

AUDIENCE ASTONISHMENT AT THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND THE SERMON AT THE TEMPLE

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When Jesus finished teaching the multitude at the Sermon on the Mount, “the people were astonished at his doctrine” (Matthew 7:28). Similarly, when Jesus gave the same teachings to the Nephites, “there were some among them who marveled, and wondered” (3 Nephi 15:2). Yet, while both audiences had similar reactions, the two texts provide different reasons for the reactions. In the Book of Mormon the marvelment arose because some “understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.” Matthew, on the other hand, explained that the audience’s astonishment came about because “he spake as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29). A cursory reading suggests that the Matthean audience response arises from differences between Christ’s teaching style or form of the presentation, but their astonishment emerges from misunderstanding the primacy of the law of Moses and the role of revelation in their spiritual lives. These two doctrines are understood by the Nephite audience, as demonstrated throughout the Book of Mormon; thus their

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astonishment is not the result of questioning Christ's authority. Yet it also arises from confusion as to how these two doctrines interact with one another. Thus one of the purposes of Christ's sermon is to reveal the relationship between the law and revelation.

AUDIENCE ASTONISHMENT IN MATTHEW

One can distinguish two clearly defined styles that characterize Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11) and the method of teachings by thesis and antithesis (Matthew 5:38–48). Yet, as we shall see, the uniqueness of Christ's sermon is not in the use of these styles but in the manner by which he presented them and in the doctrinal themes presented by incorporating the styles.

The Beatitudes. Thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that the literary genre of the beatitude predates Jesus. At least one scroll includes this presentation style for Wisdom literature:¹ “Bles[sed] are those who rejoice in her [Wisdom], and do not burst out in insane paths. Blessed are those who search for her with pure hands, and do not pursue her with a treacherous heart. Blessed is the man who attains Wisdom, and walks in the law of the Most High, and directs his heart to her ways” (4Q525 2 ii 3 2–4).² This literary genre is also found in *Sirach* 14:1–2. 20–21, an apocryphon written around 190 BC: “Blessed is anyone who meditates on wisdom, and reasons with intelligence, who studies her ways in his heart, and ponders her secrets” (*Sirach* 14:20–21; The New Jerusalem Bible).

Christ was not unique in using the beatitude style in his presentation, but he did add stylistic elements not found in other beatitude forms elsewhere. In particular, Jesus added a specific blessing to each beatitude, a formal pattern not found in *Sirach*.³ Moreover the fulfillment of the blessing was given an undisclosed future time and linked with salvation and eternal life,⁴ making the earlier blessed state an implicit set of instructions of what to do to gain those blessings, not merely a description of state. Thus Jesus promises that the “poor in spirit” and those “which are persecuted for righteousness' sake” here and now will be blessed, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, 10). Similarly, Jesus promises that those who are the pure in heart and the peacemakers are blessed because “they shall see God” and “shall be called the children of God,” respectively (Matthew 5:8–9). Thus Jesus used an already existing form

of teaching and revised it stylistically by adding a promise of the fulfillment of blessings resulting from present acts described by the “blessed” clause. In this innovation lies the true import of Jesus’ presentation, that he is one who has authority to promise these blessings.

Thesis and antithesis. Jesus also used another common teaching method known today as the thesis-antithesis method. Like the rabbis and scribes of his day, Christ began by quoting the scripture, and then he would interpret it. For example, in Matthew 5:33: “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths” and in Matthew 5:38: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” The reference Jesus makes to the Mosaic law⁵ is followed by his explanation of the meaning of the text in question.

Jesus employs the thesis-antithesis method by quoting or referring to the Old Testament and then interpreting the text in question. Yet, like in the beatitude forms, Christ innovates the formula by establishing the authority of the interpretation in himself through the clause “but I say unto you” (for example, Matthew 5:27–28: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”) or by declaring what should be done. Thus in the prohibition to forswear, Jesus answered, “Swear not at all” (Matthew 5:34), and to the law of talion, “an eye for an eye,” he answered, “That ye resist not evil” (Matthew 5:39). This was then followed by even more instruction. In the first case the Lord detailed that men should “swear not all all” (Matthew 5:34). In the second case he illustrated how a man may not “resist evil”: “whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also” (vv. 39–40).

