

Days of Wickedness and Vengeance: Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7

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In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord comments upon the conditions of the world in these last days and his reaction to those conditions as follows:

And it shall come to pass, because of the wickedness of the world, that I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full; for behold, my blood will not cleanse them if they hear me not. (D&C 29:17)

We learn from this passage that there are times when the patience of the Lord comes to an end. Though he often endures the typical wickedness of the world with great longsuffering, there are times when he will not so endure. These times are marked by three factors: (1) human wickedness is great; (2) the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached to the wicked persons and they deliberately reject it; (3) the Lord invokes a temporal punishment upon these wicked people which destroys them off the face of the earth.

The Lord also specifically designates two time periods as “days of wickedness and vengeance” (Moses 7:46, 60). One such designated time is the meridian of time, as we see in the response to Enoch’s plea to know when the Savior will perform the Atonement:

And it came to pass that Enoch looked; and from Noah, he beheld all the families of the earth; and he cried unto the Lord, saying: When

shall the day of the Lord come? When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified and have eternal life? And the Lord said: It shall be in the meridian of time, in the days of wickedness and vengeance. And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world; and through faith I am in the bosom of the Father, and behold, Zion is with me. (Moses 7:45-47)

Wickedness of those to whom the Gospel had been preached characterized the meridian of time both at Jerusalem and in the new world, and in both cases was followed by the temporal vengeance of God.

The other days of wickedness and vengeance specifically denominated by the Lord are the latter days:

And Enoch beheld the Son of Man ascend up unto the Father; and he called unto the Lord, saying: Wilt thou not come again upon the earth? Forasmuch as thou art God, and I know thee, and thou has sworn unto me, and commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace; wherefore, I ask thee if thou wilt not come again on the earth. And the Lord said unto Enoch: As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfil the oath which I have made unto you concerning the children of Noah; and the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be upon the children of men, but my people will I preserve. (Moses 7:59-61)

With these two times as “days of wickedness and vengeance” in mind, let us now turn to a close inspection of 3 Nephi 6 and 7.

Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7

The Nephite “days of wickedness and vengeance” came at the end of a prolonged war with the Gadianton robbers. To defeat their enemies the Nephites had gathered into one city,

taking all their possessions and their flocks and herds and their stores of provisions. This forced the Gadianton robbers to attack the gathered forces of the Nephites since the robbers could not exist without being parasitic on someone who would work hard to produce food and other goods (3 Nephi 3–6). The Gadianton robbers attacked the main stronghold of the Nephites and were defeated. The crucial factor in this victory was the hand of God:

And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. And it came to pass that when the armies of Giddianhi saw this they began to shout with a loud voice, because of their joy, for they had supposed that the Nephites had fallen with fear because of the terror of their armies. But in this thing they were disappointed, for the Nephites did not fear them; but they did fear their God and did supplicate him for protection; therefore, when the armies of Giddianhi did rush upon them they were prepared to meet them; yea, in the strength of the Lord they did receive them. (3 Nephi 4:8–10)

After the victory, the Nephites recognized the source of their strength:

And it came to pass that they did break forth, all as one, in singing, and praising their God for the great thing which he had done for them, in preserving them from falling into the hands of their enemies. Yea, they did cry: Hosanna to the Most High God. And they did cry: Blessed be the name of the Lord God Almighty, the Most High God. And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction. (3 Nephi 4:31–33)

That recognition on the part of the Nephites is important because it is plain that they knew what they were doing and what God had done. The record further reports:

And now behold, there was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken; for they knew that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled. And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come, because of the many signs which had been given,

according to the words of the prophets; and because of the things which had come to pass already they knew that it must needs be that all things should come to pass according to that which had been spoken. Therefore they did forsake all their sins, and their abominations, and their whoredoms, and did serve God with all diligence day and night. (3 Nephi 5:1-3)

The record continues to note the blessings of God upon the Nephites:

And they began again to prosper and to wax great; and the twenty and sixth and seventh years passed away, and there was great order in the land; and they had formed their laws according to equity and justice. And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression. (3 Nephi 6:4-5)

Unfortunately, they did fall into transgression, notwithstanding the great deliverance and blessings which the Lord had poured out upon them in the very recent past:

But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceeding great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble; some did return railing for railing, while others would receive railing and persecution and all manner of afflictions, and would not turn and revile again, but were humble and penitent before God.

And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord. (3 Nephi 6:10-14)

We note that the beginning of the trouble among the Nephites was disputation; they ceased to see eye to eye because

some became lifted up in pride and arrogated to themselves a self-rightness that was a rejection of the ways of the Lord. Rejecting the Lord is the beginning of pride; pride is enmity towards God. Having pride leads to boasting and glorying in the greatness of some persons, in their riches, in their stations in society, and in their learning. Boasting and pride lead to putting many others down and elevating the few, which is the basis of persecution.

