

Human Aspects of the Great Destruction

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Zenos¹ appears to have been the first to speak “concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of [the Messiah’s] death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:10). The prophecy of Zenos appears to have divided those of the house of Israel who had been scattered to “the isles of the sea” into two general groups at the time of the Messiah’s death. Some would experience “the thunderings and lightnings of his power” and great natural disasters associated with three days of darkness (1 Nephi 19:10-12). Others, who could be characterized by “their righteousness,” would hear the Lord’s voice “unto their great joy and salvation” (1 Nephi 19:11).

Based on Nephi’s understanding of the natural calamities to befall the descendants of Lehi at the time of the Messiah’s death (2 Nephi 26:2-7), Nephi prophesied that “the wicked ... shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:3). However, in his vision, he also “saw multitudes who had not² fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.” These (apparently more righteous) survivors of the great upheaval would see “the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven” to them, and he would teach and heal them (1 Nephi 12:5-6; 2 Nephi 26:1, 8-9).

Hundreds of years later, Samuel, the Lamanite, added a specific prophecy of doom for the city and land of Zarahemla: “ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you” (Helaman 13:21-23). Samuel also stated that “the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that [the Messiah] shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead” (Helaman 14:20). Samuel restated many of the natural calamities that had long been foretold and then prophesied that “many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me” (Helaman 14:21-26). Samuel concluded his recitation of the elements of the sign of three days of darkness by stating: “And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men” (Helaman 14:28). Presumably, the things greater than visits from resurrected saints included the ministry of the resurrected Redeemer among some who survived the great destruction.

¹ Zenos was a Hebrew prophet whose words were recorded in the brass plates taken by Nephi from Laban’s treasury at Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3-5; 19:10-21; 3 Nephi 10:14-17).

² The original manuscript for this prophecy is extant and, at the end of one of the lines of recorded dictation, the manuscript includes the word *not*. However, Oliver Cowdery accidentally dropped the words *the* before *multitudes* and *not* before *fallen* when he copied the printer’s manuscript from the original manuscript. 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), 109; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 87. The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon followed the printer’s manuscript for this passage. The omission of *the* and *not* continued in subsequent LDS editions of the Book of Mormon until the most recent one (1981), when *not* was restored. The word *not* is necessary in verse 5 because in verse 6 the word *them* refers back to those who survived the destructions. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 248-49.

Terror and Dread. When Mormon began to write about these prophecies being fulfilled, his timeline began with the arrival of a great storm, “such an one as never had been known in all the land.” The tempest was “great and terrible.” The lightning flashes were “exceedingly sharp ... such as never had been known in all the land,” and the thunder “did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder” (3 Nephi 8:5-7). The human elements in these reports are explicit. The intensity of the storm and lightning were beyond anything previously experienced or recorded. The effect of the tumult in the air on the face of the land was so violent that the people felt the earth begin to shake, as if in anticipation of the seismic ruptures that were about to occur and the vital divisions about to befall the people. Mormon’s use of the word *terrible* with respect to the tempest and thunder suggests the feelings that gripped the people. The deafening roar of the wind, the racket that accompanied its destructive sweep across the land, the earsplitting and earthshaking thunderclaps, all were “adapted to excite terror ... [or] to impress dread, terror or solemn awe and reverence.”³

Zarahemla and other cities then began to take fire and the inhabitants were burned up (3 Nephi 8:8, 24; 9:3, 9-10). Some cities sank into bodies of water and the inhabitants were drowned (3 Nephi 8:9; 9:4, 7; 4 Nephi 1:9). The earth opened and swallowed the people and buildings of other cities, leaving hills and valleys behind (3 Nephi 9:6, 8). The earth was “carried up” on the city of Moronihah, resulting in “a great mountain” that buried the people (3 Nephi 8:10, 25; 9:5). Throughout all of these specific disasters, “the exceedingly great quaking” of the earth broke up roads, destroyed buildings, and killed and injured even more people, while the atmospheric tumult formed whirlwinds that carried people away (3 Nephi 8:12-16).

