

General Comments on 3 Nephi 1-7

The text of these chapters is historically linear and straightforward in presentation. The intent is to explain what was happening to the Nephite and Lamanite populations in the run-up to the events of ch. 8, thus explaining why the death and destruction is so pervasive.

In other cases of catastrophic destruction captured in the Scriptures, there isn't much explanation as to why the populations had to suffer that consequence. It is simply implied they were wicked, or getting what they deserved. Here, it is spelled out in tragic detail. There is no question these people were wicked and deserved destruction.

The rhetorical driver for these chapters is Samuel's two predictions regarding the night of light and the three days of darkness (cf. Hela. 14). The night of light being a sign of the Messiah's birth and the three days of darkness being a sign of the Messiah's death. The rhetorical devices of light and darkness representing the offering of salvation to the world at Christ's birth, and the world's general rejection of that offer at Christ's death, and hence the more pervasive darkness that overwhelms and destroys the wicked. The more righteous survive the destruction and witness the resurrected Christ.

The underlying theological message of these chapters is miracles do not substantially convert non-believers, no matter how overwhelming or extraordinary (cp. 1 Kings 19:11-12). The more incredible the miracle is, the longer the effect seems to have. But, even the light at night event of ch. 1 only results in a few years of penitent behavior, with a quick return to wickedness in ch. 2.

A second theological message reinforced in these chapters, and also seen in the preceding books of Alma and Helaman, are wealth and power corrupt people and take down societies. Political ambition at any cost and organized crime are the result, and they tear civil society apart.

However, throughout all of the lows seen in the present text, faithful people persist regardless and are protected by the Lord. Bad things still happen to them, but they survive when the wicked do not.

General Comments on 3 Nephi 1-4

It is safe to assume the events of these chapters center on the Nephite capital of Zarahemla. We are told explicitly in 3:23 that all the people gather to Zarahemla. Prior to that the location is not explicitly identified.

However, we are informed the land of Nephi's nativity is Zarahemla (cf. Hela 7:1-3) and his permanent residence is there as well (cf. Hela. 7:10). We are told Samuel preached to the people of Zarahemla (cf. Hela.13:2), and that Nephi was in that same city receiving those who believed Samuel's testimony (cf. Hela. 16:1-5). All these things suggest the setting for these chapters is Zarahemla.

This is important because Zarahemla is the political capital of the Nephites. As such, when we have passages talking about the general condition of the Nephites we can assume it applies to the entire Nephite people and not just some local smaller population. There were numerous small populations of apostate Nephites (e.g., the Zoramites, the people of Ammonihah), but that isn't what Mormon is talking about here. He is commenting on Zarahemla, and that reflects on the Nephites in general.

Comments on 3 Nephi 1

1 NOW it came to pass that the ninety and first year had passed away and it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; and it was in the year that Lachoneus was the chief judge and the governor over the land. 2 And Nephi, the son of Helaman, had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, giving charge unto his son Nephi, who was his eldest son, concerning the plates of brass, and all the records which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem. 3 Then he departed out of the land, and whither he went, no man knoweth; and his son Nephi did keep the records in his stead, yea, the record of this people.

v1-3 In the ninety-first year of the reign of the judges (v. 1) Nephi turns over the plates to his oldest son, also named Nephi (v. 2), and then leaves the land of Zarahemla for lands unknown (v. 3).

Nephi's departure is similar to Alma's, cp. Alma 45:18-19. In this case Mormon does not indicate whether any legends became popular concerning his death and burial as was the case with

Alma. The passage in 2:9 suggests people were looking for him, but we are not informed why.

v2 "all those things which had been kept sacred", cp. Alma 37:47.

4 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the ninety and second year, behold, the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be greater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people.

5 But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite. 6 And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain. 7 And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land;

and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass. 8 But behold, they did watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

v4-8 Despite the many miracles and signs among the people (v. 4) some naysayers insist the time of the fulfilment of Samuel's prediction of a night of light has failed (v. 5), and they mock the believer's faith because of it (v. 6). They cause considerable disturbance throughout all the land, and the faith of the believers is shaken (v. 7). Nevertheless, the believers steadfastly look for Samuel's prediction to be fulfilled (v. 8).

v7 "a great uproar throughout the land", one would assume this referring to the land of Zarahemla as opposed to all the lands of the Nephites, as is suggested in the much more inclusive v. 17.

