
HELAMAN 7-16

Book of Mormon, Adult Institute Class, Monday, 22 February 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The main points of this lesson are that 1) The Lord is preparing his people who will listen for the coming of his Son; and, 2) Sadly, most of the people will not listen.

These chapters cover twenty-two years of Nephite history, from 69-90 in the reign of the judges (RoJ). Nearly everything described happens in the city of Zarahemla.

A simple outline of the chapters in this lesson is:

Topic	Reference	1830 chapter
Nephi's sermons	Helaman 7-8	Helaman 3
Nephi's innocence proved	Helaman 9	
A blessing for Nephi	Helaman 10	
Famine and robbers	Helaman 11	Helaman 4
Mormon's editorial	Helaman 12	
The words of Samuel	Helaman 13-15	Helaman 5
Wickedness prevails	Helaman 16	

HELAMAN 7 NEPHI'S FIRST SERMON

1 from the land northward. Nephi and his brother Lehi went on a mission to the land northward along with many Lamanite missionaries, as recorded in Helaman 6:6. They left in 62 RoJ, and returned it was 69 RoJ, meaning they were on a mission for 7-8 years.

3 they did reject all his words. Sadly, it appears that his long mission had little impact, even to the point that "he could not stay among them." Many missionaries today could take heart from this short mention. How many of today's missionaries preach for 18-24 months and baptize only a few? Yet here was Nephi, one of the Lord's great servants, who converted thousands of Lamanites, but who had no success among the people to the north after laboring with them for many years. Yet his efforts were completely recognized by the Lord, as we shall see in chapter 10.

4 a state of such awful wickedness. Not only did Nephi (and Lehi) struggle for many years in the land northward without success, but when they returned home to Zarahemla, they discovered that things had greatly deteriorated in their absence, including the Gadianton robbers taking control of the government, a focus on money and power, and an abundance of sins, such as adultery, stealing, and murder.

6 *in the space of not many years.* This is a phrase used uniquely in this section of the Book of Mormon; see Helaman 4:26 and 6:32.

swollen with sorrow...agony of his soul. Feeling the great weight of all of the last few years and a great sadness at seeing how his own people have gone, Nephi has a short ‘pity party’ before turning to the only thing that could bring him comfort—prayer.

7 *that I could have had my days.* The original Nephi’s days are suddenly appealing to this Nephi. But Nephi₁ would probably have found Nephi₂’s representation of his days as amusing—“easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity.”

9 *these are my days.* Nephi realizes, as we all must, that we have come to the time the Lord has given us and to the place he wills for us. In this moment of discouragement, he doesn’t yet see the great blessings the Lord will shortly give him. It is his dark night before the dawn.

10 *a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi.* Probably Nephi’s ancestral home, this is prime real estate—“by the highway which led to the chief market.” He retires to a tower in his garden for prayer. Why there? John Welch (1986) has suggested that not only was Nephi’s speech here potentially a funeral-type sermon with “mourning and lamentation” (v. 15) but that the tower itself may well have been the burial place of some of Nephi’s family. This makes the references to death, including the chief judge’s murder, all the more poignant. It also makes his musings about living in an earlier time intriguing, if he was looking out the window at his family’s burial grounds. Nephi₁ was not buried there, of course, but gazing on the graves of any ancestors might draw his mind back to the beginning of his people’s history.

11 *men passing by and saw Nephi.* A crowd gathered as first people on the highway saw him. What was he doing that would attract such attention. Again, Welch suggests that perhaps he was dressed in mourning attire, gesturing in customary gestures associated with mourning, and otherwise doing things that might cause people to wonder who had died? Why was this great man acting in this way?, the crowd wonders, and more and more gather to watch.

13 *he opened his mouth and said.* This is the beginning of Nephi’s first sermon from the tower, which goes to the end of this chapter.

That I may tell you of your iniquities? Nephi seems surprised at the crowd gawking at him, but recognizes the opportunity to call them to repentance.

17 *repent ye, repent ye...Turn ye, turn ye.* This verse is a parallelism. In Hebrew, one word translated “repent” is *šub* (shoob), which also has the meaning of “turn”, “turn back”, or “return”. Nephi also parallel’s two powerful questions: “Why will ye die?” and “Why has he forsaken you?” To be forsaken by God is to die in the worst possible way. The answer is in v. 18: “It is because you have hardened your hearts.”

