

Destruction by Air, Fire, Water and Earth

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Mormon's stanza introducing the destruction that occurred by fire, water and earth (3 Nephi 8:8-10) immediately follows his stanza describing tumult in the air (3 Nephi 8:5-7). The destruction is summarized by the fates of three Nephite cities (structure and italics added):

D _{2A}	And the <i>city</i> of Zarahemla did take <i>fire</i> ;
D _{2B}	and the <i>city</i> of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea,
E _{2A}	and the <i>inhabitants</i> thereof were <i>drowned</i> ;
D _{2C}	and the <i>earth</i> was carried up upon the <i>city</i> of Moronihah,
E _{2B}	that in the place of the <i>city</i> thereof, there became a <i>great mountain</i> ; ¹

To illustrate (in this chapter) the typical kinds of textual issues associated with the earliest extant text, it should be noted that the original manuscript dictated by Joseph Smith for the foregoing text does not exist today.² Only “about 25 percent of the current text” of the Book of Mormon survives in the form of the original manuscript. The remainder of that manuscript was destroyed by water and mold, between 1841 and 1882, while it was held in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, a hotel in Nauvoo, Illinois.³

Apparently, the earliest extant form of 3 Nephi 8:8-10 is not the version copied by Oliver Cowdery in the printer's manuscript. According to Royal Skousen, the “individuals responsible for producing the printer's manuscript and overseeing the printing—Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Hyrum Smith—probably fell behind in their copywork and allowed the original manuscript to be used by the printer until they caught up with their copying.” This change in the production process occurred “somewhere between verses 7 and 18 in Helaman 13 to the end of Mormon.” The evidence for this change consists of “penciled-in punctuation and paragraph marks [that] are found on fragments from that part of the original manuscript.” These marks appear to have been made by the typesetter, John Gilbert.⁴ Hence, for 3 Nephi 8:8-10, the earliest extant form appears to be the wording typeset from the original manuscript and printed in the 1830 Book of Mormon. Since the printer's manuscript also was copied from the original manuscript, the 1830 edition and printer's manuscript can be compared to determine the wording of the original manuscript. The printer's manuscript for the passage now known as 3 Nephi 8:8-10 reads as follows:⁵

¹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Joseph Smith, Jr., author and proprietor, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830; Independence, Missouri: Herald Heritage Reprint, 1970), 470-71; or Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work: Book of Mormon 1830 First Edition Reproduced from Uncut Sheets* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Publisher's Press, 1958), 470-71.

² Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [“FARMS”], 2001), 520-21.

³ Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6-7. A general list of extant text of the original manuscript appears on page 37.

⁴ Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One: 1 Nephi 1–Alma 17* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 3-4; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 16.

⁵ Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part Two: Alma 17–Moroni 10* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 803.

& the {C}{+·}ity of Za{-|-} -rahemla did take fire & the City {o}f Moroni did si{n}k into the debths of the Sea & the inhabitants thereof were drowned & the earth was carried up {u}pon the city {o}f Mo{r}onihah that in the place of the c{e|i}ty there{o}f there bec[a]u]me a great Mountain⁶

Skousen identified one seemingly minor textual issue relating to 3 Nephi 8:10 in the 1830 edition and printer’s manuscript. This issue may be material to a complete understanding of the passage. Both the 1830 edition and the printer’s manuscript might seem to use the word *thereof* “vacuously” in the phrase *in the place of the city thereof*.⁷ Skousen analyzed six instances in the Book of Mormon where the word *thereof* had apparently been judged by later editors to be “seemingly unnecessary” and thus all six words were removed from the 1920 LDS edition. Skousen chose to restore to his critical text all of these deletions because “this kind of usage appears to have been fully intended.”⁸ In the proposed structure for 3 Nephi 8:10 (one of the six instances where *thereof* is currently deleted), Mormon’s intention may be suggested. Line E_{2A} records a great division (compare line E_{1A} in the first stanza of this segment: “about to divide asunder;” 3 Nephi 8:6) that occurred between the survivors of the three days of darkness and the inhabitants of the city of Moroni. The people of Moroni were drowned. Similarly, the parallel line E_{2B} describes not only the fate of the buildings of Moronihah, but of its inhabitants as well. The people of Moronihah were buried. That fact is mentioned in 3 Nephi 8:25 (they were “buried up”) and 3 Nephi 9:5 (they were “covered with earth”). Thus, line E_{2B} could be paraphrased this way: *in the place of the city and the inhabitants thereof ... a great mountain was cast up*. The word *thereof* seems to be referring back to the fate of *inhabitants*, as was explicitly stated in line E_{2A} for the city of Moroni.⁹

