

3 NEPHI 20–26

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3 Nephi 20:1–9 — The Multitude Is Miraculously Fed

In 3 Nephi 20:1–9, Jesus miraculously administered bread and wine to the multitude. Consider the following questions:

- How long had they been kneeling down? Perhaps continuously beginning at 19:17?
- How was this bread and wine different from the bread and wine used in 18:1? See 19:6–7.
- Does this event suggest that the feeding of the thousands in Galilee was also sacramental?
- How did this ordinance affect the people? See 20:9. How can the sacrament have the same effect on people today?

After all the spiritual manifestations, repeatedly kneeling in steadfast prayer, being baptized and “encircled about as if it were by fire” (19:4), hearing and seeing Jesus pray unto the Father in their behalf and smile upon them (19:30), and being filled with the Spirit of the gift of the Holy Ghost which they had been given (20:9), and after “they had all given glory unto Jesus” (20:10), the people were prepared to receive his teachings of the second day.

3 Nephi 20:10–22:17 — The Father’s Covenant with All Israel

Jesus then said unto all the people gathered that morning, “Now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel” (20:10). Jesus had been commanded to tell this people that they were part of God’s covenant people, that God had not forgotten them, that he would never forget them, that they would be gathered and blessed with all the blessings he had promised.

In some ways this is a simple message, and it runs throughout chapters 20–26. In the Lord’s due time, righteous remnants of covenant keepers will be organized to spiritually build a new temple Jerusalem (20:22). It will be beautiful and safe beyond words (22:8–

17). Its purpose will be to prepare parents, children, ancestors, and posterity to welcome the final coming and reigning of the Lord (24:1; 25:2, 6). “A sign” will be given by which people in the future will know that this “work of the Father hath already commenced” in fulfilling all his promises to the covenant house of Israel (21:1, 2, 7). That sign is the beginning of “a great and a marvelous work” (20:9), promised by Isaiah and foreseen by Micah, of the coming forth of the Nephite record (20:2–7).

While simple in essence, human life is also complex. And, most certainly, this complicated block of scripture is extremely difficult to follow. It is certainly one of the most challenging sections in the Book of Mormon. Jesus even said to the people that he knew they would have a hard time understanding these things (17:2), and thus he first prepared their leaders (3 Nephi 15–16), healed and blessed them with his loving kindness (3 Nephi 17), obtained their promise that they would remember him always and keep his commandments (3 Nephi 18), and saw that they had truly received the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 19), and then the stage was set on which he could expound these things, which had long been prophesied, and could put them all into eternal perspective.

This text has been called by Victor Ludlow “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon.” Others call it the “Covenant Sermon” for short. It is clearly all about God’s everlasting “covenant.” That word (either covenant or covenanted) appears 17 times here, distributed throughout the text. Interestingly, the word *covenant* never appears in the plural here. This Sermon focuses only on one covenant, the Father’s covenant with his people through the “seed” of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (20:25, 27), promising eternal posterity and a place of everlasting inheritance, through the preaching of “the fulness of [Christ’s] gospel,” which “shall be preached unto them, and they shall be believe” that Jesus Christ is “the Son of God” (20:30–31).

In a way, this sermon on Day 2 balances the Sermon at the Temple given by Jesus on Day 1 (in 3 Nephi 12:1–16:20). It picks up on Day 2 (see 20:11) with a quote from Isaiah 52:8, which is where Jesus had left off the day before (quoted in 16:18). But the discourse on Day 1 was largely focused on personal righteousness. Here on Day 2 the subject of attention shifts to the collective well-being of the entire covenant people, in all of its scattered branches.

Notice also that on Day 1, as Jesus spoke the words found in 3 Nephi 15:11–16:20, he addressed his remarks only to the twelve disciples whom he had chosen, beginning to explain to them things about the great covenant that he had entered into with his people Israel (see 15:11). But he held off. Here, in 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5, he resumes speaking about that same subject, but now he explains this subject to the entire multitude. As you look at the similarities and differences between these two presentations, see if the difference in

audience helps you better understand what Jesus says here and what the meaning and the remaining future fulfillment of this covenant might be.

And here, on Day 2, the text becomes very intimate in another way. Now Jesus, as Jehovah, speaks even more directly than before on behalf of the Father.

In multiple instances, the resounding use of first-person pronouns here in 3 Nephi 20–21 personalize this powerful text: “I will establish,” “I made,” “I will be,” “I will return,” “I will remember,” “I would give,” “I shall declare,” “I will cut off,” “I will pluck,” “I also will be in their midst,” “I will go before them,” etc. This use of first-person divine declarations rivals Leviticus 26, the other great example in scripture of the personal delivery by God of his words of promises and assurances given directly to his covenant people.

