
3 NEPHI 1-7

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INTRODUCTION

3 Nephi is the climax of the Book of Mormon. Everything written before this leads to this point; everything written after it winds down the story. These chapters are the reason the book was written, the focal point and most important message.

In the original manuscripts and the 1830 edition, the book is called "The Book of Nephi, the son of Nephi, which was the son of Helaman." The title "III Nephi" was first applied in the 1879 edition, prepared by Orson Pratt, which also included the current chapter and verse numbers. It was called "3 Nephi" in a small (vest pocket size) 1907 edition, then Third Nephi, as in our book, in the 1920 edition (Skousen 2005-2008, 1:15-16, 42).

A simple outline of the chapters in this lesson is:

Topic	Reference	1830 chapter
The Messiah is born	3 Nephi 1	Book of Nephi 1
Gadiantons rise	3 Nephi 2	
The gathering	3 Nephi 3	Book of Nephi 2
Gadiantons defeated	3 Nephi 4	
Mormon the disciple	3 Nephi 5	
Prosperity and pride	3 Nephi 6	Book of Nephi 3
Divided into tribes; the Church strengthens	3 Nephi 7	

3 NEPHI 1 THE MESSIAH IS BORN

1 Lachoneus was the chief judge and the governor. The name of the chief judge for many years prior to this time is unknown, but Lachoneus fills that role now. As was often the case, the same person was chief judge and governor.

3 whither he went, no man knoweth. Like Alma before him, Nephi left and never returned. It was unknown what happened to him, and no mention is made of him being translated, as they supposed had happened to Alma (Alma 45:18-19). His son, Nephi, for whom this book is named, received charge of the records and other sacred relics (v. 2).

4 greater signs and greater miracles. This is the activity of the Spirit on the Church, inspiring people of faith to signs and miracles, not the signs of Christ's birth, which come a few verses later.

6 ***the time is past***. In a sense, the time of Samuel's prophecy was past. His ministry is recorded in 86 RoJ, and it is now 92 RoJ (v. 4), which is the sixth year. They had understood Samuel to say that in five years Christ would come. But a careful reading of Samuel's words let us see that he said it would be five years, and *then* would come the sign of the Savior's birth. He didn't say how long the 'and then' would be. But five years was not come and gone, and no sign so far, so both believers and unbelievers were growing concerned about being past the date.

7-8 ***sorrowful...watch steadfastly***. The reaction of the believers was to experience some sorrow that the sign had not yet come, but also to continue to exercise their faith by watching for the sign of a night without darkness.

9 ***those who believed...should be put to death***. The unbelievers reaction was to remove the source of the reminder of the words of Samuel by killing all those who believed. They gave the believers a deadline—the next day.

12 ***the voice of the Lord***. Some have used this as a 'proof-text' that a person's spirit doesn't enter his body until just before birth, but that is not a valid interpretation for at least two reasons. First, Jesus' experience may be unique—many parts of his life were. Thus if that was his voice, it may not have any reflection on the experience for the rest of us. Second, it may be not be Jesus speaking at all. There are many examples in scripture of what is commonly called 'the divine investiture of authority,' meaning that one being can speak not only on behalf of another but in the place of. This could well be such an example, with an angel delivering Jesus' words to Nephi.

13-14 The Lord's reply to Nephi's prayer comes with amazing timing—that night would the sign be given. How would the story be different if the sign had been given the day after all the believers were killed? The believers appear to have had the faith to face such an outcome. Fortunately, they were spared that trial of their faith. But that doesn't mean they were done—more tests were certainly on the way.

14 ***the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh***. Jesus came into the world to the Father's will, to be the Savior of mankind, to redeem us from death and hell. But here the pre-mortal Jesus is also saying that it is his will, to take upon him flesh, to condescend and become mortal.

16 ***who fell to the earth***. In typical Nephite fashion, those who were amazed by what is happening fell to the earth. Mormon noted that it was a "all the people upon the face of the whole earth" (v. 17).

19 ***no darkness in all that night***. It's not clear what caused the night without darkness; the book never explains it. But it's clear that it was not the star appearing—both in the prophecy of Samuel and here (v. 21), the new star is considered a separate event, not the cause of the night without darkness.

22 ***lyings sent forth among the people***. Satan's mortal servants were very happy to spread their devil-inspired lies to try to convince the people that what they had seen was not what it seemed. But the record notes that "the more part" still believed and "were converted unto the Lord."

24 ***it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses***. Seeing the sign of Christ's coming, some concluded that they no longer had to follow the Mosiah law, but those who "understood the scriptures" soon set them right. The commands of the Law of Moses remained in effect until Jesus himself rescinded them.

