

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 4, Lecture 100

3 Nephi 15–18

Sacrament Prayers

**Implications of the Sermon at the Temple**

Today we'd like to finish up the last few elements in the Sermon at the Temple and then consider some of the implications of this approach to these chapters of scripture.

Of course, right after Jesus concludes the familiar material from the Matthean sermon, we begin in 3 Nephi 15 with a statement that puts all of this again back into perspective as to what it is doing. There Jesus says, "Whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day."

Again the point that we made at the outset was that one of the main purposes for this exercise, this instruction that Jesus is giving to the people, is to allow them to be able to be lifted up at the last day to withstand the final day of judgment. This general eschatological, judgmental orientation is then reinforced by what Jesus says. Notice also that just before you begin the Matthean material in the last part of chapter 11, you have the image of the person who builds upon the rock and the contrast with the person who builds upon the sand. That also comes then at the end in 3 Nephi 14, forming a kind of frame or an *inclusio*, which is a device frequently used in ancient literature to help people to see what the orientation of a passage will be. So we have that double reference helping us all the more clearly to see this focus in the Sermon at the Temple.

Chapters 15 and 16 then move into what I would just term a lecture on the nature of the covenant. Here Jesus responds to some of the questions that people have. They're not sure how it's possible that the law of Moses, as we discussed in the first lecture, could be entirely fulfilled when there are still a number of outstanding prophecies and promises that obviously have not yet been completely satisfied. Jesus explains how that will be, how the law has been now transformed; but all of the promises that God has made, of course, are not yet materialized. They will be brought into effect both for Israel as a group and for individuals personally in due course.

In point number 42, at the conclusion of that lecture, the beginning of chapter 17, Jesus then again turns his attention to instructing the people further as to what they should do. The first instruction, 3 Nephi 17:1, is that the people, if they are going to comprehend what he has said, must ponder, must go home and think about the things that have been said and done. I think that's an important instruction that tells us that there are deep meanings in what Jesus has given—just as the temple for us is something that is never exhausted, that you must always ponder and think and pray about. So Jesus instructs his people that that's what he wants them to do with this text. It's not just a matter of doing, listening, and remembering, but also pondering and internalizing and thinking about very deeply.

Item number 43: In 3 Nephi 17:5–9, Jesus then calls the people to bring any of the sick or afflicted that they might have so that Jesus can bless them. We have then the touching scene of Jesus blessing all of those in this multitude who had any affliction or handicap or any kind of illness. A comparable function, I suppose, is served in our own temples by the prayer roll, which is placed on the altar for any of the sick or afflicted or any people who need special blessings. It seems to me that Jesus turns to a similar function. It is interesting to me, although this is

certainly not a part of any kind of ritual that would then be given by Jesus to the people, but they turn around and reciprocate to him with the washing of the feet—not with ordinary water, but they wash his feet in their tears because of the gratitude and the love that they have felt for him, having spent this day or whatever time it was with him.

Point number 44: Jesus then turns to bless the parents and the children. We frequently hear of this material. It's used in many Primary meetings and Primary inservice lessons to show how Jesus loves the children. We overlook, however, the first half of the blessing when we do that. The first thing Jesus does is to call the parents, and he blesses them. It's interesting to me that there's some discussion given, although we can't be very sure of exactly how the people positioned themselves or where they were, but the text talks about these people being round about Jesus. Jesus is in the middle somehow, and he calls first of all the children to be brought to him. It seems to me that they would have, as children naturally do, just thronged around him—just encircled him in kind of an internal circle within the multitude. And then it says that the parents stood around the children, all round about them. So it's almost as if you have Jesus in the middle with a circle of children around him, and then the parents encircling them. After Jesus blesses the parents, then he turns to the children and blesses each one of them. I think it's significant that the text says, after he concludes this blessing, that he turns to the parents and says, "Behold your little ones." It seems to me—and again I just suggest this for your pondering—that Jesus is doing something more here than simply saying: look at your little kids—aren't they cute? Aren't they cute little guys? He's saying "behold your little ones." In some sense now I think they are their little ones, in a sense that they weren't prior to the time this blessing was given.