Three Hours; Three Days. Mormon recorded that the natural calamities “did last for about the space of three hours” before the storm, tempest, lightning, thunder and most violent quaking of the earth ceased. A “thick darkness” then descended across the land, a “vapor of darkness” that the survivors could feel (3 Nephi 8:19-20). Attempts to light candles, torches and other fires were frustrating and, ultimately, futile. No light from the sun, moon or stars penetrated the “mists of darkness” (3 Nephi 8:21-22). Blinded by the thick darkness and surrounded by the dead and injured, the survivors heard the “great ... groanings of the people.” A “great mourning and howling and weeping” then arose from “all the people continually.” Like the tempest that had just ended, the “howlings of the people [became] great and terrible” (3 Nephi 8:23-25). The anguish, mourning and blindness, accompanied by the earth trembling, rocks rending, and “dreadful groanings” and “tumultuous noises,” lasted “for the space of three days” (3 Nephi 8:23; 10:9).

The terror and mourning mentioned in the text does not require the various aspects of the storm and earthquake to have been experienced by all the people in the same way throughout the Nephite and Lamanite lands. For some, the exceedingly sharp lightnings or the incessant thunderous noise might have inspired terror and dread, while for others the immense fury of the wind or the upheaval, sinking or division of the earth might have been the predominant cause of their feelings. Whatever the cause(s), as more and more people were injured and killed and as darkness descended across the land, fear and grief would have greatly intensified.

As to the duration of three hours for the most intense and destructive natural disasters, Mormon expressly noted that “it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours” (3 Nephi 8:19).

³ Noah Webster, LL.D., *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, two vols. (New York: S. Converse, 1828), II: [749] (“Terrible”), accessed at www.archive.org/details/americandictionary02websr; see also *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), II: 3267.

Presumably, in this matter as in other chronological matters, Mormon relied on Nephi's official account.⁴ In light of the extensiveness of the calamities across the Nephite and Lamanite lands,⁵ different recollections concerning the duration of the disasters would be expected. Since the trembling and rending of the earth continued to be heard during the three days of darkness, such episodes may have been felt more sharply and for longer periods by the survivors who were closer to the seismic epicenters. Similarly, the atmospheric tumult that accompanied the sinking of cities and casting up of hills and a "great mountain" may have resulted in some survivors experiencing the mists or vapors of darkness earlier than others as clouds of volcanic ash spread across and darkened the lands. Each of these possibilities would be consistent with the principle of natural uniformity,⁶ as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The actual length of "three hours," within its Nephite context, is a more complex interpretive issue. Samuel had prophesied, as instructed by his angelic visitor, that the lightning and thunder would last "for the space of many hours" at the time of the Messiah's death (Helaman 14:21, 26); so, from one interpretive perspective, "many hours" may seem to be equated with "about ... three hours." However, Samuel was a Lamanite and the Book of Mormon appears to record that there was a difference between the reckoning of Nephite and Lamanite hours. In Alma 18:14, Mormon recorded that a Lamanite king did not answer his Nephite questioner "for the space of an hour, according to their time" (apparently meaning the Lamanites' reckoning of time). This reference to "their time" suggests that Nephite and Lamanite hours were of different lengths. Thus, if Lamanite hours were shorter than Nephite hours and if the angel who appeared to Samuel referred to Lamanite hours in his instructions to the Lamanite, then the prophecy of "many hours" of thunder and lightning may have been encompassed in the period of "about ... three [Nephite] hours."

From another interpretive perspective, the word *many* might seem to be a reference to a large number. The word may be defined as "[n]umerous; comprising a great number" or as the "adjectival designation of great indefinite number."⁷ However, in the Book of Mormon, the intended number appears to be any number larger than two. For example, "many years" can refer to 600 years (3 Nephi 1:18), 22 years (Mosiah 10:3) or eight years (1 Nephi 17:4). Depending on one's age and perspective, neither 22 nor eight years would necessarily be considered a great number of years. Similarly, "many hundred years" can refer to six centuries (1 Nephi 10:4; Jacob 4:4; 7:7) or less than four centuries (Words of Mormon 1:2; Mormon 6:5-6). The term "many hours" also could refer to less than the daylight hours of a single day (Helaman 12:14). Thus, when Samuel prophesied a period of "many hours" of thunder and lightning, he may have spoken about just a portion of the daylight hours, perhaps as few as "about ... three [Nephite] hours."