27 ***Gadianton robbers, who dwelt upon the mountains.*** Remaining unconverted, the robbers maintained their wicked, murdering and plundering ways, intent to gain power over the rest of the population. They are the subject of the next three chapters.

29 ***led away by some who were Zoramites.*** It is interesting that these Nephite dissenters remained a distinct cultural group among the Lamanites. After taking charge of the Lamanite government, they appear to be an elite group, keeping their identity and social interactions apart from the general Lamanite civilization.

3 NEPHI 2 GADIANTONS RISE

1 ***began to be less and less astonished.*** Time and reflection can either cause us to forget or minimize a great miracle or event or to increase it in importance and impact (sometimes taking on exaggerated or even apocryphal status). The former seems to have been the case among the people not four years after the sign of the coming of Christ.

8 ***reckon their time from this period when the sign was given.*** Many might have lessened the importance of the sign, but those who controlled the calendar still viewed the event as significant enough to add to and then replace the two counting systems already in use—the reigns of the judges (v. 5) and the time from Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem (v. 6). Counting the time from the sign of Christ’s birth was the system used until the end of the Nephite civilization.

11 ***wars and contentions throughout all the land.*** Due to the iniquity of the people and the rising power of the Gadiantons, war once again returned to the land, this only thirteen years after the sign of Christ’s birth. It was finally bad enough that the Nephites and Lamanites both took up arms against the Gadiantons.

15 ***their skin became white.*** Other scriptures that we have discussed indicate that it was difficult to tell Nephites and Lamanites apart by physical appearance (Alma 55:4-15, where they appear to only want Laman for his accent). We have also seen that the “curse” of the Lamanites was to be separated from God because of their rebellion and that it was a separate thing from the “mark” of dark skin (Alma 3:14-17; 2 Nephi 5:19-24). Other references equate “white” and “pure” (most noticeably, 2 Nephi 30:1-7) and darkness with sin (Mormon 5:15). It could be that there was an actual skin color among some of the people, but it seems more likely that the statement is symbolic, reflecting a change in the nature of their relationship with God.

19 ***destruction did hang over them...because of their iniquity.*** The Gadiantons continued to win the battles, greatly afflicting the Nephites and Lamanites and forcing dramatic action, which is covered in chapter 3.

3 NEPHI 3 THE GATHERING

2-10 The letter from the leader of the Gadiantons, Giddianhi, to the chief judge and governor, Lachoneus, wherein he invites the people to surrender or die. He justifies this by claiming some wrong that was done against him and his people by the Nephites, which astonished Lachoneus because no wrong has been done (v. 11).

8 **on the morrow month.** Meaning, the next month. This was all a bluff. As it turned out, it was more than two years before the Gadiantons finally attacked.

13 **they should gather together...unto one place.** Lachoneus came up with the idea of collecting all their food, flocks, and other necessities, bringing all the people into one place, and building a wall around them with guards to protect them.

18 **the great commander...was Gidgiddoni.** The head of all the armies was this man, who, like Moroni before him, was a righteous man who sought and followed inspiration in his military duties (v. 19).

21 **The Lord forbid.** When the people wanted to make a pre-emptive strike against the Gadiantons, Gidgiddoni forbid it, saying that the Lord would not approve of anything but a defensive war.

22 **tens of thousands.** The biggest number in the Book of Mormon (except for the Jaredite record). In many ancient societies, this number was something like 'infinity' to us today.

25 **they did repent of all their sins.** They prepared weapons and defenses (v. 26), but the most important preparation among the people was their repentance and their prayers for deliverance.

3 NEPHI 4 GADIANTONS DEFEATED

3 **the Nephites had left their lands desolate.** Taking everything with them to their gathering place, the Nephites left nothing that would help the Gadiantons survive, even as the robbers moved into their deserted cities.

4 **they might subsist for the space of seven years.** The organization involved to collect, transport, and store seven years worth of supplies for the thousands and thousands of people involved in the gathering is mind boggling. However, it proved to be exactly the correct strategy, showing the brilliance of Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni.

7 **in the sixth month.** This would be in the fall, probably October. Gidgiddoni's people were driven by a hunger that was created by their own culture which drove them to rely on murder and plunder, not on agriculture and husbandry.

8 **did lift up their cries to the Lord.** The Nephites were frightened by the appearance of the robbers, painted in blood and armed with weapons and shielding. They knew they could not win by their own hand, and cried to the Lord for deliverance.

11 **there never was known so great a slaughter.** The number of the dead is not reported, but given the size of the armies and the fierceness of the battle, Mormon's account of the destruction is surely not exaggerated.