Moreover, as with the Beatitudes, his interpretations appear to have been more than simple interpretations or commentary but instructions, even commandments, for obtaining salvation. For example, in the following thesis-antithesis Christ’s interpretation consists more of instruction of what to do: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). The instruction revealed in this

thesis-antithesis builds upon the earlier text but also adds to it, even suggesting that the earlier material is inadequate to bring about salvation. Thus instead of providing various interpretations as the rabbis did or a single interpretation linked to a historical event as in Qumran commentaries, Jesus presented his own interpretation as an antithesis of the law, setting himself as the one who can provide a true meaning to the law.

This technique of quoting and then explaining (thesis-antithesis) is similar to the *pesharim* (commentaries) found in Qumran in which one reads a citation from scripture followed by its true meaning within the Qumran community. For instance, the following is a *pesher* on Psalm 37:23–24: “*The steps of the man are confirmed by the Lord and He delights in all his ways; though [he stumble, he shall not fall, for the Lord shall support his hand].* Interpreted, this concerns the Priest, the Teacher of [Righteousness whom] God chose to stand before Him, for He established him to build for himself the congregation”⁶ (4Q171 III 14–16).

As the above shows, the members of the Qumran community interpreted the biblical verses in light of their particular circumstances. In this case, from a generic statement concerning the Lord confirming the acts of the righteous, the community saw application to the leader of their group, the Teacher of Righteousness, considered chosen by God.

The talmudic literature—set down in writing from the fourth century AD—also reveals this teaching style by providing the manner in which the rabbis of the first few centuries following Christ quoted and then discussed the law. Here is an example with the interpretation of Exodus 12:43, founded in the *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, a compilation of halakhic midrash on Exodus, in the Tractate Piskhah, chapter 15:

Scripture here deals with both the Passover of Egypt and the Passover of subsequent generations—these are the words of R. Josiah. R. Jonathan says: This passage deals with the Passover of Egypt, and hence [from it] I would know only about the Passover of Egypt. How do I know about the Passover of subsequent generations? Scripture says: “According to all the statutes of it, and according to all the ordinances thereof, shall ye keep it” (Numbers 9:3). Said R. Josiah to him: This passage as well as that one deals with both the Passover of Egypt and the Passover of subsequent generations. Why, then, does Scripture have to say:

“According to all the statutes of it, and according to all the ordinances thereof?” It merely aims to teach thereby that even those laws which are omitted [from those passages] in the regulations for the Passover of subsequent generations [but which are stated in the regulations about the first Passover] are applicable to it. R. Isi the son of Akiba says: This ordinance prescribed for the Passover applies only to the body of the paschal lamb.⁷

In the above example, the rabbis have used the thesis-antithesis method to help interpret another body of scriptural text by providing multiple explanations. This is a common method found throughout these later Jewish texts.

Revelation versus primacy of law. While the above discussion has demonstrated that Christ innovated on recognized teaching methods, these innovations functioned primarily to highlight the fact that Christ was the authority on the doctrines presented. This explains the astonishment of the people mentioned in Matthew 7:28 but also reveals the reason for the astonishment in the first place: that the Old World audience had lost an understanding of the relationship between the law and its fulfillment and the true way for divine instruction—continuing revelation.

Both the form and the content of Christ’s teachings prove how his understanding of the law and its relationship to the concept of personal or prophetic revelation differed from the understanding of the scribes. The law as revelation was established back in Exodus, when God met with Moses following the deliverance from Egypt. Unfortunately, the first law was taken from Israel because of wickedness, and Israel was given another set of stone tablets:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two *other* tables of stone, like unto the first, and I will write upon *them* also, *the words of the law, according as they were written at the first* on the tables which thou brakest; *but it shall not be according to the first, for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them; for my presence shall not go up in their midst, lest I destroy them.*

But I will give unto them the law as at the first, but it shall be after the law of a carnal commandment; for I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not

enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage. Therefore do as I have commanded thee, and be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai. (JST, Exodus 34:1–2, italics for JST added by author)

As the Joseph Smith Translation of Exodus 34:1–2 makes clear, the original law was taken from Israel and replaced with a “carnal” law, or a set of principles that relied on physical acts to be performed properly. This is the law that Israel followed from Moses until John the Baptist and that Christ followed until the Resurrection (see D&C 84:23–27).

