

General Comments on Mosiah 7-8

With these chapters we discover the fate of a splinter group of Nephites which left the main body some 80 years earlier to return to the first land the Nephites settled in after the split with Lamanites (cf. Omni 1:27-30). The events in these chapters overlap with those of ch. 21, the main difference being the point of view of the speaker.

We learn in ch. 21 the remnants of the splinter group have turned righteous in their afflictions and are praying for delivery, cf. 21:14-15. This delivery manifests itself in the form of the search party from the main body of the Nephites. It is interesting to note in 7:1 that Mosiah sends out the search party out of irritation at the people's bugging him about them. When we compare this with 21:15 we begin to see the lack of inspiration on Mosiah's part and why there was a lack of inspiration. The remnants of the splinter group were slow to repent, so the Lord was slow to deliver them, so He didn't inspire Mosiah for the cause. In fact, the Lord might have de-inspired him for the cause to drag things out a bit longer for the unrepentant.

These two chapters very much put the historical events and present situation of the people into the context of practical theology. Their present leader recognizes they've broken the commandments are suffering for it, so they need to take corrective action or face destruction. King Limhi explicitly draws the connection between themselves and the consequences of violating the covenant theology of their fathers.

Another point of discussion is why Zeniff et al., want to go back to the land of Nephi to inherit the land of their first inheritance, and why do the people in Zarahemla want to know how they are doing? Ammon isn't even a descendant of Nephi, he is a Mulekite, so he has no ancestral claim on the land. Perhaps 7:16 gives us some insight, as it says Ammon's search party suffered "hunger, thirst, and fatigue." If they were suffering through a drought, this would drive their interest in finding land that was known to be fertile and productive. Given the seemingly easy success Zeniff's party has with their agricultural efforts, it seems likely this was at least part of their interest in returning to the land of Nephi. It was already cleared for agriculture, and presumably water was not a problem. If the land of Zarahemla was not as fertile, or was more susceptible to drought, then that would be a reason to want

to return to lands that were known to be better. Especially since the Lamanites apparently were still not practicing organized agriculture (since the Lamanite king tells his people to clear out of the land of Nephi in 9:7, that strongly suggests they are still practicing hunting and gathering, as opposed to agriculture, as if they had been working the land they wouldn't be willing to move quickly). Or is the goal purely military, to secure a firm, defensible border with the Lamanites?

One of the things unclear in the narrative of ch. 8 is whether King Benjamin has died yet when the Nephite search party goes out looking for the splinter group. Verse 6:4 tells us Mosiah took over as king, and 6:5 tells us Benjamin lived three years and then died. Verse 7:1 backtracks the chronology by saying that after three years of a peaceful reign Mosiah sends out the search party. Thus, the same year the search party was sent out king Benjamin died, but which came first?

The 1st Edition BofM on 21:28 has Ammon, the leader of the search party, saying it was king Benjamin who had the gift from God to interpret engravings in a foreign language. However, the 1st Edition BofM on 25:5-8, as do subsequent editions, informs us it was Mosiah who read the engravings (and we would assume from 28:11-18 it was by the Urim and Thummim).

If we review 1:15-16 where Benjamin charges Mosiah concerning the kingdom we see him turn over several artifacts. However, missing from this list of artifacts is the Urim and Thummim, which we learn from 28:11-18 he has subsequently acquired. We can safely conclude that Benjamin retained the Urim and Thummim until his death, acting as prophet for the people and therefore remaining in that office until death.

This also sheds some light on what probably happened during the time the Nephite search party left and returned. If Benjamin retained the Urim and Thummim as the text suggests, then he would have been the one referenced as being the translator of foreign languages as Ammon did in the 1st Edition BofM. However, while the search party was separated from the main body of the Nephites, king Benjamin, who had abdicated the throne but not the Urim and Thummim, dies. When the search party returns with the remnants of the splinter group Mosiah has assumed the Urim and Thummim, and so he translates the found plates.

Since the apparent discrepancy between Ammon's statement concerning who would translate the plates and who actually did translate the plates was not explained in the text, subsequent editions of the BofM on 21:28 were emended to say "Mosiah" instead of "Benjamin".