14 **the end of Giddianhi the robber.** Slain in heavy retreat, this man that brought so much evil on the country and has so much blood on his hands was simply "overtaken and slain."

16 **to lay siege round about.** Since a direct assault worked so poorly, the second attempt two years later was to try and starve out the Nephites. But their preparation prevented that tactic from being successful, and the robbers got hungry long before the Nephites.

17 **Zemnarihah**. The new robber leader who replaced Giddianhi determined to try the siege, but soon discovered it hurt him more than helped him, with his food running out and the Nephite armies seemingly free to attack them at will.

23 **march into the furthestmost parts of the land northward**. The people in the land northward were probably antagonistic to the Nephites, and Gidgiddoni feared that they might join forces with the robbers and pose an even greater threat to his people. So he used strategy to surround the robbers and cut them off from that opportunity.

28 **Zemnarihah was taken and hanged upon a tree**. There are at least two ritualistic elements involved in this execution. Deuteronomy 21:23 declares that “he that is hanged is accursed of God.” By killing him in this way, it showed that he was cursed and deserving of his punishment. (This scripture was surely what the crowd had in mind when Jesus was crucified and they taunted him to come down from the cross to prove he was the Messiah [Luke 23:35]. Later, Paul would cite this verse to show that indeed, Jesus was cursed by God, but not for anything he did—for our sake [Galatians 3:13]). The second is a simile curse, an action that represents the curse that would come upon the people if they were not obedient. By cutting down the tree, it represented any who would come against them, that God might bring them to the earth just as they had brought down Zemnarihah.

32 **Hosanna to the Most High God**. “Hosanna” means, ‘Save us now, we pray’ and is found three times in the Book of Mormon. First, in 1 Nephi 11:6, where the Spirit declares Hosanna to the Lord after Nephi says that he believes his father. Second is this verse. And third is 3 Nephi 11:17, which is the cry of the people after they have individually seen and touched the resurrected Christ.

3 NEPHI 5 MORMON THE DISCIPLE

3 **they did forsake all their sins...and did serve God**. After being delivered from the robbers, the people expressed their great gratitude to God by repenting and forsaking their sins and committing to serve him. It lasted a few years.

6 **they did put an end to...combinations**. The robbers could either repent and enter into a covenant or they could die. With all robbers in one of those two states, the victory was complete.

11 **plates which I have made with mine own hands**. Mormon made the plates used in his abridgement of Nephi’s ‘large’ plates with his own hands, meaning that he was not only a brilliant military leader but a craftsman as well.

12 **I am called Mormon**. This is actually the first time we learn the name of our editor and abridger—at least, chronologically. We have encountered him before in the Words of Mormon, the transition book between the small plates that he included and the abridgement of the large plates. But that was written after he wrote this, so this is actually our first encounter with Mormon by name. Prior to this, he has been the unnamed commentator and ‘thus we see’ guy whose hand is everywhere but whose name was not shared until now.

13 **I am a disciple of Jesus Christ...called of him**. Mormon here declared both his allegiance and his authority. He is not acting on his own nor according to the wisdom of men, but because he follows Christ and has received authority from him, he has created this record. To be a disciple is to be a

follower, a learner, and an emulator. The disciple's job is to become like the master. Mormon did his job well.

15 **a small record.** Compared to what he has at his disposal, Mormon's account is small, though to us it is a good-sized book.

18 **a just and true record.** "For him to say that his record is 'just' is to say that it is right and lawful; for him to say that it is 'true' is to attest that it is correct, reliable, or trustworthy. Thus his testimony is that the record he has preserved on the gold plates is a reliable account of true and righteous principles" (McConkie 1991, 4:23).

20 **a pure descendent of Lehi.** Someone's first reaction might be, 'Isn't everyone in the Book of Mormon?' But no, some are descendents of Mulek or others of his party. Some may have been descended from the Jaredites. Still others may have come from populations already in the area when Lehi and family arrived. Mormon's claim to be not only a direct descendent but a "pure descendent" shows both a careful attention to family history and a qualification for him to do the task at hand.

3 NEPHI 6 PROSPERITY AND PRIDE

1 **twenty and sixth year.** The people finally returned to their original homes in this year. Notice that they had gathered together nine years earlier (3:22). Probably what happened was that they took several years to break up and move back, and it was in this year that the task was finally accomplished.

3 **granted unto those robbers...lands.** Showing generosity, forgiveness, and trust, they gave lands to the repentant robbers that they might farm and support themselves. They also must have tutored them on farming since the ex-robbers were used to lives of plunder, not crop raising.

