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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Alma, The Son of Alma

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Abstract: This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The Book of Alma The Son of Alma

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.

The book of Alma consists of the writings of three different writers: the younger Alma (chapters 1-44) and his sons Helaman (chapters 45-62) and Shiblon (chapter 63). It covers the period of time from approximately 91 BC to 52 BC. Therefore the book chronicles about forty years of Nephite history—years of growth, internal contention, and war. The book also contains some of the most important doctrinal discourses in the Book of Mormon.

In making the abridgment, Mormon at times entered the original discourse into his narrative. Sometimes he condensed and summarized, and at other times he provided transitional commentary.

Chapter Outline of Alma

A brief outline of the book of Alma worth committing to memory is as follows:

Alma 1 The beginning of the reign of judges. The anti-Christ Nehor

Alma 5 The process of spiritual growth

Alma 8-15 The ministry of Alma and Amulek

Alma 11-15 Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted.

Alma 13 The priesthood

Alma 16 The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite invasion.

Alma 17 In the land of Nephi, Ammon, while working for the Lamanite King Lamoni, protects the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus and drives off those who attempt to steal them.

Alma 17-26 The mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi

Alma 18-19 As a result of Ammon's example and preaching, King Lamoni and his household are converted.

Alma 22 Aaron preaches to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land, and he is converted.

Alma 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons and covenant not to make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain.

Alma 30 The anti-Christ Korihor

Alma 31-35 Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites.

Alma 32 Alma's lecture to the Zoramites on faith

Alma 34 Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ.

Alma 36-37 Alma counsels his son Helaman.

Alma 38 Alma counsels his son Shiblon.

Alma 39-42 Alma's Counsel to his Son Corianton on Sexual Sin and Other

Subjects

Alma 39 Alma's Counsel on Sexual Sin

Alma 40 Alma's Counsel on the Spirit World and Resurrection

Alma 41 Alma's Counsel on the Law of Restoration

Alma 42 Alma's Counsel on Atonement, Justice, and Mercy

Alma 43-62 A period of war—the account of the remarkable chief captain

Moroni

Alma 46 The title of liberty

Alma 53, 56-58 The two thousand stripling warriors

Alma 59-61 Captain Moroni and Pahoran exchange letters

Alma chapter 1 begins the account of the fourteen-year ministry of the younger Alma (Alma 1-16) which occurred simultaneously with the fourteen-year ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17-26).

Alma Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Alma 1 The beginning of the reign of judges. The Antichrist Nehor kills Gideon and is executed on top of Hill Manti.

1 Now it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, from this time forward, king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, having warred a good warfare, walking uprightly before God, leaving none to reign in his stead; nevertheless he had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made.

verse 1 This verse essentially states: From the first year of the reign of judges onward, the people were obliged to abide by the laws of Mosiah. All other material in the verse is simply parenthetical. We will subsequently learn that the governmental system of judges will be referred to as the law of Mosiah. The set of laws codified by Mosiah, which are based on the law of Moses, are referred to as the laws of Mosiah.

“in the first year of the reign of the judges” This era began 509 years after the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem (see Mosiah 29:46-47) and will extend for one

hundred years. This era will run concomitantly with the era based on Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:28, 34). Both will end nine years after the signs of the Messiah's birth were seen. After that, the Nephites began to reckon time from the time of the sign of the Savior's birth (3 Nephi 2:5-8).

2 And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.

verse 2 Here we are introduced to Nehor, one of the arch-enemies of religious truth in the Book of Mormon. We have already met the anti-Christ Sherem (Jacob 7), and we will yet meet additional individuals whose characteristics are similar to those of Nehor. These are Amlici (Alma 2), Zeezrom (Alma 11-15), Korihor (Alma 30), and Amalickiah (Alma 46-51). Though we will not meet him in person, we will encounter the adherents of another anti-Christ, Zoram (Alma 31-35).

It is of interest to note that the name Nehor likely has Jaredite origins. See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

All of these individuals are learned, fluent in language, charismatic, and aggressive. They attempt to lead the people astray, deny Christ, and deny that any prophet can foretell the future. Their stories are also strikingly similar in that they are confronted by the Nephite leaders, are hesitant to answer when asked about their belief in scripture, ask for a sign, are accused of blasphemy, finally offer a confession, and all but one eventually suffer an ignominious death (Zeezrom eventually repents of his sins and is converted). After their deaths, the people return to righteousness.

How do we explain the apparently similar religious and political philosophies of these men? The matter turns out to be quite simple. All belonged to the same religious order founded by Nehor—the order of the Nehors. It was apparently based in Ammonihah (which was known as the “desolation of Nehors” after its destruction) and was popular among the Mulekites—particularly their learned and professional class (see Alma 14:18). These are the people who feel that the people should be governed by a king and not by the common people. They are the elite, the learned, the sophisticated, the aristocracy, those who seek for power. It is specifically stated that Zeezrom belonged to this order (Alma 14:16). Although it is never specifically mentioned that Korihor was of this persuasion, it seems likely he was. When Korihor decried Nephite traditions, for example, he did not refer to them as the traditions of “our” fathers. Rather, he called them traditions of “your” or traditions of “their” fathers (Alma 30:27,31). This religious order will later be given another name—the “king-men” (Alma 51:5). The common people who rise up against this malignant political movement will later be called the “freemen” (Alma 51:6). The conflict between people of these two movements will continue throughout the Book of Mormon and will yet be one of the most important factors that result in the destruction of the Nephite people.

Brother S. Michael Wilcox, a CES instructor, has shed interesting insight onto the anti-Christ's whom he prefers to call "faith shakers." He sees four Book of Mormon characters as the principle anti-Christ's or faith shakers, and he characterizes each slightly differently:

1. Sherem (Jacob 7) feels that the law of Moses is adequate and there was no need for a Savior or a new law.
2. Nehor (Alma 1) teaches that everyone will be saved.
3. Korihor (Alma 30) is the professed atheist who claims that sin is a relative thing and that no one really has a need to be saved from their sins.
4. Zoram (Alma 31-35) will teach that "We are saved, but you are not."

Brother Wilcox feels that the secret to understanding and neutralizing these trouble makers lies in the following five steps:

1. The first is to understand the strategies or tactics they use in tearing down the truth. These strategies are:

- a. The "first-temptation" strategy. This is the same tactic used by Satan in tempting Eve in the garden. In introducing Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden and in outlining the "house rules," the Father said, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Moses 3:16-17). Notice how the Father emphasized the many trees in the garden of which they were allowed to partake. Then he gave a warning of that one forbidden tree. His emphasis was clearly on the many trees. Lucifer, on the other hand, was not inclined to mention the many trees of which they could partake. Rather, he focused only on the forbidden tree and focused Eve's attentions on it by asking, "Hath God said—Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Moses 4:7). He wanted Eve to feel restricted or bound down by the one tree in the garden of which she was commanded not to partake. In a similar way, the faith shakers or anti-Mormons today make no mention of the many wonderful blessings and opportunities afforded by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their wont is rather to point out those commandments which warn us of danger. They want us to focus our attentions on those few. It is then easy for them to imply or directly say, "Isn't this a restriction of your freedom? They want us to feel that those few commandments are an intolerable infringement on our rights. "Aren't you mature enough to decide what is best for you without having some else tell you what to do?" A good example is the law of chastity which they may well challenge as being old fashioned. "After all," they may say, "isn't each of us capable of deciding for ourselves how we should live without having someone else prying into our lives and counseling us in these very private matters? As long as two mature adults agree and do not offend anyone else by their actions, is it anyone else's business?"

b. The debunking strategy. To *debunk* is to ridicule, scoff, scorn, or make fun of. If something is wonderful or sacred, the debunking anti-Mormon tries to take all the glory out of it through a patronizing, scornful attitude.

2. Learn thoroughly and cling to your doctrine. The prophet Joseph Smith said, "Truth will always cut its own swath." A person's righteous behavior is best underpinned by true doctrine. Remove the doctrine, and a person's behavior suffers. Ask yourself this question: If you had no belief in an afterlife or in religion, would your behavior deteriorate? For most of us, our knowledge of the doctrine and the principle of accountability helps us live more righteously. Consequently, Satan and his minions, the faith shakers, will consistently attack the doctrine.

3. Be wise. You don't always have to give audience to, or reply to the faith shaker. We will read that when Korihor took his faith-shaking strategies among the people of Ammon, they wisely refused to listen. Instead, they bound him and carried him before Ammon who was a high priest. The false doctrines of the faith shakers are often pleasing to the carnal mind, and it may at times be dangerous to pay close attention to them.

4. Turn the tables on the faith shaker. Go on the offensive. A good question to ask is, "What evidence do you have that there is no God?" Put the burden of proof on the other guy. The simple fact is that there exists no evidence that there is no God or that the Book of Mormon is not true.

5. Make certain that your own testimony is firmly based on both a spiritual witness, and also on evidence or "substance." The apostle Paul so counseled when he wrote, "Now faith is [in part] the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The evidence you acquire for yourself will be based on experiences, study, and reason. You will then be able to speak with authority.

3 And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.

verse 3 "every priest and teacher ought to become popular" "they ought to be supported by the people" Nehor preached that teachers of religion ought to be recognized, acknowledged, and paid by the people for their preaching. Today we would refer to this as "priestcraft." For a definition of priestcraft, see the commentary for verse 12.

4 And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

verse 4 Nehor preached two separate ideas here:

1. The first is that one need not worry. You're going to be all right in the end. God did not put you here to fail. You're going to be saved. A version of this idea is found today in the Evangelicals' doctrine that all one need do is confess Christ, and you will be saved. For a thorough discussion of this idea see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 10, *The Afterlife* and chapter 11, *Faith and Works*.

2. The second is the humanistic and insidiously hedonistic philosophy that all individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt, so long as other people are not injured by your thoughts, words, and actions. What you think, speak, and say is no one else's business and cannot be considered a sin. It is not difficult to understand how this erroneous philosophy might appeal to many people.

“the people . . . need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice” According to this philosophy, people need not feel obligated to follow the strict commandments of God. If one is careful not to injure others, there is no sin or need for repentance. One need only rejoice.

Regarding a need for man to repent of his sins, there are two philosophical extremes seen in the world today, both of them false:

1. God loves us and will forgive us for whatever we do that is “only human.” Those who espouse this philosophy tend to ignore God until they want something. Then they feel free to call upon God to fulfill whatever desire they possess at the time. Repentance, if it should be ever needed, is taken care of with an “I’m sorry.” If their self-perceived breach of the laws of God is serious, they may add, “I’ll never do it again.” And they won’t, that is until circumstances warrant. God is a god of mercy, and repentance is a slap on the hand.

2. The opposite false view of repentance sees God as a stern taskmaster who sets up laws that violate all natural instincts. His laws are strict and arbitrary, and he eagerly awaits the opportunity to punish those who sin. According to this view, the laws of God are merely an obstacle course which tests our obedience. God is angered by anyone who would dare break the law, and he metes out punishment to them to frighten them into forsaking sin. Repentance satisfies or placates God and thus frees the sinners from further punishment. The trick is to learn those actions that offend God, and avoid them. Then hopefully repentance is unnecessary. Those who fail in this approach are consigned to the everlasting fires of hell, a fate that mollifies God. God is a God of justice and vindictiveness, who intends to instill fear into the hearts of men so that they will obey him.

As is true with most false doctrines, there is in these two extreme views a mixture of truth and error. God loves his children beyond their ability to comprehend, and he wants nothing more than to see them return to him, to possess all that he possesses, and to become as he is. His laws exist to allow his people to grow and progress so that

they may be happy in his presence forever. He is a God of justice, as no unclean thing can exist in the presence of God. He is also a God of mercy who is willing to extend forgiveness to his people but only after they have earnestly strived to live the law and repent of their sins. He is patient and long suffering with his children, but if they ultimately fail in their obedience, he takes no delight in the suffering they will inevitably encounter.

God's laws are not arbitrary rules designed to test our obedience. They are guidelines by which we may achieve the ultimate happiness in this life and in the life to come. If obeyed, his laws help us enjoy the abundant life Christ promised to those who adhere to his gospel and ultimately they help us to become like him. We read in scripture that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:20-21). God's law provides us access to his blessings, and obedience to those laws assures us of these blessings. God knows us intimately, and he knows perfectly the potential vicissitudes of this mortal experience. His laws are designed to protect us, to uplift us, to enlighten our minds, and to enlarge our souls. God's laws then are not arbitrary rules. Nor are they merely helpful suggestions which can be disregarded at will. "And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same" (D&C 88:34-35). Mae Blanch provides us with an instructive analogy of this principle. Speaking personally about herself, she writes:

I am a diabetic; my doctor gives me certain laws—do's and don'ts—which I must obey to control my illness. I must avoid excessive fats and sugars in my diet and eat only moderate amounts of other foods. I must exercise regularly. I must take insulin injections twice a day and test my blood sugar three times a day. I must avoid undue exertion, get proper rest, and watch carefully for any minor infections, especially on my feet. I need to check in with my doctor on a regular basis to monitor the progress of my disease. If I follow these "commandments," I may control my illness and receive the blessing of health. If, however, I yield to the temptation of a hot fudge sundae or a Kara chocolate truffle, or decide to stay in bed an extra hour rather than rise and jog, I do not say my doctor is punishing me when my blood sugar climbs to unacceptable levels. And if I continue to ignore his instructions and wind up in the hospital, I don't expect to say, "I'm sorry; please forgive me; and have my health immediately restored. My repentance must involve both ceasing to break the doctor's "laws" and changing my attitude, not resenting the restrictions placed on my license to do as I please. . . . Thus . . . the laws . . . are given to me for my well-being and to help me achieve my goals, not to complicate my life or deny me pleasure ("Repentance: The Gift of Love" in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 76-77.)

5 And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.

verse 5 Nehor obviously made some converts among the Nephites. His doctrines were “pleasing unto the carnal mind” (Alma 30:53).

6 And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.

7 And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.

verse 7 “he met a man . . . and he began to contend with him sharply” Apparently Nehor accosted Gideon and engaged him in a public debate hoping to humiliate the older man in front of the people and thus “lead away the people of the church.”

8 Now the name of the man was Gideon; and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.

verse 8 Gideon was an old and greatly respected member of the Nephite society. He is the same Gideon who chased king Noah onto a high tower and would have killed him if a Lamanite army had not been seen marching upon the Nephites in the land of Nephi. He also chased the wicked priests of Noah when they deserted their wives and families and when they fled into the wilderness to save themselves. He later became king Limhi’s captain, and he saved his people from the Lamanites’ wrath when the Nephites were accused of kidnaping the daughters of the Lamanites. It was also Gideon who conceived the plan of getting the Lamanite guards drunk so that Limhi and his people could escape from the city of Nephi.

9 Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword.

verse 9 “he was wroth with Gideon” Nehor had a lot to lose if Gideon were successful in exposing him for the false teacher he was. He would lose his wealth and his popularity which were the basis of his power and influence. Apparently Gideon had begun to “carry the day” in their public debate.

If Nehor had not murdered Gideon, he would have been allowed to continue his wicked proselyting, since under the Nephite law, no one could be condemned for preaching his or her beliefs.

10 And the man who slew him was taken by the people of the church, and was brought before Alma, to be judged according to the crimes which he had committed.

11 And it came to pass that he stood before Alma and pleaded for himself with much boldness.

12 But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.

verse 12 “priestcraft” This colorful word has a specific definition. If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5).

“thou hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword” This accusation certainly applies to Nehor’s actions relative to Gideon. It is logical to suppose that Nehor was guilty in other instances of trying to force his beliefs on to others so that they would strengthen his numbers and contribute financially to his cause.

“were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction” If sufficient people were forced “by the sword” to join in Nehor’s movement, it would result in the destruction of the people. It is easy to see why spiritual destruction of a people would result from involvement with Nehor. The practitioner of priestcraft sets himself up in competition with the Lord. For those who would adhere to their teachings, they define the terms of salvation for man. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Priesthood and priestcraft are two opposites; one is of God, the other of the devil” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd edition, 593).

13 And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance.

14 Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.

verse 14 “the law which has been given us by Mosiah . . . has been acknowledged by this people” By acknowledging the law, the people committed

themselves to obey it and to accept the consequences established for disobedience of the law. Obviously capital punishment is a tenet of the law of Mosiah (see verse 18).

15 And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.

verse 15 “he . . . did acknowledge . . . that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God” The concept of having a condemned man confess his sins before being executed is intriguing. Since the man is doomed, why would he cooperate with the authorities by detailing his crime? With no hope of leniency for confessing, what could he possibly gain? The answer may lie in the regulations followed by Jewish religious authorities in the time of Christ. The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish teachings compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince from oral traditions in AD 137-219. One of the tractates of the Mishnah describes in detail the procedures used by the Sanhedrin in capital cases. A major provision concerning confession is described thus: “When he [the condemned man] was about ten cubits from the place of stoning they used to say to him, “Make thy confession,” for such is the way of them that have been condemned to death to make confession, for every one that makes his confession has a share in the world to come” (M Sanhedrin 6.2). The passage then cites Joshua 7:19 as precedent for this provision. When Achan was condemned to be stoned for his sin, “Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.”

The Mishnah makes it clear that although the confession would not alter the decision of the court, it would be taken into consideration in the final judgment that would be made by God. Because the Mishnah was not compiled until the second century AD, it seems clear that we should not expect all of its provisions to have existed in the ancient kingdom of Judah, from which the prophet Lehi fled more than seven centuries earlier. But the close parallels between these Book of Mormon accounts and the Mishnah suggest that the legal procedures discussed here may have predated the Babylonian captivity.

This seems to be the reasoning in another Book of Mormon account, in which Sherem was guilty of teaching falsehood (see the commentary for Jacob 7:16-19).

“between the heavens and the earth” The location of Nehor’s execution atop a hill may be behind the statement that he made his confessions “between the heavens and the earth.” But this expression may also have something to do with calling heaven and earth to witness.

“Ignominious” is defined in this context as shameful, dishonorable, reproachful, or infamous. We do not know the nature of the ignominious death that Nehor suffered, but in view of the Mishnaic requirement that the place of stoning be at least twice as high as a man so that the culprit could be pushed over the edge before being stoned (M Sanhedrin 6.4), it is interesting that Nehor was brought to the top of the hill to be executed. Of the various approved methods of execution, stoning was required for him “that beguiles [others to idolatry], and [him] that leads [a whole town] astray” (M Sanhedrin 7.3).

16 Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.

verse 16 Unfortunately the priestcraft Nehor had introduced did not end with his execution, but it continued to spread throughout the land.

All worldly things are “vain things” including material possessions, physical pleasures, desire for power, and popularity or influence. Vain things have no enduring or eternal value.

17 Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.

verse 17 “they pretended to preach according to their belief” Here we are taught that the preaching of “religious principles” by the purveyors of priestcraft is more a function of their business than a reflection of the beliefs of their hearts.

“the law could have no power on any man for his belief” The Nephite law guaranteed them freedom of conscience. It protected the right of personal belief. A person could not be punished for his beliefs regardless of how far from the truth their beliefs were. A person was also allowed to teach his beliefs to others as long as others were not forced or injured.

18 And they durst not steal, for fear of the law, for such were punished; neither durst they rob, nor murder, for he that murdered was punished unto death.

verses 17-18 Apparently the basis of Nephite law, the laws of Mosiah, was the Mosaic law since lying, stealing, robbing, and murder were forbidden, and the penalty for murder was death. Again, we see evidence a conceptual difference between stealing and robbing. Stealing, theft, or thieving involved an individual’s taking things that belong to his neighbor. This is a civil crime and is dealt with by the judge. Robbing or plundering involved attacking an individual for the purpose of obtaining things of value.

19 But it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church of God, and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

verse 19 We will learn that this persecution of the church from without the church will turn out to be both a curse and a blessing to the church depending upon how the members responded to it. Some of the members will be led away from the church (verses 22-24), while others will be strengthened (verse 25).

20 Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price.

verse 20 All pronouns in this verse except the first “they” refer to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

21 Now there was a strict law among the people of the church that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and that there should be no persecution among themselves.

verse 21 Here is the secret for dealing with persecution. It is simply to be living examples of Christ’s teachings, to love their enemies, to return good for evil. Also the church members were to forgive and support one another in times of persecution.

In our day the First Presidency has counseled us in dealing with persecutions from without the Church (*First Presidency letter 1 December 1983*). They have suggested that we not “challenge” or “enter into debates” with those who are critical of the Church. We are advised to deal with our detractors “without resentment and without malice.” We should prepare to answer them with “prayer” and “humility.” Our approach should be to explain the doctrines and practices of the Church in a “positive” manner, pointing out “the high standards expected of members of the Church.” We should stress positive values such as “temperance . . . morality . . . fidelity in marriage [and] . . . worthy citizenship.” We should also emphasize the “dedication and faithfulness of members . . . [in] taking care of [members] who are in need, in service to others, in missionary work, in the payment of tithes, [and] in keeping their covenants and obligations. “Above all [we should] . . . bear testimony of the restoration of the gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, and that ‘There is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we may be saved.’”

It seems that we are to look upon external persecution of the Church as a blessing and opportunity to teach the doctrines and practices of the gospel.

22 Nevertheless, there were many among them who began to be proud, and began to contend warmly with their adversaries, even unto blows; yea, they would smite one another with their fists.

verse 22 Even though the members of the church were committed not to retaliate against those without the church who were persecuting them, the pressure of persecution was too much for some of them. Rather than remain humble and submissive, they became “proud,” and they began to fight back. As we will learn in verse 24, this resulted in the excommunication and apostasy of many members of the church.

23 Now this was in the second year of the reign of Alma, and it was a cause of much affliction to the church; yea, it was the cause of much trial with the church.

24 For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God. And also many withdrew themselves from among them.

verse 24 “the hearts of many were hardened” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God” They were excommunicated from the church.

“many withdrew themselves from among them” Many also left the church of their own accord.

verses 25-31 Those who were able to successfully endure “with patience the persecution” heaped upon them, however, were strengthened and blessed. They “began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need.”

25 Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them.

verse 25 Oh that we could all be “steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God”!

26 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.

27 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.

verses 26-27 When the people saw that their priest was just like them—a working man who labored just like they did—they were inclined to also leave their labors to hear and consider his preachings. They identified with him. There is a natural human tendency for people to separate themselves into socioeconomic and intellectual strata. If the preacher is thought by his congregation to live on a separate and higher spiritual and intellectual plain, then his preachings may not be considered applicable by his hearers. These verses imply a warning that is pertinent in the church today.

“Comely” implies attractive but appropriately so—not gaudy or ostentatious.

28 And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.

29 And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

verse 29 “silk and fine-twined linen” This phrase has invited some comments from Book of Mormon critics who maintain that neither silk nor linen was known in pre-Columbian America (see also the commentary for Alma 4:6).

Linen is defined as a cloth, usually quite stiff and hard-wearing, made of fibers from the flax plants prepared by soaking and pounding. Although the flax plant is apparently not known in pre-Spanish America, several fabrics were made from vegetable fibers that look and feel like European linen. These include fabrics made from the leaf of the maguey plant; from the fibers of the yucca plant; and bark cloth, made by stripping bark from the fig tree and soaking and pounding it.

Most commonly silk is defined as “a fine, lustrous fiber produced by the larvae of certain insects,” especially an Asian moth, *Bombix Mori*. However, there are several ancient American cloths that provide a close parallel with silk. These include silk from cocoons gathered wild in Mexico and spun into expensive cloth at the time of the Spanish conquest; cloth made from the silk-like fiber from the pod of the Ceiba (or “silk-cotton”) tree found in the Yucatan; cloth from the silky fiber of the wild pineapple plant; a silk-like fabric made by the Aztecs from fine rabbit hair; and even a cotton cloth was found by the Spaniards at Teotihuacan was characterized as being “of irreproachable evenness, woven . . . exceedingly fine,” and “of gossamer thinness.” (“Possible ‘Silk’

and 'Linen' in the Book of Mormon," based on research by John L. Sorenson, November 1988, in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 162-64).

"Homely" implies plain and functional.

30 And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

verse 30 "they were liberal to all" They were generous or gave liberally.

31 And thus they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church.

32 For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness; nevertheless, the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible.

verse 32 One gains the impression that the Nephites had become a widely diverse group given to various excesses, yet the secular law was able to keep them in check—though with some difficulty.

"in idolatry or idleness" Actually idleness is a form of idolatry. See the discussion on idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

"wearing costly apparel" For a discussion of this universal inclination of the proud and worldly, see the commentary for Jacob 2:13 (cf. verse 4).

"being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes" For a discussion of the concept of pride, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self."*

33 And it came to pass that by thus exercising the law upon them, every man suffering according to that which he had done, they became more still, and durst not commit any wickedness if it were known; therefore, there was much peace among the people of Nephi until the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 33 "they became more still" When the wicked were forced to suffer the consequences of their wickedness according to the law, the effect was for them to become even more wicked. So it is in mortality. When the forces of evil and the forces for good operate along side one another, the tendency is for the good to become

stronger in their commitment, and for the wicked to become more so. Herein lies the essence and the very purpose of this mortal trial in which we are now involved.

During the first five years of the reign of judges, the majority of the people were righteous. Thus Alma as chief judge was able to deal with the problems that arose and maintain the form of government Mosiah had instituted. When the people living under the rule of judges were righteous, then the judgments rendered were just and fair and allowed the people to live in peace and security. When some of them began to be wicked, as in this verse, the law could still control them. We will learn that when the majority of the people become wicked, then the government will become corrupt and fail.

Alma Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

Alma 2 Amlici conspires to be king. He is defeated in an election; brings an army against the Nephites and joins with the army of the Lamanites. The Nephites defeat Amlici's army and the Lamanites army, and Amlici is slain by Alma.

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—

verse 1 “in the commencement of the fifth year” There is reason to believe that the Nephite year began in the month we call April (3 Nephi 8:5).

Here we are introduced to another threat to the Nephite reign of judges in the form of Amlici, a follower of Nehor. This was a crucial time for the Alma and his fledgling government. Amlici likely had Mulekite roots (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:2). Dr. John L. Sorenson has observed that the Mulekites probably “constituted a numerous population with their own history and cultural features whom the intruding Nephite elite ruled only with difficulty. The Amlicites may have been broadly categorized together with ‘the people of Zarahemla,’ [the Mulekites] although residing at a distance from the city of Zarahemla and so never headed by the chief (Zarahemla) whom the senior Mosiah encountered and coopted when he led the Nephites from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. The Amlicites . . . seem not to have traced any connection with Mulek but set themselves apart only under their current leader’s name, Amlici. Perhaps they were a local group or set of groups derived in part from Jaredite ancestry or perhaps from ancestors other than Mulek who arrived with his party” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did they Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1/1, 12).

An interesting task, as you study this segment of the Book of Mormon, is to try to draw correlations between the ministry of Alma the Younger and the simultaneous ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites. Alma chapter 1 begins the account of the fourteen-year ministry of the younger Alma (Alma 1-16) which occurred simultaneously with the fourteen-year ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17-26). Traditionally, it has been difficult to tie these two ministries together. The only concrete touchstone between the two has been the Lamanites’ marching to destroy Ammonihah in the 11th year of judges as told by Alma in Alma 16:2-9 and its twin narrative in Alma 25:2-3. One of the perplexing questions has been why there is not a correlation in the sons of Mosiah account (Alma 17-26) with the large

movements of Lamanite armies led by the Nephite dissenter Amlici, and involving a Lamanite king (see verses 32-33), here in the fifth year of the reign of judges (the fifth year of both ministries). At this same time, we will learn that Ammon (Alma 18-19) and Aaron (Alma 22) had been dealing with Lamanite kings in the land of Nephi, but the account of the sons of Mosiah mentions nothing of this threatening alliance with the Amlicites. This problem has now been solved through the careful study of the Book of Mormon text by J. Christopher Conkling and others. Brother Conkling has suggested that the Amlici and his adherents the Amlicites, whose exploits we encounter here in this chapter are the same as the Amalekites whom we will encounter in Alma 21-24 (see especially the Alma 21:2-5; 22:7; 24:28-29). The description by Ammon and Aaron of the Amalekites in these verses correlates with Alma's description of the Amlicites in the fifth year of the reign of judges. For a discussion of the reasons why the Amlicites are very likely identical with the Amalekites, see the commentary for Alma 21:2.

Note the long sentences used by Alma (or Mormon) that contain multiple parenthetical expressions. Verses 1 and 2 combine to form one complex sentence. We will learn more about this technique of writing in the commentary for Alma 3:1.

2 Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be king over the people.

verse 2 Among his own people, perhaps largely concentrated in a separate area outside the city of Zarahemla, Amlici was apparently regarded essentially as king. This is perhaps the first instance in the Book of Mormon where we encounter a particular political entity among the Nephites, the “king-men.” For a discussion of the “king-men” see the introductory comments for Alma 46.

3 Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.

verse 3 This rebellious faction of people led by Amlici posed a real threat to the Nephite system of judges and free elections. Those who accepted the latter recognized this threat and were alarmed by it. Only a majority vote could change the form of government and re-establish a king among the people. Amlici posed the threat of being able to persuade a majority of the people to vote for him.

4 Therefore, if it were possible that Amlici should gain the voice of the people, he, being a wicked man, would deprive them of their rights and privileges of the church; for it was his intent to destroy the church of God.

5 And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land, every man according to his mind, whether it were for or against Amlici, in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.

verse 5 This verse describes the excited controversy that existed because of this vital issue. We might interpret the word “wonderful” as amazing, exciting, astonishing, astounding, or remarkable.

6 And thus they did assemble themselves together to cast in their voices concerning the matter; and they were laid before the judges.

verse 6 “they were laid before the judges” The people cast their votes, and the judges tallied them.

7 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people.

verse 7 Amlici lost the election. It is notable that even though the new Nephite government was fighting for its very existence, it refrained from contravening the law. “The principle of observing and honoring law duly instituted by the people seems to be an earmark of those who would follow God” (Mae Blanch in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 288).

This verse provides evidence that at this point in time, the majority of the Nephites were righteous. What is that evidence? The fact that the “voice of the people” made the correct decision.

8 Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor.

verse 8 What is Amlici’s response to his defeat? We will learn in the following verses that he will consolidate his people, be consecrated as their king, arm them, and incite them to come against the Nephites in open civil war.

9 And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king.

10 Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.

11 Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God.

12 Therefore the people of the Nephites were aware of the intent of the Amlicites, and therefore they did prepare to meet them; yea, they did arm themselves with

swords, and with cimeters, and with bows, and with arrows, and with stones, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons of war, of every kind.

verse 12 “the *people of the Nephites*” (italics added) This is the first usage of this phrase in the Book of Mormon text. It will be found seventeen additional times. Some have seen in the expression evidence of a complex social structure among the Nephites. The expression suggests that there existed a social stratum called “the Nephites” while another category was “people” who were “of,” that is, subordinate to, the “Nephites,” even though they all existed under the same central government (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1, 12).

From the standpoint of the Nephites, this was clearly a “righteous war.” That is they were fighting in self defense, and the Lord was with them. However this fact did not prevent them from experiencing the devastation and loss of war. We will learn that thousands of the Nephites, including men, women, and children, will be slain in battle. Also they will suffer devastating losses of flocks and herds and fields of grain.

