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Sherem the Anti-Christ

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Robert L. Millet

President Ezra Taft Benson has instructed that “the Book of Mormon brings men to Christ through two basic means”:

First, it tells in a plain manner of Christ and His gospel. It testifies of His divinity and of the necessity for a Redeemer and the need of our putting trust in Him. It bears witness of the Fall and the Atonement and the first principles of the gospel, including our need of a broken heart and a contrite spirit and a spiritual rebirth. It proclaims we must endure to the end in righteousness and live the moral life of a Saint.

Second, *the Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ*. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Nephi 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. *The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon is similar to the type we have today*. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time (3; emphasis added).

Jacob ends a lengthy recitation of and a brief commentary on the allegory of Zenos by pleading with his readers to receive and pay heed to the words of the prophets and traverse carefully that gospel path which is strait and narrow. “Finally,” he concludes, “I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear” (Jacob 6:13). This would appear to be a farewell statement, an indication to the reader that Jacob had initially planned to close his record at that point. Subsequently, however,

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he had an experience worthy of inclusion in a record which would come forth to a cynical and highly secular world—his encounter with Sherem the anti-Christ.

Portrait of an Anti-Christ

There are certain characteristics of an anti-Christ, certain patterns of belief and practice which we might expect to find among those, like Sherem, who are bent upon overthrowing the doctrine of Christ. Some of these are as follows:

They Deny the Need for Jesus Christ

The first and perhaps the most obvious characterization of an anti-Christ is that he or she denies the reality of or necessity for Jesus Christ. The anti-Christ has partaken of that spirit of rebellion which resulted in the expulsion of a third part of all the children of the Eternal Father in the premortal world. Prior to the meridian of time, the anti-Christ contended that there would be no Christ and that no man had the ability to speak authoritatively concerning future things.

Of Sherem, the Nephite record states that “he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. . . . that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:2). The doctrine of Christ is the gospel, the glad tidings that deliverance from death and hell and endless torment is available through the atoning work of Jesus Christ the Lord (see Jacob 7:6; 2 Nephi 31; 3 Nephi 27:13-22; D&C 76:40-42). Frequently, as we shall see, the message of the anti-Christ is a denial of man’s fallen condition and thus of his need for anyone or anything to liberate him from the mire of mortality.

They Use Flattery to Win Disciples

“And [Sherem] preached many things which were flattering unto the people” (Jacob 7:2). To flatter is to soothe or satisfy,

to make people feel comfortable. It is to whisper in their ears that all is well. To flatter is also to raise false hopes of an anticipated reward or acquisition (*Webster's*). Nehor, a different type of anti-Christ, thus taught that "all mankind should be saved at the last day . . . for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life" (Alma 1:4).

Characteristically, anti-Christians are worldly-wise; they are properly trained for their persuasive ministry. Sherem was "learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4). Anti-Christians are usually glib of tongue and nimble of speech. They are sinister students of human behavior, knowing how to persuade and to dissuade; how to attract attention and create a following; and how to make their listeners feel secure and at ease in their carnality. An anti-Christ is ostensibly refined, schooled in rhetoric, and polished in homiletics. He is a peerless preacher of perversion. In Faustian fashion the anti-Christ has sold his soul to the devil: his power is not his own; he is but the pawn of him who in the end does not support his own (see Alma 30:60).

They Accuse the Brethren of Teaching False Doctrine

The devil and his disciples are neither shy nor hesitant about accomplishing their purposes. Some among the legions of Beelzebub are subtle and cunning; others are direct, assertive, and aggressive. Sherem goes directly to the prophet of the Lord—to Jacob—to gain a hearing in an effort to gain a convert. Satan would always rather capture a spiritual general than one of lesser rank. And be it remembered that the Lord himself was not immune from personal confrontation with the evil one (see Matt 4), and that Christ in turn said to Peter, the chief apostle, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). And thus it is that Sherem "sought much opportunity" (Jacob 7:6) to engage Jacob the prophet.

