

General Comments on Helaman 1-6

The general pattern of Alma 43-63 continues, with Nephite dissidents causing problems, but mixed into the history is a new element, starting in chapter 1:

Paanchi attempts rebellion (1:6-8)

Kishkumen's secret combination (1:9-12)

Nephite dissenter Coriantumr leads Lamanite attack on Nephites (1:14-34)

Gadianton takes over secret combination (2:1-11)

Internal conflict, dissension, wars among Nephites (3:3-22)

Secret combination spreads among Nephites (3:23)

Polarization and contention within the church (3:33-36)

Contention among Nephites with dissenters unsuccessfully attempting to instigate Lamanite aggression (4:1-3)

Nephite dissenters successfully instigate Lamanite aggression, Nephites lose considerable territory (4:4-10)

The theme of Moroni's literally combating dissenters by war carries over to his son Moronihah. But, that theme transitions over to the pernicious presence of secret combinations, and they take over as the Nephite's primary problem. The Nephites are still their own worst enemy, just in a different way. The book of Alma was largely driven by a Them versus Us power struggle resolved by literal combat. The book of Helaman is about pervasive moral corruption and cultural decay versus religion.

With chapter 4-6, the physical combat transitions to preaching as Moronihah, Lehi, and Nephi spiritually combat the dissenters successfully by preaching the gospel, cf. 4:14-19 and 5:5-52. Mormon comments on this in 4:11-13, also cp. 4:20-26, where he identifies the root cause of the Nephite's problem. The preaching is very successful among the Lamanites, so much so the Lamanites are largely converted. The problem is the Nephites, as they have embraced secret combinations. Chapter 4 informs us the Nephites have gone bad, and chapter 6 explains the Nephites have embraced secret combinations and have become entirely corrupted, while the Lamanites are mostly righteous. The seeds planted in ch. 1 by Kishkumen and Gadianton have fully grown, and taken over the Nephite government.

Back in Alma 37:21-31, Alma the younger, in his hand-off conversation with Helaman, tells Helaman to not let people know about the secret combinations of the Jaredites, because it will result in the destruction of the Nephites. Unfortunately, the Nephites figure them out on their own and embrace them. Mormon comments on this explicitly in 6:25-26. Chapter 6 is the pivot point where after the Lamanite conversion, both populations unite and enjoy exceptional peace and prosperity (5:49-6:14). However, the Nephites fully embrace secret combination and it destroys their culture and society (6:15-19, 6:32-36). The Lamanites eliminate the secret combination (6:20, 6:37) while the Nephites build it up (6:21-24, 6:38-40). Mormon comments on the origin of the secret combinations and why it took hold among the Nephites in 6:25-31.

Chapters 1-6 set up the rest of the book of Helaman. The following chapters are much more personal and driven by first-person narrative of Nephi (ch. 7-11), a rather bitter, and unfortunately accurate, parenthetical commentary by Mormon (ch. 12), and Samuel the Lamanite (ch. 13-15). The book then closes with ch. 16 being a historical summary to transition into the book of Third Nephi.

Comments on Helaman 1

1 AND now behold, it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there began to be a serious difficulty among the people of the Nephites. 2 For behold, Pahoran had died, and gone the way of all the earth; therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the judgment-seat among the brethren, who were the sons of Pahoran.

3 Now these are their names who did contend for the judgment-seat, who did also cause the people to contend: Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni. 4 Now these are not all the sons of Pahoran (for he had many), but these are they who did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people. 5 Nevertheless, it came to pass that Pahoran was appointed by the voice of the people to be chief judge and a governor over the people of Nephi.

v1-5 Pahoran, the chief judge dies of old age, and three of his sons compete for his seat, and one of them is selected by popular vote.

v3-4 We would assume these three sons of Pahoran all were judges already, and had experience as such. Perhaps the other sons were not judges, or were not interested in the position.

6 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, when he saw that he could not obtain the judgment-seat, he did unite with the voice of the people. 7 But behold, Paanchi, and that part of the people that were desirous that he should be their governor, was exceedingly wroth; therefore, he was about to flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion against their brethren. 8 And it came to pass as he was about to do this, behold, he was taken, and was tried according to the voice of the people, and condemned unto death; for he had raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people.

v6-8 Pacumeni acknowledges the will of the people (v. 6), but Paanchi does not, and attempts to take the role of chief judge and governor by force (v. 7). When the general population discovers this, they condemn Paanchi to death, because he was planning insurrection (v. 8).

9 Now when those people who were desirous that he should be their governor saw that he was condemned unto death, therefore they were angry, and behold, they sent forth one Kishkumen, even to the judgment-seat of Pahoran, and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat. 10 And he was pursued by the servants of Pahoran; but behold, so speedy was the flight of Kishkumen that no man could overtake him. 11 And he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by

their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran. 12 Therefore, Kishkumen was not known among the people of Nephi, for he was in disguise at the time that he murdered Pahoran. And Kishkumen and his band, who had covenanted with him, did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found; but as many as were found were condemned unto death.

v9-12 Those who were conspiring with Paanchi send Kishkumen to assassinate Pahoran (v. 9), who escapes (v. 10), and they form a secret clique among the Nephite population (v. 11-12).

v11 "swearing by their everlasting maker", how they reconcile their belief in God with their personal behavior is remarkable, but there are modern crime syndicates who affiliate with organized religion to their mutual benefit.

