

## Comments on 2 Nephi 5

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren. 2 But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life. 3 Yea, they did murmur against me, saying: Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people. 4 Now I do not write upon these plates all the words which they murmured against me. But it sufficeth me to say, that they did seek to take away my life.

v1-4 Despite Nephi's petitions to the Lord on their behalf (v. 1), Nephi's brothers are determined to do away with him (v. 2). Their arguments against Nephi are he is attempting to usurp rulership from them when they should be ruling, and he has been a cause of problems to them (v. 3), so they decide to kill him (v. 4).

5 And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me. 6 Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words. 7 And we did take our tents and whatsoever things were possible for us, and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days. And after we had journeyed for the space of many days we did pitch our tents.

v5-9 The Lord warns Nephi of his brother's intentions and tells him and all who will go with him to leave (v. 5). All of the people who believe the warnings and revelations of God (v. 6), pack up and leave. They travel for some time, and then establish camp (v. 7).

v6 "and all those who would go with me", possibly referring to some Ishmaelites and descendants of Laman and Lemuel as well. It seems unlikely there were strict family-line splits on who stayed and who left, given likely intermarriages.

Those who argue there were indigenous populations in the New World which the Lehites encountered use the ambiguity in this phrase to suggest the "all those" refers to indigenous populations and the groups assimilated. Arguments like this are not persuasive given the manner in which the text treats the encounter with the Mulekites and the lone Jaredite survivor as novelties, cf. Omni 1:15-21, and only accounts for their populations, cf. Mosiah 25:2. If there were other populations encountered, it seems likely the writers would document it.

v7 "tents", in the time they have spent in the New World they do not appear to have built any permanent structures until v. 15 of this chapter. This suggests the time in the New World was relatively short before Lehi's demise and division of the two groups.

8 And my people would that we should call the name of the place Nephi; wherefore, we did call it Nephi. 9 And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi.

10 And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things according to the law of Moses. 11 And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance. And we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind.

12 And I, Nephi, had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, according to that which is written. 13 And it came to pass that we began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land.

14 And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children and those who were called my people.

15 And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance.

16 And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine.

17 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands. 18 And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power.

v8-28 These verses contrast the religious nature, the blessed condition and the industry of the Nephites (v. 10-18, 26-28) with the secularism, slothfulness and cursed nature of the Lamanites (v. 19-25). If a team of sociologists could have watched and documented the separation of these two groups and the formation of their separate cultures, it would be a fascinating read.

v8-18 After the separation of the two groups, Nephite society develops. They name the place they camp in "Nephi" (v. 8) and the group decides to go under the name of "Nephites" (v. 9). The Nephites keep the Law of Moses (v. 10) and are therefore prospered

by the Lord in all their agricultural endeavors (v. 11) as well as in their families (v. 13). When the two groups separated Nephi took the brass plates, the Liahona (v. 12), and the sword of Laban (v. 14). Using the sword of Laban as an example, Nephi makes more swords as a means of defending themselves from the Lamanites (v. 14). Nephi teaches the people to be industrious (v. 17) in constructing all kinds of buildings and in metal work as well (v. 15). Nephi builds a temple after the pattern of Solomon's (v. 16). The people end up wanting Nephi to be their king, but he doesn't want them to have a king. Regardless, he does what he can for them (v. 18).

v11 Nephi ties in the standard covenant blessings of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. They were living the Law of Moses, so they were blessed and prospered.

v16 Solomon's Temple was an endeavor of epic proportions supported by a large society with great wealth and a specialized workforce, cf. 1 Kings 6-7. Obviously, the temple built by Nephi was only patterned after Solomon's and couldn't have been made of cut stones, worked timbers, and gold ornamentation. By "manner of construction" I would assume Nephi's version was composed of a series of courts with an altar at the center, the altar probably being the most ornate piece in the temple.

Also, this verse seems to suggest Nephi built the Temple himself. The preceding and following verses make reference to the other people building and doing things, but all of Nephi's references to the construction in this verse are in the first-person singular. If this is the case, and Nephi built it alone, then it must have been a rather simple construct and relatively small. Perhaps Nephi used the tents they had abandoned for permanent structures (cf. v. 15) to fashion something akin to the Tabernacle in the Wilderness from the Exodus, but Nephi explicitly references Solomon's Temple, so it seems more likely it was a permanent construction.

v18 "they should have no king", the Hebrew Bible is anti-monarchy (cf. 1 Sam. 8), and the Lord only relented after a series of genuinely awful leaders (e.g., the book of Judges), and gives them kings, which weren't all that great either. Nephi is following the counsel of the Lord in refusing to establish a monarchy.