Comments on Mosiah 7

1 AND now, it came to pass that after king Mosiah had had continual peace for the space of three years, he was desirous to know concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla; therefore, they wearied him with their teasings. 2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted that sixteen of their strong men might go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi, to inquire concerning their brethren. 3 And it came to pass that on the morrow they started to go up, having with them one Ammon, he being a strong and mighty man, and a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was also their leader. 4 And now, they knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander. 5 And when they had wandered forty days they came to a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom, and there they pitched their tents. 6 And Ammon took three of his brethren, and their names were Amaleki, Helem, and Hem, and they went down into the land of Nephi.

v1-6 Three years into a peaceful reign as king the people start bothering him about the fate of a splinter group that left the Nephites some 80 years earlier, cf. Omni 1:27-30. This group returned back to the original land settled by Nephi after the split with Laman and Lemuel (v. 1). After sufficient nagging, Mosiah relents and sends a group of 16 strong men (v. 2) for a journey with little to guide them into potentially hostile territory occupied by the Lamanites (v. 4). The group is led by a Mulekite named Ammon, who is a descendant of Zarahemla (v. 3). After wandering for over a month, the group gets close to the land of Nephi, so they climb up on a hill to camp, and perhaps to better survey the land of Nephi as well (v. 5). Then Ammon and three others head down into the land of Nephi (v. 6).

While the land is called "Nephi", it is occupied by the Lamanites. And, while the Nephites and Lamanites are not presently actively at war, the reason for the current cessation of hostilities was the Lamanites being routed badly by king Benjamin. How much time has elapsed since then isn't clear from the text, but it is less than one generation. This probably explains why sixteen "strong men" are sent, and why the bulk of the party is left on the hill while four go into the land of Nephi. If the four don't return, the others can go back and report.

v1 "teasings", the Random House College Dictionary defines this as "to irritate or provoke with persistent petty distractions, trifling raillery, or other annoyance, often in sport."

v2 "go up", the lands which the Lamanites occupied and the ancestral lands which Nephi first inhabited were apparently "up"

(cf. 28:1-9) and the land of Zarahemla was apparently "down" (cf. Alma 27:7-9, Alma 57:28-30). This is probably irrespective of North and South and has to do with relative elevations as the phrase "go down" is elsewhere used both literally and figuratively in reference to descending, cp. 1 Ne. 18:6, 2 Ne. 4:5, Enos 1:26, Mosiah 2:28, Alma 47:11, 3 Ne. 11:23. The phrases "go up", "gone up", "went up", "came up", "gone down", "go down" and "went down" are similarly used consistently in this fashion.

v3 "a descendant of Zarahemla", he was of Jewish extraction instead of Josephite extraction as were the Nephites. He appears to have been in some kind of military leadership role as a result of his stature and notable lineage.

v5 According to 11:13 there was a "great tower" on the hill north of Shilom. Assuming this is the same hill then the great tower, or the ruins of it, are probably what initially attracted Ammon and the party to this hill. If it was the highest hill in the area it would have also given them a natural vantage point for observing the lands below, the city of Shilom and the city of Lehi-Nephi included.

7 And behold, they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi, and in the land of Shilom; and they were surrounded by the king's guard, and were taken, and were bound, and were committed to prison. 8 And it came to pass when they had been in prison two days they were again brought before the king, and their bands were loosed; and they stood before the king, and were permitted, or rather commanded, that they should answer the questions which he should ask them.

9 And he said unto them: Behold, I am Limhi, the son of Noah, who was the son of Zeniff, who came up out of the land of Zarahemla to inherit this land, which was the land of their fathers, who was made a king by the voice of the people. 10 And now, I desire to know the cause whereby ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city, when I, myself, was with my guards without the gate? 11 And now, for this cause have I suffered that ye should be preserved, that I might inquire of you, or else I should have caused that my guards should have put you to death. Ye are permitted to speak.

12 And now, when Ammon saw that he was permitted to speak, he went forth and bowed himself before the king; and rising again he said: O king, I am very thankful before God this day that I am yet alive, and am permitted to speak; and I will endeavor to speak with boldness; 13 For I am assured that if ye had known me ye would not have suffered that I should have worn these bands. For I am Ammon, and am a descendant of Zarahemla, and have come up out of the land of Zarahemla to inquire concerning our brethren, whom Zeniff brought up out of that land.

14 And now, it came to pass that after Limhi had heard the words of Ammon, he was exceedingly glad, and said: Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive. And now, I will rejoice; and on the morrow I will cause that my people

shall rejoice also. 15 For behold, we are in bondage to the Lamanites, and are taxed with a tax which is grievous to be borne. And now, behold, our brethren will deliver us out of our bondage, or out of the hands of the Lamanites, and we will be their slaves; for it is better that we be slaves to the Nephites than to pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites.

