
3 Nephi 26 — I Will Try the Faith of My People — The Greater Things Withheld and the Church of Christ

3 Nephi 26: Jesus expounds all things to the multitude, great and small — from the beginning until the end, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat and the earth be wrapt together as a scroll and the heavens and earth pass away, to the great and last day when all shall stand before God to be judged by their works, to the resurrection of life or of damnation. Mormon testifies that not even a hundredth part of what Jesus taught can be written in this book; the plates of Nephi contain the more part, and Mormon has written only the lesser part — written that it may be brought from the Gentiles to this people. And it is given first to try their faith: if they believe these lesser things, the greater things shall be made manifest; if they will not believe, the greater things shall be withheld to their condemnation. Mormon was about to write all that was engraven on the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it: 'I will try the faith of my people.' Jesus taught for three days and then showed himself oft, breaking bread; he ministered to the children and loosed their tongues to utter marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed to the people, forbidden to be written. The disciples baptized and taught all who came; the baptized were filled with the Holy Ghost; many saw and heard unspeakable things not lawful to be written; they ministered one to another and had all things common, every man dealing justly. And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. The chapter is the principle of withheld revelation — the lesser given first to try faith, the greater reserved for the believing — and the birth of the church of Christ, living with all things common.

This chapter reveals one of the most important principles in all of scripture about how God gives revelation: he gives the *lesser* first, to try *our faith*, and reserves the *greater* for those who believe the lesser. Christ taught the Nephites *all things* — vast, world-encompassing things, from the creation to the final judgment — but Mormon is permitted to write only *the lesser part*, and even that is given to try *the faith* of those who will receive it. *If they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them. And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation* (vv. 9–10). This is the divine pedagogy of revelation: God does not pour out everything at once. He gives a measure, watches the response, and gives more to those who *believe* what they have been given. Faith is the gate to greater light. The chapter is the principle of *withheld revelation* — and it ends with the birth of *the church of Christ*, a people living with *all things common*.

Hebrew Word Studies

ba■an (בָּאֵן) — "to test, try, prove, examine" — **ba■an**, to test or examine, especially to assay metal for its purity, or to prove a person to discover what is in them. The word for God's testing of the heart, to bring out and reveal its true quality vv. 9, 11 (to try their faith... the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people). The principle that governs this chapter — *I will try the faith of my people*, the lesser given first to try their faith — runs on the Hebrew **ba■an**, "to test, to try, to prove." And **ba■an** is a precise and important word, distinct from its near-synonyms. While *nasah* means to test in the sense of putting to the proof (often with the risk of failure, as God tested Abraham), and *tsaraph* means to refine (the smelting fire of the previous chapter), **ba■an** carries the specific sense of examining to discover the true quality — like an assayer testing metal to see whether it is genuine. It is the word for God's searching examination of the heart: the Lord trieth (**ba■an**) the hearts (Prov. 17:3); thou, O Lord of hosts... triest (**ba■an**) the reins and the heart (Jer. 11:20); examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try (**ba■an**) my reins and my heart (Ps. 26:2); search me, O God, and know my heart: try (**ba■an**) me, and know my thoughts (Ps. 139:23). To be **ba■an**-ed by God is to be examined to the depths, so that the true quality of the heart — its faith or unbelief, its gold or its dross — is brought to light. And the crucial thing about **ba■an** is its purpose: it is not a test designed to make the person fail, nor a trap, but a true examination that reveals what is really there. God does not test in order to learn something he did not know — he knows the heart already — but to reveal and bring out the heart's true quality, both to the person and to others, and to develop it. And this is exactly the principle of revelation in 3 Nephi 26. God withholds the greater things and gives only the lesser to try the faith of his people — to examine whether they will believe. The lesser revelation is the assayer's test: it brings out the true quality of the heart. A heart of faith believes the lesser things and so proves itself ready for the greater; a heart of unbelief rejects them and so reveals itself unready, and the greater things are withheld — not arbitrarily, but because the **ba■an** has shown the heart cannot rightly receive them. The test does not create the unbelief; it reveals it. And the deep wisdom of this divine pedagogy is that faith must be tried to grow. If God gave the fullness at once, there would be no **ba■an**, no examination, no room for faith to prove and develop itself — a person handed everything never has to trust. So God gives a measure, tries the heart with it, and gives more to the faith that passes the test. This is the pattern of all spiritual growth: line upon line, here a little, and there a little (Isa. 28:10), each measure of light a **ba■an** of whether the soul is ready for more. And the Book of Mormon itself is given on this principle — the lesser part, given to try the faith of those who receive it (v. 9), so that the believing might receive the greater. The reader holds an assayer's test in their hands: the lesser things, given to **ba■an** the heart, to bring out whether there is the gold of faith that can receive the greater things of God. *I will try the faith of my people* — and the trying is mercy, for it is the only way faith grows, and the only way the greater light can be safely given.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Prov. 17:3 (the Lord trieth — **ba■an** — the hearts — the testing of v. 11); Ps. 26:2; 139:23 (examine me... try — **ba■an** — my reins and my heart... search me, O God... try me — the divine examination, v. 11); Jer. 11:20 (O Lord... that triest — **ba■an** — the reins and the heart — the trying of faith, v. 9); Isa. 28:9–10 (line upon line... here a little, and there a little — the measured giving of revelation, vv. 9–11); 2 Pet. 3:10–12 (the elements shall melt with fervent heat... the heavens being on fire — the dissolution Christ expounded, v. 3); Rev. 6:14 (the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together — the earth wrapt as a scroll, v. 3); Rev. 20:12–13 (the dead judged according to their works — the great and last day, vv. 4–5); Matt. 13:11–12 (unto you it is given to know the mysteries... whosoever hath, to him shall be given... but whosoever hath not — the greater given to faith, withheld from unbelief, vv. 9–10); Matt. 11:25 (thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes — the children uttering marvelous things, vv. 14, 16); Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35 (all that believed... had all things common — the church with all things common, v. 19); 4 Ne. 1:2–3 (they had all things common among them; therefore there were no rich and poor — the Zion this church becomes, v. 19); Mosiah 18:17 (the church first called after the manner of Christ — the church of Christ, v. 21). ```