Throughout this extended discourse, it is clear what Jesus’s main theme is. It is all about the *covenant* of his *Father* with his *people*. In 3 Nephi 20–21, the word “Father” saliently appears 39 times, the word “people” appears 35 times, and “covenant” is there 20 times.

Amidst the explanations given in this covenant sermon, Jesus uses several key words and memorable expressions. Watch for these interlocking pieces, especially as they are sometimes used more than once. For example, what can be understood here about the meaning of:

- “a New Jerusalem” (20:22; 21:23)
- “A prophet ... like unto [Moses]” (20:23)
- The command to not touch “that which is unclean” (20:41)
- a “marred” servant (20:44; 21:10)
- The “sign” (21:1, 2, 7)
- a “great and marvelous work” (21:9)
- “my church” (21:22) and “my people” (21:23, 24, 26, 27)
- “the God of the whole earth” (22:5)

In general, as you read these chapters, ask yourself on each page, “What do I learn here about Jesus Christ? About the Father and the Godhead? About the meaning of otherwise opaque prophetic words of Isaiah and Micah? About what the Father would have you do in your life and in this world today?”

A Slight Word of Caution: Chapter Breaks Can Be Confusing

One thing to be aware of in working through these difficult chapters is that both the original and the current chapter breaks are confusing. The printers must have struggled as they divided this text into chapters. Our modern chapter divisions are very different from the chapter breaks supplied in 1830 and used in the 1837 and 1840 editions as well.

That earlier division scheme is very hard to make sense of. For example, Chapter IX in the early printings began where our chapter 19 begins and goes all the way to 3 Nephi 21:21. Chapter X ends at our 23:13. Chapter XI begins with 23:14 and that one chapter contains all of the quotations from Malachi 3–4, ending with 3 Nephi 25:6. And the modern chapters breaks also break up the flow of this lengthy text, which makes it hard to keep in mind the overall flow of what Jesus is saying. So, if you are puzzled about how this text from 3 Nephi 20 to 3 Nephi 26 should be outlined and subdivided, join the crowd!

Moreover, Jesus quoted extensively from Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi in this block of text. Half of the verses in this speech actually come directly from the words that Jehovah (Jesus) had previously spoken to and through these prophets. But the meanings of these words, perhaps intentionally, are in some ways opaque. I have found it at least a little bit helpful to mark these quotations in colored markers and with quote marks, to keep track of which words are coming from Micah, Isaiah, or Malachi. The following chart can help you keep track of these textual dependencies:

Isaiah

Micah

Isaiah/Micah

3 Nephi 20

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39

40 41 42 43 44 45 46

2 Nephi 21

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29

Identifying these relationships helps make the structure of this Covenant Sermon easier to follow and to see how covenants tie into the principles that the Lord Jesus Christ was teaching here. Above all, don't get frustrated. As explained next, this Covenant Sermon actually has an underlying structural order that I think you will find helpful.

The Chiastic Structure of 3 Nephi 20:10–22:17 Helps Readers Follow This Text

The following chiastic structure of 3 Nephi 20–22, which is still open to minor adjustments, has been detected by Professor Victor Ludlow. It helps us to focus on the step-by-step development of this discourse and especially on its main point, the focal center of this passage.

In this structure, notice especially that, in line F, words from Micah 4–5 are used to show that the Gentiles will repent and obtain blessings. Farther down, in the counterpoint line labeled F', some of the same words from Micah are quoted again, dealing with what will happen to the unrepentant Gentiles. In parts H and I, Isaiah 52:11–15 is quoted; and then in parts H' and I', Isaiah is quoted again but this time Isaiah 52:15 is quoted first (in 3 Nephi 21:8), followed then (in 3 Nephi 21:10) by a quote from Isaiah 52:14, that is, in reverse order.

This extended ring-composition is like a large picture frame which, if understood, helps readers to see the order and organization of this text and thereby follow and better understand what Jesus is saying.

A The Father and Son work together ([3 Nephi 20:10](#))

B Isaiah's words are written, therefore search them ([v. 11](#))

C Isaiah's words and the Father's covenant with Israel will be fulfilled ([v. 12](#))

D Scattered Israel to be gathered ([v. 13](#))

E The promised land is an inheritance for the Nephites/Lamanites ([v. 14](#))

F Micah quoted: Gentiles to repent & receive blessings ([v. 15–20](#); [Micah 5:8–9](#); [4:12–13](#))

G The Lord's covenant with Moses, the Gentiles, and Israel concerning the New Jerusalem. ([v. 21–29](#))

H Isaiah quoted ([Isa 52:1–14](#)): Gospel preached, Zion established, servant marred ([v. 30–44](#))

I Isaiah quoted: Kings shall shut their mouths, speechless ([v. 45](#); [Isaiah 52:15](#))

J Covenant fulfillment and the work of the Father ([v. 46](#))

K A key "sign" given, when these things are "about to take place" ([3 Nephi 21:1](#))