18 *the good shepherd.* This is a fairly unique reference to the Savior in the Book of Mormon. The only other time it appears is Alma 5, where he uses the phrase “good shepherd” seven times.

19 *instead of gathering...he shall scatter.* The Lord gathers those who make covenants and are faithful, and he scatters those who won’t worship him and who disobey his voice.

21 ***murder...plunder...steal***. This word combination goes back to King Benjamin, who set the law that his people were not to “murder, or plunder, or steal” (Mosiah 2:13). They end up together many times in the Book of Mormon (never in the Bible) after that, including here, which is the last time they are used together. Often they are joined with other sins, such as adultery or lying.

22 ***wo shall come unto you***. “Woe” in the Bible (in both Hebrew and Greek) is a ‘passionate cry of grief and despair.’ Nephi uses it four times: here and verses 25, 26, and 27.

the land of our possession, shall be taken away. This was not a theoretical possibility—it has just happened not many years previously, so it was in everyone’s memory. In fact, it was only because of the preaching success of Nephi and his brother, Lehi, that the people standing listening to Nephi had been able to return to Zarahemla after losing it to the Lamanites in battle.

24 ***more righteous than you***. For most of Nephite history, the Nephites were generally more righteous than their brothers to the south. Now the tables are turned, and Nephi, who spent quite a bit of time among the Lamanites and served missions with them, knows of this all too well.

HELAMAN 8 NEPHI’S SECOND SERMON

1-2 ***they were angry***. The Gadianton judges were among those gathered at Nephi’s tower. Hearing his words angered them, and they called on the crowd to “seize upon this man” because he was speaking “against this people.”

3 ***many things did Nephi speak which cannot be written***. Mormon lets us know that the long sermon in chapter 7 was not the only thing he said—it was a summary! It must have gone on for quite some time.

5-6 ***Why do you suffer this man***. The judges’ second attempt to provoke some action from the people is captured in these two verses.

6 ***we know that his is impossible***. The absurdity of this statement should be obvious to anyone—just eleven years earlier Zarahemla and all the cities in the area up to Bountiful had been taken (Helaman 4:5).

7-9 ***he has testified aright***. Some stood up for Nephi, and their response is recorded in these verses. There were apparently enough of the crowd who supported him to cause those against him to fear to take any action (v. 10).

11 ***he was constrained to speak more***. At this juncture, Nephi got their attention again and delivered his second sermon, which goes to the end of chapter 8.

God gave power unto...Moses. He first cited their knowledge of Moses, who was obviously an important figure in their history and culture, just as he has been for Jews. Nephi’s argument is that if God could give Moses power to part the sea, why could he not give Nephi power to speak the words he had spoken.

14 ***he lifted up the brazen serpent***. Referred to by other prophets (see the 14a footnote), this story from Numbers 21 is a type of Christ. See *Student Manual*, 272.

16 ***all the holy prophets***. Compare Luke 24:37, where the resurrected Christ expounded the scriptures to the two disciples of Emmaus, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets” how all these things testified of him. See also Acts 3:18-24, where Peter explains that God has spoken through “all of his holy prophets” about these things.

17 ***Abraham saw of his coming***. Compare John 8:56. We don’t have an OT reference where Abraham is recorded as doing this, but JST Gen 15:5 adds, “...for the day cometh, that the Son of Man shall live; but how can he live if he be not dead? He must first be quickened. And it came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest.”

18 ***many before the days of Abraham***. Again, the Bible does not give us much to go on here, but the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis, much of which is found in the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, provides marvelous details about the patriarchs and others who knew of Christ, held his priesthood (“the order of his Son”), and acted in his name.

19-20 ***many prophets***. Nephi cites Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, and Jeremiah as among those who testified of Christ.

21 ***except it were Mulek***. The sure witness that Jerusalem was destroyed was not Nephi or Lehi, who left before it happened and were told in vision of the destruction (2 Nephi 1:4), but Mulek, who was apparently there as an eyewitness (or at least some in his party) and somehow escaped with a small group to come to the same land as Lehi and his family. This is the only reference to Mulek being a son of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah before its destruction by the Babylonians. The Bible records that Zedekiah’s sons were killed (2 Kings 25:7), so this knowledge of Mulek is unique to the Book of Mormon. Mulek is probably not a name but a title—in Hebrew, it probably means ‘little king.’