13 And thus they were prepared to meet the Amlicites at the time of their coming. And there were appointed captains, and higher captains, and chief captains, according to their numbers.

14 And it came to pass that Amlici did arm his men with all manner of weapons of war of every kind; and he also appointed rulers and leaders over his people, to lead them to war against their brethren.

15 And it came to pass that the Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla, and there they began to make war with the Nephites.

verse 15 “the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla” The phrase “land of Zarahemla” likely has reference to either the city of Zarahemla or perhaps to the local land of Zarahemla which immediately surrounds the city. The river Sidon apparently ran on the east of the city of Zarahemla. If reference to the greater land of Zarahemla were intended, then it might be more appropriate to say “the river Sidon, which ran through the land of Zarahemla.”

While it is not possible to know the precise setting for incidents in the Book of Mormon story, it is helpful for a student of the book to have a geographic model in mind as he attempts to follow the specific happenings. Picture, if you will, the River Sidon running, as the Nephites reckoned directions, from south to north through the land of Zarahemla. The river runs within a broad river basin several miles across. This basin is bordered on the west by a range of mountains. In and beyond these mountains is the wilderness called Hermounts. On the east the river basin is bordered by a lower, less rugged range of hills or mountains. Within the basin, the city of Zarahemla is located on the west bank of the river. Across the river to the east is a gradual incline sloping

upward toward the bordering hills. This slope is known as the hill Amnihu. Beyond the bordering hills to the east is a valley, the valley of Gideon. Up river from the city of Zarahemla, and beyond the river basin is the land of Minon, a smaller land within the greater land of Zarahemla. From Minon there are two ways to reach the city of Zarahemla. One could travel to the east of the hills bordering the Sidon basin to the valley of Gideon and then enter the basin across the river from the city of Zarahemla. Or, one may travel directly down the west bank of the River Sidon to the city of Zarahemla. See the illustration, *Geography of Hill Amnihu*.

16 Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle.

17 And they began to slay the Amlicites upon the hill east of Sidon. And the Amlicites did contend with the Nephites with great strength, insomuch that many of the Nephites did fall before the Amlicites.

18 Nevertheless the Lord did strengthen the hand of the Nephites, that they slew the Amlicites with great slaughter, that they began to flee before them.

19 And it came to pass that the Nephites did pursue the Amlicites all that day, and did slay them with much slaughter, insomuch that there were slain of the Amlicites twelve thousand five hundred thirty and two souls; and there were slain of the Nephites six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls.

20 And it came to pass that when Alma could pursue the Amlicites no longer he caused that his people should pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword; and in this valley the Nephites did pitch their tents for the night.

verse 20 One of the minor points made in criticism of the Book of Mormon is the claim that there is no evidence of a tent-making or tent-using tradition in Mesoamerica. Actually Mesoamerican literature makes it clear that tents were in regular use by Aztec armies at the time of the Spanish conquest. The Spanish called them “tiendas.” These might have been constructed of straw, grass, or some type of cloth (John L. Sorenson, FARMS Update in Insights [May 1994], 2).

21 And Alma sent spies to follow the remnant of the Amlicites, that he might know of their plans and their plots, whereby he might guard himself against them, that he might preserve his people from being destroyed.

22 Now those whom he had sent out to watch the camp of the Amlicites were called Zeram, and Amnor, and Manti, and Limher; these were they who went out with their men to watch the camp of the Amlicites.

23 And it came to pass that on the morrow they returned into the camp of the Nephites in great haste, being greatly astonished, and struck with much fear, saying:

24 Behold, we followed the camp of the Amlicites, and to our great astonishment, in the land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla, in the course of the land of Nephi, we saw a numerous host of the Lamanites; and behold, the Amlicites have joined them;

25 And they are upon our brethren in that land; and they are fleeing before them with their flocks, and their wives, and their children, towards our city; and except we make haste they obtain possession of our city, and our fathers, and our wives, and our children be slain.

26 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi took their tents, and departed out of the valley of Gideon towards their city, which was the city of Zarahemla.

27 And behold, as they were crossing the river Sidon, the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea, came upon them to destroy them.

verse 27 “the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea” This verse is obvious hyperbole and simply indicates that a relatively large body of soldiers is involved.

28 Nevertheless, the Nephites being strengthened by the hand of the Lord, having prayed mightily to him that he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, therefore the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them, and the Lamanites and the Amlicites did fall before them.

verse 28 This must have been a most dramatic moment. Observing the onslaught of an almost innumerable fighting force coming against them, the Nephites must have been overwhelmed with the feeling that they had little chance for victory. Yet they summoned the courage to pray “mightily” to the Lord for help.

29 And it came to pass that Alma fought with Amlici with the sword, face to face; and they did contend mightily, one with another.

30 And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried, saying: O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.

verse 30 Here is another exceedingly dramatic moment. Even Alma who was about to contend with the leader of the opposing force in hand to hand combat experienced some element of self doubt. It may well have been that Amlici was younger and stronger than Alma. Alma likely sensed that the outcome of this individual battle might determine the outcome of the larger battle. He was moved to cry out to the

Lord, “O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.”

31 Now when Alma had said these words he contended again with Amlici; and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword.

32 And he also contended with the king of the Lamanites; but the king of the Lamanites fled back from before Alma and sent his guards to contend with Alma.

33 But Alma, with his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drove them back.

34 And thus he cleared the ground, or rather the bank, which was on the west of the river Sidon, throwing the bodies of the Lamanites who had been slain into the waters of Sidon, that thereby his people might have room to cross and contend with the Lamanites and the Amlicites on the west side of the river Sidon.

35 And it came to pass that when they had all crossed the river Sidon that the Lamanites and the Amlicites began to flee before them, notwithstanding they were so numerous that they could not be numbered.

36 And they fled before the Nephites towards the wilderness which was west and north, away beyond the borders of the land; and the Nephites did pursue them with their might, and did slay them.

37 Yea, they were met on every hand, and slain and driven, until they were scattered on the west, and on the north, until they had reached the wilderness, which was called Hermounts; and it was that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.

verse 37 “the wilderness, which was called Hermounts” This wilderness called Hermounts was a country of wild beasts. It is interesting to note that in Egyptian *Hermonthis* is the God of wild places (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). Brother Nibley wrote:

We have always thought that the oddest and most disturbing name in the Book of Mormon was Hermounts, since there is nothing either Classical or Oriental about it. So we avoided it, until . . . a student from Saudi Arabia asked point blank what the funny word was. Well, what does the Book of Mormon say it is? Hermounts in the Book of Mormon is the wild country of the borderlands, the hunting grounds, “that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.” The equivalent of such a district in Egypt is Hermonthis, the land of Month, the Egyptian Pan—the god of wild places and things. Hermounts and Hermonthis are close enough to satisfy the most exacting philologist (*Since Cumorah*, 169; see also Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 246-47, 281).

See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“**wild and ravenous beasts**” Your author has previously defended the view that Central America is the most likely setting for the Book of Mormon story. It is interesting

to learn that the jaguar, a carnivorous member of the cat family, is endemic to the jungles of that region.

38 And it came to pass that many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been found, and have been heaped up on the earth.

Alma Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Alma 3:6-8 The skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers. And this was done that the Lord might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions.

Alma 3:27 Every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey.

1 And it came to pass that the Nephites who were not slain by the weapons of war, after having buried those who had been slain—now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number—after they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands, and to their houses, and their wives, and their children.

verse 1 This verse illustrates an interesting literary device found in ancient texts known as *epanalepsis*. It occurs where an author, following a parenthetical aside, repeats certain words previously stated in a lengthy sentence to return the reader's attention to the original train of thought. This is also called "resumptive repetition," and it was apparently helpful in ancient texts since those texts did not have the benefit of modern punctuation or paragraphing. The parenthetical aside in this verse is "now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number." Just prior to this aside, Mormon had stated, "after having buried those who had been slain." Therefore, following the parenthetical aside, in order to return the reader's attention back to that thought, he says, "after they had finished burying their dead." One Mormon scholar, Larry Childs has identified eighty-four such occurrences of epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon ("Epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 165-66). A prior example is found in Alma 2:1-2. The "resumptive repetition" in this example is the initial phrase in verse 2: "Now this Amlici."

2 Now many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men.

3 And now as many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been slain upon the bank of the river Sidon were cast into the waters of Sidon; and behold their bones are in the depths of the sea, and they are many.

verses 4-19 In your study of these verses, bear in mind that Alma is discussing two separate marks placed upon the Lamanites and those that associate with them—a dark skin and a red mark upon the forehead. Each may be referred to as a "curse," though we know that the marks themselves are not the curse. Rather they identify

those with the curse as is additionally discussed in the commentary for verses 6-8 of this chapter.

4 And the Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites; nevertheless they had not shorn their heads like unto the Lamanites.

verse 4 This red mark on the foreheads of the Amlicites may have been in part in imitation of the Lamanites who had similarly marked themselves for battle. It also had the practical purpose distinguishing the Amlicites from the Nephites. This would prevent the Lamanites from mistakenly killing their new allies. This mark is also perhaps an unintended fulfillment of a prior prophecy of the prophet Nephi: “Cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing” (2 Nephi 5:23; see also Alma 3:4, 13-19).

5 Now the heads of the Lamanites were shorn; and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them, and their bows, and their arrows, and their stones, and their slings, and so forth.

verse 5 “and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them” The Lamanites initially had armor which was inferior to that of the Nephites (see the discussion of armor in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Mosiah 21:7). Eventually, however, they will begin to copy the style of Nephite armor (see Alma 49:6).

verses 6-8 We already know that another mark had been set upon the Lamanites and the descendants of the sons of Ishmael to keep them apart from the Nephites, that of the dark skin. The dark skin was not, in and of itself, a curse. There is nothing inherently good or evil about the color of one’s skin. It is not only racist but completely false doctrine to believe that white skin is “good” or righteous and that black skin is somehow less than that. The dark skin here is only a mark or symbol which functioned to identify those who had separated themselves from God and his Spirit. That separation is the actual curse. It is apparent that the Lamanites would still have become what they did become even if they had never been marked with the “skin of blackness.” See the commentary from 2 Nephi 5:20-21. We have speculated previously that this dark skin may have resulted from the intermarriage between the indigenous peoples of the New World and the families of Laman, Lemuel, and Ishmael (see verse 9).

6 And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression

and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.

7 And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women.

verse 7 Note that “their brethren” in this verse has a different reference than “their brethren” in the previous verse. In this verse “their brethren” and the pronoun “they” refer to the Lamanites. The first use of the pronoun “them” refers to the descendants of Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Sam; while the second “them” refers to the descendants of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael.

8 And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

verse 8 “Their seed” refers to the Lamanites. The “seed of their brethren” refers to the descendants of Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Sam. The pronouns “they” and “their” refers to the Nephites.

“incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction” We have previously commented upon these false “traditions of the Lamanites” (see the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17). These are the false oral traditions handed down by the Lamanites from generation to generation which formed the basis of the hatred which the Lamanites held toward the Nephites. All Lamanitish children were doubtless indoctrinated with these traditions from the time they were able to understand. I will again summarize them: Lehi used unrighteous dominion in forcing his family to leave behind their choice possessions and their beloved home and land travel into the wilderness. Once in the wilderness, the family was unfairly dominated not only by their father Lehi, but also by their younger brother Nephi. The birthright or the right to govern, after all, rightfully belonged to the oldest son Laman and not to Nephi. When Laman and Lemuel expressed fear of boarding a ship and sailing into the unknown sea, they received no understanding or sympathy. Rather they were forced to board the boat against their will. Once in the New World in the land of their first inheritance, Nephi continued to rule over them. When they tried to resist, Nephi stole their brass plates and departed into the wilderness.

9 And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

verse 9 Note from the previous verse that the Lord’s reasons for not wanting his people to intermarry with other peoples centers on his wanting to perpetuate righteous and not false teachings among his people. Thus, those Nephites who do intermarry with the Lamanites bring upon themselves and their progeny the curse of false beliefs

and traditions. The mark of the curse, the dark skin, will naturally be placed upon the offspring of those who thus intermarry.

10 Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.

verse 10 The word “head” means title. To be “called under that head” means to be called by that title.

By this time lineal descent was less important in determining whether one was a “Nephite” or “Lamanite” than whether or not one was willing to follow the prophets.

11 And it came to pass that whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed those records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and also in the tradition of their fathers, which were correct, who believed in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth—

12 And it is they who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.

13 Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them; yea, they set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads.

14 Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.

15 And again: I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also.

16 And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed.

17 And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed.

verses 14-17 We learn that in marking their foreheads with red, both the Lamanites and the Amlicites fulfilled a prophecy made by the prophet Nephi. This mark which the Amlicites unwittingly placed upon themselves is later referred to as “the curse.”

Other than these verses, we have no other record of this interesting revelation of the Lord to the Nephi. It is not found in the writings of Nephi from the small plates and might have been in the book of Lehi, which was at that time part of the large plates of Nephi. Perhaps this revelation was included on the plates of Mormon and thus might have been found on the 116 pages of lost manuscript.

18 Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

19 Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation.

verse 19 Here Mormon (or Alma) draws an analogy between the Amlicites' willfully placing a red mark on their own foreheads and the fact that every man will be accountable for what he does with his spiritual opportunities.

20 Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle which was fought in the land of Zarahemla, by the Lamanites and the Amlicites, that there was another army of the Lamanites came in upon the people of Nephi, in the same place where the first army met the Amlicites.

verse 20 This second attack apparently occurred in or around the land of Minon.

21 And it came to pass that there was an army sent to drive them out of their land.

22 Now Alma himself being afflicted with a wound did not go up to battle at this time against the Lamanites;

23 But he sent up a numerous army against them; and they went up and slew many of the Lamanites, and drove the remainder of them out of the borders of their land.

24 And then they returned again and began to establish peace in the land, being troubled no more for a time with their enemies.

25 Now all these things were done, yea, all these wars and contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

26 And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one.

verse 26 Again we encounter the Book of Mormon's simplified version of man's post-mortal destiny consisting of either heaven or outer darkness.

27 For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth. And thus endeth the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 27 Here is a most eloquently stated and profound verse well worth committing to memory!

“And thus endeth the fifth year” In order to provide something of a chronological structure to the Book of Mormon, the prophet Mormon, who inscribed his record on the plates of Mormon, included several different phrases which signify the end of a year. These have been called “year-end marking phrases” (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint), and include such expressions as: “making in the whole . . . years,” “also ended,” “had ended,” “thus ended,” “thus endeth,” “passed away,” and “pass away.”

Other units of time used in the Book of Mormon include “day” or “days” (over five-hundred times), “week” (three times—Mosiah 18:25, Alma 31:12; 32:11), and “month,” “months,” or “moons” (seventeen times).

Alma Chapter 4

1 Now it came to pass in the sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were no contentions nor wars in the land of Zarahemla;

2 But the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites.

3 And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty.

verses 2-3 “they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations” The reader is likely to view this conflict between Alma and Amlici and their respective armies as simply good versus evil—the righteous versus the unrighteous. It is interesting to note that the Nephites did not regard this military conflict in that way. Rather they saw themselves as deserving of God’s punishment because of their own wickedness. In a sense the very occurrence of war in the Book of Mormon betrays the unrighteousness of the Nephites since the Lord had indicated to Nephi that the Lamanites would have “no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also” (1 Nephi 2:23).

4 And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God; yea, they were baptized by the hand of Alma, who had been consecrated the high priest over the people of the church, by the hand of his father Alma.

5 And it came to pass in the seventh year of the reign of the judges there were about three thousand five hundred souls that united themselves to the church of God and were baptized. And thus ended the seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and there was continual peace in all that time.

verses 4-5 The missionary work of Alma and his co-workers in the church was tremendously successful during this seventh year of the reign of Judges. Some 3,500 people were baptized into the church “by the hand of Alma.” Presumably Alma did not personally perform all these baptisms himself.

6 And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had

obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.

verse 6 “the people of the church began to wax proud” In this verse we are introduced to the downward cycle with which we will become all too familiar as we continue our study of the Book of Mormon. Initially the people obey the counsel of their leaders and keep the commandments of God. As a result of their obedience and their industry they prosper and are blessed with riches. However, some become caught up and begin to lust after these riches. They begin wearing costly apparel and become proud, fancying themselves better than others. Their hearts then become set on riches and the vain things of the world. They become scornful toward one another and begin to persecute those who do not believe as they do or have as much as they do. An element of class consciousness and inequality begins. Thus, there occur envyings, strife, malice, persecutions, and great contentions among members of the church. Those who remain faithful have to endure great afflictions and persecutions even from within the church. Some turn their backs on the needy, the naked, the sick, and the afflicted. Some church members become even more proud than those who are not members of the church. President Ezra Taft Benson succinctly warned: “God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble” (CR, April 1989, 3-7). For further discussion of the concept of pride, *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

Those “afflicted” with material wealth are said to be faced with the “test of prosperity.”

The Book of Mormon prophets often point to an early sign among the people that signals the beginnings of apostasy. It is the wearing of “costly apparel” (Jacob 2:13; Alma 1:6, 27, 32; 5:53; 31:28; 4 Nephi 1:24, Mormon 8:35- 37). This trait is seen among both men and women and is inevitably associated with pride and wickedness. Why is this so? Mae Blanch in her article, “Challenges to the Reign of the Judges” (*Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29, 292*), observed:

An analysis of the attitudes that lead to and are involved with this habit [the wearing of costly apparel] indicates why it is associated with wickedness. First, it promotes idleness and vanity. One who spends many hours coveting, shopping, spending, and adorning oneself becomes increasingly self-absorbed and uninterested in anything requiring that attention to be diverted from self. Accumulation and adornment become the prime concern. This practice is also a way of displaying wealth in a prideful manner, a manifestation of what has been called the “conspicuous consumption” of the rich, which leads to despising the poor as somehow inferior, a separation of people into “us” and “those kind of people.” And when money and possessions become the chief marks of distinction in society, then the pursuit of money becomes the only action worthwhile. And if this pursuit requires the sacrifice of honesty, integrity, compassion,

and all the other virtues, then so be it, for the love of money is indeed the root of all evil. Thus the wearing of costly apparel involves the soul as much as the body.

“fine silks” “fine-twined linen” More than a thousand years earlier the Jaredites also had “silks, and fine-twined linen” (Ether 10:24). However, when European conquerors arrived in the Americas, they found neither Old World silkworms nor flax. Critics have charged Joseph Smith with arbitrarily inserting into the Book of Mormon text the names of those two textiles, and they say that the presence of the two fibers cannot be substantiated by the cultural record for pre-Columbian America. In recent years, however, several fabrics that have been identified in ancient Mesoamerica deserve to be called “silk” and “linen.” Please see the previous commentary for Alma 1:29. Additional commentary in the issue is provided here.

Normal usage today limits the term *silk* to the fabric made of thread exuded by the Japanese silkworm (actually the larva of an Asian moth, *Bombyx mori*). However, the term embraces meanings that extend beyond the Japanese reference. For instance, Aristotle and other classical Greek writers referred to “silk” in use in their world that had no entomological connection with the Far East. Two types of silkworm native to southeastern Europe yielded cocoons from which a fine thread comparable to Asian silk was obtained (W. T. M. Forbes, “The Silkworm of Aristotle,” *Classical Philology* 25 [1930]: 22-26; and Gisela M. A. Tichtler, “Silk in Greece,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 33 [1929]: 27-33). Thus, a legitimate sense of the term silk is “a cloth having characteristics like Japanese silk,” regardless of whether it originated from the Japanese insect.

Various fabrics in use among the inhabitants of Mexico and Central America when the Spaniards arrived were considered silk or its equivalent by the invaders. One of these fabrics was, indeed, made from cocoons that were gathered from trees in the wild in Mexico and spun into costly cloth. Although the insect involved is not the Japanese one, the procedure of gathering the fine thread is essentially the same as for Japanese silk (Irmgard W. Johnson, “Basketry and Textiles,” in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, ed. Ekholm and Bernal, 312). There were also a number of other silk-like fabrics reported by the Spaniards. In Yucatan, fiber from inside the pod of the ceiba tree, called kapok, was gathered and spun. Bishop Diego de Landa compared the resulting cloth to imported silk (Alfred M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa’s Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan: A Translation, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Harvard University, vol. 18 [Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1941], 201, 205), while Father Clavigero described it as “soft and delicate, and perhaps more so, than [Jananese] silk” (*History of Mexico 1*, trans. Charles Cullen [Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1817], 41). Silky fiber from the wild pineapple plant was also used to weave a fine textile. Moreover, a silk-like fabric was woven by the Aztecs from delicate rabbit hair. Even cotton cloth could be woven so fine that specimens excavated at Teotihuacan, in central Mexico, and dating the fourth century AD have been

characterized as “exceedingly fine” and “of gossamer thinness” (William E. Safford, “Food Plants and Textiles of Ancient America,” in *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Americanists* [Washington, 1917], 17). These examples provide sufficient evidence that the Book of Mormon references to “silk” are plausible, even though Joseph Smith could not have known any of these historical facts on his own.

“Fine-twined linen” is mentioned three times and “fine linen” three more in the records of the Jaredites and Nephites (e.g., Mosiah 10:5). Yet the flax plant from which our familiar linen is made did not grow in America. On this count too the Book of Mormon has been charged with error. Again, please see the commentary for Alma 1:29. Again, I will add further commentary here.

The word *linen* has a broad dictionary meaning in addition to the narrow meaning of cloth made from flax. A textile may be called linen if it has the characteristics of linen. Linen is prepared by soaking and pounding fibers from the flax or hemp plant until they congeal into a strong, solid sheet. In pre-Spanish America native peoples made two kinds of cloth by a similar process. The leaves of the ixtle, maguey, or agave plants were soaked and pounded in the same manner as flax was treated in Europe. The resulting thread and fabric, known as henequen, was the most commonly used cloth, especially among people of the lower economic classes in central Mexico. The Spanish conquistador Bernal Diaz explicitly described this cloth as “like linen” (*The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* [New York: Farrer, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956], 24). Another cloth made of vegetable fiber is bark cloth. The bark of the fig tree was stripped off in large sheets, then soaked, pounded, and dried until the matted material was soft. The resulting “cloth” feels a good deal like henequen or linen (see Johnson, “Basketry and Textiles,” 312).

Joseph Smith had no way of knowing about the history of silk and linen, yet the record he translated, the Book of Mormon, turns out to agree with modern evidence that textiles with these labels were used in Mesoamerica.

“all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry”

It is interesting to note that these people worked for their riches. They obtained them by their “industry.” Though hard work and industry are positive virtues, the riches so obtained can still lead to being lifted up and proud.

7 Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma had consecrated to be teachers, and priests, and elders over the church; yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people.

verse 7 “Teachers” and “priests” have been mentioned previously in the Book of Mormon, but this verse is the first mention of the “elders.” Previously the terms “teachers” and “priests” have referred largely to the function of those called to labor (see

the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:26). In this verse, however, it is clear that all three terms refer to offices within the church, indeed, offices in the Melchizedek priesthood.

8 For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure.

verse 8 “they began to be scornful, one towards another” An individual who is “lifted up in the pride of [his] eyes” and who has “set [his] heart upon riches and upon the vain things of the world” is inevitably “scornful” towards others. Such a person sees others as competitors rather than brothers and sisters. Rather than being naturally inclined to lift and assist others and revel with them in their successes, he is wont to tear down and undermine them and then exult in their failures. C. S. Lewis wrote: “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man” (*Mere Christianity*, 109).

9 And thus, in this eighth year of the reign of the judges, there began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.

10 And thus ended the eighth year of the reign of the judges; and the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church; and thus the church began to fail in its progress.

verse 10 If the Spirit withdraws from the church because of the wickedness within the church, then it is virtually impossible for the church to successfully discharge its responsibility to proclaim the gospel to others and encourage them in their conversion. Thus for those seeking for truth who might have wished to be baptized, the “wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block.”

11 And it came to pass in the commencement of the ninth year, Alma saw the wickedness of the church, and he saw also that the example of the church began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people.

verse 11 The church, lacking the Spirit of God, had deteriorated to the point where some unbelievers who looked to the church for an example were only taught greater wickedness.

12 Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the

naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted.

verse 12 How important is it to impart of one's substance to the poor and needy? It is a central and vital doctrine in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reader may wish to review Mosiah 4:26 wherein king Benjamin places this doctrine in its proper perspective.

13 Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ's sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy;

verse 13 "Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people" There were many factors which might well have produced lamentations and suffering among the people. These included the "contentions," "strife," "malice," "persecutions," and the ignoring of the needy.

Yet in the midst of all this suffering, there were those who were still willing to succor the needy and endure the persecutions heaped upon them for their steadfast beliefs.

14 Looking forward to that day, thus retaining a remission of their sins; being filled with great joy because of the resurrection of the dead, according to the will and power and deliverance of Jesus Christ from the bands of death.

verse 14 It seems clear that even though the Savior would not be born for another eighty or so years, the faithful members of the church in Alma's day had a good understanding of the concepts of atonement and resurrection. They had learned of these concepts from their scriptures and from their contemporary prophets.

15 And now it came to pass that Alma, having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God, and the persecutions which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people, and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful; nevertheless the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him.

verse 15 "the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him" Alma had undoubtedly prayed for divine guidance as he desired to know how he might best serve the Lord in helping to cleanse the church. The "Spirit of the Lord did not fail him," and the answer came. What was that answer? We will read of it in verses 16-18. Alma is inspired to resign his job as chief judge or governor of the people that he might spend his full time in his priestly labors. He knew that bringing people to repentance would require all his time and effort serving in his role as high priest.

16 And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people.

verse 16 “he selected a wise man . . . and gave him power according to the voice of the people” The Nephite’s governmental system did not allow Alma to appoint his own successor. A new chief judge could only be elected by popular vote. It is likely that Alma recommended his successor to the people and then asked for their ratification.

“that he might have power to enact laws . . . and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people” We also are reminded of the extensive power of the office of chief judge or governor. He had both legislative and judicial functions.

17 Now this man’s name was Nephihah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment-seat to judge and to govern the people.

verse 17 “Nephihah” The “hah” ending is common in proper names and in the names of cities in the Book of Mormon. Consider, for example, Moronihah and Ammonihah. “Hah” means something like “house of” or “place of.” Presumably a man who bears such a name likely is of a family which is associated with that place.

Apparently, the “hah” ending performs the same function as the Hebrew word “beth” and means “house of” or “place of.” Examples in Hebrew include Bethel, meaning the place of God and Bethlehem, meaning the house of bread. Other Hebrew examples include Bethany, Bethsaida, Bethphage, and Bethabara.

Interestingly, the “ha” ending is also common in the Mayan language and implies the same meaning—house or place of. Examples of Mayan places include Xelha, Balamha, Altunha, and Pulsiha. As we might expect, a Mayan who bore one of these names was likely of a family who were associated with that place.

18 Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephihah.

19 And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.

verse 19 Never again would a Nephite serve as both spiritual and secular leader of his people. The secular office of chief judge will continue almost to the end of

Nephite civilization. The high priest will preside over all religious affairs until the coming of Christ. Then, after the coming of Christ, the office of high priest will disappear, and priesthood functions will be performed by the disciples or the “elders of the church” (Moroni 3:1).

“seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” One of the grand themes of the entire book of Alma is that the preaching of the word of God in pure testimony is mightier than politics or the sword in establishing peace and goodness among a people.

Alma realized that the solution to the wickedness within the church was for the members to either sincerely repent or to be removed from the church. In either case the church would be cleansed. This basic solution is as applicable today in the church as it was in Alma’s day. Alma’s approach was to bear “pure testimony” before the sinners, or, as the text states “against the sinners.” In this way he could then stand aside and allow the Spirit of God to try to touch the souls of his hearers. He could then challenge them to know their position. If they were receptive to the Spirit and accepted his testimony, they would remain in the church. If they did not, they were excommunicated, and the church was thus cleansed.

Regarding the concept of “pure testimony,” Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have taught: “The Holy Ghost is the converter, and the gospel teacher must never forget this. He or she must never seek to usurp the role of the Spirit nor upstage him The person who bears pure testimony never seeks for cheap substitutes for the Spirit. He never relies upon methodologies which might confuse sentimentality with spirituality, emotional display with edification. . . . He ‘tries the virtue of the word of God’ (Alma 31:5), trusts in the power of the scriptures and the words of the prophets to penetrate to the heart of his listeners, and bears witness of his message with sincerity and with soberness” (*The Holy Ghost*, 119-20).

Alma will spend the remainder of his life in laboring, bearing “pure testimony” to bring his people to repentance, and regulating the affairs of the church.

20 And thus in the commencement of the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Alma delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephihah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.

verse 20 For about eight years, Alma had functioned as both high priest and chief judge. It is also likely that he held the position of chief captain of the Nephite army (Alma 2:16). Perhaps, then, he really split his chief judgeship into three separate offices—chief judge, high priest, and chief captain.

Alma Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Alma 5 The process of spiritual growth

Alma 5:14-15 Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?

Alma 5:26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

The subject of this chapter is the spiritual growth or spiritual progress we are all expected by the Lord to make here in mortality. Spiritual growth may be defined simply as our growth toward godhood—our gradual and incremental acquisition of the characteristics or attributes of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. There exists a state of spiritual development, attainable by each person here in mortality, in which that individual stands fully qualified for exaltation. What characterizes this state? How do we refer to it? How can we achieve it?

Certainly, the amount of spiritual progress the Lord expects each of us to make here on earth, in absolute terms, varies considerably from person to person. We arrive in mortality at different stages of our spiritual development. Our spiritual growth does not begin here on earth. We spent considerable time in the premortal world, perhaps centuries, millennia, or even more, as we reckon time, living with our heavenly parents. In that sphere we were subject to law, and we had our agency. Some of us were more valiant and obedient than others. Obedience to law in that sphere resulted, as it does here in mortality, in spiritual growth—in the incremental acquisition of the attributes of God. By the time we arrive, then, here in mortality, some have made more progress in their spiritual growth, and some have made less. Those who have made more progress in that pre-earthly sphere may well be expected by the Lord to make more here in mortality (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48). The veil through which we pass as we enter mortality is not fully occlusive. Those characteristics we brought with us may well manifest themselves here in this premortal experience.

As we are born here on earth we also encounter differing circumstances. We are presented with differing opportunities for spiritual growth. To some are given relatively few, and to others, abundant opportunities are extended. For example, some are born into primitive third-world cultures where their "religion" is also primal and makes no mention of Jesus Christ. Others are born into wholesome, God-fearing cultures. Some may be born into dysfunctional families where they are neglected or even abused. Others are reared in supportive and loving family environments. The Lord's expectations of those who are blessed with the greater opportunities for growth are

doubtless higher. It is clear that while the amount of progress we are expected to make differs from person to person, there is an amount of growth, in absolute terms, which the Lord expects of each of us. There is a level attainable by each individual person according to his spiritual attainments and capacities which he brought into mortality and according also to those circumstances he encounters here on earth. It may be presumed that once an individual has reached this level, the Lord will judge that individual worthy to live forever in the celestial heaven. This exciting process of spiritual growth is the subject of Alma 5. Read on!

