

# There Shall Be Great Signs and Wonders

## *What Caused the Destruction and Darkness in the Book of Mormon Lands at the Time of the Savior's Death and Resurrection?*

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While reading the prophecies of the prophet Zenos recorded on the brass plates, Nephi noted “the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of [the Savior’s] death” unto his people and others of the house of Israel (1 Ne. 19:10). Zenos also prophesied the physical destruction which would accompany the darkness by “the thunderings and the lightnings of [the Lord’s] power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up” (1 Ne. 19:11-12). Nephi beheld his own vision of these same three days of darkness which he described as “a mist of darkness” and “the vapor of darkness.” He also saw “lightnings” and heard “thunderings” and “earthquakes” and saw cities which “were burned with fire” (1 Ne. 12:4-5). Some 600 years later Samuel the Lamanite was sent to warn the people of



“There arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.” (3 Ne. 8:5)

Zarahemla and prophesy the same catastrophic “signs” and “wonders” which would shortly befall them at the time of the Savior’s death (Hel. 14:20-29). Mormon in his abridgment of the Nephite record described with remarkable detail the actual occurrence of three hours of physical destruction and three days of “mists of darkness,” and added the Savior’s words as a voice from heaven declaring the cause and extent of the devastation and the darkness which the people were then experiencing (3 Ne. 8:5-25; 9:1-22; 10:1-14; 4 Ne. 1:8-9). The Savior’s first words to the survivors were “wo, wo, wo unto this people,” a lament on the causes of their grief and distress.

### **The Importance of Understanding Cause and Effect**

In these accounts of the three hours of destruction and three days of darkness, the several effects of these two events are named or described some 50 times, but it is often difficult from the text to link a proper cause to each of the effects. This leaves room for speculation about the causal phenomena that gave rise to the atmospheric disturbances and catastrophes on the ground as well as the darkness. For example, a darkened sky can be the result of dust storms, volcanic ash, dense fog, smoke from fires or even the temporary extinguishing of the sun, moon and stars through a Divine power. Likewise, hurricanes, tornadoes, thunderstorms, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions can all cause havoc and destruction on the earth’s surface. We attempt to establish fitting linkages between the numerous recorded effects and logical causes by a careful reading of *all* the Book of Mormon accounts, not just a few isolated verses (see “Cause and Effect” chart at end of article). We also strive to substantiate suitable meanings for significant words in the text.

### **Two Research Principles**

Our research and writings on Book of Mormon topics embrace two principles: (1) to closely adhere to the text of this “most correct” book without succumbing to the temptation to wander down paths beyond the record; and (2) to take into consideration the meaning of words in the Book of Mormon record as they were used in older English and not the meanings as they may be currently defined. Our research and the research of others confirm the Book of Mormon, like the King James version of the Bible, is translated into the English language of the 1500s and 1600s (see text box, *Oxford English Dictionary*). Numerous words in the Book of Mormon text have meanings which have changed or become obsolete over the last four-hundred years, including many within the passages

cited above. The words “signs” and “wonders” in the title of this article are examples. In older English the word “signs” meant,

**A miraculous act or event;** a miracle (performed either by God, his servants, etc. or by the Devil, false prophets, etc.); a demonstration of divine power; a message conveyed by a miracle. [We have boldfaced words here and in other quotations.]

Similarly, the word “wonders” in older English meant,

**An extraordinary natural occurrence,** especially when regarded as supernatural [an act of God] or taken as an omen or portent. Chiefly *plural*.

These “wonders” (natural occurrences such as storms and earthquakes) would lead to “destruction” and “great distress or grief.”

The observations and opinions in this article are based on our professional experience with natural phenomena in the areas of weather systems and climate, historical geography, linguistic geography and geomorphology, along with hydraulic and structural engineering, and also our work with the Book of Mormon text, including older English definitions. Because of the breadth of the topic, our analysis is divided into two sections, “The Three Hours of Destruction” and “The Three Days of Darkness.” To assist the reader, we have provided the full text of the relevant scriptural accounts at the end of the article.

### **Oxford English Dictionary (OED)**

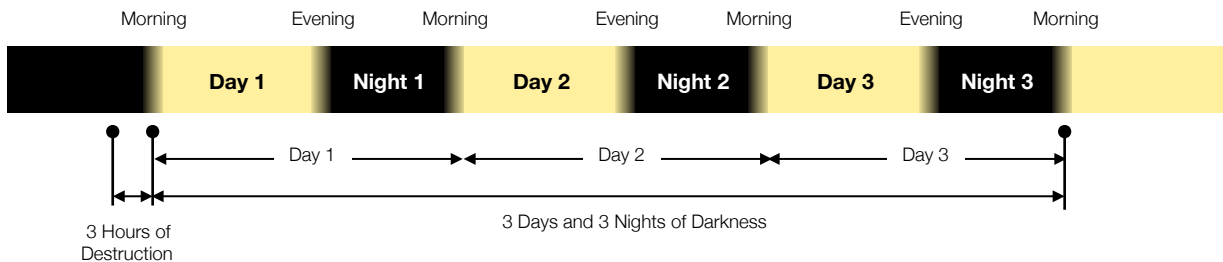
In our studies of the Book of Mormon text we have found it helpful to search for word definitions that were acceptable and appropriate long before the Book of Mormon was first printed in 1830. These older definitions from the 1500s and 1600s have been selected from the unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary*, the accepted authority on the evolution of the English language over the last millennium. Current definitions frequently obscure the original meanings of scripture text. We have found these older definitions often parallel the pattern of word usage in the *King James* translation of the Bible, begun in 1604 and completed in 1611, but based on English translations published as early as 1526. Where appropriate, these older definitions are provided in our published work on Book of Mormon topics. Examples: barges, borders, by times, chariots, curious, dearth, destructions, fevers, flocks, fountains, fruit, great (cities), highways, isle, machinery, marvelous, measure, mighty (cities), mists, morrow month, reckon, sakes, serpents, signs, silks, sojourn, tarry, thrash, timber, towers, vapors, waters, wilderness and wonders. See our articles in *A New Approach to Book of Mormon Geography* ([www.achoiceiland.com](http://www.achoiceiland.com)); Royal Skousen, *The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon*, Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University; and proceedings of the conference, *2015 Exploring the Complexities in the English Language of the Book of Mormon*, 14 March 2015, Brigham Young University.

# The Three Hours of Destruction

Mormon begins his description of the three hours of destruction which occurred just prior to the Savior's death with this statement:

And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, **there arose a great storm**, such an one as never had been known in all the land. (3 Ne. 8:5)

The initial devastation came from the effects of this “great storm,” but Mormon along with Zenos, Nephi, Samuel and the Lord also mention tempests, lightnings, thunders, fires, whirlwinds and earthquakes.



The three hours of destruction—a sign of Christ's death—occurred three days and three nights before the “morning” when the sign of Christ's resurrection was evidenced in the western hemisphere.

We start our analysis of this three-hour period of destruction with a few observations and cautions from the Book of Mormon text.

## The Constraint of a Three-Hour Destructive Phase

Mormon is careful to note that the destructive phase preceding the darkness lasted for “about the space of three hours.”

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for **about the space of three hours; and 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**—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:19; see also, Hel. 14:21, 26)

Some survivors said the “time was greater” than three hours. We suggest the devastation in the land of Zarahemla began some three hours before sunrise, while it was still dark, which lead to the inability of a sleeping and confused populace to agree on the length of

the destructive period. (See our article, *“And It Was In The Morning”: The Timing of the Signs of the Savior’s Death and Resurrection Verify the Longitude of Zarahemla in Baja California*)

This short time of “about the space of three hours” provides a critical constraint on the possible causes of the destruction. The violent atmospheric conditions and tectonic activity that occurred on the Nephite lands would have developed quickly and lasted only a short time as measured in minutes or within “about the space of three hours.” For example, thunderstorms, tornadoes, earthquakes and fires from lightning all happen suddenly and reach their maximum or full destruction within minutes and certainly within the constraint of “about the space of three hours.” Other causes of devastation such as from volcanic activity and the movement of hurricanes along their tracks typically have a life span that is measured in days rather than hours. The aftereffects from the earthquakes such as the groanings, tumultuous noises, the trembling of the earth and the rending of the rocks are the only ongoing activities recorded by Mormon that occurred after the three hours of destruction.