23 ***they were redeemed by him***. Though they lived and died long before Jesus came to Earth and completed the Atonement, those who had faith in him were as redeemed as those who were to come later. Such is the infinite and eternal nature of the Atonement.

27 ***your judge is murdered***. As a sign that judgment was about to fall upon them if they did not repent, Nephi informed them that the chief judge was murdered by his own brother. They were both Gadiantons but Seantum, the brother, was willing to kill in order to get the judgment-seat of Seezoram.

HELAN 9 NEPHI’S INNOCENCE PROVED

1 ***there were five who went***. The story of these five men couldn’t be better written in a Hollywood adventure story. They do not believe Nephi is speaking the truth or is a prophet (v. 2) but are willing to test it by going to see if what he says is true. We don’t know their names, positions, or anything else about them, but eventually become fully convinced of Nephi’s words—though not because they found the judge as Nephi said, as we will see in verse 39.

4 ***they fell to the earth***. As so many others before them, when these five were astonished by what they saw and fearful when they understood that Nephi’s words must be true, they were overcome by emotion and fell to the ground as if they were dead.

8 ***These men are they who have murdered the judge.*** When a crowd gathered, hearing the news from the judge's servants, they saw the five men who ran to see and mistook them for the killers.

9 ***the murderers had been taken.*** With no evidence other than their proximity to the dead judge, these five were considered guilty and the hunt for the real killer ended.

10 ***on the morrow...at the burial.*** It was very common in ancient cultures to bury someone the day after they died. Without mortuaries, refrigeration, or other things we commonly use today, waiting more than a day made the experience even more unpleasant for everyone involved.

12 ***Where are the five.*** Apparently not having heard back from the five who went to investigate didn't trouble anybody that first day the judge was killed. Only now did they begin to wonder what happened to them. It took a bit for them to put two and two together (or in this case, five and five) and realize they were the same men as those arrested for the murder.

14-15 The words of the five men who have no idea why they are even in prison.

16-17 ***this Nephi must have agreed.*** Going from case solved to having no one charged didn't sit well with the judges. Here they had announced that they had the murderers in custody, but they suddenly discover, to their great embarrassment, that they have nothing. So with surely more than one motive, they turn their attention to Nephi, who predicted the murder, saying that he must be in on it.

18 ***did contend with them.*** The five witnesses were happy to be released but not happy that Nephi was being accused. They each took the opportunity to argue with the judges about it, but their points were wasted on deaf ears.

19 ***Nephi should be taken and bound.*** Nephi was guilty until proven innocent—they were working to “accuse him to death,” not questioning him to know what happened.

20 ***Behold here is money.*** They wanted a guilty verdict so badly that these corrupt judges were even willing to try bribery as a means to get a confession.

21 ***Nephi said unto them.*** Nephi's response goes to verse 36.

23 ***Seezoram.*** He was only chief judge for 3-4 years (66-69 RoJ), assuming the post after the son of Cezoram was murdered, whose father Cezoram was also murdered as chief judge. It is not known who the chief judge was for the next 23 years—the next time we get a name is Lachoneus in the year before the sign of Christ's birth (3 Nephi 1:1).

25 ***I will show unto you another sign.*** The first sign was the prediction of Seezoram's death. The second sign is the way to discover his true murderer. Deuteronomy 18:22 gives the way to tell who is a true prophet—“if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken.” Thus Nephi's “sign” is that he has spoken a thing, and if it comes to pass, then he must be a true prophet.

26 ***Seantum, who is the brother of Seezoram.*** This is how we know the brother's name.

27 ***Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, who doth prophesy so much evil.*** Nephi is telling them what to say to Seezoram, but cleverly put it in terms they would readily say, instead of terms that would be correct or supportive, in his viewpoint.

32 ***From whence cometh this blood?*** John W. Welch (2002) notes that, according to ancient Hebrew law, two witnesses were required to convict a person, and his own confession was not allowed as one of them (unless it was given before a trial, as was Seantum's). In the case of an unobserved murder, the two witnesses could also include corroborating evidence—in this instance, Nephi's witness that God knew of the crime and the blood on his cloak.

39 ***the five...had been converted while they were in prison.*** Though they were overcome by fear when they found the judge dead, that was not their conversion experience. Either while they were unconscious or later while they were being held, these five had a conversion experience that caused them to not only believe Nephi's words, but the message of the gospel.