L This is "the sign:" Gentiles will learn of "scattered" Israel ([v. 2](#))

M "These things" in the Book of Mormon to come forth "from them [the Gentiles] unto you (to the Lamanites/Nephites) ([v. 3](#))

N In the "wisdom in the Father" and the "power of the Father," "the covenant of the Father" will make it possible for these things

to come forth “unto a remnant of your seed,” O house of Israel ([v. 4](#))

M' “These works” in the Book of Mormon will come “forth from the Gentiles to your seed” (to the Lamanites/Nephites) ([v.5](#))

L' Some Gentiles to “be numbered among” the house of Israel ([v. 6](#))

K' And “it shall be a sign” as Lamanites begin to know that “these things come to pass” ([v.7](#))

J' Work and covenant of the Father have already commenced ([v.7](#))

I' Isaiah quoted: Kings shall shut their mouths, speechless ([v. 8](#); [Isaiah 52:15](#))

H' Isaiah quoted: A great and marvelous work; the marred servant ([v. 9–10](#); [Isaiah 52:14](#))

G' Moses, the Gentiles, and covenant Israel ([v. 11](#))

F' Micah quoted: Unrepentant Gentiles will be cut down ([v. 12–21](#); [Micah 5:8–15](#))

E' The promised land is an inheritance for the righteous ([v. 22–23](#))

D' Gentiles to help in the gathering of Israel and a New Jerusalem ([v. 24–25](#))

C' Father’s work with his people ([v. 26–27](#))

A'* The Father and Son work together ([v. 28–29](#))

B'* Isaiah’s portrayal of Zion ([Isaiah 54](#), [3 Nephi 22](#)); search his words. ([3 Nephi 23:1–3](#))

*Note: The A-B, A'-B' order of the first two and last two element in this structure may be allowable as a minor deviation within this overall pattern, or alternatively these opening and closing elements may be seen as AB, A'B' compounds. In either case, this impressive chiastic organizing structure is quite helpful in tracking the meaning of Jesus’s words here.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Jesus Mix Together Micah and Isaiah? \(3 Nephi 20:25\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 214 (October 21, 2016).

Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 147–174. As Professor Ludlow modestly notes, “In spite of many, many hours involved in studying and analyzing this profound sermon, the outline is still a work in progress” (page 167).

Victor L. Ludlow, “Jesus’ Covenant Teachings in Third Nephi,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 177–185.

Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 284–299.

3 Nephi 20–25 — The “Prophetic Worldview” of the Nephites

To understand what Jesus is communicating in these dense chapters, it is also helpful for readers to remember the broader context of the Nephite prophetic worldview which would have been familiar to Jesus’s audience here in Bountiful. In the book *Isaiah and the Book of Mormon*, an opening chapter entitled “Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View” focuses on the prophetic foreknowledge that is found in earlier sections of the Book of Mormon. That “prophetic worldview,” as understood and articulated by the prophets Nephi, Jacob, Zenos, and Abinadi, foreshadowed the unfolding of the covenant over the course of world history after the time of Lehi. That worldview anticipated four main stages:

1. The scattering of Israel,
2. The coming of the Messiah and his rejection by those in Jerusalem,
3. The day of the Gentiles, and
4. The final victory of God over evil through the reestablishment of Israel and the judgment of the world.

In sum, in stage 1, there would be an apostasy in Israel, and the Israelites would be scattered. However, in stage 2, the Lord would be merciful; at least some of the Jews would be brought back. The Messiah would come to earth only to be rejected by his people. In stage 3, the “day of the Gentile” would rise, and the Book of Mormon would be brought forth through the Gentiles to the posterity of Lehi. But wickedness would still prevail. Some of the Gentiles would forget the Jews, and there would be transgressions and serious problems. Eventually there would be a division into only two churches, the church of the Lord or the good people, on the one hand, and the great and abominable composed of all others, on the other hand. Finally, stage 4 would bring forth the victory of God as Israel is gathered. In this overall view, there would be converts, righteousness would begin to be established again, a fullness of the truth and the Lord would prevail over all who fight against him and lift up their hand against him.

Notice that in 3 Nephi 15–16, on Day 1, Jesus added details, confirmations, and fulfillments to this same overall prophetic expectation that these righteous people in Bountiful already knew quite a bit about. By the time of 3 Nephi, the first two of these

four stages had already been fulfilled. So, in 3 Nephi 15–16, as Jesus spoke to His disciples, He began by focusing on elements that pertain to stage 3, when he discussed what can be called the “day of the Gentiles.” Once the Gentiles had become ripe in iniquity, however, they would eventually reject the fullness of the gospel, and there would arise “all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations” (3 Nephi 16:10). All the elements belonging to stage 3 of the Nephite prophetic worldview can be found in chapters 15 and 16.

