

Introduction

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) observed, “From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 7). Mormon included several accounts of war in the Book of Mormon for a purpose. These accounts teach about the need to preserve freedom in order to maintain religious rights, the damage traitors inflict, the value of even a few righteous youth, the moral justification for war, and strategies to combat evil while relying upon God’s power to intervene.

Commentary

Alma 52–53. War and Bloodshed

- Alma 52–53 are a verification of the Savior’s statement that “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Led by wicked and apostate Nephites (Ammoron and others), the Lamanites sought to violently capture and maintain Nephite cities. Each city was taken at a high price, however: “They had not taken any cities save they had lost much blood” (Alma 52:4). Captain Moroni was always reluctant to take up the sword and far more eager to lay it down for peace (see Alma 52:37). He knew that even when the Nephites were victorious, it cost thousands of lives on both sides.

War would never occur if all people were living the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace, and those who follow Him are emissaries of peace.

ALMA 53:9

What caused the Nephites to be placed in dangerous circumstances? What could they have done to avoid such circumstances?

Alma 53:9. Iniquity—The Real Cause of Conflict

- One commentator explained how external trials such as the Nephites endured can sometimes point to internal needs: “So it was a blessing to the Nephites after all to have the Lamanites on their doorstep to ‘stir them up to remembrance’—‘Happy is the man whom

God correcteth’ (Job 5:17). No matter how wicked and ferocious and depraved the Lamanites might be (and they were that!), no matter by how much they outnumbered the Nephites, darkly closing in on all sides, no matter how insidiously they spied and intrigued and infiltrated and hatched their diabolical plots and breathed their bloody threats and pushed their formidable preparations for all-out war, *they were not the Nephite problem*. They were merely kept there to remind the Nephites of their real problem, which was to walk uprightly before the Lord” (Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. [1988], 339–40).

Alma 53:10–18. The Importance of Covenants

- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared how we gain power through keeping our covenants: “Sometimes we are tempted to let our lives be governed more by convenience than by covenant. It is not always convenient to live gospel standards and stand up for truth and testify of the Restoration. . . . But there is no spiritual power in living by convenience. The power comes as we keep our covenants” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 113; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 86).

- President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained that keeping covenants keeps us safe:

“Keep your covenants and you will be safe. Break them and you will not. . . .

“. . . We are not free to break our covenants and escape the consequences” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 107–8; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 84).

Alma 53:16–21. The Example of the Stripling Warriors

- The stripling warriors, who went to battle in place of their fathers, were young men of righteousness. They were committed to defending their country (see Alma 56:5). They were fearless in the face of death and courageous in battle (see Alma 56:45–49, 56). God rewarded their faith with amazing strength and protection. Not one of them died in battle (see Alma 57:25–26). This is not always the case with righteous young men in military service. Sometimes even the

righteous “die in the Lord” (D&C 63:49). But in the case of these young men, divine protection was given that preserved their mortal lives in battle. They exemplified the type of manhood that all of God’s sons should emulate and stood as a witness to the Nephite nation that God would deliver them if they were faithful.



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Alma 53:20–21. Being Good Examples in Military Service

- In modern times, the First Presidency has given the following counsel to Church members in military service: “To our young men who go into service, no matter whom they serve or where, we say live clean, keep the commandments of the Lord, pray to Him constantly to preserve you in truth and righteousness, live as you pray, and then whatever betides you the Lord will be with you and nothing will happen to you that will not be to the honor and glory of God and to your salvation and exaltation. There will come into your hearts from the living of the pure life you pray for, a joy that will pass your powers of expression or understanding. The Lord will be always near you; He will comfort you; you will feel His presence in the hour of your greatest tribulation; He will guard and protect you to the full extent that accords with His all-wise purpose. Then, when the conflict is over and you return to your homes, having lived the righteous life, how great will be your happiness—whether you be of the victors or of the vanquished—that you have lived as the Lord commanded. You will return so disciplined in righteousness that thereafter all Satan’s wiles and stratagems will leave you untouched. Your faith and testimony will be strong beyond breaking. You will be looked up to and revered as having passed through the fiery furnace of trial and temptation and come forth unharmed. Your brethren will look to you for counsel,

support, and guidance. You will be the anchors to which thereafter the youth of Zion will moor their faith in man” (Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 96).

Alma 53:20–21. “True at All Times”

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles discussed what it means to be true at all times:

“That word *true* implies commitment, integrity, endurance, and courage. It reminds us of the Book of Mormon’s description of the 2,000 young warriors:

“[Alma 53:20–21.]

