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The Fulfillment of Helaman 5:6-7 in
Helaman 8:7 and 11:18-19**

Matthew L. Bowen

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“HE IS A GOOD MAN”: THE FULFILLMENT OF HELAMAN 5:6-7 IN HELAMAN 8:7 AND 11:18-19

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: Mormon, as an author and editor, was concerned to show the fulfillment of earlier Nephite prophecy when such fulfillment occurred. Mormon took care to show that Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, fulfilled their father’s prophetic and paranetic expectations regarding them as enshrined in their given names — the names of their “first parents.” It had been “said and also written” (Helaman 5:6-7) that Nephi’s and Lehi’s namesakes were “good” in 1 Nephi 1:1. Using onomastic play on the meaning of “Nephi,” Mormon demonstrates in Helaman 8:7 that it also came to be said and written of Nephi the son of Helaman that he was “good.” Moreover, Mormon shows Nephi that his brother Lehi was “not a whit behind him” in this regard (Helaman 11:19). During their lifetimes — i.e., during the time of the fulfillment of Mosiah’s forewarning regarding societal and political corruption (see Mosiah 29:27) that especially included secret combinations — Nephi and Lehi stood firm against increasingly popular organized evil.

At the time that he instituted the momentous change in Nephite society from monarchy to a hierarchical judiciary, King Mosiah II forewarned: “Therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law — to do your business **by the voice of the people**. And **if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity**, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land” (Mosiah 29:27). Mosiah II had recently translated the twenty-four plates of Ether (see Mosiah 28:11–19) and knew what secret combinations portended for his own society (as Moroni eventually confirms in Ether

8:21).¹ The destruction detailed in this record was at least one motivating factor in his decision to end monarchy among the Nephites.²

Mormon informs us that Nephi the son of Helaman lived during the time of the entrenchment of secret combinations within Nephite society and the fulfillment of king Mosiah's prophecy³ in which the Nephites saw a great deal of destruction: "For as **their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good**, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted" (Helaman 5:2). Mormon's care as a narrator is evident in his deliberate use of the phrase "voice of the people" in specifically recalling Mosiah 29:25-29, but so too in his use of words translated "evil" and "good." I submit that his use of both terms here constitutes a play on the name "Nephi." In this short note, I will propose two additional instances in which Mormon incorporates onomastic wordplay involving the meaning of the name "Nephi" from his sources in order to demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy and parental hope.

The name "Nephi," which is best explained as a derivation from Egyptian *nfr* (later pronounced *neh-fee*, *nay-fee*, or *nou-fee*),⁴ means

1 Ether 8:20–21: "And now I, Moroni, do not write the manner of their oaths and combinations, for it hath been made known unto me that they are had among all people, and they are had among the Lamanites. And they have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi."

2 Others included the recent experience of Alma's and Limhi's peoples with King Noah's monarchic evil (see Mosiah 11–24; see especially Mosiah 23:6-13 and Mosiah 29:13–24) and the refusal of Mosiah's own sons to accept the throne after him (see Mosiah 28:10: "Now king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept of the kingdom").

3 In Helaman 4:21-22 Mormon makes it clear that he sees this period of time as the fulfillment of Mosiah's prophecy in Mosiah 29: "Yea, they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah; and they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God; And that they had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people, insomuch that they were wicked even like unto the Lamanites."

4 John Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189-91. Idem, "Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009), 1–5.

“good,” “goodly,” “fine,” or “fair.”⁵ Nephi’s abdication of the chief judgeship marked a transition point for the Nephites, the “goodly” or “fair ones,”⁶ to a new public morality in which the majority chose “evil.” The “good” man — Nephi — who had been their chief judge had become weary of their “iniquity” (Helaman 5:4; cf. Mosiah 29:27) or “evil” and could no longer bear it. Consequently, Nephi “delivered up”⁷ or “yielded up” the chief judgeship in order to “preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days” (Helaman 5:4).

At this axial moment in Nephite history, Mormon recalls the fatherly paranesis⁸ of Helaman to his sons Nephi and Lehi in which he explained the giving of their names:

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works **ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.** Therefore, my sons, **I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.** (Helaman 5:6–7)

Helaman here manifests an awareness of the meaning of the name Nephi — “good.” Mormon, too, is aware of this meaning.⁹ Where had it

5 Matthew L. Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 2. See also idem, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi” *Insights* 23/6 (2003): 2. Cf. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131–32.

6 Ibid.

7 Helaman 5:1.

8 Paranesis (or paraenesis, from Greek *parainesis*) is a rhetorical term designating speech or discourse containing advice, counsel, or exhortation, particularly of a religious nature.