41 ***Behold, he is a god.*** Many of the people took Nephi's foreknowledge of these two events and his knowledge of "the thoughts of our hearts" as signs that he was more than a man—as Lamoni did at first with Ammon (Alma 18:18).

HELAMAN 10 NEPHI'S BLESSING

1 ***leaving Nephi alone.*** This is a fascinating image: Nephi has just been freed from his bonds, and all the people around him are arguing so much about him that they forget he is standing there, so he just walks away.

2 ***pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown.*** Revelation and pondering are often intertwined. See *Student Manual*, 274.

4-11 The Lord's words to Nephi takes up 8 verses in this chapter.

4 ***with unwearyingness.*** The Lord uses this word twice in his description of Nephi, the only time it is used in all of scripture. It is an excellent description of a man who served for 9 years as chief judge, then 8 years as a missionary among the Nephites, Lamanites, and those in the land northward, during which time he was cast into prison, bound and accused of murder, and cast out of several cities. Those 17 years and many experiences were proof of his unwearyingness to do God's will.

5 ***thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.*** What a marvelous achievement! To submit ourselves to the will of God is one of the great purposes of life. That the Lord should recognize Nephi's efforts to do so shows the discipline that he had achieved. See *Student Manual*, 274-275 for an example of President Marion G. Romney doing the same.

6 ***ye shall have power over this people.*** The Lord grants to Nephi that whatever he says will happen, whether it is famine, pestilence, or destruction. He will leverage that promise in chapter 11.

7 ***whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven.*** The sealing power is both power over the elements (he says it on earth and it happens in the heavens) and the sealing power as we generally know it today (binding families together for eternity). To 'seal' something in the Bible is to close it, bind it with wax or some other substance, and mark it with a signet or impression that identifies the person doing the sealing. This is true for legal contracts and other documents (e.g., Esther 8:8; Isaiah 8:16; 29:11; Daniel 9:24). It is used most often in Revelation (11 times), much of it having to do with opening the seven seals on the document John sees at the beginning. To seal something or someone is an emblem of ownership, security, and permanency. In other words,

Nephi was given the power of God to be used to seal things in his name—as if he had God’s ring—and God would honor such actions and determinations as if he had done it himself.

12 **he did stop and did not go unto his own house.** The Lord gave great blessings to Nephi but also one command (v. 11): “Go and declare unto this people...Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction.” Nephi was so obedient that he immediately turned away from his home and went back to the people to continue preaching. He could have said, ‘That’s what I just finished telling them,’ or, ‘I’ll get to that right after I have a shower and dinner.’ But he did not, choosing instead to obey instantly.

16 **taken by the Spirit.** He delivered his message and it generated only anger, so the Spirit literally carried him away to a safer place. Compare Matthew 4:1-11, where Jesus is carried about by the Spirit (note the JST changes in the footnotes), and 2 Nephi 4:25, where Nephi was carried by the Spirit into a mountain.

17 **he did go forth in the Spirit.** It’s not clear if this continues the thought of verse 16—that the Spirit carried him from place to place—or if he was just ‘in the Spirit,’ meaning directed and sustained by it.

19 **thus ended the seventy and first year.** This section started in 69 RoJ (7:1) and no other passage of time is mentioned. Thus we can conclude that Nephi’s preaching mission described in vv. 17-18 lasted two years.

HELAMAN 11 FAMINE AND ROBBERS

1 **wars throughout all the land.** The Gadianton robbers were attacking everywhere, causing wars and destruction among both the Nephites and the Lamanites (v. 6).

4 **let there be a famine.** Exercising the power given him in four years previously, perhaps for the first time, Nephi asks the Lord to bring a famine upon the land in order to stop the warfare and bring the people to repentance.

6 **the earth was smitten that it was dry.** The Bible mentions famine on several occasions, but this is the only mention of it in the Book of Mormon since Lehi and his family arrived in the promised land, except for short-term ‘famine’ which was probably a lack of food while traveling (Mosiah 9:3) or during warfare (Alma 53:7; 62:35, 39) more than a drought-induced lack of crops. This has to be compared to Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings 17-18, where he sealed the heavens and caused a three-year drought that humbled the people and led to the confrontation with the priests of Ba’al.

9 **he cried again unto the Lord.** After Nephi felt like there was sincere repentance and change of heart among the people, he went to the Lord to end the famine.