At that point you remember that the parents witness what has gone on. Angels descend and minister, and thus this portion of the Sermon at the Temple is witnessed by God, angels, and the parents as witnesses. The suggestion, of course, is that some form of priesthood blessing has been given which now brings these families together in a special, spiritual way. They would never be the same as families, in any event, having experienced this great event together as a family unit.

In chapter 18 we turn then to point 45, where Jesus will give the people a new name. The new name that they are given is the name of Christ, which they take upon themselves by way of covenant. It's interesting that we now encounter the eucharist, the sacrament, where Jesus divides the congregation into the groups and has the disciples minister unto them, giving them each the bread and the wine as tokens of his body and blood. In so doing, as they partake of that, they covenant and witness that they will keep the commandments which he had given them this day. We usually think of the sacramental covenant only in connection with our baptismal covenants. But as I understand it, when we partake of the sacrament every Sunday, we renew whatever covenant we have ever made with God, and so it is the full range of covenant relationship that's being renewed and enriched and represented by that.

I'd like to digress for just a minute to talk about the sacrament because I think it bears on the general question of whether or not it is reasonable to think that the Nephites took what they experienced on this day and incorporated it somehow into their religious liturgy and ritual. I think one of the strongest evidences of that is in the sacrament prayers. If you compare, and a few people have done this, 3 Nephi 18, where Jesus administers to the bread and then administers to the wine, the words and phrases which Jesus uses there all find their way into the sacrament prayer that you find in Moroni 4 and 5—that they will take upon them the name of Christ and always remember him. In 3 Nephi 18 it's all cast in the first person. Jesus, of course, is saying that you will keep the commandments which I have given you, that you will always remember the body which I have shown unto you. Someone has taken this—whether it was Nephi himself or whether it was Jesus himself, we don't know—but someone has taken this experience and then cast those words and phrases into the prayer that the Nephites I think immediately begin using as their sacrament prayers.

It is interesting to me that as Latter-day Saints we do not technically observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The prayers that we administer, the sacrament that we participate in, is really the sacrament of the Lord's appearance, because it is from the Book of Mormon that we know those prayers. We don't know those from the New Testament or from anything in early Christianity. The way in which the priests administer the sacrament is explained in the Book of Mormon and follows this prototype. What that says to me is that we generally spend our time during preparation for partaking of the sacrament thinking [of New Testament scenes], and this is certainly appropriate. I don't mean to take away; I mean simply to augment. We usually think of the Last Supper, the Upper Room—the events that preceded the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It seems to me that we should add to that an effort to try to spiritually place ourselves into the context of the Sermon at the Temple—that we should try to see ourselves as having experienced the same thing that these Nephites did. It is their prayer that we use. A couple of questions:

“When Christ was in the Old World, first he said the prayer and then he broke the bread and administered the wine. But now and also on the American continent he did it the opposite way. Is there any significance to that, do you think?”

I had never wondered about that. The question is whether it makes any difference whether the bread is broken prior to the blessing, as seems to be the case in the New Testament record, or the other way around. I guess I'm not sure.

They are told right at the outset that this is a covenant, that I want you to partake of this. Then they are told, now that you have done this, this is the meaning of what has happened. I don't know. It's an interesting question. I would have to think about that.

“The Joseph Smith Translation changes the order of that?”

In John?

“It's either Luke or John. The other question is, how do you think the liturgy and rituals here in the New World compared with the Old World? Did they use similar prayers?”

Well, that's a good question. The question is, did the prayers that Jesus then initiated here in the New World track very closely what he would have given to the apostles in the Old World? The problem there is we don't have much of the eucharistic literature from the first couple of centuries. There's a little bit. There's a lengthy treatise by Lietzmann on the liturgical material—the baptismal prayers and the sacramental prayers from early Christianity (third century, fourth century), a wide variety of it. I've looked at that. I don't see much in the way of similarity that would indicate [they were the same]. You see basic things that are there. You'd always expect that, but in terms of verbatim similarities, no, not that I've found. Part of the problem here, too, is that to us the sacrament is a very open thing. Anyone can come and watch us administer to and pass and partake of the sacrament. What we're seeing here [is that] when Jesus finally gets to the pinnacle, the last thing that he is going to present to these people—it is the sacrament, a very sacred inner ordinance. In early Christianity the love feasts, the agape feasts, the eucharistic experience was kept extremely secret. In fact that was one of the things that led to so much speculation about what the early Christians were doing off in these things. People assumed that since they were called “love feasts” they must be R rated or X rated or something. That was part of the reason that the Christians then made the sacrament a more public event in the second century. I point that out simply to say that whatever those prayers were originally, they were kept very sacred and very secret and that explains, I think, to some extent why we don't know exactly what Peter and Paul would have been using as they went around and administered the sacrament to the faithful there. It's an interesting question. Maybe someday we'll know more about it.

