
3 Nephi 21 — A Great and a Marvelous Work — The Sign of the Gathering and the New Jerusalem

3 Nephi 21: Jesus gives the sign by which his people may know the gathering has begun. The sign is the coming forth of this very record — when the things he has declared are 'made known unto the Gentiles' and 'come forth of the Father, from them unto' the remnant of Jacob, it shall be a sign that 'the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant.' It is wisdom in the Father that the Gentiles be established as a free people in this land, so that these things might come forth from them to the scattered seed of Israel. In that day the Father will work 'a great and a marvelous work' — there will be those who will not believe it, though a man declare it; but the life of the Lord's servant shall be in his hand, and though he be marred, the Lord will heal him, showing that his wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil. Whosoever will not believe Christ's words, brought forth to the Gentiles, shall be cut off. The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles as a lion among sheep; and the Lord will cut off the Gentiles' horses, chariots, cities, witchcrafts, idols, and all lyings, deceivings, priestcrafts, and whoredoms. Those who repent and come to Christ shall be numbered among the remnant and shall help build the New Jerusalem; then the power of heaven shall come down, and Christ in their midst. The work of the Father shall commence among all the dispersed of Israel, even the lost tribes, gathering them home. The chapter is the sign of the latter-day gathering — the record coming forth to the Gentiles as the token that the covenant work has begun, and the building of the New Jerusalem where Christ will dwell with his gathered people.

This chapter gives the *sign* — the unmistakable token by which God's people in the last days may know that the great gathering of Israel has *begun*. And the sign is something remarkable: it is *this very record*, the Book of Mormon, coming forth to the Gentiles. Christ tells his disciples that when the things he has declared *shall be made known unto the Gentiles and come forth of the Father, from them unto* the scattered remnant of Israel, *it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant* (v. 7). The appearance of the record in the latter days is the starting-gun of the gathering — the public, datable event that announces, to anyone watching, that God has begun to keep his ancient promise. The chapter is thus one of the most self-aware passages in all of scripture: the book in the reader's hands declares *itself* to be the sign that the gathering of Israel has commenced.

Hebrew Word Studies

tsiyyon (צִיּוֹן) — "Zion" — tsiyyon, originally the name of the fortified hill of Jerusalem captured by David, then the temple mount, then Jerusalem itself, and finally the great symbol of the city and people of God — the dwelling-place of the Lord, the gathering-place of his people, the holy city of the redeemed. The New Jerusalem is Zion built anew vv. 1, 22–25 (**establish again among them my Zion... build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem**). The goal of the whole chapter — *establish again among them my Zion*, the building of the *New Jerusalem* — turns on the Hebrew *tsiyyon*, "Zion," one of the most layered and beloved words in all of scripture. *Tsiyyon* began as a place-name: the fortified hill the Jebusites held, captured by David and called *the city of David* (2 Sam. 5:7). But from that concrete beginning the word grew, layer upon layer, into the richest symbol of the people and presence of God. First it became the *temple mount*, the place God chose to dwell: *the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it* (Ps. 132:13–14). Then it became *Jerusalem* itself, the holy city; then the *people* of God: *say unto Zion, Thou art my people* (Isa. 51:16). And finally it became the great symbol of the *gathered, redeemed people of God* — the city that is also a people, the dwelling that is also a community, the place where God lives among his own. Zion is, at its deepest, *the place where God dwells with his people* — and that is exactly what the New Jerusalem is. The longing for Zion runs all through the Psalms and the Prophets: the exiles weep, *by the rivers of Babylon... we wept, when we remembered Zion* (Ps. 137:1); the redeemed *come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads* (Isa. 35:10); and the great promise is that *the Lord shall bring again Zion* (Isa. 52:8, quoted in the previous chapters). And the New Testament takes the symbol to its height: *ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem* (Heb. 12:22); and the Revelation sees *the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven... and God himself shall be with them* (Rev. 21:2–3). So when Christ promises to *establish again my Zion* and build the *New Jerusalem*, he is naming the fulfillment of the whole biblical longing — the building of the city-that-is-a-people where God will dwell with his own. And notice the two things the chapter says about this Zion that mark it as the true *tsiyyon*. First, it is built by the *reconciled*: the repentant Gentiles *numbered among* the remnant of Jacob, Gentile and Israelite laboring *together* to build the city (vv. 22–24) — Zion is the place where the old divisions are healed into one people. Second, and most importantly, it is the place of God's *presence*: *the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst* (v. 25). This is the defining mark of Zion in every age — not its walls or its beauty but the *dwelling of God in its midst*. A Zion without the presence is just a city; the true *tsiyyon* is *where God is*. And the deepest meaning of the New Jerusalem, then, is the same as the deepest meaning of the sacrament and the gathering and the whole gospel: *God dwelling with his people*. The bread fills the soul; the covenant blesses the nations; and the end of it all is *Zion* — the city, the people, the place where, at last, *I will be in the midst of you, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God* (Rev. 21:3). Zion is the answer to the exile of Eden, the homecoming of the scattered, the dwelling restored — the place where the long-separated God and his people live together again. *Establish again my Zion*: the whole hope of the Bible in three words.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Isa. 29:14 (*I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder — the great and marvelous work*, v. 9, the chapter prophesying a sealed book); Mic. 5:8–15 (*the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles... as a lion among the beasts of the forest... I will cut off thy horses... thy cities... thy witchcrafts... thy graven images — quoted in vv. 12–18*); 2 Sam. 5:7; Ps. 132:13–14 (*the Lord hath chosen Zion... here will I dwell — the tsiyyon established*, vv. 1, 25); Isa. 52:1–2, 8 (*Awake, awake... O Zion... the Lord shall bring again Zion — the Zion of v. 1*); Heb. 12:22 (*ye are come unto mount Sion... the heavenly Jerusalem — the New Jerusalem*, vv. 23–25); Rev. 21:1–3 (*the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God... God himself shall be with them — the city where Christ is in the midst*, vv. 23–25); Ether 13:2–11 (*the New Jerusalem on this land, built by the remnant of Joseph — the city of v. 23*); 3 Ne. 16:10–13 (*the Gentiles who reject the fulness, and the covenant remembered — the judgment and mercy of vv. 11, 22*); Deut. 18:19 (*whosoever will not hearken unto my words... I will require it of him — the cutting off for rejecting the word*, v. 11); 1 Ne. 13:34–42 (*the record going forth to the Gentiles and back to Israel — the sign of vv. 2–7*); 3 Ne. 20:22 (*the New Jerusalem with Christ in the midst — restated in vv. 23–25*); 2 Ne. 3:6–15 (*the latter-day servant/seer of the seed of Joseph — the servant of v. 10, held as the Lord gave it*). ``