Some background is necessary before proceeding. The concept of spiritual growth is intimately related to other basic doctrinal concepts. These include the law of justice, the fall, the atonement, the concepts of faith, and man's natural self and spiritual self. Indeed, as one learns about the basic concepts of the gospel it becomes readily apparent they are all closely interrelated.

Ideally, the reader will take the time to read and study detailed discussions of each of these topics. These can be found in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. In volume 1, see chapter 5, *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self,"* chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man,* chapter 9, *Revealed Faith,* chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith,* chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith,* chapter 12, *The Law of Justice* and chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*. In volume 2, see chapter 1, *Understanding the Eden Experience—the Fall* and chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*.

If the reader prefers to proceed immediately with this discussion of Alma 5, I have provided a brief discussion of these concepts:

The Law of Justice

This law sets a standard for all of God's actions relative to the eternal fate of each of his creatures. It holds that in their quest for their eternal reward, none of his creatures—none of his intelligences—will ever be unfairly accorded an advantage over another. And, no one of his creations will ever be penalized without that penalty's being fully deserved and wholly appropriate. In all God's giving and taking there will be no biases, no favoritisms, no discriminations, no prejudices, no prepossessions, no inconsistencies, and no partialities.

The law of justice requires that whenever a divine commandment is broken, there must be a punishment imposed and compensation made to restore the balance in natural law that was upset by the violation (see Alma 42). A violation of God's law renders the sinner unworthy to enter the presence of God. He will remain unworthy until recompense is made. This law is very exact. If even one sin is committed, and that sin is not forgiven or removed, the individual guilty of the sin does not qualify for entry back into God's presence. Hence the scriptural statement to the effect that "no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of God" (1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34; Alma 11:37; 40:26; 3 Nephi

27:19; Moses 6:57). The positive side of the law of justice assures us that God must grant blessings to those who obey the commandments (D&C 130:20-21).

Justification. A man is said to be “justified” or “reconciled to God” when all his sins are forgiven. He is then brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute and must be understood to be absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified.

Corollaries to the law of justice. There are a few vital corollaries:

1. Men are punished only for those things of which they themselves are guilty. It is unjust to punish one man for another’s sin.

2. In order to violate the law, one must be capable of understanding the law—in other words the individual must be “accountable.”

3. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for violation of the law, but a man may be judged lightly until he has a chance to receive the law and understand it. All accountable people will eventually have the opportunity to adequately understand the law to the point where their subsequent behavior, relative to the law, will either cause spiritual growth or lead to their condemnation.

Payment of the debt to the law of justice. Since each of us has sinned and is therefore in debt to the law of justice, it is vital to learn how appropriate payment for sins can be made. In theory there are three ways to meet the demands of the law of justice and be exalted:

1. A man may keep the law perfectly and never break the law. This is referred to as being “justified by the law.” Obviously no man except Jesus Christ has ever lived without sin, therefore we know that it is impossible for the rest of us to become justified by the law.

2. A man may pay the debt produced by his sins by suffering himself. It is apparently possible for a man to contribute partial compensation for his own sins through personal suffering. In the next sphere of our lives, the spirit world, many will be required to do just that. We are taught, however, that man is incapable of paying his own debt completely—to the point of complete justification or exaltation. Therefore, every man is in desperate need of help (Mosiah 13:28).

3. Thus there is only one practically valid way for a man to meet the demands of the law of justice. It is to get help. No man can save himself. Each man must allow another qualified individual to intercede for him and to plead his cause. This is made possible by a law which is closely related to the law of justice. This is the law of mercy.

The law of mercy. The law of mercy may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, a debt is incurred and the transgressor is unworthy of eternal glory (a restatement of the law of justice). The individual who transgressed the law is not hopelessly lost, however. The law of mercy provides that under certain specific conditions, exceptions can be to the law of justice on behalf of the sinner. The law of mercy allows that an intercessor may request these exceptions. However, the

intercessor must be *perfectly* qualified to intercede. If he becomes perfectly qualified, this person will then be allowed to appeal to the law of justice for these exceptions on behalf of the sinner. And his appeals will be granted. Obviously that qualified individual is the Savior. He completed his qualification during the agony of his atoning sacrifice. The law of mercy does not subtract from the law of justice, rather it is an essential addition to it (Alma 42:24-25).

When an unrepentant sinner dies, he finds himself outside the atoning power of Jesus Christ. He must then reside in that part of the spirit world referred to as the spirit prison. There, we presume, he will suffer the “hell” of beginning to pay the debt himself. Even though it is impossible for him to make complete payment or restitution himself, his efforts and motivation for doing so will then be judged. Most such people will eventually repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then Christ’s atoning influence will produce a degree of justification which will enable them to inherit a kingdom of glory—either the terrestrial or telestial kingdom. Those few who remain unrepentant, or “filthy still,” will go with Satan to become sons of perdition forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

The Fall of Man

To properly understand the atonement of Jesus Christ, one must first grasp the concept of the fall of man. To understand the fall, one must first understand its dual nature—its two major aspects. The first is “the fall of Adam.” The second is the fall of each individual.

The fall of Adam. Because of the transgression of Adam and Eve, each of us will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality. This spiritual death is called the “first death” as opposed to the “second death” (see below). Each man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. Both these penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects have, automatically and without any effort on our part, been reversed. No man will be permanently cut off from the presence of God or live permanently without a physical body because of Adam and Eve. No one will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2).

The fall of you. The second major aspect of the fall is “the fall of each individual”—the fall of you and me! No one, save for the Savior himself, will ever live without sin. Thus, no man is qualified based on his own merits to remain in the presence of God. Because of his own sins each man “falls” or cuts himself off from the presence of God. In contrast to the effects of Adam’s transgression, this self-induced spiritual death experienced by each man is “permanent.” That is, it will remain in force for eternity unless its causes are reversed.

The Atonement

The next vital concept is the atonement. It is probably not given to man, at this point of our progression, to understand all the reasons why or how the Savior is qualified to be our Mediator or Redeemer. We only know that he is qualified. We may, however, make the observations that:

1. His central motivation for volunteering to be the Savior was his unequivocal love for us. He had no thought of self aggrandizement. Was the Father capable of discerning Jesus's deepest motives? Of course. And would the Father have picked Jesus for this ultimate calling had not his motives been pure? His love for us—particularly that aspect of his love that inclines him to be merciful to us, undeserving as we are, is referred to in scriptures as the “grace of God.”

2. He was “justified by the law.” That is, he kept the laws of God perfectly, and he thus avoided the debt altogether.

3. By some unfathomable process called the atonement, which he endured from the time he entered Gethsemane until his death, he somehow satisfied the requirements to become our Savior, to be able to intercede and plead for us. He experienced a unique and exquisite suffering that only he was capable of enduring. This suffering satisfied the law of justice.

What are the effects of Christ's atonement? There are “unconditional” and “conditional” effects of the atonement. Man is automatically the beneficiary of the unconditional benefits without any effort on his part. By these unconditional effects, the consequences of the fall of Adam are completely overcome. Keep in mind that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another's sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam's sin. At some point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God, at least long enough to be judged. No matter how wicked or unrepentant, each person will, after the resurrection, be brought back into the presence of God for judgment. This returning to God's presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam's transgression. The effects of Adam's transgression (temporary spiritual death and physical death) are unconditionally and completely overcome by the Savior's atonement. But what about the “permanent spiritual death” due to a man's own sins?

The conditional effects of the Savior's atonement will overcome the consequences of the fall of each individual person but only on condition of that person's repentance and obedience to the laws of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once in God's presence each person is judged. All will either be admitted to the celestial kingdom of God and remain in his presence, or they will suffer the “second death” (as opposed to the “first death” spoken of above) wherein they will be sent out from the presence of God a second time, this time forever. These will be consigned to one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer the complete second death and go to live with Satan forever as sons of perdition.

Nothing that man can do for himself will result in his admission to a kingdom of glory. The presence of an intercessor or advocate is essential. Ultimately, therefore, admission to a kingdom of glory is a gift and is not earned. We qualify to receive this gift by accepting Christ, obeying him, and repenting of our sins.

The Natural Self

In this discussion so far, we have provided some needed background. Now let us turn to “the problem” each of us faces as we are born into mortality. As we enter mortality, we are all inclined toward being “natural” men and women. A “natural man” is one who has not been touched by the influence of the Holy Ghost. He tends to be attracted by and seek for things of the world. These worldly or earthly things which provide the primary motivation for the natural man are not necessarily evil in and of themselves. Yet, the natural man is motivated only by them. He does not respond to any eternal or spiritual invitations. Also, these earthly motivators—these influences of the world—are usually indulged in to excess. The natural man is an “enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19) because his nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is incapable of understanding spiritual things. “[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The essential truth is that only the Spirit of God can teach spiritual or eternal truths, and an individual can learn these truths only if he is responsive to the Spirit on account of his own desires and behaviors. The natural man is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent and proud rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is competitive and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions. It is important to reiterate that all of us in mortality are inclined toward being natural men or women. Each of us has the capacity and the inclination to be attracted to influences in the world which appeal to the “natural” within us.

The Spiritual Self

In addition, however, each of us is a spiritual being with characteristics befitting that noble title. We all possess a combination of “natural” and “spiritual” characteristics. None of us is either wholly natural or wholly spiritual. Each of us is constantly embroiled in a conflict. Our natural or worldly side pulls this way, while our spiritual self attempts to pull us in another direction. Which part of us will come out victorious—the natural or the spiritual?

As pointed out previously, in order to earn our exaltation, each of us must achieve significant spiritual growth. Each must rise from this “natural” condition to a spiritual plateau where we are worthy to return to our celestial home. This is not only

possible in mortality, but it is expected of each one of us. Unfortunately, however, it appears that a majority will not achieve this goal. What is this mysterious plateau? By what name is it referred to in the scriptures? How do we go about achieving it? How does one know if one has achieved it? This state is referred to variously in the scriptures by several different names. Individuals who have achieved this lofty level are said, for example, to be “totally converted,” “justified,” “reconciled to God,” “born again,” “born of the Spirit,” “born of God,” and “quickenened in the inner man.” They might also be said to have “experienced a mighty change” or to have “received his image in [their] countenances” or to have “entered into the rest of God.” They might be referred to as “new creatures.” They may even be called “perfect” or “perfect in Christ.” Can a mortal really ever be perfect? While perfection in absolute terms must follow progress over eons of time, an individual who is born of the Spirit or totally converted is indeed referred to in the scriptures as being “perfect” (JST Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Colossians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10). He may not be just like Christ and is certainly not immune from committing sin. Yet his spiritual progress has earned him the right to be considered “justified before God” and “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33).

First Principles of the Gospel

What is the formula for achieving this state? You will likely not be surprised to learn that the secret lies in adhering to the first principles of the gospel. These are:

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once an individual has manifest his desire to believe in Christ and develop an eternal relationship with him, that individual must then manifest his faith through deliberate obedience and diligence in “experimenting upon the words [commandments] of Christ.” Then that individual will be rewarded by the Spirit of God with gifts of the Spirit, or incremental attributes of God and Christ. These attributes, received through the process of personal revelation may be referred to as the gift of faith.

As we grow spiritually and acquire the attributes of God, we become inclined toward gratitude to God, humility, submissiveness, and a desire for seeking out righteousness. Spiritual growth provides further impetus or motivation to strive to become more like our Father in Heaven and our Savior.

Repentance. The essence of this principle is obedience and a willingness to change and improve. It consists of a man’s repeatedly and thoughtfully analyzing his behavior against the standard which the Savior has set—against the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ—and then altering his behavior, as is appropriate.

Baptism. More discussion on this vital gospel principle follows. In order to become eligible for celestial resurrection, it is necessary for one to experience the complete or total ordinance of baptism. The reader is encouraged to read carefully the important discussion of the ordinance of baptism in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, Baptism, *the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

The gift of the Holy Ghost. This is the second part of the ordinance of baptism, the baptism of the Spirit.

Enduring to the end. We might include the “fifth principle of the gospel”—enduring to the end and living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God (2 Nephi 31:20-21; 3 Nephi 27:19-22; Matthew 7:21).

The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land. Comprising chapter 5.

As has been mentioned previously, the headnotes or superscriptions preceding some of the chapters in the Book of Mormon are not the product of modern editors but rather are part of the original ancient record and were written by the prophet Mormon. They are a type of colophon or editorial explanatory paragraph (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3). The phrase “comprising chapters . . .” added to some of the headnotes is, of course, the product of modern-day editors. This phrase appeared for first time in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon.

1 Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land.

verse 1 It is clear that Alma regarded the “word of God” to be a powerful antidote for a sinful society (see Alma 31:5). Governmental legislation of the laws of God, however, is not effective. The word of God has to be received into the hearts of the people before it has any effect in reclaiming the sinners.

2 And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record, saying:

verse 2 The prophet Mormon is about to quote from Alma’s own record which is recorded on the large plates of Nephi.

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things, behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi; yea, the land which was called the land of Mormon; yea, and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon.

verse 3 “I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God” This father-to-son pattern of succession to the priesthood was first instituted at the time of Adam and applied during the times of the ancient patriarchs. “The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam” (D&C

107:40-41).

“in the land which was in the borders of Nephi” This phrase could mean that the land of Mormon was near (just outside) the smaller land of Nephi—that land surrounding the city of Nephi (see the commentary for Mosiah 7:5). It might also mean that the land of Mormon was in the mountains—the “borders”—of the larger land of Nephi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5 for a discussion of the relationship of the word *borders* and the word *mountains*).

4 And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God.

5 And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

verse 5 The events mentioned in this verse are contained in Mosiah 23 and 24. Note here that the younger Alma seems to include himself in the group of colonists that fled Helam to travel to Zarahemla (“we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God” (italics added). This suggests that he may have born in Helam or even earlier.

6 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

verse 6 As mentioned previously, the majority of Alma’s audience consisted of baptized members of the church while there were also some among them who were not members (verse 62).

“he has delivered their souls from hell” See the commentary on the “bands of death” and the “chains of hell” in the following verse.

7 Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

verse 7 “the light of the everlasting word” This is the gospel or eternal truth. Can you name three sources from which we receive eternal truths? They are (1) scripture, (2) the teachings of living prophets, and (3) the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

What are the “bands of death” and the “chains of hell”? Alma will teach in Alma 12:9-11 that those who harden their hearts to the word of God are given ever diminishing portions of the word until eventually they know nothing of the doctrine or word of God. Then they are inevitably taken captive by Satan and led down to destruction. This is what is meant by the “bands of death” and the “chains of hell.” The mechanism of this captivity is simple. The individual who repeatedly gives in to the pulls of the natural man within him, and commits sin, experiences a diminution of the light of Christ. Consequently, the Spirit of the Lord becomes a bit more distant—his influence a bit more difficult to feel. Hence, matters of the eternities become less compelling and less important. Such an individual becomes more inclined, the next time he is tempted by things of the world, to respond to that temptation. This is the vicious cycle of sin, wherein committing a sin leads to an increased inclination to sin again. Eventually sin becomes a habit, an addiction, and thus the individual becomes trapped—bound by “the chains of hell.” An individual so captivated by his sins is devoid of the influence of the Spirit of God. Not only is he not interested in matters of the Spirit, they seem silly, naive, ridiculous, and foolish to him (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In D&C 123 Joseph wrote from liberty jail that a world of people without a knowledge of eternal truths is ripe for a takeover by the devil. He then goes on to describe this spiritual bondage as “an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell” (D&C 123:7-8). The antidote, then, for captivity by the devil is the word of God. God’s word is a weapon which can cut through the “bands of death” and the “chains of hell.” But the word of God is effective only if the individual is willing to actually respond to the word of God and deliberately obey. The word of God is no antidote for the individual who fails to manifest his deliberate faith and obey the tenets of the word.

We must also keep in mind that while the devil is persuasive and beguiling, he has no influence over the righteous man. Additionally, he is not the source or cause of man’s inclination to sin. For that, we may blame each man’s own natural self. We hand over influence to Satan only when we commit sin. Much of his influence comes to the sinner in the form of comfort and self justification. The devil delights in the disobedience of man, and he is skillful in pointing out to the sinner all of the reasons why he was justified in committing sin.

It is clear that this discourse of Alma’s was delivered to a congregation who mostly were already members of the church through baptism. There were some listeners, however, who were not baptized (see verse 62). It is clear from Alma’s remarks that simply being baptized does not produce immediate spiritual rebirth. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary for Alma to work so hard to “stir [his people] up in remembrance of their duty” (Alma 4:19). Alma’s approach is to remind them of their fathers some of whom were baptized but only afterward being “awakened . . . out of a deep sleep . . . unto God.”

8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not.

9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

verse 9 “sing redeeming love” Here is an expression that is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon, indeed unique to the prophet Alma. He describes the thoroughly converted individual as one who is apt to “sing the song of redeeming love” or more simply “sing redeeming love” (see also Alma 5:26; 26:13). It would seem that when a person “sings redeeming love,” he deeply feels profound gratitude for the Savior’s atonement, and his heart bursts forth with a hymn of gratitude to him.

“they are saved” They are saved from spiritual death, hell, and the devil. In other words, they are admitted to the celestial heaven. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:23.

10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

verse 10 Alma asks the question: “Exactly how were your fathers converted? What were the conditions which had to be fulfilled in order for them to become converted and hence “saved”? In the next three verses of this chapter, verses 11 through 13, Alma will answer his own question. He will mention four conditions essential for complete conversion and salvation.

11 Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

verse 11 Here is the first of Alma’s four conditions: (1) Follow the living prophet and believe on his words. Their fathers had believed the words of Abinadi and subsequently had followed another prophet, the senior Alma. We might extend this “condition” somewhat by including the necessity of receiving the “light of the everlasting word” from whatever source it may come (see the commentary for verse 7). Again, to truly receive the word of God or believe in the words of a living a prophet, the individual must act on those words. He must deliberately obey even when it is difficult to do so.

12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

verse 12 Here is Alma's second condition: (2) Experience a mighty change of heart. How does one judge whether or not a mighty change of heart has occurred? Consider the people of king Benjamin who were converted following his great sermon. They were changed from their carnal and fallen state to a state of righteousness. They had "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2) and they were "willing to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things" (Mosiah 5:5). These changes can only come through the influence of the Spirit of God. And the Spirit of God extends this marvelous blessing only to those inclined to obey the Lord's commands. Individuals who experience this "mighty change" are afforded the redeeming powers of the atonement. Hence, they become new creatures and are called "the sons and daughters of Christ" (Mosiah 5:7).

"According to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart"

Conversion or spiritual rebirth cannot occur without faith. A heart and a mind inclined to act on a belief, regardless of the strength of the belief, is the fundamental pre-requisite to the process of conversion. Faith is more than an inclination to belief held in the mind of man. Deliberate faith is manifest only when that belief is acted upon. Faith is fundamental to the process of conversion or the process of spiritual growth. Faith is the very power which makes spiritual growth happen. Becoming spiritually reborn, or converted, without having faith is a bit like trying to run a three-hour marathon without being able to walk. The "faith" necessary to produce spiritual rebirth must be based upon an inclination to submit to the will of the Savior. But faith is actual obedience to his commands. This faith is not a non-specific thing. Rather, it is specifically faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see verse 15).

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

verse 13 Alma's final two conditions which must be satisfied for an individual to experience complete conversion and salvation are found in this verse. They are: (3) Trust in the true and living God. and (4) Endure to the end.

A trust in God is the very evidence of faith. An individual who has trust in God is inclined to defer satisfaction of his worldly wants and needs and appetites and adhere instead to the directives of the unseen God.

We must not only obtain a mighty change in our hearts and a forgiveness of our sins, but we must *retain* them as well.

verses 14-30 These verses contain what may be called a "spiritual checklist" that allows us to measure our behavior and attitudes against those of the Savior.

Alma's people, of course, had to assess themselves based upon the characteristics of the *prophesied* Christ.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

verse 14 Here is a "classic" Book of Mormon verse well worth committing to memory. Alma has just summarized the process by which his people's forebears earned excellent prospects for exaltation. Since unapplied history is of little value, Alma now attempts to put those lessons learned from the past into perspective. He asks three questions and thus attempts to give those lessons present application.

"have ye spiritually been born of God" We have already discussed the fact that Alma's audience is largely made up of baptized members of the church. Haven't all members of the church who have been baptized by water been spiritually reborn? From our discussions of this chapter, it is obvious that they have not. Alma's question is appropriately asked.

"Have ye received his image in your countenances" The key words in this phrase are rich in meaning. "Image" is more than just an outward visual impression. Rather it is a total likeness and clear representation. "Countenance" implies more than merely a facial expression or appearance. The word has French origins and originally denoted "behavior," "demeanor," or "conduct." The essence of this question seems to be: "Are you just like Christ in your attitudes and behavior? Have you learned to think as he thinks, believe as he believes, feel as he feels, and do as he does." In scripture this process has been referred to by Paul as obtaining "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), and by Peter as partaking of "the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

On another level, it is true that the radiance of one's appearance reflects one's spiritual state. The light that emanates from a Christlike individual is discernable in that individual's countenance.

"Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" Alma implies that this change must be "experienced." It is a difficult concept to communicate with words. It was never intended to be understood passively or merely intellectually. We learned that those who do experience this "mighty change" experience a sense of joy and satisfaction to the point where they "have felt to sing the song of redeeming love" (Alma 5:26).

15 Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

verse 15 “Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?”

To exercise faith in the Savior and in his atoning sacrifice, one must simply obey his commandments.

“him who created you” Is Jesus Christ really our Creator? The essence of man was never created and is co-eternal with God (D&C 93:29). The Father may be said to be our Creator in the sense that he sired our spirit bodies. Under the supervision of the Father, Jesus is the supreme Creator of heaven and earth. He is our Creator in the sense that he created all of the earthly materials of which our mortal bodies are formed. He is also our Creator and our Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority. We know that perhaps Jesus did participate in the organization of the spirit bodies wherein the intelligences were clothed with bodies of spirit matter (D&C 93:10), even though these bodies were begotten of the Father and an Eternal Mother by a divine procreative process. See also the commentary for Mosiah 26:23.

“an eye of faith” To have an “eye of faith” is to see the hand of God in all things and thus patiently anticipate the fulfillment of all that God has declared and promised. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught that to see with the eye of faith is “to see with the eyes [you] possessed before [you] had a mortal body . . . to hear with ears [you] possessed before [you] were born . . . to push back the curtains of mortality and see into the eternities” (“The Great Plan of Happiness” in *Doctrine and Covenants / Church History Symposium Speeches*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1993, 6).

“this corruption raised in incorruption” For a discussion of the terms corruption and incorruption, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11.

verses 16-18 Here Alma divides all people into three categories. These are (1) The “blessed” (verse 16)—these have repented and been faithful. Their “works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth.” (2) The liars (verse 17)—these are unrepentant but would have others believe that they are righteous. Indeed, they have often even fooled themselves, believing themselves to be among the righteous. How ludicrous to think they can lie to an omniscient Savior! (3) The guilty (verse 18)—these are also unrepentant, but they admit it; they are well aware of their guilt.

16 I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

verse 16 “in that day” This is the day of judgment and will be referred to several times in the next few verses.

“can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying . . . Come unto me ye blessed” Do you have confidence in your own eventual judgment

and resurrection? As you persist in righteous acts, you will be blessed to receive increments of the attributes of Jesus Christ in the form of gifts of the Spirit. Along with this spiritual growth, there will also come a growing reassurance and confidence that your efforts are adequate before the Lord and that he will, indeed, welcome you to your celestial home. This is the gift of hope. See further discussion of this important perquisite gift in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

Certainly one of the crowning achievements of an individual’s total conversion is the coming to grips with one’s own eventual death, particularly when a significant illness has occurred and makes that death an imminent possibility. A successful adjustment to this reality can only occur when an individual has earned the right to feel that he is regarded as righteous or justified by the Father (D&C 42:46-47). He may then even come to relish the eventuality of his death as a release from physical trials and a just reward for his efforts in mortality.

17 Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?

18 Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?

19 I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

verse 19 After outlining his categories of mortal men, Alma now asks, in effect: “In which category are you?” His question and wording are reminiscent of Psalm 24:3-4 wherein David asks: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

“pure heart and clean hands” The “pure heart” includes one’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes, resolves, motivations. “Clean hands” reminds us of the necessity of subjecting our flesh to our will. Consider the untenable and indefensible position of those who maintain that it is natural and good to acquiesce to all “God-given” appetites of the flesh so long as that acquiescence occurs between “consenting adults.” If one maintains a pure heart, then one’s hands will remain clean, as unrighteous acts are generally not performed without being previously rehearsed in the mind’s fantasy.

20 I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?

21 I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.

verse 21 “**there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white**” Here is direct reference to the sacred and vital phenomenon of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.” When any man is judged sufficiently valiant in mortality relative to the eternal law of God and in his testimony of Jesus Christ. Then the Spirit will extend to that individual the grace of God—the cleansing power of the atonement. He will then be cleansed and justified. He will be “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33). Other symbolic scriptural references to this process include such expressions as “robes of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14; Revelation 19:8), “garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10), or “clothed with salvation” (D&C 109:80). The same symbolism is found in our temples wherein we are taught, utilizing a largely symbolic presentation, how we may return to God’s presence.

Brother Hugh Nibley added insight to this verse:

Alma is obsessed with the image of the white garment: “There can no man be saved except his garments are washed white” [see also Alma 13:11, 12; 7:25] . . . Such expressions forcibly call to mind the work of Professor [Erwin] Goodenough, in which he shows that the white garment had a special significance for the early Jews. God himself may be represented in the earliest Jewish art as one of three men clothed in white. . . . This image [from the Dura Europos synagogue] wasn’t even known to exist until 1958, but every time Goodenough goes back into the earliest Jewish pictorial representations he can find, there are the three men in white, or a single figure, the prophet in white. The symbol of the chosen prophet, an emissary from God, is always the white robe, which is reserved for heavenly beings. Nephi says that the righteous shall be “clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14) (*Temple and Cosmos*, 238-39).

22 And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you?

verse 22 The symbolism “stained with blood,” of course, means tainted by sin. All who have sinned are filthy, and only those who have been washed through the blood of the Savior will be found clean.

23 Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?

verse 23 It seems likely that Alma's reference to "murderers" here is intended to refer to sins less specific than the actual taking of human life. Alma will later refer to his behavior prior to his conversion by saying, "I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction" (Alma 36:14).

24 Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?

verse 24 This verse serves as a reminder that there is no social caste system in heaven. Even the most lowly and meek will sit down with the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and will receive the same reward those holy prophets receive.

25 I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.

verse 25 In the resurrection mercy will not rob justice. Abundant scriptural evidence so testifies (Alma 42:22).

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

verse 26 Alma now asks: "If you have been totally converted, are you still totally converted?" His question is an obvious reminder of the necessity of enduring to the end. Conversion is a dynamic and ongoing process. In mortality man has a constant tendency to drift spiritually downward. His spiritual health requires continuous nourishment. He cannot rest for long on spiritual plateaus—there are no plateaus in spiritual growth!

27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

28 Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

verses 27-28 A humble man sees himself in his eternal perspective. His view of himself extends beyond this mortal sojourn. His thoughts and actions are true to this perspective. A proud man, in contrast, has lost the eternal perspective. He is consumed by the need to attain things of the world and compete for these things against others in the world.

“the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” The duration of our mortal life is short and unpredictable. The “kingdom of heaven” is, of course, God’s heaven kingdom—the celestial kingdom.

29 Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

verse 29 The child of pride is envy. If a man’s attentions are riveted solely upon things of the world, he cannot help but experience envy as he views the worldly holdings of others.

30 And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

31 Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!

verses 30-31 “is there one among you that make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions” “To mock is to humiliate, ridicule, insult, revile, make fun of, deride, sneer at, scorn, or hold in contempt. . . . Occasions for mockery usually occur in the context of real or imagined differences. Differences in beliefs, wealth, learning, social position, physical characteristics, group membership, and behavior may be used as pretexts for the justification of mockery” (Bunker, Gary L. “Mocking Our Brother.” *Ensign* [April 1975] 5:36-41).

32 Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

verse 33 “he sendeth an invitation unto all men” The opportunity to be cleansed and redeemed by the atonement of Christ is available to all.

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

verse 34 Jesus is both the “tree of life” and the “bread and water of life.” We come unto him as we follow him and commit ourselves to strive to be like him through submitting our will to his and obeying him.

35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

37 O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice!

verse 37 The “vain things of the world” are all worldly things. Those who seek after them to the exclusion of spiritual things are said to be proud or “puffed up.”

Those who “have professed to have known the ways of righteousness [but who] nevertheless have gone astray” are guilty of hypocrisy.

38 Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

verse 38 When we are baptized into the Church we enter into a covenant with God. We announce our candidacy and our desire to be exalted in the celestial kingdom. At the time of our baptism, however, we are not guaranteed that exaltation. If, over our lifetime, we diligently persist in our efforts to become like the Savior, then we may eventually qualify for that highest of all eternal rewards. At that time we shall have the name of Christ sealed upon us forever. Recall that King Benjamin pleaded with his people: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15).

39 And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil.

verse 39 Ultimately all men will either accept Christ and his atonement and be rewarded with a kingdom of glory or will refuse to accept him and serve Satan forever.

40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

verse 40 The writers of ancient scripture sometimes formed sharp contrasts between consecutive lines or stanzas. This is the form of Hebrew poetry known as antithetical parallelism. It was intended to make clear the meaning of the lines and emphasize their importance. This verse is an excellent example of antithetical parallelism (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

Whatsoever is *good* cometh from God,
and whatsoever is *evil* cometh from the devil.

Note the italicized antonyms. The contrast in these lines is clearly established (Donald W. Parry, “Antithetical Parallelism” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 167-69).

Moroni will teach: “Every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God . . . is of the Devil” (Moroni 7:16-17). Some thoughtful people have urged caution with this concept, suggesting that it may be too pat and simplistic, and that it may lead to our becoming overly judgmental. It would seem logical that there are many features of our mortal world which we might use for good or for ill. These have been placed in mortality by God to help ensure that this mortal experience is a rich and ample test. These features might include, for example, a desire for material possessions, a need for recognition and affirmation, a yearning for sexual satisfaction, and others. If we seek after things of the world in an entirely appropriate fashion—only when they are necessary and timely—then we do not misuse them. In this instance, Satan has little power over us. It is when we begin to seek after things of the world to the exclusion of things of the spirit that we give over control to Satan.

The phrase “whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil,” while an effective counterpoint to the phrase which precedes it—“Whatsoever is good cometh from God,” is not, strictly speaking, true. While Satan is an active and effective cheerleader for evil in the world, and he rushes to comfort those who elect things of the world and exclude from their lives things of the eternities, the major source of evil is not Satan himself. Rather, it is the “natural” inclinations of each and every human being. Each of us is variably inclined to seek after things of the world instead things of the spirit. This is the quality of our being which we may refer to as the natural man or the natural self.

41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.