Sherem accused Jacob of perverting the gospel and of uttering false prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ (Jacob 7:7). Surely some Nephites who were in tune with the Spirit must have discerned in Sherem the spirit of one who “accused” the brethren (Rev 12:10), who was guilty of evil speaking of the Lord’s anointed. “That man who rises up to condemn others,” Joseph Smith taught, “finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 156-57; see also 193; hereafter *TPJS*). Sherem was on a course which would take him cross-lots to hell—by the most direct route.

They Have a Limited View of Reality

When a person refuses to exercise faith—to have a hope in that which is unseen but true (Alma 32:21)—he thereby denies himself access to the spiritual world, another realm of reality. His vision of things is at best deficient and at worst perverse; he does not see things “as they really are” (see Jacob 4:13; D&C 93:24). He is a scientist with insufficient data; his methodology is limited by his approach and his conclusions must surely be suspect.

Sherem’s naturalistic view of reality precluded his appreciation of the unseen and his desire to apprehend the unknown. Those who rely exclusively upon human sensory experience and human reason to come to the truth cannot find a place in their tightly-enclosed epistemological system for such matters as spirit and revelation and prophecy. In responding to Jacob’s testimony that Christ shall come as the fulfillment of the law, Sherem said: “This is blasphemy; for *no man knoweth* of such things; for *he cannot tell of things to come*.” Further, “If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but *I know that there is no Christ*, neither has been, nor ever will be” (Jacob 7:7, 9; emphasis added). If we were to paraphrase Sherem’s argument, it might be stated as follows: “If there should be a Christ—here and now, one that I

could see and feel and hear, one which requires no faith or hope—then I would not deny him; I would believe.” This, of course, is not true. The unbelievers and the faithless have hardened their hearts to the point that most of the time they deny or rationalize even tangible evidence (see 1 Nephi 16:38; Hel 16:21). It is usually the case that proof is the last thing that those demanding it really want. The louder the shouts for evidence, the less the inclination to accept it.

The doubter—the one whose faith centers in that which may be seen and heard and felt through natural means only—errs grossly through generalizing beyond his own experiences. What he has not experienced, he assumes no one else can. Because he does not know, no one knows (compare Alma 30:48); because he is past feeling, surely no one else has felt; because he lacks internal evidence concerning the coming of a Messiah, unquestionably the evidence amassed by every believing soul is either insufficient or naively misinterpreted. Those who dare not believe dare not allow others to believe.

They Have a Disposition to Misread and Thereby Misrepresent the Scriptures

Those whose motives are less than pure are not entitled to that which the scriptures call “pure knowledge” (D&C 121:42), knowledge from a pure source. They are unable to comprehend the scriptures in their true light, to perceive and then incorporate the purity of their messages into their own impure lives. Such persons are frequently guilty of *wresting* the scriptures, of distorting their true meanings and thus doing violence to that which was intended by the inspired writers. “Behold, the scriptures are before you,” Alma said to the spiritually unstable people of Ammonihah; “if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction” (Alma 13:20; compare 2 Peter 3:16). Those who wrest the scriptures do not understand them (see D&C 10:63); they have little sacred structure for their lives and wander far

astray from that gospel path which must be traversed with care and caution (see Alma 41:1).

Sherem professes to know and to believe in the scriptures, but, lacking that elevated perspective and learning which comes not only by study but also by faith, he is unable to discern the undergirding message of the scriptures (Jacob 7:10-11)—that all things bear witness of the Holy One of Israel, that all things which have been “given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4; see also Moses 6:63). Devoid of that divine influence which constitutes the spirit of prophecy and revelation, Sherem cannot possess the testimony of Jesus (see Rev 19:10).

