

General Comments on Helaman 7-12

These chapters trace the decline of the Nephites into a terrible state of apostasy through a series of personal accounts. The previous ch. 6 recounts a brief period of righteousness among both the Nephites and Lamanites, but their blessed condition quickly brings about wealth, greed, pride, and inevitably apostasy. The Gadianton Robbers infiltrate and take over the government of the Nephites, setting up conflict with Nephi. In ch. 7, Nephi laments the wickedness of the Nephites and tells them to repent or be destroyed. Chapters 8-9 recount a series of confrontations between Nephi and the corrupt leaders where they do everything they possibly can to conspire against and entrap him. Chapters 10-11 discuss Nephi's commission by the Lord and then Nephi requesting the Lord send a drought, to get the people to repent rather than self-destruct. They do repent, but then quickly return to wickedness. The section is rounded out by ch. 12, a blistering commentary by Mormon on the vanity and foolishness of man.

Comments on Helaman 7

1 BEHOLD, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward. 2 For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward, and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them; 3 And they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity.

4 And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness, and those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats—having usurped the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men; 5 Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money; and moreover to be held in office at the head of government, to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world, and, moreover, that they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill, and do according to their own wills—

6 Now this great iniquity had come upon the Nephites, in the space of not many years; and when Nephi saw it, his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast; and he did exclaim in the agony of his soul: 7 Oh, that I could have had my days in

the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord-- 8 Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren. 9 But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren.

v1-9 Nephi returns home to Zarahemla after spending about 5 years preaching in the North countries (v. 1-2). Having been entirely rejected by those who he was preaching to in the North, he had to return home (v. 3).

Much to his dismay he discovers that in his absence the people in Zarahemla have become terribly wicked and have embraced the secret combinations of Gadianton (v. 4-5). When he witnesses the growth of such wickedness in such a short period of time he is overwhelmed by agony and mourns out loud to God (v. 6). Nephi wishes he could have lived back in the good old days (v. 7), then he would have been happy because were righteous (v. 8). Instead, he must live in sorrow among the wicked (v. 9).

v1 "returned...from the land northward", cf. 6:6.

v3-4 After having been rejected by the people in the North, Nephi returns home to find that things are even worse. This is cause of his pathos-filled lament.

v4 "seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness", it seems likely Nephi must have been home for some days or weeks for him to understand how bad things had gotten among the people. Perhaps he had been informed by someone else at home upon his return, but his accusations are specific and detailed, suggesting he has witnessed it firsthand.

v7-9 These verses illustrate how eminently human Nephi is. Nephi's presentation and view of how things were back in the "good old days" is remarkably selective. It is common human behavior to romanticize and idealize the good old days, especially when things are bad in the present.

It is doubtful the original Nephi would have characterized his family and people the way the contemporary Nephi does in v. 7. Sure, the Nephites originally did pretty well for the first

couple of hundred years in the New World, but even then all of the record keepers complain vehemently about the stiff-neckedness of the people (cf. Jacob 1:15-19, Enos 1:23, Jarom 1:3-4).

Another factor is after landing in the New World the Nephites and Lamanites split up shortly afterwards. This effectively polarized the two groups and the Nephites at that point were the more religious people. Of course, they were easier to deal with and were more prone to be admonished by the word of God, because the nonbelievers had been left behind. Prior to that, Laman and Lemuel repeatedly tried to kill Nephi and were causing all kinds of problems. But, the contemporary Nephi selectively ignores this in creating his idealized view of how good things were way back when. Just like we all do.

10 And behold, now it came to pass that it was upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market, which was in the city of Zarahemla; therefore, Nephi had bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden, which tower was also near unto the garden gate by which led the highway.

11 And it came to pass that there were certain men passing by and saw Nephi as he was pouring out his soul unto God upon the tower; and they ran and told the people what they had seen, and the people came together in multitudes that they might know the cause of so great mourning for the wickedness of the people.

v10-11 Nephi is on top of a tower in his garden when he is lamenting out loud, and his garden is located nearby a highway which is on the way to the largest market in the city (v. 10). So, when some people who are sympathetic to Nephi's lament hear him, they go and summon others so they may also hear Nephi's lament over the wicked (v. 11).

v10 This verse gives the reader considerable insight into Nephite culture. There is a chief market, implying there is more than one market in Zarahemla, necessarily implying specialized agriculture and a complex economy. Nephi's home has a garden, and a tower in the garden. All of this is adjacent to a highway, presumably the widest path to the market.

There is considerable archaeological evidence ancient people of Mesoamerica engaged in [agriculture](#) and [silviculture](#) with numerous domesticated plants. The three staple crops known to archaeologists are the "three sisters" of maize, squash and beans.

