

General Comments on Mosiah 9-11

Chapters 9-11 backtrack chronologically from where ch. 8 ends, returning us to the events of WofM 1:12-14 and Omni 1:27-30. As such, a considerable amount of Nephite history is filled in. The narrative is told from the point of view of Zeniff, the original Nephite leader of the splinter group we have been reading about in the previous chapters.

Aside from the history, the chapters paint a picture of a group of people who were not particularly spiritual, but whose afflictions chastened them and brought them to remember the Lord. They are led by a man who fears the Lord and confesses their weakness before Him, and thus the people prosper under his leadership. This sets the stage for the subsequent chapters when Zeniff's son Noah takes over leadership and drags them down into apostasy. The result is we have a sharp contrast between Zeniff and Noah as leaders, and the impact a single man can have on a whole population.

Zeniff and his grandson Limhi clearly understand OT Covenant Theology and fear the Lord. Both explicitly speak about it at length (Zeniff: 9:3, 9:17-18, 10:17, Limhi: 7:17-20, 7:25-33). Noah obviously doesn't follow his father's example. How Limhi ended up being a man of God isn't hinted at, other than him acknowledging the bad example of his father Noah. We don't know when Zeniff died or when Limhi was born, only that he passed the kingship over to him in 11:1. Perhaps Limhi knew his grandparents and was raised or taught by them. It is strange that absent that connection that Limhi would end up the opposite of his father. Perhaps Limhi was influenced by Abinidi's prophecy?

What is the motivation of this group of Nephites and Mulekites in occupying the land and city of Nephi? Are they trying to establish a firm border with the Lamanites? Are they trying to obtain fertile lands? Is it simple revenge? The text is unclear as to what their motivation is.

General Comments on Mosiah 9-10

Zeniff's account in ch. 9-10 is in the first-person. It appears Moroni copied it verbatim from Zeniff's own record. This is in contrast to the following chapters dealing with king Noah. There, obviously, Noah isn't going to document his apostasy, so the account shifts from first-person to third-person as Mormon takes over as editor to convey the story.

Comments on Mosiah 9

1 I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers' first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them--but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed. 2 Therefore, I contended with my brethren in the wilderness, for I would that our ruler should make a treaty with them; but he being an austere and a blood-thirsty man commanded that I should be slain; but I was rescued by the shedding of much blood; for father fought against father, and brother against brother, until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness; and we returned, those of us that were spared, to the land of Zarahemla, to relate that tale to their wives and their children.

v1-2 tie in with WofM 1:12-14, informing us why the Nephite advance against the Lamanites stalled.

The context is that of an ongoing war between the Nephites and Lamanites, cf. Omni 1:1-11. The Lamanites had advanced against the Nephites capturing their lands until reaching the Land of Zarahemla (this is what necessitated the righteous Nephites fleeing and discovering the land of Zarahemla, cf. Omni 1:12). But, under king Benjamin's leadership the Lamanites are routed and driven back all the way to the original border between the Nephites and Lamanites, cf. WofM 1:14.

This is the present setting in v. 1 as the Nephite armies are poised to invade Lamanite occupied territories with the intention of annihilating them. Zeniff, being a Nephite among a larger Mulekite population, is familiar with the lands of his ancestors so he is chosen as a spy against the Lamanites. But in spying upon them he sees they are decent people and does not want them to be slaughtered (v. 1).

Zeniff argues for the leader of the armies to make a treaty with the Lamanites, but the leader is a severe and war-like man who is determined to kill the Lamanites. The result is the invading army turns on itself because of the division of opinion and many are killed. The remnants of the conflict abandon the plan to attack the Lamanites and return to Zarahemla (v. 2).

v1 The invading army apparently expects the land of Nephi to be populated by Lamanite military who have occupied the city of Nephi as a stronghold. Instead, they find the Lamanites have not repaired any of the city or walls that were damaged by the prior Lamanite invasion (cf. v. 8). The Lamanites present clearly have not occupied the city or the land to any great degree. The Lamanites appear to still be hunter-gatherers, so they have little reason to occupy the city and establish it as a Lamanite stronghold.

v2 "an austere and a blood-thirsty man", this group of Nephites and Mulekites are on a military offensive. After years of on-and-off wars

with the Lamanites, this groups of soldiers is out to take the land of Nephi back.

"the greater number of our army was destroyed", in Omni 1:28 it states fifty of them return, so more than fifty were killed in the internal conflict. The original party exceeded one hundred.

3 And yet, I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers, collected as many as were desirous to go up to possess the land, and started again on our journey into the wilderness to go up to the land; but we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God. 4 Nevertheless, after many days' wandering in the wilderness we pitched our tents in the place where our brethren were slain, which was near to the land of our fathers.

