

General Comments on Helaman 13-16

These chapters cover the ministry of Samuel, a Lamanite, to the Nephites at Zarahemla. Samuel preaches among the Nephites for quite a while, but is rejected and thrown out (16:2). He is about to leave and head home when an angel tells him to return and continue to preach (16:3), giving them a warning of impending destruction (16:8-20).

Samuel's experience with the Nephites is similar to Alma's experience at Ammonihah, cf. Alma 8:14-17.

Why would the Lord send Samuel when Nephi was already there (cf. 16:1)? There are a couple of background theological reasons for it. First, there is no prophet in his own country (cf. Luke 4:24). Nephi has largely been rejected by his own people, so an external authority is warranted. Second, in the mouth of two or three witnesses is every word established (Deut. 19:15, Matt. 18:16, 2 Cor. 13:1). Nephi is only one witness, and Samuel is the second, testifying pretty much the same thing: you Nephites are wicked and need to repent.

However, there is something else at issue here. Samuel is a Lamanite (cf. 14:10). At present, the Lamanites are generally more righteous than the Nephites, as established in ch. 6 and reinforced in 13:1. Thus, Samuel represents the righteous Lamanites in condemning the wicked Nephites. But, Samuel's threat against the Nephites is that the Lamanites will destroy the Nephites (cf. v. 8). A Lamanite is telling the Nephites that unless they repent, the Lord is going to have the Lamanites destroy them. While the Lamanites and Nephites presently enjoy a general peace between them, that peace is in jeopardy because of the Nephite wickedness. And when the peace fails, the Lamanites are going to harass and destroy the Nephites. Now, this has been a recurring theme for the entire Book of Mormon (cf. 2 Ne. 5:25, Jacob 3:3). But, this time, Samuel tells them it is going to be a war of extinction. It is no longer a matter of the Lamanites keeping the Nephites in check. The Lord is going to wipe the Nephites off the face of the earth and leave the Lamanites to survive. Samuel represents the Lamanites at this point, explaining that their extinction is because of their wickedness and is Judgement from the Lord.

At the beginning of the Book of Mormon, the original Nephi has a vision where he sees the history of the Lehites play out (cf. 1 Nephi 12-15). In 1 Ne. 12, Nephi sees the seed of his family, the Nephites, contending with the seed of his brothers,

the Lamanites. In 1 Ne. 12:19 the Lamanites "overpower", or destroy, the Nephites. From that point on in Nephi's vision, we don't hear about Nephites anymore. They are extinct.

Samuel is repeating the prediction Nephi made. Samuel adds quite a bit of prophetic content with respect to the birth and death of the Messiah. But with respect to the demise of the Nephites, Samuel's content is largely the same as Nephi's. The Nephites in general don't take it well, and try to murder him for his testimony. This seals the testimony against the Nephites, as they are totally unrepentant and murderous. The irony is he is only repeating what Nephi himself said.

Another implicit rhetorical connection between the present text and Nephi's vision is the present wealth, political corruption and apostasy the Nephites are experiencing represents the fountain of filthy water, mists of darkness and great and spacious building, per 1 Nephi 12:16-18. The symbols of ancient Nephi's vision are clearly equated with the present reality of the Nephite's behavior.

Comments on Helaman 13

1 AND now it came to pass in the eighty and sixth year, the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses.

v1 This verse picks up the history from the end of ch. 11 and informs us the Nephite's downward trend is continuing while the Lamanites are strong in the faith.

2 And it came to pass that in this year there was one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla, and began to preach unto the people. And it came to pass that he did preach, many days, repentance unto the people, and they did cast him out, and he was about to return to his own land.

3 But behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, that he should return again, and prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart. 4 And it came to pass that they would not suffer that he should enter into the city; therefore he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart.

v2-4 A Lamanite named Samuel preaches among the Nephites at Zarahemla for some time but has no success. In fact, they throw him out of the city, so he starts to head home (v. 2). But, the Lord speaks to Samuel and tells him to return to Zarahemla and

preach whatever the He puts into his heart (v. 3). Samuel returns back to Zarahemla, but the people refuse to let him in the gate. Samuel instead climbs up on the city wall and preaches to the people (v. 4).

