

2. Support for this assertion comes not only from the passage under consideration (3 Nephi 19:19) and Jesus’s teaching that he fulfilled the law and its requirements (see the previous note), but from a variety of other scriptures that contrast sacrifices in the previous era with that made by Jesus. For example, Jesus “needeth not daily, as those [earlier Aaronic] high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27; see 10:1–12). Historically, Jewish sacrificial offerings ended with the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. Prior to this early Christians in Jerusalem did go to the temple, but only to pray and to teach (for example, Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42); they generally did not offer sacrifice (but see Acts 21:18–26). Likewise, early Christians were expected not to offer sacrifices to Greek and Roman gods (for example, 1 Corinthians 10:18–20). Interestingly, several New Testament authors used sacrificial terminology and symbolism from the previous era to teach early Christians about the “spiritual sacrifice” they could and should make in their own lives (1 Peter 2:5; see also Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15–16), again highlighting the Christian avoidance of actually offering animal or other types of sacrifices as non-Christians around them continued to do. The Book of Mormon only contains a few passages indicating that the true worshippers of Jehovah offered legitimate sacrifices prior to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice (for example, 1 Nephi 7:22; Mosiah 2:3), but it also emphasizes that such activity should cease following Jesus’s offering: “It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be . . . a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled” (Alma 34:13; emphasis added).

start offering a broken heart and contrite spirit as your sacrifice. The following two quotations illustrate this point.

After promising eternal life to all who would repent and follow him, Jesus declared his divinity and announced that the preparatory law of Moses was now “fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:14-17; 15:5). *The new requirement* of a broken heart and a contrite spirit was declared (3 Nephi 9:20).³

The practice of sacrifice that was fulfilled in Christ was one of rites and rituals, whereas the *new practice* commanded of the Lord involved inner attitudes that would bring about outward obedience to commandments and ordinances. . . . Among the few things done away by the Savior was the offering of animal sacrifice. The Lord *now required* a personal offering which consisted of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (see 3 Nephi 9:20).⁴

On the one hand, the common approach demonstrated by these quotations—of understanding the Lord’s request for a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” as something new and innovative—is curious since the words *new* and *now* do not occur in Jesus’s instructions on this offering.⁵ But on the other hand, Jesus’s death and resurrection

3. Gary Lee Walker, “The Downfall of the Nephite Nation: Lessons for Our Time (3 Nephi 6-10),” in *Alma 30—Moroni*, Studies in Scripture, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 144; emphasis added.

4. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Third Nephi through Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 44 and 72; emphasis added. In the following note I present some scriptures that I think argue against the ritual-without-heart view of the Mosaic dispensation that seems to be presented in this quotation, as well as in many others.

5. In addition to the quotations just cited, other published examples of this before/after interpretation include Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon: Alma 30-Moroni 1* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2008), 301: “The law of Moses has been fulfilled and the Lord requires of us a *new sacrifice*” (emphasis added). This perspective is also reflected in a statement by J. Reuben Clark: “It is difficult for us today to realize the tremendous revolution involved in altering the ritualism of the Law of Moses into the humble and lowly concept of worship, not with the sacrificial blood of animals, but with this broken heart

inaugurated a new gospel dispensation (the Mosaic one was over) with new practices. My position is that interpreting the content of these verses in a before/after, old-way/new-way dichotomy violates the original sense of 3 Nephi 9:19-20 and represents a misunderstanding of the Lord's expectations for his covenant people in the Mosaic dispensation. Rather than this new dispensation bringing a *new* expectation—that disciples begin offering a broken heart and contrite spirit—this new dispensation brought a *renewed* earlier expectation, now minus the ritual evidence of physically offering sacrifice at an altar.

A third question that arises about 3 Nephi 9:19-20 is, does Jesus's instruction to offer a broken heart refer to a onetime act, to an ongoing activity of offering (as Israelites had done with animals) that represents a condition or status of brokenheartedness, or to both of these options? Latter-day Saint leaders and authors have often employed the content of 3 Nephi 9:19-20 to highlight various doctrinal

and contrite spirit of the worshiper. . . . The sinner [under the Mosaic law] seemingly, in general, took on no obligation and considered himself under no obligation to abandon his sins, but took on only the obligation to offer sacrifice therefore. But under the new covenant that came in with Christ, the sinner must offer the sacrifice out of his own life, not by offering the blood of some other creature; he must give up his sins, he must repent, he himself must make the sacrifice." *Behold the Lamb of God: Selections from the Sermons and Writings, Published and Unpublished, of J. Reuben Clark, Jr. on the Life of the Savior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 107; see similarly George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:289 (July 27, 1879), who does not employ Clark's "seemingly, in general" qualification. Unfortunately, Clark (as Cannon previously) seems to perpetuate a general misunderstanding of the Mosaic law. No one in that or any other dispensation could repent just by offering an animal in sacrifice. Jehovah condemned this very attitude in Isaiah 1:11-15 (quoted below). A number of other scripture passages from the Mosaic dispensation further counter this standard misconception, including: "return unto the Lord thy God, and . . . obey his voice . . . with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 30:2); "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13); and "whosoever transgresseth against me, . . . if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also" (Mosiah 26:29).