To complete the first segment of text that introduced the three days of darkness (3 Nephi 8:5-18), Mormon’s third stanza outlined the scope of the devastation (3 Nephi 8:11-18; structure and italics added):

B_{5A} and there was a *great and terrible destruction* in the land southward.
 B_{5B} But behold, there was a *more great and terrible destruction* in the land northward:
 D_{3A} for behold, the *whole face of the land was changed*,
 B_{2B} because of the *tempest*,
 B₆ and the *whirlwinds*,
 B_{3B} and the *thunderings*,

⁶ The text of the printer’s manuscript has 11 legibility issues and emendations: (1) the capital letter C in the first word *City* has been partially overwritten by the capital letter C; (2) the capital letter C in the first word *City* has an extra dot; (3) the first dash in the hyphenated word *Zarahemla* has been overwritten by another dash; (4) the letter o has been partially overwritten by the letter o in the second word of; (5) the letter n has been partially overwritten by the letter n in the word *sink*; (6) the letter u has been partially overwritten by the letter u in the word *upon*; (7) the letter o has been partially overwritten by the letter o in the fourth word of; (8) the letter r has been partially overwritten by the letter r in the word *Moronihah*; (9) the letter e has been overwritten by the letter i in the word *city*; (10) the letter o has been partially overwritten by the letter o in the word *thereof*; and (11) in the word *became*, the text may be a or u, with the letter a preferred.

⁷ Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2008), 3312.

⁸ Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Four* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2007), 2534-36.

⁹ While I came to this solution based on my proposed structure for this stanza, this is a similar solution to one proposed by Skousen for another “seemingly vacuous or redundant” use of *thereof* in Ether 14:17. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Four*, 2535.

B_{4B} and the *lightnings*,
 D_{1B} and the *exceeding great quaking* of the whole earth;
 D_{4A} and the *highways were broken up*,
 D_{4B} and the *level roads were spoiled*,
 D_{4C} and many *smooth places* became *rough*,
 D_{4D} and many *great and notable cities* were *sunk*,
 D_{4E} and *many were burned*,
 D_{1C} and *many were shook* till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth,
 E_{3A} and the *inhabitants* thereof were *slain*,
 E_{4A} and the *places* were *left desolate*;
 D_{4F} and there were *some cities* which *remained*;
 B_{5C} but the *damage* thereof was *exceeding great*,
 E_{3B} and there were *many* in them which were *slain*;
 E_{4B} and there were *some* which were *carried away in the whirlwind*;
 C_{2A} and whither they went, *no man knoweth*,
 C_{2B} save *they know* that they were carried away;
 D_{3B} and thus the *face of the whole earth* became *deformed*,
 B_{2C} because of the *tempests*,
 B_{3B} and the *thunderings*,
 B_{4B} and the *lightnings*,
 D_{1D} and the *quaking* of the earth.
 E_{1B} And behold, the *rocks* were *rent in twain*;
 E_{1C} yea, *they were broken up*
 D_{3C} upon *the face of the whole earth*,
 C₃ insomuch that *they were found*
 E_{1D} in *broken fragments*,
 E_{1E} and in *seams*,
 E_{1F} and in *cracks*,
 D_{3D} upon all *the face of the land*.¹⁰

This third stanza intermixed destruction associated with all four natural elements: air (verses 12, 16-17), earth, water and fire (verses 13-14, when viewed in the light of 4 Nephi 1:7-9; also note the reverse order from that in verses 8-10), and earth again (verses 17-18). At the same time, this stanza described the location and scope of the destruction on the land. The devastation affected the lands “southward” and “northward” (verses 11 and 12). In fact, “the whole face of the land was changed” (verse 12) or “the face of the whole earth became deformed” (verse 17).