5 And he said unto them: Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people. 6 Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh unto this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.

8 Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent I will take away my word from them, and I will withdraw my Spirit from them, and I will suffer them no longer, and I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them. 9 And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence. 10 Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger, and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction; and this shall surely come except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your destruction.

11 But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord; yea, thus saith the Lord, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not.

12 Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold, it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved; yea, wo unto this great city, for I perceive, saith the Lord, that there are many, yea, even the more part of this great city, that will harden their hearts against me, saith the Lord.

13 But blessed are they who will repent, for them will I spare. But behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it. 14 But behold, it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared.

But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction; yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her. 15 Yea, and wo be unto the city of Gideon, for the wickedness and abominations which are in her. 16 Yea, and wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in them. 17 And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts, because of the peoples' sake who are upon the land, yea, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

18 And it shall come to pass, saith the Lord of Hosts, yea, our great and true God, that whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord. 19 For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up

their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous; and he that hideth not up his treasures unto me, cursed is he, and also the treasure, and none shall redeem it because of the curse of the land. 20 And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures, because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, and will hide up their treasures when they shall flee before their enemies; because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord.

v5-20 Samuel indicates his initial calling to the Nephites was to preach "glad tidings" (v. 7) of "repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6). But, they "would not receive" (v. 7) him, so his message changed to one of "heavy destruction" (v. 5-6). He then quotes the Lord at length (v. 8-20).

v5 "four hundred years...the sword of justice falleth", the warning of annihilation is pretty far off. The present audience will be long dead of natural causes before this ever comes to pass. So, what is the point of threatening them with annihilation in 400 years?

The point is the Lord is threatening them with 400 years of suffering, of being beaten down, of being slaughtered by the sword, of famine, and of disease (v. 8-9). Then, after about 400 years of this unpleasantry, they will be annihilated (v. 10). In other words, the Lord is promising them their entire lives and their children's lives, and their grandchildren's lives will be unmitigated hell unless they repent. Note v. 9-10 establish 400 years equals 4 generations.

This follows the pattern of punishment established in the Law. Those among Israel who deliberately pervert the ways of the Lord and teach their children to do so are punished so long as they fail to repent. In the Law this is extended to the third and fourth generation, which is the extreme to which a father could directly influence his offspring, cf. Exod. 20:5, Exod. 34:7, Num. 14:18, Deut. 5:9.

v8-20 The Lord first warns the Nephite race of extinction if they do not repent, but persist in their wickedness from generation to generation (v. 8-11). He then warns the people at the capital city of Zarahemla of fire from heaven (v. 12-14). And he finally warns the people at Gideon in specific and all of the cities of Nephites in general (v. 15-16) of a curse on their wealth (v. 17-20).

v8 Persisting in wickedness will cause the Lord to abandon them entirely and curse them per the statement in 1 Ne. 2:23-24.

v9-10 "four hundred years...fourth generation", the metric is a generation is equal to about 100 years, cp. 4 Ne. 1:22. Naturally, this is the long generation, and would refer to the extreme of a contemporary natural life span. The short generation, or "rising generation", is about 20 years, cp. Mosiah 26:1, Alma 5:49, 3 Ne. 1:30.

The reference to the fourth generation is rhetorically connected to Nephi's vision in 1 Ne. 12-13, specifically 1 Ne. 12:12.

v11 No matter how angry the Lord gets and no matter how dire the threats of destruction, it is always calculated to get them to repent. The covenant curses are designed to humble Israel, so when they return to the Lord they are blessed, cf. Lev. 26:40-45. The 200 years of peace and prosperity after the destruction of 3 Ne. 8 show the Lord's willingness to lift the curse on the Nephites. Unfortunately for them after the two hundred years they slide back into their final apostasy and utter destruction.

v12-14 The warning to Zarahemla is reminiscent of Abraham's discussion with the Lord over Sodom in Gen. 18:23-33. In this case there are sufficient righteous in Zarahemla to warrant a stay of execution, but if the wicked ever expel or dispose of them then the Lord will burn the city off the face of the earth. We see in 16:1-2 there are a substantial number of righteous who do repent as a result of Samuel's ministry.