Because of the importance of this law, many of the Jews believed that obedience to it led to salvation,⁸ and indeed that was its primary purpose, but Israel’s continued wickedness led not only to abandonment of the law as a mechanism for greater revelation, but even to the neglect of the moral and ethical natures of the law. This neglect was one of the central criticisms of the Old Testament prophets. Through the mouths of these prophets the Lord condemned the people’s sacrifices as having no value (see Isaiah 1:11–15; 29:13; Hosea 6:6) because they did not take care of the weak, the poor, and the orphans (see Jeremiah 5:26–28; Amos 5:12). Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, chastised the priests for performing impure sacrifices with the wrong intent and with insincerity (see Malachi 1: 6–14). Following Malachi, centuries of apostasy further corroded the understanding of the law as a vehicle to greater spiritual insight, let alone greater revelation; the performance of the law apparently became a series of rote actions that one could engage in without much thought. Moreover, the concept of continuing revelation was completely lost from the Jewish worship system.

According to Josephus, writing in the first century AD, the Pharisees believed that prophetic revelation such as found in the Bible had come to an end with the last prophet, Malachi (*Against Apion* I, 38–41). Similarly, in I Maccabees 9:27 we find that at least some elements of Jewish teachings recognized the loss of prophetic leadership and revelation. The different traditions within Judaism of Christ’s day reacted variously to the ending of prophetic revelation. Among the Pharisees, the interpretation of sacred texts had succeeded prophetic revelation. As a supplement to Mosaic law—also called written law—they had also begun the development of the oral law.⁹ The oral law consisted of the teachings of wise

men, interpretations of written law applied to questions arising from everyday life or added prescriptions to answer new needs of the people. In the New Testament these teachings, transmitted orally from master to disciple, are called “the tradition of the elders” (Matthew 15:2).¹⁰ Jesus condemned these “commandments of men” (Mark 7:7) inasmuch as they separated men from the divine law and led to hypocrisy.¹¹ Sadducees and Samaritans of the period also rejected the oral traditions and recognized only the law of Moses.

While the extensiveness of these texts demonstrates the concern and devotion of the rabbis to understanding and then performing the law, it also reveals their ignorance of the role of continuing revelation in one’s spiritual growth. A passage from the Talmud of Babylon, written long after the life of Jesus, provides a good illustration of rabbinic conceptions of the law. *Baba Mezi’a* 59b relates a disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua about the *halachah*, or laws supplementing or explaining the Mosaic law:

Again he [Eliezer] said to them: “If the *halachah* agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!” Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: “Why do ye dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the *halachah* agrees with him!” But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: “*It is not in heaven.*” What did he mean by this?—Said R. Jeremiah: “That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai. *After the majority must one incline.*”

R. Nathan met Elijah and asked him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?—He laughed [with joy], he replied, saying, “My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.”¹²

The fundamental difference between the teaching of the scribes and the wise men and the teachings of Jesus, as shown in the above narrative, is that the authority of the former rested on acceptance of historical tradition whereas the authority of the Lord rested on revelation. When Jesus made the distinction “ye have heard . . . but I say unto you,” he showed he did not derive his teaching from the law of Moses as the rabbis did, but

instead sought to restore the true power of the law of Moses as a vehicle for greater revelation. Jesus' stress on "but I say" is audacious, but it signifies that he went beyond the traditional authority. The very way Jesus spoke testified—to those among the audience who were able to understand—that direct revelation from heaven was not extinguished but alive and functioning again through Christ.¹³

Jesus sought neither to justify his words nor the authority by which he pronounced them. He proclaimed divine will as recognized in Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:37: "He taught them as one having authority *from God*, and not as having authority from the scribes." It is this appeal to direct divine authority that ultimately is the cause for the audience's astonishment recorded by Matthew.

"*I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*" This distinction is apparent in Christ's announcement that immediately follows the Beatitudes: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Frank F. Judd Jr. distinguishes two ways one may speak of fulfillment with respect to the law of Moses. According to him, the New Testament speaks on the one hand of the fulfillment of the sacrificial portions of the law, and on another hand of the fulfillment of the ethical portions of the law. The Gospels, because Christ's mission was not completed, presuppose that the "ritual" law was still necessary. In fact, nowhere did Christ break the law of Moses—the laws of the elders, yes, but not the law of Moses. As Judd states, "Ritual aspects of the law would be 'fulfilled' in the sense that they would cease once the events toward which they pointed actually occurred."¹⁴