And then, in 3 Nephi 20–25, on Day 2, speaking to a more spiritually prepared people, Jesus emphasized stage 4. Twice he quoted Isaiah 52:7–8, about the “watchmen” who shall lift up their voices in a day of fullness and how Jesus will be the primary messenger who will announce deliverance to the Israelites, and they will know how beautiful his feet are (see below). He also quoted all of Isaiah 54 about the end of times when the barren or childless woman (symbolizing the church during the Great Apostasy) will be comforted, will become fruitful, and will enlarge and richly adorn her tent (or tabernacle) with seed (children) who will eternally inherit. Other themes of glory and the building of Zion are introduced that pertain especially to the converted Nephites (see further below). And he concluded by quoting Malachi 3–4 about the earth not being wasted at his final coming.

It is clear here that Jesus taught those who needed to know only after they were spiritually prepared to understand these sublime materials. He taught them within the traditional framework of the four stages of the Nephite prophetic worldview. He drew on scriptures that they had and then added Malachi 3–4 to them. He stressed the value of keeping their records so that they could fulfill a crucial role in the complete fulfillment of the Father’s covenant with his people throughout the world.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Vision Guides Nephi's Choice of Isaiah Chapters? \(2 Nephi 11:2\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View](#),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

3 Nephi 20–21

3 Nephi 20:16–25 — The Lord’s People Make, Keep, and Renew Covenants with Him

3 Nephi 20:16–19 quotes from Micah 5:8–9 and 4:12–13, especially to show that all “gain” would be consecrated unto the Lord (20:19). What Micah (and Isaiah) meant by “the remnant of Jacob” (Micah 5:8; 3 Nephi 20:16 see also Isaiah 10:21–22) remains obscure, but Jesus quotes Micah here after saying that there will be many “remnants” scattered abroad (20:13–14). One remnant of Israel (or Jacob) in particular “will return” unto the Lord and it will be a great sign when “these things” will come forth “unto them” (21:4).

Then, in 3 Nephi 20:22–25, Jesus went on to teach about the covenant that had been made with Jacob regarding the land (20:22) and also the covenant made with Abraham (20:25, 27) regarding the blessing of all the kindreds of the earth through his seed. It is interesting that he lists these two patriarchs in the reverse order from our normal expectations. We often talk about the covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but here it is first the covenant of Jacob, and then Abraham. In Leviticus 26:42, the Holy of Holies of the book of Leviticus, the Lord likewise promises, in reserve order, “Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.” I think we have here in the Book of Mormon a credible and appropriate reference here back to the holiest spot of the book of Leviticus, which is the holiest of all places in the Old Testament.

Both there and here, God promises many things, but above all he promises that he will fulfill all his promises and will never forget his people, so long as they will “confess their iniquity” and “accept of the punishment of their iniquity” so that “I might be their God,” and I will never forget them (Leviticus 26:40–42, 45) and that “the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 14:13–14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 206 (October 11, 2016).

3 Nephi 20:29–30 — The Lord Will Gather Israel

In this covenant speech, Jesus began by explaining in these verses how all of Israel will be scattered and lost, but that there would be a day of the Gentiles when they would be the nursing fathers to help bring the gospel back to the people who had been scattered. The key point is that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will be the sign (21:5, 7) that will let everyone know that the word of God is coming forth again to the scattered Israelites, and that the Gentiles, if they will believe, can then become members of the House of Israel.

The people there in Bountiful had a crucial role to fulfill in the covenant of God with the children of Abraham, providing a visible sign that God had set His hand again to fulfill that covenant.

Jesus explained how this will happen, how people will rejoice, how people will be gathered in, how a New Jerusalem will be formed, and how the victory of God over the forces of evil and separation will eventually be complete. This promise would have been especially meaningful to these people who had recently witnessed such massive destruction and tragedy.

Nephi, as recorder, and Mormon, as compiler, structurally retained this culminating climax of Jesus' covenant speech. Mormon sacrificed his life to preserve these records, especially because he knew that Jesus had taught that the coming forth of this record would be a sign that God's covenant is being fulfilled. This covenant speech is a Nephite document emphasizing the Nephites' role in the Father's plan of salvation and of the fulfillment of God's covenant.

This is also part of our role today among God's people, to take the Book of Mormon to the world in order to bring to pass the fulfillment of the great covenants and promises of God. We as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the inheritors of this record, and thanks to publishing and technology, we are able to take it to all the world as an ensign (a banner) to the nations. The Lord has promised that people from all the nations of the earth will flow unto the House of the Lord and unto the covenant of the Lord, so that they may be blessed eternally. As we become members of this covenant, we become children of God in receiving the blessings of all that the Father has and all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through all the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Nephi 20:35–36 — What Is the Meaning of the Word “Holy” in Jesus’ Sermons?