"the people who believed", the believers were in the minority, cf. Hela. 16:10.

9 Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet.

10 Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful. 11 And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers. 12 And

it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:
13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. 14 Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son--of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

v9-14 The nonbelievers plan on executing the believers if Samuel's predicted sign doesn't come to pass (v. 9). When Nephi finds out about these plans he is understandably upset about them (v. 10), and spends all day on his knees pleading with the Lord for the faithful (v. 11-12). The voice of the Lord comes to Nephi and informs him the sign will occur that very night, and thus the believers will be spared. The Lord is condescending into mortal flesh on the next day to fulfil the predictions of the Messiah (v. 13) and to fulfil the Atonement (v. 14).

v9 How these plans came about we are left uninformed. Whether it was a covert plan or not, or if it was something popularly supported or privately planned we are not told. Nephi does find out about it in v. 10, suggesting it couldn't have been all that covert. And v. 16 says "many...fell to the earth" because "the great plan of destruction...had been frustrated". Whether "many" means a majority or just a large number of people isn't clear.

Previous cases of such a thing were the people at Ammonihah who murdered the believers (cf. Alma 14:8) and the Zoramites who expelled the believers (cf. Alma 35:3-6). In both of these cases it was the corrupt leaders who instigated.

Since the nonbelievers already think the time for Samuel's prediction has lapsed per v. 7, their ultimatum is just an arbitrary and artificial one.

An alternative reading is there was a date set for the executions to occur and it wasn't delivered with an ultimatum that the sign occur or else. In this case the second half of the verse is read as what would spare the believers from the planned day of execution.

"there was a day set apart", the day set apart is soon per the statement "those who were about to be destroyed" in v. 11, but not necessarily the next day. That it is "a day" and not "the morrow", as in v. 13, suggests the day is imminent but not the very next day. So, the mortal birth of Christ didn't have to be rushed to save the believers.

v13-14 The Lord makes it clear He is coming into His mortal flesh to fulfil the prophecies (v. 13) and perform the atonement (v. 14), not to thwart the non-believers.

v13 "on the morrow come I into the world", presuming this is the pre-mortal Jesus speaking, not an angel speaking in His behalf, a tangential point of doctrine derived from this conversation is pre-mortal spirits do not join their mortal bodies until birth or shortly before birth.

This position is generally supported by the rule in the Law of Moses which does not categorize causing a stillbirth with murder, cf. Exod. 21:22. If the spirit were in the womb at fertilization or early in gestation then it seems likely a violence induced stillbirth would be categorized as involuntary manslaughter and the offending party would have to flee to a city of refuge or risk death at the father's hands. Instead, the penalty is financial and proportional to the length of gestation.

v14 "to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son", in condescending into flesh Jesus does the will of His Father, but it is also his own will as well. He chooses to do it, so it is the will of both the Father and the Son, cp. D&C 93:4.

"of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh", by "me" the Lord is referring to His antemortal self, His spirit and the things He has done while antemortal. The antemortal Lord did the Father's will in the Father's presence. Now, in the Father's absence, Jesus chooses to do His Father's will. Thus, the Son's will is the Father's will. He being the "Son" because he is mortal.

Speaking possessively and abstractly of one's mortal flesh in the manner the Lord does here is not unprecedented, cp. Isa. 53:10, John 17:1-3, D&C 49:5-6.

15 And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people

began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

16 And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand. 17 And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth. 18 For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.

19 And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given. 20 And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets. 21 And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word.

v15-21 That night the words which were spoken to Nephi are fulfilled because when the sun goes down there is still light (v. 15). Those who had planned to execute the believers are so stunned they fall to the ground (v. 16). And not only do they fall to the earth, but many people over all the face of the land fall down astonished because now they know the Son of God is born (v. 17) and are therefore stung by their wickedness, faithlessness, and ignorance of the prophets (v. 18). There was no darkness all that night, and the following morning the sun rose as usual, so it was that full night of light predicted (v. 19). Thus, all of the predictions by the prophets, including Samuel, were fulfilled (v. 20) including the new star (v. 21). v15 "at the going down of the sun there was no darkness", the symbolism of the light overpowering the darkness is obvious enough, cp. Gen. 1:4-5, John 1:5. The darkness at the destruction after Christ's crucifixion is equally obvious.