Those who have become more than distant acquaintances with the words of scripture begin to see things as God sees them: they gain “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) and are thereby able to have “great views of that which is to come” (Mosiah 5:3). They are able to see a providential pattern in all things, to sift through the sands of the fleeting and the ephemeral, and to treasure that which is eternal. Sherem, on the other hand, seems to have been afflicted with a means-to-an-end sickness, an obsession with the here and now but a refusal to look beyond the present to greater and grander ends. In accusing Jacob of preaching false doctrine, Sherem tells him that “ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence” (Jacob 7:7). Sherem, like the priests of Noah, believed that the law was all-sufficient (see Mosiah 12:31-32), that salvation would come through observance of the law without any reference whatsoever to Christ the Lawgiver. It is strange indeed that Sherem would argue for the sufficiency of the law of Moses when, in fact, the law was given by God to point the people toward the coming of Christ. Sherem’s dispute was not, then, with Jacob alone on this issue, for Nephi had taught similar doctrine many years earlier (see 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:24-25). The irony and inconsistency of Sherem’s argument is seen in his use of revelation—the

law of Moses—to deny the principle of further revelation—the revelation of the Father in the person of Jesus Christ. Like many of his modern counterparts, Sherem was a master of scriptural manipulation: his was not a search for truth; he read with a jaundiced eye for self-justification, not sanctification.

They Are Sign Seekers

Like most anti-Christ, Sherem insisted that Jacob prove by demonstrable evidence that his was a true position—he demanded a sign (Jacob 7:13; compare Alma 30:43). Miracles or wonders or gifts of the Spirit always follow true believers; indeed, they are one of the signs of the true Church and evidence that the power of God is operating among his people. And yet Jesus taught that it is an “evil and adulterous generation [that] seeketh after a sign” (Matt 12:39). Joseph Smith added that this principle “is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven; for whenever you see a man seeking after a sign, you may set it down that he is an adulterous man” (*TPJS* 157; compare 278).

Why is this so? How does a disposition to seek after signs relate to seeking after carnal pleasures? Simply stated, those who have given themselves up to their lusts, who desire that which will satiate the flesh, who have exhausted their passions in their search for the sensual—also seek for physical manifestations of spiritual sensations. They demand proof! Unable to recognize and acknowledge eternal certainties, they insist that the truths associated with the area with which they are least familiar—the spiritual—be manifest and translated into that realm they have come to know more surely than any other—the fanciful and the physical. The adulterous are those who worship at the altar of appetite, whose thresholds for gratification are ever rising, and who thereby demand something extraordinary to establish the truthfulness of a claim. Ironically, this claim may only be verified by the quiet and unobtrusive whisperings of the Spirit. Spiritual blindness and the spirit of adultery are thus common companions.

Of this fascinating but pathetic phenomenon, Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written:

First of all, the people of the world cannot presume to command God to provide them with signs. A person can neither be a disciple and command the Master nor can he require “perpetual renewal of absolute proof.” Some behave, however, as if they would set forth the conditions under which they will believe—complete with specifications; they then invite God to “bid” on their specifications! . . . Sign seekers, like adulterers, often do have a clear preference for *repeated* sensation. Those who do not understand why adultery is intrinsically wrong will also fail to understand why faith is a justified requirement laid upon us by God. We are to walk by faith and to overcome by faith (see D&C 76:53). . . . By contrast, the faithful, who are intellectually honest but are confronted with new and present challenges, sing of the Lord, “We’ve proved Him in days that are past.” . . . Those who are adulterous have also a strong preference for “now” rather than for eternity. Impatience and incontinence, quite naturally, team up.

Such erring individuals or generations also have a strong preference for meeting the needs of “me” over attending to others, a lifestyle which speeds selfishness on its endless, empty journey.

By making demands of God, the proud would attach conditions to their discipleship. But discipleship requires of us unconditional surrender to the Lord. Hence the proud neither understand nor really love God. Therefore they violate the first commandment by seeing God as a sign provider upon request; as a function, not a tutoring Father (58-59).

Sign seekers have one thing going for them when it comes to convincing an audience—the servants of the Lord will not stoop to cheap theatrics to win the hearts of observers. In fact, “faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe. Yea, signs come by faith, not by the will of men, nor as they please, but by the will of God” (D&C 63:9-10). That is to say, signs and miracles fan the flame already burning in the hearts of believers. Seldom will God perform a notable miracle through his legal administrators to titillate sign seekers. And sign seekers know enough about the Lord and the prophetic past to know this. Simply stated, the anti-Christ demands a sign because he knows that the Lord does not give them in that manner. Unfortunately for Sherem (as we shall see), once in a great while the Lord does choose to make bare his mighty arm in response to taunting imps

of uncleanness, but in such cases it is in wrath and proves the condemnation of the thrill seekers.