The technique of the antithesis Jesus employs in the Sermon on the Mount reveals the contrast between the law as understood and practiced by the Jews and the law in its fullness as Jesus invited his audience to practice it. The words of Jesus in Matthew 23:23 are instructive from this point of view: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone." Christ's admonishment is not that they keep the carnal elements of the law. Indeed, he had taught in the Sermon on the Mount that complete observance of *every* commandment was necessary (see Matthew 5:19; JST, Matthew 5:21).¹⁵ Jesus reproached

the Jews for only selectively obeying the law, concentrating uniquely on the ritual part. Similarly, in the Beatitudes Jesus taught the audience, using his authority to bless, in order to raise their spiritual awareness of the ethical dimension of the law. Throughout the sermon, Christ emphasized an internal focus toward the law, which would lead to an obedience manifest not just in one's outward ritual behavior but in one's personal virtue and charity. Both are necessary requirements to individual revelation.

Jesus sought to raise the law to a higher level: that of the spirit of the law. Law is fulfilled when it takes on its full dimension and passes from the horizontal level (facts that may be seen by everybody) to include the vertical level (thoughts and intents known by God alone). Humans may go beyond external and apparent perfection toward a true perfection, that of the whole being, both external and internal. It is in this sense that the verb "fulfill" (Greek *plēroō*) in Matthew 5:17 takes on its full dimension and its full significance because it means "to make entire," "to complete."

The higher law Jesus taught not only prevents humans from sinning but also leads them unto individual perfection. It is thus that humans, purified from the inside, may in truth become "children of [their] Father" (Matthew 5:45; see also Luke 6:35) and obedient to the highest of the commandments: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Thus Christ's declaration that he would "fulfill" the law includes not only fulfilling the physical requirements of the law but also extends to providing, through his teachings in general and this sermon in particular, the means for each listener to fulfill or complete their spiritual journey. It highlights his unique role as the only qualified authority to provide this instruction and restore the true power of the law of Moses after centuries of apostasy. Thus the combination of these things created the astonishment in his listening audience.

AUDIENCE ASTONISHMENT IN 3 NEPHI

A slightly different form of the Sermon on the Mount was delivered to the righteous who survived the horrible calamities as recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10 who, like their Old World counterparts, "marveled" at Christ's words (3 Nephi 15:1–2). Yet the reasons for the New World astonishment are different. First, the Nephites understood the purpose of

the law of Moses; second, they believed in the principle of continuing revelation; and third, unlike the Jews, the Nephites upon reception of the sermon no longer lived the law of Moses. Thus their astonishment is not a result of Christ's teaching style, nor his insights into the law of Moses, but in the greater implications of having the law fulfilled.

The Nephites, the law of Moses, and continuing revelation. Like the Jews of the ancient world, the Nephites lived the Mosaic law, but it seems clear that the function of the law of Moses to point people toward Christ was clearly understood by the righteous in the Book of Mormon. Jacob stated, "We keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him [Christ]; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness" (Jacob 4:5). Likewise, Jacob's grandson Jarom explained, "The prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was" (Jarom 1:11).

Finally, we are told in Alma that the people "did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them. Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ" (Alma 25:15–16).

As these three references demonstrate, the law of Moses was understood to lead one to Christ,¹⁶ a doctrine that had been lost in the Old World.

Another factor influencing the difference in astonishment between the Matthean and Nephite audiences is the role of revelation in the spiritual lives of the two communities. Whereas the Old World appears to have lost the importance of personal and continual revelation, the Nephites had a continual understanding of the role of authority that comes from the spirit of prophecy and from revelation (see Alma 17:3). The Book of Mormon testifies of Nephite belief in revelation found not only in teachings of ancient prophets—engraved on the brass plates—but

also in the teachings of prophets in their own time, right up to the coming of Jesus, and long after his coming. Jacob set out with clarity the different kinds of revelation: “Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” (Jacob 4:6). Alma taught that personal revelation was in fact necessary to one’s spiritual development:

Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.

And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God. (Alma 5:45–47)

Four hundred years earlier, Nephi established that these principles applied to all, regardless of whether they were “prophets” or not: “I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men. . . . For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come” (1 Nephi 10:17, 19). These references indicate that the Nephites believed that continuing revelation was necessary not just for prophets but for anyone to grow spiritually and fulfill the plan of salvation and that ancient and contem-

porary revelation served the same goal: strengthening faith and leading people unto Christ.

“And there were some among them who marveled.” In comparison to the Jews of the ancient world, the Nephites had little reason to be astonished by the authority or the addition of new doctrine contained in Christ’s sermon. However, Mormon records, “When Jesus had said these words he perceived that there were some among them who *marveled*, and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new (3 Nephi 15:2; emphasis added).