There is a little difference that I think you might also want to observe between the Old World and the New World. For those who see this as the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the prayer (and Paul reflects this) on the bread was always "eat in remembrance of the body which was broken." It is the broken bread, the symbol of the breaking there that becomes important for the Old World. But in 3 Nephi 18:7 what does the bread symbolize in the memory of the Nephites? You should partake of the bread in memory of the body which I have shown unto you. The Nephites didn't see the breaking [of Christ's body] as John and James and Peter did, and Mary and Martha and those who were there at the cross. For them it was a symbol of the resurrection—the life, the blood, the bread of life—a little different orientation.

You might also want just to note and put this in the hopper to think about as well: Although we don't celebrate the sacrament today in our temples, in the Kirtland Temple and in the Nauvoo Temple that was standard. In fact, as a part of the dedicatory service for the Kirtland Temple, after Sidney Rigdon finally got through with his two-and-a-half-hour sermon (Sidney was into long sermons), they broke for the afternoon and came back. Then following the dedicatory prayer and a number of testimonies and speaking in tongues and so on, then the twelve apostles administered the sacrament to all who were present. That was also done in the Nauvoo Temple.

We move then to point number 46. After the sacrament is administered, Jesus then gives the people instruction about the importance of continuing worthiness: that no one is to be allowed to participate in the sacrament—and by that I would understand all of the ordinances and instructions leading up to and a part of the partaking of the sacrament. Everything that Jesus has done, whatever is going to be continued of this—no one is to be allowed to participate in these from this point forward unless they are proven worthy to do so. Something along the order of a temple recommend is perhaps suggested here, that priesthood authorities are not knowingly to allow people to participate in these ordinances unless they are worthy to do so.

Finally, the last thing that Jesus does before he ascends that evening is number 47 at the end of chapter 18. He lays his hands upon the twelve whom he has chosen and gives them the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. I think that's an interesting thing to observe. Jesus, of course, had called them as twelve in chapter 11, but if you look carefully, the text is very precise and says that at that point, Jesus gave them only the power to baptize. That of course is the Aaronic Priesthood or the Levitical Priesthood, or something equivalent in the Nephite jargon. But by the time they have completed this day, they are now prepared to take upon themselves the Melchizedek Priesthood. So there's something that has happened between chapters 11 and 18 that I think is significant from a priesthood advancement point of view, and I think that too fits very nicely into what we have been suggesting as the essence of this experience altogether.

So with that the remarkable first day of Jesus with the Nephites concludes. You can imagine going home that night and indeed having been fed and impressed. When Jesus says go home and think about this, there's certainly a lot to think about. Can you imagine having just had this all thrown at you? You remember when you went to the temple or when you were baptized or whatever it was. It doesn't all sink in right at first; it takes a while. And you can just imagine how these people would have felt after not just a first discussion or a second discussion, but basically getting the whole banquet in one sitting. Really rather staggering.

I would like to turn my attention now to the assignment that I asked you to think about, and that is just a question of the implications of this. As I've thought about this I would like to divide the implications into four different groups. I'll suggest a few that I've thought of and perhaps you would like to share some that you've come up with. There may be more than four groups, but for purposes of being a little bit organized, if you try to think where your ideas might fit if you want to contribute them, let's do it this way. (1) There are implications for the Book of Mormon in what I'm suggesting. (2) There are implications for our understanding of the Sermon on the

Mount, the New Testament, early Christianity, and the apostasy. (3) There are implications for our own temple worship and temple attendance. (4) There are implications for our reading and studying and understanding of scripture in general.

