



Type: Book Chapter

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## Chapter XXXVIII

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Source: *The Story of the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City; Joseph Hyrum Parry, 1888

Pages: 225-231

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**Abstract:** Growth of Evil amongst the Nephites—The Increase of the Gadianton Robbers—Nephi's Announcement of the Murder of the Chief Judge—The Discovery—Nephi Arrested—He is Proven Innocent—God's Covenant with Him—Increase of Iniquity—A Terrible Famine—The Welcome Rain—The Trend to Death

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GROWTH OF EVIL AMONGST THE NEPHITES—THE INCREASE OF THE GADIANTON ROBBERS—NEPHI'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MURDER OF THE CHIEF JUDGE—THE DISCOVERY—NEPHI ARRESTED—HE IS PROVEN INNOCENT—GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIM—INCREASE OF INIQUITY—A TERRIBLE FAMINE—THE WELCOME RAIN—THE TREND TO DEATH.

THE GOODLY reign of universal peace, to which we referred in our last chapter, brought stability, stability developed wealth, wealth engendered pride, pride gave birth to numerous sins, to be followed by contentions, dissensions, and then wars. These evils begat sorrow, sorrow softened their hearts to repentance, repentance was followed by the blessing of God, which again brought peace, prosperity and, by-and-by, riches. At this era of Nephite national life, this is the one eternal round which their inspired historians are compelled to chronicle. Within four short years of the happy time of universal peace we have just referred to, the riches of the world had induced stubbornness and rebellion towards God, combined with the insane desire to rob, plunder and murder their fellow-men. If there ever were a people swift to do evil, it was the Nephites of this generation. In the year B. C. 26, Cezoram, the chief judge, was murdered by an unknown hand, as he sat on the judgment seat, and his son, who succeeded him, suffered in like manner within the year. The Gadianton robbers grew in strength, numerically and morally, and were actually fostered amongst the Nephites, while the more righteous Lamanites utterly destroyed all that they found

within their borders. The one people dwindled in unbelief, the other grew in grace and in the power of God's divine Spirit.

Nephi, who had gone to the northern continent, tarried there until the year B. C. 23, when, his teachings and prophecies having been rejected by its inhabitants, he returned in sorrow to Zarahemla; but he found no comfort there. The Gadianton robbers filled the judgment seats, and perverted the law to their own avarice and lust. The life, the property, the liberty, the virtue of righteous men and women were counted but things of naught, their playthings or their spoil.

Nephi's house in Zarahemla was situated on one of the principal thoroughfares. It led to the chief market-place. In his garden, near the highway, he built a tower, whither it was his wont to repair for prayer. On one occasion, shortly after his return from the north, he became so deeply concerned because of the iniquities of the people, that in earnest supplication to the Lord he raised his voice so high that he was heard by the passers by in the street below. A listening crowd soon gathered, and when the prophet had ended his devotions and become aware of their presence, he commenced to teach them. His words were not sugar-coated, to adapt them to the tastes of his congregation. To the contrary, he boldly rebuked their sins, their murders, and their secret wickedness; at the same time, in the love of the gospel, he entreated and plead with them to amend their lives and do better. He also warned them of the terrible judgments that would fall upon them if they did not turn from their sinful ways.

Towards the conclusion of his address, Nephi

surprised his hearers by stating that the chief judge had been murdered by his brother, who was anxious to obtain the chief judgeship himself. Both these men were members of the vile band of robbers who owned Gadianton as their chief.

The people did not believe Nephi's statement that their chief judge was murdered, so five incredulous men ran to the judgment hall to find out the truth of the matter. When they reached there they discovered Seezoram—for that was the name of the judge—lying dead in a pool of blood near the judgment seat. The five messengers were so overcome with fear at this awful sight that they fell to the earth.

Soon after, other citizens who had not heard Nephi came in. Finding the dead judge and the five men all there they concluded that the latter must be the murderers, who, by some manifestation of the power of heaven, had been prevented from leaving the scene of their shameful deed. The officers therefore took the five and cast them into prison.

When the wicked learned that Nephi's words had proven true, they charged him with being an accomplice. They did not believe in revelation from God, so argued that Nephi must have had a hand in the murder or he could not have known anything about it. He was therefore taken and bound and brought before the multitude. Then they cross-examined him, abused him, and finally offered him money to confess that he had employed some one to do the dreadful deed. They were anxious to bring reproach and trouble upon him that they might have an excuse for not believing his words and heeding his teachings. How he escaped their plot we will let the Book of Mormon itself tell.

The conversation is between Nephi and his accusers:

And now behold, I will shew unto you another sign, and see if ye will in this thing seek to destroy me.