points, including applying the ongoing *condition of having* a broken heart to our need to be submissive to God's will.⁶

My intent in this study is to “go behind” these uses of this passage to explore what the *initial act* of offering a broken heart meant in its ancient context. Indeed, the whole of 3 Nephi 9:20 suggests that Jesus's primary focus was the *act* of offering a broken heart, not the process of maintaining one: “And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso commeth unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion.”

This study also aims to demonstrate that the divine requirement to offer a broken heart to God did *not* begin when Christ fulfilled the law of Moses through his atoning sacrifice and resurrection from the dead. The requirement that true disciples offer a broken heart is attested in the Old Testament and 2 Nephi—scriptures that date to the Mosaic dispensation—and was thus understood by disciples living before Jesus's mortal ministry. Additionally, since the phrase “broken heart and a contrite spirit” occurs in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), this study also aims to explain what this phrase originally meant, based on an examination of the available biblical Hebrew texts.

6. For example, Bruce D. Porter suggests understanding “broken heart and contrite spirit” in a number of ongoing dimensions, including, “When we have received a forgiveness of sins, a broken heart serves as a divine shield against temptation” (Porter, “A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 31-32). As noted in my text, I am focusing on the *act* of breaking our hearts, not on applying this concept to the necessary, ongoing status of being submissive and obedient (*maintaining* a broken heart); however, I very much appreciate Porter's comments and the insights he shares. Porter also teaches that even Jesus had a broken heart: “though Jesus of Nazareth was utterly without sin, He walked through life with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, as manifested by His submission to the will of the Father.” For another suggestion of how Jesus had a “broken heart,” see Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 27, p. 29 in the 2008 expanded edition. This volume also provides a number of insights that are worth considering, even though they have a different focus than the dimension that I am emphasizing herein.

This last aim is important since the English word *broken* is used in a variety of ways; for example, a broken dish is one in many pieces, a broken heart in emotional matters is one that is hurt deeply, a broken horse is one that will follow a rider's direction, broken sleep is disrupted sleep, and a broken switch is one that does not function. To accurately understand what the Lord intended when he asked for the sacrifice of a broken heart, it is vital to know what the English word *broken* means in the phrase *broken heart*.

Doctrinal Orientation

Before reviewing early scripture passages mentioning the offering of a “broken heart,” an essential concept for understanding the content of 3 Nephi 9:19-20 will first be treated. Traditional Christians typically believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ first arrived on earth with Jesus and his mortal ministry. Because of the restoration of the gospel, however, Latter-day Saints understand that Christ's gospel was taught to Adam and Eve and their posterity and that the principles and ordinances of the gospel were similar before and after Christ's ministry and sacrifice.⁷ Enoch, for example, reported that God taught Adam:

If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . All men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there. . . . Even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water,

7. The scriptures attest that there were times of apostasy and restoration between Adam and Eve's era and Jesus's ministry, and that as history progressed the percentage of the earth's population who accepted and lived the gospel became smaller and smaller. Nevertheless, restoration scriptures, such as Moses 5-7 and the Book of Abraham, make clear that the gospel was on the earth long before Jesus's ministry.

and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin. (Moses 6:52-59; see also 5:7-15)

Many centuries later, in the Mosaic dispensation, Nephi similarly taught: “I know that if ye shall follow the Son [of God], with full purpose of heart, . . . with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism . . . , behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:13). Thus, God’s expectations for those who desire salvation did not suddenly appear with Christ’s earthly ministry, but were taught by prophets from the very beginning.