42 And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.

verse 42 “for his wages he receiveth death” It certainly is possible to become in this life spiritually dead or unresponsive to promptings of the Spirit. Such an individual will define his life in purely worldly terms. He is not likely to perform righteous acts lest they happen to benefit him in immediate and tangible ways. We also, of course, reap eternal rewards for our good or for our evil acts.

verses 43-44 We learn in these verses that Alma was commanded by God to deliver this testimony to his people. It was his priesthood calling—“according to the holy order of God.”

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God.

verse 43 It would seem that “and” would be a more suitable conjunction here than “or.”

44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

verse 44 “I am called to speak . . . and testify unto this people” Alma teaches here the importance of bearing testimony to those gospel truths we teach. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “Now, after we teach the great plan of the eternal God, we must personally bear our testimonies of its truthfulness” (*Ensign* [May 1987] 85).

“the things which have been spoken by our fathers” This phrase refers to the Nephites’ scriptures.

45 And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

46 Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.

verse 46 “I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God” This testimony Alma is delivering to his people in Zarahemla was revealed to him through the Spirit. Indeed, a testimony can come to an individual in no other way. The apostle John said “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Alma teaches here an important principle of testimony bearing. After we bear our testimony, we must testify also as to how we know. We must give credit to the Holy Spirit of God.

“I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself” There is obviously no “free lunch” in gaining a testimony. Even after having a dramatic experience with an angel of God (Mosiah 27:11-17), Alma had to fast and pray to gain his witness. This fact and the events surrounding the conversion of Alma certainly present us with a clear picture of the relationship between miraculous events and genuine conversion. Miraculous events simply do not, in and of themselves, produce conversion.

47 And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God.

verse 47 “the words which have been spoken by our fathers” By the time of Alma, the Nephite tradition concerning Jesus Christ would have been available through the spoken traditions and through the Nephite scriptures wherein are recorded the inspired prophecies of the Book of Mormon prophets.

The “spirit of prophecy” is the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:10) as communicated to man through the Spirit of God. Though Alma had been stopped in his tracks through the intervention of an angel (Mosiah 27), his testimony was grounded not alone in this dramatic encounter but also in quiet, personal, spiritual experience over time and through significant effort.

48 I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.

verse 48 “the Only Begotten of the Father” *Begotten* is to have been sired (generated as offspring by a male parent) or to have been produced. This term is used most frequently, as here, to describe the unique, divine parentage of Jesus’s physical body. The children of God are “spiritually begotten” of Christ when they covenant to do his will, keep his commandments, and are born of the Spirit (Mosiah 5:5-7).

49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

verse 49 “this is the order after which I am called” Alma says, in effect, “This is my priesthood calling.”

50 Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men.

verse 50 “for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” What event is being referred to here? This verse is actually a bit problematic. The reader should be reminded to distinguish between the kingdom of God on the earth (his earthly church or kingdom) and the kingdom of God in heaven, the kingdom of heaven (his heavenly kingdom, the celestial kingdom). Here the kingdom of heaven is characterized by the “Son of God [coming] in his glory [splendor, radiance], in his might, majesty, power, and dominion.” The event which fits this description best is the Savior’s second coming, though you might well argue that it was hardly “soon at hand” in Alma’s day. Thus we learn that in a limited sense the millennial (terrestrial) earthly kingdom of God may be considered to be the “kingdom of heaven.” This phrase might also have reference, in even a more limited sense, to Jesus’s earthly ministry which was indeed “soon at hand.” Or, this phrase might be referring to the death of each person within earshot of Alma’s message. Some time after death each person will enter the kingdom of heaven, at least briefly, to stand before the judgment bar of God.

51 And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying: Go forth and say unto this people—Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven.

52 And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.

verse 52 “the ax is laid at the root of the tree” This is a most interesting warning which the Lord apparently reserves for very particular circumstances. He is obviously warning a people that they are about to be destroyed because they are failing to bring forth good fruit—they are in danger of being cut down and cast into the

figurative fires of hell. But it is interesting to study the circumstances in which the Lord has tendered this warning to a people in the scripture.

Here, this warning is given to Alma's people who have great need to repent of their sins and have before them the great Lamanite wars which threaten great risk of destruction. The same warning was addressed to the faltering saints in this final dispensation. In 1833 the saints in Independence, Missouri, had brought on themselves threatening circumstances through their own unrighteous and unwise actions. They were in imminent danger of being attacked and routed by the Missourians, in fact persecutions had already begun (see D&C 97:7 and its commentary). In New Testament times, the same warning was delivered to the apostate and wicked Pharisee and Saducee Jews who will soon be destroyed by their failed revolt against Rome (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9). In all of these cases deliverance is still possible if the rebellious individuals will only repent.

We may conclude that the Lord reserves this particular warning for a people who have brought upon themselves, through their own unrighteousness, devastatingly dangerous circumstances. There is still time to escape, but the need to repent is urgent.

Trees can't move; they can't run away or hide from the woodsman's axe. Their only defense against being cut down for firewood lies in producing valuable fruit.

“every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire” An interesting question is raised by this phrase. Is it possible that our exaltation will depend upon more than merely resisting evil. Perhaps we also take a pro-active approach to life and look for ways to “bringeth . . . forth good fruit.”

“a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire” This phrase seems to reflect the simplified and incomplete version of our post-mortal life taught in the Book of Mormon: If we die righteous, we will live with God in heaven. If we do not, then we will live forever with Satan and suffer everlastingly.

53 And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?

verse 53 “can ye withstand these sayings” Alma asks, in effect, “Are you going to continue as you are, or are you going to change your hearts as I have suggested?”

54 Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this

church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—

verse 54 “sanctified by the Holy Spirit” At least some of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ in Alma’s day (the “holy order of God”) had put off the “natural man” and had truly become converted. For a discussion of why the “natural man” must become “sanctified by the Holy Spirit,” see the commentary for Mosiah 3:19. Also for a discussion of the sanctifying function of the Holy Ghost and the baptism of fire, see the introductory commentary for this chapter.

“they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance” The meaning of the adjective “meet” in this context is an archaic one. It means consistent with or indicative of.

55 Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?

56 And finally, all ye that will persist in your wickedness, I say unto you that these are they who shall be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous, that the word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

verse 57 “come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things” The implication of Alma’s counsel is that one should avoid even a curious and casual association with evil things lest that casual association lead to a more intimate one. One cannot partake of sin without first “touching” it. To avoid even the “touching” creates a reserve of safety.

“their names shall be blotted out” The reference here is to the “book of life” mentioned in the next verse. This book is a record kept in heaven containing the names of those who will inherit eternal life. The names of the faithful are entered while they are yet in mortality (D&C 76:68; 88:2; 128:6-7; 132:19; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1-4; Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 21:27). These names may be blotted out of the book in the event of wickedness (Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 22:19).

One might also regard this verse as referring to the process of excommunication of those members of the church whose misbehavior merits such action. Regarding the necessity of excommunication when it is appropriate, Elder Dean L. Larsen has written:

We have been assured that in this last dispensation of the fulness of times, there will be no universal apostasy. When the Lord appears again in his glory, he will find a

people who will have remained faithful and who will be ready to receive him and join with him in the completion of his work.

But the fact that there will not be a complete apostasy in this last dispensation does not mean all who have received the gospel and become members of the Church will remain faithful. Prophetic references to our own day, in fact, seem to indicate that there will be many who have known the truth and have tasted of the Lord's goodness that will then allow themselves to be tempted away from the course the Lord has marked out for them. . . .

Historically, the drifting away from the course of life marked out by the Lord has occurred as individuals begin to make compromises with the Lord's standard. This is particularly true when the transgression is willful and no repentance occurs. . . . [This drifting away begins] as individual members of the Church knowingly [begin] to make compromises with the Lord's standard. They [seek] the association of those who are willing to drift with them along this path of self-delusion. . . .

As the number of drifting individuals increases, their influence becomes more powerful. . . . The drifting is the more dangerous when its adherents continue to overtly identify with and participate with the group that conforms to the Lord's way. Values and standards that were once clear become clouded and uncertain. The norm of behavior begins to reflect this beclouding of true principles. Conduct that would once have caused revulsion and alarm now becomes somewhat commonplace. . . .

Within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior has provided a refuge from the evils of the world. Wherever a congregation or community of saints is found, there should be the sustaining influence of the gospel and the assurance that those who identify themselves as saints are applying themselves to gospel principles (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D Tate, Jr., 5, 8).

58 For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.

verse 58 “the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life”

See the commentary for the previous verse.

59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

60 And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep;

and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.

verses 59-60 Alma is not promising that belonging to the church or “fold” of the Savior will prevent us from having to contend with “wolves,” but he does promise that we will not be “devoured” or “destroyed.”

61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

verse 61 Again, we learn that Alma was “assigned” or called to deliver this sermon by the Lord himself.

62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.

verse 62 It is interesting to learn that Alma directed his writings in Alma 5 to members of the church as well as to those who were not members. Is his counsel pertinent to members of the Church today? Indeed it is.

“partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” These will live with Christ forever. Christ is the tree of life. President David O. McKay has described a sublime personal vision which he beheld in a dream. He saw a beautiful city, the Savior, and a great concourse of people dressed in white. He said:

The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness. But who were they? As the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words: These are they who have overcome the world—who have truly been born again! When I awoke it was breaking day” (*Cherished Experiences From the Life of President David O. McKay*, 59-60).

Alma Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

Alma 6:6 Alma commanded the people that they should join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church.

verse 1 “he ordained priests and elders” While it is clear that Alma ordained brethren to help lead the church, it is not clear that “priests” and “elders” were specific offices in the priesthood as we know them today. We do know that the Aaronic priesthood was not to be found among them (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3:87), thus the office of “priest” in Alma’s day was likely more akin to what we would term “high priest” today. These were priests of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood.

“The order of God” is the priesthood. Note that Alma ordained these men “by laying on his hands.”

2 And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church.

3 And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church that did not repent of their wickedness and humble themselves before God—I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts—the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous.

verse 3 “the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out” Reference is made here to the practice of excommunication.

4 And thus they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.

verse 4 The “order of the church” refers to the authorized structure and procedures according to the priesthood.

5 Now I would that ye should understand that the word of God was liberal unto all, that none were deprived of the privilege of assembling themselves together to hear the word of God.

verse 5 Here is a reminder that no sincere person, regardless of their social standing or any other categorization, is to be turned away from the congregations of the church.

6 Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

verse 6 “Oft” means often. The “children of God” here are members of the church. They are commanded to do some missionary work.

7 And now it came to pass that when Alma had made these regulations he departed from them, yea, from the church which was in the city of Zarahemla, and went over upon the east of the river Sidon, into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword.

verse 7 For a model of the possible relationships between the city of Zarahemla, the River Sidon, and the valley of Gideon, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

8 And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word which had been spoken by his fathers, and according to the spirit of prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come to redeem his people from their sins, and the holy order by which he was called. And thus it is written. Amen.

verse 8 Again, “the holy order by which he was called” refers to Alma’s priesthood.

Alma Chapter 7

The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record. Comprising chapter 7.

Just as Alma 5 was a record of the preachings of the prophet Alma to the people of Zarahemla, Alma 7 is Alma's teachings to the people of Gideon. For a model of the possible geographic relationship of the valley of Gideon to Zarahemla, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 7:11-12 (compare Hebrews 2:18) He suffered that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Alma 7:23-24 I would that ye should be humble, submissive, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience, long-suffering, and temperate in all things.

1 Behold my beloved brethren, seeing that I have been permitted to come unto you, therefore I attempt to address you in my language; yea, by my own mouth, seeing that it is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth, I having been wholly confined to the judgment-seat, having had much business that I could not come unto you.

verse 1 The phrases "in my language" and "by my own mouth" have reference to Alma's having the opportunity to speak in person to the people in Gideon. Previously, any correspondence with these people had to be by letter.

2 And even I could not have come now at this time were it not that the judgment-seat hath been given to another, to reign in my stead; and the Lord in much mercy hath granted that I should come unto you.

3 And behold, I have come having great hopes and much desire that I should find that ye had humbled yourselves before God, and that ye had continued in the supplicating of his grace, that I should find that ye were blameless before him, that I should find that ye were not in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla.

verse 3 "the supplicating of his grace" This is the only place in all the scriptures where this phrase is found. We might alternatively render this thought "the humble pleading for the redemptive power of his atonement to be extended to you."

4 But blessed be the name of God, that he hath given me to know, yea, hath given unto me the exceedingly great joy of knowing that they are established again in the way of his righteousness.

verse 4 “They,” of course, refers to the people of Zarahemla. Alma’s teachings to the people of Zarahemla had borne fruit!

5 And I trust, according to the Spirit of God which is in me, that I shall also have joy over you; nevertheless I do not desire that my joy over you should come by the cause of so much afflictions and sorrow which I have had for the brethren at Zarahemla, for behold, my joy cometh over them after wading through much affliction and sorrow.

verse 5 Alma tells the people of Gideon in effect: I hope that here in Gideon I may see an already righteous people begin to perfect themselves, rather than having to see an unrighteous people endure the painful agony of repentance from grievous sins.

6 But behold, I trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren; I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea, I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come.

verse 6 Alma’s “trust” in the people of Gideon has certainly been granted to him by personal revelation from the Spirit. He has discerned that these people are healthier spiritually than those in Zarahemla (see also verses 19-20).

The idol worship in Zarahemla to which Alma refers likely refers to the idols of worldliness—materialism, lust for power, lust for sexual satisfaction, etc.

7 For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

verse 7 “there is one thing which is of more importance than they all” This phrase refers to the mortal advent of Jesus. The very essence of the gospel is that Jesus Christ lives and that he is our Mediator. He stands ready to mercifully extend to us the fruits of his atoning sacrifice—he longs to forgive our sins and satisfy the law of justice as it applies to each of us (3 Nephi 27:13-16).

8 Behold, I do not say that he will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle; for behold, the Spirit hath not said unto me that this should be the case. Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are according to his word.

verse 8 “Now as to this thing I do not know” Alma seems to be unsure as to exactly whether or not, or when, the Savior will appear to the people in the western hemisphere. He does feel that it will probably not be while the Savior is in his mortal condition. It is puzzling that Alma seems unclear on this point as the prophet Nephi had clearly taught that the resurrected Christ would appear to the Book of Mormon people (2 Nephi 26:1).

9 But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

verse 9 “walk in his paths which are straight” Note that the paths of the Lord—the route by which we achieve our exaltation—are “straight” or undeviating. However, the gate through which we must enter the kingdom of heaven is “strait” which means narrow, strict, difficult to enter (Matthew 7:13-14; 3 Nephi 14:13-14; 27:33).

The use of the word *straight* (rather than *strait*) in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“the kingdom of heaven is at hand” For a discussion of the possible meanings of this phrase, see the commentary for Alma 5:50. Here the reference seems to be to the beginning of Christ’s mortal ministry, though that is certainly an atypical usage of the phrase “kingdom of heaven.”

10 And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

verse 10 “he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers” Of course Joseph Smith knew that Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. In writing this particular sentence, has Joseph Smith made an error? This passage is not an error. In fact, it may well be another evidence that Joseph was the translator of the Book and not its author. Here Jerusalem is referred to as a land and not a city. It was the custom of the day to refer to the area surrounding a large city, such as Jerusalem as the land of Jerusalem. Any small town or village located near the major city was referred to as being in that city’s land. Thus Bethlehem was located in the land of Jerusalem. Joseph Smith could not have known, from his study of the Bible, about this concept of lands and cities since it is not clearly elucidated in the Bible. Modern sources, however, have confirmed the fact that anciently the town of Bethlehem was considered to be located in the “land of Jerusalem” (John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd edition, 221-22. See also Dan Barag, *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 [1979]:1997-

217). A recently released text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, a text claiming to have originated in the days of Jeremiah (and, therefore, in Lehi's time), says that the Jews of that period were "taken captive from the land of Jerusalem" (Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* [Shaftesbury, England: Element, 1992]: 57-58). Texts discovered earlier in the twentieth century seem to include Bethlehem within that "land."

The expression "land of Jerusalem" is not found in the Bible. It is, however, found several times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 3:9,10; 5:6; 7:2,7; 16:36; 17:14,20,22; 18:24; 2 Nephi 1:1,3,9,30; 25:11; Jacob 2:25,31,32; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; 10:12, etc.)

A similar situation in the Bible has actually been pointed out by an Evangelical scholar, Craig L. Blomberg (*How Wide the Divide?*, 46). There is a seeming discrepancy between Mark 5:1 (and Luke 8:26) and Matthew 8:28. Did Jesus exorcise the demoniac in the region of the Gadarenes or of the Gergesenes? Biblical scholars suggest that Jesus likely did minister in the area of Gadara, just east of the Galilee and the home of the Gadarenes, but that he did not reach as far east as Gerasa, the home of the Gergesenes, a city of Roman Arabia in the mountains of Gilead. Blomberg suggests that Jesus was likely near Khersa, a town that in Greek transliteration could easily turn into Gerasa, in the larger territory of Gadara named after the more prominent city by that name within the region. Thus, Mark (and Luke) likely used the name of a larger city Gadara to refer to the land surrounding it which included a smaller city, Khersa.

This passage also states that Jesus was born "at" Jerusalem not in Jerusalem. One definition of *at* is "close by" or "near." Thus "at Jerusalem" might well mean "near Jerusalem." See also the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4.

"she being . . . a precious and chosen vessel" Please review the discussion of the scriptural word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

"who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost" We have previously learned that Jesus was conceived "after the manner of the flesh" (1 Nephi 11:18). Here we learn that as Mary miraculously conceived the Christ child, the Holy Ghost was in some way involved.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which he performed his mission in the flesh was sired by that same holy being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was he begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the son of the Eternal Father!" (*Come Unto Christ*, 4).

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

verse 11 “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” Elder Neil A. Maxwell taught: “Can we, even in the depths of disease, tell him anything at all about suffering? . . . The very weight of our combined sins caused him to descend below all. We have never been, nor will we be, in depths such as he has known. Thus, his [life and his] atonement made perfect his empathy and his mercy and his capacity to succor us, for which we can be everlastingly grateful as he tutors us in our trials” (*Even As I Am*, 116). It is certainly also true that we can teach him nothing about temptations.

“and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” Alma seems to be quoting the prophecy of a previous prophet. Who is that prophet? The gospel writer Matthew will identify him as “Esaias.” Matthew wrote: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17). Esaias is the New Testament form of Isaiah. Isaiah wrote of the future Messiah: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4, Mosiah 14:4).

Brother Thomas A. Wayment has postulated that Alma 7:11, Isaiah 53:4, and Matthew 8:17 were all taken from the identical Hebrew text. He further postulates that Alma 7:11 was taken from the brass plates version of Isaiah which he feels must have been written in Hebrew. There is some feeling that some of the materials on the brass plates of Laban were written in some form of Egyptian (see Mosiah 1:3-4 and the commentary for those verses). Brother Wayment, a Hebraist, has made the most interesting observation that of the three scriptural quotations, the one which most accurately reflects the original Hebrew is Alma 7:11. He concludes that Joseph Smith used neither the KJV of Isaiah or the KJV of Matthew in writing Alma 7:11. Rather he translated the Hebrew from the brass plates (“The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 2005, 14:98). This suggests that some of the materials on the brass plates was written in Hebrew.

While the speculative assumption has been made that Joseph Smith utilized his KJV in making the larger block quotes from the scriptures from Isaiah and Malachi, and writing them into the Book of Mormon (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 141-42), we actually have no direct evidence whatever that he ever used his KJV Bible. It is notable, however, that when this same quotation discussed in the previous paragraph appears in the Book of Mormon a second time (Mosiah 14:4), a translation identical to the KJV is given. This does support the supposition that the KJV made have played some role in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

verse 12 “he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people” To review: The fall of man has a dual nature or two major and quite separate aspects.

1. Because of Adam’s transgression in the garden, all mankind suffers a temporary spiritual death—that is, man is separated from God—and a temporary physical death—each man will eventually die wherein his spirit will separate from this body.

2. Because of a man’s own sins, the law of justice dictates he will suffer a “permanent” spiritual death.

Two specific benefits each man derives from Jesus’s atonement are: (1) Through his experience in Gethsemane and on the cross, Jesus qualified himself to completely and unconditionally absolve each man from the effects of Adam’s transgression. (2) Also he earned the right to forgive each man of his sins, on condition of that man’s repentance, thus giving him the opportunity to be redeemed from his self-induced spiritual death.

“he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy” Here is a little known yet most precious doctrine and another specific benefit obtained by each man through Jesus’s atonement. Jesus suffered the agony of the atonement, not only that he might forgive the sins of all mankind but also in order that his own empathy and compassion for his brothers and sisters might be perfected! Regardless of what we are called upon to suffer in this life, he hears our cries and understands our vicissitudes because of his own personal experience in Gethsemane and on the cross. And regardless of the depths to which a man might sink—in despair, suffering, pain, remorse, fear or any other extreme of the human experience—Jesus has qualified himself to fully understand, to succor, and to comfort. He will never ask any of us to suffer any adversity that he has not suffered himself. The compassion and empathy which Jesus has for us as we suffer the travail of this mortal life is not the abstract compassion and empathy of a sinless individual who would never so suffer. Rather, it is the compassion and empathy of one who has suffered more than all of us. We cannot teach him a thing about suffering! For a more detailed discussion of this topic see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

“that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” The phrase “according to the flesh” is rich with meaning. It generally denotes the conditions and laws that govern in mortality (see 1 Nephi 19:6; 22:18, 27; 2 Nephi 2:8, 27; 9:53; 10:2; 31:7). In this particular verse, the

phrase has even richer meaning. Here Alma uses the phrase to teach that cognitive understanding was not sufficient for Christ to accomplish the atonement. He had to actually experience “according to the flesh” the suffering, pain, afflictions, and temptations of every kind so that he would know by his own experience how to best help and judge his people.

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *succor* as, “Literally, to run to, or run to support; hence to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress; to assist and deliver from suffering.” One of the blessings of the atonement is that we can receive of the Savior’s succoring. Isaiah spoke repeatedly of the Lord’s healing, calming influence. He testified that the Savior was “a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isaiah 25:4). As to those who sorrow, Isaiah declared that the Savior possessed the power to “comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:2), and “wipe away tears from off all faces” (Isaiah 25:8; see also Revelation 7:17); “revive the spirit of the humble” (Isaiah 57:15); and “bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1; see also Luke 4:18; Psalm 147:3). So expansive was his succoring power that he could exchange “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3).

His spirit heals; it refines; it comforts; it breathes new life into hopeless hearts. It has the power to transform all that is ugly and vicious and worthless in life to something of supreme and glorious splendor. He has the power to convert the ashes of mortality to the beauties of eternity. So sweeping is the Savior’s healing balm that Isaiah promised, “Sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). While the Savior knew all things in the Spirit (Alma 7:13), he also came to know the pains, infirmities, and temptations of man as experienced in the flesh. He never allowed godly power to insulate him when he walked the path of mortals. He chose to let every pain and affliction and weakness of man traverse and engulf his physical frame.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gave this insight into the relationship between the atonement and the Savior’s succoring powers: “His empathy and capacity to succor us—in our own sicknesses, temptations, or sins—were demonstrated and perfected in the process of the great atonement” (*Plain and Precious Things*, 99). He also said, “The marvelous atonement brought about not only the immortality but also the final perfection of Jesus’s empathetic and helping capacity” (*Ibid.*, 42). Subsequent to the atonement, he was able to comfort with empathy, not merely with sympathy.

13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

verse 13 “the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his

people” The “Spirit” referred to here is not the Holy Ghost. Rather it is the Spirit of the Son of God. The pre-mortal Jesus Christ, who lived with a spirit body, was the great Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, and as such knew “all things.” Yet, he still needed to come to earth and experience some things first hand “according to the flesh.”

“his people” Alma will define this blessed group in the three following verses 14-16.

14 Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

verse 14 “if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven” For a review of the process of being “born again,” see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Bring’s Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

15 Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

16 And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.

17 And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things? Behold, I say unto you, yea, I know that ye believe them; and the way that I know that ye believe them is by the manifestation of the Spirit which is in me. And now because your faith is strong concerning that, yea, concerning the things which I have spoken, great is my joy.

verse 17 Note here the method used by the master teacher Alma. After bearing testimony to the people of Gideon, he felt the Spirit come upon his audience. He then bore their testimony back to them. Elder W. Grant Bangerter taught: “We need confidence in the Holy Ghost; believe in him and expect his presence . . . and be able to help others to feel the influence that he brings. One of our great missionaries said: I bear them my testimony. Then I bear them their testimony. And then I have them bear their testimony back to me. That’s the process” (CR, [April 1980], 65-68).

18 For as I said unto you from the beginning, that I had much desire that ye were not in the state of dilemma like your brethren, even so I have found that my desires have been gratified.

verse 18 Early in his sermon to the people of Gideon, Alma had told them that he hoped and desired they were more righteous than their Nephite brethren in the land of Zarahemla had been when Alma first preached to them (verses 3-6). In the course of speaking to the people of Gideon, Alma has learned through the medium of the Holy Spirit that what he had hoped was in fact the case—“my desires have been gratified.”

19 For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

verse 19 What does it mean to make “straight” the paths of the Lord? The practice of preparing paths or roads for the victorious advance of a conqueror or king by clearing them of obstacles was certainly known anciently. As we live the gospel and urge others to do the same, we prepare the earth for the Savior’s triumphal return to the earth. The scriptures contain several examples of prophetic counsel warning us to “make straight” the pathway of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4). We are also counseled to make the “crooked” or uneven paths “straight” or unobstructed (Luke 3:5).

The use of the word *straight* in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

20 I perceive that it has been made known unto you, by the testimony of his word, that he cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round.

verse 20 “his course is one eternal round” Alma perceives that the people of Gideon have been taught by the Spirit of God the vital concept that “his course is one eternal round.” This is a vital and rich concept: God is absolutely dependable and constant, as is his law. We are governed by his law. It is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action there is an identical result. These results follow without respect to person. It has always been thus in Adam’s day, just as in ours, and in the eternities to come. Thus, “the course of the Lord is one eternal round.”

An alternate explanation has been offered for this phrase. We belong to “one round” of the Father’s creations. This includes our earth and the innumerable worlds created by Jehovah. It also includes Jesus as our Savior and will include all things in

our post mortal world. After this round of creation, the Father will organize another, and another, etc.

21 And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness.

verse 21 “he doth not dwell in unholy temples” The Spirit of the Lord will not abide with those who are guilty of sin.

“neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God” Here is a simple restatement of the law of justice spoken of in the introduction to Alma chapter 5 (see 1 Nephi 15:34; Alma 11:37).

“he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness” This is a reference to the sons of perdition.

22 And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received.

verse 22 “that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received” That you may abide by the principles of the Melchizedek priesthood by which you are governed.

23 And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

verse 23 “easy to be entreated” To *entreat* is to earnestly ask for something; to beseech; to beg; to make an earnest request or petition. Here this phrase means that when the Lord implores us to live the gospel and obey the commandments, we are readily submissive; eager to respond; willing to grant what is desired—responsive to the Lord’s commands.

24 And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

verses 23-24 These wonderful verses describes the “fruits of the Spirit”—the characteristics of the individual who has been “born of the Spirit.” See “The Fruits of Faith” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. See also a detailed discussion of the concept of charity in *Ye Shall Know of the*

Doctrine, volume 2, chapters 6, *Charity as Empathy*, and 7, *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*.

verses 25-27 Before Alma leaves the people of Gideon, he will establish the priesthood order of the church among them (Alma 8:1). Additionally, because of these people's relative righteousness, he is able to pronounce upon them a special blessing contained in these verses.

25 And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.

verse 25 As a person undergoes the sanctifying “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” he becomes a little more like God. It is said that his “garments are made white or spotless.” Not only will such a person be worthy to enjoy the company of the great prophets of the earth, but he will be confident and comfortable in their presence as well (D&C 121:45).

“to go no more out” This expression is unique to the Book of Mormon (see also Alma 34:36; Helaman 3:30; and 3 Nephi 28:40) and means, of course, to dwell in the celestial heaven for eternity.

26 And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word.

27 And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.

verse 27 “the peace of God” A genuine confidence in one's eternal future is associated with an incomparable peace of mind. This is an earned blessing or fruit of the Spirit which comes to those who are spiritually born again. It is related, if not identical, to the gift of hope. Possessed with this peace an individual is able to face not only the vicissitudes of life with calm and perspective, but he can anticipate his own death with eagerness and excitement rather than with fear and uncertainty. The Savior spoke of this blessing: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Alma Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

Alma 8-15 The ministry of Alma and Amulek

Alma 8:10 When Alma was rejected in Ammonihah, he labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer.

1 And now it came to pass that Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written, having established the order of the church, according as he had before done in the land of Zarahemla, yea, he returned to his own house at Zarahemla to rest himself from the labors which he had performed.

verse 1 “having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written” Why could Mormon not write these things? It seems likely that he chose not to record some of Alma’s teachings because of practical considerations such as time or limited space on the plates. His abridgment of the “large plates of Nephi” was certainly a constant process of discerning and prioritizing. It is also possible that some of Alma’s teachings to the good people of Gideon included such sacred truths that Mormon was constrained not to include them. Isn’t it tantalizing and exciting to ponder over additional spiritual truths that one day may be made available to us?

“having established the order of the church” Generally speaking the Book of Mormon text tells us little about the organization of the Nephite church (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2).

“he returned to his own house at Zarahemla to rest himself” Modern scripture wisely counsels us: “Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength” (D&C 10:4; Mosiah 4:27).

2 And thus ended the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

3 And it came to pass in the commencement of the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma departed from thence and took his journey over into the land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon, on the west by the borders of the wilderness.

verse 3 It is helpful to have in mind a plausible geographic model as we follow the travels of Alma. For a suggestion as to the “lay of the land,” see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

“on the west by the borders of the wilderness” The reader should keep in mind that the word *borders* may refer to boundary lines or it may refer to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5).

4 And he began to teach the people in the land of Melek according to the holy order of God, by which he had been called; and he began to teach the people throughout all the land of Melek.

5 And it came to pass that the people came to him throughout all the borders of the land which was by the wilderness side. And they were baptized throughout all the land;

6 So that when he had finished his work at Melek he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.

verse 6 Alma arrives at the fourth city on his missionary travels. This will be the most difficult city which he will encounter on his missionary journey.

7 Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

verse 7 A statement on Mesoamerica by the 16th-century Mexican author Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl is pertinent in this context: “In each place where the Chichimecatl settled, whether it be a large city or a small village, it was their custom to name it according to the first king or leader who possessed the land. . . . This custom was prevalent in naming other cities and villages throughout the land” (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Joseph L. Allen, 41). See the commentary for Alma 4:17.