The wording of the printer’s manuscript for 3 Nephi 8:11-18¹¹ is different from the wording of the 1830 edition in four instances. Two of the instances (where Oliver Cowdery wrote *there were*, rather than *there was*; see 3 Nephi 8:11-12) appear to have been caught and changed almost immediately by Cowdery as he copied from the original manuscript. In a third instance, Cowdery appears to have dropped the word *thus* (3 Nephi 8:17). Skousen’s analysis concluded that “it is more likely that Oliver Cowdery would have omitted a single word like *thus* from [the printer’s manuscript] than the 1830 typesetter would have added it, especially in this context” (verse 17 “summarizes information found in verses 12 and 13”).¹²

¹⁰ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 471. This text also appears to have been typeset directly from the original manuscript. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4.

¹¹ Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 803-04.

¹² Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3312-13, 16-17.

The fourth difference between the 1830 edition and the printer's manuscript is that the singular word *tempest* appeared in the text of the 1830 edition (in what is now 3 Nephi 8:12), while in the printer's manuscript, Cowdery wrote the plural word *tempests*. In Skousen's analysis of this minor discrepancy, he focused on "conjoined nouns" in Mormon's lists in 3 Nephi 8:17 and 3 Nephi 10:14. Skousen dismissed or failed to mention other nearby singular nouns similarly "conjoined" (*quaking* in 3 Nephi 8:12 and 17, and *fire* and *smoke* in 3 Nephi 10:14), and he quickly concluded that "it seems quite reasonable to assume that the singular *tempest* in the 1830 edition for 3 Nephi 8:12 is an error for *tempests*."¹³ Skousen then distinguished, in passing, the "semantics and syntax" of *tempest* in Mormon's list at 3 Nephi 8:19 (where Skousen merely noted "interestingly" that the plural *quakings* also appears). He referred back to his analysis of Nephi's use of *tempest* in 1 Nephi 19:11 (where Skousen proposed the rule that "in conjuncts the word *tempest* agrees in number (singular or plural) with the nearest nouns") and he noted that the unknown "scribe 2 of [the printer's manuscript] miswrote *tempest* as *tempests*" in 3 Nephi 22:11.¹⁴

I suggest that Skousen's proposal of an accidental typesetting error in the 1830 version of 3 Nephi 8:12 was too hasty. He focused primarily on the question of "conjuncts" and relied on a contrived rule that ignored or overlooked relevant texts. Mormon expressly described his purpose in 3 Nephi 10:11, 14. He sought to record the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies. Zenos, as quoted by Nephi, had prophesied a singular *tempest* (1 Nephi 19:11). Samuel the Lamanite similarly prophesied a *tempest* (Helaman 14:27); however, Samuel also prophesied *great tempests* (Helaman 14:23). Three of Mormon's four lists of disturbances in the air (in 3 Nephi 8) used *tempest*, but the other list recorded *tempests*, apparently in accordance with Mormon's purpose and Samuel's prophecy of *tempests*. Significantly, Mormon's first list of disturbances in the air described a *great and terrible tempest* (3 Nephi 8:6). Skousen's analysis ignored or overlooked that verse and the related list. The singular *tempest* in the 1830 version of 3 Nephi 8:12 begins Mormon's second list of disturbances in the air. It seems plausible that Mormon would have referred back to the *great and terrible tempest* (and to the prophecies of Zenos and Samuel concerning a *tempest*) when Mormon began his second list. I think it is also significant that in describing the great winds that tore up the face of the land, Mormon used two terms in his second list (3 Nephi 8:12): first, *the tempest* and then *the whirlwinds*. However, in his third list (3 Nephi 8:16-17), the order and number of these terms were reversed: first, *the whirlwind* and then *the tempests*. If Skousen's proposal of an error is accepted, then the two-part reverse parallelism suggested above would disappear (together with the logical use of a singular *whirlwind* when only the plural *whirlwinds* had been prophesied; see 2 Nephi 26:5). Thus, I suggest that the probability of Skousen's proposed error in the 1830 version of 3 Nephi 8:12 cannot be maintained.

In neither of the stanzas quoted above (3 Nephi 8:8-10 and 11-18) are there any "A" lines. The chronological note was provided in the first stanza of this segment (3 Nephi 8:5-7; in lines A₁-A₃). The "B" lines continue to refer to great things, some of which were introduced in the first stanza; e.g., damage, destruction, tempest, thunder, mountain, quaking and breaking up of the earth. The "C" lines appear again in the third stanza with reference to the knowledge of the people and what they found. The "D" lines continue to refer to the shaking of the earth, the face of the earth, or just the earth or land, and to the physical destruction upon the land (and by implication, its cleansing from wickedness, as introduced in the "D" lines of the first segment, 3 Nephi 8:1-4). The "E" lines describe divisions, both from the loss of human life and from rocks breaking up. Through the literary techniques of repetition, parallelism and word choice, Mormon clearly described the

¹³ Ibid., 3314.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3314-15; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 411.

assault of natural forces, the overpowering commotion and tumult of air, fire, water and earth, and the devastation that occurred to the land and people.