Let me come back up to the first one, some implications for the Book of Mormon. If this is right, does it change our view? Does it affect our view of the Book of Mormon? As I said last time at the end of class, the Doctrine and Covenants affirms that the Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel. One of the criticisms that has been raised by people—some legitimate and serious seekers of truth and others who were simply trying to discredit the Book of Mormon—is if the Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel, why doesn't it contain some of the things that you Latter-day Saints think to be of ultimate importance? It seems to me that perhaps we can answer that question now in a more powerful way than we had ever suspected before. Indeed, of the Book of Mormon it is said that it will be viewed as a weak thing, as a thing of naught, and that it is out of some of the things that will be viewed as the weakest of all that the Lord will turn those into great strengths. Sometimes we look beyond the mark. There it might be right under our nose, and yet we don't see. We don't perceive. Our eyes and ears are not attuned, and we're not ready. Or maybe it just is that it is not the time for those kinds of things to be brought forth. I don't know.

It seems to me that there are some implications here for the translation process of the Book of Mormon. It has been suggested not only by critics of the Book of Mormon but some very astute students of it, including B. H. Roberts and others, that when Joseph Smith got to certain portions of the text—after all, translating was a very difficult process—that he would simply open his King James Bible [and take material from there]. If he found that Jesus gave some kind of sermon, what kind of sermon might Jesus have given? [Joseph might have asked]. Well [a person might] kind of crudely splice into the text a body of known material, because, after all, it seems to work. I now find that to be a much less likely explanation for the similarities between the King James language, and indeed the King James translation of the Sermon on the Mount, than I had before. It seems to me to run against any likelihood that these materials could be worked into a coherent whole from chapter 11 to chapter 18 in the way that we have seen it work. It fits exactly into that kind of context so neatly, if indeed this is just some kind of expedient or crude kind of incorporating of foreign material that doesn't belong. But more than that, it also seems to me to fly in the face of a lot of historical information about how the translation took place. In this light we probably now need to go back and think this through one more time. At least the testimony of Emma in 1879 was emphatic that Joseph never had notes or books or any materials in front of him. David Whitmer [similarly testified] in the 1880s. I recognize these are late testimonies; nevertheless, they are by people who were present and understood and saw this process of translation. They never saw Joseph Smith using any other books or notes. As was the case in most of the translation of the book as we have it, if Joseph was using the seerstones with his head in the hat, it would be very difficult to put on the table anywhere into that kind of configuration a book that he was somehow pulling out and using.

People say, well, what about the curtain? Wasn't he sitting behind a curtain so that he could deceive everyone? No, [according to] Emma and others. Oliver Cowdery's wife, Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, testified in correspondence that you would have no reason for being prejudiced, that she often sat and saw them translating. Yes, there was a curtain, but the curtain was only over the door to prevent people, at least at the Whitmer farm, from breaking into the room and surprising the people who were working. There may have been a curtain between Joseph and Martin Harris when the 116 pages were translated. All of the description of the curtain stuff comes from some early statements that were attributed to Martin Harris, some of them coming through Charles Anthon. So it may have been that, when he was using the Urim and Thummim, a slightly different method of translation was in place, especially if Martin Harris, as the Doctrine and Covenants calls him, "that wicked man," was not yet one whom the Lord wanted the see the plates or the interpreters. That would make some sense. But for Oliver

Cowdery there would be no reason to withhold from him a view of these things, partly because Oliver (and you can find this in Dean Jessee's collections of the personal writings of Joseph Smith) received himself a vision of the Lord and of the plates prior to the time he joined Joseph Smith. It was in March of 1829 that he had that vision, and the Lord said, I want you to go and be his scribe. That was why on April 5 Oliver Cowdery showed up in Harmony, Pennsylvania, to help Joseph. So he had already been certified by the Lord as one who could see the plates. I think that might explain some of the difference there.

