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KnoWhy #390 - What Impact Do My Actions Have on Others?

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Abstract: The list of the seven Lehite tribes found in the Book of Mormon states their names in exactly the same order with the Zoramites in the middle of the list. The reason for this is likely because the Zoramites were not the traditional allies of the Nephites or the Lamanites. They were the “swing” tribe, who sometimes sided with one group, and sometimes with the other. Corianton’s dalliance with Isabel was part of the reason the mission to the Zoramites failed, which contributed to the Zoramites siding with the Lamanites instead of the Nephites during the war chapters of Alma.

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“Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.” Alma 39:11

The Know

Often, as we go about our daily lives, we may not think much about how our choices could impact the larger world around us. We may think that our choices impact only us or a few other people. But sometimes our choices can have very far-reaching consequences. The impact of Alma’s son Corianton on the Zoramites is a good example of this principle.

Throughout their history, the Zoramites sometimes sided with the Nephites and sometimes with the Lamanites.¹ Many years after the death of Christ, for example, the Zoramites sided with the Nephites (4 Nephi 1:37), but hundreds of years before, they had sided with the Lamanites (Alma 35:10).² A list of the seven Lehiite tribes found in Jacob 1:13, 4 Nephi 1:37–38 and Mormon 1:8–9, suggests that this had been the case for many years.³

This list always names the tribes in exactly the same order: Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.⁴ Even when the list is interrupted halfway through by other content, it always resumes where it leaves off and finishes in the same order.⁵ 4 Nephi 1:37–38, for example, states, “Therefore the true believers in Christ ... were called Nephites, and

Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites. And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites, and Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.” This detail shows the accuracy and consistency of the Book of Mormon, but it also suggests something about Lehiite politics.

This list always names the Nephites and their traditional allies, the Jacobites and Josephites, at the beginning of the list, and the Lamanites and their traditional allies, the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, at the end of the list.⁶ The Zoramites are invariably placed in the middle of the list. The reason for this is likely because the Zoramites were not the traditional allies of the Nephites or the Lamanites. They would eventually become the “swing” tribe, who sometimes sided with one group, and sometimes with the other.⁷ This arrangement of seven tribes appears to have been “the social and legal order that lasted among these people for almost one thousand years.”⁸

On one of the only known occasions when the Zoramites sided with the Lamanites, Alma’s son Corianton was part of the cause of this alliance. During one particularly tense period, “the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites” (Alma 31:4).⁹ To avoid this, Alma

and a group of missionaries, including Corianton, went to preach to the Zoramites. Although it met with some success (Alma 35:6), many of the Zoramites did not listen to Alma and his companions. These Zoramites began to stir up the Lamanites against the Nephites, leading to the long wars of the Book of Alma (Alma 35:11).

According to Alma, Corianton was part of the reason the Zoramites did not listen to the gospel, for he “didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel” (Alma 39:3).¹⁰ Alma told him that when the Zoramites “saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11). Thus Corianton, through his sin with Isabel, contributed to the failure of the mission to the Zoramites, which indirectly led to the Zoramites siding with the Lamanites and the wars contained in the Book of Alma.

The Why

Obviously, Corianton’s dealings with Isabel were only one factor among many that contributed to the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites. However, Corianton probably did not expect that his actions would have any impact at all on Nephite-Lamanite relations. Most of us do not expect our mistakes to drive a long-standing neutral party into the hands of our enemies, yet in the case of Corianton, this is what happened. An action that Corianton may have assumed would only affect himself and one other person had significant consequences for his whole society.

Most of our sins will probably not lead to a war with our neighbors, but they can still have significant consequences. As President Gordon B. Hinckley noted, “I should like to emphasize the importance of watching the little things in our lives. Have you ever noticed a large gate in a farm fence? As you open it or close it there appears to be very little movement at the hinge. But there is great movement at the perimeter.”¹¹

He continued, “Small, kind acts can grow into mammoth good institutions ... It is so likewise with evil things. Small acts of dishonesty, small acts of an immoral nature, small outbursts of anger can grow into great and terrible things.”¹² President Hinckley’s words are a reminder to all of us of the possible significance of our actions. Although Corianton’s actions were not a

small sin, the consequences of his actions were likely far greater than he ever imagined.

Sometimes, we may try to rationalize our sins by thinking “I’m not hurting anyone else.” But before we do this, we would do well to think about the wide-reaching effects of Corianton’s sin, and consider the impact our sins might have on others. As Richard C. Edgley stated, “When such justifications are given either outright by others or subtly by the whisperings of the tempter, you are warned. Don’t listen. Don’t experiment. Just don’t do it.”¹³

Further Reading

Sherrie Mills Johnson, “The Zoramite Separation: A Sociological Perspective,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 74–85.

John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch, “Seven Tribes: An Aspect of Lehi’s Legacy,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 93–95.

John A. Tvedtnes “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 305–306.

Notes

1. For more on the history of the Zoramites, see Parrish Brady and Shon Hopkin, “The Zoramites and Costly Apparel: Symbolism and Irony,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1 (2013): 40–53.
2. For more on this event, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why Was the Zoramite Defection So Disastrous? (Alma 35:11),” *KnoWhy* 143 (July 14, 2016).
3. For more on the seven tribes, see Diane E. Wirth, “Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.
4. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Lehi Divide His People into Seven Tribes? (Jacob 1:13),” *KnoWhy* 319 (May 29, 2017).
5. Doctrine and Covenants 3:17–18 also lists the seven tribes in exactly the same order. Based on the date this revelation was received, in July of 1828, it is possible that the list was also present in this order on the 116 pages as well.
6. Although not obvious in the Book of Mormon, these tribal relationships appear to have been part of the organizing principle of Nephite and Lamanite society. See Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 4:25.
7. For more on this, see John A. Tvedtnes “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 305–306; Sherrie Mills Johnson, “The Zoramite Separation: A Sociological Perspective,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 76.
8. John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch, “Seven Tribes: An Aspect of Lehi’s Legacy,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 93.
9. For an example of why this was so important, see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:566–568.
10. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why was Corianton’s Sin So Serious (Alma 39:5)?” *KnoWhy* 147 (July 20, 2016).
11. President Gordon B. Hinckley, “Small Acts Lead to Great Consequences,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 83, online at lds.org.
12. Hinckley, “Small Acts,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 83, online at lds.org.
13. Bishop Richard C. Edgley, “Satan’s Bag of Snipes,” *Ensign*, November 2000, online at lds.org.