The Power of Jacob's Testimony

There are few greater prophets than Jacob, the son of Lehi. He was one of the mighty apostles of the Book of Mormon: as a special witness of Christ, he bore a perfect testimony and was true to his calling. It was to a very young Jacob that father Lehi said:

Jacob, my firstborn in the wilderness, *thou knowest the greatness of God*; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, *I know that thou art redeemed*, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men. *And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory*; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; for the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free (2 Nephi 2:2-4; emphasis added).

In speaking of Jacob's witness of the coming Messiah, Nephi declared: "I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words, . . . for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. *And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him*; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true" (2 Nephi 11:2-3; emphasis added).

Having described Sherem's power of persuasion, Jacob noted: "And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for *I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken*" (Jacob 7:5; emphasis added). Jacob here provides a marvelous pattern for steadfastness in the face of spiritual persecution and intellectual challenge. Only when we have drunk deeply of the waters of life—when we have

been grounded in revealed theology, rooted in genuine spiritual experience, and established in the things of God—can we hope to withstand the burning rays of doubt and the scorching thirst of skepticism. To be able to meet the snide remarks of the cynical head on, to be able to bear witness of the truth in the face of ridicule, and to give no heed to the enticing and otherwise convincing voices of the worldly-wise are, according to Joseph F. Smith, to have entered into the “rest of the Lord,” to have partaken of the “spiritual rest and peace which are born from a settled conviction of the truth” (126). To enter the rest of the Lord “means entering into the knowledge and love of God, having faith in his purpose and in his plan, to such an extent that we know we are right, and that we are not hunting for something else, we are not disturbed by every wind of doctrine, or by the cunning and craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive.” To enter into the rest of the Lord is to enjoy “rest from doubt, from fear, from apprehension of danger, rest from the religious turmoil of the world” (Smith 58). After Enos, the son of Jacob, had prayed without ceasing; after he had wrestled in mighty supplication to the God of his fathers; after he had searched and pondered and inquired with a fervor known only to the spiritually hungry; then the voice of the Lord came to him, announced that his sins were forgiven, and regenerated his soul. “And after I, Enos, had heard these words, *my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord*” (Enos 1:11; emphasis added). Again we note that it is through being introduced into the realm of the sacred that one is able to proceed confidently and unimpeded when confronted by the profane.

The Lord explained to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in our day—at a time when the Church was under attack by those bent on its overthrow—that “there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and if any man lift his voice against you he shall be confounded in mine own due time” (D&C 71:9-10). We see this promise literally fulfilled in the ministry of Jacob, particularly in his encounter with Sherem. “But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul,” Jacob wrote, “insomuch that I did confound him in all his words” (Jacob 7:8).

To say that Jacob *confounded* Sherem is to say that he threw him into disorder; perplexed him; terrified, dismayed, astonished, or stupefied him (*Webster's*). The power of God resting upon his servant Jacob both disarmed and disabled Sherem.

It was at the climax of his encounter with this anti-Christ that Jacob testified powerfully of the reality and necessity of Jesus Christ and again affirmed the depth of his own knowledge of the things of the Spirit (compare Alma 30:37-44):

Believest thou the scriptures? [he asked Sherem.] And [Sherem] said, Yea. And [Jacob] said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ. And this is not all—it *has been made manifest unto me* [note that Jacob first appeals to the testimonies of earlier prophets and then bears his own witness—compare Alma in Alma 5:43-48], for *I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost*; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost (Jacob 7:10-12; emphasis added).