It is revealing to look where the word “holy” appears in this text and what it means. The word “holiness” in both Greek and Hebrew has no particular synonym, and so it is hard to define. If you want to understand holiness, you have to look at how this word is used contextually.

In 3 Nephi, you have references to holy ones (people within the church; 5:14), to God's holy arm (20:35), a holy city (the New Jerusalem; 20:36), holy prophets (1:13, 26; 29:2), and holy angels (27:30), along with the “Holy Ghost” (mentioned 30x in 3 Nephi). Alma 13 had also spoken dominantly, 18x, about “holy” things: holy works, God's holy order, a holy calling, a holy ordinance, the holy order of the high priesthood, holy men, God's holy name, holy scriptures, holy angels, holy commandments, and holy fathers. In these texts, we can identify many of these things that one would have found associated with the Holy of Holies of the biblical times. In 3 Nephi we now encounter even the holy presence of

God and the very words of the Lord, as previously only the High Priest was allowed to do in the ancient Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies is described in Jewish literature as a place of the fullness of joy. Above all, holiness is a state of joy and rejoicing. “Joy” is mentioned, being another dominant term, 16x in 3 Nephi, especially in 3 Nephi chapters 16, 17, 27, 28. This was certainly a time of immense joy and happiness for those people. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were stored inside the Ark of the Covenant, but now Jesus preached openly new commandments in his Sermon at the Temple. The rod of Aaron, also inside the Ark of the Covenant, represented his holy Aaronic priesthood authority, and Jesus now gave the higher priesthood authority to his disciples at the end of 3 Nephi 18. The shewbread of the Temple, which could only be eaten by the one High Priest, anticipated Jesus’ miraculous administration of the sacrament, now given to all the covenant people.

Being “holy” refers to and defines all that we are striving to be as Latter-day Saints. The word “saint” (from *sanctos* in Latin) means “sanctified.” It means one who has been made holy. We are striving to be true and faithful Latter-day Saints, or holy ones. Holiness should define our relationships with God, our relationships within our families, our conduct within church circles, and our dealings with all other people. Everyone who has been to the temple is an anointed one and are all anointed beings, to become holy people, made holy by the Anointed One, in every way possible.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 14:13–14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 206 (October 11, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55; also published in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 1–33.

3 Nephi 22

As mentioned above, in this concluding chapter, the Lord quotes what is now known as Isaiah 54. Here, and in 3 Nephi 23–25, watch for temple themes and temple elements. Imagine yourself hearing these words at the temple and in an immediate temple context. How does that help you understand why the Savior concluded his second day of teaching with these particular passages? As I suggest further below, the presence of the children

amidst this assembly provides a meaningful context for why Jesus quoted Isaiah 54, which focuses to a large extent on childbearing and the importance to the Lord of bringing children into this glorious world and earthly existence.

Read 3 Nephi 22 (Isaiah 54) with special sensitivity, as if you were hearing it recited by the Savior. This is a beautiful and powerful scripture. Pause to think about such words as:

- “Sing barren” (22:1)
- “cords” and “stakes,” “enlarge thy tent” (22:2)
- “break forth,” which can mean “give birth” (22:3)
- “inherit the Gentiles” (22:3)
- “fear not” (22:4)
- “forget the shame of thy youth” and the “reproach of thy widowhood” (22:4)
- God as a “husband” (22:5)
- “called to grief ... as a woman forsaken” (22:6)
- “for a small moment” (22:7, remembering D&C 122:4)
- “waters of Noah” (22:9, even the flood did not last forever)
- “everlasting kindness,” “my kindness shall not depart” (22:8, 10)
- “foundations of sapphires” (22:11), as part of beautiful temples
- “great shall be the peace of thy children” (22:13), the heritage of the Lord
- “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper” (22:17)

What do the words and assurances in this chapter mean to you personally? How do you see yourself in latter-day circumstances described in these chapters? What are your roles in God’s covenant plan? As these prophecies are fulfilled in our day, how do we move ourselves from being spectators to being witnesses and agents of their fulfillment? On all of these words and phrases, I highly recommend the research from Cynthia Hallen, a retired professor from the BYU Department of Linguistics. She has written beautifully about the meanings of many of these exquisite words and phrases.

3 Nephi 22:7–12 — The Lord’s Kindness Shall Not Depart from His Children

Concerning the word “kindness” in English and even in other languages, Professor Cynthia Hallen offers a key to understanding the Lord’s relation to his covenant people. As she explains, “the earliest etymological meaning of kindness is the reconstructed Indo-European root *gen-*, meaning to give birth, beget; with derivatives referring to ... procreation and to familial and tribal groups.” Several other terms in this chapter of Isaiah come from that same semantic root of kindness. They are deeply related to the gospel in the Book of Mormon and to the writings of Isaiah, including words such as gentiles, genteel, gentile, gentle, generation, genealogy, genesis, progenitor, nation, nativity, kindred, even the word king. All these words are linguistically related to the word

“kindness,” and all those things have to do with the Lord’s covenant “kind,” “kinship,” and “kingly” relationships with His people. His “everlasting kindness” (22:8) is a truly merciful, binding, and eternally sealing.