We must remember that for the disciples in the Holy Land this question of Mosaic Law was also complicated, even after the ascension of Jesus, as evidenced by later New Testament texts (see Acts 15; Romans 1–3; Galatians 1–3). Yet this declaration is missing from the Sermon on the Mount because at the time of delivery the law of Moses was still in effect. Thus it represents a uniquely Nephite aspect to the sermon.

Nephite confusion of the doctrine is understandable when one considers that the declaration follows the portion of his sermon that highlights the spiritual and ethical elements of the law. Moreover, the rest of the sermon includes instruction that had been followed through the observance of the law of Moses. Finally, the sermon concludes with Christ providing the Golden Rule and promoting this principle of the law: “Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (3 Nephi 14:12). In light of these things, the confusion and marveling that arose from Christ’s claim of fulfilling the law becomes understandable. Yet, as we shall see, the answer to the confusion will lie in the Nephite appreciation for prophetic revelation. When Christ noticed misunderstanding among some of the Nephites, he took time to explain again, in 3 Nephi 15:3–10, the question of fulfillment of the law:

And he said unto them: Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.

Behold, *I am he that gave the law*, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore it hath an end.

Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled.

And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come.

For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.

Behold, *I am the law*, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.

Behold, *I have given unto you the commandments*; therefore keep my commandments. And *this is the law and the prophets*, for they truly testified of me. (emphasis added)

The principle behind this explanation does not appear in the New Testament because at that time the people continued to keep the law of Moses. The comprehensiveness of his answer demonstrates that Christ is well aware of their confusion and understands the validity of the confusion. Three elements are taught to answer the concern: (1) Christ gave the law in the first place and thus fulfills it, (2) even though the law has been fulfilled, some words of the prophets will be fulfilled in the future, and (3) the “commandments” supersede the specific elements of the law.

This last element is important in that it reveals that there were foundational doctrines upon which the law was established. In fact, the implication is that the law’s primary purpose was to provide the means for obeying the commandments, which in turn testified of Christ. If one understands this, then it becomes possible to say that the law was fulfilled and that the law, or at least the spiritual and ethical elements of the law based on the commandments, was to continue. The key to understanding the proper relationship between the commandments, the law, and the prophets is recognizing how all three center on the authority of Christ. Christ gave the commandments, the law, and the word to the prophets. Centering our spiritual development on Christ, “looking unto him” as

our authority, harmonizes these three revelatory mechanisms. Of course, the only way to recognize Christ's function here is to possess the personal revelation of Christ, which explains the inclusion of the role of the Holy Ghost throughout the Nephite version (see 3 Nephi 11:31–41; 12:1–2; 15:23; 16:6). Thus to resolve the Nephite astonishment concerning the relationship between the law and the prophets, Christ relies upon their understanding of revelation, prophetic and personal, an understanding he cannot utilize with their Old World counterparts.

A key teaching on perfection. Of course, like the overall purpose of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount, the Nephite version sought to lead the audience to salvation. But unlike the Old World version, this one made this purpose more explicit, particularly in one of the noticeable changes in the first set of teachings. Whereas the Sermon on the Mount followed the Beatitudes with an exhortation on righteousness (see Matthew 5:20), the Nephite sermon follows the Beatitudes with the plea to come unto Christ: "Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (3 Nephi 12:20). Significantly, this plea is placed precisely at the beginning of the Book of Mormon's thesis-antithesis discourse, providing the overall perspective to the Lord's specific antitheses. In so doing, Christ folds the purpose of the law of Moses, as understood by the Nephites, into the new teachings that arise from the fulfillment of the law. In both cases, one still seeks to come unto him and find rest.

All of the above finds its ultimate form in Christ's injunction to be perfect. Though this imperative is also found in Matthew's record there is a significant difference between these two calls to perfection. As we find elsewhere in the Nephite version, the commandment focuses on Christ as the role model: "Ye should be perfect even as I." In Matthew, Christ exhorts his audience to be perfect like their Father in Heaven. Christ had not yet accomplished his mortal ministry and therefore was not perfect in the total, complete sense, but the Old World audience also did not recognize Jesus as the Christ, a concept that requires revelatory insight.

