

General Comments on 3 Nephi 8-10

These three chapters review the destruction in the New World that attended the death of Christ (8:5-18), the laments of the survivors (8:24-25, 10:8) and the words spoken to them by the deceased Lord (9:2-22) with His own lamentation (10:4-7), prior to His resurrection. The Lord comments on why the destruction occurred (9:2-12), and why the people he is presently talking to survived, encouraging them to repent (9:13-22). The Lord then laments the situation, as He has tried to get Israel to repent and rely on Him, but they refuse (10:3-7). Mormon inserts a comment that there were numerous prophets sent to warn Israel in general and the Nephites in specific, but they were murdered for it (10:14-17).

All of these events lead up to the personal visit in ch. 11, approximately one year later. They also serve to explain why the Lord has taken such a great interest in the Mulekite and Lehite populations. He is bound to the covenant with Israel (cf. 10:3-7), and this population is a direct descendant of Israel, whom He has tried to lovingly guide and gather. Their open rebellion and murderous nature has precipitated a drastic and lethal response from Him, in order to preserve a smaller population. He then visits them personally, to get them onto the right track. All of this revolves around the covenant with Abraham, perpetuated through Israel, which He is committed to. So committed, He gets personally involved when necessary. The result is almost 400 years of good people.

The destruction in the New World coincides with the darkness (cf. Matt. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44-45) and tremors (cf. Matt. 27:51) felt in the Old World at Christ's crucifixion. Whether the Old World effects were caused by the New World destruction, or coincident is unclear. The destruction in the New World was clearly on an epic scale, and could have caused the tremors in the Old World. But, volcanic ashfall typically takes days to travel over global winds, so the Old World darkness is probably unrelated.

Comments on 3 Nephi 8

Events detailed in this chapter were predicted in 2 Nephi 26:3-8 and Samuel warned of them in Hela. 14:20-27. As the people probably had access to this text (cf. Alma 63:2) and were

contemporaries of Samuel, one could see the increase in baptisms in 7:26, after a long period of decline (cf. 7:14-25, esp. 7:21), as being out of fear of impending disasters. Hence the watching and disputations among what we would assume were sign seekers in v. 3-4.

The destruction is likely a result of seismic and volcanic action. What we know of Geology today explains the earthquakes, vapor of darkness (ash fall), massive wind storms, and lightning. However, in ancient times these things were not well understood. As we would expect, this lack of understanding is reflected in the text. Note in v. 6 and 12 they see the thunder as the cause of the earthquakes, and not the other way around. Central America is [dotted with volcanos](#) along the Western coast. For a brief history of Geology, [see here](#), and for a brief history of plate tectonics, [see here](#). In both cases, the modern understanding of both post-date the publication of the Book of Mormon.

1 AND now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record--for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity-- 2 And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away; 3 And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land. 4 And there began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people, notwithstanding so many signs had been given.

v1-4 According to Nephi's record (v. 1), if he didn't make any mistakes (v. 2), the thirty third year passed without the fulfilment of Samuel's sign of three days of darkness (v. 3). This results in a considerable uproar among the people, even though there were so many other signs (v. 4).

v1 "a just man who did keep the record", cross reference with 23:7 indicates it was in fact Nephi who kept the record. This agrees with the statement "he truly did many miracles" in this verse per Mormon's statement in 7:19-20.

v2 "if there was no mistake made", even though the man is considered "just" and "cleansed every whit from his iniquity" per v. 1, Mormon still allows room for honest mistakes. People

commonly expect infallibility from religious leaders, particularly ones as prominent as was Nephi. Mormon's approach is the correct one. Just because a person is sanctified doesn't mean they won't make honest mistakes. Its simply a function of being mortal.

v3-4 "the people began to look...for the sign...doubtings and disputations among the people", we would have to assume "the people" here are the disbelieving majority, just as in 1:5-7. We know from the preceding chapter that few believed (7:21). And, while "many" were baptized (7:26) in the year preceding the sign, it is plain from the description of the destruction in this chapter and the next that the majority of the people are wicked and therefore killed. No quantitative terms are given, but with entire cities being swallowed up it is plain the destruction among the people was massive, thus the wickedness among "the people" was great as well.

As "the people" would have been the disbelievers they would not have realized what was to precede the three days of darkness per the original Nephi's prediction in 2 Ne. 26. It is ironic they never get to see the sign they are looking for because they get wiped out beforehand.

v4 "notwithstanding so many signs had been given", it is the nature of unbelievers to ignore available evidence in favor of their skeptical belief and focus solely on perceived flaws and failures. Their disbelief precedes the collection and review of evidence, so they are simply looking for things to substantiate their preconceived conclusions in favor of disbelief.

5 And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land. 6 And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder. 7 And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land. 8 And the city of Zarahemla did take fire. 9 And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned. 10 And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain. 11 And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward. 12 But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth; 13 And the highways were broken up, and the level roads

were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough. 14 And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate. 15 And there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceedingly great, and there were many in them who were slain. 16 And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away. 17 And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth. 18 And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.

v5-18 Four days into the new year (v. 5) massive natural disasters (v. 6-7) cause pervasive destruction in all of the lands of the Lehiters (v. 8-12). No part of the land of the Lehiters is left unaffected (v. 13-18).

v5 "in the thirty and fourth year", the Nephites start counting from the sign of Christ's birth, cf. 2:5-8. The Nephites must have been observing the religious calendar according to the Law as well as at least 3 secular calendars in order to keep their time. According to the most recent secular calendar, it was the 34th year, and it would have corresponded with the Passover of the religious calendar according to the Law.

v6 "tempest", The American Heritage Dictionary defines this term as "1. A violent windstorm, frequently accompanied by rain, snow, or hail. 2. Furious agitation, commotion, or tumult; an uproar."

v8 "Zarahemla did take fire", cp. Hela. 13:13 for a related threat.

v12 "more great and terrible destruction in the land northward", this was where Nephi was entirely rejected and ultimately expelled because of their unbelief some 30 years earlier, cf. Hela. 7:1. We would conclude from this things hadn't improved any since then, hence the destruction visited on them.

v15 "there were some cities which remained", we would assume the city Bountiful was one of these given the Temple was spared destruction per 11:1.

19 And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease--for behold, they did last for about the

space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours--and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. 20 And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; 21 And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all; 22 And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land. 23 And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen;

v19-23a After three hours of complete upheaval the earthquakes and storms cease (v. 19) and a tangible overpowering blackness hangs in the air (v. 20-22).

v20 "the inhabitants...could feel the vapor of darkness", the comment in 10:13 indicates this "vapor of smoke and darkness" had "overpowered" some people such that they died. It is common for there to be casualties due to asphyxiation in volcanic events because of ash fall.

and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. 24 And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. 25 And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible.

v23b-25 After the destruction stops, the survivors lament the destruction (v. 23b), acknowledging they were warned to repent beforehand (v. 24-25).

v24-25 "great and terrible...great and terrible...great and terrible", this descriptor is commonly used for the Day of the Lord, cp. Joel 2:11. A triple repetition is a superlative in Hebrew.

v24 "O that we had repented before this great and terrible day", the survivors lament the destruction, but for the dead, referred to in v. 25, it is too late, cp. Hela. 13:30-39. The survivors lament both the physical and spiritual fate of the dead.

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