In conformity with the principle of uncertain cultural understanding, one might also consider the idea that "three hours" was Joseph Smith's interpretation, in his time frame (a 24-hour day), of the period described in Mormon's record in a Nephite time frame. Mormon's son, Moroni, also wrote in his abridgement of the Jaredite record about events that occurred in "the space of three hours" (Ether 2:14; 15:27). Were Mormon and Moroni using a Nephite (or perhaps originally a

⁴ See part one, "The Fulfillment of Lehi's Prophecy," 1-5, in the chapter on "Jesus' Birth;" and "When Was the Messiah Crucified and Resurrected? An Introduction," 1-4, in this chapter on "Jesus' Death and Resurrection."

⁵ See part one, "Tumult in the Air," 8-9, in this chapter on "Jesus' Death and Resurrection."

⁶ See, e.g., James L. Baer, "The Third Nephi Disaster: A Geological View," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19/1 (1986): 129-32.

⁷ Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, II: [97] ("Many"); *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), I: 1721-22.

Jaredite) frame of reference to describe a portion of the daylight hours that Joseph Smith interpreted as “three hours”?

Finally, one might question how, during all of the calamitous events that were occurring, a remembrance was created regarding the length of time between the onset of the storm and the following darkness. Given the fierceness and length of the storm and earthquake, it seems unlikely that mechanical tools (if any existed) were able to measure the period. However, if the period was observational (such as the time from sun-rise to mid-morning, mid-morning to noon, noon to mid-afternoon, mid-afternoon to sunset, or some other combination of solar positions), then the issue may have a ready answer. Whatever that answer might be (and each of the foregoing possibilities is worth considering about the meaning and length of “three hours”), there does not appear to be sufficient evidence in the Book of Mormon to state definitively, in terms of the present 24-hour day, how long the natural calamities occurred among the Nephites and Lamanites.

The length of “three days of darkness” seems more certain. The storm began on the fourth day of the 34th year following the coming of Christ (3 Nephi 8:5), as measured by the calendar used to calculate the “Nephite Christian Era” or “NCE.” Darkness descended during that daylight period and remained apparently for two more of such periods (through the fifth and sixth days of the month), with light returning only “in the morning” of the seventh day of the month, when “the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land” (3 Nephi 8:22-23; 10:9).

Mechanical tools for measuring days (if there were any) again may have been useless because of the destruction caused by the fierceness and length of the storm and earthquake, and the utter darkness that followed. Then, normal periods of sunlight, moonlight and starlight during the remainder of the fourth day and in the fifth and sixth days of the month were not observable within the darkened lands. It is possible that outside of the destroyed lands, there were people whose time-keeping had been coordinated with Lamanite or Nephite time-keeping, or whose observations of the destruction, from afar, gave them information concerning the length of time that the mists and vapors covered the land. Only after the darkness dispersed could record keeping coordination have been accomplished by Nephi, the official record keeper, and the other survivors.

In addition, in the chapter on Calendars, one of the solutions or chronological structures associated with Mormon’s use of the NCE calendar was what I referred to as *The 33-Year Solution*.⁸ The conjunction of three astronomical periods was noted in connection with the alternate sums 12051 and 12052: 33 solar years (12052.9926 days); 137 mean sidereal periods of Mercury (12051.753 days); and 104 mean synodic periods of Mercury (12051.52 days). Assuming that the NCE calendar consisted of a 365-day year, then the mortal life of the Messiah was calculated by the Nephites as a minimum of $(33 \times 365 = 12045) + 3 = 12048$ days. On the 4th day of the 34th NCE year, the storm arose, destruction commenced and darkness descended (3 Nephi 8:1-19). The darkness lasted for three days; that is, for the 4th, 5th and 6th days of that year (3 Nephi 8:20-23). On the morning of the 7th day of the year, the darkness dispersed (3 Nephi 10:8-17). Thus, during the following night, 33 NCE calendar years (12045 days) and 7 days of the 34th year (a total of 12052 days) came to an end. Mormon’s use of the NCE calendar to create *The 33-Year Solution* suggests that the 12051- and 12052-day periods (and the related conjunctions of solar and Mercury periods) were understood as direct astronomical evidence for the three days of darkness in Nephite and Lamanite lands—and perhaps so far as the survivors were concerned, for the time between the Messiah’s birth and what they understood as “the ascension of Christ into heaven” (3 Nephi 10:18-19).

⁸ See part 14, “Group Analysis of the NCE Calendar,” 26-30.