Mormon notes that the people began to be distinguished by ranks according to their riches and their chances for learning. When the Nephites were righteous, even the kings labored with their own hands to provide for the temporal support of their own households so as not to bring unnecessary burdens upon the people and to be equal with those over whom they reigned. (Mosiah 2:14; 6:7) When the priests and teachers of the Church were righteous they labored with their own hands for their own support and taught for nothing; teacher and hearers would leave their labors, savor the word of God together, and return to their labors rejoicing:

And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men; that they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support. Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God. (Mosiah 27:3-5)

In Alma we read:

And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy,

and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely. (Alma 1:26-27)

We observe in Nephite history the typical pattern in the societies of “natural men.” Society is stable and prosperous when there is a religious piety and humility among a people. But when pride enters, people reject God and morality and begin to fashion their own designs to foster their personal interests. Those who are proud forget that every person is a beggar before God, dependent upon him for life, breath, and prosperity. They begin to think that their good fortune in being richer or more learned or more refined than other people is due to their intelligence, or their hard work, or their superior genes. They begin to say of the poor, in the words of King Benjamin: “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just” (Mosiah 4:17).

King Benjamin then comments upon this foolish thinking: “But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 4:18). No interest in the kingdom of God? Surely, some will say, if a people are moral and upright and attend church faithfully, God will find a celestial abode for them. But King Benjamin makes it clear that taking care of the poor, even making ourselves equal with them is a necessity and not a nicety for discipleship unto Christ:

For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world. . . .

And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants. (Mosiah 4:19–23, 26)

Now it is clear that the Book of Mormon peoples, the Nephites in particular, had a very clear understanding of this necessity to impart to the poor and to be humble before God. The generation that we have been examining had been rescued from an everlasting destruction only four years before they again began to wallow in the mire of sin and selfishness, caring neither about their less fortunate neighbors nor about the eternal welfare of their own souls.

What could cause so great and so quick a lapse from faith in Christ and bring total rejection of discipleship? Mormon provides the answer to this question:

Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years. . . . Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God. (3 Nephi 6:15–16, 18)

The next stage of this drama was that another opportunity for repentance was given to these people who had been greatly blessed by God and knew it and yet did wilfully rebel against him. For he sent prophets unto them who plainly spoke of their transgressions and rebellions:

And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings. (3 Nephi 6:20)

At this point the wickedness of the wayward Nephites increased, for some in leadership positions murdered those prophets, thus shedding innocent blood and giving the ultimate rejection of the Savior:

Now there were many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ who testified boldly, who were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor of the land until after their death. Now behold, this was contrary to the laws of the land, that any man should be put to death except they had power from the governor of the land. (3 Nephi 6:23–24)

The final episode in this saga of evil-doing was that those who murdered the prophets also conspired to murder the governor and to set up their own kingdom. They preferred the rule of evil dictators to a government of good laws and just rulers, a further rejection of all that the Savior stands for: “And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings” (3 Nephi 6:30).

The result of all of this wickedness was the destruction of the government and the Church and the division of the people into tribes or kinship groups:

And it came to pass in the thirty and first year that they were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred and friends;

nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, insomuch that in some degree they had peace in the land; nevertheless, their hearts were turned from the Lord their God, and they did stone the prophets and did cast them out from among them. (3 Nephi 7:14)

In this final state of wickedness the Lord sought yet a third time to recover his people, the Nephites. He sent his faithful servant Nephi, and others, to bear a final witness before the day of wrath and vengeance:

Thus passed away the thirty and second year also. And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins . . . And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized unto repentance; and thus the more part of the year did pass away. (3 Nephi 7:23, 26)

Thus the human part of the drama had come to an end. The Lord in his kindness had blessed the people when they called upon him and his name. But when they became worldly and wicked in the peace and prosperity with which the Lord blessed them, he sent prophets to them, whom they slew. Finally, the Lord sent his most faithful servant unto them. Through all of this came a final separation of the righteous from the wicked. The few who were righteous hearkened to the words of the prophets and Nephi; the many who were wicked stonily rejected both them and God, ultimately rejecting their own redemption. Now it was time for the Lord to do his great work of vengeance.

In the beginning of the thirty and fourth year, at the time of the crucifixion of the Savior in Judea, there arose a great storm in the land of the Nephites, worse than had ever before been experienced. By fire and tempest, by the opening and closing of the earth, by the sinking and rising of parts of the land, all but the more righteous part of all of the people of the Nephites were destroyed. And these included the humble fol-

lowers of Christ, who had already repented (3 Nephi 8). The day of vengeance came as the Lord destroyed of the more wicked among the Nephites, thus fulfilling the days of wickedness and vengeance among this people.