Just as the doctrines of faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism by water and by the Spirit were taught from the time humans first lived on the earth, so likewise the law of sacrifice was introduced to Adam and Eve at their expulsion from Eden (Moses 4:27).⁸ The angelic explanation to scripture’s first human couple that animal sacrifice symbolized “the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7) came to them sometime later, following their initial obedience to this law (5:6-8). These early animal sacrifices were intended to be “instructive as well as worshipful. They were accompanied by prayer, devotion, and dedication, and represented an acknowledgment on the part of the individual of his [or her] duty toward God, and also a thankfulness to the Lord for his [or her] life and blessings upon the earth (see Gen. 4:3-7; Gen. 8:20; Gen. 22:1-17; Ex. 5:3; Ex. 20:24).”⁹ Thus, when disciples faithfully offered a legitimate animal sacrifice in dispensations prior to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice, they understood that the animal symbolized the infinite sacrifice the Son of God would make, and the act of their offering represented their

8. Whether one accepts that Moses 4:27 (“Unto Adam, and also unto his wife, did I, the Lord God, make coats of skins, and clothed them”) is connected to the initiation of the law of sacrifice or not, Moses 5:6 specifically indicates that Adam had been offering animal sacrifice for some time *before his angelic tutor arrived*.

9. The Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible, s.v. “sacrifices.”

heartfelt devotion as they gave something of personal value that they could not thereafter retrieve (the animal), with confidence in obtaining something greater (the Lord's blessing).

This view, that animal sacrifice was intended to be a manifestation of faith and devotion, not just the offering of an animal, is emphasized by Jehovah's words in Isaiah: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, . . . and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. . . . Bring no more vain oblations. . . . And when . . . ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:11-15). Similar divine pronouncements are found in Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24, and elsewhere in the Old Testament. Clearly, such statements did not announce the termination of animal sacrifice seven centuries before Jesus's ministry and sacrifice. They represent divine displeasure toward Israelites whose hearts were far from the intent of the law as they hypocritically went through the external motions of the law of sacrifice (such as offering an animal).

Latter-day Saints therefore accept that just as faith, repentance, obedience, and other gospel requirements were necessary to qualify for the salvation *prior* to Jesus's mortal ministry, the requirement that premeridian disciples of the Lord participate in all aspects of the law of sacrifice with heartfelt devotion was also expected by the Lord throughout those earlier millennia; it was not something originally announced to Nephite survivors when the Son of God concluded his saving mission. Specific passages in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon evidencing this will now be reviewed.

Early Occurrences of the Phrase *Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit*

Chronologically speaking, the phrases *broken heart* and *contrite spirit* do not first appear in scripture in Jesus's instructions recorded in 3 Nephi 9:19-20. The two individual phrases appear in Old Testament texts that date to before Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (about 600 BC), as well as in 2 Nephi, where the combined form, "a broken

heart and a contrite spirit,” also occurs. An accurate interpretation of 3 Nephi 9:19-20 must, therefore, take these earlier attestations into account.

Psalm 51:16-17 provides the best evidence of this teaching in the Old Testament.

For thou [God] desirest not [animal] sacrifice; else would I
 give it:
 thou delightest not in burnt offering [*ʿōlâ*].
 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit [*rûaḥ nišbārâ*]:
 a broken and a contrite heart [*lēb-nišbār wēnidkeh*], O God,
 thou wilt not despise.¹⁰

Animal sacrifice is clearly referenced in verse 16. The Hebrew noun *ʿōlâ* is the standard biblical term for the whole “burnt offering” on an altar of sacrifice. However, verse 17 emphasizes that “a broken and a contrite heart”—not just an animal—is the real, meaningful sacrifice of a true disciple.¹¹ The format of this verse, with “a broken spirit” paralleled by “a broken and a contrite heart,” serves to reinforce the essential nature of what God expects, as well as highlighting the analogous sense of these expressions.¹²

There are passages in the Old Testament that combine the same Hebrew noun—*lēb*, “heart”—and verb—*šbr*, “to break”—found in

10. The passage is Psalm 51:18-19 in the traditional Hebrew Bible, the Masoretic Text (hereafter MT). I have formatted the four main phrases (stichs) of this verse on separate lines to represent the parallelism inherent in the content. Curiously, Psalm 51:17 is paraphrased, with no scripture citation, in George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, amplified and arranged by Philip C. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 7:119, as part of a surprisingly brief commentary on 3 Nephi 9:19-20.

11. This is also emphasized in commentary from New English Translation (NET) Notes, Psalm 51:16, note 42: “This is not a categorical denial of the sacrificial system in general or of the importance of such offerings. . . . God requires something more fundamental, a repentant and humble attitude (see v. 17), before these offerings can have real meaning.”

12. In case it is not clear, the phrase *the sacrifices of God* at the beginning of verse 17 means sacrifices acceptable to God, not sacrifices that God makes.

Psalms 51:17, but in a somewhat different context. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this.

