
3 Nephi 28 — Ye Shall Never Taste of Death — The Three Who Tarry

3 Nephi 28: before he departs, Jesus asks each of the twelve disciples, one by one, what they desire of him after he goes to the Father. Nine ask that, after they have lived the age of man, their ministry may end and they may come speedily into his kingdom; he blesses them and promises that at seventy-two they shall come to him and find rest. But three sorrow and dare not speak their desire — and Jesus, knowing their thoughts, tells them they have desired the thing John the Beloved desired: to tarry. 'More blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until... I shall come in my glory.' They shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; they shall have no pain nor sorrow save for the sins of the world; and this because they desired to bring souls unto Christ while the world stands. He touches the nine; the three are caught up to heaven and see unspeakable things, transfigured. They minister among all the people, and the prisons cannot hold them, the earth cannot bury them, the furnace cannot burn them, the wild beasts cannot harm them. Mormon testifies he has seen them and they ministered to him; they shall be among Gentiles and Jews unknown, ministering to all nations, 'as the angels of God,' working great and marvelous works before the judgment day. Mormon, inquiring of the Lord, learns a change was wrought on their bodies so they could not taste death, that Satan could have no power over them; they are sanctified in the flesh until the judgment, when they receive a greater change. The chapter is the gift of the three who tarry — the love that chose ongoing ministry over rest, and the mystery of the translated who bring souls to Christ while the world stands.

This is the chapter of the *Three Nephites* — the three disciples who, like John the Beloved, asked to *tarry* on the earth, never tasting death, until the Lord comes again, that they might keep bringing souls to Christ while the world stands. It is one of the most beloved and mysterious chapters in the Book of Mormon, and at its heart is a beautiful contrast of holy desires: nine disciples ask for *rest* — to finish their ministry and come quickly to Christ's kingdom — and three ask for *labor without end* — to stay on the earth, ministering, until the last day. Both desires are *blessed*; but the three are called *more blessed*, because they chose the harder and more loving path: to forgo rest, to keep laboring, to *bring the souls of men* to Christ for as long as the world endures. The chapter is a meditation on love that chooses ongoing service over reward, and on the mystery of the *translated* — those changed so they cannot die, sanctified in the flesh, ministering unseen among the nations.

Hebrew Word Studies

laqa (לָקַח) — "to take, fetch, receive, take away" — **laqa**, to take or take away; the word used for God taking Enoch and Elijah from the earth without death — the great Hebrew term for translation, the taking of a person out of mortality without the passage through death vv. 7–9, 37–40 (ye shall never taste of death... there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not taste of death). The state of the Three Nephites — *changed* so that they *never taste of death*, yet not fully resurrected — is what scripture calls *translation*, and the Hebrew word at its root is **laqa**, "to take." The Old Testament records two great instances of God *taking* a person out of mortality without death, and both use **laqa**. Of Enoch: *Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took (laqa) him* (Gen. 5:24) — Enoch did not die; God took him. And of Elijah: as he and Elisha walked, *there appeared a chariot of fire... and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven* — and Elisha cried, *the Lord will take away (laqa) thy master from thy head today* (2 Kgs. 2:3, 11). Both were *taken* — **laqa** — translated, carried out of mortality without passing through death. And the Psalmist hopes for the same: *thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive (laqa) me to glory* (Ps. 49:15); *God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive (laqa) me* (Ps. 73:24). To be *taken* by God is to be *received* directly to him, the grave bypassed. This is the state of the Three Nephites: not dead, not yet fully resurrected, but *changed* — *taken* into a translated condition in which they *never taste of death* (v. 7) and remain to labor until the Lord comes. And Mormon's careful description (vv. 37–40) clarifies the theology: the translation is *not equal* to the resurrection of the last day; it is a *change wrought upon their bodies* that holds them in a sanctified, deathless state *until* the judgment, when they receive a *greater change* — the full immortality. So translation is a *middle state*, a being-*taken* into a holiness and deathlessness that precedes and anticipates the resurrection. And the *purpose* of being *taken* in this case is the most beautiful thing about it. Enoch and Elijah were *taken* up away from the earth; but the Three Nephites are *taken* into a translated state precisely so that they may *remain* on the earth — kept deathless not to be removed from the world but to *keep laboring in it*, bringing souls to Christ while the world stands (v. 9). Their translation is not an escape but a *commissioning* — the gift of a deathless life given so they can give that life away in endless service. And there is a deep resonance with the desire that earned it. They desired to *bring the souls of men unto Christ*; and so they are *taken* — **laqa** — not out of the world but into a state that lets them stay in it forever, gathering souls, as the angels of God. The word **laqa** holds both the wonder and the cost: they are *taken* out of the ordinary human lot (death, rest, reward), and *taken* into an extraordinary one (deathless, tireless, sanctified labor). To be *taken* by God is the highest honor and the deepest commissioning — and the Three Nephites were *taken* not to rest but to work, *received* into a translated holiness so that they might never stop bringing souls home to the Christ they loved more than their own rest.

From the Chapter's Architecture

“cross-references Gen. 5:24 (*Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took — laqa — him — the translation of Enoch*, vv. 7, 37); 2 Kgs. 2:9–11 (*Elijah taken up by a whirlwind into heaven — the laqa of Elijah*, vv. 7, 37); John 21:21–23 (*if I will that he tarry till I come... then went this saying abroad... that that disciple should not die — John the Beloved's desire to tarry*, v. 6); Ps. 49:15; 73:24 (*God... shall receive — laqa — me... afterward receive me to glory — the taking to God*, vv. 7, 37); 1 Cor. 15:51–52 (*we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye — the change of v. 8*); Dan. 3:23–27 (*the three in the fiery furnace unharmed — the furnace the three are cast in thrice*, v. 21); Dan. 6:16–22 (*Daniel in the lions' den, unharmed — the wild beasts of v. 22*); Acts 5:18–20; 12:6–10 (*the apostles and Peter delivered from prison by angels — the prisons rent*, v. 19); Heb. 12:1–2 (*for the joy that was set before him endured the cross — Christ's own choice of labor over ease, the model for the three*, v. 9); 3 Ne. 28:10; 19:23, 29 (*ye shall be even as I am... that we may be one — the oneness the three enter*, v. 10); 4 Ne. 1:14, 30–33 (*the Three Nephites ministering after the nation's fall — the continuing work*, vv. 26–29); Morm. 1:13–16; 8:10–11 (*Mormon and Moroni and the ministry of the three — they have ministered unto me*, v. 26). ”