
3 Nephi 9 — Will Ye Not Now Return Unto Me — The Voice of Christ in the Darkness

3 Nephi 9: out of the three days of darkness, a voice is heard among all the inhabitants of the land — the voice of the still-unseen Christ. It cries woe upon the fallen people, for the devil laughs and his angels rejoice over the slain; it names the destroyed cities one by one — Zarahemla burned, Moroni sunk, Moronihah buried, Gilgal, Onihah, Mocum, Jerusalem, Gadiandi, Gadiomnah, Jacob, Gimgimno, Jacobugath (king Jacob's people, burned for wickedness above all the earth), Laman, Josh, Gad, Kishkumen — and gives the reason: to hide their wickedness from before God's face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints might cry against them no more. Then the voice turns, and the woe becomes an embrace: 'O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?... mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive.' And the voice names itself: 'I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth... I am in the Father, and the Father in me... I came unto my own, and my own received me not... I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.' He declares the law of Moses fulfilled in him, ends the shedding of blood in sacrifice, and gives the new offering: 'ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit,' and whoever comes so will be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost. 'Repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.' The chapter is the voice of the risen Lord speaking out of the darkness before he is seen — judgment turned to mercy, the old law of blood sacrifice fulfilled and replaced by the offering of a broken heart, the extended arm of the God who is light calling the survivors home to be healed.

Out of the impenetrable darkness — the three days when no fire would burn and the world lay in a blackness that could be felt — a voice speaks. It is the voice of Jesus Christ, risen but not yet seen, and this chapter is what he says. It is one of the most important chapters in the Book of Mormon, because here the risen Lord, before he descends in person, announces the great transition that his death and resurrection have accomplished: the end of the old law of sacrifice and the beginning of the new, the fulfillment of the law of Moses in himself, and the offering that now replaces all burnt offerings forever — *a broken heart and a contrite spirit*. And he does it not from a throne of triumph but as a voice in the dark, calling the survivors of a terrible judgment to *return* and be *healed*. The chapter holds together, in a single voice, the severity of judgment and the tenderness of mercy — and the movement from one to the other is the whole shape of the gospel.

Hebrew Word Studies

lev nishbar / rua ■ **nishbarah** (לֵב נִשְׁבָּר / רוּא נִשְׁבָּרָה) — "a broken heart / a broken (contrite) spirit" — **lev, heart; nishbar, broken, shattered** (from *shabar*, to break, as one breaks a vessel); **rua** ■, spirit, breath; "contrite" renders *dakka*, crushed, beaten small. The sacrifice of a self broken open and humbled before God, replacing the slain animal on the altar v. 20 (ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit). When the risen Christ ends the age of animal sacrifice and names the new offering — *a broken heart and a contrite spirit* — he is quoting, almost exactly, the deepest verse in the Psalms about what God truly wants on his altar. David, after his great sin, writes: *thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (rua nishbarah): a broken and a contrite heart (lev nishbar v'nidkeh), O God, thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 51:16–17). This is the astonishing thing: a thousand years before Christ ended the sacrificial system, David had already grasped that the blood of bulls was never what God really wanted — that the true sacrifice God desires is the *broken heart*. The Hebrew is vivid and physical. *Nishbar* comes from *shabar*, "to break, shatter," the verb for breaking a clay vessel into pieces; and *dakka* (contrite) means "crushed, beaten fine, pulverized." So a *broken heart* is a heart *shattered* like a pot, and a *contrite spirit* is a spirit *crushed* small — the proud, hard, self-sufficient self broken open and ground down until it is soft and humble before God. This is the opposite of the hard heart that has run all through these chapters (the *qashah lev* of the rebellious, the pride that built ranks and murdered prophets); the broken heart is the hard heart *shattered*, the resistance broken, the self surrendered. And it is a *harder* sacrifice than any animal, which is the whole point. To bring a lamb costs you a lamb; to bring a *broken heart* costs you *yourself* — your pride, your self-will, your control. The animal sacrifices of the law were always a *shadow* of this: the worshipper laid his hands on the animal's head, identifying himself with it, and the animal's death stood in for the death of the worshipper's own self-will. Now the shadow is fulfilled, the true Lamb has been slain, and what remains is the *substance* the shadow always pointed to — not the death of a beast but the breaking of the self. *To obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Sam. 15:22); *I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings* (Hos. 6:6) — the prophets had said it for centuries, and now the risen Christ makes it the *whole* offering: *ye shall offer... a broken heart and a contrite spirit*. And notice the grace in what God does with such an offering. The old fire fell on the animal, consuming the sacrifice on the altar; the new fire falls on the offerer: *whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart... him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost* (v. 20). The broken heart is not consumed but *filled* — the surrendered self met not with destruction but with the descending fire of the Spirit, which sanctifies rather than destroys. This is why the broken heart is the one sacrifice *God will not despise* (Ps. 51:17): because it is the offering of the only thing that was ever truly ours to give, the self, and the God who receives it gives back his own Spirit in exchange. The age of blood ends; the age of the broken heart begins; and on that altar God still meets every soul that will bring, not a lamb, but the shattered and surrendered offering of itself.