In the New World, not only was Jesus recognized as the Christ but because of the revelations received about him, he also became the perfect symbol of the law itself. Like the law, Christ had fulfilled his mission and

become perfect. His very transformation of perfection stood as a tangible symbol of old things being done away and all things becoming new. Yet in doing so, the essential nature that is in Christ remains. In other words, the spiritual and ethical elements of the law remain to lead and guide us. The law, the commandments, and prophets all center on Christ, who is the true path to salvation.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, both communities were astonished upon hearing Christ's sermon, but the reasons for that astonishment differed. The Nephites were primarily confused with the pronouncement that the old law had passed and all things had become new, particularly how those teachings pertained to future prophetic fulfillment.¹⁷ Yet this audience quickly resolved the concern because they understood the principles of personal revelation, having received a personal witnesses of Christ's authority.

For the Jews of the ancient world, especially the Pharisees, the astonishment arose from their inability to recognize Christ as an individual who held authority. Unlike their Nephite counterparts, this view came from general apostasy that led the Jewish leadership to believe that prophetic revelation had ended and that authority derived from tradition.

While the two reactions may have arisen for different reasons, their presence in the overall presentation of the sermon gives us insight into the entire sermon. Though the audiences differ in time and place, Christ is revealed to be the master teacher, able to teach the truths of salvation while building on what they already knew to give them even greater understanding. And of course his teaching is not done, for by recognizing the reasons for the two astonishments we too are taught concerning the relationship between the law and revelation thereby providing for us, another audience altogether, the opportunity to be "fulfilled" and become "new" as well.

NOTES

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1. Wisdom literature is a genre that was common in the ancient Near East. Its intent was to offer insight and wisdom about major questions asked by humanity (i.e., the choice between right and wrong, nature, and relation to the divinity). In the Bible the following are considered to be Wisdom books: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Song of Songs. In the Apocrypha, *Wisdom* and *Sirach* are Wisdom literature.

2. Florentino García Martínez and Elbert C. J. Tigchelaar, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 2: 4Q274-11Q31 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1053.

3. It is possible that blessings were included in a second part of 4Q525, but one cannot be certain because this record is fragmentary.

4. John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 56–58.

5. Exodus 20:7, Leviticus 19:12, and Deuteronomy 5: 11 in the first case and Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 in the second one.

6. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: The Penguin Press, 1997), 489; emphasis added.

7. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933).

8. Stephen E. Robinson, “The Law after Christ,” *Ensign*, September 1983, 70–71.

9. Robinson, “The Law After Christ,” 69.

10. These oral traditions, which date from before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, were put in writing from AD 200 to 220 in the Mishna and form the beginning of rabbinic literature.

11. Robert L. Millet, “Looking beyond the Mark: Why Many Did Not Accept the Messiah,” *Ensign*, July 1987, 60–64.

12. *Baba Mezi'a*, ed. H. Freedman (folios 25a to the end), in *Soncino Babylonian Talmud, Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices*, ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935), 352–53.

13. The Dead Sea Scrolls offered alternate conceptions of the law and revelation because the Qumran community believed in divine revelation. The members of the community, who authored many of the Dead Sea texts, were obliged, in order to enter the community, to make a covenant called the “new covenant” to keep strictly the law of Moses. The following oath is found in the *Community Rule*: “Whoever enters the council of the Community enters the covenant of God in the presence of all who freely volunteer. He shall swear with a binding oath to revert to the Law of Moses, according to all that he commanded, with whole heart and whole soul, in compliance with all that has been revealed of it to the sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the covenant and interpret his will and to the multitude of the men of their covenant” (1QS V 7–9, in Florentino García Martínez and Elbert C. J. Tigchelaar, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1: 1Q1–4Q273 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 81.

14. The word employed for “revere” is the word that stands for “conversion” (*shuv*). To be converted to the law—that is to say to observe it fully and not in part only as other Jews—it was necessary to have knowledge of the law obtained only through revelation. Revelation was necessary to give the law its full meaning. The revelation of the hidden things of the law was reserved for the members of the group who saw

themselves as the chosen people. Such revelation came both from inspired interpretation of the texts and also more directly.

15. Frank F. Judd Jr., “The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1: *From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 324; see also Robinson, “The Law after Christ,” 69–70.

16. W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Prophetic Enlightenment on the Sermon on the Mount,” *Ensign*, January 1999, 15–21.

17. Nevertheless, as shown in Jacob 7 with Sherem, at least a strand of Nephites were strict Mosiac followers.

18. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple*, 35–36.