10-16 Nephi’s prayer occupies these 7 verses, as he pleads to the Lord on behalf of the people.

17 **in the seventy and sixth year.** Note that Nephi’s prayer was not fulfilled immediately, but the next year! The faith and patience of the people (and of Nephi) was still being tested.

19 **Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him.** We don't hear much about Lehi in this record, but Mormon assured us that he was every bit as righteous as Nephi. Of course, that means that he was probably also being persecuted at this time as much as Nephi.

23 **having many revelations daily.** Nephi, Lehi, and other Church leaders were in constant communication with God, seeking and receiving the Lord's guidance daily.

24 **a certain number of dissenters.** The peace they had enjoyed for about four years began to erode with the re-emergence of Nephite dissenters among the Lamanites who stirred up old anger, leading to war again.

26 **they became robbers of Gadianton.** Starting by conducting attacks for "murder and plunder," these dissenters and Lamanites soon discovered the "secret plans of Gadianton" and thus came into league with them, destroying among the Nephites and the Lamanites (v. 27).

28-31 **an army of strong men.** The first army was driven back by the robbers, both because of the strategic position they held in the mountains and their surprising numbers. A second attempt met with more success but also more sacrifice on the part of the army, with many dead. They simply couldn't overcome the robbers who "infested the mountains and the wilderness."

33 **did carry away others captive.** Plundering is used by the robbers for themselves, and perhaps some of the captives they took simply became their slaves. But this passage leads one to wonder if they became slave traffickers, selling the women and children they captured to other nearby civilizations, such as those cities in the land northward.

HELAMAN 12 MORMON'S EDITORIAL

1 **thus we can behold.** Mormon uses some version of his favorite editorial indicator phrase four times (verses 1, 2, and 3) but the rest of the chapter follows the pattern and contains his observations and teachings, much based on his own experience as much as what is happening in this part of the story.

7 **how great is the nothingness of the children of men.** Mormon's somewhat pessimistic view of mankind's general disobedience is surely heightened by his own day. Looking at the story, he can also see what is coming for these people—the appearance of the Savior himself in not many years, which must cause him to wonder why they could not also see it and be faithful.

15 **is the earth that moveth and not the sun.** There are a few references in the Book of Mormon that gives us insight into Nephite understanding of astronomy and the cosmos. This is a key one—that they comprehended the movement of the earth around the sun.

25 **I would that all men might be saved.** He knows it will not happen (v. 26), and he's certainly seen enough sin, depravity, and evil to not even wish it for everyone, but Mormon still has it in his generous heart to offer salvation to all men.

HELAMAN 13 THE WORDS OF SAMUEL, PART 1

Chapters 13-15, as the original heading says, are “the prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite,” and chapter sixteen is what happens as a result of his preaching. We will look at this one chapter at a time to facilitate discussion, but the next four chapters are really one single unit.

1 *the eighty and sixth year.* It has been 33 years since Nephi became the chief judge (in 53 Ro)). We don’t know how old he or Lehi are, but assuming he was relatively mature when he became chief judge, he is likely in his 50s or even 60s now. He will fade into the background for three chapters while Samuel teaches the people, but when Samuel’s words have their desired effect on some of the people, it is to Nephi they go for baptism and continued teaching.

2 *one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla.* Samuel was not the first missionary to come from the Lamanites (see Helaman 6:4), but his mission proves to be quite exceptional. It is interesting that no one seemed to have thought to have recorded his preaching on the plates of Nephi at the time, but someone must have written them down on more perishable materials. When Jesus came among the people, he asked them to bring the plates and asked why Samuel’s words were not recorded. Realizing the mistake, Nephi (the son of the man in our current lesson) quickly rectified that situation and added them (3 Nephi 23:6-13). Mormon’s inclusion of them in correct chronological sequence is part of his editorial work, thus we have them here in Helaman where they belong.

2 *they did cast him out.* The people of Zarahemla would have nothing to do with this missionary preaching repentance, and they kicked him out of the city. Like Alma before him, he began to leave, but was called to return (see Alma 8:13-18). And like Alma, he had to figure out another way to deliver his message. In Alma’s case, he found Amulek to help him. In Samuel’s case, he simply scaled the wall (v. 4).