Throughout the assault of nature, “there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually” (3 Nephi 8:23). However, that fact does not require the various aspects of the storm to be experienced by all the people in the same way throughout the Nephite and Lamanite lands. For some, the incessant thunderous noise or the exceeding sharp lightnings might have inspired terror and dread, while for others the immense fury of the wind or the upheaval or division of the earth might have been the predominant cause of their feelings. Whatever the causes, as more and more people were injured and killed and as darkness descended across the land, fear and grief would have greatly intensified.

Multitudes Hear the Redeemer's Voice. Near the end of the three days of darkness, “a voice was heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land.” The voice cried, “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen” (3 Nephi 9:1-2) The voice then gave both details and a general summary of the destruction of the wicked that had occurred (3 Nephi 9:3-12) and extended an invitation to the multitudes who had survived: “O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God” (3 Nephi 9:13-15). The Lord then spoke of his mission of redemption, fulfilling the law of Moses (3 Nephi 9:16-21), and he reiterated his invitation: “Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (3 Nephi 9:22). Thus, he commanded the “more righteous” multitudes to accept him and be converted.

The Lord's statement that he had taken up his life again indicates that the Nephites and Lamanites heard his voice near the end of their three days of darkness, probably at a time relatively soon after the Redeemer's resurrection at Jerusalem. Mormon then reported that “all the people of the land did hear these sayings, and did witness of it. And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours; [f]or so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours” (3 Nephi 10:1-2).

Eventually, the silence was broken by the Lord's voice of warning. This message probably is more easily understood if presented in what I propose is its parallel structure (3 Nephi 10:4-7, italics added).

A_{1A} *O ye people of these great cities which have fallen,*
A_{1B} *which are a descendant of Jacob;*
A_{1C} *yea, which are of the house of Israel;*
A_{1D} *O ye people of the house of Israel,*
B₁ *how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,*
C₁ *and have nourished you.*
B_{2A} *And again, how oft would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens*
under her wings;
A_{1E} *yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, which have fallen;*

A_{2A} *yea, O ye people of the house of Israel;*
A_{2B} *ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen;*

B_{2B} yea, how oft would I have *gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens,*
C₂ and ye would not.

A_{3A} O ye house of Israel, whom I have spared,
B₃ how oft will I *gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens* under her wings,
C₃ if ye *will repent and return unto me* with full purpose of heart.
A_{3B} But if not, O house of Israel,
B₄ *the places of your dwellings* shall become desolate,
A₄ until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to *your fathers*.⁹

Remarkably, this time the Lord spoke first to those who had fallen in the great devastation (the A₁ lines). He spoke to those who were carried away in the whirlwind, buried in the earth, burned up, drowned or slain by other effects of the earthquake; however, the survivors also heard this message. The Lord emphasized that he had nourished those who had fallen (line C₁), but, by implication, they refused to be gathered to him (the B₁ and B_{2A} lines). This implication is made explicit in the next few lines, where those at Jerusalem (lines A_{2A} and A_{2B}) are described as being like those who had fallen (line A_{1A}); they rejected him (line C₂).¹⁰ Lastly, the Lord spoke to those in the house of Israel (the A₃ lines) who were spared because of their righteousness (3 Nephi 9:13). These were the ones who had just survived the great destruction. If they would repent, they would again be gathered and nourished. However, if they would not repent, the places of their dwellings would become desolate until the gathering that was prophesied to occur in the last days (e.g., 1 Nephi 22; 2 Nephi 10; 21; compare Isaiah 11).

Following this second statement from the Lord, the people “began to weep and howl again because of the loss of their kindred and friends” (3 Nephi 10:8). Mormon then reported the end of the three days of darkness (3 Nephi 10:9-11; structure and italics added).

And it came to pass that
A₁ thus did the *three days* pass away.
A_{2A} And it was in the *morning,*
A_{2B} and *the darkness dispersed* from off the face of the land,

⁹ 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), 474; 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), 474. This text appears to have been typeset directly from the original manuscript rather than the printer's 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. The wording of the printer's manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the misspelling *he* rather than the first *her* (line B₁ above), the misspelling *hoy* rather than *how* (line B_{2B} above) and the singular word *place* rather than *places* (line B₄ above). Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part Two* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 808-09. No material interpretive issue exists relative to the textual transmission of these verses; however, “there is also evidence elsewhere in the text that Oliver Cowdery sometimes wrote *place* instead of the correct *places*, at least momentarily; the plural *places* is also supported by the plural *houses* in Helaman 15:1; the two alternative readings where *dwellings* is replaced with *dwelling* also work but involve one more [assumed] change (a mishearing during the dictation of the text).” Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2008), 3336-39.