Of course, that is not the end of the story. After the visitation of the Savior among them, the Nephites entered into that blessed era of Zion, an era of such faithfulness as had never been before seen among so many. They lived in righteousness and peace for the full lifetimes of two generations (4 Nephi 1:22–23). The days of wickedness and vengeance were thus designed for a purpose: to cleanse the earth in preparation for ushering in a special era of righteousness.

The Last Days: Also Days of Wickedness and Vengeance

It remains for us now to trace the parallels and differences between the former and the latter days of wickedness and vengeance:

1. Key participants in both occasions are segments of the house of Israel. The house of Israel is the “chosen” people, those who have been commissioned by the Savior for a special mission in the history of the world. The mission of Israel is to bear witness of Christ in both word and deed, that all the world might know to come unto him and through him partake of life and salvation. But most of the time in the history of the world, Israel has not been able to get itself into any great faithfulness, let alone perform its mission to the remainder of humanity. In the meridian of time in Jerusalem, John the Baptist was sent as a special messenger to prepare the Jews for the advent of the Messiah. John did his work well, for all of Judah knew of him and of the Messiah about whom he taught. To those who accepted John’s message, the Savior came in glory and with blessings. To those who rejected John, the Savior was a stumbling block. Their rejection of John was a rejection of Jesus. When they demanded Jesus’ blood, they sealed their own fate

and brought upon themselves the destruction of Jerusalem and of the last vestige of the kingdom of Judah, vengeance following upon wickedness.

Among the Nephites in the meridian of time, the wickedness and vengeance came before the Savior appeared to them. The Nephites were blessed to have prophets. And as they hearkened to God under the instructions of those prophets, they were blessed. But when they deliberately rejected God, knowing his goodness, they too reaped just vengeance as a consequence of their choosing wickedness.

In the last days, Israel is again front stage in the Lord's great drama. Again the mission is the same, to bear witness of Christ in word and deed that all the world might know how to come to Christ and find rest in him. But in these last days there is a special warning which necessarily accompanies the invitation. Not many days hence the world will be cleansed by fire, and every corruptible thing, of man or of nature, will be swept from the earth. The invitation to come unto Christ is also the invitation to become pure, to be able to pass through the fire unscathed. The fire is the Lord's vengeance in these latter days. If Israel were not to do its work in these latter days, then neither the world nor Israel would be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ, and the world would then be "utterly wasted" at his coming (D&C 2).

2. A second parallel between the meridian of time and the last days is the increased fury of Satan. It seems to be a general principle that before great blessings come strong temptations and trials. We see this in the attack of Satan on the boy prophet Joseph Smith in the grove (JS-H 1:15-17); had he yielded in fear to being possessed of Satan, he would not have received the blessing of the vision. Satan worked mightily with the Jews of Jerusalem to blind them to the gifts and signs from heaven, both spiritual and temporal, which led the majority of the blood of Israel to reject both John and Christ, notwithstanding the fact that they came in explicit fulfillment of plain prophecy which the children of Israel themselves also accepted.

Among the Nephites, it is a marvel to see that in the space of three years the majority of the people could turn from universal gratitude to God for preserving their lives to gross immersion in worldliness and the abandonment of Christ and his teaching. Such can only be accounted for by extraordinary pressure from the adversary, and the prophets acknowledge Satan's success.

In the last days, Satan will also be unleashed in devastating fury. We are told that people will be as bad as they were in the days of Noah, when the thought of every man's heart was only to do evil continually. In Noah's time the people "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (JS-M 1:42-43). Because they knew not the Lord in the time of Noah, they lived according to their own will and pleasure, rejecting righteousness. The call of Israel to the world in these last days is that everyone should seek the Lord and his righteousness to know that all things must be done in the Savior's way to be good or righteous and that to do otherwise is to reap the whirlwind of vengeance and destruction. The world today, as it moves toward the Second Coming, is full of gross wickedness and selfishness in abusing others, particularly children and spouses, committing abortions, taking drugs, wantonly destroying, and the flaunting of all that is holy and sacred. This great success by Satan is to be expected, for it is the spiritual fire through which all of the righteous must pass; they deliberately reject and refuse to participate in the evil which is all around them. That rejection enables them to be worthy to pass through the temporal or physical fire which will come to cleanse the earth of all wickedness at the Second Coming. Those who successfully pass through both of these fires will then be able to endure the joy of the Savior's presence and blessings during the millennium.