16 And now, king Limhi commanded his guards that they should no more bind Ammon nor his brethren, but caused that they should go to the hill which was north of Shilom, and bring their brethren into the city, that thereby they might eat, and drink, and rest themselves from the labors of their journey; for they had suffered many things; they had suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

v7-16 Ammon and the three others encounter the king of the people of Shilom and his body guards, and are taken captive (v. 7). They are left in prison for two days and then brought before the king for questioning (v. 8). The king announces he is the descendant of the leader of the Nephite splinter group and king of the people by their voice (v. 9). He commands Ammon and the others to explain why they were so bold as to approach the king and his guard (v. 10), and only for the purpose of answering this question were they kept alive (v. 11).

Ammon bows before the king, and praises God that he hasn't been executed (v. 12). He then explains he is in fact Ammon, a descendant of Zarahemla and is leader of a party sent out to find the Nephite splinter group, and had the king known this he wouldn't have treated them they way he had (v. 13).

When the king hears what Ammon says he rejoices, because he thought the original group from where their splinter group had come were extinct. He decides that the next day he will gather all of his people together to hear what Ammon has to say (v. 14). He explains to Ammon that he and his people are in bondage to the Lamanites, and that they are willing to be slaves to the Nephites if they will deliver them out of bondage from the Lamanites (v. 15).

King Limhi then instructs his guards to treat Ammon and the others with hospitality, and to bring in the other members of the search party as well so they can rest (v. 16).

This forced interview between the king and Ammon appears to be the first point where each of them realize who the others are. Had Ammon known or suspected the king was grandson of Zeniff or had the king known Ammon was sent from the Nephites, the two days in prison would not have occurred. One would assume if Ammon thought this was the Nephite splinter group he would have spoken up even though they were in jail. Thus, in v.

9 when the king identifies himself and in v. 12 when Ammon identifies himself, it was probably a moment of considerable astonishment on both sides.

v7 In 21:23 we are informed Limhi initially thought they were some of his father's priests, who had been raiding their goods. This seems odd though, as wouldn't Limhi have been able to recognize his father's own priests? Perhaps Limhi had little to do with them while they were there, as he himself was a just man, and so he avoided them. But it seems likely someone among them would have been able to recognize them as Noah's priests. Perhaps that is the case and that is why they were asked to appear before the king.

Limhi wouldn't have deduced Ammon was from Zarahemla because they were under the impression the Nephites were extinct, cf. 21:26.

v12 "he went forth and bowed himself before the king", the king obviously considers Ammon and his cohorts to be hostile. If they were, then bowing before the king would be the last thing they would do as they would be defiant as prisoners of war. Thus, the gesture is intended to be an act of good faith to disarm the king's hostilities.

v14 "my brethren...are yet alive", Limhi sent out his own search party to find the original Nephites, but they instead found a land that had the remnants of a dead and destroyed people, the Jaredites, cf. 8:8-12, 21:25-26. Limhi apparently assumed that was the Nephites.

v15 "deliver us out of bondage...we will be their slaves", the Semitic concept of "slavery" is different than the Western concept of "slavery". American slavery as practiced treated the person as the property of the owner. This is not the case in Semitic culture. In Semitic culture a "slave" would be more akin to an indentured servant in Western culture where the person is obligated to labor for another to dispose of some debt.

Thus, what Limhi is probably suggesting is they will be indebted as servants to the Nephites if they deliver them from the Lamanites. Limhi is probably thinking along the lines of armed conflict, for which they would be indebted to the Nephite armies. But, it ends up they just abandon the land and retreat

to Zarahemla, and we never hear anything about them being slaves to the Nephites as a result of it.

17 And now, it came to pass on the morrow that king Limhi sent a proclamation among all his people, that thereby they might gather themselves together to the temple, to hear the words which he should speak unto them. 18 And it came to pass that when they had gathered themselves together that he spake unto them in this wise, saying:

O ye, my people, lift up your heads and be comforted; for behold, the time is at hand, or is not far distant, when we shall no longer be in subjection to our enemies, notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made.

19 Therefore, lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and caused that they should walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, and fed them with manna that they might not perish in the wilderness; and many more things did he do for them. 20 And again, that same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now; and behold, it is because of our iniquities and abominations that he has brought us into bondage.

21 And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about-- 22 And all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites, to the amount of one half of our corn, and our barley, and even all our grain of every kind, and one half of the increase of our flocks and our herds; and even one half of all we have or possess the king of the Lamanites doth exact of us, or our lives. 23 And now, is not this grievous to be borne? And is not this, our affliction, great? Now behold, how great reason we have to mourn.