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart [*nišbērê-lēb*]; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit [*dakkēʿê rūah*].” (Psalm 34:18)¹³

“The Lord hath . . . sent me to bind up the brokenhearted [*lēnišbērê-lēb*].” (Isaiah 61:1; quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18)¹⁴

The phrases *broken heart(ed)* and *contrite spirit* in such passages refer to those who are downtrodden or worn out as the result of their sins or by other painful circumstances of mortal life, as opposed to those who act to give to the Lord a voluntary offering of a broken heart.¹⁵

Significantly, while the vocabulary in such passages is similar to Psalm 51:17, the Hebrew word order is reversed in these passages addressing those who are broken in heart, with the noun following, rather than preceding, the adjectives or verbs (participles). The Hebrew of Psalm 51:17 can be literally translated “a spirit, a broken one; a heart, a broken and contrite one.” However, a literal rendition of the pertinent phrases in Psalm 34:18 is “the ones who are

13. The citation in the Hebrew MT is Psalm 34:19.

14. See similarly, Psalm 109:16: “Because that he [a wicked person] remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart [*nikʿēh lēbāb*];” and Psalm 147:3: “He [God] healeth the broken in heart [*lišbūrē lēb*], and bindeth up their wounds.” See also Isaiah 57:15. Other passages in the Old Testament, such as Proverbs 15:13 and 17:22, Jeremiah 23:9, and Ezekiel 6:9, include *broken* and *heart* but have a different sense than the one investigated in this study.

15. This observation is neatly summarized in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), s.v. “brokenness”: “Brokenness is most commonly employed in the Bible as an image for people overwhelmed by troubles. In the OT this is commonly expressed by saying that the heart or spirit is ‘broken.’ The image represents feelings of anguish and despair, and a loss of hope or a sense of well-being. A broken heart or spirit can result from suffering, persecution and sorrow (Job 17:1; Ps 34:18; 69:20; 109:16; 147:3; Prov 15:18; Is 61:1; 65:14). It can also result from a recognition of the devastation of God’s judgment on the sins of others (Jer 23:9; Ezek 21:6) or one’s own sin (Ps 51:17).”

broken of heart . . . such as be contrite of spirit.”¹⁶ This literary distinction underscores the difference in the messages expressed in Psalms 51:17 and 34:18.

While the Lord has the power to comfort and heal those who are broken in heart and spirit, as Psalm 34:18 testifies, being bruised and broken in heart by life in this fallen world does not automatically mean a person has offered his or her broken heart to God. While it is true that challenging life circumstances often incline people toward divine help, the act of offering a broken heart must be initiated by the individual, whatever his or her circumstances are (consider Alma 32:1-15 in this regard). This is the sense expressed in Psalm 51:16-17 and in 2 Nephi 2:7.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi quotes his father Lehi as teaching, “Behold, he [God the Son] offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7). Lehi taught that Christ’s sacrifice “answer[s] the ends of the law,” but only for those who break their hearts. In other words, the atonement allows us to meet the demands of the law of justice against us when our faith in Christ leads to our repentance and on to our sanctification. This correlates with the content of Psalm 51:17, in that disciples must voluntarily break their heart to offer it to God.

Nephi’s own plea, “May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite!” (2 Nephi 4:32), can be understood in the same manner, although it reads more like a statement of the ongoing condition of Nephi’s heart—submissive, “broken”—than his initial act of breaking and offering his heart.¹⁷ Nephi implies that he has broken his own heart as an offering to the Lord, and thus prays for divine assistance against hellish powers.

16. Modern English translations more accurately render this distinction. For example, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of Psalm 34:18 reads, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

17. This latter interpretation seems to be what is taught by Porter, “Broken Heart,” 32.

In Jacob 2:10, Jacob declares, “I must . . . tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God.” It is not clear how his words should be interpreted, whether to understand “pure in heart” as parallel to “broken heart” (the ones who have broken their hearts) or whether Jacob used the phrase *the broken heart* to designate the suffering of Nephite wives and children—those who were broken in heart and spirit—because of the “wickedness” of their men (2:6-7; Psalm 34:18, discussed above).

While passages in the Old Testament and the early portion of the Book of Mormon that convincingly mention the offering of a broken heart as a sacrifice to God are relatively few in number, they do exist. And they are sufficiently clear to indicate that this concept was taught and understood among God’s covenant people during the Mosaic dispensation, prior to the mortal mission of Jesus Christ. The need for a disciple of the Lord to offer a broken heart and contrite spirit was presumably part of the law of sacrifice from the very beginning. It was not initially instituted by Jesus in 3 Nephi 9:19-20.