rapha (רָפָא) — "to heal, cure, restore, make whole" — **rapha, to heal, mend, repair; used of healing the body, the land, the breach, and the soul. The root behind God's covenant name Yahweh Rapha, "the Lord that healeth thee" — God as the great Physician who restores what sin and sickness have broken v. 13 (will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?).** The goal Christ names for the survivors' return is not merely pardon but *healing* — *that I may heal you* — and the Hebrew *rapha* opens up how rich that promise is. *Rapha* means to *heal, mend, cure, make whole* — and it is one of God's own covenant names. At the waters of Marah, having made the bitter water sweet, God reveals himself: *I am the Lord that healeth thee (ani Yahweh rophekha)* (Ex. 15:26) — *Yahweh Rapha*, the Lord your Physician. And the verb runs all through scripture as the great word of God's restorative mercy. He *healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds* (Ps. 147:3) — notice, the *broken in heart*, the very ones invited here. *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely* (Hos. 14:4) — God healing the very relapse and backsliding that this people committed. *He sent his word, and healed them* (Ps. 107:20). And most famously, in the prophecy of the suffering servant whose death this chapter's darkness marks: *he was wounded for our transgressions... and with his stripes we are healed (nirpa)* (Isa. 53:5) — the wounded Healer, whose own wounds are the medicine. This is the crucial thing about *rapha* and about what Christ offers in verse 13: salvation is presented not merely as a *legal* transaction — guilt pardoned, debt paid — but as a *medical* one, the *healing* of a wounded and broken person. Sin, in this view, is not only a crime to be forgiven but a *wound* to be healed, a sickness to be cured, a brokenness to be made whole. And Christ comes not only as the Judge who pardons but as the Physician who *heals* — *they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick... I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Matt. 9:12–13). This is why the invitation of verse 13 is so tender. The voice does not say *return, that I may acquit you*; it says *return... that I may heal you*. The survivors are not merely guilty; they are *wounded* — by their own sin, by the destruction they have witnessed, by the grief of *O that we had repented* — and what Christ offers is not just the removal of guilt but the *mending* of the wound, the restoration of the whole person. And the deep wonder is that the Physician heals by *his own wounds*: the One whose stripes heal us is the very voice speaking from the darkness, having just been *wounded for our transgressions* on the cross whose signs devastated the land. The wounded Healer calls the wounded

home. *Return unto me... that I may heal you* — and the arm extended in mercy (v. 14) is the arm that bears the print of the nails, the wound that is the world's medicine. The whole gospel is in the shift from *acquit* to *heal*: God does not merely cancel the sinner's debt and leave him as he was; he *makes him whole*, binds up his wounds, cures the sickness of the soul, and restores the broken to wholeness. *Yahweh Rapha* — the Lord that heals — is the name of the voice in the darkness, and *that I may heal you* is the reason he calls.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Ps. 51:16–17 (*thou desirest not sacrifice... the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise — the source of the new sacrifice*, v. 20); Ex. 15:26 (*I am the Lord that healeth thee — Yahweh Rapha — God the Healer, the heal you of v. 13*); Ps. 147:3 (*he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds — the broken-hearted healed*, vv. 13, 20); Hos. 6:6; 14:4 (*I desired mercy, and not sacrifice... I will heal their backsliding — the heart-offering above sacrifice, and the healing of relapse*, vv. 13, 20); Isa. 53:5 (*he was wounded for our transgressions... with his stripes we are healed — the wounded Healer whose death darkens the land*, vv. 13–18); Gen. 4:10 (*the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground — the blood of the prophets crying against the cities*, vv. 5–11); John 1:1–11 (*all things were made by him... he came unto his own, and his own received me not — the Creator-Word, quoted in vv. 15–16*); Rev. 1:8; 22:13 (*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end — the self-naming of v. 18*); 1 Sam. 15:22; Mic. 6:6–8 (*to obey is better than sacrifice... what doth the Lord require... but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly — the heart above the offering*, vv. 19–20); Matt. 9:12–13 (*they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick — Christ the Physician*, v. 13); Matt. 18:3–4 (*except ye... become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom — come unto me as a little child*, v. 22); Hel. 13:38; 3 Ne. 8:24–25 (*the procrastinated repentance and the lament O that we had — the survivors now called to return*, v. 13); 3 Ne. 11:8–15 (*the descent of Christ in person — the face that follows the voice*). ``