Destruction by Air. According to Mormon, “the whole face of the land was changed” as a result of tempest, whirlwinds, thunderings and lightnings, in connection with the great earthquake (3 Nephi 8:12). In parallel form, he wrote that the “the face of the whole earth became deformed” because of tempests, thunderings and lightnings in association with the whirlwind and earthquake (3 Nephi 8:16-17). As discussed above, a tempest (1 Nephi 19:11; Helaman 14:27) and great tempests (Helaman 14:23) had been prophesied by Zenos and Samuel. Nephi had prophesied that whirlwinds would carry some of the wicked away (2 Nephi 26:5). Thunder and thunderings, and lightning and lightnings, were mentioned variously by the prophets Zenos, Nephi and Samuel (1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:6; Helaman 14:21, 26-27).

Tempests and whirlwinds in their most violent forms uproot trees, break branches, rip up and beat down crops, destroy buildings, and hurl dust, sand, rocks, branches and other objects (including people) through the air. Lightning starts fires in vegetation, gouges holes in the earth (where it follows electrical conductors in the ground) and kills people. The attendant thunder (at least as experienced by those near a lightning strike) can literally shake the earth. However, the extensive shaking described in other passages of the text indicates that it was not caused merely by the sonic shocks of lightning, but involved extensive and extreme seismic activity, as will be noted below. Finally, when Mormon included destruction caused by atmospheric tumult, the principles of simplicity and natural uniformity require an interpretation that does not assume some sort of miraculous disturbance. The tumult of the air was powerful and destructive, apparently beyond human remembrance or record (3 Nephi 8:5, 7), but it was natural (see 1 Nephi 19:12). God’s foreknowledge and the miracle of true prophecy provided the accurate expectation held by the believers and fulfilled by nature.

Destruction by Fire. Zenos prophesied that the Lord would visit fire and smoke on the unrighteous (1 Nephi 19:11) and Nephi saw that many cities would be “burned with fire” (1 Nephi 12:4). Nephi also prophesied that the proud and wicked would be burned up (2 Nephi 26:4, 6). In fulfillment of those prophecies, Mormon reported that Zarahemla, the great capitol of the Nephites, “did take fire” (3 Nephi 8:8). How the city took fire is not stated in this verse; so, it might be supposed that the intense earthquake destroyed buildings where fires were kept and that fierce winds then spread the fires throughout the city. Also, since Mormon referred to an extreme lightning storm (3 Nephi 8:7) just before his report that Zarahemla took fire, perhaps lightning was the most immediate cause of the city taking fire. The principle of thoroughness, however, requires more than just identifying possibilities. Other relevant passages in the text must be examined.

During the three days of darkness, “there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land” (3 Nephi 9:1). The speaker identified himself as “Jesus Christ the Son of God,” the being who “created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are ... the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 9:15, 18). The voice of this great being cried, “Wo, wo, wo unto this people ... except they shall repent.... Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof” (3 Nephi 9:2-3). He also identified “that great city Jacobugath” as another capitol that, along with its inhabitants, he “caused to be burned with fire ... because of their secret murders and combinations; for it was they that did destroy the peace of my people and the government of the land” (3 Nephi 9:9). The Lord then listed four more cities (Laman, Josh, Gad and Kishkumen) which he “caused to be burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof, because of their wickedness in casting out the prophets, and stoning those whom I did send” (3 Nephi 9:10).