Behold I say unto you, Go to the house of Seantum, who is the brother of Seezoram, and say unto him, Has Nephi the pretended prophet, who doth prophesy so much evil concerning this people, agreed with thee, in which ye have murdered Seezoram, who is your brother?

And behold, he shall say unto you, Nay.

And ye shall say unto him, Have ye murdered your brother?

And he shall stand with fear, and wist not what to say. And behold, he shall deny unto you; and he shall make as if he were astonished; nevertheless, he shall declare unto you that he is innocent.

But behold, ye shall examine him, and ye shall find blood upon the skirts of his cloak.

And when ye have seen this, ye shall say: From whence cometh this blood? Do we not know that this is the blood of your brother? And then shall he tremble, and shall look pale, even as if death had come upon him.

And then shall ye say, Because of this fear and this paleness which has come upon your face, behold we know that thou art guilty.

And then shall greater fear come upon him; and then shall he confess unto you, and deny no more that he has done this murder.

And then shall he say unto you, that I, Nephi, know nothing concerning the matter, save it were given unto me by the power of God. And then shall ye know that

I am an honest man, and that I am sent unto you from God.

And it came to pass that they went and did, even according as Nephi had said unto them. And behold, the words which he had said, were true; for according to the words, he did deny; and also according to the words he did confess.

Some of the citizens now acknowledged that he was a prophet, others declared that he was a god, whilst many remained hardened in their sins. So violent became the contention that the people gathered in excited crowds upon the streets, wrangling and disputing about the events of the past two days, and in their excitement they entirely forgot Nephi, and left him standing alone in the street.

With a sorrowful heart he wended his way homeward; but before he reached there, the voice of the Lord came to him with many words of comfort and commendation. As with others of his servants, the Lord made a covenant with him, that he would bless him forever. That whatsoever he bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever he loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven; that he should have power over the elements to bless and to curse; to smite the earth with famine and pestilence and destruction.

Notwithstanding the many proofs the ungodly Nephites had that Nephi was a true prophet, they continued to reject his teachings. They persecuted him, and even went so far as to seek his life. But he was conveyed out of their midst by the power of God, and ministered among other peoples.

The general character of the Nephites now com-

menced to grow worse and worse. The Gadianton robbers grew stronger and stronger. For a few years there was increasing commotion, disunion and bloodshed. At last, wearied at beholding so much misery and contention, Nephi prayed that the Lord would not suffer the people to be destroyed by the sword, but rather let a famine desolate the land and, peradventure, bring the people to an understanding of their awful condition, and cause them to humble themselves and repent. The Holy One heard and answered his petition, the heavens became as brass over the land, the rains ceased, the earth dried up, the crops failed, the people perished for want of food.

Two years passed (B. C. 19 and 18) and the third came, and still the refreshing rain was withheld (B. C. 17). During this year the people, humbled by their sufferings, turned towards the Lord. They endeavored to root out iniquity from their midst. They destroyed the Gadianton robber bands, and established the government on a more righteous foundation. Nephi, observing the change in their conduct and feelings, interceded with the Lord in their behalf. His prayers were answered, the welcome rain descended on the parched-up soil, and a bounteous harvest once more crowned the labors of the husbandman (B. C. 16).

The repentant people now regarded Nephi in his true light; they revered him as a great prophet, and for a few short years they listened to his teachings. While they did so they prospered. But the leaven of unrighteousness had too thoroughly permeated the national life for their faithfulness to God to be of long duration. Two, three, or perhaps half a dozen years they would maintain their integrity, and then corrup-

tion would seethe, the vile would snatch the reins of government, the good would be oppressed, and contention and war, with all their horrors, would again reign supreme. Thus it was after the three years of famine. For two years there was peace, in the third there began to be much strife (B. C. 13), in the next, the Gadianton bands reappeared, and carried havoc amongst their more peaceable fellow-countrymen. Going on, year by year they grew in iniquity and ripened for destruction. For many years Nephi strove to stem the tide of vice. At times partial success rewarded his unceasing efforts, and he had joy in the baptism of some honest souls. But the great bulk of the people had rejected the gospel, they had no love for its holy principles, and were unfit for its blessings.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

SAMUEL THE LAMANITE—HIS MISSION AND PROPHECIES—  
THE VAIN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY HIM—HE RETURNS  
TO HIS OWN COUNTRY.

WE COME now to the days of Samuel the Lamanite (B. C. 6). Without any previous reference to him, he appears suddenly in the foreground of ancient American history, bearing a weighty and solemn message; a messenger of God's displeasure, he stands a Jonah to the Nephites. That message is faithfully delivered; then he disappears forever from our sight.

The condition of society in the days of Samuel