Further Reading

Cynthia L. Hallen, “The Lord’s Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds. (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 313–349.

3 Nephi 22:13 – The Covenant Is a Family Covenant

The covenant of God with Abraham and Sarah has application to families and posterity. Towards the end of the first day of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, the little children were given a special blessing. In 3 Nephi 17:23, he said, “Behold your little ones,” and the multitude saw their children in a sacred environment: “And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.” Before Jesus left on Day 1, He drew attention to the family again, speaking of family prayer: “Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed” (3 Nephi 18:21).

When Jesus returned for Day 2 and on Day 3, the people apparently brought their children with them. After all, who would have been taking care of them? And think what would their parents have been worrying about? We know that Jesus continued to minister to them, for the children spoke “unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than [Jesus] had revealed unto the people” (26:14), and the people “both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things” (26:16).

Thus, when Jesus quotes passages that mention “children,” we should realize that they too were actually there in attendance. For example, in quoting Isaiah 54, Jesus emphasizes the importance of childbearing and childrearing. Isaiah prophesies that in the days of glory, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children” (3 Nephi 22:13), and 22:17 ends with “and this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,” echoing Psalm 127:3 which refers to children as the heritage of the Lord. And the quotation from Malachi 3–4 ends with turning “the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers” (25:6). Just as Jesus had ended Day 1 by focusing on the family, he ends Day 2 and Day 3 similarly (26:14–16).

The covenant is not just a national promise; the covenant is a family promise too. It is all about gathering. Israel will be gathered from north, south, east, and west; and people also

will gather in families. That final gathering is what family reunions represent. In those reunions, families recognize their children as their greatest blessings. The Lord, as he sees his children being gathered, likewise recognizes them as his greatest inheritance.

3 Nephi 23:6–25:6

Up to this point, Jesus has quoted and expounded scriptures that were known in writing among the Nephites. For example, the priests of Noah had quoted Alma 52 when they challenged Abinadi, and he quoted Isaiah 53 in his reply to them. And since they had Isaiah 53, they probably already had Isaiah 54 too; and Micah was a very early Israelite prophet whose writings also could have been known to the Nephites as well, although we don't know for sure about that.

But 3 Nephi 23:6 says that after Jesus “had expounded all the scriptures unto them *which they had [previously] received,*” he discussed “other scriptures ... *that ye have not.*” Accordingly, in these chapters, Jesus added one missing point to the Nephite record of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite, and then he quoted to them Malachi 3–4, in 3 Nephi 24–25, which they apparently did not already have.

3 Nephi 23:7–14 — Jesus Corrects the Nephite Record

As a first matter of business, the Lord asks Nephi to “bring forth the record which ye have kept,” and Nephi presented to the Lord the records that his people had kept. The Lord “cast his eyes upon them” and accepted them (23:8), with one needed correction: Samuel's prophecy had been omitted, about “many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many” at the time that “the father should glorify his name” in Jesus (23:9). That point was then added and now appears as inserted into Helaman 14:25. Jesus then ratified all the rest by expounding these records “all in one” and commanding the people to use those records in teaching the things “which he had expounded unto them” (23:14).

What personal lessons can we learn from this brief exchange? Why do you suppose that the Nephites had failed to record this detail? Have you had some experiences in which recordkeeping proved especially crucial? Why would Nephi and then Mormon have included this little event in the record? Either of them could have felt embarrassed by it. As recordkeepers, they were doing their best, but they knew they were not perfect. Moroni, too, worried about any possible imperfections in the record (Ether 12:23–24). But they did not hide their failings.

Remember that writing records in the ancient world was no simple task. You couldn't just go down to the bookstore and buy paper or fig bark sheets or tumbaga plates. You had to

make the materials on which you would write. You had to record by hand the characters or letters of the words very carefully. It was difficult. It was also one of the most sacred responsibilities of ancient priests to keep the holy books of any temple, and it is out of the books that people will be judged. These written words need to be preserved and handed down from one generation to another.

In this text we find a wonderful depiction of the earnestness of this Nephi—the High Priest presenting his records to the Lord—how devoted he must have been to have created those records in the first place. I imagine Nephi would have been crestfallen when the Lord pointed out that something important had been left out of the record. Perhaps he even wondered, “Am I worthy to continue to serve having made such an obvious mistake?” He and his people also would have known the kindness of Jesus in his response. His interest was not in chastising but in emphasizing the importance of record-keeping. And think how many other things Nephi had gotten right!