Tornado in Baja California.

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, **and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.**

**And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood;** and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. (3 Ne. 10:9-10)

All these lingering earthquake effects, including the “cleaving together” of the earth ceased within the three days of darkness. In older English, “cleave together” and “stood” meant to “hold fast” and “remain motionless.”

## The Extremes of Historic Precedence

We are clearly dealing in these Book of Mormon accounts with unusual atmospheric disturbances and environmental destruction, but we suggest one should not assume these events went way beyond the *extremes of historical precedence*—the range that occurred or had been seen in the past in Nephite or Lamanite lands or in other areas of the earth. The text merely indicates that this initial storm was more severe than other storms within the memory or records of those at the time, and “such an one as never had been known in all the land” (3 Ne. 8:5). Similarly, they also experienced “exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land” (3 Ne. 8:7).

## Who were the Survivors?

Understandably, not all the people were killed by these devastating events. According to the words of the Savior, some were “spared because [they] were more righteous” than the others (3 Ne 9:13). Nephi saw in vision those who were spared:

And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, **I saw multitudes who had not fallen** because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. (1 Ne. 12:5)

The word “multitudes” in older English meant “large numbers (of people or things).” More than 2,500 survivors are mentioned in the account of the Savior’s visit to Lehi’s descendants in the land of Bountiful after the time of the destruction and darkness (see 3 Ne. 11:1; 17:25; 19:1-5). Thus an unknown number—at least measured in the thousands—was spared from these extreme conditions. Mormon comments on those who were saved from the devastation.

**And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved**, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared—

**And they were spared** and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness. (3 Ne. 10:12-13)

One may speculate on the process that separated the “righteous part of the people who were spared” from the others who lost their lives. The following verses seem to imply that a

number of the “unrepentant” were spared during the devastation, but some presumably righteous souls such as their wives, daughters and children perished.

And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: **O that we had repented** before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla.

And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: **O that we had repented** before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; **then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared**, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible. (3 Ne. 8:24-25)

We now analyze the three-hour period of destruction and the possible natural causes of this sudden sequence of events under two subsections, “Atmospheric Disturbances” and “Tectonic Disturbances.”



Geological fault line caused by earthquake in northern Baja California.

## Atmospheric Disturbances

### A Great Storm

As noted, Mormon begins his account of the three hours of destruction by mentioning the arising of a “great storm.” He also concludes his description of this short time period by referring to the cessation of the “storm.”

And it came to pass **in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm**, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

...

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and **the storm**, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth **did cease**—for behold, **they did last for about the space of three hours**; and 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—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:5, 19)

#### “On the fourth day of the month.”

The precise date of this “great storm” in the “thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month” provides an essential benchmark for creating a chronological framework of the destruction and darkness, as well as the Savior’s birth, crucifixion and resurrection (3 Ne. 8:5). See our article, “*And It Was In The Morning*,” and our publication, *The Mortal Ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: A Unified Harmony of the Testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, especially the section, “The Last Week: A Chronology of Events Surrounding the Crucifixion and Resurrection.”

Mormon uses the term “storm” to cover the several atmospheric disturbances that occurred during the three hours of destruction. In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) a “storm” is defined as,

**A violent disturbance of the atmosphere**, manifested by high winds, often accompanied by heavy falls of rain, hail, or snow, by thunder and lightning, and at sea by turbulence of the waves.

Today we would call such a violent disturbance of the atmosphere a “thunderstorm,” that is, a cyclonic storm with strong winds, accompanied by thunder and lightning and also heavy rainfall or hail. Hail is mentioned in the Book of Mormon text but not within the accounts of the three hours of destruction (see Mosiah 12:6; Hel. 5:12).

Thunderstorms are extremely complex weather systems that can cause untold damage and even loss of life, especially from flash flooding. Every year more people die from the effects of thunderstorms than the combined total from lightning, hurricanes and tornadoes (NSSL: The National Severe Storms Laboratory, *Severe Weather 101: Thunderstorm*



*Basics*). The causal factors of thunderstorms and their various forms can be described as follows.

Thunderstorms result from the rapid upward movement of warm, moist air. They can occur inside warm, moist air masses and at fronts. As the warm, moist air moves upward, it cools, condenses, and forms cumulonimbus clouds that can reach heights of over 20 km (12.45 miles). As the rising air reaches its dew point, water droplets and ice form and begin falling the long distance through the clouds towards the Earth's surface. As the droplets fall, they collide with other droplets and become larger. The falling droplets create a downdraft of cold air and moisture that spreads out at the Earth's surface, causing the strong winds commonly associated with thunderstorms, and occasionally fog.

Thunderstorms can generally form and develop in any particular geographic location, perhaps most frequently within areas located at mid-latitude when warm moist air collides with cooler air. Thunderstorms are responsible for the development and formation of many severe weather phenomena. Thunderstorms, and the phenomena that occur along with them, pose great hazards to populations and landscapes. Damage that results from thunderstorms is mainly inflicted by downburst winds, large hailstones, and flash flooding caused by heavy precipitation. Stronger thunderstorm cells are capable of producing tornadoes and waterspouts.

...

Warm air has a lower density than cool air, so warm air rises within cooler air (this effect can be seen with a hot air balloon). Clouds form as relatively warmer air carrying moisture rises within cooler air. As the moist air rises, it cools causing some of the water vapor in the rising packet of air to condense. When the moisture condenses, it releases energy known as latent heat of vaporization, which allows the rising



Lightning strikes accompanying an approaching thunderstorm.

packet of air to cool less than the surrounding air, continuing the cloud's ascension. If enough instability is present in the atmosphere, this process will continue long enough for cumulonimbus clouds to form, which support lightning and thunder. (*Wikipedia*, Thunderstorm)

Thunderstorms give rise to not only violent winds, thunder, lightning and heavily precipitation but also devastating flash flooding and even tornadoes—all causing severe damage and potential loss of life.

## Tempests

The term “tempest,” mentioned eight times in the Book of Mormon accounts of the three hours of destruction, is an older English word meaning,

**A violent storm of wind**, usually accompanied by a downfall of rain, hail, or snow, or by thunder.

Thus a “tempest” is associated with thunderstorms but with emphasis on the violent nature of the devastating winds. Here is Mormon’s account of the “tempests.”



Violent winds preceding a severe storm.

And there was also **a great and terrible tempest**; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

...

But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of **the tempest** and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

...

And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of **the tempests**, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

...

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and **the tempest**, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and 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—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:6, 12, 17, 19; see also, 1 Ne. 19:11, Hel. 14:23, 27; 3 Ne. 10:14; note also, 1 Ne. 18:13-14, 21, where Nephi indicates the relationship between a tempest and a storm)

## Thunders and Lightnings

Thunder and lightning occur together as products of thunderstorms.

Thunder is described as,

**The loud noise accompanying a flash of lightning** (apparently following it, being heard after it at an interval depending on distance), due to the sudden violent disturbance of the air by the electric discharge; varying from a sharp report or crash to a prolonged roll or reverberation. Also, the unseen cause of the phenomenon, the meteorological condition or action (scientifically, the electric storm and discharge) from which the loud noise proceeds.



Lightning accompanying a desert storm.

Lightning is defined as,

**The visible discharge of electricity** between one group of clouds and another, or between the clouds and the ground.

Lightning and thunder are mentioned numerous times in the Book of Mormon record. As informed by an angel, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that,

Yea, at the time that [the Savior] shall yield up the ghost there shall be **thunderings and lightnings** for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;

...

And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me; for he said unto me that there should be **thunderings and lightnings** for the space of many hours.