In any event, I think that the accounts we have of how the translation took place support the idea that what we have here is in fact a more literal representation of what was actually on the plates than just some kind of nebulous, general interpretation. David Whitmer said that in the translation process a character would appear to Joseph, and then he would give the translation. It's interesting to me that he says that sometimes in that translation process, one character would end up being a whole sentence. Other times a character would only represent a word. In other words, we wouldn't expect to find a one-to-one correlation between what is in the English translation and the symbols on the plates. But everything that is translated into English has some equivalent, whether it is a symbolic or more of a literary kind of equivalent, it was, at least in David Whitmer's mind, something that was coming from the plates and not just being incorporated in from the rest of Joseph's memory of scripture. I don't think he had these things memorized. Perhaps in some deep, profound, psychological sense the biblical texts were imbedded in his memory, and the Lord was able, through the felicity of the spirit, to bring these kinds of things to his memory in a way that is supernatural and extraordinary. Maybe that would account for it, but certainly not, in my opinion, pulling the book out and just reading from it. Question?

"I just have a question about the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. The Joseph Smith Translation renders it differently, but in the Book of Mormon it has it exactly as it has it in Matthew."

Right. Well, the Sermon on the Mount in the Joseph Smith Translation is not exactly the same as the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Mormon. I account for that because the JST makes it clear that Jesus is giving that instruction at that time. The way you have it in the JST is at the very beginning of his ministry when he first calls the Twelve and sends them on a mission. It is being used in a missionary context there. I conclude from that that Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount more than once. The basic text remained the same, but certain portions of it could be changed to adapt it to the various audiences or the needs or circumstances. I think he gave it when he called the apostles and sent them out—when they needed to have power in order to act in his name. I think he gave it to them again after the resurrection and before he left in Luke 24. I don't know how many times he gave it. One of the premises of New Testament scholarship is that Jesus said everything only once, and therefore our chore as scholars is to try to plow back into the text and find what the original form of the saying was. When you compare, for example, the prayer in Luke 11 with the prayer in Matthew 6, or the Beatitudes in Luke 6 with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 [you see this]. The task that the critical New Testament scholars have taken upon themselves is to find what the original form of those Beatitudes must have been. That assumes that there was only one set of Beatitudes and that Jesus only blessed people once and that Jesus only taught people how to pray once. I guess I just find that really hard to believe. He worked for three years. Any of you who have preached the gospel for a couple of years know that you give the same discussion more than once. And it's not always exactly the same, as hard as the MTC might try to make it that way.

Well, that's jumping a little ahead to implication area number two, though, for implications on our understanding of the New Testament. Before we leave this point of translation, let me make just a couple of other points. There's an interesting thing you should know a little about. Well, let me give you this example and then explain some of the others. In Matthew 5:21–22 there's the saying, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill. . . . But I say unto

you, That whosoever is angry with his brother . . . shall be in danger.” Now in your King James version you read, for “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause,” Okay? In other words, if you’ve got a good cause, then you’re okay. But if you are angry with your brother without a good reason, then you are in danger of the council and the judgment. Now that phrase, without a cause, is this little Greek word *eikē*, and it’s kind of hard to translate exactly what it means literally, but likely or something like that. Now, [you notice an] interesting thing when you go to the earliest manuscripts, several of them—[such as] P64 and P67. This New Testament manuscript dates to around A.D. 200, among the earliest New Testament manuscripts we have. Also [there is] the original hand of the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the better of the New Testament codices, and several other minuscules and other early Christian Fathers. When they present this material, they drop this word. I mean they don’t drop it—it’s just not there. So it just says whoever is angry is in trouble.

Now you look at 3 Nephi 12, and you’ll see that the phrase “without a cause” is not there. New Testament scholars have concluded that this is probably the original, the better reading, to drop this, because Jesus rarely gave people excuses or escape hatches. He doesn’t say, whosoever looks upon a woman to lust after her with good cause is okay. No. The harder sayings of Jesus are the ones that are usually consistent with the rest of his preaching. So here we have one place in the Book of Mormon where the New Testament manuscripts make a difference in the meaning of how we understand what Jesus is saying, and the Book of Mormon conforms with what appears to me, and I think most would agree, to be the stronger reading.