“In the spirit of that description I say to our returned missionaries—men and women who have made covenants to serve the Lord and who have already served Him in the great work of proclaiming the gospel and perfecting the Saints—are you being true to the faith? Do you have the faith and continuing commitment to demonstrate the principles of the gospel in your own lives, consistently? You have served well, but do you, like the pioneers, have the courage and the consistency to be true to the faith and to endure to the end?” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 101–2; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 73; italics added).

Alma 56:45–48. “We Do Not Doubt Our Mothers Knew It”

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that parents can only give what they themselves already have:

“When a parent’s teaching and helping job is done well and when there are receptive children to receive the message, then we encounter those marvelous situations such as the one involving young men in the Book of Mormon who had been taught so well by their mothers [Alma 56:47–48]. . . .



“The reliance, of course, by these young men on their mothers is touching and profound, but the mothers first had to know ‘it’ in such a way that the young men,

observing them closely and hearing them (as is always the case with children observing parents), did ‘not doubt’ that their mothers knew that ‘it’ was true” (*That My Family Should Partake* [1974], 58–59).

- Speaking of the need for women to have more vigilance, Sister Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president, described covenant women who know who they are:

“In the Book of Mormon we read about 2,000 exemplary young men who were exceedingly valiant, courageous, and strong. ‘Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him’ (Alma 53:21). These faithful young men paid tribute to their mothers. They said, ‘Our mothers knew it’ (Alma 56:48). . . .

“The responsibility mothers have today has never required more vigilance. More than at any time in the history of the world, we need mothers who know. . . . When mothers know who they are and who God is and have made covenants with Him, they will have great power and influence for good on their children” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 76).

Alma 57:19–21. “Firm and Undaunted”

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) discussed the importance of staying firm and undaunted:

“‘You reflect this Church in all you think, in all you say, and in all you do,’ President Hinckley told the youth. ‘Be loyal to the Church and kingdom of God.’ . . .

“President Hinckley told the youth that they are ‘out there as the sons of Helaman in a world that is full of destructive influences. . . . But if you put your trust in the Almighty and follow the teachings of this Church and cling to it notwithstanding your wounds, you will be preserved and blessed and magnified and made happy.’

“Speaking of the world in which they live, President Hinckley told the youth, ‘You’re in the midst of Babylon. The adversary comes with great destruction. Stand above it, you of the noble birthright. Stand above it’” (“Prophet Grateful for Gospel, Testimony,” *Church News*, Sept. 21, 1996, 4).

Alma 58. The Right to Fight for Liberty

- For an insight on fighting for liberty even among bloodshed, see the commentary for Alma 43:45–47 on page 250.

Alma 58:10–11. The Lord Spoke “Peace to Our Souls”

- While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder Dennis E. Simmons explained that God’s peace is not dependent on outward circumstances:

“If all the world is crumbling around us, the promised Comforter will provide His peace as a result of true discipleship. . . . We can have His peace with us irrespective of the troubles of the world. *His* peace is that peace, that serenity, that comfort spoken to our hearts and minds by the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, as we strive to follow *Him* and keep *His* commandments. . . .

“Just as Helaman discovered in the midst of battle that ‘he did speak peace to our souls’ (Alma 58:11) . . . , all sincere seekers can have that same peace spoken to them. That peace comes from the assurances spoken by a still, small voice” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 41–42; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 31).

ALMA 58:10–11

What was the result of the Nephites’ prayer of faith? How can these answers apply in our struggle for deliverance?

Alma 58:34–37. “We Do Not Desire to Murmur”

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell helped us better understand a cause of murmuring: “In a happy day ahead, ‘They that murmured shall learn doctrine’ (Isaiah 29:24; 2 Nephi 27:35). This suggests that doctrinal illiteracy is a significant cause of murmuring among Church members” (“A Choice Seer,” in *Brigham Young University 1985–86 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [1986], 115).

Alma 59:9. Easier to Keep a City from Falling

- Mormon records that it is far easier to keep a city from falling than to retake it (Alma 59:9). As with cities, so it is with people. It is much more difficult and

dangerous to reclaim one who has fallen than to help keep them from falling. In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), “It is better to prepare and prevent, than to repair and repent” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 285).