24 Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity. 25 For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words; but there arose contentions among them, even so much that they did shed blood among themselves. 26 And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ. 27 And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth-- 28 And now, because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do which brought down the wrath of God upon them. Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage, and that they are smitten with sore afflictions?

29 For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them. 30 And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall

reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison. 31 And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction. 32 And now, behold, the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and ye are smitten and afflicted. 33 But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

v17-33 King Limhi has all of his people gather to the Temple so they can hear about the contact with people from the Nephites, and what the result of it is (v. 17).

Limhi tells his people to rejoice because the time is at hand that they are to be delivered from the Lamanites (v. 18). He tells them it can be accomplished because the Lord has ever delivered Israel from their captors (v. 19), and will do the same for them because they have repented of their wickedness (v. 20).

Limhi recounts their history leading up to their captivity to the Lamanites (v. 21-22), and confesses their condition is lamentable (v. 23). Even very lamentable, because of all of those who have died (v. 24) because of their wickedness and rebellion against the Lord (v. 25). They even murdered a prophet who told them of their wickedness (v. 26) and taught them concerning the true nature of the Lord's condescension into flesh (v. 27). Obviously, the result is the people were cursed by the Lord and are now slaves to the Lamanites (v. 28).

Limhi then presents three proof texts indicating the Lord will punish those who rebel in wickedness (v. 29-31). The Lord will not support his people in wickedness, but will cause them to stumble and fall so they will be encouraged to repent (v. 29). If they choose to sow filthiness, they will reap what they deserve, which is destruction (v. 30-31). This is the covenant the Lord has made with Israel, and it is fulfilled in their very eyes (v. 32). But, if they return to the Lord and fully repent, then He will deliver them from this covenant curse of bondage to the Lamanites (v. 33).

v17 "the temple", this is apparently the temple originally built by Nephi (cf. 2 Ne. 5:16), or at least one of the permutations of it. One would assume over time the Temple had been rebuilt and perhaps expanded since some 400 years had elapsed since the original construction.

The splinter group returned to the land originally occupied by Nephi and his followers, cf. 9:6. They rebuilt the city and walls of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom (cf. 9:8). Later, King Noah added a palace and tower near the temple (cf. 11:12) and new buildings in the city Shilom and a tower to the north (cf. 11:13). This suggests the Temple was not a new construct, but one of the pre-existing ones as no mention is made of building a new Temple.

v20 Limhi understands the nature of Israel's covenant with the Lord very well to be confessing their bondage to the Lamanites is a result of their own wickedness, cf. Lev. 26:25. He knows when they repent of their wickedness the Lord will again turn to them and deliver them, cf. Lev. 26:36-45. Limhi also provides three quotes from the Lord substantiating the idea of covenant curses in v. 29-31. Limhi is clearly one who is familiar with the Scriptures, as well as being "a just man", cp. 19:17.

v22 Being in bondage and not being able to eat your own produce are classic covenant curses, cp. Deut. 28:33, ct. Isa. 65:21-23.

v29-31 Limhi presents three quotations of the Lord. Assuming they are quotes and not paraphrases, we don't presently have access to any of the texts he is quoting.

The general ideas found in the three quotes are all found in the OT, compare v. 29 with Joshua 24:20 and Isa. 8:14, and compare verses 30 and 31 with Hosea 8:7, Hosea 13:3, Isa. 17:13, Ezek. 19:12.

v30 "filthiness", this word in the KJV OT is generally used to describe the condition of the idolatrous heathen nations surrounding Israel. It is also used in reference to sexual immorality as well, and from the text it is plain King Noah and his priests engaged in this kind of behavior, cf. 11:14.

"reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind", chaff is the inedible and largely useless straw left over after the harvest. It is easily carried away by the whirlwind because it is light and insubstantial. The meaning is that if people pursue wickedness they are left with nothing substantial or nourishing when it comes to harvest. The things they have sought after and accumulated are easily blown away and they are left with nothing. Since Limhi's people grown crops and keep livestock, they likely are keeping the chaff for straw for the animals.

Those who covet material things and crave self-indulgent acts can never get enough. So they are left with nothing but "poison" to their soul as they pursue things that are fleeting and insubstantial instead of things which are beneficial.

v31 "the east wind", to the Semites the west wind brought rain and the east wind brought drought. To an agrarian culture drought meant starvation and death.

v32 "the promise of the Lord is fulfilled", generally referring to the various covenant blessings and curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

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