It is interesting to note that in the destruction of 3 Ne. 8:8 it says "the city of Zarahemla did take fire" when here in v. 13 the Lord threatens them with fire.

v15 The city Gideon is probably singled out because it was formerly very righteous (cf. Alma 7:6, Alma 30:21-22), but has now gone bad. We never hear of the city or land of Gideon again after this. It isn't explicitly listed among the cities destroyed in 3 Ne. 8, but there are many cities ambiguously referenced in that chapter.

v17-20 The Lord informs the Nephites that because they love their wealth He will curse them so it is stolen from them (v. 17). The wicked who try to hide their wealth so it isn't stolen will lose it anyway. But, the righteous who hide their wealth so it isn't stolen will still be able to redeem, because they

will use it for righteous purposes, to serve the Lord (v. 18-20).

The figurative approach to these verses is to assume the Lord is contrasting spiritual treasures (cf. Prov. 8:12-21) with physical treasures. However, the verses read quite literally as both the wicked and righteous "hide up" their treasure, but only the righteous can redeem it.

The Lord is perfectly willing to bless the righteous with material wealth and physical comforts, so long as they enjoy it and use it in righteousness and acknowledge the source, cf. v. 21-22. The problem is most people can't seem to deal with wealth righteously.

21 Behold ye, the people of this great city, and hearken unto my words; yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith; for behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you. 22 Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord your God for them; yea, your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities. 23 For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land, and also upon your riches, and this because of your iniquities.

24 Yea, wo unto this people, because of this time which has arrived, that ye do cast out the prophets, and do mock them, and cast stones at them, and do slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time. 25 And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out. 26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil. 27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth--and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. 28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. 29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?

30 Yea, behold, the anger of the Lord is already kindled against you; behold, he hath cursed the land because of your iniquity. 31 And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye

cannot retain them. 32 And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say: 33 O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us. 34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. 35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land. 36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them. 37 Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those days. 38 But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head. 39 O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved.

v21-39 Samuel now adds his testimony against the Nephites in the form of two accusations (v. 21-23, 24-29), and the prediction of a confession that the two accusations were true. But, the confession comes after it is too late (v. 30-39).

v21-23 Samuel's first accusation against the Nephites is they love riches more than the Lord (v. 21, 23). Rather than thank the Lord for blessing them materially, they become filled with pride and this causes all kinds of problems (v. 22).

This is the same accusation as in Matt. 6:24. Also compare Isa. 2:7-8, Isa. 3:16-23, 1 Tim. 6:10.

v24-29 The second accusation is they hypocritically reject the true prophets of the Lord (v. 24-26) because they love and sustain false prophets who preach vain and flattering lies (v. 27-29).

v30-39 Samuel then informs them the Lord's curse on them has already commenced (v. 30), and a curse of slippery riches is coming as well (v. 31).

Samuel predicts in the day of destruction when the wealthy lose their worldly possessions (v. 32-35) and the wicked lament rejecting and killing the prophets (v. 33), they will confess they are sinners and should have repented (v. 36).

But, it is too late to repent because they are dead and damned, surrounded by evil spirits (v. 37). They have wasted their lives seeking happiness in wickedness, which is against the nature of God (v. 38).

Samuel then appeals to the people to repent so the Lord's anger will be turned away from them (v. 39).

These verses appear to transition from a mortal context (v. 30-36) to a post-mortal context (v. 37-38). As the mortal context is couched in the time of the day of desolation and destruction it is safe to assume that even though the subject is still mortal, death is imminent. Hence the close connection to the blatantly post-mortal text of v. 37-38.

An alternative reading would be corporate instead of individual, as is the case in 3 Ne. 8:24-25. In this case the lamentations in v. 30-36 would be that of the survivors, while those who didn't survive are described in v. 37-38.

v31 The ultimate fulfilment of the slippery riches is in Mormon 1:18 and Mormon 2:10. However, the present problems with the Gadianton Robbers (cf. 11:30-33) and the intervening times where they had problems with the Gadianton Robbers (cf. 3 Ne. 1-5) are certainly points of partial fulfillment.

The same sort of curse afflicts the Jaredites as well, cf. Ether 14:1-2.

v33 Compare 3 Ne. 8:24-25.

Copyright © 2024 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@cgmail.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.