19 And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher. Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life. 20 Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying

that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

21 And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. 22 And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. 23 And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done.

24 And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

25 And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction.

v19-25 In contrast to the Nephites (v. 8-18) are the Lamanites, who have been cut off from the Lord as a result of the two groups separating (v. 19-20). The Lamanites are cursed by the Lord (v. 21), and become a filthy and loathsome people, so they and the Nephites will not mix (v. 22-23, cp. Alma 3:6-11). The Lamanites become lazy and devious, and turn to hunting as a means of subsistence (v. 24). They become an affliction to the Nephites, a means of chastening them when they forget the Lord (v. 25).

v21 "skin of blackness", this is about behavior, not race. The entire context of v. 20-24 is about behavior. If you are in the light of the Lord you are "white and delightsome", and if you are wallowing in sin then you are in the darkness. It has nothing to do with race in the contemporary American cultural concept of "black" (African-Americans) and "white" (European-Americans), and yet that is how we read it, which is absurd. For a reading that is contemporary to Nephi's time, see Joel 2:6, Jer. 8:21, Lam 4:8, Lam. 5:10, Nahum 2:10, and also see John 3:19-21, which uses symbolism of light most fully developed in Isaiah.

Why does it read like it is about race? "fair" sounds like the person is light-skinned and therefore Caucasian, but that is not what the corresponding Hebrew in the OT means, the Hebrew word tob translates best to "good", so the "fair" means "not bad".

The "flint" also sounds dark, but that is Nephi talking about the quality of their hearts, they are hard like the rock you use to strike against to start a fire.

"blackness" sounds highly pigmented, but that is not how it is used in the Bible, the term in the OT is used to refer to the absence of light, cf. Job 3:5, Isaiah 50:3, Joel 2:6, Nahum

2:10, and in the NT see also Hebr. 12:18, Jude 1:13. The term "black" is never used in the Bible as a reference to race. Whenever a naturally dark-skinned person is referred to in the Bible they are referred to by their country of origin, e.g., a Cushite or Ethiopian. The phrase "black and white" (cf. 26:33) is talking about righteous and sinners, not European-descended Americans and African-descended Americans. Also compare Alma 11:44, where similar statements of inclusion are used, but in Amulek's speech he says "righteous...wicked" instead of "white...black".

"fair and delightsome", see 4 Ne. 1:10 where it is said the Nephites had become "exceedingly fair and delightsome", again indicating this had nothing to do with skin color, but was about behavior.

v25 In the covenant theology formulas of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, the Lord warns Israel He will bring foreign nations against them when they are disobedient. Here, the Lamanites will occupy the role of afflicting the Nephites, instead of the foreign nations. Until the Nephites are effectively wiped out, leaving only Lamanites, and then the Lord brings the foreign Gentiles to afflict the Lamanites, until they repent.

26 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people. 27 And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness. 28 And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.

29 And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far. 30 And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people. 31 Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things. 32 And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon these plates. 33 And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates. 34 And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren.

v26-27 Nephi consecrates Jacob and Joseph to be priests and teachers for the people (v. 26). And, so, being religious and industrious, the people live happily (v. 27).

v28 A timekeeping placemark.

v29-33 The Lord now commands Nephi to start making the small plates as the religious version of their history (v. 30). Previously, Nephi had been documenting all of their history on the large plates (v. 29). So, to be obedient, he makes the

small plates, which record the reader is presently viewing (v. 31). In this account he writes religious things, and those interested in religious things will appreciate this record (v. 32). If people want a more inclusive account of their history, they need to read the account on the large plates (v. 33).

The small plates now go "real time" as opposed to being a selective editing of the more inclusive large plates.

v34 They land in the New World about 589 BC and enjoy peace for about 20 years until 569 BC, but then "wars and contentions" occur between 569 and 559 BC. During this same 10 years Nephi is commanded to start the small plates.

"wars", given the relatively small size of the populations involved, the "wars" here would be nothing like what we would consider a "war" in contemporary English. The term "war" first appears in the KJV in Gen. 14:2 wherein a number of local kings go to war and Lot gets caught up in it just by virtue of geography. A few verses later Abraham goes to save Lot and trounces these various kings with a force of 318 men. Clearly, the term "war" doesn't necessarily imply large populations are involved. A better modern English term would be "a battle".

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