The Woeful End of Sign Seekers

In a modern revelation the Lord explained that “signs come by faith, unto mighty works, for without faith no man pleaseth God; and with whom God is angry he is not well pleased; wherefore, unto such he showeth no signs, only in wrath unto their condemnation” (D&C 63:11). Indeed, when God does choose to manifest his power by means of the miraculous—and it is seldom—the curious sign seeker is often surprised and stunned by what is brought to pass: the sign is usually a divine judgment upon the sign seeker. After Korihor had been struck dumb by the power of God through Alma, the chief judge asked Korihor: “Art thou convinced of the power of God? In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign? Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign? Behold, *he has showed unto you a sign*; and now will ye dispute more?” (Alma 30:51; emphasis added). Elder George A. Smith recounted one

incident from Church history in which Joseph Smith dealt with a sign seeker:

When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was first founded, you could see persons rise up and ask, "What sign will you show us that we may be made to believe?" I recollect a Campbellite preacher who came to Joseph Smith . . . and said that he had come a considerable distance to be convinced of the truth. "Why," said he, "Mr. Smith, I want to know the truth, and when I am convinced, I will spend all my talents and time defending and spreading the doctrines of your religion, and I will give you to understand that to convince me is equivalent to convincing all my society, amounting to several hundreds." Well, Joseph commenced laying before him the coming forth of the work, and the first principles of the Gospel, when [the minister] exclaimed, "O this is not the evidence I want, the evidence that I wish to have is a notable miracle; I want to see some powerful manifestation of the power of God, I want to see a notable miracle performed; and if you perform such a one, then I will believe with all my heart and soul, and will exert all my power and all my extensive influence to convince others; and if you will not perform a miracle of this kind, then I am your worst and bitterest enemy." "Well," said Joseph, "what will you have done? Will you be struck blind, or dumb? Will you be paralyzed, or will you have one hand withered? Take your choice, choose which you please, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ it shall be done." "That is not the kind of miracle I want," said the preacher. "Then, sir," replied Joseph, "I can perform none, I am not going to bring any trouble upon any body else, sir, to convince you" (*Journal of Discourses* 2:326).

After Jacob had borne his powerful apostolic witness, Sherem replied: "Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much. And [Jacob] said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign *in the thing which thou knowest to be true*? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil." Then Jacob said: "Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come" (Jacob 7:13-14; emphasis added). It is interesting to note that Jacob, like his Master and other humble servants endowed with the Spirit, discerned the true intents of Sherem's heart (see Matt 9:4; 12:25; Luke 9:47; Alma 18:16, 18); further, Jacob perceived, as is often the case (see Alma 11:24; 30:42), that the antagonist already knew that what the servant of

the Lord was preaching was true and that he, the anti-Christ, was fighting the truth and thus sinning against the light.

Jacob then writes: “And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days” (Jacob 7:15). Sherem was struck down dramatically, even as Korihor was (Alma 30), and as Ananias and Sapphira were in the New Testament (Acts 5); his heresies were stopped, his perverse teachings silenced, and his flattering ways revealed for what they truly were. From the account it appears that from then until the time of his death Sherem was unable to care for himself; Jacob 7:15 states that he “was nourished for the space of many days.” Surely he was nourished in the sense that his physical needs were met—he was fed and clothed and sheltered. Further, to *nourish* is to encourage, to educate, and to instruct (*Webster’s*). It may be that Sherem was taught the gospel, was reproved and corrected in his doctrine, and was “nourished by the good word of God” (see Jacob 6:7; compare Alma 39:10). This act alone demonstrates Christianity at its highest and discipleship at its deepest—a group of Saints who had been the object of a very unchristian intellectual attack, now providing succor for him who had formerly wielded the sword of Satan, and had specialized in subtlety. This passage demonstrates one of the marvels of Christianity: the ability to truly love an enemy and to return good for evil. No true Christian takes delight in any person’s demise, even if that person happens to be an anti-Christ, an avowed enemy to the cause of truth. The Saints of all ages pray for the defeat of evil and the overthrow of bitterness and opposition (see D&C 109:24-33), but they seek also to forgive and forget and welcome home the wandering prodigal. They leave judgment in the hands of the keeper of the gate, the Holy One of Israel (2 Nephi 9:41).