The record is silent about the first possessor of the land of Ammonihah whose name was apparently Ammonihah. See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

8 And it came to pass that when Alma had come to the city of Ammonihah he began to preach the word of God unto them.

verse 8 The city of Ammonihah has particular significance. It was likely the center of a school of religious and political thought—the order of the Nehors (Alma 14:16; 15:15). Its founder was Nehor the man who introduced priestcraft among the Nephites (Alma 1:1-16). For a review of the concept of “priestcraft” see the commentary on Alma 1:12 and 2 Nephi 10:5. Members of this order were purveyors of priestcraft and the arch-enemies of religious truth. We have met or will yet meet additional individuals belonging to this same order including Amlici (Alma 2), Zeezrom (Alma 11-15), Korihor (Alma 30), and Amalickiah (Alma 46). All of these individuals were learned in language, and they attempted to lead the people astray. They denied Christ and denied that any prophet can foretell the future (Alma 21:8). They believed that every priest and teacher ought not to labor with their hands but rather ought to be supported

by the people (Alma 1:3). They believed that all people would be saved and hence there was no need for repentance (Alma 1:4; 15:15; 21:6). Apparently this order was popular among the Mulekites—particularly their learned and professional class (see Alma 14:18), though doubtless this order included many also of Nephite ancestry.” These are the people who feel that the people should be governed by a king and not by the common people. They are the elite, the learned, the sophisticated, the aristocracy, those who seek for power. This religious order will later be given another name—the “king-men” (Alma 51:5). The common people who rise up against this malignant political movement will later be called the “freemen” (Alma 51:6). The conflict between people of these two movements will continue throughout the Book of Mormon and will yet be one of the most important factors that result in the destruction of the Nephite people.

9 Now Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma.

10 Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city; that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance.

verse 10 This verse is a model for all missionaries who may have been called to work under difficult circumstances or who find little success.

11 Nevertheless, they hardened their hearts, saying unto him: Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church which thou hast established in many parts of the land, according to your tradition; and we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions.

verse 11 “they hardened their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

12 And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephihah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us.

verses 11-12 The Mulekites were the dominant culture in Ammonihah. Notice the evidences of the rift that still exists between the Nephites and the Mulekites: “according to *your* tradition . . . we do not believe in such foolish traditions” and “we are not of *thy* church” (italics added). It is interesting to note that while they have openly disavowed the church, they still seem to recognize, at least publicly, the secular authority of the chief judge over them. We will learn that this “lip service” was probably offered to hide their seditious intentions (see verse 17). Generally speaking, they were not supportive of the idea of a chief judge, as predominantly they were “king men” and preferred to be ruled by a king.

13 Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed thence and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron.

14 And it came to pass that while he was journeying thither, being weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul, because of the wickedness of the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass while Alma was thus weighed down with sorrow, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying:

verse 14 “an angel of the Lord appeared unto him” This is the same angel who appeared to Alma when Alma was converted (see the following verse). At least ten years had elapsed since Alma’s miraculous conversion.

15 Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you.

verse 15 This marvelous message of comfort was certainly needed by the discouraged Alma.

16 And behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent the Lord God will destroy them.

verse 16 The message which the angel commanded Alma to deliver to the people of Ammonihah was a simple one: Repent or be spiritually damned and temporally destroyed! Clearly, the Lord intended that Alma’s preaching serve as a witness against this wicked people.

17 For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people.

verse 17 As has been mentioned previously, many of the people of Ammonihah were “after the order and faith of Nehor” (Alma 14:16) or “of the profession of Nehor.” At this particular time they were actually plotting the political overthrow of the other Nephites.

Apparently the Lord had given to the Nephite people “statutes,” “judgments,” and “commandments” urging them to be submissive to the righteous secular authority placed over them. Why are three different words used here in referring to the Nephite secular law (“statutes,” “judgments,” and “commandments”)? See the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:10.

18 Now it came to pass that after Alma had received his message from the angel of the Lord he returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah. And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah.

verse 18 Alma's face was known to many of the people of Ammonihah. He had to sneak back into the city.

19 And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man: Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?

20 And the man said unto him: I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision: Thou shalt receive. Therefore, go with me into my house and I will impart unto thee of my food; and I know that thou wilt be a blessing unto me and my house.

verse 20 "I am a Nephite" Why did Amulek identify himself in this manner? Shouldn't it have been obvious to Alma? After all, Ammonihah was a Nephite city under Nephite control (verses 11-12, 24) in the land of Zarahemla. We might expect that it would have been largely inhabited by Nephites. If this were the case, we would not expect Amulek to say, "I am a Nephite." Clearly Amulek had recognized Alma as a Nephite, either by his speech, his appearance, or the content of his conversation. To what other social or ethnic category might Amulek have belonged? Amulek's statement makes sense only if most of the people of Ammonihah were not Nephites and also if Amulek's characteristics did not make it already apparent to Alma that he was a Nephite.

One possibility is that Amulek wanted Alma to know that he was a Nephite and not a Mulekite. Even though people of Mulekite origin who inhabited Ammonihah (see the commentary for verse 9) would have been loosely categorized as Nephites, they obviously did not really consider themselves Nephites in every sense. Another possibility is that Ammonihah was inhabited by a large number of unnamed people who were native to the land at the time the Lehites landed. For a discussion of this possibility, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths* (see particularly myth number five).

21 And it came to pass that the man received him into his house; and the man was called Amulek; and he brought forth bread and meat and set before Alma.

22 And it came to pass that Alma ate bread and was filled; and he blessed Amulek and his house, and he gave thanks unto God.

verse 22 It is interesting to note that there exists an ancient Jewish practice of blessing God after eating. The basis for this practice is Deuteronomy 8:10: "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which

he hath given thee.” Deuteronomy 6:10-11 and 8:12-14 warn against eating and being full and yet being ungrateful to God (Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 6, number 2 [1997] 251-54).

23 And after he had eaten and was filled he said unto Amulek: I am Alma, and am the high priest over the church of God throughout the land.

24 And behold, I have been called to preach the word of God among all this people, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy; and I was in this land and they would not receive me, but they cast me out and I was about to set my back towards this land forever.

verse 24 “according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy” Alma’s priesthood calling was to preach the word by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Note the colorful expression “I was about to set my back towards this land forever.” It is found in no other place in all the scriptures.

25 But behold, I have been commanded that I should turn again and prophesy unto this people, yea, and to testify against them concerning their iniquities.

26 And now, Amulek, because thou hast fed me and taken me in, thou art blessed; for I was an hungered, for I had fasted many days.

verse 26 Do you suppose Alma had “fasted many days” on purpose for spiritual reasons, or had he gone without food because none had been offered to him? Perhaps the latter applies especially considering the reception he encountered in Ammonihah.

27 And Alma tarried many days with Amulek before he began to preach unto the people.

verse 27 Doubtless these “many days” were spent in tutoring Amulek. We will learn in Alma 10:6 that these “many days” were less than a month. Alma first encountered Amulek on the fourth day of the seventh month, and they went out preaching the same month.

28 And it came to pass that the people did wax more gross in their iniquities.

29 And the word came to Alma, saying: Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying—Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, except ye repent I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away.

30 And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

verse 30 Alma and Amulek benefited from the gifts and powers of the Spirit as they preached. These might well have included personal revelation, discernment, and a feeling of charity or Christ-like love for the people. We will learn in the following verse that these also included marvelous physical powers.

31 And they had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither was it possible that any man could slay them; nevertheless they did not exercise their power until they were bound in bands and cast into prison. Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his power in them.

verse 31 Mormon previews a miraculous event that will be described in Alma 14:26-29.

32 And it came to pass that they went forth and began to preach and to prophesy unto the people, according to the spirit and power which the Lord had given them.

Alma Chapter 9

The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which were declared unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma. Comprising chapters 9 to 14 inclusive.

1 And again, I, Alma, having been commanded of God that I should take Amulek and go forth and preach again unto this people, or the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass as I began to preach unto them, they began to contend with me, saying:

verse 1 Note that Alma is now speaking in the first person. It is likely that Mormon is quoting directly from Alma's record.

verses 2-4 To this point, we have no record of what specific messages Alma might have preached to the people of Ammonihah. We only know that he had preached "the word of God unto them" (Alma 8:8). We do know that he had been instructed by the angel to warn them that "except they repent the Lord God will destroy them" (Alma 8:16). It would appear that Alma had already delivered this message to them. He had warned them that lest they repent, the Lord would destroy their city in only one day. Their response in effect is: "Who do you think you are, coming here and telling us that our city will be destroyed because of our sins? Do you really expect us to believe you? Never mind the city, why not tell us that because of our sins the whole earth will come to an end? We simply do not believe that our great city will be destroyed in one day."

2 Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away?

verse 2 Undoubtedly one of the arguments leveled against Alma during his first visit to Ammonihah was that Alma was traveling alone and that his testimony was of only "one man." The same criticism is repeated in verse 6. This criticism will be answered when Amulek adds his testimony to Alma's in chapters 10 and 11.

3 Now they understood not the words which they spake; for they knew not that the earth should pass away.

verse 3 The "they's" here, of course, refer to the people of Ammonihah. In deriding Alma by using sarcastic hyperbole, the contenders had inadvertently hit upon a great truth. We know that the telestial earth will, in fact, one day "pass away" or be cleansed, just prior to the Lord's second coming, in preparation for its terrestrial phase—the Millennium.

4 And they said also: We will not believe thy words if thou shouldst prophesy that this great city should be destroyed in one day.

5 Now they knew not that God could do such marvelous works, for they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

verse 5 “they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

6 And they said: Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?

verse 6 Consider the blasphemy here. The people say in effect, “Who does your God think he is in sending only one man here to declare unto us these fantastic and unbelievable things? Does he really expect us to believe them?” We will later learn that they also will say of Ammonihah, “God could not destroy [Ammonihah], because of its greatness” (Alma 16:9). We will learn that it will be decimated in one day by Lamanites (Alma 16:10).

Thus far the people of Ammonihah had heard only Alma testify to them and warn them. The law of witnesses states: “*One* witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of *two* witnesses, or at the mouth of *three* witnesses shall the matter be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15; see also 2 Corinthians 13:1, italics added). Also the Lord’s law of warning holds that he will never destroy a people “save it were foretold them by the *prophets* of the Lord” (2 Nephi 25:9, italics added). Note that the word “prophets” is plural.

7 And they stood forth to lay their hands on me; but behold, they did not. And I stood with boldness to declare unto them, yea, I did boldly testify unto them, saying:

8 Behold, O ye wicked and perverse generation, how have ye forgotten the tradition of your fathers; yea, how soon ye have forgotten the commandments of God.

verse 8 The people of Ammonihah were generally categorized “Nephites” though, as previously mentioned, many of them likely had Mulekite heritage. Beginning at the time Mosiah first brought his Nephite settlers into the land of Zarahemla, there occurred considerable amalgamation of Nephite and Mulekite cultures, though the integration never became complete.

verses 9-11 Alma reviews some of the main tenets of the Nephites’ “tradition of [their] fathers” in these verses.

9 Do ye not remember that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God? Do ye not remember that they were all led by him through the wilderness?

10 And have ye forgotten so soon how many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed, even by the hands of their own brethren?

11 Yea, and if it had not been for his matchless power, and his mercy, and his long-suffering towards us, we should unavoidably have been cut off from the face of the earth long before this period of time, and perhaps been consigned to a state of endless misery and woe.

12 Behold, now I say unto you that he commandeth you to repent; and except ye repent, ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. But behold, this is not all—he has commanded you to repent, or he will utterly destroy you from off the face of the earth; yea, he will visit you in his anger, and in his fierce anger he will not turn away.

13 Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 13 Alma recalls the Lord's words to Lehi. The prophet Nephi previously recorded that the Lord said this same thing to him (1 Nephi 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:20), but we have no record of the Lord's delivering this same message to Lehi.

14 Now I would that ye should remember, that inasmuch as the Lamanites have not kept the commandments of God, they have been cut off from the presence of the Lord. Now we see that the word of the Lord has been verified in this thing, and the Lamanites have been cut off from his presence, from the beginning of their transgressions in the land.

15 Nevertheless I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than for you, if ye remain in your sins, yea, and even more tolerable for them in this life than for you, except ye repent.

verse 15 It is clear that God holds his children strictly accountable for the light and knowledge available to them. The people of Ammonihah were apostate "Nephites" (mostly Mulekites) and had received much light and knowledge. They had been given much for which they would be held accountable. The Lamanites would not be held to such a high standard.

16 For there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites; for it is because of the traditions of their fathers that caused them to remain in their state

of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them and prolong their existence in the land.

verse 16 “there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites”

The Lord promised to be merciful to the Lamanites and to judge them lightly because their sins were partly the result of incorrect “traditions of their fathers” (see the commentary for Mosiah 10:12-17; see also Helaman 7:24; 15:11-12). Do you suppose the Jews may be judged more lightly by the Lord for similar reasons? How about the Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Protestants?

17 And at some period of time they will be brought to believe in his word, and to know of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers; and many of them will be saved, for the Lord will be merciful unto all who call on his name.

verse 17 This prophecy will find fulfillment both in Book of Mormon times (Helaman 13:1) and in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

18 But behold, I say unto you that if ye persist in your wickedness that your days shall not be prolonged in the land, for the Lamanites shall be sent upon you; and if ye repent not they shall come in a time when you know not, and ye shall be visited with utter destruction; and it shall be according to the fierce anger of the Lord.

verse 18 This prophecy will be fulfilled some four years after it was delivered (Alma 16:1-3; 25:1-3).

"fierce anger of the Lord" It is most interesting how the Old Testament period prophets portray Jehovah's motives and emotions. We have learned, through abundant New Testament and modern-day scripture that the Lord seems to have been misrepresented. Today, we might speculate that rather than fierce anger, Jehovah is more likely to have felt disappointment and frustration. And, we would add, he was not without hope that the Ammonihahites would one day repent. Yet, here is the prophet Alma accusing him of feeling "fierce anger." It is not entirely clear to me why this "misimpression" of the Lord's emotions exists among the Nephites. Perhaps, the people (and the prophets) then were reared to believe that God was less patient, less long-suffering, less merciful. Or, perhaps God simply had to deal with the people of that age differently than he deals with us today. This latter explanation seems less likely given the extremes of wickedness to which we are exposed today.

Given the capacity for vindictiveness attributed to God then by his prophets, it is not surprising to read that they also felt him capable of orchestrating "utter destruction" of a people. While today, we would certainly have to allow him that ability, we would rather suspect that instead of deliberately arranging their destruction, he simply withdrew his protective veil and allowed the true nature of mortality and some mortals to take their course.

19 For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people. I say unto you, Nay; he would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God;

verse 19 The meaning of this verse may be restated succinctly: When some Nephites become immersed in iniquity, they pose a threat to the spiritual integrity of other Nephites. The Lord would rather destroy the sinners rather than allow the righteous to be led astray (this is roughly the principle of 1 Nephi 4:13—It is better that one man should perish rather than a nation be led into unbelief).

verse 20-23 Here is yet another a restatement of the Nephites' "traditions of their fathers."

20 Yea, after having been such a highly favored people of the Lord; yea, after having been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people; after having had all things made known unto them, according to their desires, and their faith, and prayers, of that which has been, and which is, and which is to come;

21 Having been visited by the Spirit of God; having conversed with angels, and having been spoken unto by the voice of the Lord; and having the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and also many gifts, the gift of speaking with tongues, and the gift of preaching, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of translation;

22 Yea, and after having been delivered of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord; having been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; having been brought out of bondage time after time, and having been kept and preserved until now; and they have been prospered until they are rich in all manner of things—

23 And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, I say unto you that if this be the case, that if they should fall into transgression, it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them.

24 For behold, the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites, but they are not unto you if ye transgress; for has not the Lord expressly promised and firmly decreed, that if ye will rebel against him that ye shall utterly be destroyed from off the face of the earth?

verse 24 “the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites” See the commentary for verse 16.

25 And now for this cause, that ye may not be destroyed, the Lord has sent his angel to visit many of his people, declaring unto them that they must go forth and cry mightily unto this people, saying: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand;

verse 25 What “angel,” and who are these “many . . . people”? Perhaps Alma has reference to his own miraculous conversion along with that of the sons of Mosiah and others (Mosiah 27:11-24). Their conversion by the angel apparently included a mandate, spoken or unspoken, to carry the gospel to others (Mosiah 27:32). This same angel stopped Alma on the road from Ammonihah to Aaron, and it may well have been the same angel who instructed Alma and Amulek in the home of Amulek (Alma 10:10).

Alma summarizes the angel’s message beginning in this verse and extending through verse 28 (see verse 29).

26 And not many days hence the Son of God shall come in his glory; and his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, equity, and truth, full of patience, mercy, and long-suffering, quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers.

verse 26 Alma’s reference here, of course, is to Christ’s mortal advent.

“his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father” During his mortal sojourn Christ was allowed unique access to the powers of the Father, though his “glory,” during his mortal sojourn will not be evident to all, as it will be at the time of his *second* coming.

“**grace . . . longsuffering**” The godly attributes of Christ are spelled out. How would you define “grace”? It is the matchless love he has for us, particularly that aspect of this love that inclines him to be patient and merciful with us even when we don’t, by our actions, merit that mercy.

“Equity” is a rich word with a unique meaning. Can one really distinguish between equity and justice? Intuitively we may define *justice* as “according to the law as it is written.” What then is equity? Is it something in addition to justice? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has defined *equity* as “the principle which tempers the harshness of justice. Equity dictates that the law shall be administered according to its spirit and not merely its letter (D&C 102:16; 134:3; Helaman 3:20; 3 Nephi 6:4). It is an attribute of Deity (Psalm 98:9; 99:4; Alma 9:26)” (“Equity” in *Mormon Doctrine*, 231). See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 6:4 for a discussion of the meaning of “equity” as contrasted with the concept of “justice.”

“quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers” Here it is made clear that though we pray to the Father, Jesus answers our prayers (see Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mortal Messiah*, 4:74).

27 And behold, he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name.

28 Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been—if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil.

verse 28 “prepare ye the way of the Lord” This commandment is identical with that to “make straight” the pathway of the Lord (see the commentary for Alma 7:19).

“all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been” Here is a reminder of the principle of accountability which is an integral part of the law of justice. It is also an elaboration of the “law of restoration” (see the introductory commentary for Alma 41).

“they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ” Remember that no man will be saved or exalted on his own merit.

“they shall reap damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil” For a discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

We know it is the law of justice (see the introductory commentary for Alma 5), not Satan, that condemns the unrepentant sinner. What is the role of Satan in an individual’s damnation? As the Spirit may prompt a man to do good, so the influence of Satan may prompt him to do evil. One might well argue that the promptings of the devil are more ubiquitous and more readily accessible to man, as they require no effort or striving. They are provided to all mortals “free-of-charge.” On the other hand, one must strive to qualify for the promptings of the Spirit of God.

This verse is another beautiful example of “antithetical parallelism” (see the commentary for Alma 5:40 for a discussion of this interesting form of Hebrew poetry). Note the italicized antonyms in this verse:

If they have been *righteous*
they shall reap the *salvation* of their souls,
according to the *power and deliverance*
of *Jesus Christ*,
and if they have been *evil*

they shall reap the *damnation* of their souls,
according to the *power and captivity*
of the devil.

29 Now behold, this is the voice of the angel, crying unto the people.

verse 29 Verses 25 through 28 have contained the message of the angel probably delivered to Alma and Amulek while they prepared together in Amulek's home (Alma 10:10). Who is this angel? See the commentary for verse 25.

30 And now, my beloved brethren, for ye are my brethren, and ye ought to be beloved, and ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance, seeing that your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God, and seeing that ye are a lost and a fallen people.

verse 30 "ye ought to be beloved" You ought to love one another and me as well.

"ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance" You ought to behave in a manner which provides evidence of your repentance.

"your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God" You are not responsive to promptings of the Spirit. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

"ye are a lost and fallen people" You are consumed by things of the world.

31 Now it came to pass that when I, Alma, had spoken these words, behold, the people were wroth with me because I said unto them that they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

32 And also because I said unto them that they were a lost and a fallen people they were angry with me, and sought to lay their hands upon me, that they might cast me into prison.

33 But it came to pass that the Lord did not suffer them that they should take me at that time and cast me into prison.

verse 33 Notice how this verse illustrates Alma's trusting his fate completely to the Lord.

34 And it came to pass that Amulek went and stood forth, and began to preach unto them also. And now the words of Amulek are not all written, nevertheless a part of his words are written in this book.

Alma Chapter 10

1 Now these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, saying:

2 I am Amulek; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi; and it was the same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God.

verse 2 “Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple” Here is a most tantalizing mention of a story, involving a Nephite holy man and one of the forebears of Amulek, to which we do not have access! This must have been a most interesting story and might well have been included on the large plates of Nephi. If so, then Mormon obviously chose not to include it on the plates of Mormon. Amulek’s reference to the story suggests that it was well known among the Nephites. This story is not to be confused with the account in Daniel 5 of Daniel’s interpreting writings on the temple wall for Belshazzar the king, though its mention here is reminiscent of the Daniel 5 story.

3 And Aminadi was a descendant of Nephi, who was the son of Lehi, who came out of the land of Jerusalem, who was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.

verse 3 “Lehi . . . was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.” It is an often overlooked fact that there is an extensive ethnic mix found in the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Beginning with father Lehi, we already have a rich mixture of near eastern blood. Lehi was descended from Manasseh, therefore he was at least partly of Arabic blood. Manasseh’s mother was Egyptian, and Egyptians were a blend of nomads, cattle raisers, farmers, Africans, Asiatics, Semites, and Hamites. Egypt was a complete melting pot. Zoram was a servant or a slave and probably not an Israelite. Tradition in the Church has it that Ishmael was a descendant of ancient Joseph through Ephraim (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 7:1-5). Now stir in the Mulekites and especially the Jaredites. The Mulekites may well have been a heterogeneous group themselves, and they likely became mixed up with the indigenous native peoples that were already in the New World. The Jaredites came originally from the primal mixing center, the tower of Babel.

Once Lehi’s traveling party arrived in the New world, the mixing really began in earnest. There was mingling and undoubtedly intermarrying between the Nephites and Lamanites from time to time. The Lamanites were partly of Lehitish origin, but there may well have been some of the same indigenous native American blood mixed in, as we have speculated previously.

4 And behold, I am also a man of no small reputation among all those who know me; yea, and behold, I have many kindreds and friends, and I have also acquired much riches by the hand of my industry.

verse 4 Amulek gives us the feeling that he was very successful in a worldly way and that his orientation had previously been directed toward things of the world. This helps to understand why he had not been previously responsive to things of the Spirit and had “harden[ed his] heart” (see verse 6). His decision to receive Alma is all the more laudable if we keep in mind that he was not simply choosing to go out among the people of Ammonihah preaching with Alma. He was actually deciding to reject his former life. We will learn that he was not only forsaking “all his gold, and silver, and his precious things” (Alma 15:16), but he was also giving up “those who were once his friends and also . . . his father and his kindred” (*Ibid.*). It is even possible that he had to give up his wife and children (Alma 10:11).

5 Nevertheless, after all this, I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people.

verse 5 “mysteries” For a review of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for Alma 12:9.

“I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people” Amulek has reference to the Nephite people, and he likely had in mind the divine help his ancestors received in traversing the wilderness, crossing the ocean, and remaining secure under the constant Lamanite threat in the New World.

6 Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart, even until the fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 6 “I did harden my heart” To harden one’s heart is to willfully close one’s heart against the Holy Spirit, in rebellion against God, in order to accomplish one’s own will. The resulting hard-heartedness can result in the Spirit’s ceasing to strive with a person and in spiritual death. Hard-heartedness can lead progressively from indulging oneself somewhat in wrongdoing to gross wickedness. Hard-heartedness is associated with complaining or murmuring, unbelief, blindness of mind, anger, impenitence, stiffneckedness, pride and sexual sin, desire for vengeance, abominations, cruelty, and murder. Hard-heartedness restricts spiritual understanding and can eventually lead to “know[ing] nothing” concerning the mysteries of God, and

then being “taken captive by the devil” (Alma 12:9-11). It resists the softening action of the Holy Spirit and its attendant virtues, like meekness, compassion, and humility. It renders one vulnerable to lies, and blind to divine signs and wonders. It flourishes in conditions of ease and prosperity.

“I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God”

Amulek had been repeatedly “called” or whispered to by the Spirit. His conscience had been pricked, and deep down he really knew the truth. Yet he had not fully responded. President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “I believe there are tens of thousands of people who have heard the truth and have been pricked in their hearts, but they are seeking every refuge they possibly can to hide themselves from their convictions of the truth” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 360-61).

Amulek “knew concerning these things.” This means he knew well what he should do. He knew what his behavior (thoughts, feelings, actions) should be according to the standard of the Lord’s commandments. He knew that he should deliberately summon the character to obey. But his natural self resisted. He goes on to say, “yet I would not know.” To truly learn (“know”) a spiritual truth requires deliberately obeying the Lord’s commandments—deliberately doing what you know is right. Then, through the process of personal revelation, you receive gifts of the Spirit which include increments of divine attributes and a testimony of spiritual truths. Amulek refers to a time when he “would not know” spiritual truths because he was not obey the Lord’s commandments.

“the fourth day of this seventh month” What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1. Amulek’s reference to “this *seventh* month” (italics mine) suggests that Alma and Amulek spent less than a month preparing before going out to preach to the people.

7 As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me and said: Amulek, return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; for he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house.

verse 7 Amulek’s visitation by an angel has caused some to ask the questions: “Why did Amulek receive such a marvelous blessing of the Lord? What did he do to merit such marvelous divine favor?” One might well ask the same questions about Alma (Mosiah 27) and Paul (Acts 9). Perhaps Amulek, as well as Alma and Paul, were foreordained to his calling. Alma will later speak of the principle of foreordination (Alma 13). We might suppose that Amulek was “called and prepared from the foundation of

the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of [his] exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). Such valiance in the pre-existence may have rendered him worthy of this heavenly visitation even though he was temporarily caught up in things of the world here in mortality. It should be also noted that pre-earthly faithfulness and foreordination does not always guarantee obedience here on earth. It is to Amulek’s eternal credit that he did believe and cooperate with the angel.

What a blessed compliment to Alma, having the angel say of him, “He is a holy man . . . a chosen man of God.” For a discussion of the scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

8 And it came to pass that I obeyed the voice of the angel, and returned towards my house. And as I was going thither I found the man whom the angel said unto me: Thou shalt receive into thy house—and behold it was this same man who has been speaking unto you concerning the things of God.

9 And the angel said unto me he is a holy man; wherefore I know he is a holy man because it was said by an angel of God.

10 And again, I know that the things whereof he hath testified are true; for behold I say unto you, that as the Lord liveth, even so has he sent his angel to make these things manifest unto me; and this he has done while this Alma hath dwelt at my house.

verse 10 “I say unto you, that as the Lord *liveth*, even so has he sent his *angel*” (italics added) Amulek not only bears testimony to the people but he swears a solemn oath that what he said about the angel was true. For more thoughts on the ancient practice of oath taking, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:31-33.

11 For behold, he hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake.

verse 11 It is apparent that Amulek was a family man who had in his household “women,” “children,” “my father,” “my kinsfolk,” and “all my kindred.” We need not suppose he was a polygamist because he had “women” in his house. These might certainly have been other relatives.

12 And now, when Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused, and also of the things which were to come, according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

verse 12 Obviously some among the people of Ammonihah were responsive to the Holy Ghost, the “spirit of prophecy.”

13 Nevertheless, there were some among them who thought to question them, that by their cunning devices they might catch them in their words, that they might find witness against them, that they might deliver them to their judges that they might be judged according to the law, and that they might be slain or cast into prison, according to the crime which they could make appear or witness against them.

verse 13 “by their cunning devices they might catch them in their words”

We will learn hear that Amulek is referring to a group of articulate lawyers professionally trained in the techniques of debate. The first “their” refers to these lawyers, and the second “their” refers to Alma and Amulek.

“according to the crime which they could make appear or witness against them” Obviously these clever and wicked lawyers (see verse 14) were out to entrap Alma and Amulek by manipulating the circumstances and make them appear guilty of a crime so they might be delivered before a judge and be convicted of the crime.

14 Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people before the judges.

verse 14 “it was those men who sought to destroy them” One aspect of these lawyers’ motivation seems to have been simply a Satan-driven hatred for the things of God.

“lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials . . . before the judges” The meaning of the phrase “administer the law” is worth a moment’s consideration. It would appear that the role of the lawyer in that day was much the same as it is today. They did not write, enforce, or interpret the law. Rather they simply represented the interests of people involved in legal conflict. This is referred to here as “administering” the law.

15 Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skillful in their profession.

verse 15 It has been noted, with amusement by some, that in almost every instance, “lawyers” are mentioned in a derogatory context in the Book of Mormon. Undoubtedly in Book of Mormon times, as in our day, lawyers played a valuable role in protecting the rights of the individual.

16 And it came to pass that they began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him cross his words, or contradict the words which he should speak.

17 Now they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs. But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said

unto them: O ye wicked and perverse generation, ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundation of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God.

verse 17 “they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs” One of the gifts of the Spirit is the ability to discern the mind and intentions of others.

“ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundation of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God” It seems important to point out that these men were not wicked because they were lawyers. In Ammonihah it is likely that most of the lawyers were of the learned and wealthy class who espoused the teachings of Nehor. They were of the order of the Nehors. Thus, they were philosophical enemies of the prophets of God.

In a gospel sense, hypocrisy is the pretense of religious conviction in the absence of true conviction. It is the claim to religious commitment without the practice of religious principles. A hypocrite feigns belief, while the heart is really serving personal pride and vain ambition. The Greek word translated as “hypocrite” in the New Testament is the word for an actor in a play, one who portrays someone different from the person he or she really is. Hypocrisy is a manifestation of the carnal or “natural man” and not of the truly converted “saint.”

18 Ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people.

19 Yea, well did Mosiah say, who was our last king, when he was about to deliver up the kingdom, having no one to confer it upon, causing that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction.

verse 19 Amulek refers to a warning of King Mosiah recorded in Mosiah 29:27.

“well did Mosiah say” The word “well” here means appropriately, aptly or correctly. It also seems to carry the meaning of poignantly or penetratingly. Note the additional usage of this same meaning of the word “well” later in this verse and also in verses 20 and 21.

20 And now I say unto you that well doth the Lord judge of your iniquities; well doth he cry unto this people, by the voice of his angels: Repent ye, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

verse 20 “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” For a discussion of the meaning of this phrase, see the commentary for Alma 5:50. Perhaps Amulek’s meaning here is that the duration of mortal life is short and unpredictable. One never knows

when one's death might occur, particularly if one lives in the city of Ammonihah (which will soon become a doomed city) and if one is unrepentant (see verse 23).

21 Yea, well doth he cry, by the voice of his angels that: I will come down among my people, with equity and justice in my hands.

verse 21 “with equity and justice in my hands” We never need question the absolute fairness of the Lord's judgments.

verses 20-21 “well doth the Lord judge . . . well doth he cry unto this people” For a discussion of a unique meaning for the word “well” in these verses, see the commentary for verse 19.

22 Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by famine, and by pestilence, and the sword.

verse 22 “if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” Obviously not all of the people in Ammonihah were caught up in priestcraft and other false concepts. We will learn that after the preaching of Alma and Amulek, “many of them did believe . . . and began to repent, and to search the scriptures” (Alma 14:1). However, “the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek” (Alma 14:2).