And he said unto me that while the **thunder and the lightning** lasted, and the tempest, that these things should be, and that darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days. (Hel. 14:21, 26-27; see also, 1 Ne. 12:4; 19:11)

Mormon mentions “thunderings and lightnings” several times.

And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible **thunder**, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

...

But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and **the thunderings and the lightnings**, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

...

And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and **the thunderings, and the lightnings**, and the quaking of the earth.

...

And it came to pass that when **the thunderings, and the lightnings**, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and 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—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:6, 12, 17, 19)

Curiously, Mormon twice asserts that the face of the earth was “changed” and “deformed” because of not only the tempests, whirlwinds and lightning, but also the thunder (3 Ne. 8:12, 17). In older English, however, “thunder” was,

Regarded as the destructive agent producing the effects usually attributed to **the lightning**; [that is] a thunderstroke or ‘thunderbolt’.

We note volcanism can cause lightning but normally not on the scale depicted in these Book of Mormon accounts where lightning is solely associated with tempests and whirlwinds.

## **Whirlwinds**

“Whirlwind” is the older English word for “tornado” and is defined in the OED as,

**A whirling or rotating wind**; an atmospheric eddy or vortex; a body of air moving rapidly in a circular or upward spiral course around a vertical or slightly inclined axis which has also a progressive motion over the surface of land or water.

In its larger forms it constitutes a violent and destructive storm, as **a cyclone or tornado**; over a body of water it sometimes causes a waterspout, over a sandy or dusty region a sand-pillar or dust-whirl.

Mormon mentions four times the “whirlwinds” that occurred during the three hours of destruction.

But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and **the whirlwinds**, and the thunderings and the

lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

...

**And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind;** and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away. (3 Ne. 8:12,16)

And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and **they were not carried away in the whirlwind;** neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness.

And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and **by whirlwinds,** and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. (3 Ne. 10:13-14)



Multiple vortexes of whirlwinds (tornadoes).

Note that Mormon refers to “whirlwinds” in the plural. Tornadoes can be spawned from the cyclonic action and low pressure of thunderstorms and often have multiple vortexes occurring simultaneously within short range of each other. Wind speeds of tornadoes have been measured up to 300 miles per hour. The extremely low air-pressure cells and fierce wind speeds of tornadoes often carry cars, buildings, animals and even humans great distances (see *Wikipedia*, Tornado). As noted, Mormon states “there were some who were

carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away” (3 Ne. 8:12, 16; see also, 3 Ne.10:13-14).

Did hurricanes play a role in this mix of destructive atmospheric disturbances? Hurricanes, like tornadoes, are cyclonic storms and could be considered types of “whirlwinds.” They are differentiated by their origin—hurricanes originate over subtropical oceans and tornadoes generally form over land in the midlatitudes. The word “hurricane” is a late arrival into the English language, coming by way of Spanish from a Carib word of the West Indies where it referred to extensive subtropical storms. It did not become a common English word until the late 1600s. Thus we should not expect the word “hurricane” to be part of the Book of Mormon lexicon. Hurricanes originate over extremely warm areas of ocean water and move slowly poleward for days as low-pressure cyclones, sometimes reaching land where heavy rainfall and flooding cause more damage and loss of life than the fierce cyclonic winds which attain speeds of between 75 and 150 miles per hour. We suggest the problem of including hurricanes into the mix of atmospheric disturbances, however, is the limitation of a three-hour destructive period in the Book of Mormon record, and the lack of words and phrases in the text, including older English words, which could differentiate hurricane conditions from those of tornadoes. Seldom if ever does devastating activity from hurricanes happen within such a short period of time—instead it extends over many hours and even several days.

## **Fires**

Nephi saw in vision that many cities “were burned with fire.”

And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many **cities** that they were sunk; **and I saw many that they were burned with fire**; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4; see also, 1 Ne. 19:11)

The Lord through Samuel prophesied that,

Yea, wo unto this great **city of Zarahemla**; for behold, it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved; yea, wo unto this great city, for I perceive, saith the Lord, that there are many, yea, even the more part of this great city, that will harden their hearts against me, saith the Lord.

But blessed are they who will repent, for them will I spare. But behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that **fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it**. But behold, it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared. But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction; yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her. (Hel. 13:12-14)



A village rapidly destroyed by fire.

Mormon recorded that the city of Zarahemla took fire, which he associated with “sharp lightnings.”

And there were exceedingly **sharp lightnings**, such as never had been known in all the land.

**And the city of Zarahemla did take fire.** (3 Ne. 8:7-8)

The Lord by voice from heaven declared the burning of Zarahemla and its inhabitants and other cities and their inhabitants by fire.

Behold, **that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire**, and the inhabitants thereof.

...

And behold, **that great city Jacobugath**, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I **caused to be burned with fire** because of their sins and their wickedness, which 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; therefore **I did cause them to be**

**burned**, to destroy them from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them.

And behold, **the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I 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 to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations.

And because they did cast them all out, that there were none righteous among them, **I did send down fire and destroy them**, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom I sent among them might not cry unto me from the ground against them. (3 Ne. 9:3, 9-11; see also, 3 Ne. 10:13-14)

From Mormon's accounts it appears lightning was the cause of the fires that burned at least six cities. In addition to igniting fires, it is estimated 24,000 people around the world are killed each year by lightning strikes and some 240,000 are injured (*Wikipedia*, Lightning strike).



A wildfire destroys desert flora.

## Tectonic Disturbances

### Earthquakes (Quakings)

“Earthquakes” or “quakings” are clearly part of the three hours of destruction. Both words had the same meaning in older English, but the word “earthquake” is more common today than its abbreviated form as “quake.” An “earthquake” is defined as,

**A shaking or movement of the ground**; especially a violent convulsion of the earth's surface, frequently causing great destruction, and resulting from movements within the earth's crust or from volcanic action.

Major earthquakes are confined to particular active regions of the earth's crust corresponding to the edges of crustal plates, and most are due to the release of strain energy associated with the relative motions of the plates. The magnitude of earthquakes is now expressed by the Richter scale, destructive earthquakes generally measuring between about 7 and 9.



Nephi saw in vision the results of quaking, lightnings and heard thunderings and earthquakes.

And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and **earthquakes**, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of **the quaking** thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4; see also, 2 Ne. 6:15)

Mormon describes the “quaking of the earth” at the time of the three hours of destruction.

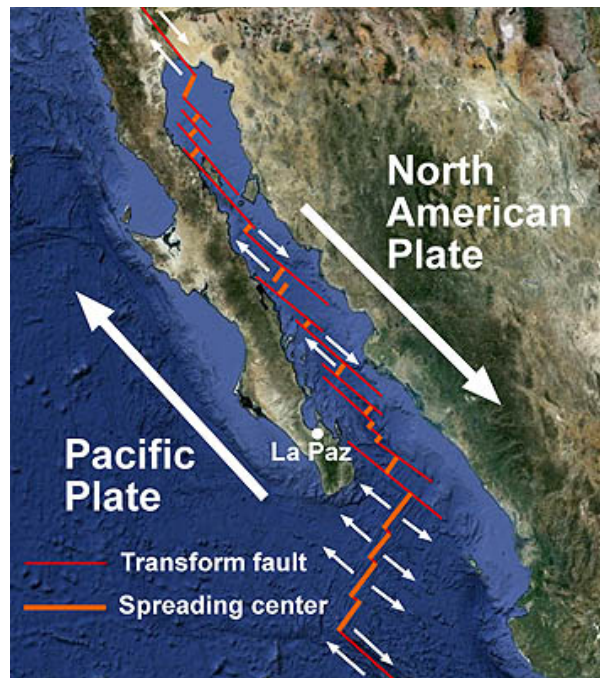
But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, **and the exceedingly great quaking** of the whole earth;

...

And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, **and the quaking** of the earth.

...

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, **and the quakings** of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and 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—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:12, 17, 19)



Major fault lines in Baja California associated with the Pacific Ring of Fire.

Earthquakes occur over many parts of the world, but especially along the Pacific Ring of Fire in such areas as Japan, China, New Zealand, Alaska, California and the peninsula of Baja California.