Except for Zarahemla, none of these cities is otherwise mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. However, Laman was the name of Lehi's eldest son, a young man who sought to kill Lehi and Nephi during their desert journey (1 Nephi 2:5; 16:37-38) and who later sought to kill Nephi after Lehi had passed away (2 Nephi 4:12-13; 5:1-5). Lamanites and Nephites remained bitter enemies for hundreds of years (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:34; Jacob 1:13-14; Words of Mormon 1:13-14; Alma 25:1-3). In addition, at least some Lamanite kings were known as Laman (Mosiah 7:21; 9:10-13; 10:6, 18; 24:3, 9). Hence, it may be that the city of Laman was the political center of a people devoted to destroying the Nephites. Similarly, Kishkumen was the name of the co-founder of the Gadianton robbers and murderers (Helaman 6:18, 24). Kishkumen personally murdered the Nephite chief judge, Pahoran (Helaman 1:9-12; 2:3), and laid plans to kill the succeeding chief judge, Helaman (Helaman 2:3-9). Thus, the city of Kishkumen may have been one of the key centers for the Gadianton marauders. The name Josh is not otherwise mentioned in the Book of Mormon until the very end of the Nephites' existence as a separate people, when a Nephite commander named Josh is said to have been killed (Mormon 6:14). The name Gad does not appear in any other context in the Book of Mormon.

With respect to each of the six identified cities, Mormon stated that the city's inhabitants were destroyed by being "burned with fire" (3 Nephi 9:3, 9-10). The creator of heaven and earth, the light and life of the world, "did send down fire and destroy them, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before [his] face" (3 Nephi 9:11). The Lord's statement would appear to contradict the idea that the consumption of these cities was caused only by local house fires being spread by earthquake and tempest. To accomplish his purposes, the Lord might also have used lightning and fierce winds to cause all the fires necessary to incinerate the six cities. However, as with fires caused by the overturning of house fires, fires caused by lightning strikes also might have given the inhabitants time to escape. When considered in the light of other seismic events described in the text and to be noted below, I think it is reasonable to interpret the fires that the Lord "did send down" as including incendiary cinders that fell suddenly from volcanic eruptions and trapped people in their cities by the speed of such fiery disasters. Whatever the specific causes (which may have differed somewhat from one city to the next), great fires destroyed lives and property, and contributed to the whole face of the land being changed.

Destruction by Water. The city of Moroni "did sink into the depths of the sea" (3 Nephi 8:9). This statement indicates that the city was not washed away by a flood or wave action, but that the earth subsided in such a way as to sink the city into the watery depths. When the voice of Jesus was heard during the three days of darkness, the "great city Moroni" was said to have been "sunk in the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof ... drowned" in accordance with the will of the Lord to destroy the wicked at that time (3 Nephi 9:4-5). The Lord also identified the cities of Onihah, Mocom and Jerusalem (a great Lamanite city located near a place called Mormon; Alma 21:1-2) as places where he caused "waters ... to come up in the stead thereof" to destroy the inhabitants because of "their wickedness and abominations" (3 Nephi 9:7). Onihah and Mocom are not otherwise mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. Because Mormon's record of the Lord's words does not state that these three additional cities were sunk, it may be thought that they were simply flooded when the water came up.¹⁵ However, in a later report, Mormon apparently clarified this point. After referring to the rebuilding of burned cities, including Zarahemla (4 Nephi 1:7-8), Mormon stated, "But there were many cities which had been sunk, and waters came up in the stead thereof; therefore these cities could not be renewed" (4 Nephi 1:9). Thus, the

¹⁵ Russell H. Ball stated, "Having waters 'come up' upon some cities could be accounted for either by the flooding of rivers, or by the blocking of rivers by landslides and the subsequent formation of artificial lakes." Russell H. Ball, "An Hypothesis concerning the Three Days of Darkness among the Nephites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 109.

subsidence of the earth led to many cities being covered permanently by water. This suggests further that all four cities named by the Lord as being destroyed by water were part of this group.

The subsidence of the earth, where cities existed, had been foreseen by Nephi: “I saw many cities that they were sunk” (1 Nephi 12:4). However, there does not appear to have been any specific prophecy that such cities were also to be covered by water (as Mormon made clear; see 3 Nephi 8:9; 9:4-5, 7; 4 Nephi 1:9). Was that a material omission by the prophet? I suggest not. The word *sunk* is the past tense of the verb *sink* and is frequently conjugated (as in Nephi’s case) with the verb *to be* instead of *have*. The principal meaning of *sink* is to “become submerged in water; to go under or to the bottom.” Of course, sink may also mean to “subside or go down into, to be swallowed up by, the earth.”¹⁶ Since there were prophecies suggesting non-watery sinkings into the earth (e.g., 1 Nephi 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5), I think it is reasonable to assume that Nephi “saw many cities ... sunk” into lakes or the sea, as well as into the earth.