4 *got upon the wall.* Unlike the traditional image in our building libraries (right), everything we’ve read about NepHITE walls in the Book of Mormon tells us that Zarahemla was not protected with ashlar stone walls but with a huge mound of earth, dug out from just beyond the city, creating first a deep moat and then a wall. On top of that was a palisade of wood of some kind. This was designed to be very hard to scale, but in this time of peace, no one was likely to be watching very closely, allowing Samuel to deftly march up the dirt wall and climb the palisade. It’s unclear if there was a catwalk or some other place for him to stand; it could be that his position was quite precarious, especially when they started shooting at him later. But the traditional image is dramatic and makes the point that he was in a dangerous position and thus protected only by the Lord’s power.



5 **Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak.** Samuel's words start here and continue almost uninterrupted until the end of chapter 15. That they are recorded in their entirety is an interesting detail—who was writing them down at the time? Or were they preserved by the Spirit only so that Nephi or someone else could record them?

5 **four hundred years pass not away.** Samuel starts off long-term, speaking of the future destruction of the Nephites, just as Nephi and Alma had done before him.

7 **an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me.** Also like Alma, an angel had visited Samuel and taught him, including affirming the coming of Christ and his mission to “suffer many things” and “be slain for his people” (v. 6).

13 **I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it.** Samuel's words were a warning to Zarahemla that if they did not repent, they would be destroyed by fire. 3 Nephi 9:3 shows that is exactly what happened.

15 **who be unto the city of Gideon.** Gideon is a ‘satellite’ city of Zarahemla—close enough to be within easy walking distance, the two populations likely interacted frequently. That means that many from Gideon were probably in the crowd hearing Samuel's words. No other cities are mentioned by name, though he makes it clear that “all the cities which are in the land round about” (v. 16) are under the same condemnation if they do not repent.

26 **if a prophet come among you.** Samuel is likely here thinking of Nephi and Lehi more than himself, yet his words are true for his own experience with the people of the city—they were angry with him, and cast him out, and are about to seek to destroy him.

27-28 **ye will receive him.** Many times people speaking flattering words were warmly received and given power, authority, and money. Today it is no different.

31 **riches, that they become slippery.** This is a theme in the early chapters of 3 Nephi, as we will see in future lessons.

33 **O that I had repented.** Samuel's prophecy was fulfilled in 3 Nephi 8:24-25.

HELAMAN 14 THE WORDS OF SAMUEL, PART 2

1 **a great many more things.** Mormon writes like he is done giving Samuel's words, providing a normal ‘more things to say’ summary, then he appears to change his mind, because he gives us two more chapters. No doubt, though, that Samuel said even more than is recorded.

2 **give more years cometh.** It is 86 RoJ. Five years is 91 RoJ. As we shall see, it ends up being a bit more than five years (92 RoJ) when the sign actually comes, causing some stress for the believers at that time.

3 **great lights in heaven...no darkness.** We sometimes see this portrayed as a single, bright star, perhaps tying to v. 5 and to the Old World account about a star that guided the wise men. But Samuel's word is plural—“great lights.” No other records in other areas of the world speak of a great star that shone so brightly that there was no night, which would have been the case if that was the cause. Perhaps the reason for the night without darkness was something more local, such as an

amazing aurora borealis or some other phenomenon that would show in the lands of the Nephites but not elsewhere in the world?

5 **a new star arise**. Again, it doesn't say the star is the source of the brightness—this is a second sign (they are also clearly separated in 3 Nephi 1).

6 **many signs and wonders**. Though most of Samuel's words are carefully noted in 3 Nephi, there is no specific mention of this particular prophecy being fulfilled (though Helaman 16:13 and 3 Nephi 2:1 are potential cross-references). The *Student Manual* has a good summary of Samuel's prophecies and their fulfillment on page 283.

14 **a sign of his death**. Having provided signs of his birth, Samuel shifted now to what would happen 33 years later at the time of his death. But first he spent 4 verses talking about the necessity of that death.

15 **becometh expedient that he dieth**. Jesus had to die to redeem man from all the effects of the fall—both physical and spiritual death. See *Student Manual*, 284.

20 **sun shall be darkened...also the moon and the stars...three days**. At his birth there is light for an extra night. At his death, there will be darkness for three times that.

21 **thunderings and lightnings...earth shall shake**. We'll cover this in 3 Nephi more extensively, but note that these things are descriptive of a lengthy volcanic eruption.

