
3 Nephi 10 — As a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens — The Gathering Voice and the Morning After the Dark

3 Nephi 10: the close of the darkness. After the voice of Christ has spoken, there is silence in the land for the space of many hours — the people so astonished they cease their howling. Then the voice comes again, and now it is the voice of the gathering Shepherd lamenting over his people: 'O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob... how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you. And again, how oft would I have gathered you... and ye would not.' If the surviving house of Israel will repent and return with full purpose of heart, he will yet gather them; if not, their dwellings shall be left desolate until the covenant is fulfilled. The people weep again; and thus the three days pass. Then, in the morning, the darkness disperses, the earth ceases to tremble, the rocks cease to rend, the dreadful groanings cease, and the earth cleaves together again and stands — and the mourning of the spared is turned to joy, their lamentations into praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ their Redeemer. Mormon notes that it was the more righteous part who were spared — those who received the prophets and stoned them not, who shed not the blood of the saints — and that all these destructions fulfilled the prophecies of Zenos, Zenock, and Jacob concerning the remnant of the seed of Joseph: 'are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph?' And he promises that soon after Christ's ascension into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto the people, showing his body and ministering unto them — 'an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter.' The chapter is the morning after the darkness: the gathering lament of the mother-hen God, the dawn that ends the three days, the joy of the spared remnant, and the promise that the Redeemer himself is about to appear.

This is the morning-after chapter — the dawn that ends the three days of darkness, the joy that breaks the long weeping, and the promise that the Lord himself is about to appear in person. But before the dawn comes one more word from the voice in the dark, and it is the most tender thing the voice has said: the lament of the gathering Shepherd, the mother-hen God grieving over the children who would not come to her wings. *O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob... how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you. And again, how oft would I have gathered you... and ye would not* (vv. 4–5). This is one of the most moving images in all of scripture — God as a mother hen, spreading her wings to shelter her chicks, and the chicks refusing to come. And it is the very image Christ used, weeping over Jerusalem: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* (Matt. 23:37). The voice that named the buried cities, that announced the new covenant of the broken heart, now grieves like a mother whose children ran from her sheltering wings — and the grief is the deepest revelation of the heart behind the judgment. God did not *want* the destruction. He *wanted to gather them*, again and again, *how oft*, and they *would not*. The judgment is the tragedy of a refused gathering.

Hebrew Word Studies

kanaph (כנף) — "wing, edge, corner, skirt" — **kanaph, the wing of a bird; by extension the edge or border of a garment (the "skirt" or "corner")**. **To be gathered under the wings is the image of God's sheltering, protecting, nourishing care — the mother-bird covering her young vv. 4–6 (how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings)**. The tenderest image in the whole destruction account — God as a *hen gathering her chickens under her wings* — runs on the Hebrew *kanaph*, "wing," and it draws on one of the most beloved threads of imagery in all of scripture: the sheltering wings of God. *Kanaph* is the wing of a bird, and the Bible uses the picture of God's wings again and again as the very emblem of his protecting, sheltering, nourishing love. The Song of Moses pictures God as a mother eagle: *as an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings (kenaphav), taketh them, beareth them on her wings* (Deut. 32:11) — God bearing his people on his wings as an eagle bears its young. The Psalms make it the great image of refuge: *hide me under the shadow of thy wings (kenaphekha)* (Ps. 17:8); *in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge* (Ps. 57:1); *he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings (kenaphav) shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield* (Ps. 91:4). Ruth comes to Israel's God *under whose wings (kenaphav) thou art come to trust* (Ruth 2:12). And the *kanaph* is the very place of mercy in the temple: the cherubim's wings spread over the mercy seat, where God meets his people. So when the voice of Christ says *how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings*, he is invoking this whole tradition of the sheltering wings — and adding to it the specific tenderness of the *hen*, the mother-bird who gathers her chicks beneath her feathers against danger and cold, covering them with her own body. It is a maternal image of God, and a vulnerable one: a hen has no talons, no fierceness; her only protection of her chicks is to *cover them with herself*, to put her own body between them and the threat. And there is a piercing depth in the image when the One speaking it is the crucified Christ. A hen, when the fox comes or the fire sweeps the barnyard, will spread her wings over her chicks and let herself be killed to keep them covered — so that afterward, in the ashes, the dead hen is found with living chicks sheltered beneath her scorched wings. That is *exactly* what Christ has just done: spread himself over his people and died to shelter them, his body the covering between them and destruction. The voice that grieves *how oft would I have gathered you under my wings* is the voice of the One who, days before, stretched out his arms on a cross and let himself be killed to cover them. And the heartbreak is in the response: *and ye would not*. The hen spread her wings; the chicks ran into the fire. The whole tragedy of the judgment is the refusal of the offered shelter — not that God failed to spread his wings, but that the people *would not* come under them. Christ wept the same words over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37), and weeps them here over the fallen cities — the mother-bird grieving the chicks who refused her covering and so were caught in the fire she would have died to spare them. And yet the wings are *still spread*: *O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you... if ye will repent and return* (v. 6). To the living, the wings are open still. The gathering God has not folded them. And in the chapters that follow, the spared remnant will at last come under those wings — will gather to the descending Christ, be enfolded in his ministry, and find the shelter they would not refuse. *Under his wings shalt thou trust* — the offer that the fallen refused and the spared accepted, the covering of the God who gathers his children as a hen her chicks, and who died with his wings spread to keep them.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Matt. 23:37 (*O Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* — the identical lament, vv. 4–5); 2 Esdras 1:30 (*I gathered you together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings: but now, what shall I do unto you? — the same image in the apocrypha*); Deut. 32:11 (*as an eagle... spreadeth abroad her wings — kenaphav — taketh them, beareth them — God the mother-bird bearing his young*); Ps. 91:4 (*he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings — kenaphav — shalt thou trust — the sheltering wings of God*); Ps. 17:8; 57:1; 61:4 (*hide me under the shadow of thy wings — the refuge of the wings, vv. 4–6*); Ruth 2:12 (*under whose wings thou art come to trust — gathering under God's wings, v. 6*); Ps. 30:5 (*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning — the mourning turned to joy, v. 10*); Gen. 1:3–5 (*God divided the light from the darkness — the new-creation morning, vv. 9–10*); Gen. 45:7; 2 Ne. 3:5 (*the remnant — sheerit — of the seed of Joseph preserved — the survivors of v. 17*); Jacob 5 (*Zenos's allegory of the olive tree, and the prophets who testified of the remnant — vv. 14–16*); 3 Ne. 5:23–26 (*Mormon's covenant hope of the remnant of Joseph gathered — fulfilled in the spared, v. 17*); 3 Ne. 11:8–17 (*the descent of Christ in person — the manifestation promised in vv. 18–19*); Mal. 4:5–6; 3 Ne. 25 (*the covenant fulfilled in its due time — the fulfilling of the covenant, v. 7*). ```