4 **to prosper and to wax great.** With their land free of robbers and the people generally believing, the Lord blessed them with prosperity. But following the familiar Book of Mormon pattern, it would not last, but would turn to pride.

7 **many cities built...old cities repaired.** Besides a massive reconstruction effort (no doubt required by their nine year absence and the abuse on their abandoned cities by the robbers), they also built "highways...and many roads" to improve transportation and commerce.

10 **pride and boastings.** With prosperity, they enjoyed riches. But with riches, they began to dispute and distinguish themselves by classes, to see themselves as better than others, and then to boast in their superiority. This is the certain path to destruction—and a model for our day.

12 **their chances for learning.** For the first time, educational opportunities are mentioned as being a source of division among the people. Those who had money were able to get great learning, which in turn increased their pride and feelings of superiority over the poor. Instead of following king Benjamin's counsel to stay humble, remember our indebtedness to God, and be generous to the poor (Mosiah 2-4), they sought for their own gain. Very relevant lessons for our day!

13 ***humble and penitent before God.*** Not everyone was caught up in the pride cycle. Some remained humble, enduring persecution from the arrogant, and looked to God for support. See *Student Manual*, 292, for a relevant quote from Marvin J. Ashton.

14 ***the church was broken up in all the land.*** Except among some faithful Lamanites, the church went into a state of apostasy for the most part, just thirty years after the sign of the Messiah, and just nine years after seemingly everyone was converted (5:3).

19 ***Lachoneus, the son of Lachoneus.*** After being chief judge for thirty years, Laconeus either passed away or stepped down, and his son by the same name filled the judgment seat. The son will not last long, and will be the last judge, a system of government that lasted only 121 years.

20 ***men inspired from heaven and sent forth.*** God does not give up on his people, but even in great wickedness continues to inspire prophets and messengers to call the people to repentance, to warn them of coming judgment, and to teach them the message of redemption through Christ. In this case especially, “they did testify of [Christ’s] death and sufferings,” which were only three years distant.

23 ***put to death secretly.*** Because the chief judge/governor was still apparently a righteous man, the enemies of the prophets killed them secretly. Being arrested, the murderers (as others had done in the past) conspired together for support and secrecy, that they might free their accused friends, overthrow the government, and set up a king instead.

3 NEPHI 7 DIVIDED INTO TRIBES; THE CHURCH STRENGTHENS

1 ***murder the chief judge.*** Killing the chief judge was the first part of their plan. But for some reason, the conspirators never garnered enough support to put a king in charge. Instead, they broke up into large family groups or “tribes” (v. 2). Perhaps this was on the lines of descent—all those descended from Nephi, all those from Laman, etc.

7 ***but few righteous men among them.*** In so very few years, the people had gone from the majority striving to be obedient to the majority wicked—“six years had not passed away” (v. 8), according to Mormon.

9 ***Jacob.*** Jacob is the third and final person of that name mentioned in the text. He somehow managed to unite sufficient followers among the tribes to gather a group, get himself named king (v. 10), and convince them to march north and form a city called Jacobugath, which was destroyed at the death of Christ (9:9). He was one of the anti-prophet leaders (v. 10) and probably involved in the killing of the chief judge.

15 ***Nephi.*** With the collapse of the government and the persecution of the prophets (v. 14), Nephi (son of Nephi, grandson of Helaman) still managed to be “visited by angels” and hear the voice of the Lord. He was given to “know concerning the ministry of Christ.” He taught great things to the people and “did minister with power and with great authority.”

18 ***angels did minister unto him daily.*** What an amazing blessing for Nephi—daily support and teaching from divine messengers. This is another example of the power of our choices and that no matter our circumstances and persecutions, we can still side with the Lord and receive his richest blessings.

19 **his brother did he raise from the dead.** 3 Nephi 19:4 tells us that this brother's name was Timothy. There are two names in the Book of Mormon that appear to be Greek in origin, and both appear in 3 Nephi: Timothy and Lachoneus. This should not be a surprise. Greek influence in Israel at the time of Lehi is well attested historically and archaeologically. Additionally, Mulek and his group could have come to the New World with the help of Phoenician sailors, who had close ties to Greece. Thus either Lehi and family or Mulek and those with him (or both) could have brought Greek names to be used among the Nephites, including these two (Ricks 1992).

22 **they did show forth signs also and...miracles.** Those who remained faithful were healed of "sicknesses" and "infirmities" and "wrought upon by the Spirit of God." Thus their faith was strengthened by miracles but their numbers remained small.

24 **none who were...not baptized with water.** This point is significant because later they will be baptized again (4 Nephi 1:1). They were baptized now "as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins" (v. 25).

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