
3 Nephi 16 — The Lord Hath Made Bare His Holy Arm — The Gentiles, the Covenant, and the Gathering

3 Nephi 16: Jesus widens the vision again. He has yet other sheep, not of this land nor of Jerusalem nor of any land round about — they have not yet heard his voice, and he is commanded of the Father to go to them, that there may be one fold and one shepherd. He commands the twelve to write these sayings, for they are meant for the latter days: if the Jews at Jerusalem will not seek a knowledge of the Nephites and the other tribes, the record shall be kept and made manifest to the Gentiles, so that through the fulness of the Gentiles the scattered remnant of Israel may be brought to a knowledge of their Redeemer — and then God will gather them from the four quarters and fulfil the covenant made to all the house of Israel. Blessed are the Gentiles who believe; but wo to the unbelieving Gentiles, who have scattered and trodden down the house of Israel. The Father reveals the latter-day pattern: when the Gentiles sin against the gospel, reject its fulness, are lifted up in pride above all nations, and are filled with lyings, deceits, hypocrisy, murders, priestcrafts, whoredoms, and secret abominations, then the Father will bring the fulness of the gospel from among them and remember his covenant with Israel, bringing the gospel to them; and if the Gentiles repent they shall be numbered among God's people, but if not, they shall be as salt that has lost its savor. Then the words of Isaiah shall be fulfilled: 'Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice... they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion... The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.' The chapter is the great latter-day prophecy — the record kept for the Gentiles, the warning and the hope of the Gentile age, and the covenant gathering of all Israel under the bared, saving arm of the Lord.

This chapter is the most directly *latter-day* in 3 Nephi — it is Christ speaking, in effect, *about us*, the Gentile readers who would one day hold this record. He widens the vision of the flock one more time (there are sheep even the Nephites do not know of), and then he reveals the whole latter-day plan: the record will be kept and brought to the *Gentiles*, and through the Gentiles the scattered remnant of Israel will be gathered to Christ — *if* the Gentiles believe and do not, in their pride, reject the fulness of the gospel. The chapter holds a great blessing and a great warning side by side, both aimed across the centuries at the Gentile world: blessed are the Gentiles who believe; but wo to the Gentiles who, lifted up in pride and filled with every abomination, reject the gospel. It is one of the few places in scripture where Christ speaks a prophecy aimed directly at the modern world and the people who would receive his word in the last days — and it is sobering, because the warning describes, with uncomfortable precision, the temptations of exactly such a people.

Hebrew Word Studies

zeroa (זרוע) — "arm, forearm, strength" — **zeroa**, the arm, especially the forearm; the biblical symbol of strength in action, of power exerted to deliver or to judge. The "arm of the Lord" is God's saving might; to "make bare the arm" is to roll up the sleeve and reveal that strength in decisive action v. 20 (The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God). The triumphant climax of Isaiah's prophecy — *the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations* — turns on the Hebrew **zeroa**, "arm," one of scripture's great symbols of God's saving power. The arm is the limb of action and strength — you lift, strike, deliver, and rescue with your arm — and so the arm of the Lord (**zeroa** Yahweh) becomes the standard biblical image for God's power exerted to save. The Exodus was wrought with a stretched out arm (**zeroa** netuyah) (Deut. 4:34; 5:15) — the arm of God reaching down to break the bondage of Egypt. *Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand* (Ps. 89:13). And in Isaiah especially, the arm of the Lord is the agent of redemption: *the Lord shall... gather the lambs with his arm* (Isa. 40:11); *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord* (Isa. 51:9); and the suffering servant himself is the question to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Isa. 53:1) — for the arm of the Lord, the saving strength of God, is finally revealed in the Christ who suffers and saves. Now the specific phrase here is *make bare* the arm. In the ancient world, the long robe covered the arm; to *bare the arm* — to push back the sleeve and expose the forearm — was the gesture of a man preparing to work, to fight, to act with full strength. A bared arm means business; it means the time for decisive action has come. So *the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations* (v. 20) is a picture of staggering power and openness: God, who has long worked in hidden ways — scattering his people, leading away the lost tribes, hiding the Nephites, working through the long centuries of the Gentile times — at last rolls up his sleeve and acts openly, visibly, decisively, in the eyes of all the nations. The hidden God becomes the manifest God; the secret purposes become the public salvation; and the result is that *all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God*. This is the deep reassurance that ends the chapter, and it is why the **zeroa** matters so much after the warnings to the Gentiles. The whole chapter has been conditional — if the Gentiles believe, if they repent, if they do not reject the fulness — and conditionals can fail, for human beings fail. But the bared arm of the Lord is not conditional. It is the unconditional certainty underneath all the contingencies: that whatever the Gentiles do, whatever the failures and the woes, God himself will act, will bare his holy arm, will bring again Zion, will gather his people, will reveal his salvation to all the earth. The gathering of Israel does not finally depend on the arm of flesh — the **zeroa** basar that always fails (Hel. 4:13, *the arm of flesh*) — but on the holy arm of the Lord, the **zeroa** Yahweh, which never fails. And the same arm that was revealed in the suffering servant (Isa. 53:1), the arm whose hand bears the prints of the nails (3 Ne. 11:14), is the arm that will be made bare in power before all nations. The wounded arm is the saving arm; the arm that was nailed is the arm that gathers. *All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God* — not because men succeed, but because God bares his holy arm and acts, and no power in heaven or earth can stay the arm of the Lord when he rolls up his sleeve to save.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Isa. 52:7–10 (*thy watchmen shall lift up the voice... the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God* — quoted in vv. 18–20); Isa. 53:1 (*to whom is the arm — zeroa — of the Lord revealed? — the saving arm revealed in the servant, v. 20*); Deut. 4:34; 5:15 (*by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm — the arm of the Lord that delivered Israel from Egypt, v. 20*); Isa. 51:9 (*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord — the bared arm of God's salvation*); Isa. 40:11 (*he shall gather the lambs with his arm — the gathering arm, vv. 5, 20*); Rom. 11:25–26 (*blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in: and so all Israel shall be saved — the fulness of the Gentiles and the gathering of Israel, vv. 4–5*); 1 Ne. 13:34–42 (*the record going forth to the Gentiles and back to the remnant of Israel — the latter-day plan of v. 4*); 1 Ne. 14:1–7 (*the Gentiles who hearken numbered with Israel, and the wo on those who fight against Zion — vv. 13–15*); 3 Ne. 12:13 (*salt that hath lost its savor... good for nothing but to be cast out — applied to the unrepentant Gentiles, v. 15*); 3 Ne. 21:1–22 (*the sign of the gathering and the latter-day covenant — the continuation of this chapter's prophecy*); Morm. 5:15–24; 8:34–41 (*Mormon and Moroni's direct address to the latter-day Gentiles — fulfilling the commandment to write for them, v. 4*); 3 Ne. 15:17, 21 (*the one fold and one shepherd — the gathering of all folds, vv. 1–3*). ``