23 But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent.

verse 23 “then will not the Lord stay his hand” A more conventional rendering would be “then the Lord will not stay his hand.”

24 And now it came to pass that the people were more angry with Amulek, and they cried out, saying: This man doth revile against our laws which are just, and our wise lawyers whom we have selected.

verse 24 “This man doth revile against our laws which are just” We will learn (in verse 26) that the people were incorrect in this criticism of Amulek. The law of the land was the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 12:1) consisting of the system of judges which governed the land. Amulek and Alma were, of course, supportive of the principles behind this form of government. Amulek, however, did take issue with how the people of Ammonihah interpreted or practiced this form of government. He had previously denounced the practice of government in Ammonihah when he said: “Mosiah [caused]

that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction. . . . If it were not for the prayers of the righteous . . . ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” (verses 19, 22). Obviously the “voice” or majority of the people in Ammonihah had chosen unwisely, and their “wise lawyers” were not in fact wise.

“This man doth revile against . . . our wise lawyers whom we have selected” They are accurate in this criticism. Amulek had reviled against their lawyers (see verse 17).

25 But Amulek stretched forth his hand, and cried the mightier unto them, saying: O ye wicked and perverse generation, why hath Satan got such great hold upon your hearts? Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?

verse 25 **“Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?”** For a discussion of how Satan may blind the eyes of a man and bind him with the chains of hell, see Alma 12:9-11 and its commentary. For a more complete discussion of Satan and his strategies, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan*.

26 For behold, have I testified against your law? Ye do not understand; ye say that I have spoken against your law; but I have not, but I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation.

verse 26 **“I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation”** The law of Mosiah was based upon righteous principles. These principles had been violated by the Ammonihahites.

27 And now behold, I say unto you, that the foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges.

verse 27 Again, the formula for destruction is spelled out in verse 19: “if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity . . . they would be ripe for destruction.”

28 And now it came to pass that when Amulek had spoken these words the people cried out against him, saying: Now we know that this man is a child of the

devil, for he hath lied unto us; for he hath spoken against our law. And now he says that he has not spoken against it.

verse 28 Here is the age-old irony of Satan-inspired individuals accusing the righteous of being Satan-inspired.

29 And again, he has reviled against our lawyers, and our judges.

30 And it came to pass that the lawyers put it into their hearts that they should remember these things against him.

verse 30 Obviously these lawyers were the learned, the charismatic, the influential, the leaders. They determined the ideological directions for the majority of the people.

31 And there was one among them whose name was Zeezrom. Now he was the foremost to accuse Amulek and Alma, he being one of the most expert among them, having much business to do among the people.

verse 31 Here we are introduced to Zeezrom, an intelligent, clever, and wicked lawyer. Make certain that you are pronouncing his name correctly. It has three syllables rather than two, and the middle syllable is emphasized—Zee-eh'-zrum—(see the *Pronouncing Guide*).

“having much business to do among the people” Zeezrom was one of the most successful and sought after of the lawyers. We will learn that he was “expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good” (verse 21).

32 Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.

verse 32 The primary motivation of the lawyers was not the welfare of the people. They were not idealists who sought primarily the promulgation of fairness and justice.

Alma Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

Alma 11-15 Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted.

Alma 11:37 Amulek’s teaching that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Alma 11:40 He shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name, and salvation cometh to none else .

Alma 11:42-43 There is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death.

1 Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.

verse 1 “the law of Mosiah” This refers to the Nephite governmental system of judges established by Mosiah before his death.

verses 3-19 The following chart shows the relative monetary values of the currency probably throughout the land of Zarahemla:

Gold	Silver	Measure of Grain	Day’s Wage for a Judge
leah		0.125	
shiblum		0.25	
shiblon		0.5	
senine	Senum	1.0	1.0
antion		1.5	
seon	Amnor	2.0	
shum	Ezrom	4.0	
limnah	Onti	7.0	

(Larry E. Dahl, “The Plan of Redemption—Taught and Rejected,” *Studies in Scripture, Volume 7, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 318.)

John W. Welch has pointed out the similarities between Mosiah’s measures of exchange and those of an ancient Babylonian law code, the Code of Eshnunna. The following initial provisions stand at the head of this ancient law code:

1 kor of barley [she’um] is priced at 1 shekel of silver;

3 qa of “best oil” are priced at 1 shekel of silver;

1 seah and 2qa of sesame oil are priced at 1 shekel of silver . . .

The hire for a wagon together with its oxen and its driver is 1 massiktum and 4 seah of barley. If it is paid in silver, the hire is one third of a shekel. He shall drive it the whole day (Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 59; John W. Welch's "The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics," *FARMS Update, Insights* [December 1998]: 2).

Consider these parallels:

1. The basic legal form of these two texts is consistent. The standard phrasing "1 kor of barley is priced a 1 shekel of silver" resembles that in the Book of Mormon, "A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold" (Alma 11:7).

2. The primary conversion in Babylonia was between silver and barley. Thus, precious metal and grain measures were convertible into each other. The law of Mosiah featured precisely the same conversion capability: the basic measure for either gold or silver was equated with "a measure of barley" (Alma 11:7).

3. In Babylonia the basic commodity valuation system allowed traders to deal in a variety of items, all convertible into silver or barley. Similarly, Mosiah's system covered transactions from silver into "a measure of every kind of grain" (Alma 11:7).

4. Both economic systems were announced by kings to have been instituted for similar reasons. The laws of Eshnunna began with a royal superscription that proclaimed this standardization as instrumental in establishing justice, eliminating enmity, and protecting the weak. Likewise, King Mosiah enacted his laws expressly to establish peace and equality in the land (see Mosiah 29:38, 40).

5. The practical motivation behind the laws of Eshnunna seems to have been to undergird the rental market and to standardize values on daily wages and the computation of various damages and penalties. Similarly, a motivation for the economic part of King Mosiah's reforms was to provide a standard system under the new reign of judges for the payment of judges on a daily basis: "a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver" (Alma 11:3).

In enacting his law, as the Book of Mormon takes pains to tell us, King Mosiah "did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem" (Alma 11:4). Evidently he drew on some other system of weights and measures. Perhaps Mosiah obtained the legal form of his economic decree from the Mulekites, who had had contact with the Jaredites, who had left from Mesopotamia not long before the time of Eshnunna. Moreover, Mosiah's system is distinctively binary. That is, each unit of measure is half the size of the next large unit. Perhaps Mosiah found this binary manner of reckoning somewhere on the plates of brass, which, after all, were written in a type of Egyptian text. Indeed, as became known in the early twentieth century, the units in the ancient Egyptian grain measure were also binary in ratio (John W. Welch

and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999], chart 113). We cannot be sure how to explain the similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna or between the Nephite and Egyptian grain measures, but this much can be said: Such similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna and the Egyptian mathematical papyri (which were unknown in Joseph Smith's day) show yet another way in which the Book of Mormon presents specific details whose roots run unexpectedly deep in ancient societies.

2 Now if a man owed another, and he would not pay that which he did owe, he was complained of to the judge; and the judge executed authority, and sent forth officers that the man should be brought before him; and he judged the man according to the law and the evidences which were brought against him, and thus the man was compelled to pay that which he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber.

verse 2 “a thief and a robber” Please note the distinction between thief and robber, two terms which are essentially synonymous in our culture. See the commentaries for Mosiah 13:22 and 3 Nephi 3:12.

3 And the judge received for his wages according to his time—a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver, which is equal to a senine of gold; and this is according to the law which was given.

4 Now these are the names of the different pieces of their gold, and of their silver, according to their value. And the names are given by the Nephites, for they did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem; neither did they measure after the manner of the Jews; but they altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the judges, they having been established by king Mosiah.

5 Now the reckoning is thus—a senine of gold, a seon of gold, a shum of gold, and a limnah of gold.

verse 5 It seems likely that these names for certain amounts of gold did not represent actual coins, but rather represented standard weights.

6 A senum of silver, an amnor of silver, an ezrom of silver, and an onti of silver.

7 A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold, and either for a measure of barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain.

verse 7 “a measure of barley” See the commentary for Mosiah 7:22. Obviously barley was a crop of primary importance to the Nephites.

8 Now the amount of a seon of gold was twice the value of a senine.

9 And a shum of gold was twice the value of a seon.
 10 And a limnah of gold was the value of them all.
 11 And an amnor of silver was as great as two senums.
 12 And an ezrom of silver was as great as four senums.
 13 And an onti was as great as them all.
 14 Now this is the value of the lesser numbers of their reckoning—
 15 A shiblon is half of a senum; therefore, a shiblon for half a measure of barley.
 16 And a shiblum is a half of a shiblon.
 17 And a leah is the half of a shiblum.
 18 Now this is their number, according to their reckoning.
 19 Now an antion of gold is equal to three shiblons.
 20 Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ, therefore, they did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness, that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them; therefore they did stir up the people against Alma and Amulek.

verse 20 This verse explains the essence of why the entire legal system of Ammonihah was corrupt. A “suit” may be defined as an action taken to secure justice in a court of law. The influential and self-serving lawyers had ulterior motives in fomenting conflict and animosity. They stood to gain from any form of civil strife, enmity, or hostility.

“Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ” Brother David E. Bokovoy (“Repetitive Resumption in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Update, no. 182, vol. 27, 2007) has pointed out that this phrase illustrates a common form of editorial activity utilized here in the book of Alma that is also found in the Bible. It is called repetitive resumption. Biblical scholarship has recognized this writing form only since the time of Joseph Smith.

Repetitive resumption refers to an editor’s return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption. For example, in Johsua 1:7, Moses’s successor, Joshua, counsels ancient Israel to be “strong and very courageous.” This admonition is then followed by a mandate to continually meditate upon the “book of the law” (verse 8). Since the reference to the “book of the law” alters the focus of Joshua’s account, most biblical scholars conclude that Joshua 1:8 represents a later editorial insertion. Directly following this interruption, the Hebrew redactor returns to the original narrative by restating the key words that immediately precede his textual interruption or insertion: “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage” (verse 9). Similar examples of this phenomenon have been identified throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Here in Alma 11:20, we see that the editor, presumably Mormon, has used repetitive resumption in just the same way. Mormon interrupts the account of Alma's confrontation with Zeezrom by interjecting an outline of the Nephite monetary system (verses 1-19). Prior to this insertion, the account reads, "Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ" (Alma 10:32). After the editorial interruption that breaks the flow of the primary narrative, the editor returns to the original account by using repetitive resumption here in this verse: "Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ." See another example of repetitive resumption in the Book of Mormon in Helaman 5:14.

This literary technique is significant not only because it supports the authenticity of the Book of Mormon (the technique had not yet been identified by biblical scholars in 1830) but also because it allows readers to identify the primary message that the original writers of the Book of Mormon wanted their audience to receive.

21 And this Zeezrom began to question Amulek, saying: Will ye answer me a few questions which I shall ask you? Now Zeezrom was a man who was expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good; therefore, he said unto Amulek: Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you?

22 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord, which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord. And Zeezrom said unto him: Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being.

verse 22 It is also not surprising that Zeezrom would offer Amulek money to recant his testimony. After all, Zeezrom was of the order of Nehor (commentary on Alma 8:9; Alma 14:16; 15:15). Nehor had taught that priests and teachers ought to be popular, and that they ought not to labor with their hands. Rather they should be supported by the people (Alma 1:3). Thus Zeezrom was indoctrinated with the idea that the priests and teachers of his land were primarily profit motivated.

One onti of silver was equivalent to seven days' wages for a judge. Therefore six onties equaled a judge's wages for forty-two days (see commentary for Alma 11:3-19).

23 Now Amulek said: O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations?

verse 23 Amulek leaves no doubt as to who, he felt, was inspiring and motivating Zeezrom.

24 Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay, thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him.

verse 24 Amulek was inspired to be able to discern the mind of Zeezrom.

“thou lovest that lucre more than him” We might appropriately expand the definition of “lucre” to include all things of the world rather than simply money. Here then is the essence of this mortal trial. It is not sufficient to profess and even have some degree of love for the things of God. We must evidence in our lives that we love the things of God more than the things of the world. This is the spirit of sacrifice. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 17, *The Law and Spirit of Sacrifice*.

25 And now thou hast lied before God unto me. Thou saidst unto me—Behold these six onties, which are of great worth, I will give unto thee—when thou hadst it in thy heart to retain them from me; and it was only thy desire that I should deny the true and living God, that thou mightest have cause to destroy me. And now behold, for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward.

verse 25 Again, Amulek correctly discerns the mind and intentions of Zeezrom.

“for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward” Zeezrom’s reward will come in the form of mental anguish and suffering over his sins (see Alma 1:46; 12:1,7; 14:6; 15:3,5).

verses 26-33 In these verses Zeezrom engages Amulek in conversation. Zeezrom’s hope is obviously to catch Amulek contradicting himself and expose him to the listening audience.

26 And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God?

27 And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God.

28 Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?

29 And he answered, No.

verse 29 Amulek’s reference here is obviously only to Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did he not acknowledge the other two members of the godhead? Did he know about them? It seems certain that Amulek did understand the nature of the godhead as we understand it today (see the commentaries for verses 33 and 44). His emphasis that there is but one God might have been given to counter those who would worship many gods. This is the same spirit that is reflected in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord God is one Lord,” and in Mark 12:29: “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.” Amulek’s statement about one “true and living God” is also similar to one given in the New Testament by Paul in a similar context: “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

30 Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?

31 And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.

verse 31 Amulek refers to the ministrations of the angel to Alma and Amulek in the latter's home (Alma 10:10).

32 And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?

verse 32 In this verse Zeezrom's motives become transparent. Amulek has stated that there is but one God (verse 29). Now Zeezrom wants him to say that the God who shall come and dwell among his people is the Son of God, thus implying that there are at least two Gods. To his listening audience this would constitute an inconsistency or contradiction.

33 And he said unto him, Yea.

verse 33 Amulek seems to fall into Zeezrom's trap. He acknowledges that the Savior who will come is the Son of God. It seems evident that Amulek, who is obviously a capable and bright individual, could easily perceive the direction in which Zeezrom was trying to lead him. Thus the verse provides evidence that Amulek did understand the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

34 And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word.

verse 34 Zeezrom, feeling that he has scored one victory, now attempts to trap Amulek again. Zeezrom asks the question: "Shall he save his people in their sins?" It is understandable that Zeezrom might ask this question since he was of the persuasion of the order of Nehor (see the commentary for Alma 8:9; Alma 14:16; 15:15). Nehor had taught that all people would be saved, therefore there was no need for repentance or for fear and trembling over their sins (Alma 1:4; 15:15). Perhaps he hoped to disguise the word "in" when he asked, "Shall he save his people in their sins?" Zeezrom was asking if God, by divine decree, can pardon sinners regardless of their failure to repent, simply because he wills it and wants it. Amulek immediately discerned his intent and answered in the negative "Ye cannot be saved in your sins" (verse 37). Amulek knew that the Savior would save his people from their sins, based on their repentance, and that he would not save his people in their sins. President John Taylor wrote: "It would be impossible for [God] to violate law, because in so doing he would strike at his own dignity, power, principles, glory, exaltation and existence" (*Mediation and Atonement*, 168).

35 Now Zeezrom said unto the people: See that ye remember these things; for he said there is but one God; yet he saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people—as though he had authority to command God.

verse 35 Now believing that he has scored two victories over Amulek, Zeezrom says to the listeners, “See that ye remember these things.” He then misquotes Amulek: “He saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people.” He also misconstrues Amulek’s intent by adding, “As though he had authority to command God.”

36 Now Amulek saith again unto him: Behold thou hast lied, for thou sayest that I spake as though I had authority to command God because I said he shall not save his people in their sins.

verse 36 Now Amulek takes the offensive. He first exposes Zeezrom’s obvious distortion of the truth in accusing him of intending to “command God.”

37 And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins.

verse 37 Amulek then explains the important doctrinal error which those of the Order of the Nehors apparently espoused. If the reader wishes to review the essential elements of the atonement, please review the introductory commentary for Alma 5. The Savior cannot save people *in* their sins—that is while they are still unrepentant. He can save them *from* their sins. If man will come to him and repent, then he will extend the saving power of the atonement which will satisfy the law of justice (Helaman 5:10-11).

**38 Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?
39 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last;**

verses 38-39 Jesus Christ is God, the Creator or Father of heaven and earth. If we choose to refer to his other roles, then he is also the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. He is also the Eternal Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority and because he is the Father by adoption of those who accept the gospel (Mosiah 5:7).

40 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

verse 40 As in most every instance of the use of the word “salvation” in the Book of Mormon, the word here is identical in meaning to *exaltation* or *eternal life*.

“he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name” All men, even those slow to repent, will benefit from his atonement. Only those who repent in a timely fashion and come to believe on his name, however, will enjoy the full benefits of the atonement—exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

“and salvation cometh to none else” We are again reminded of an absolute truth: Of the billions of people who have lived on earth, not one will be saved in a kingdom of glory lest he accept Jesus Christ and sincerely repent.

verses 41-45 What are the unconditional benefits of the atonement which will be extended without exception to every man and woman born into mortality? They are: (1) All will be resurrected, and (2) All will be brought back into the presence of God to be judged. The unworthy, of course, will not remain in the presence of God.

41 Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

42 Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

verse 42 The “temporal death” was, of course, brought upon all men because of Adam’s transgression. The phrase “bands of death” refers to the concept that death would hold all people captive forever if Jesus Christ had not triumphed over it through the Atonement. This expression may also refer to the bands of spiritual death (see Alma 5:7-10, 13).

43 The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

verse 43 **“The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form . . . even as we now are at this time”** The construction of the phrase seems awkward since the two nouns “spirit and the body” are the antecedents of the singular pronoun “its.” In the church today, we have a singular name for the combination of the spirit and body. It is the soul of man (D&C 88:15). In this phrase the “spirit and the body” are obviously regarded as a single entity, the soul.

The exact process and sequence in which the resurrection will occur may not be as yet fully revealed to us. However, this verse is helpful.

One feature of the doctrine of the resurrection is ambiguous. Is it a one-step process or a gradual process? For a discussion of this ambiguity, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*. See particularly the subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” under “The Great Final Judgment” in that chapter.

The “gradual” school of thought feels that at the instant of our resurrection, our body will be just as it was at our death. Joseph Smith taught: “As concerning the resurrection, I will merely say that all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young; there will not be ‘added unto their stature one cubit,’ neither taken from it; all will be raised by the power of God, having spirit in their bodies, and not blood” (*TPJS*, 199-200). President Joseph F. Smith added: “The body will come forth as it is laid to rest, for there is not growth or development in the grave. As it is laid down, so will it arise, and changes to perfection will come by the law of restitution” (*Improvement Era*, June 1904). President Joseph Fielding Smith later explained that this law of restitution will act “almost instantly” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:293-94). Perhaps following the resurrection, within moments, our body will be restored to a state of immortal perfection and will be quickened by that glory which we are to inherit (D&C 88:28). According to the “gradual” theory, those who die as children will be resurrected as children and will subsequently grow to adulthood.

“and we shall be brought to stand before God” This standing before the judgment bar of God appears to be an eternal ordinance of the gospel. Perhaps he will not really render a judgment at that moment since that judgment may have already been made. We will stand before him clothed in the body that will reflect that judgment. The body we will possess on that occasion will be a celestial one or a terrestrial or telestial one. Or it may be a body characteristic of those who will live forever with Satan. He will at that time apparently pronounce our eternal destiny and confirm the validity and justice of our eternal fate.

“knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt” Brightness connotes vividness and precision. We will all at that moment be acutely aware of the fairness and justice of the judgment which has been rendered. Elder Neal A. Maxwell expanded our understanding of this “bright recollection”:

At the judgment we will not only have the Book of Mormon’s prophesied “bright recollection” and “perfect remembrance” of our misdeeds (see Alma 5:18; 11:43). The joyous things will be preserved too. . . . Among the “all things [that] shall be restored” (Alma 40:23) will be memory, including eventually the memory of premortal events and conditions. What a flood of feeling and fact will come to us when, at a time a loving God deems wise, this faculty is restored! Surely it will increase our gratefulness for God’s long-suffering and for Jesus’s atonement! Hence one of the great blessings of immortality and eternal life will be the joy of our being connected again with the memories of both the first and the second estates (*Men and Women of Christ*, 132).

44 Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and

be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

verse 44 The phrase “or in the body” is a reiteration of the phrase “as it is now.” Every thing shall be restored to our bodies just as those things are now. Again, might the complete sequence consist of an initial resurrection to a state just as we were before our death. Then the “restitution” spoken of by Joseph Fielding Smith above might occur within moments following the judgment. Our eternal body will then be changed to a state commensurate with the eternal kingdom in which we will live.

“the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit” Here are named the three members of the godhead: Christ the Son, God the Father, and the Holy Ghost. Can there be any doubt that Amulek understood the nature of the godhead?

The judgment bar of God is here referred to as “the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God” We are taught in the scriptures that the Father has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22; 2 Nephi 9:41). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:

The scriptural assertion that all men “shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” means simply that Christ’s judicial decisions are those of the other two members of the Godhead because all three are perfectly united as one. The ancient Twelve and the Nephite Twelve, and no doubt others similarly empowered, will sit in judgment, under Christ, on selected portions of the house of Israel; but their decrees will be limited to those who love the Lord and have kept his commandments, ‘and none else’ (D&C 29:12; 3 Nephi 27:27; Matthew 19:28)” (*The Promised Messiah*, 215-16).

“which is one Eternal God” See the commentary for Mormon 7:7.

45 Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning the resurrection of the mortal body. I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption.

verse 45 It is likely that most readers will read through this verse without realizing its importance. Consider for a moment that those who have read the entire Bible have never read an explanation or a definition of the concept of resurrection. The term “resurrection” is never mentioned in the Old Testament, and the only definition we have in the New Testament was given by Paul and is incomplete at best. Paul taught: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in

incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Here in verse 45 we have quite a clear definition of resurrection (see also Alma 40:23).

“thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption” The word *spiritual* means not subject to death. *Corruption* means mortal, of the world, subject to death.

46 Now, when Amulek had finished these words the people began again to be astonished, and also Zeezrom began to tremble. And thus ended the words of Amulek, or this is all that I have written.

verse 46 In Zeezrom we again encounter an individual who, in spite of his worldly and wicked ways, was probably a choice individual in the pre-mortal world. We see evidence in this verse that the Spirit was beginning to reach him and that he was responsive to the Spirit.

“this is all that I have written” Here is a reminder that Mormon is the first person and is doing the redacting.

Alma Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

Alma 12:9-11 Alma's teaching of the "chains of hell." He that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word and then they are taken captive by the devil.

Alma 12:14 For our words and our works will condemn us and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

Alma 12:24 Death comes upon mankind, nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent.

Alma 12 and 13 consist of Alma's discourse to Zeezrom and to the people of Ammonihah.

1 Now Alma, seeing that the words of Amulek had silenced Zeezrom, for he beheld that Amulek had caught him in his lying and deceiving to destroy him, and seeing that he began to tremble under a consciousness of his guilt, he opened his mouth and began to speak unto him, and to establish the words of Amulek, and to explain things beyond, or to unfold the scriptures beyond that which Amulek had done.

verse 1 Zeezrom has become uncharacteristically quiet or silent. The Spirit had obviously touched him to know the truth of Amulek's teachings, and he was probably contemplating their significance in view of his sinful past.

"Amulek had caught him in his lying and deceiving to destroy him" Amulek had correctly perceived that Zeezrom was lying and deceiving in order to destroy Amulek in their ideological debate.

"to establish the words of Amulek, and to explain things beyond" Alma's intent in speaking to the Ammonihahites was to confirm the truth of Amulek's preaching and to teach *additional* truths ("things beyond") over and above those things Amulek had taught.

2 Now the words that Alma spake unto Zeezrom were heard by the people round about; for the multitude was great, and he spake on this wise:

3 Now Zeezrom, seeing that thou hast been taken in thy lying and craftiness, for thou hast not lied unto men only but thou hast lied unto God; for behold, he knows all thy thoughts, and thou seest that thy thoughts are made known unto us by his Spirit;

verse 3 “**thou hast lied unto God; for behold, he knows all thy thoughts**” It is impossible to remain undetected if we attempt to lie to God, yet we can deceive Satan, for “there is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart” (D&C 6:16).

4 And thou seest that we know that thy plan was a very subtle plan, as to the subtlety of the devil, for to lie and to deceive this people that thou mightest set them against us, to revile us and to cast us out—

verse 4 By now, the reader perceives that “subtle” and “subtlety” are negative qualities. But do you recall exactly what they mean? *Subtlety* usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Here, however, “subtle” means crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

5 Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee. Now I would that ye should remember that what I say unto thee I say unto all.

verse 5 “**he hath exercised his power in thee**” Alma tells Zeezrom, “You have been used by the very adversary for his purposes.”

6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity.

verse 6 A *snare* is anything by which one is entangled and brought into captivity and trouble.

7 Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God; and he was also convinced that Alma and Amulek had a knowledge of him, for he was convinced that they knew the thoughts and intents of his heart; for power was given unto them that they might know of these things according to the spirit of prophecy.

verse 7 The “spirit of prophecy” is, of course, the Holy Ghost.

8 And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works?

verse 8 We witness a miraculous transformation of Zeezrom from vicious critic and heckler to honest investigator!

verses 9-11 These verses explain the basis on which eternal truths are taught to the human family.

9 And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

verse 9 “mysteries of God” Harold B. Lee taught that a mystery is a spiritual truth which may be grasped only through divine revelation—a fact or concept that can truly be understood only with the help and influence of the Spirit of God. All spiritual truths are “bewildering mysteries” to those who are “hard-hearted” or “stiff-necked” as they simply are unable to understand them. This definition of *mysteries* seems to pertain in this particular verse and throughout the Book of Mormon (*Ye Are the Light of the World*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 211).

These mysteries are advanced concepts of spiritual understanding. There are essential requirements for receiving this type of mystery. They are received and understood only by those who have been prepared by learning the concepts of the gospel in a step-wise fashion, “line upon line” and “precept upon precept.” They are received only under the influence of the Holy Ghost, therefore only those righteous individuals who live worthy of the Holy Ghost’s influence qualify to receive them. Such concepts are sacred, and there is a measure of defilement in disclosing them to someone who is not prepared to receive them because of failure to meet the above qualifications. Such disclosure not only profanes the sacred concept, but in addition is a waste of time since it is not possible for one who is unprepared to spiritually comprehend it. For a more complete discussion of the concept of mysteries of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

During his mortal ministry Jesus used parables to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom from the unworthy and the spiritually unprepared. These parables were so effective at concealing the message that Jesus often had to explain the meaning afterward even to his disciples.

“they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” Here is a commandment directed to those with an understanding—a spiritual witness—of some of the “mysteries of God.” To whom are they allowed to teach or to impart these mysteries? They are allowed to teach these sacred concepts only to those who have

appropriately prepared themselves spiritually by seeking the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer, by study, and by obedience—they have given “proper heed and diligence . . . unto him.” They have acknowledged the Author of the mysteries by their obedience to him.

The Lord may reveal, through his Spirit, to some individuals particular morsels of understanding because of the diligence of their study or because of their particular circumstances. In these instances, the Lord may not intend that these morsels be taught to all members of the Church. They may, at times, not even be applicable to the general membership of the Church.

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

verse 10 “he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word” For a discussion of this concept see the commentary for verse 11. See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“to him is given the greater portion of the word until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full” The promise is given only to the faithful and obedient: They will be given knowledge “line upon line, precept upon precept” until they receive, in “due time” a fulness of the Father (D&C 98:12; 93:19). They who receive light and continue in that light “receiveth more light: and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). Simply stated, they will receive all the knowledge the Father has. This concept is discussed also in the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:30. More is implied than the idea that knowledge is given to man a little at a time. The receiving of new knowledge is a matter of personal desire, personal worthiness, and personal readiness. Also implicit in this concept is the idea that in order to receive additional knowledge, one must prove oneself a faithful steward over the knowledge already received. If not, then even that which has been already received will be taken away.

The concept of a man’s coming to *know* a spiritual truth is far richer than a mere mental process of learning and understanding. “Knowledge” of each spiritual truth comes as a gift of the Spirit, an increment of an attribute of God. When a man comes to know a spiritual truth, he receives that truth by personal revelation, and his heart and mind are changed. He becomes a new creature. Such knowledge of spiritual truths comes less by reading and studying than through one’s obedience to gospel commandments. To learn gospel truths is to receive gifts of the Spirit. This same concept adds richness to the expression “the word of God.” Learning the word of God effects a change in an individual. That change may be termed *spiritual growth*. See

Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, volume 1, chapter 7.

“mysteries of God” Again, see the discussion of mysteries in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

11 And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.

verse 11 In contrast to the previous verse wherein we are taught how an individual might receive a fulness of light or knowledge, this verse describes the phenomenon of a man’s losing all knowledge of eternal truths. Then, inevitably, the man is taken captive by the devil and led down to destruction. The concept of “the chains of hell” is particularly apt. The devil slips his chains around the neck of the unbeliever so subtly and shrewdly that he snares and binds them almost before they realize it. Nephi commented on this ability of Satan when he observed that the devil “leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord [a soft cord], until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever” (2 Nephi 26:22). These “chains” are referred to elsewhere in the scriptures as “awful chains” (2 Nephi 28:22), “everlasting chains” (2 Nephi 28:19), and “everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18).

Just as knowledge of spiritual truths comes through one’s obedience to the gospel commands and represents real spiritual growth, one will fail to grow and even lose the growth that one does possess through one’s disobedience to gospel law. Both the process of learning and the process of forgetting spiritual truths tend to be self-perpetuating. He who denies his natural self and obeys a commandment is rendered more likely to subsequently deny himself again and obey again. Contrariwise, the man to gives in to his natural self and fails to obey a commandment becomes more inclined to disobey the next time he is tempted. This latter individual becomes caught in a spiraling whirlpool which takes him down and down until he is irreversibly ensnared by the “chains of hell.”

12 And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

verse 12 These words of Amulek are found in Alma 11:41-45.

13 Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

verse 13 This verse is a reiteration of verse 11. The idea that the word of God “has not been found in us” does not refer so much to what we *know*. Rather, it refers to what we have become.

verses 14-18 Here Alma speaks of those who refuse to repent.

14 For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

verse 14 The principle underlying this verse is *accountability*. Accountability is being responsible, or answerable, for one’s “thoughts,” “feelings,” “words,” and “works.” For mortals to be accountable to God, three conditions must exist. First, a law must be given which defines the boundary between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:13; Alma 42:17-22). Second, there must be a knowledge of the law, a knowledge of good and evil (2 Nephi 2:5); and third, there must be agency, the freedom to choose between obedience or disobedience, between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:26-27). God has created a mortal experience where all three of these essential elements are present.

Is it not true that a person’s “thoughts,” “feelings,” “words,” and “works” are but outward manifestations of what that person really is at his very core, in his very heart of hearts?