Life’s starkest reality is death. And death is the great moment of truth. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, death is “a subject which strikes dread—even terror—into the hearts of most men. It is something we fear, of which we are sorely afraid,

and from which most of us would flee if we could” (106). Even the most hardened atheists and the most elusive agnostics face what they believe to be the end with fear and trembling. Sherem, in the knowledge that he was about to face his God, sought to purge his soul of duplicity. He spoke plainly unto the people “and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels. And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil [compare Alma 30:53]. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment” (Jacob 7:17-18). These are doctrines which would normally be scoffed at by the learned and ignored by the sophisticated. Sherem now spoke of these things because they weighed upon his mind: hell and eternal punishment were, to him, no longer religious rhetoric, but reality.

Sherem’s final words are both poignant and pathetic: “I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him. And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God” (Jacob 7:19). Although the ultimate fate of Sherem is not known to us, this we do observe: deathbed repentance does not have within it the seeds of everlasting life. “It is the will of God,” Joseph Smith observed, “that man should repent & serve him in health & in the strength & power of his mind in order to secure his blessings & not wait untill [sic] he is called to die” (*Words of Joseph Smith* 107). It would appear that Sherem’s sin was not unpardonable—that he will not be numbered among the sons of perdition—for he still possessed a soul capable of repentance, which disposition is wholly alien to a son of perdition (*TPJS* 358). Confession at any time is to be commended, even just prior to death. But true repentance consists not only in confessing sins, but also in forsaking forbidden behavior and attitudes and in keeping the commandments thereafter (see D&C 1:32). It is well that Sherem acknowledged his lies and professed a belief in the scriptures and the coming of Christ before his demise; his situation

would, however, have been far more positive had he not been compelled to believe.

A Warning to Our Day

The Book of Mormon “was written for our day,” President Benson has taught us. “The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. Mormon wrote near the end of the Nephite civilization. Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, he abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us” (19). Mormon’s son, Moroni, having witnessed the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in a day of pride and envy and wars and pollutions, said: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35).

With this in mind—with the voice of the Nephite prophets crying out to us and stressing the eternal relevance of their messages, with the clear witness burning in our souls that the Book of Mormon is an ancient book which exposes modern falsehoods and modern anti-Christ—President Ezra Taft Benson has challenged the Saints as follows:

Now, we have not been using the Book of Mormon as we should. Our homes are not as strong unless we are using it to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat the falsehoods in socialism, organic evolution, rationalism, humanism, and so forth. . . . Social, ethical, cultural, or educational converts will not survive under the heat of the day unless their taproots go down to the fulness of the gospel which the Book of Mormon contains (6).

The Book of Mormon thus attests that anti-Christ are to be found in every age; that doubt and skepticism are ever with us, at least as long as Satan reigns on this planet and as long as people of the earth value the accolades of their cynical constituency more than the quiet acceptance of the Lord and his people; but

that certitude and peace and power are the fruits of personal spiritual experience and the keys to remaining steadfast in the face of opposition and challenge.

One of the most effective ways to teach faith in Christ is through reading the scriptural accounts of persons who have evidenced great faith, then patterning our lives after them. Similarly, an indispensable guide in discovering the path of repentance and the miracle of forgiveness is the way of spiritual regeneration and holiness set forth in the labors and ministries of the Saints of earlier dispensations. In our own day there exists no more credible and critical source for discerning and exposing the spirit of anti-Christ than the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon; nor is there any better formula for remaining untroubled and unhindered in our course than that put forward in the example of Jacob, who had received many revelations, had been ministered to by angels, knew well the voice and dictation of the Spirit, was a student of holy writ, and had spent many quiet hours in spiritual struggle and mighty prayer (see Jacob 7:5, 8, 11, 22). When the moment of significant confrontation came to him—just as it has or will come to individual Latter-day Saints—he stood steadfast and immovable, firm in the faith of his beloved Redeemer. Only when we are built upon the rock of Christ, are anchored and settled in true doctrine and personal spiritual experience, will we have the strength and capacity to perceive the perverse or engage the diabolical. In the words of Nephi, the son of Helaman, “when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel 5:12).

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