Earlier that day, Jesus had gone off by himself to pray for the people, asking for the Lord’s infinite blessings to come upon them. Nephi would have had the confidence to know that even though he had made a mistake in recordkeeping, the record was being given with earnestness and fullness. It was the best he could do, and the Lord would take what he had done and perfect it.

This also, of course, gives us yet another meaningful lesson about how important it is when we deal with the scriptures: every word is important. Sometimes, we read the scriptures too quickly. I think the slower we read them, the more we will look at each particular word and wonder: Why did the Lord or his prophets want these particular words in this text? The answers will speak to our hearts and souls, speaking volumes of meaning far beyond what just the ink on the printed pages might represent.

Sometimes when we talk about the auditing of the Nephite records, we think of what Samuel prophesied. However, Jesus specifically asked not just what Samuel had said but if Samuel’s prophecies were *fulfilled*. He was concerned that the Nephites noted the *fulfillment* of Samuel’s prophecies. Think of all the times in the New Testament Gospels, when the author says, “because it was written,” “as it was written,” or “to fulfill that which was written.” It is important to the Lord that we take note of when prophecy is fulfilled. He sees that every word shall be fulfilled.

3 Nephi 24

2 Nephi 24–25 — Jesus Quotes Malachi 3–4

Jesus then quotes the last two chapters of Malachi. Why didn't he give them chapters 1–2 as well? At least for purposes of discussion, I assume that they had those chapters already. But even if they didn't, we cannot fully understand chapters 3 and 4 without also reading Malachi 1–2.

We should also note that when Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith on September 21, 1823, he quoted a version of Malachi 4:5–6 (see D&C 2:1–3). So, it is interesting that Moroni begins the opening of the Restoration exactly where Jesus left off at the end of his Covenant Sermon and scripture additions on Day 2, about the final stage in the sacred history of the world.

What reasons might Jesus have had for quoting these two chapters in particular? Remember that he met again with these people, on Day 2, near their temple and with their children. So, as you read these two chapters from the book of Malachi, see how many correspondences you can spot between the words in the book of Malachi and the words or themes of the temple. Here is a list of possible temple elements in the chapters and verses of Malachi:

Possible Temple Elements Reflected in Malachi 1–2

Scripture	Temple Reference
1:6	the law of obedience
1:6–7	evil speaking of, despising with contempt, desecrating the Lord's name
1:7	not polluting the bread on the altar or table of the Lord
1:8, 10, 14	making an acceptable sacrifice and sacred vows to God
1:8, 9	praying for God's graciousness and asking him to give regard
1:11	the Lord's name, that it will be great in all nations
1:11	incense and pure offerings, with prayers, shall go up in all places
2:1–3	priesthood authority, curses for not glorifying God's name

2:4–5	keeping the covenant of life and peace
2:6	the law of truth
2:10–11	not dealing treacherously with a brother; not profaning the holy
2:12	cutting off any man who profanes the covenant
2:14–16	keeping the law of chastity; fidelity to spouse and God
2:16	hating divorce; covering violence with a garment
2:17	preparing for the coming judgment of God

Possible Temple Elements Reflected in Malachi 3–4 (3 Nephi 24–25)

Scripture	Temple Reference
3:1 (24:1)	the coming of a messenger of the covenant “suddenly to his temple”
3:3–10	making pure consecration of tithes and offerings
3:11	rebuking Satan, the devourer
3:12	being called “blessed” in a delightful land
3:14	abiding the day of his coming judgment
3:16	those who fear the Lord speaking often one to another
3:16	keeping a book of remembrance of the names of the righteous
3:17	treasuring people as jewels, as a man spareth his own son
3:18	being able to discern between the good and the evil
4:2 (25:2)	The Sun (Son) of Righteousness shall heal the sick
4:4	remembering the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai

4:5	sending the prophet Elijah
4:5–6	bringing parents and children, ancestors and posterity, together
2:16	hating divorce; covering violence with a garment
2:17	preparing for the coming judgment of God

I am happy to thank the late Marshall Goodrich of Portland, Oregon, one of my missionary companions and scripture class members, for expanding and sharing this list of temple elements and covenantal connections in the book of Malachi. All of them, and several others as well, are well worth pondering, not only in the context of the temple in Bountiful but also, especially, in relation to our own experiences, with and for our own posterity and progenitors, in the Lord's holy temples that now dot the earth.

3 Nephi 24:2 – The Lord Will Refine Us and Cleanse Us

My friend Rita grew up in the textile industry in England. She related to our scripture study class how, in order to soften and whiten wool from sheep, they have to soak it in fuller's earth for a period of time. The fuller, the man who cleaned the wool and then presented it, smelled horrible, and so did the whole neighborhood of the mill. Nothing smells worse than wet sheep's wool with lanolin in it. The fuller had to become dirty to clean the wool. She rightly sees this as a great metaphor for the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In order to have our garments cleansed and purified, they must be made white by the fuller. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark described how the Lord's "raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so, as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark 9:3). The cleansing power of the Atonement transcends all, and Malachi in 3 Nephi 24:2 was certainly aware of this.