Minerva K. Teichert, Courtesy of BYU Museum of Art

Alma 59:11–12. Cities Lost Because of Wickedness

- The loss of the city of Nephiah illustrates the strong correlation between the wickedness of the Nephites and their inability to defeat their enemies in the “strength of the Lord” (see Mosiah 9:16; 10:10–11; Alma 60:16). The leaders of the Nephite armies were often men who “had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy” (3 Nephi 3:19). These righteous military leaders attributed Nephite defeats not to the Lamanites but to Nephite wickedness. By contrast, faithful Nephites were usually able to defend themselves and recover lost cities, often with relatively minimal loss of life (see Alma 52:19; 56:53–56; 57:7–12; 58:25–28; 62:22–26). The Lord has repeatedly taught that while we may face difficulties and serious problems, if we are righteous and rely on Him, we can always have confidence that He will be with us and His work will ultimately prevail (see D&C 6:34; 10:69; 33:13).

Alma 60:10–14. The Slaying of the Righteous

- Moroni wrote that the Lord permits the righteous to be slain so that “his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 60:13).

Soon after the beginning of World War II, the First Presidency of the Church stated: “In this terrible war now waging, thousands of our righteous young men in all parts of the world and in many countries are subject to a call into the military service of their own countries. Some of these, so serving, have already been called back to their heavenly home; others will almost surely be called to follow. But ‘behold,’ as Moroni said, the righteous of them who serve and are slain ‘do enter into the rest of the Lord their God’ [Alma 60:13], and of them the Lord has said ‘those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them’ (D.&C. 42:46). Their salvation and exaltation in the world to come will be secure. That in their work of destruction they will be striking at their brethren will not be held against them. That sin, as Moroni of old said, is to the condemnation of those who ‘sit in their places of power in a state of thoughtless stupor,’ those rulers in the world who in a frenzy of hate and lust for unrighteous power and dominion over their fellow men, have put into motion eternal forces they do not comprehend and cannot control. God, in His own due time, will pass sentence upon them” (Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 95–96).

Alma 60:19–36. Moroni’s Letter to Pahoran

- Pahoran could have chosen to be offended by the letters sent by Moroni, but he did not. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the fact that we, like Pahoran, can choose to not be offended:

“When we believe or say that we have been offended, we usually mean we feel insulted, mistreated, snubbed, or disrespected. And certainly clumsy, embarrassing, unprincipled, and mean-spirited things do occur in our interactions with other people that would allow us to take offense. However, it ultimately is impossible for another person to offend you or to offend me. Indeed, believing that another person offended us is fundamentally false. To be offended is a *choice* we make; it is not a *condition* inflicted or imposed upon us by someone or something else. . . .

“Through the strengthening power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, you and I can be blessed to avoid and triumph over offense. ‘Great peace have they which

love thy law: and nothing shall offend them' (Psalm 119:165). . . .

“. . . As described by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, the Church is not 'a well-provisioned rest home for the already perfected' (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 57; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 38). Rather, the Church is a learning laboratory and a workshop in which we gain experience as we practice on each other in the ongoing process of 'perfecting the Saints.'

"Elder Maxwell also insightfully explained that in this latter-day learning laboratory known as the restored Church, the members constitute the 'clinical material' (see 'Jesus, the Perfect Mentor,' *Ensign*, Feb. 2001, 13) that is essential for growth and development. . . .

"You and I cannot control the intentions or behavior of other people. However, we do determine how we will act. Please remember that you and I are agents endowed with moral agency, and we can choose not to be offended" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 95–97; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 90–91).

Alma 60:23. Cleansing the Inner Vessel

- President Ezra Taft Benson left little room for doubt that these warnings apply to us. He declared: "All is not well in Zion. As Moroni counseled, we must cleanse the inner vessel (see Alma 60:23), beginning first with ourselves, then with our families, and finally with the Church" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, 3, or *Ensign*, May 1986, 4).

ALMA 60:23

You may want to mark this verse. Then ask yourself what things you must do to cleanse your inner vessel.

Alma 61. Response to Unjustified Scolding

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained how differences can occur even between faithful members: "In a perfect church filled with imperfect people, there are bound to be some miscommunications at times. A noteworthy example occurred in ancient American

Israel. Moroni wrote two times to Pahoran complaining of neglect because much-needed reinforcements did not arrive. Moroni used harsh language, accusing the governor of the land, Pahoran, of sitting on his throne in a state of 'thoughtless stupor.' (Alma 60:7.) Pahoran soon made a very patriotic reply, explaining why he could not do what Moroni wanted. Though censured, Pahoran was not angry; he even praised Moroni for 'the greatness of your heart.' (Alma 61:9.) Given the intense, mutual devotion of disciples, discussions as to how best to move the Lord's work along are bound to produce tactical differences on occasion. Just as in this episode, sometimes scolding occurs that is later shown to be unjustified" (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [1979], 119).