Indeed, a few Latter-day Saint authors have expressed this view. For example, Ellis Rasmussen correctly observed in connection with 3 Nephi 9:15-22 that the “sacrifice of animals culminated in Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice, of which they were mere types, but the sacrifice of ‘a broken heart and contrite spirit’ *continues*,”¹⁸ indicating that the offerer’s faith and broken heart had always been required *along with* the animal for it to be a true and effective sacrifice. Likewise, M. Catherine Thomas explained that “under the law of Moses, the broken heart was to accompany the animal sacrifice (cf. Ps 51:17-19); the Lord did away with the animal sacrifice after the law of Moses was fulfilled (3 Nephi 9:17-20), but the broken heart and contrite spirit *remained* as a requirement from the Lord’s people.”¹⁹

18. Ellis T. Rasmussen, “Old Testament (Temporary and Eternal Laws),” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1028; emphasis added.

19. M. Catherine Thomas, “Broken heart and contrite spirit,” in *The Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003),

These statements affirm the same perspective presented herein, that the faith-based law and principle of sacrifice was in effect before Jesus's mortal mission and continued on after his atonement. Only the practice of offering animals and agricultural products at an altar was discontinued.

Re-reading 3 Nephi 9:19-20

With an understanding that the gospel of Christ was on the earth from the beginning, and that the offering of a broken heart constituted a premeridian dimension of the law of sacrifice, how does one accurately read 3 Nephi 9:19-20? Based on the perspective I am presenting here, the Lord seems to really be saying: Beginning today you will no longer offer animal or any other sacrifice at an altar, because the saving act they symbolized has been accomplished by me. Therefore, I will no longer accept them as legitimate expressions of your faith and symbols of salvation (9:19). You will continue to live the law of sacrifice and will demonstrate this as you voluntarily offer to me your broken heart. Only with such an offering (as was also true before my redeeming mission) can you be sanctified (9:20). Thus, the first sentence in 3 Nephi 9:20 is understood to mean “and ye shall [continue to] offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit,” *not* “and ye shall [begin to] offer for a [new] sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.”

172; emphasis added. See similarly, Eric Huntsman, “Broken heart and contrite spirit,” in *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, to be published in 2012. I thank Eric for sharing a prepublication draft of his entry with me. Jeffrey R. Holland has taught, “A ‘new’ sacrifice, *the spirit of which was always to have been the motivating force behind the earlier symbolic sacrifices*, is that of ‘a broken heart and a contrite spirit,’” in *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 257; emphasis added. Although he uses the word *new* in his statement, the fact that he places it in quotes suggests to me that he understands that the offering of a broken heart is not an entirely new command, but rather a newly emphasized older precept. McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:44, correctly observe that by doing away with animal sacrifice, “the Savior was not rescinding the eternal law of sacrifice but rather was declaring that the specific practice or instructional methodology employed earlier was no longer in effect.” Unfortunately, in their next several lines of text (quoted in note 4, above), these authors sound like they engage in the before-after interpretation I argue against in this study.

Thus, with the elimination of the strong, visual, external evidence of commitment to God provided by an animal offering, the Lord gave extra and *renewed* emphasis in 3 Nephi 9:20 to the offering of a broken heart as another gospel dispensation was beginning. But the offering of a broken heart had always been required of the Lord's covenant people as an indication of their sincere willingness to sacrifice whatever Jehovah requested.

Jesus actually twice instructed his surviving Nephite disciples to offer their hearts to him, although the second occurrence is only briefly mentioned in this study. Third Nephi 11 recounts that Jesus eventually appeared as a glorified, resurrected being to the Nephites near the Temple in Bountiful. His instructions to them included a modified version of the (so-called) Sermon on the Mount from his mortal ministry in the land of Israel (Matthew 5-7 / 3 Nephi 12-14). He included therein one command, similar to 3 Nephi 9:20, which is not found in Matthew 5: "ye shall believe in me, and . . . repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 12:19). This important charge also occurs later in the Book of Mormon (Ether 4:15, the Lord's words to Moroni), as well as in the Doctrine and Covenants (20:37; 59:8; 97:8). Such repetition serves to affirm the significance the Lord places on this gospel principle in every dispensation.

