
3 Nephi 19 — That They May Be One — The Disciples Purified and the Prayer of Unity

3 Nephi 19: the second day. After Jesus ascended, word spread all night, and an exceedingly great multitude labored to be present on the morrow. The twelve disciples (Mormon names them) divide the multitude into twelve bodies and teach the same words Jesus had spoken, 'nothing varying'; they pray for what they most desire — the Holy Ghost — then go to the water, and Nephi baptizes them all. The Holy Ghost falls upon them; they are filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire, encircled about as if by fire, and angels minister to them. Then Jesus comes and stands in their midst and ministers; he has them kneel and pray, and they pray to Jesus, 'calling him their Lord and their God.' He withdraws a little way and prays to the Father — thanking him for giving the Holy Ghost to those chosen, and praying for all who will believe their words, 'that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one.' Returning, he finds them still praying; his countenance smiles upon them, and they become white, even as the countenance and garments of Jesus, exceeding all whiteness. He prays again, that they may be 'purified in me, through faith,' that 'we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.' He prays a third time, words that cannot be written or uttered. Then he says: 'So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews... neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard.' The chapter is the disciples baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost and fire, and made white as Christ himself through the threefold prayer of the Lord — the great intercessory prayer for the unity and purification of all who would believe, that they might be one with the Father and the Son.

This chapter is, in a sense, the Nephite version of Christ's great intercessory prayer in John 17 — the prayer of unity, the prayer that *they may be one as we are one*. It is the second day of the Lord's ministry, and what fills the chapter is *prayer* — the disciples praying, the multitude praying, and above all Christ himself withdrawing three times to pray to the Father for the unity and purification of all who will believe. And the fruit of the prayer is visible: the disciples are baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost and fire, encircled by angels, and finally made *white* — *white as the countenance and garments of Jesus* — purified and transfigured through his intercession. The chapter shows what happens when the Lord prays for his people: they are made *like him*, made *one with him*, purified and shining. The intercession of Christ is not a mere formality; it *transforms* those he prays for.

Hebrew Word Studies

taher (טָהַר) — "to be clean, pure; to purify, cleanse, make pure" — **taher**, to be ceremonially or morally clean; in its causative forms, to purify, cleanse, refine. The word of cleansing from defilement, of refining metal to purity, of the heart made clean before God — and associated throughout with the imagery of white, the color of the purified vv. 28–29 (that they may be purified in me, through faith... that we may be one). The transfiguration of the disciples — made white as the countenance of Jesus — is the visible form of the purification Christ prays for, and the Hebrew *taher*, "to purify, to make clean," carries the whole theology of it. *Taher* is the great word of cleansing in the Old Testament — used for cleansing from ritual defilement, for the refining of metal to purity, and supremely for the cleansing of the heart. David prays, *purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean (taher): wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... create in me a clean (tahor) heart, O God* (Ps. 51:7, 10) — and notice the pairing of purification with whiteness: the cleansed heart is *whiter than snow*. This is exactly what happens to the disciples: as Christ prays that they be *purified in me*, they become *white... exceeding all the whiteness*, the visible radiance of a purified soul. The connection of *taher* with *white* runs all through scripture, because white is the color of the clean, the pure, the undefiled. Daniel sees the faithful *purified, and made white, and tried* (Dan. 12:10) — purification and whitening together. Isaiah promises, *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow* (Isa. 1:18) — the scarlet of sin turned to the white of purity. And in the Revelation, the redeemed are clothed in *white robes... washed... and made white in the blood of the Lamb* (Rev. 7:14) — purified, and so made white. So the whiteness of the Nephite disciples is *taher* made visible: they have been *purified in Christ*, and the purity shines out as a whiteness beyond anything on earth. But the deepest thing about the *taher* of this chapter is *how* the purification comes — and it is not by their own scrubbing but by Christ's *prayer and faith on his words*. *That they may be purified in me, through faith on their words* (v. 28). The purification is *in Christ*, received *through faith*, accomplished by his intercession. The disciples did not make themselves white; Christ prayed, and they were made white. This overturns the natural assumption that purity is achieved by effort. The clean heart is *created* (Ps. 51:10 — *create in me a clean heart*); the white robe is *washed in the blood of the Lamb* (Rev. 7:14); the purification is *in Christ*, through faith. The human part is faith and prayer and open hearts; the purifying is God's gift, accomplished by the One who prays. And the purpose of the purification is *union: that they may be purified in me... that we may be one* (vv. 28–29). To be *taher*, purified, is to be made fit for *oneness with God* — for the impure cannot dwell in the unity of the holy God, but the purified can. The whiteness of the disciples is the sign that they have been made clean enough to be *one* with the Father and the Son, drawn into the very purity and unity of the Godhead. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (3 Ne. 12:8) — and here the pure-in-heart are made white as God, purified in Christ, one with the Father, his glory shining from their cleansed and radiant faces. The prayer of purification is answered in white.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references John 17:9–23 (*I pray for them... that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us... I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one — the great intercessory prayer, the source of vv. 23, 28–29*); Ps. 51:7, 10 (*wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... create in me a clean — tahor — heart — purification and whiteness, vv. 25, 28*); Dan. 12:10 (*many shall be purified, and made white, and tried — the taher that makes white, v. 25*); Isa. 1:18 (*though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow — sin's scarlet turned to purity's white, v. 28*); Rev. 7:14 (*washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb — purified and made white in Christ, vv. 25, 28*); Matt. 17:2 (*Christ transfigured, his face did shine... his raiment was white as the light — the whiteness the disciples share, v. 25*); 1 Cor. 2:9–10 (*the things the eye hath not seen... God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit — the unutterable prayer understood in the heart, vv. 32–33*); Matt. 13:58 (*he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief — the unbelief that limited the Jews, v. 35*); 3 Ne. 17:16–17 (*the earlier unutterable prayer — the ineffable intercession repeated, v. 32*); 3 Ne. 11:14–15 (*the disciples worshiping Christ — praying to him as Lord and God, v. 18*); 3 Ne. 12:8 (*blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God — the purification that fits for union, vv. 28–29*); Moro. 7:48 (*pray... that ye may be filled with this love... that we may be purified even as he is pure — the purification of v. 28 as Moroni frames it*). ``