It is estimated that around 500,000 earthquakes occur each year, detectable with current instrumentation.

...

Most of the world's earthquakes (90%, and 81% of the largest) take place in the 40,000 km long, horseshoe-shaped zone called the circum-Pacific seismic belt, known as the Pacific Ring of Fire, which for the most part bounds the Pacific Plate. Massive earthquakes tend to occur along other plate boundaries, too, such as along the Himalayan Mountains.

...  
 Shaking and ground rupture are the main effects created by earthquakes, principally resulting in more or less severe damage to buildings and other rigid structures. The severity of the local effects depends on the complex combination of the earthquake magnitude, the distance from the epicenter, and the local geological and geomorphological conditions, which may amplify or reduce wave propagation.

...  
 Earthquakes, along with severe storms, volcanic activity, coastal wave attack, and wildfires, can produce slope instability leading to landslides, a major geological hazard.

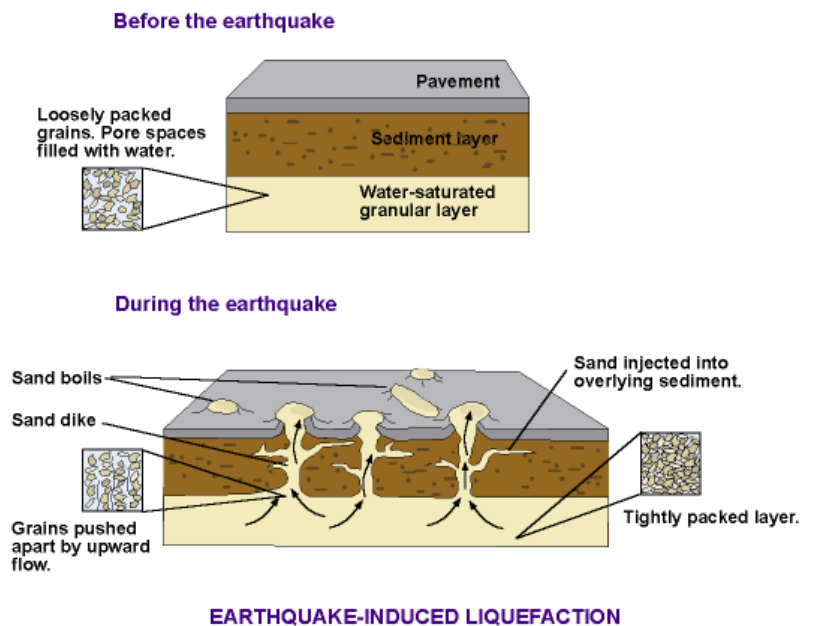
...  
 Soil liquefaction occurs when, because of the shaking, water-saturated granular material (such as sand) temporarily loses its strength and transforms from a solid to a liquid. Soil liquefaction may cause rigid structures, like buildings and bridges, to tilt or sink into the liquefied deposits. For example, in the 1964 Alaska earthquake, soil liquefaction caused many buildings to sink into the ground, eventually collapsing upon themselves.

...  
 One of the most devastating earthquakes in recorded history was the 1556 Shaanxi earthquake, which occurred on 23 January 1556 in Shaanxi province, China. More than 830,000 people died. (*Wikipedia, Earthquakes*)

Soil liquefaction during earthquakes causes the ground to act like a liquid and could account for some of the devastation recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Soil liquefaction describes a phenomenon whereby a saturated or partially saturated soil substantially loses strength and stiffness in response to an applied stress, usually earthquake shaking or other sudden change in stress condition, causing it to behave like a liquid.

...  
 Although the effects of liquefaction have been long understood, it was more thoroughly brought to the attention of engineers after the 1964 Niigata earthquake and 1964 Alaska earthquake. It was also a major factor in the destruction in San Francisco's Marina District during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, and in Port of Kobe during the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake. More recently



Soil-liquefaction causes the ground to behave like a liquid.

liquefaction was largely responsible for extensive damage to residential properties in the eastern suburbs and satellite townships of Christchurch, New Zealand during the 2010 Canterbury earthquake and more extensively again following the Christchurch earthquakes that followed in early and mid-2011. (*Wikipedia*, Soil liquefaction)

## Meaning of Words Describing Earthquake Activity

Along with substantial loss of life, earthquakes can cause ground ruptures, floods, volcanic activity, quicksand, quick clay, soil liquefaction, groanings, tsunamis, and slope instability leading to landslides. The complex devastation from earthquakes can be confusing and difficult to interpret in the Book of Mormon accounts. Knowing the meanings of older English words and phrases such as “rent,” “rend,” “rent in twain,” “carried up,” “sunk,” “mountains” and “great” can help sort out causes and effects.

### Meaning of term “rocks rent (rend)”

In the Book of Mormon account “rocks are rent in twain” during the earthquakes. In older English “rent” or “rend” meant broken in two (twain) by tearing or splitting, thereby causing a cleft, fissure or rupture in rock formations. The term “rent” or “rend” occurs several times.



One of thousands of large rocks “rent in twain” in the Cataviña area of Baja California.

*Nephi quoting Zenos:* And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. **And the rocks of the earth must rend;** and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers. (1 Ne. 19:12)

*Nephi:* And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; **and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent;** and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4)

*Samuel:* Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; **and the rocks** which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, **shall be broken up;**

**Yea, they shall be rent in twain**, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.

And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.

**And many highways shall be broken up**, and many cities shall become desolate. (Hel. 14:21-24)

*Mormon:* And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward.

But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

**And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough.**

...

And behold, **the 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. (3 Ne. 8:11-13, 18)

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, **and the rocks did cease to rend**, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

**And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood**; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. (3 Ne. 10:9-10; see also, 3 Ne. 10:14)

## Meaning of word “sunk, sink”

The words “sunk” or “sink” as verbs appear several times in the Book of Mormon text. Understandably, these terms have several meanings.

[To be] **sunk in water**; submerged in, or situated beneath the surface of, water or other liquid.

To become partly or completely **submerged in quicksand**, marshy ground, snow, etc.

To subside or go down into, to be **swallowed up by, the earth**, etc.

Thus a city that is “sunk” could be *covered* by water from flash floods or by earth and rock from landslides. In contrast, some cities could have “sunk” *down into* the earth by liquefaction or into the sea by a massive landslide falling down upon them from the cliffs of a coast. We note only the city of Moroni—located along the eastern seacoast of the land of Zarahemla—actually “sunk” into the sea (3 Ne. 8:9; 9:4).

*Nephi:* And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; **and I saw many cities that they were sunk;** and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4)

*Mormon:* **And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea,** and the inhabitants thereof were drowned.

...

**And many great and notable cities were sunk,** and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate. (3 Ne. 8:9, 14)

*The Lord:* And behold, **that great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea,** and the inhabitants thereof to be drowned.

...

And behold, **the city of Gilgal have I caused to be sunk,** and the inhabitants thereof to be **buried up in the depths of the earth;**

Yea, and **the city of Onihah** and the inhabitants thereof, **and the city of Mocum** and the inhabitants thereof, **and the city of Jerusalem** and the inhabitants thereof; **and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof,** to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them.

And behold, **the city of Gadiandi, and the city of Gadiomnah, and the city of Jacob, and the city of Gimgimno, all these have I caused to be sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof;** and the inhabitants thereof have I buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them. (3 Ne. 9:4, 6-8)

Mormon notes that some cities were “sunk” by being “buried up in the earth.”

**And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth;** and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness. (3 Ne. 10:13)



A rockslide in California.

Mormon indicates that some cities were “sunk” by the waters that covered them, and decades later they could not be “renewed.”

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 Ne. 1:9)

### **Meaning of word “mountain”**

The word “mountain” is a generic term for “a large natural elevation of the earth’s surface,” but its specific meaning is a reflection of culture or local usage. The OED points out that, “down to the 18th century” the term mountain “often applied to elevations of moderate altitude.” The term “mountain” also meant an earth formation of much lesser height, such as those caused by the effects of earthquakes and flash flooding. Thus a “mountain” could be,

**A heap or mound of earth, sand, or other material,** raised or formed by human or other agency.



A small section of a massive rockslide in Baja California, caused by flash flooding in 2013.