13 And now behold, Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people, to be a chief judge and a governor over the people, to reign in the stead of his brother Pahoran; and it was according to his right. And all this was done in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges; and it had an end.

v13 With the other two brothers no longer present, the third surviving brother takes the seat of chief judge and governor.

14 And it came to pass in the forty and first year of the reign of the judges, that the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men, and armed them with swords, and with cimeters and with bows, and with arrows, and with headplates, and with breastplates, and with all manner of shields of every kind. 15 And they came down again that they might pitch battle against the Nephites. And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and he was a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man.

16 Therefore, the king of the Lamanites, whose name was Tubaloth, who was the son of Ammoron, supposing that Coriantumr, being a mighty man, could stand against the Nephites, with his strength and also with his great wisdom, insomuch that by sending him forth he should gain power over the Nephites--17 Therefore he did stir them up to anger, and he did gather together his armies, and he did appoint Coriantumr to be their leader, and did cause that they should march down to the land of Zarahemla to battle against the Nephites.

18 And it came to pass that because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government, that they had not kept sufficient guards in the land of Zarahemla; for they had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the heart of their lands to attack that great city Zarahemla. 19 But it came to pass that Coriantumr did march forth at the head of his numerous host, and came upon the inhabitants of the city, and

their march was with such exceedingly great speed that there was no time for the Nephites to gather together their armies. 20 Therefore Coriantumr did cut down the watch by the entrance of the city, and did march forth with his whole army into the city, and they did slay every one who did oppose them, insomuch that they did take possession of the whole city. 21 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, who was the chief judge, did flee before Coriantumr, even to the walls of the city. And it came to pass that Coriantumr did smite him against the wall, insomuch that he died. And thus ended the days of Pacumeni.

v14-21 Owing to internal conflict, the Nephites had not been paying attention to external threats as they should have (v. 18). The result is a dissenter goes to the Lamanites and they muster an army to attack the Nephites (v. 14-17). Rather than attack the border cities, the Lamanite army barges straight through to the capital city of Zarahemla and captures it (v. 18-20), killing the chief judge (v. 21).

22 And now when Coriantumr saw that he was in possession of the city of Zarahemla, and saw that the Nephites had fled before them, and were slain, and were taken, and were cast into prison, and that he had obtained the possession of the strongest hold in all the land, his heart took courage insomuch that he was about to go forth against all the land. 23 And now he did not tarry in the land of Zarahemla, but he did march forth with a large army, even towards the city of Bountiful; for it was his determination to go forth and cut his way through with the sword, that he might obtain the north parts of the land. 24 And, supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land, therefore he did march forth, giving them no time to assemble themselves together save it were in small bodies; and in this manner they did fall upon them and cut them down to the earth.

25 But behold, this march of Coriantumr through the center of the land gave Moronihah great advantage over them, notwithstanding the greatness of the number of the Nephites who were slain. 26 For behold, Moronihah had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the center of the land, but that they would attack the cities round about in the borders as they had hitherto done; therefore Moronihah had caused that their strong armies should maintain those parts round about by the borders. 27 But behold, the Lamanites were not frightened according to his desire, but they had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla, and were marching through the most capital parts of the land, slaying the people with a great slaughter, both men, women, and children, taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds.

28 But when Moronihah had discovered this, he immediately sent forth Lehi with an army round about to head them before they should come to the land Bountiful. 29 And thus he did; and he did head them before they came to the land Bountiful, and

gave unto them battle, insomuch that they began to retreat back towards the land of Zarahemla. 30 And it came to pass that Moronihah did head them in their retreat, and did give unto them battle, insomuch that it became an exceedingly bloody battle; yea, many were slain, and among the number who were slain Coriantumr was also found.

31 And now, behold, the Lamanites could not retreat either way, neither on the north, nor on the south, nor on the east, nor on the west, for they were surrounded on every hand by the Nephites. 32 And thus had Coriantumr plunged the Lamanites into the midst of the Nephites, insomuch that they were in the power of the Nephites, and he himself was slain, and the Lamanites did yield themselves into the hands of the Nephites. 33 And it came to pass that Moronihah took possession of the city of Zarahemla again, and caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace. 34 And thus ended the forty and first year of the reign of the judges.

v22-34 The Lamanite invasion of Zarahemla goes so well, they continue attacking local cities (v. 22-27). The Nephites quickly react by bringing the border armies into the center of the land and surround the Lamanites, slaughtering them (v. 28-32), such that they surrender and are allowed to leave (v. 33).

It seems likely that Mormon, being a military leader himself, saw this event and absurd, and is mocking the strength and wisdom of Coriantumr, since he strategically positioned his armies to be surrounded and crushed. Knowing the military position of your enemies is essential to success in combat.

Copyright © 2020 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.