23 **great tempests...mountains laid low**. Storms and dramatic changes to the surface of the earth are also part of a volcanic event.

25 **graves shall be opened**. This is the single thing Jesus calls out, from all of Samuel's words, as being fulfilled, when he asks for Samuel's words to be added to the record (3 Nephi 23:9).

28 **many shall see greater things than these**. It's hard to imagine something "greater" than 3 days of darkness, earthquakes, lightning, huge storms, and the land being dramatically changed, but that's what he said. The purpose of these greater things is to convert and save. It makes sense, therefore, that the "greater things" are actually change of heart and being born again—nothing that you can see on the outside but which is obvious and much greater than signs in the heavens to anyone experiencing it.

31 **ye might choose life or death**. God never removes our freedom to choose. He teaches truth, encourages and directs us toward that end, but ultimately we must choose which direction to go, who to follow, what commitments and covenants to make and keep.

HELANAN 15 THE WORDS OF SAMUEL, PART 3

3 **the people of Nephi hath he loved**. Samuel's words, spoken by a Lamanite, could carry deep jealousy, but they seem to instead convey his sadness at the situation the Nephites have put themselves in.

4 **the Lamanites hath he hated**. Not true in the sense that God always loves his children, but true in the sense that Samuel means it—God hated "their deeds [which] have been evil continually."

7 for ye have witnessed it. Samuel said that the Nephites have seen the righteousness of the Lamanites. While it may be true that many of the Lamanite converts might be known to the Nephites, the most obvious example is the one he alludes to in v. 9 (“they buried their weapons of war”): the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, or the people of Ammon, mostly living in the Melek area west of Zarahemla. These Lamanites-become-Nephites have been among them now for nearly 70 years.

12 the Lord shall be merciful unto them. The Lamanites will go on into the last days and be blessed by the Lord, even though they shall be “hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered.”

15 had the mighty works been shown unto them. The Lamanites were mostly left to themselves, Samuel says, while the Nephites had prophets, revelation, and other “mighty works.” Samuel’s point is that if the Lamanites had had the same privileges, they would never have fallen away in the first place. Perhaps a bit of hyperbole—Laman and Lemuel would seem to contradict that.

HELAN 16 SATAN HAS GREAT HOLD

1 as many as believed on his words went forth and sought for Nephi. Nephi is the local leader of the Church, and even those outside the Church recognize his role. When Samuel’s words touch their heart, it is to Nephi they turn for further direction, covenants, and support.

2 cast stones...shot arrows. The Spirit must have put it in Samuel’s heart that he should just stand still and he’d be fine, otherwise, he would have ducked and run for cover. But he stood firm as a final witness of their sin, and they could not harm him.

3 many more who did believe. As a result of this final miracle, many more hearts were softened. They, too, went to Nephi for the next steps.

4 baptizing, and prophesying, and preaching. Though Samuel has been the focus for three chapters, Mormon does not want us to forget that Nephi was still hard at work, not only preaching with power, but “showing signs and wonders, working miracles.” He continued to teach about the coming of Christ.

6 the more part of them did not believe. Sadly, the majority of the population rejected Samuel’s and Nephi’s messages.

7 he did cast himself down. This was perhaps a painful experience. He did not carefully climb down, nor even speedily move away, but he “cast himself down,” perhaps landing hard on the bank of dirt below and even rolling down the hill (at least in my mind’s eye). Fortunately, he does not appear to have been injured as he is able to “flee out of their lands” and go home.

13 great signs given unto the people, and wonders. Mormon doesn’t explain what these are (though he refers to them as “miracles” in v. 23), but this could be what Samuel was referring to in Helaman 14:6.

14 angels did appear unto men. Just as in the days of Alma (Alma 9:25; 13:24), angels came ministering to “wise men” and declaring “glad tidings of great joy,” which by the language clearly anticipates the coming of Christ (compare Luke 2:10).

16-21 **they began to reason and to contend.** The non-believers (the majority) attempted to use logic and reason to refute the words of the believers and the prophets. They declared that the message of Christ was foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23) and an attempt to simply control and suppress them.

25 **thus ended the book of Helaman.** Helaman₂'s record was started by him but mostly kept by his son, Nephi₂, who handed off the records to his son, Nephi₃, and then walked out of the picture (3 Nephi 1:2-3), just before the signs of the Savior's birth were manifest.

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