¹⁰ By referring to those at Jerusalem, the Lord's warning parallels the prophecy of Zenos, who warned that they would be “scourged by all people” and “hated among all nations” because they “despised the Holy One of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:13-14).

B_{1A} and the *earth did cease to tremble*,
 B_{1B} and the *rocks did cease to rend*,
 B_{2A} and the *dreadful groanings did cease*,
 B_{2B} and all the tumultuous *noises did pass away*,
 C₁ and the *earth did cleave together* again,
 D₁ that it *stood*,
 B_{3A} and the *mourning*,
 B_{3B} and the *weeping*,
 B_{3C} and the *wailing*
 C₂ of the *people which were spared alive*,
 B_{3D} *did cease*;
 D_{2A} and their mourning was turned into *joy*,
 D_{2B} and their lamentations into the *praise and thanksgiving*
 E₁ unto the *Lord Jesus Christ*,
 E₂ their *Redeemer*:
 A_{3A} And thus far were *the scriptures fulfilled*,
 A_{3B} which had been *spoken by the prophets*.¹¹

In this passage, the “A” lines refer to prophetic fulfillment: the three days of darkness ended when the light of the fourth morning broke forth and the darkness dissipated. The “B” lines describe the ending of the earth’s movements and noises, as well as the ending of the survivors’ mourning. The “C” lines similarly depict the earth holding together, suggesting that the survivors may have done the same when they realized their lives were spared. The “D” lines continue this comparison. In line D₁, the earth “stood,” presumably meaning that it stood still; however, as a symbol of the people, the statement suggests that the survivors were finally able to stand, see their way through the destruction around them and begin to gather with and comfort each other. The D₂ lines reflect the survivors’ change in behavior, from mourning and lamentation into joy, praise and thanksgiving to Jesus Christ, their Redeemer (the “E” lines).

Wicked and More Righteous. Nephi prophesied that the wicked would perish (2 Nephi 26:3); yet he also saw multitudes who would survive (1 Nephi 12:5-6). The Nephite recorder of Samuel’s prophecies used “wickedness” and “abominations” to describe the activities of the inhabitants of Zarahemla, Gideon and “all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites” at the time of the destruction (Helaman 13:14-17). During the three days of darkness, the Lord’s voice expressed the general reason for the annihilation of the populations of sixteen cities: “their iniquity” or “iniquities” (3 Nephi 9:2, 5), “wickedness” (3 Nephi 9:7-12) and “abominations” (3 Nephi 9:2, 5, 7-8, 10-12). The Lord also expressed his judgment on the survivors: “wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent... O all ye that are spared because ye were *more righteous than they*, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? ... [R]epent, and come unto me ye ends of the

¹¹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 475. This text also appears to have been typeset directly from the original manuscript rather than the printer’s 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. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the word *the* before *thanksgiving*. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 809. No material interpretive issue exists relative to the textual transmission of these verses; however, Skousen’s analysis of the use of the definite article *the* in conjunctive noun phrases suggested to him that the use of *the* before *thanksgiving* was probably the original wording. If that were the case, then the typesetter may have erroneously omitted *the* before *thanksgiving* when preparing the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3340-42

earth, and be saved.... But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers" (3 Nephi 9:2, 13, 22; 10:7, italics added). Unquestionably, the implication of the Lord's words is that the "more righteous" people included multitudes in need of conversion. (The difficulties and dangers associated with accomplishing such conversions are spelled out in 3 Nephi 28:18-23.)

James L. Baer has asked if a disaster, such as that described in Third Nephi, "[c]ould ... discriminate between the wicked and the righteous."¹² Baer's question touches on important theological issues—whether the Lord loves and rules the natural universe and its life forms and, if so, how he expresses that love and rule. Those issues are relevant to the message of the Book of Mormon (see, e.g., Helaman 12; 3 Nephi 9:15, 18); however, they are outside the scope of this source book. As to the fulfillment of prophecy, the text is clear: a great natural disaster occurred and its effects fell differently on separate populations, as prophesied.