Destruction by Earth. In 3 Nephi 8:18, Mormon reported that “rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.” This intense and extensive seismic activity was also described as “exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth” (3 Nephi 8:12), which apparently lasted, at least in its greatest intensity, “for about the space of three hours” (3 Nephi 8:19), with lesser aftershocks and the attendant rending of rocks, “dreadful groanings” and “tumultuous noises” continuing throughout the three days of darkness (3 Nephi 10:9).

When the voice of the Lord was heard in the darkness, the survivors heard him say, “And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (3 Nephi 9:12), just as Nephi had prophesied (“all manner of destructions;” 2 Nephi 26:6). The list of the earthly destructions provided by Mormon included: (1) highways (perhaps roads or trails through the high country) being broken up and level roads (apparently those in the flatter parts of the land) being spoiled (compare Helaman 14:24 with 3 Nephi 8:13); (2) smooth places became rough (compare 1 Nephi 12:4 with 3 Nephi 8:13); (3) cities were sunk (compare 1 Nephi 12:4 with 3 Nephi 8:14); (4) cities were shaken until the buildings collapsed (compare 1 Nephi 12:4 with 3 Nephi 8:14); (5) the loss of life in some cities was so extensive that they were left desolate (compare Helaman 14:24 with 3 Nephi 8:13-14); (6) some cities were not completely devastated, but many still died there (compare 2 Nephi 26:5 with 3 Nephi 8:15); (7) the earth, with its mountains and rocks, was rent and broken in pieces (compare 1 Nephi 12:4; 19:12, 14; Helaman 14:21-23 with 3 Nephi 8:18); and (8) rocks were found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments across the face of the land (compare Helaman 14:12 with 3 Nephi 8:18).

Mormon also reported that “the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain” (3 Nephi 8:10; compare 1 Nephi 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5; Helaman 14:23). Later, Moronihah was described as another “great city” where the inhabitants were “buried up” (3 Nephi 8:25). During the period of darkness, the voice of the Lord was heard, saying, “behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof” because of their iniquities and abominations (3 Nephi 9:5). The Lord then identified the city of Gilgal (otherwise not mentioned as a city in the Book of Mormon; see Mormon 6:14 [a Nephi commander] and Ether 13:27-30 [a valley]) as one that was “sunk, and the inhabitants thereof ... buried up in the depths of the earth” (3 Nephi 9:6; compare 1 Nephi 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5). Between these two forms of earthly destruction (where a great mountain came up in

¹⁶ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), II: 2835 (“Sink”).

the place of a city and where the earth subsided and a city was buried), there was a third type of earthly devastation. Four cities were named by the Lord: Gadiandi, Gadiomnah, Jacob and Gimgimno, none of which is otherwise mentioned as a city in the Book of Mormon. They all were “sunk” and “the inhabitants thereof” were “buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before [the] face” of the Lord; however, he “made hills and valleys in the places thereof” (3 Nephi 9:8; compare 1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5). All of this indicates that the subsidence of the earth and the casting up of hills and a great mountain involved extremely violent seismic activity.

The Geographic Extent of the Destruction. The texts examined in this part refer to the *earth* and the *whole earth*. In part one of this chapter, I briefly mentioned the question of the geographic extent of the tumult of nature at the time of the Messiah’s crucifixion, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. I referred to the treatment of this topic by Russell H. Ball¹⁷ and I indicated that the meaning of *whole earth* might be thought to be merely hyperbolic. However, to me it seemed that the translation of the original concept into English also could be incomplete. The principle of uncertain cultural comprehension is applicable to this issue. My inclination was to see the *earth* and the *whole earth* as terms based on an ancient view of the separation of nature into directly perceivable elements of air, fire, water and earth.¹⁸ That is, the *earth* would be something like the ground that a person could stand upon or dirt that could be picked up, and the *whole earth* would include the ground that could be seen or experienced by one’s companions or other contemporaries as well. Whatever the original meanings of the terms, unquestionably the most intense destruction appears to have been localized in Nephite and Lamanite lands and perhaps in nearby parts of the lands “southward” and “northward.” The devastation cannot be rationally interpreted as extending outward (in terms of a modern understanding of the *earth* and *whole earth*) to the entire globe.

¹⁷ Ibid., 113-19.

¹⁸ See part one of this chapter, “Tumult in the Air,” 8-9.