There’s another one like that in 3 Nephi 12:10. In Matthew it says for whosoever shall suffer persecution and so on for righteousness’s sake shall be blessed. Now as people have tried to translate the Sermon on the Mount in Greek back into the Aramaic that Jesus might have spoken, that is a very difficult expression to put back into Aramaic. A very strong and cogent argument has been made that Jesus didn’t say that we should suffer for righteousness’s sake, but that in Aramaic that most likely would have been “whosoever will suffer for the Righteous One’s sake.” In other words you’re suffering for whom? For God. He is the Righteous One. The Book of Mormon is consistent with that where it says that you will suffer for my name’s sake. It is the Lord that is behind that.

Now there are about ten other significant places in the Greek manuscripts where it appears that there were some differences in the early manuscripts. They’re significant from a very technical kind of textual point of view, but they don’t, in my opinion, result in any difference in the meaning of the passage. In other words, in some places the Greek will say “whoever is angry with his brother.” In other places it will say “whosoever is angry with his brother,” and some places will just say “who is angry with his brother.” Well, there we have some textual confusion. Was it who, whoever, or whosoever? But does it matter in English how you render it? I can render that any one of those three ways into English and then ask you to tell me which of those three in Greek it originally was and you can’t tell. You could render all three of those Greek expressions with the same whosoever in English. And that’s the case, I believe, in all of those other places where we have variants. The one place where it does make a difference, the Book of Mormon delivers the needed translation.

Well, other implications that occur to you for the Book of Mormon, its meaning, its message? Yes?

I think there are a lot of stories in the Book of Mormon that can be interpreted in that same sense with covenants and temple symbols.

Yes. Now that we know that they were seeing the fulfillment of the old practices in this new, and also knowing how important temple ritual was in ancient Israel, we can start looking at places

like 2 Nephi 6–10 which is a covenant speech that Nephi wants Jacob to deliver to the people. We can now look at Mosiah 1–6 with a new set of eyes, which of course has a lot of similarities [to the covenant text in 3 Nephi]. The covenant language in Mosiah 5 is directly related to the language that we have in 3 Nephi 18. All of the promises—taking upon yourself a new name, promising to remember him always and keep his commandments which he has given you—those phrases are right there in Mosiah 5. Also look at Alma 12 and 13, where Alma is describing a manner in which priests after the Order of the Son of God are ordained, a manner in which they can look forward to the atonement of Christ. It’s a symbolic type of ordinance, more going on there than just a simple ordination by the laying on of hands. Yes?

“One thing I noticed is the way Doctrine and Covenants 84 talks about Moses trying to preach the gospel parallels 3 Nephi very closely in the way he’s trying to prepare them to see the face of God.”

Yes, you’re looking at Exodus 19, washing your clothes and preparing. Of course, they chicken out at the end and say, Moses, you go do it.

“The law given to Joseph Smith in D&C 42 also parallels very closely.”

That’s right. D&C 42 was known as *the law*—these are the rules by which all people who participate in the new and everlasting covenant are bound, and notice the similarities there again to the Ten Commandments and basic teachings that are present in all of these texts. That’s a good point. Any other Book of Mormon implications?

One of the theme songs, of course, of President Benson’s administration has been that we still labor under a condemnation because we have not remembered “the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon.” Look at the phrase there in the D&C 84:57. The problem is not that we have forgotten the Book of Mormon. The problem is not that we don’t know the story of the stripling warriors, etc. The problem is not that we don’t have Arnold Friberg paintings etched in our minds. You know, we remember the Book of Mormon in those kinds of ways, but what the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that we must remember is “the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon.” Of course, one of its purposes is that we might know the covenants and know that we are not cast off. That’s right on the title page, so perhaps we need to attend much more to the understanding of the covenant relationship that the Book of Mormon is trying to create between us and our Father in Heaven and Christ. All of these kinds of texts work into that objective.