Initially, Baer answered his question by arguing that "because the majority of people living at that time were not righteous, most of those killed would, by chance, have been wicked."¹³ His underlying assumption, in the way he structured his question and answer, is that the people of the land were perceived by the Nephite record keepers at the time of the destruction as being divided into two general groups: the wicked majority and the righteous minority. However, the texts examined previously in this chapter indicate that the people were perceived as being divided into three general groups. One group was described as being wicked because they had cast out or killed the prophets and their followers. The wicked appear to be those who were especially associated with the sixteen destroyed cities. The wicked perished as prophesied (2 Nephi 26:3; 3 Nephi 9:2-12). A second group was portrayed as the converted ones. They repented of their sins and were baptized (and by implication, were cleansed from iniquity and lived in righteousness). This seems to have been a small part of the population (but apparently still a "great multitude") who were looking forward to the signs of the Messiah's death and resurrection. They were among those who could be described as more righteous than the wicked (3 Nephi 7:14-8:4; 11:1-2). Third, there were those who had not been converted. This group could also be described as being more righteous than the wicked. They included both Nephites and "those who had been called Lamanites." They did not cast out or kill the prophets or their followers (3 Nephi 9:13-22; 10:12-19). This third group probably was the most numerous within the Nephite and Lamanite lands. Thus, if only chance were involved (as Baer initially suggested), most of those killed probably would have been in the non-converted population who still could be described as more righteous than the wicked. Chance, at least on the general level of group prophecy and fulfillment, does not appear to have been involved.

Baer's alternative answer to his question abandoned his assumption of a two-part division of the people in the land. "Another explanation," he wrote, "is that because, even in the most destructive earthquakes, the disastrous effects seem to be localized and because people of similar beliefs tend to live together, the disaster that struck a particular city would be likely to kill people of a particular persuasion."¹⁴ The Book of Mormon records the religious intolerance and political enmity suggested by Baer's second answer.

¹² James L. Baer, "The Third Nephi Disaster: A Geological View," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19/1 (1986): 129.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Five years before the Messiah's birth, Samuel prophesied fire from heaven would come down on the city of Zarahemla when its people cast out the righteous (Helaman 13:12-16). About 35 years later, "the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites" (3 Nephi 6:14). Some of the righteous (who had been testifying against the wickedness in the land) were secretly killed by certain judges. When the crimes of these judges came to light, they were to be tried before the chief judge, but their "friends and kindreds" joined with most of the lawyers and high priests in a secret combination that murdered the chief judge. They chose "a man whom they did call Jacob" to be their king and apparently attempted to assert control over the rest of the Nephites. The people (apparently within the territory most closely associated with the city of Zarahemla)¹⁵ separated into disputing tribal groups based on kinship because the "more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked." The tribes resisted the imposition of a monarchy. King Jacob and his followers were forced to flee "into the northernmost part" of the territory. By the end of the 31st year from the coming of Christ, the prophets had been cast out of the territory (3 Nephi 6:19-7:14).

Thus, about three years before the great storm and earthquake, formerly righteous Nephites in and around the city of Zarahemla had chosen wickedness and the church was broken up within their tribes. The surviving Nephite prophets were stoned and cast out from the precincts of the Nephite tribes. These prophets continued to preach and obtain new converts, but apparently not in the vicinity of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 7:14-26). After the destruction, a great convocation of the believers occurred at the temple in the land of Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1), several days' travel north of Zarahemla.¹⁶ Hence, it may be that the believers migrated into that part of the land prior to the terrible destruction (see 3 Nephi 19:1-4). All of this suggests that Baer's assertion is correct, at least within the lands most closely associated with the city of Zarahemla. That is, the majority of the people living at that time in or near the city of Zarahemla were violently intolerant of the believers. The fiery devastation that fell upon that area destroyed the wicked.¹⁷

The followers of the usurper-king Jacob settled in a place known as Jacobugath and there they met their fiery end. The Lord said "their sins and their wickedness ... was above all the wickedness of the whole earth, 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). Another of the destroyed cities, also named Jacob, was sunk and replaced with hills and valleys (3 Nephi 9:8). The usurper-king's assumption of the name Jacob and the wickedness of the people in the cities of Jacob and Jacobugath (they murdered the prophets and believers) may suggest common religious intolerance and political goals. Perhaps these two cities were located near each other.