Early morning September 2, 1859 there was a [massive solar storm](#) that caused the night sky to be lit up as though it were daytime. This is referred to as the [Carrington Event](#). Coronal mass ejections cause the common Northern Lights, or aurora borealis. Massive events are rare, but not unheard of, and could easily explain the events described here. The new star in v. 21 could be a comet or a supernova.

Note the sun went down in v. 15 and rose the next morning in v. 19, so there is no suggestion the sun or earth stood still.

v16-17 While the nonbelievers fall down astonished in v. 17, those who were plotting murder fall down as though they are dead in v. 16. The more wicked the people were, the more overwhelming the sign was to them. It is not mentioned in the text, but the faithful were probably rejoicing over the sign. Nephi was certainly relieved.

22 And it came to pass that from this time forth there began to be lyings sent forth among the people, by Satan, to harden their hearts, to the intent that they might not believe in those signs and wonders which they had seen; but notwithstanding these lyings and deceivings the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord.

23 And it came to pass that Nephi went forth among the people, and also many others, baptizing unto repentance, in the which there was a great remission of sins. And thus the people began again to have peace in the land.

24 And there were no contentions, save it were a few that began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses. Now in this thing they did err, having not understood the scriptures. 25 But it came to pass that they soon became converted, and were convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should not pass away till it should all be fulfilled; therefore in this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults.

26 And thus the ninety and second year did pass away, bringing glad tidings unto the people because of the signs which did come to pass, according to the words of the prophecy of all the holy prophets.

v22-26 After the great sign, the adversary inspires people to send lies among the people in order to dissuade them from believing, but the majority of the people ignore these lies, repent, and are converted to the Lord (v. 22). Nephi and other believers go among the repentant Nephites and baptize them. The result is there is a great change in the people causing them to abandon sin, so there is peace all throughout the land (v. 23).

Some few people think they don't have to observe the Law of Moses anymore since the Christ has come (v. 24), but they are

set straight and realize the Law must be observed until Christ fulfils it in its entirety (v. 25).

Thus ends the 92nd year of the judges with the people in general turning around because the gospel has been made known to all of them as a result of the great sign (v. 26).

v22 "lyings sent forth...that they might not believe", while signs can be overpowering, the most hardhearted people will rationalize them away rather than repent, cf. 2:2, 1 Ne. 16:38.

27 And it came to pass that the ninety and third year did also pass away in peace, save it were for the Gadianton robbers, who dwelt upon the mountains, who did infest the land; for so strong were their holds and their secret places that the people could not overpower them; therefore they did commit many murders, and did do much slaughter among the people. 28 And it came to pass that in the ninety and fourth year they began to increase in a great degree, because there were many dissenters of the Nephites who did flee unto them, which did cause much sorrow unto those Nephites who did remain in the land. 29 And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers. 30 And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation.

v27-30 While the Nephites enjoy peace amongst themselves, the Gadianton Robbers are causing problems for them. They live in secret strongholds in the mountains and plunder the Nephites (v. 27). After only a couple of years, there are dissensions among the Nephites and people resort to the Robbers (v. 28). Among the Lamanites the younger people are flattered away by the vain words of the Zoramites to go and join the Robbers (v. 29). Thus, both the Nephites and Lamanites are afflicted because of the wickedness of the younger people among them (v. 30).

v27 "the Gadianton Robbers", the apostate Zoramites never repented, but instead form the core of the Robbers per v. 29. See Hela. 11:24-31 for the history of the Robbers being composed of dissident Nephites.

While these are "Zoramites", the original Zoramites are probably all long gone as they had their origin some 75 years earlier, cf. Alma 31:1. Thus, we have the children and followers of the original Zoramites perpetuating the wickedness of the fathers in the form of the Gadianton Robbers.

v29 One would assume the Zoramites would have to secretly come among the Lamanites and Nephites in order to do their recruiting, otherwise they would have been executed as Robbers.

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