3 Nephi 26

3 Nephi 26:1–16 – Jesus Expounds Things “Both Great and Small” Preparing to Ascend Again

What is significant about expounding things “both great and small”? (3 Nephi 26:1). God is in the microscopic details. God is also in the macrospheres of cosmic and spiritual order.

How does seeing “all things even from the beginning until the time [Jesus] should come in his glory” help people to live righteously and happily? (3 Nephi 26:3). It is faith-

promoting to know that God knows the end from the beginning. He has a plan. He rules and reigns with justice, mercy and equity, for time and for all eternity.

Why does Mormon not write any more about what Jesus taught to the Nephites? (3 Nephi 26:9). Are we patient enough in receiving small things before hoping to have greater things made manifest to us?

3 Nephi 26:13–21 — The Tongues of Children are Loosed

There are several things that are very reassuring about Jesus' final departure from these people and the end of this astonishingly magnificent day. Can we really fathom what has happened here? What significance do you find in the fact that Jesus ended his second appearance to the Nephites, first, with the renewal of covenants again with the sacrament, ministering again unto the children, healing again all the sick, letting the children speak, baptizing those who came forth, seeing that they shared all things in common and that they did all things as they had been commanded (3 Nephi 26:13–20).

We don't know when he finally left these people, but we know that he didn't leave until he had walked and talked many days with his disciples, and didn't go until he was sure that they were fully trained and able to carry on with the building of Zion in their community. He did not leave until he knew that those little children who had been blessed were being properly taught and the order of the Church had been properly instituted.

Just as the children are of supreme importance to Jesus's ministry here on Day 2, I believe those little children who were present on this occasion will become the key to understanding 4 Nephi. There were four generations of wonderful righteousness, peace, and happiness following the appearance of Jesus among these people, partly because those little children would have lived long enough to testify of their experiences to the future generations. In an era of peace and prosperity, life expectancy increases. So, their grandchildren would likely have known them, which means four generations of people would have been taught by those little children who grew up, married, had children and grandchildren. Many years later, those people could say, my grandmother told me what it was like "when I was there with the Savior." This kind of testimony no doubt fueled the amazing Zion community that 4 Nephi reports. I do not think Jesus would have departed until he was sure that that all this was securely in place.

Brothers and sisters, I realize that this block of text (3 Nephi 19–26) is as deep as it is dense. I plead with you to take extra time and make a sincere effort as you ponder these precious words, praying that the Holy Ghost will open your eyes of understanding. In these words, Jesus gives to us, as well as to those Nephites who were in attendance, the very essence of the Father's prophetic covenant with his people. The events of Day 1 moved us as the

Savior received each individual, compassionately healed their sick, and ministered unto the children. On this Day 2, the teachings are deeper, intentionally veiled, and more abstract, and yet, even more importantly, Jesus here gives us the heart of the Father's promised covenant to all of mankind. Working through these supernal words this time, line upon line, was more spiritually moving and more revealing to me than ever before. I am grateful—as I am sure you will be too—for the guidance of the Holy Ghost in bringing all this together in one great whole.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the Peace Last So Long in 4 Nephi?](#) (4 Nephi 1:16)," *KnoWhy* 225 (November 7, 2016).

3 Nephi 26:15 — The Elusiveness of Time during Jesus' Visit

I think it is very telling that we do not have an exact date for the departure of Jesus at the end of 3 Nephi. It is almost as if there is no temporal end to his presence. He is still with these people in spirit and maybe even in close proximity physically. The book of 3 Nephi begins with a day, month, and year. We know exactly when the sign of his birth was given, but we do not know of any of the other such precise dates after the coming of Christ. It is almost as if time becomes irrelevant as 3 Nephi unfolds.

This is very uncharacteristic of most historical books, and also of the rest of the Book of Mormon. But something happens in the Holy of Holies. Anciently, it was seen as a timeless place and as a place of eternal perfection. The Holy of Holies was 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits, a perfect cube, in which all things stood still, symbolizing the unity, the oneness, the eternal harmony of being in the presence of God. There, time becomes immaterial. From there emanates constantly the beginning and the renewal of creation. When the sacred order moves out into the next room in the temple, we find the days of the creation being represented. But in the Holy of Holies, in the presence of God, we are brought into a timeless context. Perhaps that is why we are not given the time or the day of the departure of Jesus. For indeed, he is still with us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is So Little Said about the Timing of Christ's Temple Ministry?](#) (3 Nephi 10:18)," *KnoWhy* 481 (November 1, 2018).