The Meaning of the Hebrew Words Translated "Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit"

The other major question examined in this study is, what is a "broken" heart? As quoted above, Psalm 51:17 reads: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit [*rûah nišbârâ*]: a broken and a contrite heart [*lêb-nišbâr w'ênidkeh*], O God, thou wilt not despise."²⁰

In the Bible, the Hebrew word meaning "heart"—*lêb* (and the related *lêbâb*)—designates a person's actual, physical heart, but also a person's intentions, will, perceptions, inner emotions, and conscience. The Hebrew noun *rûah* is often translated "spirit" but can

20. As noted above, this is Psalm 51:18 in the MT.

also denote wind, breath, and internal orientation. Thus, both of these terms—*lēb* (“heart”) and *rûaḥ* (“spirit”)—are used in a variety of literal and figurative ways in scripture.

The Hebrew verb translated “broken” in both occurrences in Psalm 51:17, from the lexical root *šbr*, means “to break, smash, shatter.” It occurs here as a participle in the *Niphal* stem (or conjugation) and has an essentially adjectival function. In addition to hearts, the *Niphal* stem of *šbr* in the Hebrew Bible designates the brokenness of, for example, a human neck (1 Samuel 4:18) and other body parts (Isaiah 8:15), a pottery vessel (Leviticus 6:28), a staff (Jeremiah 48:17), wrecked ships (1 Kings 22:48; v. 49 in the Hebrew Bible), and enemies, such as Moab (Jeremiah 48:4) and Babylon (Jeremiah 51:8). Not surprisingly, therefore, the early Greek translation of Hebrew scripture, known as the Septuagint, rendered this Hebrew verb with *suntribō*, “to crush, break.”²¹

The Hebrew term translated “contrite” in Psalm 51:17 is the *Niphal* participle of the lexical root *dkh*, which means “to crush” (as does the related *dkʿ*). Another example of this usage occurs in Psalm 38:8: “I am feeble and sore broken” [literally, “very crushed”; *nidkêti* ‘*ad-měʾōd*]). The English word *contrite*, which has come to mean “penitent, remorseful,” originally derives from the Latin term *contritus*, which means, “crushed, ground down.” There is, thus, a similar, parallel sense between the two phrases, *broken heart* and *contrite spirit*. Although more could be said here about *contrite spirit*, the focus of this study is on *broken heart*. However, it is important to reiterate that the two phrases originally designated a similar condition, not two separate phenomena. A literal translation of Psalm 51:17 thus reads, “The sacrifices of God are a spirit, a broken one; a heart, a broken and crushed one, O God, you will not despise.”

21. The Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, is the early Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, produced in Alexandria, Egypt, in the last few centuries BC. This affirming evidence of the LXX in understanding the meaning of Hebrew *šbr*, “to break, smash,” is cited by Thomas, “Broken heart and contrite spirit,” 172. Huntsman, “Broken heart and contrite spirit,” likewise cites the Greek translation of the “broken heart” passages in the Hebrew Bible and provides further discussion.

Therefore, a broken or contrite heart or spirit is one that is crushed, smashed, broken to pieces.

Since nineteenth-century English is the oldest language in which the Book of Mormon is available to us, we cannot be sure what the Nephite words were that were rendered “broken” and “contrite.” However, given the biblically oriented, Jerusalem-based origins of Nephite culture and the presence of certain Hebrew features in the English text of the Book of Mormon,²² the Hebrew of the biblical expression “a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17) provides the most plausible understanding of what Lehi (2 Nephi 2:7) and Jesus (3 Nephi 9:20) *originally* meant by the phrase “broken heart and a contrite spirit.”

When Latter-day Saint commentators discuss the meaning of the word *broken* in 3 Nephi 9:20 (and many do not), they sometimes refer to the metaphor of breaking a horse, in which the horse’s will becomes the rider’s will. According to this explanation, someone with a broken heart submits to the will of and follows the directions given by his or her Master.²³ This and other interpretations of the English word *broken* can provide important insights into our relationship with the Lord. However, they do not draw upon the meaning of the biblical Hebrew and thus can be viewed as conveying alternative, additional applications of the passage, not what I think the Lord originally intended when he instructed disciples in the Mosaic and later dispensations to offer a *broken heart* to him.

Application of This Understanding

What, then, was Jesus asking from those he commanded to offer the sacrifice of “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20)? Much has already been written to answer this question. For example, to help church members apply Jesus’s instruction, some have taught that a broken heart “is, as Paul taught, a ‘godly sorrow’

22. For example, M. Deloy Pack, “Hebraisms,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 321-25, with further bibliography.