We suggest one has to use caution when applying a meaning to the word “mountain” in the Book of Mormon accounts, especially when “mountain” features are “carried up” quickly within a three-hour period of time as the result of storms and earthquakes. It is tempting to conjure up a mental image of an immense or towering earth formation when we encounter the term “mountain.” (See the sections “carried up” and “great,” below)

*Nephi quoting Zenos:* For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, **and by mountains which shall be carried up.** (1 Ne. 19:11)

Nephi in vision saw “mountains tumbling into pieces,” the inverse of mountain building.

And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; **and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces;** and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4)

*Nephi quoting the Lord:* And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; **and mountains shall cover them,** and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder. (2 Ne. 26:5)

*Samuel:* And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be **many mountains laid low, like unto a valley,** and there shall be many places which are now called **valleys which shall become mountains,** whose height is great. (Hel. 14:23)

## Meaning of term “carried up”

Like with many prepositions in the English language, it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of the prepositional phrase “carried up” as it applies to the formation of a mountain. In older English it simply meant the process of increasing in size or height:

To continue (building, etc.) to **a given height.**

*Nephi quoting Zenos:* For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and

vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, **and by mountains which shall be carried up.** (1 Ne. 19:11)

*Mormon:* **And the earth was carried up upon** the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain. (3 Ne. 8:10; see also, 3 Ne. 9:5)

### **Meaning of word “great”**

The word “great” occurs 31 times in the Book of Mormon accounts of the three hours of destruction and the three days of darkness and surprisingly 19 times in the 21 verses of one of Mormon’s descriptions (3 Ne. 8:5-25). Along with the “great city” of Zarahemla, even newly built military cities, such as Moroni and Moronihah are referred to as “great” (3 Ne. 9:3–5). If one attempts to define the word “great” solely in the superlative sense of being very large or expansive, the phrase, “great city,” or even “great mountain” can be misleading. In older English the term “great” in this context refers to the role or noteworthiness of the city and not its size. A great city would be a capital city (political, administrative, military or monarchical) or a city that functions as a central marketplace or in any significant role, even though its size could be rather small. Four times Nephi refers to the Jerusalem of his youth as a “great city” (1 Ne. 1:4; 2:13; 10:3; 11:13). Some 2,000 years ago the city of Jerusalem occupied a small area of some 1,600 feet by 1,200 feet or 45 acres, with a population of less than 10,000 (see Map 12, “Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus,” in the LDS Bible *Appendix*). Thus a city could be called “great” if it had a distinctive attribute relative to other cities, or a “mountain” formed by a landslide could be designated “great” even if its height was only 20 feet above the surrounding terrain.

As an example, Mormon describes the devastation that befell the city of Moronihah by mentioning “a great mountain.”

And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a **great mountain.** (3 Ne. 8:10; see also, 3 Ne. 10:13)

In contrast, here is the Lord’s declaration on the same event where he refers to the city of Moronihah as “great” and not the earth that covered it.

And behold, that **great city Moronihah** have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof, to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them. (3 Ne. 9:5)



We suggest caution when considering words such as “great,” “sunk,” “mountain” and “carried up.” They all had meanings which are often dissimilar from those in use today.

## An Inventory of Destruction

Cities and the Destruction that Caused them to Become Desolate (3 Ne. 8-9)

	Buried by Sea Water	Buried by Earth	Destroyed by Fire	Destroyed by Flooding	
<b>Moroni</b>	✔				3 Ne. 8:9; 9:4
<b>Moronihah</b>		✔			3 Ne. 8:10, 25; 9:5
<b>Gilgal</b>		✔			3 Ne. 9:6
<b>Jacob</b>		✔			3 Ne. 9:8
<b>Gadiandi</b>		✔			3 Ne. 9:8
<b>Gingimno</b>		✔			3 Ne. 9:9
<b>Gadiomnah</b>		✔			3 Ne. 9:10
<b>Zarahemla</b>			✔		3 Ne. 8:8, 24; 9:3
<b>Jacobogath</b>			✔		3 Ne. 9:9
<b>Laman</b>			✔		3 Ne. 9:10
<b>Gad</b>			✔		3 Ne. 9:11
<b>Josh</b>			✔		3 Ne. 9:12
<b>Kishkumen</b>			✔		3 Ne. 9:13
<b>Onihah</b>				✔	3 Ne. 9:7
<b>Mocum</b>				✔	3 Ne. 9:7
<b>Jerusalem</b>				✔	3 Ne. 9:7

## **Did volcanic activity cause some of the destruction?**

It is understandable that one would wish to add dramatic volcanic activity to the list of destructive agents. We share this desire, but one should recognize there are problems when attempting to stretch the descriptions in the Book of Mormon text to include volcanic activity as a causal force. For example, there are no words or phrases that uniquely describe a volcanic event such as “eruptions,” “lava flows” or “ash” in the air or on the ground, even within their possible meanings in older English. It is true that some of the recorded effects such as darkness, lightning, ground movement and fires could be caused by volcanic activity, but as we have noted, one should be careful when attempting to link unstated causes to these effects if there are other agents such as tempests (thunderstorms), whirlwinds (tornadoes) and earthquakes which are actually mentioned in the text and can produce the same effects. Possibly the greatest problem with including volcanism is the need to conform to the limitation of a three-hour destructive period. Seldom if ever does devastating activity from volcanoes happen within such a short period of time—instead it extends over many hours and even several days.

We find it instructive to compare eyewitness accounts of recent volcanic eruptions with descriptions in the Book of Mormon. For example, on the morning of May 18, 1980, the citizenry of Ritzville and Yakima, Washington, received the greatest amounts of falling ash from the massive and historic eruption of Mount St. Helens. Their most serious challenge came from the lingering effects of the volcanic ash and not the darkness which lasted less than a day before the ash cloud—“oblong-shaped, 40 miles long, 30 wide and more than 6 miles deep”—moved eastward, affecting other communities. According to reports, the next “morning broke bright and clear.” The depth of the ash (up to five inches) and the almost impossibility of removing the ash by sweeping or washing it away, along with problems of breathing, toxicity and acrid smell were the critical issues people faced (“Mount St. Helens remembered: ‘God is speaking,’” *The Seattle Times*, May 14, 2000; and *Wikipedia*, 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens). The Book of Mormon account presents a completely different set of concerns during the three days of darkness and never mentions challenges from the effects of volcanic ash. Moreover, volcanic ash, unlike other potential causes of the three days of darkness, does not disperse suddenly, as required by the timing in the Book of Mormon account.

## The Three Days of Darkness

By closely adhering to the text of the Book of Mormon and taking into consideration the meaning of words as they were used in older English, we propose the three days of darkness in the Nephite lands between the time of the Savior's death and resurrection were caused by the sudden appearance of *heavy fog*. This fog condition is described as "thick darkness," "mists of darkness" and "vapor of darkness," which quickly "dispersed" after the three days. As previously noted, this conclusion is also based on our professional experience with natural phenomena and our work with the Book of Mormon text, especially older English definitions.



The density of thick fog is difficult to depict in a photograph.

Why don't the Book of Mormon accounts of the three days of darkness mention the word fog? Well, they do, but with words having an equivalent meaning. Thus the translations of these accounts use older English words and phrases to describe what we today call fog.

The following are the English words and phrases depicting fog in the Book of Mormon text, as based on their older meanings:

### **Mist (Mists of Darkness)**

In the OED a “mist” is defined as,

A natural phenomenon consisting of **a diffuse cloud of fine water droplets** suspended in the atmosphere on or near the ground so as to limit visibility; such droplets viewed collectively as a substance or medium.

Thus the word “mist” in older English meant a condition we would call fog today. Nephi saw in vision a “mist of darkness” or fog on the face of the land.

And it came to pass that I saw **a mist of darkness** on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. (1 Ne. 12:4)



Fog in the San Francisco Bay area.