“we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *fain* as, “Gladly; willingly; with joy or pleasure.” Thus the expression “fain be glad” is an odd, redundant phrase.

Can you think of a state that is the exact opposite of the one described in this verse? Consider, in the context of this verse, D&C 121:45: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”

15 But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.

verse 15 **“But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him”** This phrase refers to the final thought in the previous verse, “we would fain be glad if we

could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.”

It is sobering to contemplate the inevitable consequences of maintaining an unrepentant attitude here in mortality. Except for those who go with Satan and become sons of perdition, each and every individual will (1) feel shame in God’s presence; (2) see himself with all sham and pretense stripped away and realize that God’s judgments are completely fair—indeed, more than fair; and (3) acknowledge that there is no other way to be saved in a kingdom of glory than acknowledging Jesus as their Savior and sincerely repenting of their sins.

One meaning of the word *meet* is “that which is suitable, fitting, and proper.” To bring “forth fruit meet for repentance” is to sincerely repent and then provide appropriate evidence of the completeness of that repentance.

16 And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness.

verse 16 “then cometh a death, even a second death” Again, we are considering the fate of him who remains unrepentant here in mortality. What exactly is this “second death”? To understand clearly the answer to this question, let us review part of the concept of the fall: Because Adam transgressed in the garden, all mankind will temporarily suffer two penalties: (1) Each person will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality, the so-called spiritual death. This may also be referred to as the “first death.” (2) Every man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. These penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects will automatically be some day reversed by virtue of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice and death. In other words, “No man will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression” (Article of Faith 2). Remember, that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another’s sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam’s sin. At a point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God to be judged. It does not matter how wicked and unrepentant, every person will, after the resurrection, be brought back into the presence of God for judgment (Alma 40:11-14). This returning to God’s presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam’s transgression.

Once in God’s presence each person is judged. They will either be exalted in the kingdom of God and thus remain in his presence or they will be sent out of his presence a second time and suffer the so-called “second death.” They will be cut off from the presence of God, and from his happiness and joy, forever. These will be consigned to

one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer a complete second death and live with Satan forever as sons of perdition.

The term “second death” is used several times in the Book of Mormon. It sometimes seems to refer to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see Jacob 3:11). The reader is reminded that the doctrine of the post-mortal phase of man’s existence is incomplete as taught in the Book of Mormon. Those who ultimately inherit the terrestrial or telestial glories also may be said to have suffered the “second death.”

“then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death” “Then” refers to the time when people will be consigned to suffer the second death. This tragic consignment occurs when an individual lives through mortality and dies unrepentant. After his physical death, he will consequently also die spiritually.

We must keep in mind that at our death, the “partial judgment” of each one of us is made by an all-knowing and all-seeing Lord. We will be judged worthy of a state of “paradise” or be placed in the spirit world in a non-paradisiacal state, a state of “prison.” Each of God’s children will finally live eternally where they are happy and fulfilled. If they are truly celestial people in their hearts—at their core—they will so be judged. If they would fit and be happiest in a lesser degree of glory, then that is where they will live for eternity. Hence, the individual “who dieth in his sins” simply means that during his mortal experience, he failed to become—through repeated repentance and obedience—a true celestial being. And, he will consequently be remanded to a lesser degree of glory or to outer darkness.

The phrase, “he shall die as to things pertaining to righteousness” suggests an aspect of permanence to the phenomenon of the “second death.”

17 Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; and then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them according to his will.

verse 17 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression refers to those who suffer the second death. It does not, of course, describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the important commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16. If the reasons why the spirit world is referred to in scripture as “hell” are not fresh in your mind, please review that commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16.

“they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction” Verse 11 and its commentary reviews the manner in which Satan uses the chains of hell to capture those with hardened hearts. These eventually come to have no knowledge of spiritual truths and have no choice but to respond to the will and logic of the devil. Only those who

become sons of perdition are completely and eternally “chained down to an everlasting destruction.”

This “captivity of Satan” will also be experienced in some measure by those who eventually inherit a lesser degree of glory. They will be temporarily consigned in the world of spirits to “prison,” the place for all of those not blessed with the state of paradise. In the case of these individuals in prison, however, this captivity will come to a finite end at the moment they are resurrected with a terrestrial or a telestial body. For them this captivity is “eternal” or “everlasting” only in the sense that it is God’s punishment (see D&C 19:10-12). In their cases, it does not last forever.

18 Then, I say unto you, they shall be as though there had been no redemption made; for they cannot be redeemed according to God’s justice; and they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption.

verse 18 This verse can only describe the sons of perdition. It is only they who “shall be as though there had been no redemption made” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:8-9). It is only they who will not “be redeemed according to God’s justice.”

“they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption” The word “corruption” in scripture means something like decay or deterioration. What a desperate plight awaits the sons of perdition! They will find themselves in outer darkness, subject to the devil and, initially at least, possessing an eternal body. There will, however, be no escape from their hopeless situation. Whether or not they will eventually experience dissolution of their resurrected body, they will remain in outer darkness forever. There is no way out!

The question as to the state of the body of those resurrected to inherit outer darkness is not completely settled. This verse may suggest that the “perdition body” will last for eternity. There is some speculation, however, that the resurrected body of those doomed to live in outer darkness forever will eventually undergo dissolution (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:22).

19 Now it came to pass that when Alma had made an end of speaking these words, the people began to be more astonished;

verse 19 “the people began to be more astonished” Obviously some of the people were beginning to respond to the Spirit. They were beginning to believe the words of Amulek and Alma.

20 But there was one Antionah, who was a chief ruler among them, came forth and said unto him: What is this that thou hast said, that man should rise from the dead and be changed from this mortal to an immortal state that the soul can never die?

21 What does the scripture mean, which saith that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the east of the garden of Eden, lest our first parents should enter and partake of the fruit of the tree of life, and live forever? And thus we see that there was no possible chance that they should live forever.

verses 20-21 Antionah is critical of the possibility of immortality because God had placed cherubim before the tree of life to prevent Adam and Eve (or their posterity) from living forever.

What are cherubim? We have previously discussed this question. Allow me to remind you. Many animals and plants live in God's presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God's presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92). One such animal is the seraph (singular) or seraphim (plural). In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes *seraphs* (alternately *seraphim*) in God's presence. Joseph refers to them as "bright, shining seraphs." Another type of winged heavenly creature is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth. An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the human family, and that the descriptions of their non human parts ("wings") is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their "wings" are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

It is interesting to note that Antionah doubted the doctrine of the resurrection and perhaps the doctrine of an afterlife because of a misinterpretation of the account of "cherubim and a flaming sword" in the Garden of Eden. He had assumed that since Adam and Eve were prevented from eating the fruit of the tree of life, "there was no possible chance that they should live forever." His error is an understandable one and perhaps even a sincere one. Alma will explain his error, read on!

verses 22-27 There are three key points to understanding Alma's explanation to Antionah:

1. Adam's transgression brought about a temporary spiritual death or a temporary separation of man from God, and in addition every man will perpetuate this spiritual death and render it "permanent" by his own sins (Romans 3:23).

2. The plan of redemption holds that the only way to overcome this permanent separation from God is through obedience and repentance in a mortal state.

3. Once Adam and Eve had fallen from their immortal state and were mortal, it was necessary to prevent them from partaking of the fruit of the tree of life. The Bible tells that if they had partaken, they would have "live[d] forever" (Genesis 3:22). However, in neither Genesis nor the book of Moses are the implications of this situation

clearly defined. We can be grateful to Alma for an explanation. Apparently, eating of the fruit of the tree of life, once they were mortal, would have simply perpetuated their “mortal” state forever. They would have existed forever in a sort of quasi-resurrected state. This quasi-resurrected body would not die, and somehow, in this condition, they would have been prevented from engaging in the real process of mortality. They could not have been properly tested. They could not have grappled with the tests of temptation, obedience, disobedience, and sin. They could not have repented of their sins. Apparently, they also could not have born children. There is obviously much we still do not know about the implications of the tree of life in Eden.

A period of *ordinary* mortality is absolutely necessary for our spiritual progress. If Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life, they would have been shut out from the presence of God forever. A most vital part of the plan of redemption is the relatively brief period we spend in mortality—our “moment” of probation.

We may thus more clearly understand why the Book of Mormon warns against wasting the days of our probation. If a person “wasteth the days of his probation, . . . awful is his state” (2 Nephi 9:27), for he finds himself in the same condition that would have prevailed if Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life immediately and continued forever in their sins, shut out from the presence of God. Those who waste the days of their probation exist as though there were no plan of redemption and no atonement.

22 Now Alma said unto him: This is the thing which I was about to explain, now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.

verse 22 “**by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people**” Do we really become a “lost and fallen people” because of Adam’s fall? Let us review the consequences of Adam’s transgression. They are:

1. All mankind became mortal. Our bodies are subject to “corruption” or deterioration, and all of us will eventually suffer a physical death. We are therefore temporarily “lost and fallen” in the sense that we are in need of being resurrected.

2. All mankind became separated from God, and we need to regain his presence, thus in another way we become temporarily “lost and fallen” because of Adam’s sin.

3. We came to know good from evil. That is, humankind was enabled to have a full knowledge of good and evil, sufficient to allow them to grow spiritually as they make moral choices. This effect of Adam’s fall may be regarded as positive and productive.

4. Mankind was enabled to procreate. This, also, is a positive and productive change.

Now, we do believe that no one of us will suffer eternally because of Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2). We are taught that consequences (1) and (2) of

Adam's transgression (above) will be automatically removed or fixed. It is however by virtue of Christ's atonement that none of us will suffer eternally due to Adam's fall. Without being rescued or redeemed by that atoning sacrifice, each of us would indeed have remained permanently a "lost and fallen people."

Another consequence of the fall is that man, in his mortal state, is significantly reduced in power and in the ability to acquire knowledge compared to his living in a spirit body. In speaking of the reductions in ability that man experiences in this mortal sphere, Joseph F. Smith wrote: "I think that the spirit, before and after this probation, possesses greater facilities, aye, manifold greater, for the acquisition of knowledge, than while manacled and shut up in the prison-house of mortality" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 13).

23 And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

verse 23 This verse makes the point that if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life in the garden, then they never would have died. They would have lived forever in their fallen "mortal" state. This would have been, of course, a major problem.

"the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die" This instruction and warning by God was given in the context of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis 3:3, Eve implies that God had told Adam and Eve that if they partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. This death, and the mortal life that preceded it, of course, would be a good thing—a vital part of the God's plan. An untimely partaking of the fruit of the tree of life would have thwarted God's plan. Man would not experience mortality and then die and later be resurrected. In this sense, then, God would have been "a liar."

24 And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

verse 24 The logic of this verse is that since death has come upon mankind, then obviously a functional and redemptive mortal probationary period has also come upon mankind.

"this life became a probationary state" Adam and Eve did not partake of the tree of life, and this life did become a valid probationary state.

It may be parenthetically noted that one doctrine not fully explained in the Book of Mormon is the complete truth of the “probationary state” or second estate through which each of us must pass. It includes not only our mortal lives on earth but also the period of time that some will spend in the “spirit prison.” Those who are blessed to go to “paradise” need no further probationary state since they have already completed their probation. The fact that it is possible to repent after this mortal phase is missing from the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

“that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead” This seems to refer to that eternal period when all, save the sons of perdition, will live in the kingdoms of glory.

25 Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation of the world, there could have been no resurrection of the dead; but there was a plan of redemption laid, which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, of which has been spoken.

verse 25 “from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home.

“the plan of redemption” This is another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6).

26 And now behold, if it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state; and thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated, and the word of God would have been void, taking none effect.

verse 26 This verse proposes a hypothetical situation which did not, and indeed could not never have come to pass because the word of God stated otherwise. As we have discussed, if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life after they had secured their mortality by partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would have lived forever in a sort of suspended state of eternal “mortal” agony where they were guilty of sin but unable to repent. They would have had a type of quasi-resurrected, “mortal” body which would not die. Though they had transgressed in the garden (partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) and fully knew right from wrong, there would be no mortal period of probation available to them. There would be no opportunity to be tried and to repent. They would be unable to earn their exaltation. The rest of us would also have suffered. We would have been stuck in our pre-existent unembodied state.

27 But behold, it was not so; but it was appointed unto men that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end.

verse 27 “it was appointed unto men that they must die” Intrinsic within this statement is the idea that it was appointed unto men that they must become mortal, live out their mortal probationary period, and then die a mortal death.

28 And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

verse 28 It is given unto man to know about the plan of salvation and other eternal truths. Every man should know fully that he will die and be judged by the Lord.

29 Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory.

verse 29 At the time of Adam, the heavenly instructions to mortal man were delivered through angels (see Moses 5:6, 58 and D&C 29:42).

30 And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men, and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world; and this he made known unto them according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.

verse 30 “from the foundation of the world” See the commentary for verse 25.

Since the time of Adam, spiritual knowledge has been bestowed upon mortals contingent upon their faithfulness—their “faith and repentance and their holy works.”

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good—

verse 31 “they having first transgressed the first commandments” The “first commandments” were those given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Though the plural “commandments” is used in this verse, we regard this phrase as referring to the single commandment not to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When this commandment was transgressed, the act brought unto Adam and Eve knowledge of good and evil, placing them in a position to act “according to their wills . . . whether to do evil or to do good.” It also brought upon them a separation from God, mortality, and the inevitable eventuality of their own deaths.

For a discussion of the difficult questions raised by Adam and Eve's experiences in the Garden of Eden, see the commentary for Moses 3:17 in *Learning to Love the Pearl of Great Price*.

32 Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God.

verse 32 “Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption” These are the “second commandments” spoken of in verse 37. These were given to Adam and Eve and their offspring. These commandments are the gospel of Jesus Christ or the plan of redemption. The penalty for breaking these commandments is the “second death,” an everlasting spiritual death. See the discussion of the meaning of the phrase “second death” in the commentary for verse 16 above.

“for on such the plan of redemption could have no power” Every individual who, at the final judgment, is judged unworthy to enter the presence of God suffers the “second death.” Once a person has been so judged, there is no provision in the plan of salvation for bringing him back into the presence of God.

“the works of justice could not be destroyed” This phrase refers to the law of justice. There is no appeal from the workings of this law.

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

verse 33 It is fundamental to the gospel plan that we do all that we do in the name of the Son. Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. “Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8).

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

verse 34 “these shall enter into my rest” What is the “rest of the Lord”? Alma will refer to this concept several times during his preaching to the people of Ammonihah (verses 36, 37; Alma 13:6,12,13,16,29; 16:17). In brief it is to *rest* or *dwell* in the presence of the Lord for eternity. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See

also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

35 And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.

36 And now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord; therefore your iniquity provoketh him that he sendeth down his wrath upon you as in the first provocation, yea, according to his word in the last provocation as well as the first, to the everlasting destruction of your souls; therefore, according to his word, unto the last death, as well as the first.

verse 36 “the rest of the Lord” Again, for the meaning of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary verse 34.

“first provocation” The “first provocation” was in the Garden of Eden. God was provoked by Adam and Eve’s transgression. As a result he brought physical and spiritual death upon them and their posterity.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were disobedient. Hence the Lord was provoked and withdrew his presence and swore in his wrath that they would not enter into his rest while in the wilderness (Psalm 95:8-11). This is the “last provocation.”

“last death” The “last death” is the same as the “second death.” The “first” death and the “second death” are defined in the commentary for verse 16 above.

The general meaning of verse 36 is since God was true to his word in earlier provocations, there is every reason to believe that he will be equally true to his word if we provoke him by our disobedience here in mortality.

37 And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts, that we provoke not the Lord our God to pull down his wrath upon us in these his second commandments which he has given unto us; but let us enter into the rest of God, which is prepared according to his word.

verse 37 “his second commandments” For an explanation of the “second commandments” see the commentary for verse 32.

Alma Chapter 13

Scripture Mastery

Alma 13 Alma's discourse on the Priesthood

Alma 13:3 Alma's teaching on the principle of foreordination.

In Alma 13, Alma provides us with an insightful and prophetic discussion of the higher priesthood, "the holy order of God." For a discussion of the doctrine of the priesthood and especially the rather confusing nomenclature having to do with matters of the priesthood see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 12, *Priesthood*.

Before undertaking a detailed consideration of each of the chapter's verses, it may be of interest to consider the history of the priesthood organization among the Israelites before the time of Lehi's family's departure from Jerusalem.

From Adam to Moses the high priesthood was administered through what we now refer to as the *Patriarchal Order*. The Patriarchal Order is a form of government in which worthy high priests preside over and govern their extended families in both civil and ecclesiastical matters. During this time period, the main office of the priesthood was that of patriarch. Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham were patriarch's and administered the Lord's work righteously and by the inspiration of God. A patriarch could bless his offspring by calling upon the powers of heaven. As he gave the birthright blessing to one of his sons, for instance, the keys and powers of the priesthood were extended to that son for the governing of the next generation. By the law of primogeniture, these birthright blessings normally were given to the eldest son. However, from Abraham to Ephraim the birthright blessing went to younger sons because of their righteousness (Genesis 21, 27-28, 48-49).

When the children of Israel proved unworthy to bear the fulness of the high priesthood, it was taken from among them by Jehovah. He also took from among them Moses himself, who held the keys of the priesthood—the right of presidency. Even though the people were then limited largely to the ministrations of the Aionic priesthood, rather than the higher priesthood, the Lord did leave a few men among them who held the Melchizedek priesthood. These included most prominently the Lord's prophets. In the New World, some of these included Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Benjamin, Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, and Moroni. These men clearly held the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. There is no evidence that the Aionic priesthood existed among the Nephites until after the coming of Jesus to the Americas. To what extent all other male Nephites held the priesthood, how and under what circumstances it was conferred, and the exact nature of the priesthood organization between 600 BC and AD 34 are not made clear in the Book of Mormon text.

Before proceeding with our consideration of Alma 13, it should be made clear that each and every blessing offered to a man through his possessing and honoring his priesthood is available also to the righteous woman. Men have no advantages over women in the process of striving to earn their exaltation. In fact, the highest blessings afforded to those in the covenant order of the Melchizedek priesthood can only be bestowed upon the union of the man and woman, not upon the man alone. While she may not be said to “hold” the priesthood, she is a vital part of the covenant order, the higher priesthood.

1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

verse 1 “my brethren” Alma is still speaking to Antionah, a chief ruler among the Ammonihahites and a few others of Ammonihah who had responded to the preachings of Amulek and Alma (see Alma 12:19-20).

“I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children” To *cite* is to direct or urge. In this context, Alma is saying, “I would urge you to consider or think about . . .” In our terminology today we would say “I would cite your minds backwards or back in time.” The word *forward* here means toward the beginning, or toward the front, or earlier in time.

“These commandments” likely refer to those “second commandments” spoken of in Alma 12:32, 37. These were given “unto men” after Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. The commandments were basically the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The penalty for breaking these commandments consists of the second death, which was “an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness.”

“his holy order . . . the order of his Son” In our dispensation we have been instructed to refer to the higher priesthood as the Melchizedek priesthood. In the Book of Mormon it is referred to as “the holy order,” “the holy order of God,” “the order of his Son,” or in some instances simply “the order.”

“the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son” Alma seems to be speaking here of those prophet high priests from Adam to Moses about whom he doubtless learned as he studied the brass plates. These men were patriarchs or presiding high priests.

An interesting question is raised by this phrase “the Lord God ordained priests.” Since the time of Adam, has every priesthood ordination taken place by the laying of one mortal’s hands on the head of another mortal? Or, has God ever dispatched a heavenly messenger to take care of the ordination without the mediation of another mortal? Certainly whenever a mortal priesthood holder has been available then the

ordination has been handled from man to man. But has there ever been a time when no mortal priesthood holder was available to perform the ordinance? The restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods in this dispensation are two examples, of course. But have there been other instances? It is difficult to be certain. Joseph Smith did teach on one occasion: “All the prophets had the Melchizedek priesthood and were ordained by God himself” (*TPJS*, 180-81). Joseph’s meaning is not clear. Perhaps he is referring to God’s ordaining his prophets through other mortals that represented God.

“to teach these things unto the people” “These things,” again, are the commandments of the gospel referred to in Alma 12:32.

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

verse 2 “ordained . . . in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” This is a most provocative passage (see also verse 16), and it has caused some to speculate. Is it possible that the ordinance of ordaining to the priesthood among the Nephites was not accomplished simply by the laying on of hands as it is today? These verses suggest that when high priests were ordained, the manner of ordination itself somehow communicated information that would cause the people to “know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” Perhaps the mechanism of ordination itself was more symbolic than the simple laying on of hands.

Perhaps another meaning was intended in verses 2 and 16. The patriarchs or prophets—those who were ordained to the office of high priest—were themselves to be considered types or symbols of the great high priest himself. Not only were they types, but also they were commissioned to teach of Christ and his gospel. “Those who preceded the Lord . . . pointed toward and anticipated his coming. . . . All prophets are types and shadows of the Savior. He was called and prepared from before the foundations of this world. So were they. He speaks the truth. So do they. He offers the words of life. So do they. He preaches as one having authority. So do they. He offers his life as a final testament. Such also is required on occasion of those who stand in the prophetic office. Thus the ancient prophets were living Messianic prophecies” (Robert L. Millet, *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 65).

Yet another meaning may have been intended. The ordaining of a man to the priesthood is a type of the Savior as follows: In the great heavenly councils of the first estate, Jesus was called and ordained to his earthly ministry on account of his great faith and good works in that first estate. He had obeyed implicitly the will of his Father. He received the priesthood in the pre-existence, would receive it anew in mortality, and he will possess it for eternity. In like manner, we do not receive the priesthood

capriciously or by chance. We were ordained to receive it because of our obedience and our good works in the first estate. Any ordination occurring during the premortal phase is referred to as *foreordination*. We may well have been foreordained then, will be ordained anew in this second estate, and we may possess it for eternity providing we are worthy.

We have previously discussed the importance of types or symbols of Christ. Perhaps Lehi summed up this topic best when he taught 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, italics added). These “things” include ordinances (verse 16), the law of Moses (Alma 25:15), and his prophets. Put in another way, all of God’s creations made available for the use of man are designed by him to help us recognize, understand, and appreciate the Son of God and his atonement (see Moses 6:63 which says, “all things are created and made to bear record of me”).

Perhaps this verse is best explained by its intention to teach that ordination to the priesthood is symbolic of Christ’s redemption in at least two ways. (1) Both (Christ and the priesthood) were “prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God;” and (2) verses 11-12 (see below) will suggest that at the time of ordination, a number of these new priesthood holders undergo a redemptive experience. If verse 16 were to be placed following verse 12, it would fit perfectly, the phrase “these ordinances” referring to priesthood ordinations.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

verse 3 An important general principle is illustrated in this verse, the doctrine of foreordination. Just as our behavior in this mortal phase of our existence—our “second estate”—influences our condition in the eternities—our “third estate”—so does our behavior in our pre-existent phase—our “first estate”—influence our condition here in mortality. Of all of God’s spirit children in the premortal world, some few distinguished themselves by their valiance, their obedience, and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These have been foreordained to have the greatest opportunities and blessings here in mortality. Foreordination implies no guarantees from God, but rather extra opportunities and often extra obligations and challenges. Foreordination is like all other blessings. It is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness. Just as a prophet’s prophecies may accurately predict events without determining their outcome, so is foreordination a bestowal of a blessing or an opportunity which foresees but does not fix the outcome.

Some notable mortals have, of course, failed their trusts. David and Judas come to mind. In spite of his doubtless sublime foreordination, David saw Bathsheba from the balcony, lusted after her, and sent for her. God was obviously not pleased with David, but neither was he surprised, since he had perfect divine foreknowledge of David. Judas Iscariot was foreordained to a critical role in the dispensation of the meridian of time. He was to become one of Christ's chosen apostles during the Savior's mortal ministry. He received the testimony that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, in the full light of that conviction, he turned against his Lord and betrayed him to death.

Foreordination is a powerful doctrine that must be understood carefully in context of other gospel principles. If misunderstood it can encourage a belief in fatalism, lead to a misunderstanding of our agency, cause us to focus on status or position in the kingdom rather than service, and prompt us toward a belief in predestination. Predestination is not a valid gospel concept. While some, because of their outstanding performances in the first estate, may be foreordained to great accomplishments here in mortality, no one is predestined to be exalted without regard to the quality of their mortal lives.

Elder Orson Hyde said of our premortal perspective, "We understood things better there than we do in this lower world." Given this heightened eternal perspective, Elder Hyde speculated about the agreements we made there, "It is not impossible that we signed the articles thereof with our own hands—which articles may be retained in the archives above, to be presented to us when we rise from the dead, and be judged out of our own mouths, according to that which is written in the books. . . . Just because we have forgotten, our forgetfulness cannot alter the facts" (*JD*, 7:314-15). Our forgetting notwithstanding, on occasions there are inklings of remembrance that penetrate the veil, moments that Elder Neal A. Maxwell has referred to as "doctrinal *deja vu*'s." President Joseph F. Smith said:

But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil that we might merit the reward of our own choices and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, and the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home (*Gospel Doctrine*, 13-14).

One might well ask, "Why have the prophets revealed to us the doctrine of foreordination?" It would seem that, surely, an understanding of the precious doctrine of foreordination can and should encourage us in good works here on earth.

This particular verse is a treatise on foreordination to the priesthood. Here we learn that our accountability began before this earthly phase of our existence. It began in the premortal phase. No man is called to the higher priesthood in the second estate (this mortal life) without being prepared, qualified, called, and foreordained in the first estate—the pre-existence. Thus priesthood holders in this second estate are "doubly called."

We may expand the concept of foreordination to include other prerogatives of the Lord. Generally, the Lord eschews any interference with our agency. But he does reserve to himself one particular privilege—that of “staffing” the mortal earth. He seems to dispatch the premortal spirits to earth where and when he wishes. How else, for example, would prophets be able to prophesy of this final gospel dispensation—that it will not fail prior to the Lord’s second coming. He doesn’t, after all, force the kingdom of God to survive. He has rather “guaranteed” its success by virtue of those whom he has dispatched to earth during this period. Thus, by this staffing privilege (foreordination) he ensures the kingdom’s success until that splendid moment.

Doubtless the foreordination of individuals in the premortal world to accomplish particular things here in mortality is dependent upon the attributes they acquired through their obedience in that pre-existent sphere. Depending on their unique abilities, or combinations of abilities, hands are laid upon the spirit heads of pre-existent spirits, and they are foreordained to specific earthly tasks. They are thus called to specific earthly callings. These callings become—for those of us so called—stewardships or spiritual obligations here on earth (D&C 72:3-4). Those who magnify and accomplish these callings or these stewardships may then be chosen for exaltation. There is ample evidence in scripture, however, that many are called (foreordained) but only a few are chosen or exalted (see Matthew 7:13-14; 3 Nephi 27:33).

It would not be surprising to one day learn that these foreordained stewardships include even highly individual tasks the Lord would have us identify, prepare for, and accomplish here on earth for the benefit of his earthly kingdom. Each of us comes to earth with a unique combination of hard-won attributes earned in that “first place” by our obedience to the Lord’s laws. It is just possible that there await us here on earth opportunities that we alone might best fulfill. The stumbling block, however, to complete fulfillment of our stewardship here, may well be the necessity of identifying our latent abilities and redeveloping them to a point where they will be truly useful to the Lord and his earthly purposes.

“And this is the manner after which they were ordained” Alma seems to be referring here to the ancient patriarchs. Does this verse apply only to them or does it also apply to all those of us with lesser station in the church? It likely applies to the rest of us as well. Read on!

“being called and prepared from the foundation of the world” The phrase “from the foundation of the world” refers to man’s pre-existence or first estate.

“according to the foreknowledge of God” This calling and foreordination to the priesthood (and to other special stations in life) is not made capriciously. It is made “according to the foreknowledge of God.” Was our being foreordained a free gift to us, or did we have to earn it? The latter is true, of course. The first estate was an important period of testing to see if we would “choose good or evil.” Those who chose the good qualified to become foreordained to receive the higher priesthood and

doubtless many other foreordinations here in mortality. Joseph Smith wrote: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council” (*TPJS*, 365). Referring to this statement of the prophet’s, J. Reuben Clark, Jr. said: “I do not know whether we have a right to interpret the prophet’s statement . . . but I like to think that it does include those of us of lesser calling and lesser stature. . . . I like to think that perhaps in the Grand Council something at least was said to us indicating what would be expected of us, and empowering us, subject to the re-confirmation here, to do certain things in building up the kingdom of God on earth” (*CR* [Sept-Oct 1950] 170-71).

Referring to the foreknowledge of God, Elder James E. Talmage wrote:

Our heavenly Father has a full knowledge of the nature and disposition of each of his children, a knowledge gained by long observation and experience in the past eternity of our primeval childhood; a knowledge compared with which that gained by earthly parents through mortal experience with their children is infinitesimally small. By reason of that surpassing knowledge, God reads the future of child and children, of men individually and of men collectively as communities and nations. He knows what each will do under given conditions and sees the end from the beginning. His foreknowledge is based on intelligence and reason. He foresees the future as a state which naturally and surely will be; not as one which must be because he has arbitrarily willed that it shall be (*Jesus the Christ*, 29).

Both the Father and the Son have divine foreknowledge concerning all mortals regarding their responsiveness to the gospel message. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and *know* my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14, italics added). On another occasion he said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I *know* them, and they follow me” (John 10:27, italics added). In this dispensation he declared, “And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts” (D&C 29:7). It is no wonder that the Lord could say to Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and I ordained thee a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul said of God, “He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). With our primitive mortal intellects, we cannot possibly understand, in full, this divine foreknowledge. In some way, the past, present, and future are before God simultaneously, though we certainly cannot understand just how. In a revelation to Moses, the Lord said, “And all things are present with me, for I know them all” (Moses 1:6). In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord described himself as “The same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes” (D&C 38:2).

We commonly observe in life some individuals with special limitations and challenges. These are all in the Lord’s hands, and he loves them perfectly. According to his divine foreknowledge, he has placed, or at least he has allowed to be placed—

doubtless mostly through “mortal accident”—a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Like him who was “blind from birth,” (John 9:1-2) some will come to bring glory to God because of their infirmities. Certainly we should not assume that all circumstances here on earth are micromanaged and dictated by the Lord, but he does, on occasion, direct circumstances in the spirit of divine tutorials. For these occasional instances, a proper understanding of the doctrine of foreordination can help us in understanding and coping with the vicissitudes of life. We can be more comfortable with the things allotted to us in life.

“on account of their exceeding faith and good works” Was it really necessary for us to exercise *faith* when we lived in the pre-existence—referred to here as “the first place”? After all, did we not live with our heavenly parents and see them with our eyes and converse with them? Was it really necessary for us to exercise *faith* in that setting? Did we not walk by knowledge and not by faith? We know that it was necessary to exercise faith as we all strove, with various degrees of success, to be obedient (see particularly the discussion of deliberate faith in *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* in volume 1, chapter 10 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). Based on that obedience some qualified for more blessings from the Father than did others. Abraham was allowed a vision of the individuals in the first estate, and he saw “many [who were] noble and great ones.” This implies that there were some there also who were not as noble and not as great. None of the talents or gifts we possess here on earth was given to us gratuitously. Rather, they were earned. For example, those born into this life with the gift of deliberate faith (the compelling inclination to obey even when circumstances make it difficult, or inconvenient) merit that blessing. We are taught that there is a law “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated” (D&C 130:20-21). This eternal principle pertained in the first estate as well as in the second estate. It should not be surprising, then, that the Lord has selected certain individuals for particular assignments before they came here. These individuals have been foreordained to these assignments.

