
3 Nephi 2 — Less and Less Astonished — How Wonder Dies and the Lines Dissolve

3 Nephi 2: the years after the sign. The people begin to forget the signs and wonders they had seen and heard, growing 'less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven,' until they harden their hearts, blind their minds, and disbelieve all they had witnessed — imagining it was wrought by men and the devil. Satan regains possession of their hearts, blinding them to the doctrine of Christ as a foolish and vain thing. The years pass in wickedness; the Nephites begin to reckon their calendar from the coming of Christ — history itself reorganized around the sign. Nephi the father, keeper of the records, does not return and cannot be found. By the thirteenth year the Gadianton robbers have grown so numerous and murderous that all the people, Nephites and converted Lamanites alike, are compelled to take up arms against them to defend their lives, their families, their worship, and their freedom. The converted Lamanites unite fully with the Nephites — numbered among them, called Nephites, their distinction dissolved in shared covenant and shared struggle. The war grows exceedingly sore; the Nephites are threatened with utter destruction; and because of their own wickedness and dissensions, the robbers gain advantage, so that the sword of destruction hangs over a people who, just a few years before, had seen the heavens declare the birth of their God. The chapter is the anatomy of how wonder dies — how a miracle becomes ordinary, then doubtful, then denied — and how, against that dimming, the old line between Nephite and Lamanite dissolves the moment both stand together in righteousness.

This is a short, sobering chapter about how quickly a miracle wears off. A few years ago these people saw a night with no darkness and a new star, watched a prophecy fulfilled to the letter, and were converted by the tens of thousands. And now, in 3 Nephi 2, Mormon shows us the slow death of that wonder — not a dramatic apostasy but a gradual dimming, an erosion so ordinary it is almost invisible. *The people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen* (v. 1). Read that sequence slowly, because it is the precise pathology of how faith dies in a comfortable people: first you *forget*, then you grow *less astonished*, then you go *hard* and *blind*, and finally you *disbelieve the very thing you saw with your own eyes*. It is not that the evidence fades; it is that the heart goes dull, and a dull heart can explain away anything.

Hebrew Word Studies

pala (פֶּלֶא) — "to be wonderful, marvelous, extraordinary, beyond comprehension" — **pala**, to be surpassing, wondrous, too great to grasp; the root behind **niphlaot**, "wonders, marvels," the mighty works of God that astonish. A **pele** is a wonder, a marvel — something that breaks through the ordinary and arrests the soul v. 1 (began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven). The death of faith in this chapter is, precisely, the death of *wonder* — the people grow *less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven* — and the Hebrew **pala** names exactly what they lost. **Pala** means to be *wonderful, marvelous, extraordinary*, and its noun forms — **pele**, a wonder; **niphlaot**, marvels — are among the great words for the works of God. The Red Sea, the manna, the deliverances, the healings, the whole catalog of God's mighty acts are his **niphlaot**, his *wonders*, and the proper human response to them is *astonishment* — the heart arrested, stopped, undone by something too great to take in. *Who is like unto thee, O Lord... fearful in praises, doing wonders (pele)?* (Ex. 15:11). *I will remember the works of the Lord... and talk of thy doings... thou art the God that doest wonders (pele)* (Ps. 77:11–14). The Psalms are full of the plea to *remember* God's **niphlaot**, his wonders, precisely because the human heart is so prone to *forget* them — and forgetting the wonders is the first step away from God. This is the exact disease of 3 Nephi 2. The people had seen a genuine **pele**, a wonder from heaven — a night with no darkness, a new star — and the right response was lasting astonishment, a wonder that should have anchored them forever. But wonder, Mormon shows, is perishable in a careless heart. They grew *less and less astonished* — the **pele** became familiar, then ordinary, then unremarkable, and a wonder that no longer astonishes is a wonder you can begin to deny. The tragedy is that the marvel did not diminish; their capacity to be marveled diminished. And here is the deep spiritual law the word exposes: *astonishment is not automatic; it must be guarded*. The same miracle can leave one soul forever changed and another, a few years on, merely bored — and the difference is whether the heart keeps the wonder alive by *remembering* and *returning* to it, or lets it dull through familiarity and neglect. This is why the scriptures command, over and over, *remember his marvellous works that he hath done* (1 Chr. 16:12) — because the wonders of God do not keep themselves; a dull heart will let the most staggering miracle fade into background noise. There is even a haunting prophecy in the root: Isaiah foretells that because the people *draw near with their mouth... but have removed their heart far from me*, God will do a *marvellous work and a wonder (pele)* among them — and the wise shall be confounded (Isa. 29:13–14), the very passage that names the latter-day coming-forth of the Book of Mormon itself. The God who does *wonders* will do one more wonder; but a people who have let their astonishment die will meet even that final wonder with a dull heart. The whole warning of 3 Nephi 2 is the warning of the dying **pele**: guard your astonishment. The moment the works of God stop amazing you, you have begun the slow road to disbelieving them — not because they failed, but because your wonder did.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Ex. 15:11 (*who is like unto thee... fearful in praises, doing wonders — pele? — the marvels of God the people cease to be astonished by*, v. 1); Ps. 77:11–14 (*I will remember the works of the Lord... thou art the God that doest wonders — the remembering of the pele that the dull heart abandons*); 1 Chr. 16:12 (*remember his marvellous works that he hath done — the guarding of wonder, against vv. 1–3*); Isa. 29:13–14 (*this people draw near... but have removed their heart far from me... I will proceed to do a marvellous work — pele — and a wonder — the heart far from God meeting a final wonder*, vv. 1–2); Gal. 3:28 (*there is neither Jew nor Greek... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus — the dissolved division of vv. 14–16*); Alma 3:14–19 (*the curse defined as what the Lamanites brought upon themselves by rebellion and tradition, not a matter of worth — the reading of v. 15*); Hel. 15:4 (*the Lamanite curse named as the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers — the separation from God, not lineage*, v. 15); Hel. 16:13–23 (*the people reasoning away the signs they saw — the same hardening against witnessed wonders*, vv. 1–2); 3 Ne. 1:22 (*Satan's lyings to make them disbelieve what they saw — the seed of the disbelief of v. 2*); 3 Ne. 8:1–25 (*the destruction that the dying wonder of this chapter makes intelligible*); Matt. 13:58 (*he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief — the dull heart that cannot receive wonders*); 2 Pet. 3:3–4 (*scoffers saying where is the promise of his coming? — the forgetting of the signs*, vv. 1, 5). ``