Mormon also uses the same phrase, “mists of darkness,” to describe fog conditions.

And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were **the mists of darkness** which were upon the face of the land. (3 Ne. 8:22; see also, 1 Ne. 8:23-24; 1 Ne.12:17)

### **Vapor (Vapor of Darkness)**

In the OED a fog condition is also defined as a “vapor.”

An exhalation rising [be given off] by natural causes from the ground or from some damp place; frequently, **a mist or fog**.

Thus the word “vapor,” as in the phrase, “vapor of darkness,” meant in older English what we would call fog today. Nephi in vision saw the “vapor of darkness” or fog which passed from off the face of the earth.

And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw **the vapor of darkness**, that it passed from off the face of the earth; (1 Ne. 12:5)

Nephi quotes the words of Zenos depicting the “vapor of darkness” or fog.

For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and **vapor of darkness**, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up. (1 Ne. 19:11; see also, 1 Ne. 22:18)

Mormon also uses the phrase “vapor of darkness” to describe the fog on the land.

And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel **the vapor of darkness**; (3 Ne. 8:20)

And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by **fire**, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by **the vapor of smoke and of darkness**. (3 Ne. 10:13; see also, Morm. 8:29)

### **Thick (Thick Darkness)**

In the OED the word “thick” understandably has several possible meanings, but one meaning is the state of being dense, such as in this older definition of “thick.”

Of **mist, fog**, smoke, etc.: Having the component particles densely aggregated, so as to intercept or hinder vision. Hence of the weather, etc.: Characterized by mist or haze; **foggy, misty**.

Mormon equates “vapor of darkness” with “thick darkness.”

And it came to pass that there was **thick darkness** upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could **feel the vapor of darkness**; (3 Ne. 8:20)

Note the people could “feel” the “thick darkness.” Following the sending of plagues upon Pharaoh and his people, the Lord through Moses caused this same phenomenon of a thick darkness or fog “which may be felt” to remain for three days over the land of Egypt.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be **darkness** over the land of Egypt, even **darkness which may be felt**.

And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was **a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days:**

They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for **three days:** but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. (Ex. 10:21-23; see also, Ex. 10:15)

We suggest this fog condition of “thick darkness” was selective in location because the “children of Israel” in the outlying land of Goshen “had light in their dwellings,” whereas the Egyptians “saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days.” Fog conditions commonly occur in Egypt, but the area lacks volcanoes, therefore, one would not expect the “three days” of “thick darkness” to have been caused by volcanic ash.

Subsequent to this widespread fog condition in Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses from within a “thick darkness” or fog.



Fog enveloping the great pyramids of Egypt.

And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto **the thick darkness** where God was.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (Ex. 20:21-22)

These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of **the thick darkness**, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me. (Deut. 5:22; see also, 1 Kgs. 8:12; Joel 2:2; Acts 13:11; 2 Pet. 2:17; JS—H 1:15)

## The Darkness

The term “darkness” is generally defined as,

Absence or want of light (total or partial).

The OED, however, notes “darkness” in older English had a meaning beyond merely the absence of light. Darkness could indicate,

**A condition or environment** [such as fog] which conceals from sight, observation, or knowledge.

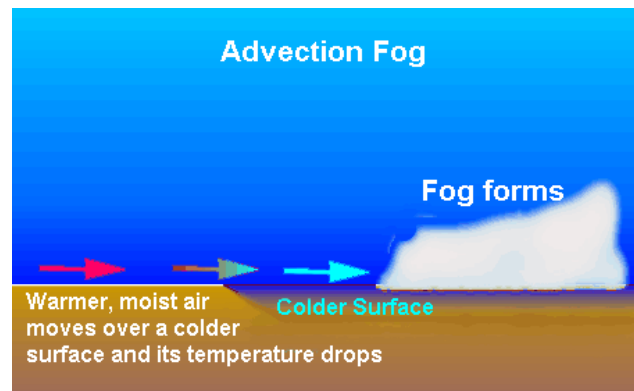
Mormon characterizes “the darkness” as something that could be quickly “dispersed from off the face of the land,” such as fog.

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. **And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land**, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away. (3 Ne. 10:9)

## The Process of Fog Formation

We propose the phrases “mists of darkness,” “vapor of darkness,” “thick darkness” and “the darkness” in the Book of Mormon text all refer to an atmospheric condition we today would call fog. Fog is “a thick cloud of tiny water droplets suspended in the atmosphere at or near the earth’s surface that obscures or restricts visibility,” sometimes to a few feet or less. Fog is actually a low-lying cloud

formed at the earth’s surface. Today the meteorological definition of mist is the same as for fog, but a mist by convention has a visibility beyond one kilometer. Fog occurs when humid air cools rapidly, for example when air comes into contact with surfaces that are much cooler than the air. Fog can form in a number of ways, depending on topography and how the cooling that causes the condensation takes place, including adiabatic cooling (cooling by increasing altitude under conditions of thermal equilibrium). The various cooling types and processes include radiation fog, ground fog, advection fog, evaporation fog, frontal fog, valley fog and upslope fog. A prevalent type is advection fog.



Advection fog occurs when moist air passes over a cool surface by advection (wind) and is cooled. ... It is most common at sea when **moist air encounters cooler waters**, including areas of cold water upwelling, such as along the California coast.

The advection of fog along the California coastline is propelled onto land by one of several processes. A cold front can push the marine layer coast-ward, an occurrence most typical in the spring or late fall. During the summer months, a low pressure trough produced by **intense heating inland creates a strong pressure gradient, drawing in the dense marine layer**. (*Wikipedia, Fog*; see also, San Francisco fog)

Two or more fog types can combine to form a single fog mass. Advection fog often mixes with radiation fog where a cool ground causes condensation in the surface air by heat conduction. The formation of fog within the topographic limits of a valley is also common:

Valley fog forms in mountain valleys, often during winter. It is essentially a radiation fog confined by local topography, **and can last for several days** under certain conditions. In California's Central Valley, valley fog is often referred to as **Tule fog**. (*Wikipedia, Fog*)

The thick Tule fog of central California can stretch contiguously from Red Bluff on the north to Bakersfield 400 miles to the south and often extends westward through the Golden Gate bridge. This dense fog, with a visibility down to ten feet or less and often near zero, can last for days and even weeks, contributing to numerous vehicle accidents. (See *Wikipedia, Tule fog*)

These prevalent types of fog occur in many locations around the world, especially in desert and Mediterranean climate areas on the west coasts of continents such as the coastal regions of the state of California and the peninsula of Baja California. The cold California Current, which circulates from north to south



A thick bank of fog blankets the Central Valley of California. The fog is bracketed by the Cascades to the North, the Coastal Ranges to the West and the Sierra Nevada (mountains) to the East. This particular type of winter fog, or Tule fog, occurs at night when the surface cools quickly; it happens during the rainy season and can persist for weeks. Essentially, all types of fog are clouds that are in contact with ground and can reduce visibility to as little as 3 meters (10 feet) or even to zero in extreme cases. (NASA satellite image)



along the coast of North America, is much cooler than the warm inland air along this same coastline. The California redwood forests and many types of desert vegetation can thrive essentially from the condensation that forms under these fog conditions. Pronghorn antelope in the Vizcaíno Desert of central Baja California can survive with fog condensation or morning dew as their sole sources of water.

### **Rapid Formation and Dispersion of Fog**

In the Book of Mormon account, the three days of darkness appear suddenly and end just as abruptly—possibly within an hour. Mormon describes the onset of the darkness or fog.

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and 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—**and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land.**

And it came to pass that there was **thick darkness** upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; (3 Ne. 8:19-20)

The older English word “behold” in the phrase “and then behold” is an imperative,

Used to direct attention to **the presence or approach of something**, or to what is about to be said; [for example], Look! See! Behold! Frequently in phrase *lo and behold*.

It appears Mormon desired to draw attention in the record to the sudden appearance of the darkness or fog. When fog forms quickly it is called “flash fog.”