Why there is a tower in the garden is unclear from the text. But, the context (v. 14) suggests it at least had some religious purpose, as Nephi was praying on it. Archaeologists know that ancient Mesoamericans engaged in irrigation, so perhaps the tower was involved with that. We typically think of ancient American towers as the ziggurats that have survived to the present day, but that is not necessarily the case here. The tower couldn't have been too tall, as people walking by heard Nephi's lament.

12 And now, when Nephi arose he beheld the multitudes of people who had gathered together. 13 And it came to pass that he opened his mouth and said unto them:

Behold, why have ye gathered yourselves together? That I may tell you of your iniquities? 14 Yea, because I have got upon my tower that I might pour out my soul unto my God, because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities! 15 And because of my mourning and lamentation ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel;

yea, and ye have great need to marvel; yea, ye ought to marvel because ye are given away that the devil has got so great hold upon your hearts. 16 Yea, how could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo?

17 O repent ye, repent ye! Why will ye die? Turn ye, turn ye unto the Lord your God.

Why has he forsaken you? 18 It is because you have hardened your hearts; yea, ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd; yea, ye have provoked him to anger against you. 19 And behold, instead of gathering you, except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts.

20 O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you? 21 But behold, it is to get gain, to be praised of men, yea, and that ye might get gold and silver. And ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity.

v12-21 These verses form a prophetic lament in the classic OT style (cp. Isa. 1:21-31, Jer. 8), complete with "How..." and "Why..." questions.

Nephi's lament is in an antithetical A-B-C-B-A parallelism, which follows:

A - pour out my soul unto my God...because of your iniquities

B - given away that the devil has got so great hold upon your hearts...everlasting misery and endless woe

C - Repent...turn to the Lord your God

B - He has forsaken you because you have hardened your hearts...scatter you forth...meat for dogs

A - vain things of the world...all manner of iniquities

Nephi's accusations present them with the stark reality of physical and spiritual destruction if they fail to repent. The adversary wants them to be eternally destroyed (v. 16), and the Lord will physically destroy them (v. 19) for their rebellion. Their only alternative is to repent and return to the Lord (v. 17).

v19 A classic covenant curse, cf. Lev. 26:22.

v20 "in the very day", all of the adults were around some six to twelve years ago when the Nephites were spared annihilation at the hands of the Lamanites, and the miraculous conversion of the Lamanites and subsequent ceding of the land back to the Nephites. Nephi's point is all of the events of the preceding few chapters were witnessed firsthand by the present audience, these things weren't in the historical past, in a day before theirs.

22 And for this cause wo shall come unto you except ye shall repent. For if ye will not repent, behold, this great city, and also all those great cities which are round about, which are in the land of our possession, shall be taken away that ye shall have no place in them; for behold, the Lord will not grant unto you strength, as he has hitherto done, to withstand against your enemies. 23 For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those who repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words.

Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent. 24 For behold, they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea,

he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent.

25 Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it,

yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianton! 26
Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have
suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond
that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches! 27
Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!

28 And except ye repent ye shall perish; yea, even your
lands shall be taken from you, and ye shall be destroyed from
off the face of the earth. 29 Behold now, I do not say that
these things shall be, of myself, because it is not of myself
that I know these things; but behold, I know that these things
are true because the Lord God has made them known unto me,
therefore I testify that they shall be.

v22-29 These verses form a woe oracle, again in the classic OT
prophetic style (cp. Isa. 5, Jer. 22-23, Hab. 2).

The Lord will not support and protect the Nephites when
they rebel against him in wickedness (v. 22-23). The Lamanites
are more righteous than them and will be preserved while the
Nephites are destroyed (v. 24). The Nephites have embraced
organized crime (v. 25) because they love wealth and sin (v. 26-
27). Unless they repent, they will be annihilated (v. 28),
according to the voice of the Lord Himself (v. 29).

The subject of the text is a synthetical A-B-C-B-A
parallelism, again centered on the theme of their repentance, as
was the previous v. 12-21, as follows:

A - except ye repent all cities in lands of possession
taken away, thus says the Lord

B - Lamanites more righteous, will be shown mercy

C - Lamanites will be preserved, Nephites
destroyed unless they repent

B - wo be unto you because of your wickedness in
uniting with the secret combinations

A - except ye repent ye shall perish, lands taken away,
destroyed off face of earth, Lord God made known to me

v22 Nephi's threat in this verse must have seemed odd at the
time to the near-sighted, given the exceptional peace presently
being enjoyed between Lamanites and Nephites, cf. 6:7-14. The
problem is that peace is what gave rise their extraordinary
wealth, pride, and wickedness.

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