23. For example, Monte S. Nyman, *Divine Ministry—The First Gospel: Jesus among the Nephites* (Orem, UT: Granite, 2003), 110.

which ‘worketh repentance to salvation’ (2 Corinthians 7:10). It is much more than just a repentant attitude; it includes a recognition of total dependence upon the Lord for salvation and a willing submission to him and his law (see Mosiah 3:19).²⁴

While such teachings emphasize important truths connected with the *condition* of having a broken heart—including faith, humility, obedience, and repentance—they bypass the original, underlying sense and symbolism of the act of breaking or smashing one’s heart and then offering it to God.²⁵ I conclude this study by briefly emphasizing a few ideas that are in harmony with this imagery.

We must break, smash, crush our heart to pieces to make it an acceptable offering to the Lord because, as the scriptures teach, even though we are God’s children, each of us lives in a fallen world and has a fallen nature (see Mosiah 3:19). We all develop, to one degree or another, hearts that are “hard.” A hard heart is one that is sinful in orientation and lacks faith in Christ, one that is not readily penetrated by the Holy Spirit. A hard-hearted person resists the love and the will of God. This is evident in several passages of scripture. For example, the Lord instructed Enoch: “Prophecy unto this people, . . . Repent, for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people, and my fierce anger is kindled against them; for their hearts have waxed hard” (Moses 6:27). Zedekiah, king of Judah, was described as one who “stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel” (2 Chronicles 36:13). And Mormon observed that shortly before Christ’s birth the Nephites

24. McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:44.

25. Conceptually closer to the point I am making about breaking our hearts as an offering to God are Amaleki’s statement in Omni 1:26 (“I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved”) and Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:1 (“present your bodies [as] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”). Bruce R. McConkie observed concerning this latter verse that, “to present one’s body as a living sacrifice is to come forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit through obedience.” McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 2:292.

“began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen [and] . . . began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations” (3 Nephi 2:1-3).²⁶

Such passages indicate that a hard heart is a proud and sinful heart, one that puts the things of self before the things of God, one that worships “other gods.” Thus, by extension, a proud, hard heart can be viewed as an idolatrous heart. In this regard, Edward Meadors emphasizes “the biblical axiom that worshipers *become like that which they worship*. Idolaters, those who worship created things, suffer hardening and sensory depletion as they assimilate to the inanimate objects of their faith.”²⁷ He bases his assessment on the teaching found twice in the book of Psalms that “their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not. . . . They that make them [idols] are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115:4-8; see similarly 135:15-18). These observations by the Psalmist and by Meadors correlate the creation and worship of lifeless objects with the development of (figuratively) lifeless, hard hearts. Thus, idol worship—whether the “idol” was an ancient image or is a modern, worldly possession or power—leads to a hardening of hearts. And hard-hearted people make and worship idols of various sorts.

Moses instructed the Israelites who would enter the land of Canaan to “overthrow their altars, and break their pillars [*šibbartem ʿet-maššēbôtām*], and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:3; see also Exodus 23:24; 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:14). The verb

26. For further citations and discussion, see Thomas, “Hard-heartedness,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 319.

27. Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Human Heart* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 2; emphasis in the original. N. T. Wright makes a similar observation: “When human beings give their heartfelt allegiance to and worship that which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God. One of the primary laws of human life is that you become like what you worship; what’s more, you reflect what you worship not only back to the object itself but also outward to the world around.” Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 182.

break in this passage derives from the same lexical root, *šbr*, found in Psalm 51:17: “a broken spirit [*rûaḥ nišbārâ*]: a broken and a contrite heart [*lēb-nišbār wēnidkeh*].”²⁸ Israelites “breaking” or smashing to pieces hard, stone pillars [*maššēbôt*] employed in illegitimate worship provides a striking analogy to “breaking” a heart that has become hard and idolatrous.²⁹

In this dispensation, Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.”³⁰ President Kimball’s statement correlates well with biblical warnings on idolatry. We exist in the image of what we worship. To have “the image of God engraven upon [our] countenances” (Alma 5:19), we must first break our hard hearts as a worshipful act of faith in and repentance through Jesus Christ.

28. Psalm 51:18 in the Hebrew Bible.

29. There are several words in the Hebrew Bible that designate idols and images that were condemned by the prophets, and several verbs that describe how these images were destroyed. Interestingly, the *Piel* stem of the lexical root *šbr* is used several times to indicate the destruction of *maššēbôt*. These were typically unhewn or rough-hewn stones erected to commemorate deity or divine activity. The King James Version of the Bible usually translates this term as “pillars” (as most modern translations do), but sometimes renders it less accurately as “images.” Biblical attestations of the term *maššēbâ*, and the plural *maššēbôt*, however, present a more complicated situation than can be discussed here. As an example, Genesis recounts several times that Jacob erected a *maššēbâ* (Genesis 28:18, 22; 35:14), and Moses set up *maššēbôt* at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:4). But biblical texts reporting Israelite activity in the land of Canaan regularly denounce Canaanite *maššēbôt*.

30. Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 4. He provides an interesting overview of modern examples of idols in *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 40-41: “Modern idols or false gods can take such forms as clothes, homes, businesses, machines, automobiles, pleasure boats, and numerous other material deflectors from the path to godhood. What difference does it make that the item concerned is not shaped like an idol? . . . Intangible things make just as ready gods. . . . Many worship the hunt, the fishing trip, the vacation, the weekend picnics and outings. Others have as their idols the games of sport, baseball, football, the bullfight, or golf. These pursuits more often than not interfere with the worship of the Lord and with giving service to the building up of the kingdom of God. To the participants this emphasis may not seem serious, yet it indicates where their allegiance and loyalty are. Still another image men worship is that of power and prestige.”

The symbolism of our smashing or breaking or crushing our hard, willful heart into pieces and offering the result to God is significant, because a smashed heart no longer exists in a recognizable or retrievable form. Just as an animal given over to God through sacrifice on an altar was no longer retrievable, so our broken hearts must be offered fully, irretrievably (we cannot break them and then fix them ourselves). It is at this point that the Lord can replace our now broken, offered heart with a new one. As he encouraged the Israelites in Ezekiel's day, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit" (Ezekiel 18:31). Clarifying how one gets this new heart, the Lord further taught, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26; see similarly 11:19; of course, it is possible to corrupt and harden this new heart through subsequent sin).³¹ As used in this passage, "flesh" (Hebrew *bāsār*) emphasizes the aliveness of the heart, not its fallen nature (as "flesh" is often used elsewhere in scripture).

Conclusion

From the time of Adam and Eve onward, the Lord's disciples have always needed to willingly break or smash their own hearts and to faithfully offer them to the Lord, so that their own will and pride were not obstacles to realizing perfection through Christ. When we break our hard, stony heart and turn all the pieces over to the Lord as a dedicated offering, he is able to give us a new, soft, living heart, one that is susceptible to the impressions of the Holy Spirit.³² This allows

31. In Jeremiah 31:31-33, God's writing of his new covenant law "in their hearts" is contrasted with the previous law given at Sinai. Paul draws on the contrast inherent in this imagery, and that of the stone Sinai tablets, when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3). Such language serves to emphasize the faithful internalization of God's word and power in one's soul.

32. This "new" heart is essentially theologically equivalent to living life with a submissive and obedient "broken heart" that many latter-day church leaders emphasize (see examples in note 6, above).

the penetrating, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to transform us (see 3 Nephi 9:20; 27:20): “I will give them an heart to know me” (Jeremiah 24:7). As Bruce D. Porter has observed, “When our hearts are broken, we are completely open to the Spirit of God and recognize our dependence on Him for all that we have and all that we are. The sacrifice so entailed is a sacrifice of pride in all its forms.”³³ This process is integrally connected with and a stepping-stone to fulfilling the great command to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5; see Matthew 22:37).

Ultimately, offering our hard-but-now-broken heart to the Lord and receiving a new, soft heart demonstrates our loyal devotion to him and our declared willingness to live within the gospel covenant, allowing the Father to reconcile us to himself through the power of his Son’s sacrifice. “It is the gift of yourself—what you are and what you are becoming” through Christ Jesus’s atoning power.³⁴ Following the offering of our fallen, hard, worthless but now-broken heart and the creation of a new heart within us, our ongoing faith, repentance, obedience, and submissiveness to the Lord’s will—sometimes referred to as *having* a broken heart—attests that the act of offering of our broken heart was a righteous offering to the Lord.

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33. Porter, “Broken Heart,” 31–32. Porter goes on to say, “Like malleable clay in the hands of a skilled potter, the brokenhearted can be molded and shaped in the hands of the Master.” While the Lord can and does do this as a result of our ongoing submission and obedience, I think the broken-heart metaphor in the scriptures more specifically teaches, as outlined above, that God will *replace* our heart, figuratively speaking, not remodel it. Again, I am emphasizing what I consider to be the original sense of this passage, understanding it as a command to act by offering our broken heart, not to continue living in a condition of submissiveness (which of course is expected by the Lord, but not explicitly addressed in this passage, according to my way of thinking).

34. D. Todd Christofferson, “When Thou Art Converted,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 12.