Mormon noted that after three days of darkness the fog dispersed from off the face of the land “in the morning.” The Jewish day (and thus the Nephite day) began at sunset, followed by a brief period called the evening, even or eventide. The evening is the time between sunset and complete darkness, a variable period of dusk or partial darkness lasting about an hour. The “morning” is the short time between when the first light of the day could be seen and the time the sun actually appeared over the horizon (sunrise). This time period was called the “morning” and lasted up to an hour (see, for example, 1 Ne. 16:10; Alma 56:39, 41-42; 62:23; Matt. 27:1; Mark 1:35; 15:1; 16:2). We sometimes call this *dawn*. Sunrise time varies throughout the year, but at the spring equinox, the time of the year when the three days of darkness was upon the land, sunrise occurs at about 6:00 AM.

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. **And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land**, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away. (3 Ne. 10:9)

Nephi describes the dissipation of the “vapor of darkness” or fog he saw in vision:

And it came to pass after I saw these things, **I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth**; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. (1 Ne. 12:5)

The phrase “passed from off of the face of the earth” contains the older English expression “pass off.” In the context of mists and vapor, “pass off” meant:

Of a vapour or other substance: to leave or come away from, especially **by evaporation**.

In other words, “pass off” or “passed from off” in this context refers to the process of “evaporation” which is exactly what the condensed water droplets do in fog when they dissipate and pass from a liquid (condensation) form to a gaseous state by the process of



Fog dispersion in a desert landscape.

evaporation. Informally we often use the expressions “to burn off” or “to lift off” to describe the rapid evaporation and disappearance of the tiny water droplets forming fog. In older English the terms “dissipate” and “disperse” had similar meanings:

*Dissipate:* To dispel by dispersion or minute diffusion (**mist, clouds**, etc.); **to cause to disappear**.

*Disperse:* To dissipate; to remove, dispel, **cause to disappear** (**vapours, humours [meaning moisture]**, trouble, etc.)

Fog forms at temperatures where the relative humidity is near 100 percent. This is called the dew point or saturation point. If an air mass is warmed, even a degree or two, the relative humidity decreases below the dew point, and the fog rapidly “disappears” in minutes when the water particles evaporate. In contrast, volcanic ash in the air does not “disappear” or dissipate by evaporation nor does it disperse quickly, often taking days or even a week or more to disappear completely.

## **Sun, Moon and Stars Darkened**

The prophet Samuel prophesied that “for the space of three days” the sun, moon and stars would “be darkened.”

But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death **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 he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead. (Hel. 14:20)

The verb “darkened” in older English meant: “to become obscure,” and “to make dark, to deprive of light; to shut out or obstruct the light of.” Mormon states that the “mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land” were the cause of the “darkened” sun, moon and stars and the inability to see fire. It was the heavy fog that obscured the sun, moon, stars and fires for three days.

**And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land.**

And it came to pass that it did last **for the space of three days that there was no light seen**; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. (3 Ne. 8:22-23; see also, Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; 2 Ne. 23:10)

A “glimmer” in older English was the feeble or wavering light of a fire. Smoke from the pervasive fires would have added to the obfuscation of the fog causing what we would call “smog.”

*Mormon:* And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by **the vapor of smoke and of darkness.**

And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and **by smoke**, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. (3 Ne, 10:13-14; see also, 3 Ne. 10:11)

We suggest that during the three days of darkness the sun understandably continued to rise and set each day, and a sufficient ambient illumination would have been present throughout the daytime such that the people could discern night from day and count the days.



Sun nearly obscured by dense fog.

## No Light from Candles, Torches or Wood Fires

Mormon records that in addition to the obscuring of the sun, moon and stars, the people could not light candles, torches or fine wood.

And it came to pass that there was **thick darkness** upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness;

**And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood,** so that there could not be any light at all; (3 Ne. 8:20-21)

The term “torch” in older English meant “a light which was carried in the hand, consisting of a stick of resinous wood, or of twisted hemp or similar material soaked with tallow, resin, or other inflammable substance.” The word “fine” in the context of “fine and exceedingly dry wood” meant “very small in bulk or thickness; extremely thin or slender.” We suggest the nearly 100 percent relative humidity of the “thick darkness” (the heavy fog), combined with the inordinate amounts of rain from the thunderstorms during the preceding three hours of destruction, would have drenched flammable materials and covered them with fog condensation, thus preventing their igniting. This explanation provides a reasoned answer to what has been a long-standing question for some Book of Mormon readers: If the “thick darkness” were caused by volcanic ash in the air, why wouldn’t the lighting of wood, candles and torches still have been possible?



Wood soaked by condensation from high relative humidity.

## Baja California as the Setting for Book of Mormon Lands

In our analysis we propose two major causes of the three hours of destruction—storms and earthquakes. In turn, the storms spawned tornadoes (whirlwinds). These events were followed by three days of darkness as a consequence of fog. The required settings for these disastrous phenomena fall within the environmental and climatic purview of the

peninsular of Baja California and adjacent areas to the North. The peninsula is located along the tectonic boundary of two crustal plates—the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate—creating the potential for seismic activity. The San Andreas geological fault line extends along the Sea of Cortez from the state of California on the North to the eastern boundary of Baja California on the South.



Recent rockslide in "Valley of Alma" near San Javier in Baja California, caused by flash flooding (2013).

Because of a suitable atmospheric pressure regime and a midlatitude location, tornadoes occur from time to time in Baja California. Moreover, the cold California current in the eastern Pacific Ocean creates latent conditions for fog along the western coastline of the peninsula, where heating over inland areas creates a strong pressure gradient that draws in the fog. We propose there is no need to twist the wording of the text to match the physical environment of Book of Mormon lands to Baja California, nor do we need to ignore any recorded features or environmental conditions. In this article (and in all our articles) our intent has been to consider all relevant references in the Book of Mormon text and not to selectively choose from among the hundreds of applicable verses. For the record, Baja California from time to time is subject to devastating subtropical storms and hurricanes, and five dormant volcanoes are located in the area where we place the land of Zarahemla—*La Reforma, La Virgen, El Azufre, El Viejo and Isla Tortuga*.

In the last few years we have personally observed exceptional destruction on the land in Baja California. In the north of the peninsula there are hundreds of square miles of massive rocks which have been "rent in twain." In 2013 we traversed a once scenic valley clogged with boulders the size of cars, carried suddenly and rapidly downslope by extremely heavy rainfall only few months before. In 2014 we surveyed the unbelievable devastation from a 10-foot surge of water which formed unexpectedly only a few months before at the head of the Rio San Ignacio. This unusual storm caused extensive flash flooding along the length of the river, the same water course we propose as the river Sidon in the land of Zarahemla. All this overwhelming destruction might not have been at the elevated level mentioned in

the Book of Mormon accounts, but it showed the potential for such extreme conditions to suddenly occur.

We are currently involved in a comprehensive study of the geography of the Book of Mormon that affirms Lehi's family came from the land of Jerusalem in 600 B.C. to the peninsula of Baja California and there established their culture upon the land for some 1,000 years. The family's first settlement was near the southern end, but over the course of their tenure on the land they migrated to the northern areas of the peninsula in several stages before being "swept" off the land after a horrendous and devastating war. All of our work is published on our website: [achoiceand.com](http://achoiceand.com)

The Book of Mormon is a history of the record keepers—such as Nephi, Alma, Mormon and Ether—and not a history of their descendants or even their cousins. Thus the Book of Mormon text describes only the lands where these record keepers lived—the same lands which were the environmental setting for the three hours of destruction and the three days of darkness. After the last battles of the Nephites and Lamanites, the survivors were swept off these lands by divine decree and scattered to distant locations throughout the Americas. This fundamental truth is often overlooked in the search for Book of Mormon lands. We should not expect the present-day locations of the descendants of these scattered survivors to be the original lands of the record keepers, even though these progeny may possess cultural traits of their forefathers. Today we can find descendants of Biblical Jews in New York City, Europe and Russia, but it does not follow that these scattered locations are the homelands of the ancient Jewish record keepers. (See our article, *Prophesied Cursing and Blessing of Book of Mormon Lands*)



High water mark from flash flooding of the Rio San Ignacio (river Sidon) in Baja California (2014).