5 And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace. 6 And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom. 7 And he also commanded that his people should depart out of the land, and

I and my people went into the land that we might possess it. 8 And we began to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom. 9 And we began to till the ground, yea, even with all manner of seeds, with seeds of corn, and of wheat, and of barley, and with neas, and with sheum, and with seeds of all manner of fruits; and we did begin to multiply and prosper in the land.

v3-9 Zeniff recruits more people to go back with him to settle the land, but they do not rely on the Lord and are subsequently left to themselves to suffer hardships (v. 3). After wandering for some time the group finally arrives at the site of the prior internal conflict of v. 2, which was near to the city of Lehi-Nephi (v. 4).

Zeniff and four others travel into the city of Lehi-Nephi where the king over that portion of the land is so they may find out how he feels about the Nephites moving back into their ancestral lands (v. 5). The king covenants with Zeniff that he can have the land (v. 6) and tells the Lamanites living there to move out (v. 7). Zeniff and the others with him rebuild the buildings and walls of Nephi-Lehi and Shilom (v. 8), plant crops, and his group begins to prosper there (v. 9).

v5 "I went again...into the city", note Zeniff is saying he went in again, suggesting his prior visit in v. 1 as a spy placed him in amongst the Lamanites and not just watching them from a distance. It seems unlikely he would have gone unnoticed. Assuming they tolerated him or readily accepted him, even though he was a Nephite, is likely why he argued against the original party's invading them, instead recommending a treaty. It seems likely the Lamanites there are not soldiers, but are simple hunter-gatherers.

v6 The king in this case must mean the political leader over that local area, and not the king of all of the Lamanites, as it is unlikely they would travel all the way down into the land of the Lamanites. And, Zeniff says "I went again", meaning this is his second time in the city of Nephi, so he isn't talking about traveling to the land of the Lamanites. Or, perhaps the local Lamanites are employing runners back to the actual king of the Lamanites in the land of Laman.

v7 If the two cities there were in ruins then it seems unlikely there were many Lamanites living there. This suggests the Lamanites continue to be hunter gatherers instead of transitioning to an agricultural society and occupying the cities in the manner the Nephites did.

v9 "with neas, and with sheum", Smith apparently transliterated unknown terms.

10 Now it was the cunning and the craftiness of king Laman, to bring my people into bondage, that he yielded up the land that we might possess it. 11 Therefore it came to pass, that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage. 12 Now they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields. 13 Therefore it came to pass that king Laman began to stir up his people that they should contend with my people; therefore there began to be wars and contentions in the land.

v10-13 Zeniff realizes after the fact the king of the Lamanites was planning trickery against him and his group the whole time (v. 10). After twelve years of settlement king Laman decides it is time to raid and plunder them for their goods before they get too strong (v. 11-12). So, king Laman prepares his people for war (v. 13).

14 For, in the thirteenth year of my reign in the land of Nephi, away on the south of the land of Shilom, when my people were watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands, a numerous host of Lamanites came upon them and began to slay them, and to take off their flocks, and the corn of their fields. 15 Yea, and it came to pass that they fled, all that were not overtaken, even into the city of Nephi, and did call upon me for protection.

16 And it came to pass that I did arm them with bows, and with arrows, with swords, and with cimeters, and with clubs, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons which we could invent, and I and my people did go forth against the Lamanites to battle. 17 Yea, in the strength of the Lord did we go forth to battle against the Lamanites; for I and my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers.

18 And God did hear our cries and did answer our prayers; and we did go forth in his might; yea, we did go forth against the Lamanites, and in one day and a night we did slay three thousand and forty-three;

we did slay them even until we had driven them out of our land. 19 And I, myself, with mine own hands, did help to bury their dead. And behold, to our great sorrow and lamentation, two hundred and seventy-nine of our brethren were slain.

v14-19 In the thirteenth year of settlement the Lamanites come upon his people and start the plunder and murder (v. 14). His people flee to the city Nephi for protection (v. 15) and Zeniff prepares them for war (v. 16). They go against the Lamanites in the strength of the Lord because their afflictions have chastened them (v. 17) and the Lord hears their prayers. In the ensuing battle 3043 Lamanites are killed and only 279 Nephites die, and the Lamanites are successfully driven out of the land (v. 18-19).

v14-15 The invading army is solely interested in plunder. Had they been disciplined and interested in political subjugation, they would not have allowed civilians to escape.

v15 "the city of Nephi", probably the same as "the city Lehi-Nephi" reference in v. 8, as that was the Lamanite appellation.

v16 They do not have time to prepare armor and specialized weapons, so they field whatever weapons they have on hand. Bows, arrows and slings would have been on hand for hunting, clubs are improvised, and scimitars could have been repurposed scythes.

v18-19 Zeniff's people would have been behind fortifications per v. 8, suggesting the reason for the vastly disproportionate casualty counts.

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