9 There is abundant evidence in the Book of Mormon that the Nephites saw themselves in terms of “good” or “fair ones.” See especially Mosiah 9:1; Alma 21:5;

3 Nephi 2:16; 4 Nephi 1:10; Mormon 6:17–19; cf. Mosiah 19:13. See further Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2.

been “said, and also written” that their namesakes and “first parents,” Lehi and Nephi (and their works), were good? One such place¹⁰ was in 1 Nephi 1:1 where Nephi states autobiographically:

I, **NEPHI**, having been born of **goodly parents**, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of **the goodness** and the mysteries **of God**, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days (1 Nephi 1:1).

In language that plays on his own name,¹¹ Nephi describes his father as “goodly,” i.e., of “good” or fine moral quality. In other words, Nephi is “good” or “goodly” on account of his “goodly” father and his father’s teaching him and inspiring him to acquire a “great knowledge of the goodness and mysteries of God.”

One of Mormon’s literary and editorial aims in the Book of Helaman (specifically) is to show how Helaman’s words come to fulfillment — how that in doing “good” it came to be said and written of Nephi and his brother Lehi “that they were good,” just as it was said and written of Lehi and Nephi their first parents. After detailing Nephi and Lehi’s participation in one of the most notable miracles recorded in scripture in which many Lamanites and Nephite dissenters were converted (Helaman 5:14-52) and detailing the societal corruption evident in the Nephites’ embrace of Cainitic¹² “secret combinations,” Mormon includes the “Prophecy of Nephi”¹³ which begins with Nephi’s public lament atop a tower in his own garden. Nephi’s accusations of corruption against the

10 There may have been other instances in which Lehi and Nephi were called “goodly” or “good” in the records on Nephi’s large plates or Mormon’s abridgment of the same, which are unfortunately unavailable to us.

11 Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” 2.

12 I.e., “secret combinations” have their ultimate source in Cain’s ancient pact with Satan and the “secret combination” formed at that time (see Moses 5:29-33). On the influence of the pre-biblical Cain/“get gain” etiology on the authors of the Book of Mormon (especially Mormon and Moroni) and the wordplay on the name “Cain” throughout the Book of Mormon (including the Book of Helaman), see Matthew L. Bowen, “Getting Cain and Gain,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 115–141.

13 See especially Helaman 7–9.

people and the judiciary are met with immediate anger by members of the corrupt judiciary:

And it came to pass that thus they did stir up the people to anger against Nephi, and raised contentions among them; for there were some who did cry out: Let this man alone, for **he is a good man**, and those things which he saith will surely come to pass except we repent. (Helaman 8:7)

Here Mormon mentions that it was now “said” of Nephi that he was “good” in fulfillment of Helaman’s hope for his sons (see Helaman 5:6–7). By virtue of Mormon’s preserving this incident from his written sources in writing, it was also *explicitly* “written” that Nephi was “good” (as more or less implied in Helaman 5:2), in a marvelous play on the meaning of the latter’s name. Nephi was living up to every expectation that his father had for him.

What of his brother Lehi? In Helaman 11:18–19, Mormon records the public acclaim that Nephi and Lehi’s “good” works garnered:

And behold, the people did rejoice and glorify God, and the whole face of the land was filled with rejoicing; and they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God. And behold, Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness. (Helaman 11:18-19; cf. 9:40–41)

Here Mormon is careful to show that what has been “said and also written” about Nephi is “said and also written” of his brother Lehi. While the wordplay on “Nephi” and “good” is not directly invoked here as previously (recall Helaman 8:7), the clear implication is that Lehi was “not a whit behind [Nephi] as to things pertaining to righteousness”; that is, he was *every whit* as “good” as his brother. Both had become sons that had, in every measure, lived up to their father’s hopes for them. Furthermore, they were descendants who, in every measure, came to live up to the “good” legacies of their “goodly” first parents (1 Nephi 1:1). Nephi and Lehi both stood courageously against the “evil” of Gadianton and Kishkumen’s secret combination as it spread throughout Nephite society, destroying their society as they knew it just a generation later (see 3 Nephi 7) and eventually helping to make a final end of it (Helaman 2:13–14), just as such combinations had of the Jaredites before them (Helaman 6:28; Ether 8:20–21). Nephi’s own son, Nephi, became a “just

man” who “did many miracles in the name of Jesus” because he was “cleansed every whit from his iniquity” (3 Nephi 8:1) and was privileged to assist the Lord in ushering in a new dispensation among the Lamanites and Nephites.

For his part, Helaman — like his ancestor Lehi — had demonstrated that he was a “goodly parent” by his faithful fatherly paranesis — his sons had “been taught in all the learning of [their] father” (cf. 1 Nephi 1:1; Helaman 5:5-13). Helaman was a fortunate father in that his “good” sons hearkened to his paranesis. Many other “goodly” parents — like Lehi with respect to his older sons Laman and Lemuel — are not always as fortunate.

Matthew L. Bowen was raised in Orem, Utah and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC and is currently an Assistant Professor in Religious Education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.