Alma 62:41. The Effects of Adversity

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained that we choose how we will be affected by adversity:

"Surely these great adversities are not without some eternal purpose or effect. They can turn our hearts to God. . . . Even as adversities inflict mortal hardships, they can also be the means of leading men and women to eternal blessings.

"Such large-scale adversities as natural disasters and wars seem to be inherent in the mortal experience. We cannot entirely prevent them, but we can determine how we will react to them. For example, the adversities of war and military service, which have been the spiritual destruction of some, have been the spiritual awakening of others. The Book of Mormon describes the contrast:

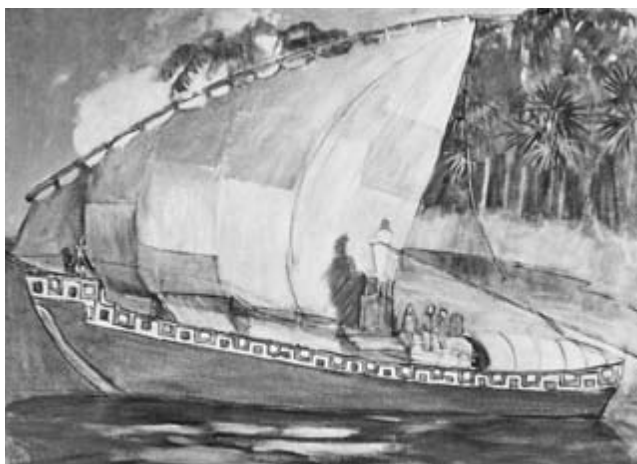
"'But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility' (Alma 62:41).

"I read of a similar contrast after the devastating hurricane that destroyed thousands of homes in Florida some years ago. A news account quoted two different persons who had suffered the same tragedy and received the same blessing: each of their homes

had been totally destroyed, but each of their family members had been spared death or injury. One said that this tragedy had destroyed his faith; how, he asked, could God allow this to happen? The other said that the experience had strengthened his faith. God had been good to him, he said. Though the family's home and possessions were lost, their lives were spared and they could rebuild the home. For one, the glass was half empty. For the other, the glass was half full. The gift of moral agency empowers each of us to choose how we will act when we suffer adversity" ("Adversity," *Ensign*, July 1998, 7–8).

Alma 63:4–10. Journey to the Land Northward

- "To [a] group of Saints in the South Seas, President [Spencer W.] Kimball observed: 'President Joseph F. Smith, the president of the Church, reported, "You brothers and sisters from New Zealand, I want you to know that you are from the people of Hagoth." For New Zealand Saints, that was that. A prophet of the Lord had spoken. . . . It is reasonable to conclude that Hagoth and his associates were about nineteen centuries on the islands, from about 55 B.C. to 1854 before the gospel began to reach them. They had lost all the plain and precious things which the Savior brought to the earth, for they were likely on the islands when the Christ was born in Jerusalem.' (Temple View Area Conference Report, February 1976, p. 3.)" (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [1987–91] 3:329).



Minerva K. Teichert. Courtesy of BYU Museum of Art

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) substantiated what happened to some of Hagoth's people when he gave the following proclamation in the dedicatory prayer of the New Zealand Temple: "We express gratitude that to these fertile Islands Thou didst guide descendants of Father Lehi, and hast enabled them to prosper" ("Dedicatory Prayer Delivered by Pres. David O. McKay at New Zealand Temple," *Church News*, May 10, 1958, 2).

Points to Ponder

- What can you do to honor, sustain, and defend your country?
- What lessons can we learn from both Moroni's and Pahoran's letters that could help us in our lives? (see Alma 60–61).
- What is the correlation between righteousness and freedom?
- After reading Alma 52–63, what are some of the greatest principles regarding war that you could teach another person?

Suggested Assignments

- Record in your journal how you can apply Moroni's defense tactics in your own personal battles for righteousness.
- You may wish to record the insights discovered about how to defend yourself against the enemies of your faith.
- Write a family home evening lesson outline from one or more of the subjects listed below:
 1. Making use of the means the Lord has provided (see Alma 60:21)
 2. Cleansing the inner vessel (see Alma 60:23)
 3. Seeking God's glory over the honor of the world (see Alma 60:36)
 4. Not taking offense (see Alma 61:9)