## The Lord's Justification for the “Signs and Wonders”

We conclude our analysis by quoting the Lord’s reproof words, as a voice from heaven, declaring the justification for the “signs and wonders” attending his death and resurrection —the three hours of destruction followed by the three days of darkness. As noted, his first words to the shocked survivors were “wo, wo, wo unto this people” (3 Ne. 9:2). The Lord had warned Lehi’s descendants numerous times through the prophets that their land, a “land choice above all other lands,” could only remain favored if they kept the commandments: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Ne. 1:20; and 17 equivalent references). The Lord’s rebuking words from heaven, amidst their grief and suffering, offered healing, mercy and eternal life to those who would come unto him.

And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

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. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. (3 Ne. 9:12-15)

These words should give us pause when likened to ourselves.

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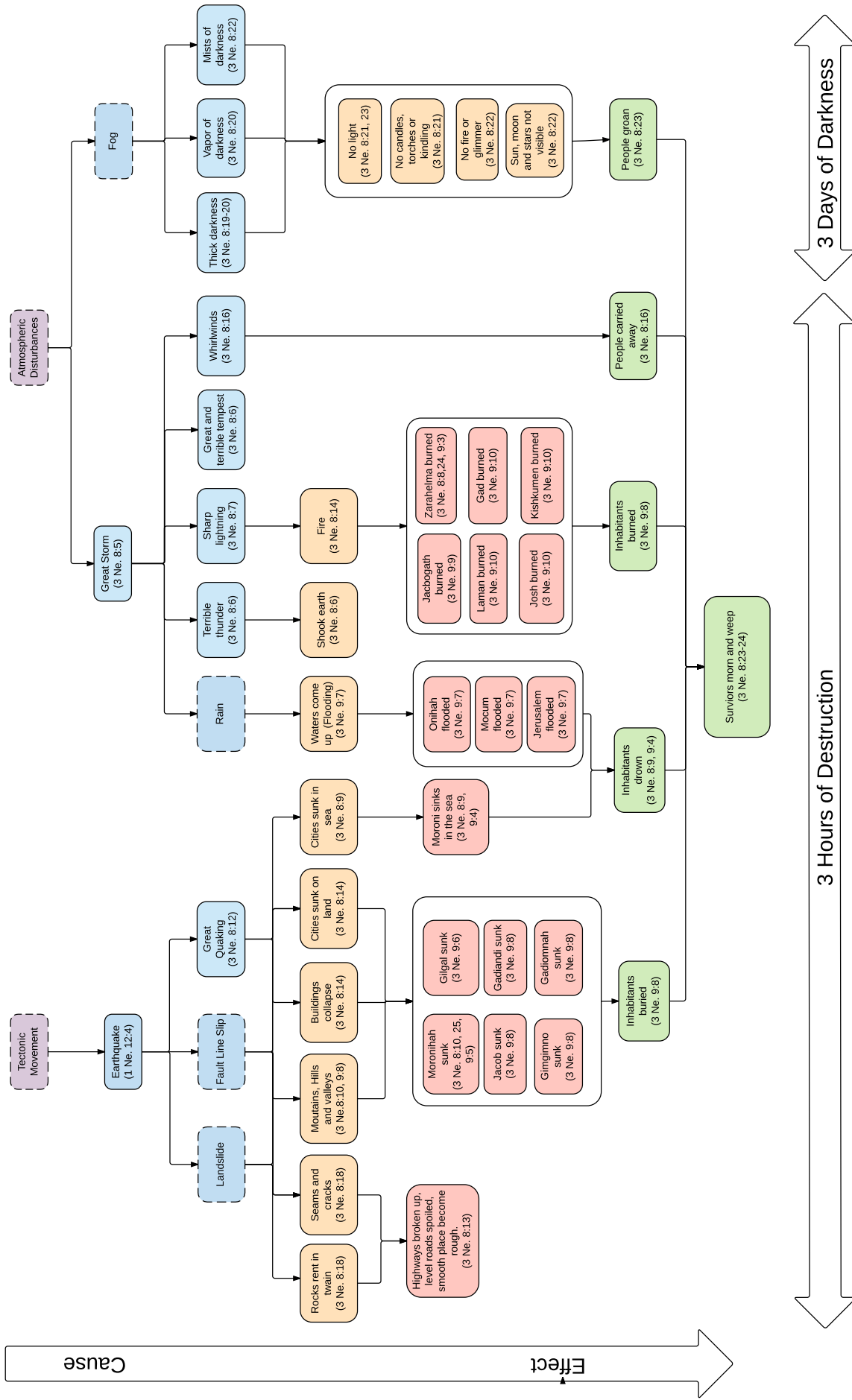
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# Cause and Effect



# **Book of Mormon Accounts of the Three Hours of Destruction and Three Hours of Darkness**

## **Nephi's account of Zenos' prophecies of the destruction and the darkness**

10 And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.

11 For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.

12 And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers. **(1 Ne. 19:10-12)**

## **Nephi's vision of the destruction and the darkness**

4 And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof.

5 And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. **(1 Ne. 12:4-5)**

## **Nephi's prophecy of the destruction and the darkness**

3 And after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth, and also of his death and resurrection; and great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked, for they shall perish; and they perish because they cast out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them; wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them.

4 Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble.

5 And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder.

6 And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts.

7 O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just.

8 But behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not, but look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs which are given, notwithstanding all persecution—behold, they are they which shall not perish. **(2 Ne. 26:3-8)**

### **Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy of the destruction and the darkness**

20 But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death 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 he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead.

21 Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;

22 Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.

23 And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.

24 And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate.

25 And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many.

26 And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me; for he said unto me that there should be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours.

27 And he said unto me that while the thunder and the lightning lasted, and the tempest, that these things should be, and that darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days.

28 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—

29 And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation. **(Hel. 14:20-29)**

### **Mormon's description of the actual destruction and the darkness**

5 And it came to pass in the \*thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

6 And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

7 And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land.

8 And the city of Zarahemla did take fire.

9 And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned.

10 And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moroni, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain.

11 And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward.

12 But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

13 And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough.

14 And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate.

15 And there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceedingly great, and there were many in them who were slain.

16 And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away.

17 And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

18 And behold, the 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.

19 And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and 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—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land.

20 And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness;

21 And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all;

22 And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land.

23 And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them.

24 And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla.

25 And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible. **(3 Ne. 8:5-25)**

### **The Savior's declaration on the extent of the destruction, as voiced during the darkness**

1 And it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land, crying:

2 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 Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof.

4 And behold, that great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof to be drowned.

5 And behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof, to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them.

6 And behold, the city of Gilgal have I caused to be sunk, and the inhabitants thereof to be buried up in the depths of the earth;

7 Yea, and the city of Onihah and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Mocom and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Jerusalem and the inhabitants thereof; and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them.

8 And behold, the city of Gadiandi, and the city of Gadiomnah, and the city of Jacob, and the city of Gimgimno, all these have I caused to be sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof; and the inhabitants thereof have I buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them.

9 And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness, which 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; therefore I did cause them to be burned, to destroy them from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them.

10 And behold, the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I 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 to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations.

11 And because they did cast them all out, that there were none righteous among them, I did send down fire and destroy them, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom I sent among them might not cry unto me from the ground against them.

12 And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

13 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?

14 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.

15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. **(3 Ne. 9:1-15; see also, 3 Ne. 9:16-22; 10:3-8)**

### **Mormon's description of events after the three days of darkness**

9 And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

10 And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.

11 And thus far were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets.

12 And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared—

13 And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness.

14 And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. **(3 Ne. 10:9-14)**

### **Mormon's account of the effect of the destruction after several decades.**

8 Yea, even that great city Zarahemla did they cause to be built again.

9 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 Ne. 1:8-9)**