

Sunday School Lesson #4: Differences in the Sermons on the Mount

Submitted by Michael Kelley 2006-07

Lesson #4 Pharisees, Scribes and Publicans: There are other differences between the Sermons on the Mount between the Bible and Book of Mormon that highlight certain cultural differences between the Jews and Nephites. These differences are rather obscure and could have been easily overlooked by an unlearned farm boy such as Joseph Smith had he been plagiarizing the Bible as some critics claim. Below I have highlighted these differences in ***Bold Italics***:

Matthew 5:20 For I say unto you, That except ***your righteousness shall exceed [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees,*** ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

3 Nephi 5:68 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.

These differences show the absence of the religious sects of Scribes and Pharisees among the Nephites. **Easton's Bible Dictionary** explains that the Scribes and Pharisees were:

Pharisees: Separatists (Heb. *persahin*, from *parash*, "'to separate'"). They were probably the successors of the Assideans (i.e., the "'pious'"), a party that originated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in revolt against his heathenizing policy. The first mention of them is in a description by Josephus of the three sects or schools into which the Jews were divided (B.C. 145). The other two sects were the Essenes and the Sadducees. In the time of our Lord they were the popular party (John 7:48). They were extremely accurate and minute in all matters appertaining to the law of Moses (Matt. 9:14; 23:15; Luke 11:39; 18:12). Paul, when brought before the council of Jerusalem, professed himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6-8; 26:4, 5). There was much that was sound in their creed, yet their system of religion was a form and nothing more. Theirs was a very lax morality (Matt. 5:20; 15:4, 8; 23:3, 14, 23, 25; John 8:7). On the first notice of them in the New Testament (Matt. 3:7), they are ranked by our Lord with the Sadducees as a "'generation of vipers.'" They were noted for their self-righteousness and their pride (Matt. 9:11; Luke 7:39; 18:11, 12). They were frequently rebuked by our Lord (Matt. 12:39; 16:1-4). From the very beginning of his ministry the Pharisees showed themselves bitter and persistent enemies of our Lord. They could not bear his doctrines, and they sought by every means to destroy his influence among the people."

Scribes: In later times, after the Captivity, when the nation lost its independence, the scribes turned their attention to the law, gaining for themselves distinction by their intimate acquaintance with its contents. On them devolved the duty of multiplying copies of the law and of teaching it to others (Ezra 7:6, 10-12; Neh. 8:1, 4, 9, 13). It is evident that in New Testament times the scribes belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, who supplemented the ancient written law by their traditions (Matt. 23), thereby obscuring it and rendering it of none effect. The titles "'scribes'" and "'lawyers'" are in the Gospels interchangeable (Matt. 22:35; Mark 12:28; Luke 20:39, etc.). They were in the time of our Lord the public teachers of the people, and frequently came into collision with him. They afterwards showed themselves greatly hostile to the apostles (Acts 4:5; 6:12).

The sect of the Pharisees did not exist until 145 BC and the Scribes did not become theologians, so to speak, until after the Babylonian captivity, both of which occurred well after Lehi's migration to the new world which explains why the Nephites would not be familiar with such sects and offices. Other differences include the absence of Publicans in the Book of Mormon "Sermon on the Mount":

Matthew 5:45-47 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, *and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more [than others]? do not even the publicans so?*

3 Nephi 5:91 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; *therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled.*

Easton's Bible Dictionary: Publican - One who farmed the taxes (e.g., Zacchaeus, Luke 19:2) to be levied from a town or district, and thus undertook to pay to the supreme government a certain amount. In order to collect the taxes, the publicans employed subordinates (5:27; 15:1; 18:10), who, for their own ends, were often guilty of extortion and peculation. In New Testament times these taxes were paid to the Romans, and hence were regarded by the Jews as a very heavy burden, and hence also the collectors of taxes, who were frequently Jews, were hated, and were usually spoken of in very opprobrious terms. Jesus was accused of being a "friend of publicans and sinners" (Luke 7:34)."

Smith's Bible Dictionary: Roman Empire - 1. The first historic mention of Rome in the Bible is in 1 Macc. 1:10, about the year 161 B.C. in the year 65 B.C., when Syria was made a Roman province by Pompey, the Jews were still governed by one of the Asmonaeon princes. The next year Pompey himself marched an army into Judea and took Jerusalem. From this time the Jews were practically under the government of Rome. Finally, Antipater's son Herod the Great was made king by Antony's interest, B.C. 40, and confirmed in the kingdom by Augustus, B.C. 30. The Jews, however, were all this time tributaries of Rome, and their princes in reality were Roman procurators, On the banishment of Archelaus, A.D. 6, Judea became a mere appendage of the province of Syria, and was governed by a Roman procurator, who resided at Caesarea. Such were the relations of the Jewish people to the Roman government at the time when the New Testament history begins.

As we can see here also, the office of Publican did not exist any earlier than 65 BC. Neither the words Publican nor Roman are ever mentioned in the Book of Mormon because Lehi and his family departed Israel well before these entities existed and this is why these names and offices are absent from the "Sermon on the Mount" when Jesus taught this sermon to the Nephites in the New World. There are many of these obscure differences that surely Joseph Smith, or even learned men of his day, would have been ignorant of, or would have overlooked, had they been trying to "create" a new "Bible" of their own in the early 1800s. I also find it very interesting how Jesus so eloquently and seamlessly handles these differences yet brings for the same identical teachings, which testifies of a higher intelligence and Divine authorship of the Book of Mormon.