Well, what about implications for the New Testament? If what we’re saying is correct about Jesus’ teaching, what does it do to your reading of the New Testament materials? Any things that go off there? First of all, what about the composition of the Sermon on the Mount? [There is] the idea that Matthew, late in life sat down and pieced together out of his scrapbook, his treasures of truth or whatever he kept, little sayings of Jesus, kind of on the order of the Gospel of Thomas. Well, it seems to me that when you have a Socrates, a Jesus, a Buddha, whoever it is that stands as the fountainhead of a powerful new religious movement or ideology or philosophical school, it is rarely the followers who come traipsing along behind, especially when they are fishermen, who somehow impose upon these miscellaneous sayings a coherent order. Somehow we have this view, and maybe it’s created by something of an enamorment with evolution, that things always start out simple and then get complex; therefore, Jesus’ gospel must have started out with simple sayings and then the complex structures were added ecclesiastically after the community was somehow formed. It seems to me that that isn’t necessarily the way we ought to view this. It’s more likely to me that the powerful historical fact of Jesus has to be understood in conjunction with his being the source of not just a few aphorisms or proverbs, but an entire world view that is put together in a coherent whole. It seems to me that that’s a more likely interpretation and that the reasons offered by textual critics to the contrary are interesting and teach me to read the text very carefully, but they don’t explain what I see going on here.

“It just occurred to me that we’ve been told to keep journals now for how many years. Would Matthew not have recorded things and then just written his testimony from his journal?”

Well, I’m sure that Matthew kept records. By training he was a person who was a record keeper.

“We just have what was written 70 years later. From what record was this written?”

Yes, and the New Testament scholars are moving away from the radical idea that I’ve presented here that Matthew somehow just pulled this all together. There are too many things in the Sermon on the Mount, even as we have it, that are inconsistent with the agenda that Matthew seems to be imposing on the text in other places where you can see that he’s doing it. And just vocabulary. I can’t remember off the top of my head, but I’ve looked at the vocabulary in the Sermon on the Mount, and there are an astonishingly high number of words in the Sermon on the Mount that are used only in the Sermon on the Mount and never again in anything that Matthew writes and rarely in anything else in the New Testament. It bears the characteristics of a pre-Matthean text that Matthew didn’t write. Surely he incorporated it into his record, but I can’t imagine Matthew pawning off in A.D. 70 a gospel and saying, here, this is what Jesus said to us on the mountain. You remember? Hey, there were people who were still around who remembered, and they would have said, gee, I don’t remember Jesus ever saying that. And how’s this going to be bought? How’s this going to be pawned off on people? Their memories were not that short. Besides that, there are too many evidences that the Sermon served a role in the late thirties and early forties in the ward or branch or community in Jerusalem—it’s actually called a synagogue still in the epistle of James. And it was used according to the best scholarly opinion right now as a cultic reminder of the covenants that people made when they joined the Christian church. So it served a role that indicates that it would have been a text known and kept and not just created late in the day.

Well, it invites us also to look—every time you see other passages in the New Testament or in the early Christian literature where Sermon on the Mount phraseology is used—to wonder now. It takes on a higher level of spiritual significance. It’s got an aura about it if this text is more than just a moral discourse about turning the other cheek and being a nice guy.

There’s another thing in terms of apostasy if you look back again and reread 1 Nephi 13 where Nephi prophesies about the loss of plain and precious things. At large in the land generally among Latter-day Saints is the idea that what happened was that plain and precious things were taken away from the record. First of all, somebody came along and with some scissors excised things that were plain and precious. That’s not what Nephi says if you read the order in which he presents the apostasy and the process by which it occurred. First, he says, that they will take away plain and precious parts from the gospel. And next, they will take away the covenants of the Lord. And third, as a result, plain and precious parts will be left out of the record. The process is first a change in the understanding of the gospel. Once the gospel is changed, they don’t understand how to use or have the power to administer the covenants. Once those things are gone, then [in] the later collections of records [they] have a hard time understanding or explaining, perhaps omitting certain things that they just aren’t doing anymore. The cause is not a textual problem; it’s not a transmission or a scribal problem. In fact I think in many cases the plain and precious things can still be right there in the record. But if the knowledge has been taken away from the gospel, and if the understanding of the priesthood and the covenants are gone, then you can read exactly the same words and just understand it in a completely different light. The result is exactly the same either way.

Well, that’s the bell. We have one more session together, which will be on Wednesday. We’ll wrap this up and try to pull together a bit of an overview for the remainder of 3 Nephi as well. Thanks very much, and I’ll see you next Wednesday.