Relatives and sympathizers associated with the great Gadianton army that invaded the Nephite land and was destroyed about seventeen years earlier (3 Nephi 3:1-5:6) may have continued to live and increase in the wilderness and mountains near the land of Zarahemla (Helaman 2:11; 3 Nephi 1:27; 4:1-3, 13). In the Lord's recitation of destroyed cities, two (Kishkumen and Gad) were burned up and two more (Gadiandi and Gadiomnah) were sunk and replaced by hills and valleys. My tentative linking of these four cities is based on two factors: first, Kishkumen was the name of one of the co-founders of the Gadianton robbers and murderers

¹⁵ John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 25.

¹⁶ John E. Clark, "Revisiting 'A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,'" *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 42. Sorenson estimated the distance between Zarahemla and the northern boundary of the land of Bountiful as roughly 160 miles. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*, 58.

¹⁷ The separation of the people in Zarahemla occurred as a result of choices they made, not merely by chance, as Baer may have been suggesting. Baer, "The Third Nephi Disaster: A Geological View," 131.

(Helaman 1:9-12; 2:3-11; 6:18, 24); and second, the common element *Gad* in three of the city names may suggest places associated with a new generation of Gadianton robbers and murderers who were about to begin marauding again (compare Helaman 11:10, 24-26; 3 Nephi 1:27-29). They served the devil through secret oaths and covenants (Helaman 6:26-29) and they cast out, stoned and murdered the prophets and believers who had been sent to convert them (3 Nephi 9:8, 10-11).

Finally, the cities of Laman and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Lord, the former by fire and the latter by water (3 Nephi 9:7, 10). Jerusalem was a great Lamanite city located near a place called Mormon; its inhabitants apparently were both Lamanites and descendants of bitter apostate Nephites, known as Amalekites and Amulonites, who were renowned for their war mongering and murderousness (Alma 21:1-4; 24:1; 43:6, 13). The city of Laman appears to have been named after Lehi's eldest son, Laman, 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 cities of Laman and Jerusalem were located near the political center of a people devoted to destroying the Nephites. These cities were destroyed because of their wickedness (3 Nephi 9:7, 10). Thus, the Book of Mormon indicates that Baer's second answer is likely a correct one. The localized effects of the great storm and earthquake fell most heavily on areas where the wicked had settled and the righteous had been cast out or killed.

The Lord's Visit. In contrast to the exact date when the three days of darkness began and ended, little detail is provided about when the prophesied visit of the Lord to the survivors occurred. Despite his visit having apparently been envisioned in connection with the end of the great destruction and three days of darkness (1 Nephi 12:5-6; 2 Nephi 26:1, 8-9), the Lord did not immediately appear with the return of daylight. The people presumably directed their efforts to rescuing the injured, burying the dead, obtaining food and shelter, and reconnecting families and communities, in addition to expressing their joy, praise and thanksgiving.¹⁸

Moreover, at least some of the survivors continued to "look forward unto Christ with steadfastness" (2 Nephi 26:8). Then, "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year" (3 Nephi 10:18-19), "a great multitude [were] gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place. And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death" (3 Nephi 11:1-2). The people then heard "a voice as if it came out of heaven." They did not understand the voice at first, but "notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn" (3 Nephi 11:3). The people heard the voice a second time and again did not understand it. On the third occurrence, they recognized the voice to say, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:4-7). The Lord then descended out of heaven, identified himself, and began to organize his church among them and to teach and bless the multitude (3 Nephi 11:8-26:15).

¹⁸ Clifford P. Jones, "The Great and Marvelous Change: An Alternate Interpretation," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, 19/2 (2010):50-57, 61-63.

Correction of the Record. During the second day of the Lord's visit with the righteous multitude (3 Nephi 19:1-15), he commanded Nephi, "Bring forth the record which ye have kept." Nephi produced the "records" and set them before the Lord, who "cast his eyes upon them and said: Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so? And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled." The Lord then questioned how this information was omitted and commanded that the omission in the record should be corrected (3 Nephi 23:7-10). Thus, another of Samuel's prophecies (Helaman 14:25) associated with the death and resurrection of the Redeemer was recorded as having been fulfilled.

Notably, the Lord did not require the record to be amended regarding the lengths of time or dates that may have been recorded by Nephi for the Lord's life, death, resurrection or ascension into heaven (not all of which were included by Mormon in his abridgment). The implication seems to be that the information regarding lengths of time that Mormon did provide is reliable for chronological and historical purposes. That is the assumption of this source book.