3. A third major parallel of these two times of "wickedness and vengeance" is the coming of the Savior following each of them.

When the Savior came to Judea in the meridian of time, his mission was to complete his atonement, to fulfill our Father's plan by which every human being might be reconciled to him. The Savior had volunteered to come and do our Father's will in all things, by which obedience he might show all of us the way back to Father's presence. Our Savior accomplished three of the four requisites which comprise the Atonement.

The Savior came to Judea first to descend from his exaltation to go below all things, that he might then again rise above all things and be the judge of all things. To fulfill this part of his mission, our Savior was born of Mary but fathered by our Heavenly Father, that in his mortal life he might have the dual heritage of mortality and immortality. Then, commanding and controlling both of these opportunities, he molded them together in perfect obedience to Father, thus showing the ultimate pattern which all people must seek to attain. This living a perfect life in mortality qualified him to become the perfect and pure sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. Thus in living a perfect life every day, our Savior wrought the Atonement.

Having lived a perfect mortal life enabled our Savior to do the suffering which was necessary for atonement, to pay for all sins so he might forgive each human being who will sincerely repent. Without being forgiven of our sins, none of us could again stand in our Heavenly Father's presence, for in him there is not the least degree of allowance for sin (Alma 45:16). All who enjoy his presence must be pure, free both from sin and from all trace of sin. Thus our Savior took upon him the sins of every man, woman, and child, suffering for each of us individually in Gethsemane and upon the cross. By doing so, he fulfilled Father's will and completed the Atonement.

In his death, our Savior worked out a third aspect of his great atonement, the sacrifice of a mortal life which was pure, without spot or blemish. By offering this sacrifice, our Savior seized the keys of death and hell from Satan. This makes it possible for every human being to be resurrected to an unending physical existence after this mortal probation is over, after the

temporary body we have in mortality has been returned to the earth.

The fourth aspect of the Atonement which our Savior wrought was fulfilled not only in time but also in eternity, in the eternality of existence which was the envelope of his moral sojourn. As the premortal Jehovah, as the mortal Jesus of Nazareth, and as the resurrected Christ, our Savior presides over the process by which the Holy Spirit labors to eventually witness to every human being of the righteousness of God, the atoning mission of Christ, and the opportunity and means by which each one may come personally unto the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ, thus to share with him all that he and Father have in eternity. This is the fourth and final aspect of the Savior's atonement.

Thus the coming of the Savior to the Jews was to make possible the eternal blessings for all humankind. Our Savior wrought his work well, and prepared the way, but most of the Jews rejected him in his sojourn to earth. That rejection was great wickedness, which was visited on their heads with vengeance, the righteous and just vengeance, recompense of a just God.

The coming of our Savior to the Nephites was part of his eternal rather than his temporal assignment. He came to the Nephites not to atone, but to bless. For the days of wickedness and vengeance had already passed for them, and he came to reward those who had passed through the fire of vengeance spiritually unscathed because of their righteous faithfulness in him. And he did bless them. In time, they were all converted to him and came to have one heart, one mind, to dwell in righteousness, without having any poor person among them (4 Nephi 1:1-22). This period of Zion was indeed the precursor and pattern of the Second Coming in which his presence will bless the whole world with this same opportunity to partake of the heavenly gift and to dwell in Zion.

Our Savior's mission at his Second Coming in the last days is to do just as he did with the Nephites: He will bless all of us

who manage to pass through the fire of the days of wickedness and vengeance and the fire of his temporal destruction with the joy of his presence and the opportunity to dwell safely in Zion forever. But instead of coming only to Israel to offer them such a delight as he did with the Nephites, in these last days every nation, kindred, tongue, and people is being invited to the wedding feast. Admission to the feast comes in having the good sense to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached in these last days and to come into the fold of the Good Shepherd and partake of the fulness of the New and Everlasting Covenant. By hearkening to the Holy Spirit, we will receive safe passage through the fires of wickedness and vengeance to enter into the joy of the Lord.

The conclusion to this whole matter is to see that the days of wickedness and vengeance are in reality the days of righteousness and blessing. The wickedness through which each of us must pass is but the fire which proves our love for the Lord and his righteousness; it is the special opportunity to be especially righteous in these last days. The vengeance is itself a blessing, a cleansing of the earth that greater blessings may follow, even as being in hell is a blessing which makes possible the greater blessing of inheriting glory afterwards. All that God does is a blessing to those who will receive a blessing at his hand. To live in the days of wickedness and vengeance is thus to live in the very days of the greatest faith, righteousness, and blessing which the world has ever seen, albeit on the part of but a few. Each of us individually chooses for himself or herself whether these will be days of wickedness and vengeance or days of righteousness and blessing.