Those men who demonstrated “exceeding faith and good works” were ordained in that “first place” to receive the higher priesthood in this second estate. This is the doctrine of foreordination. A man’s foreordination is based upon his faithfulness in the pre-existence and God’s foreknowledge of that faithfulness and the man’s unique combination of spiritual gifts.

The reference made in this verse and the verses which follow to the first estate or pre-existence—the “first place”—is probably the first reference in modern scripture, made available in this dispensation, to our premortal phase. More specific references were eventually made available to the saints in the book of Moses.

Did righteous men hold the priesthood in the pre-existent world? Or is the priesthood saved for a man’s second estate? Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “In regard to the holding of the priesthood in the pre-existence, I will say that there was an

organization there just as well as an organization here, and men there held authority. Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit world [the pre-existence] held priesthood” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:81).

“in the first place being left to choose good or evil” The “first place,” again, is the premortal world. There the spirit children of our Father in Heaven had their agency and abundant opportunities to choose between good and evil.

“they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling” Those who were valiant in the first estate were “called with a holy calling”—that is, they were foreordained to receive the higher priesthood. If it was possible to hold the priesthood in the premortal world, then perhaps this being “called with a holy calling” refers to actually receiving the higher priesthood in the first estate as well.

“that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such” This phrase is at first a bit confusing. Let us consider its meaning carefully. “That holy calling” refers to the higher priesthood. The phrase “which was prepared with, and according to” means that the higher priesthood “was created for the purpose of.” Thus far the meaning is that “the higher priesthood was created or prepared for the purpose of.” Of what? Why was the higher priesthood created? What is its essential purpose here on earth of those who bear this higher priesthood? Their purpose is to assist in the “preparatory redemption” of man. What is this “preparatory redemption”? The primary function of those called with this “holy calling” to the higher priesthood is to assist in the redemption of fallen man. Their calling is to aid, to strengthen, to encourage, to bless lives and ultimately to assist in the exaltation of their fellow mortals. Their work is preparatory in the sense that before Christ’s mortal advent, the work of the priesthood was to prepare the people for his coming. The work of those who have lived or are living in this final dispensation is to prepare the world for his *second* coming. Whom are these bearers of the higher priesthood supposed to assist in their redemption from the fall? They are to provide help “for such” people as those priesthood bearers encounter here on earth.

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

verse 4 This verse teaches the simple idea that some of those foreordained in the premortal world to receive the Melchizedek priesthood on earth will fail to live worthy of that privilege and miss out on the blessings they might have had.

“And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith” Once these faithful and foreordained men arrive on earth to live out their mortal

experience some of them live up to their foreordination, accept the gospel, and receive the priesthood.

“while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” Others of these foreordained men may prove to be unresponsive to the promptings of the Spirit and never receive the gospel or the priesthood.

“if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren” If it had not been for the “hardness of their hearts” and the “blindness of their minds” they might well have received the same blessings here on earth as their brethren who lived up to their foreordination. The following verse reiterates this tragic irony.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—

verse 5 “In fine” means in summary or in conclusion.

“in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren” The “first place” is the premortal world. This refers to those potential priesthood holders who were valiant in the pre-existence and who thus were foreordained to receive the priesthood here on earth. Unfortunately they were not valiant at some subsequent time in their progression—either later in their pre-existent sojourn or here on earth. In the pre-existence they earned the “same standing” or the same foreordained blessings as did their brethren who later received the priesthood here on earth. Yet the “hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” caused them to lose the blessings of the priesthood.

Here, then, is the difference between the valid concept of foreordination and the false concept of predestination: If God had seen fit to pronounce a man predestined to receive the priesthood, then he would do so without regard to his obedience or valiance. On the other hand those who are foreordained in the pre-existence may indeed lose their blessings through sin and ultimately “live beneath their privileges.” In the “first place” they qualify for marvelous earthly blessings, but, once in mortality, they fail to respond to the promptings of the Spirit, become lost in worldliness, and lose their rewards. President Harold B. Lee explained the meaning of a pertinent scripture in this regard: “Despite that calling which is spoken of in the scriptures as ‘foreordination,’ we have another inspired declaration: ‘Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen’ (D&C 121:34). This suggests that even though we have our agency here, there are many who were foreordained [“called”] before the world was, to a greater state than they have prepared themselves for here. Even though they might have been among the noble and great, from among whom the Father declared he would make his chosen

leaders, they may fail of that calling here in mortality [they are not “chosen” for the priesthood calling on earth or for celestial glory] (CR, [Oct 1973] 3-10). For additional discussion of the scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

An interesting aside as that while the Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of the pre-existence, as in this verse, there is no mention in the Book of Mormon of the spirit creation of all things which is known from Moses 3:5 and D&C 29:31-34.

“being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son” Here is a phrase that might at first cause confusion. For example, what is the antecedent of “being”? What does the phrase “in and through” actually mean? How does the atonement of the Savior tie in to our present topic?

The antecedent of this phrase seems to be the higher priesthood or at least a foreordination to this priesthood—“this holy calling.”

If one utilizes modern scripture-search technology to study the uses in scripture of the phrase “in and through,” it is interesting to note that it is found exclusively in the Book of Mormon. There are six other places where it is used (2 Nephi 2:6; 10:24; Mosiah 3:17, 18; 16:13; Alma 38:9). Its meaning in each of these instances is to show the absolute obligatory relationship between the salvation of man and the Savior’s atonement. Here in verse 5, then, we might conclude that this phrase “in and through” signifies an absolute obligatory relationship between the higher priesthood and something else. What is that something else? It is “the atonement of the Only Begotten Son.”

In what way is the higher priesthood obligatorily dependent upon the atonement? The covenant order of the higher priesthood could not exist had there been no atonement made. The very real blessings a man receives by virtue of his holding the priesthood are well out of proportion to his works in meriting those blessings. Had not the Savior atoned, he could not bestow those blessings. It would not be fair. It would not be just. The law of justice would be offended and would not allow it.

“who was prepared” Here is a reminder that the Savior himself, in the pre-existence and here on earth, had to progress line upon line, from grace to grace until he received the “fulness of the priesthood (D&C 124:28),” the “fulness” of his Father (D&C 93:11-14).

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—

verse 6 Those who had been foreordained to receive the higher priesthood—those “called by this holy calling”—who did not harden their hearts are then ordained to the “high priesthood of the holy order of God.” This verse speaks of the covenant order of the higher priesthood as the “holy order of God,” while the following verse refers to “the order of his Son.” We would presume that these two orders are one and the same.

We might define an “order” as a group of individuals who are distinguished by some particular characteristic. In this “order” the individuals are characterized by certain blessings and certain obligations.

It is apparent there are certain levels within this holy order of God. We gain entrance into this order when we receive the Melchizedek priesthood. Another level is achieved when we receive the ordinances of the temple—the endowment and the ordinance of eternal marriage. The ultimate level is reached when an individual is sealed up to eternal life or has his calling and election made sure, a state which the scriptures refer to as receiving the “fulness of the priesthood” (D&C 124:28) or gaining entrance into the “Church of the Firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23; D&C 76:54, 71, 94, 102). Joseph Smith taught: “If a man gets a fulness of the priesthood of God, he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord” (*TPJS*, 308). He later added: “Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings” (*TPJS*, 323).

Understanding this highest level of the Melchizedek priesthood sheds significant light on some choice scriptural references. For example, that priesthood order into which Enoch and his people were received (which is the same that was later conferred upon Melchizedek) is described in JST, Genesis 14:30-32: “For God having sworn unto Enoch and his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course . . . to stand in the presence of God.” Some people were even taken from the earth because of their righteousness: “And men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven.”

Just as there are different degrees of blessings in the higher priesthood, there are also differing levels of obligation. As we receive more and higher blessings we place ourselves under increasing obligation to be true to the covenants of the priesthood. Every man who is introduced into this covenant order is provided an explanation of the “oath and covenant of the priesthood” as contained in D&C 84:33-42. Simply stated, when a man receives the higher priesthood, he must understand that he places himself under obligation to be true to the covenants he makes. If he is not true to them, then it would have been better for him in the eternities had he never entered into them in the first place. The more blessings he receives, the greater is his obligation. Ultimately, if he receives the highest blessing and is sealed up to eternal life, then his obligation is so sacred and binding, that a complete disavowal may even constitute grounds for being found guilty of committing the unpardonable sin or the so-called sin against the Holy Ghost.

The male does not make this ascent in the priesthood by himself. While an unmarried male may hold the higher priesthood, it is the completed eternal unit, the

male and the female joined in eternal marriage, that may receive the blessings of the fulness of the priesthood and become exalted to the highest degree in the life to come. Certainly the Melchizedek priesthood is not an automatic ticket into the celestial kingdom. Each man and woman must painstakingly earn their own way by repeatedly repenting and striving to obey the commandments. Also each must receive the full ordinance of baptism including the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit, and the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. See *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in volume 1, chapter 18, of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

“to teach his commandments unto the children of men” The antecedent of “his” is, of course, “the Only Begotten Son” in verse 5. Certainly one of the most important charges of those who hold the Melchizedek priesthood is to teach the doctrines of salvation. The Lord stated in D&C 84:19 that the “greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.” Joseph Smith taught that the Melchizedek priesthood “is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven” (*TPJS*, 166-67).

“that they also might enter into his rest” For a discussion of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

Moses, as he traveled with the Israelites in the wilderness wanted his beloved Israelites to share in the sacred privilege which he had had—that of seeing God face to face. He taught them that in order to have this privilege they had to possess the highest degree of the Melchizedek priesthood (the “fulness of the priesthood” spoken of above) which, of course, required them to be responsive, obedient, and worthy. Unfortunately they failed the test. Hence the higher priesthood was removed from them, and even Moses was taken from them. Read the account of this incident in D&C 84:19-25:

And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

For without this [the power of godliness] no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also.

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—

verse 7 “in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things” A similar expression is found in Hebrews 7:1-3 where it has caused much confusion. In Hebrews, in apparent reference to Melchizedek, king of Salem, we read that “Melchisedec” is: “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” We learn from the JST and from this verse in the Book of Mormon that Hebrews 7:3 was not intended by Paul to say that Melchizedek was endless. Rather it was the priesthood to which he was ordained that is endless. The priesthood is from eternity past to eternity future. In further explanation of Hebrews 7:3, Joseph Smith wrote: “The Melchizedek priesthood holds the right from the eternal God, and not by descent from father and mother; and that priesthood is as eternal as God himself, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (*TPJS*, 323).

Joseph Smith taught: “The priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years” (*TPJS*, 157). President George Q. Cannon taught that the priesthood “had no beginning; [it will have] no end. It is [as] eternal as our Father and God, and it extends into the eternities to come, and it is as endless as eternity is endless, and as our God is endless: for it is the power and authority by which our Father and God sits upon his throne and wields the power he does throughout the innumerable worlds over which he exercises dominion” (*JD*, 26:245). Thus we learn that the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God was in operation in the first estate or pre-existence. It exists here in mortality. And, it will play a vital role in the spirit world and in the kingdoms of glory.

8 Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

verse 8 “they were ordained after this manner” *They*, again, refers to those who had been foreordained to receive the higher priesthood who did not harden their

hearts and were ordained here on earth to the “high priesthood of the holy order of God.”

We have learned then from these verses in Alma 13 that in order to hold the priesthood one must be called of God (one cannot appoint oneself), be valiant in one’s loyalty to the Savior and his gospel, and then receive the priesthood according to the order of the Church, that is by the laying on of hands.

Here is a provocative question: Are women excluded from the opportunity of receiving “holy callings,” or foreordinations, from God? It seems clear they are not.

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

verse 9 “Thus they become high priests forever” There are apparently two meanings of the title “high priest.” First, it is one of the ordained offices within the Melchizedek priesthood. Second, Elder Bruce McConkie taught that a high priest is “God’s chief representative on the earth, the one who holds the highest spiritual position in his kingdom in any age. . . . This special designation of the chief spiritual officer of the church has reference to the administrative position which he holds rather than to the office to which he is ordained in the priesthood” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 355).

10 Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

verse 11 The process of being *sanctified* has two separate parts. It occurs in response to an individual’s successfully obeying a commandment. First, it means to have an increment of the natural self burned out of one’s soul “as if by fire.” Second, sanctification refers also to the receiving of an increment of a gift of the Spirit—a portion of an attribute of Christ. Sanctification is an ongoing process that occurs as an ongoing reward for an individual’s obedience to the commandments of the gospel. For a more complete discussion of the principle of sanctification see *Justification and Sanctification* in volume 1, chapter 17 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

For a discussion on the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost and the so-called “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18. The sanctified individual is worthy of a celestial reward. He earned this state through striving to conform to the principles of the gospel and through repeatedly repenting of imperfections and striving and striving again and again.

12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

verses 10-12 Alma's repeated references to "they" as he spoke to the people of Ammonihah refers to those, in prior history, that had been ordained to the higher priesthood after being foreordained to such in the premortal world.

It seems that we human beings in any era tend to regard our own generation and our own people as enlightened and advanced and smugly regard those of other times and other cultures as less informed, less sophisticated, and less capable. It is humbling to note that Alma was inspired to report on "many, exceedingly great many" who lived between the time of Adam and his own day who were righteous souls who were ordained to the higher priesthood, sanctified by the blood of Christ, and who entered into the rest of the Lord. In like manner, President Joseph F. Smith in October 1918 saw in vision "an innumerable company" of righteous spirits who had assembled in paradise to greet the Christ who visited them between his crucifixion and resurrection (D&C 138).

13 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

verse 13 "bring forth fruit meet for repentance" The meaning of the adjective "meet" in this context is an archaic one. It means consistent with or indicative of. "Fruits" of repentance implies tangible works and deeds rather than mere intentions or professions.

verses 14-19 The subject of these six verses is the man Melchizedek. To those whose sole source of information about Melchizedek is the Bible he is an enigmatic character about whom many traditions abound. For example, by some he is identified as Shem, the son of Noah. Others hold that he was a descendant of Shem. One tradition suggests that he was named Melchizedek by God when the priesthood was bestowed upon him (Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*. 2 volumes Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937, 1:233; 5:225-26). In the Bible Melchizedek suddenly appears on the scene at the time of Abraham. Abraham unhesitatingly recognizes him as a man of superior spiritual status, pays tithes to him, and receives from him a blessing. Melchizedek then disappears from the biblical record for a thousand years. King David then refers to the eternal "order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Another thousand years passes, and then Paul refers to him in Hebrews 7.

His name is derived from two Hebrew roots, *melekh* (king), and *tzedek* (righteousness). Thus the name Melchizedek literally means “righteous king.” Josephus explained that the city of Salem, over which Melchizedek reigned as king and presided as high priest, later became known as Jerusalem (Josephus Flavius, *Josephus: Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston. Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981, 1.10.3). In writing of Jerusalem and referring to Melchizedek, Josephus wrote: “He who first built it was a potent man among the Canaanites and in our tongue called the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there] the first priest of God, and first built a temple [there]” (*Ibid.*, 6.10.1).

What additional information do we in the Church have today about this interesting character? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Today we have an advantage in learning about Melchizedek. We are able to study these verses in Alma 13 along with the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14, Joseph’s lectures on the priesthood, and the Joseph Smith Translation of Hebrews 5 and 7, all of which contain considerable information about this good man.

It is clear that Melchizedek was a remarkable type or symbol of Christ. His was a life of devotion to duty, a life that truly pointed people toward the Christ. The church in ancient days and the church today call the higher priesthood after his name. This is done both to honor the name of Melchizedek, because he so closely emulated Christ, and to avoid the too frequent repetition of the sacred name of Deity (D&C 107:3-4). Elder Franklin D. Richards reported that the prophet Joseph said that the power of Melchizedek was “not the power of a prophet, nor apostle, nor patriarch only, but of a king and priest to God, to open the windows of heaven and pour out the peace and law of endless life to man. And no man can attain to the joint heirship with Jesus Christ without being administered to by one having the same power and authority of Melchizedek” (*Words of Joseph Smith* 245; spelling and punctuation corrected). Melchizedek is the prototype of the righteous priesthood holder. He magnified his priesthood callings and chose righteousness.

Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Bible provides us with provocative insights into the man Melchizedek:

Now Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch. It being after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God; And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name. For God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of

their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God; to do all things according to his will, according to his command, subdue principalities and powers; and this by the will of the Son of God which was from before the foundation of the world. And men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven. And now, Melchizedek was a priest of this order; therefore he obtained peace in Salem, and was called the Prince of peace. And his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch which God had before taken, separating it from the earth, having reserved it unto the latter days, or the end of the world; And hath said, and sworn with an oath, that the heavens and the earth should come together; and the sons of God should be tried so as by fire. And this Melchizedek, having thus established righteousness, was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace (JST, Genesis 14:26-36).

Also from the JST we learn that Melchizedek was the keeper of God's storehouse and that God had appointed him to receive tithes for the poor. "Wherefore, Abram paid unto him tithes of all that he had, of all the riches which he possessed, which God had given him more than that which he had need" (JST, Genesis 14:37-39).

14 Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.

verse 14 "Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken" This is the "holy order of God" or the "holy order of the Son of God."

"who also took upon him the high priesthood forever" It is sobering to realize that those of us who are blessed with the priesthood, like Melchizedek, may be privileged to exercise it forever—for all time and eternity.

15 And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.

verse 15 This is an interesting bit of information about Melchizedek and dates Melchizedek's sojourn on earth as being about 1900 BC. An old Jewish tradition states, "Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, priest of God Most High, and king of Jerusalem, came forth to meet [Abraham]," as Abraham was returning from war "with bread and wine. And this high priest instructed Abraham in the laws of the priesthood and in the Torah" (Ginzberg 1:233). Modern revelation teaches us that "Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah; And from Noah till Enoch, through the lineage of their fathers; And from Enoch to Abel, who was slain by the conspiracy of his brother, who received the priesthood by the commandments of God, by the hand of his father Adam, who was

the first man” (D&C 84:14-16). Joseph Smith reported that Abraham said to Melchizedek: “I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, now I have a priesthood” (*TPJS*, 322-23).

16 Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

verse 16 “these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God” See the commentary for verse 2.

“it being a type of his order, or it being his order” This may be an example of a “typo,” and the correction of that typo, made during the engraving of the plates. It obviously is not possible to erase errors that are engraved onto the plates. The writer may have decided mid-sentence that the manner of priesthood ordinations is not just a type or symbol of God’s order; it is actually the order of God itself.

I mentioned previously that scholars have suggested that this verse is actually out of place and probably should have been placed between verses 12 and 13 of Alma 13 (Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon as a Written/Literary Artifact” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12/2, 2003, 107-09), and that it may well have been intended to fit between verses 12 and 13. Because of the dictated nature of the translation process (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*), and the fact that this verse has always been placed just where it is now (including the original and printer’s manuscript and all subsequent editions), the misplacement of the verse must have happened prior to its being recorded on metal plates.

The first clue to this verse’s being out of place is that if it were omitted, we would never miss it. In fact, it interrupts the smooth flow of ideas in the discussion of Melchizedek (verses 14-20). The second clue is that the expected connections do not make sense. The phrase “these ordinances” in this verse must refer to some ordinances mentioned earlier, and the only possible antecedent that immediately precedes this verse is tithing. Though we might consider tithing as an ordinance, it is difficult to see how paying tithing encourages people to “look forward on the Son of God.” Also why would paying tithing be referred to by the plural form: these ordinances?

We have already drawn a connection between this verse and verse 2 of this chapter (see the commentary for that verse), and verse 16 certainly fits better if it is read in the context of the discussion on priesthood ordination in verses 1-12. Note also that the phrase “that rest” in verse 13 demands an antecedent, which it would have if it followed verse 16. Thus if verse 16 were shifted to follow verse 12, it would fit better

with both what comes before and what follows. The discussion of Melchizedek which follows, beginning in verse 14, then proceeds smoothly to the end of Alma's speech, save for the odd break in verse 16.

Is it possible that this apparent error might have been made by the prophet Mormon or someone working with him? It is entirely possible. Brother Hardy has pointed to a few examples in the Bible of verses generally thought to be out of place:

1. Judges 20:23 which should probably be moved to precede verse 22;
2. Isaiah 38:21-22 which should be moved between verses 6 and 7 (thus bringing Isaiah 38 in line with 2 Kings 20:6-11); and
3. A few manuscripts place 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 after verse 40.

The fact that such mistakes happen challenges scholars to try to determine the cause. How could a block of text come to be misplaced, and why would that error be carried forward? Generally such errors are the result of (1) scribal additions; (2) editorial comments in the margins becoming part of text; or (3) mistakes by scribes as they looked back and forth from the manuscript they were copying to the one they were writing.

How could such an error have gotten into a text written on metallic plates? Errors might have crept in before the text was committed to the metal plates of Mormon (please make certain that you are familiar with the Book of Mormon plates by reading the supplemental article *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*). Perhaps someone transcribing the passage onto the plates of Mormon from other plates forgot verse 16, caught his mistake three verses later, and then wrote in verse 16 with an arrow or similar sign—which Joseph did not reproduce in English—or in the margins. In this particular case there is something that would immediately catch the attention of textual scholars. Verses 12 and 16 both end with virtually the same phrase: “enter(ed) into the rest of the Lord.” A copyist could have read verse 12 and looked down to write it out, but then as he looked back at the original, his eye could have skipped to the next rest of the Lord (at the end of verse 16, which may have been the next verse), resulting in the inadvertent deletion of an entire sentence. Realizing his mistake three verses later, he then copied what he had missed, out of order, so as not to lose any of the precious words. This very phenomenon has, in fact, occurred and is the explanation for an entire verse being omitted just after Alma 32:30 in the 1830 edition (the missing words were finally restored only in 1981—see Robert J. Matthews, “The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981,” *BYU Studies*, 22/4 [fall 1982]: 387-424). The latter example, however, was a mistake in the transmission of the English translation, whereas Alma 13:16 seems to be a problem that predated the translation. That is, it was on the plates of Mormon themselves.

There is, in this rather protracted discussion of the misplacement of Alma 13:16, an evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The misplacement of Alma 13:16 appears to be the result of some kind of mechanical problem in copying at a

particular time in the ancient history of the text. Such errors are fairly common when people are working with handwritten materials, but is it difficult to see how such shifts of textual blocks could have occurred if the work was originally an oral composition (as critics must assume of the Book of Mormon if they imagine that Joseph Smith was making it up as he went along). This particular irregularity in the text is best explained as the result of ancient copying of written materials, long before Joseph Smith ever came in contact with the plates. This particular mistake actually strengthens the book's claim to be an ancient written text.

17 Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;

18 But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father.

verses 17-18 We learn that in the land of Salem the people were initially wicked, but through Melchizedek's priesthood ministrations, his mighty faith, and his preachings he established peace and righteousness among his people. We are taught elsewhere that Melchizedek and his people established Zion and attained a level of transcendent righteousness, even as Enoch (JST, Genesis 14:33-34, 36).

“he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father” We are not given the name of Melchizedek's father, but we learn that Melchizedek reigned “under” him. The term “under his father” appears to be a Hebrew idiom which means that he “takes the place of his father” or “reigns in his father's stead”—literally he succeeds his father (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90-91).

19 Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention.

verse 19 It is no wonder that Alma closes his discussion of Melchizedek with a tribute to that great man! “They” refers to the prophet-authors of the scripture.

20 Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice. Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction.

verse 20 “if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction” To “wrest” the scriptures is to distort; pervert; twist their true meaning—to derive meaning from them that was not intended by the Lord.

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith's dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer's manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This particular phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer's manuscripts, this phrase read ". . . if ye will arrest them it shall be to your own destruction." The word *arrest* was allowed to stand by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. By the 1837 edition, it was changed to *wrest*, as is found in our present edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

Who is it that is speaking in this verse? The text suggests that it is still Alma (see verse 21) though it might as well have been Mormon inserting an editorial comment directed at those in this final dispensation who are reading the Book of Mormon. In essence he says, "There, in a nutshell, is the doctrine of the priesthood. Be careful with it. For while it is the mechanism of the ultimate blessings, it may also result in your eternal destruction.

21 And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh;

verse 21 What did Alma mean by "the day of salvation"? He may have been referring to the day of the Savior's birth into mortality, or he might have been simply trying to emphasize the vital nature of this brief mortal trial.

22 Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us.

verse 22 "doth declare it unto all nations" Consider, for a moment, the significance of this most provocative phrase. It is certainly one you might be likely to pass right by in casual reading. "It" refers to the good news of the Savior's birth, the "glad tidings of great joy," a testimony of the Savior. *Prior* to this great event, the announcement of his birth was made to "all nations"—to "all his people!" Does this include even the heathen and gentile nations? Most certainly!

And by what mechanism was this announcement made in all nations? Angels—both seen and unseen—declare the word of the Lord or "voice of the Lord" unto the Lord's "chosen vessels" (Moroni 7:31). The angels teach of Christ's birth and ministry

and death and resurrection. These “chosen vessels” or prophets then in turn declare these teachings unto “the residue of men” (Moroni 7:32).

“to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth” This phrase refers to scattered Israel.

“wherefore they have come unto us” Because we are scattered Israel, those angels have come unto us to make the announcement of the “glad tidings of great joy.”

23 And they are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard.

verse 23 “they are made known to us in plain terms” This might be more simply rendered: “The angels are assigned to speak to us plainly.”

24 For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.

verse 24 “For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land” Most of us who acquire a testimony of the Savior do so by means of personal revelation from the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost. To some select few is extended the opportunity to enjoy the direct ministrations of angels (Moroni 10:14).

“at the time of his coming in his glory” It seems clear that Alma (and/or Mormon) are referring to Christ’s coming at the time of his mortal ministry. The phraseology in this verse (“coming in his glory”), however, is usually preserved to refer to his second coming—not when he is born in a lowly stable. Then he comes in glory for all to see.

25 And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice.

verse 25 The phrase “of his coming” might be rendered “that he has come.”

“For the time cometh, we know not how soon” How is it that Alma was not aware of the time of Christ’s coming? After all, had not the prophet Nephi predicted specifically that the Savior would be born “six hundred years” after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19)? It is possible that the prophet Alma was not even aware of Nephi’s prophecy! He did have in his possession the small plates of Nephi, but they existed among voluminous other records. The prophet Mormon seemed to be unaware of the small plates of Nephi until he “searched among the records which had been delivered into [his] hands” (Words of Mormon 1:3).

26 And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

verse 26 Wouldn't it be fascinating to have a biographical sketch of all those "just and holy men" to whom the angels announced the blessed news, "He is born." Apparently some of the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem were among them.

27 And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance;

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

verse 28 How does an aggressive and carnal man become "humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering"? It is only by the gradual, painstaking, transformative influence of the Holy Ghost. See the important discussion of the ordinance of baptism in the chapter *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* referenced above. Pay particular attention to the "baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost."

"watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear" Some confusion has arisen regarding the concept of temptation. The confusion probably originated with a verse of scripture written by Paul the apostle: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The misconception that has arisen out of this verse might be expressed as follows: God will never allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist. We are thus safe from committing major sin. Even if we are a bit careless and find ourselves in compromising circumstances, we may be certain that God will never allow us to destroy ourselves spiritually. We may even flirt with sin a little and stray somewhat off the strait and narrow. It doesn't matter. He will rescue us. The more complete truth is contained in this phrase here in verse 28. God will not rescue the indifferent sinner. The promise that Paul intended was that if we are careful, diligent, vigilant, indeed if we "watch and pray continually," then there is no temptation from which he will not rescue us or at least empower us to rescue ourselves. Guarding against sin cannot be a passive exercise. Rather we must be most actively engaged.

29 Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.

verse 29 For a discussion of the “rest of the Lord” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

30 And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death.

verse 30 “may the Lord grant unto you repentance” Does man repent of his sins, or does God *grant* him repentance? True repentance requires more than “worldly sorrow.” It also requires “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10). See a discussion of this important concept in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29 and in *Repentance* in volume 3, chapter 4 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. There, you will read that godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit received from the Lord by personal revelation after a person qualifies himself by his behaviors (feelings, thoughts, words, and actions).

“second death” We have discussed previously this important concept (see the commentary for Alma 12:16). For the convenience of the reader I will repeat that discussion here. What exactly is this “second death”? To understand clearly the answer to this question, let us review part of the concept of the fall. Because Adam transgressed in the garden, all mankind will temporarily suffer two penalties: (1) Each person will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality, the so-called spiritual death. This may also be referred to as the “first death.” (2) Every man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. These penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects will automatically be some day reversed. No man will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2). Remember, that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another’s sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam’s sin. At a point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God to be judged. It mattereth not how wicked and unrepentant, after the resurrection every person will be brought back into the presence of God for judgment. This returning to God’s presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam’s transgression. Once in God’s presence each person is judged. Each will either be exalted in the kingdom of God and thus remain in his presence or they will be sent out of his presence a *second* time—hence they will suffer the so-called “second death.” They will be cut off from the

presence of God, and from his happiness and joy, forever. These will be consigned to one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer a complete second death and live with Satan forever as sons of perdition. The term “second death” is used several times in the Book of Mormon. Sometimes it refers to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so- called outer darkness (see Jacob 3:11).

31 And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book.

Alma Chapter 14

1 And it came to pass after he had made an end of speaking unto the people many of them did believe on his words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures.

2 But the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek; for they were angry with Alma, because of the plainness of his words unto Zeezrom; and they also said that Amulek had lied unto them, and had reviled against their law and also against their lawyers and judges.

verse 2 “they also said that Amulek had lied unto them, and had reviled against their law and also against their lawyers and judges” The majority of the people of Ammonihah were right on one count. Amulek had reviled against their lawyers (see Alma 10:17). They also accused Amulek of lying and reviling against their law neither of which he had done. The law of the land was the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 12:1). It consisted of a system of judges which governed the land. Amulek and Alma were, of course, supportive of the principles behind this form of government. Amulek, however, did take issue with how the people of Ammonihah interpreted or practiced this form of government. He previously denounced the practice of government in Ammonihah when he said: “Mosiah [caused] that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction. . . . If it were not for the prayers of the righteous . . . ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” (Alma 10:19, 22). Obviously the “voice” or majority of the people in Ammonihah had chosen unwisely, and their “wise lawyers” were not in fact wise. When accused of speaking out against the laws of Ammonihah, Amulek stated that he had not, in fact, spoken out against their laws. Rather he maintained that he had spoken in favor of the law of Mosiah (Alma 10:26). For this denial, Amulek was accused of being a liar.

3 And they were also angry with Alma and Amulek; and because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness, they sought to put them away privily.

verse 3 “they sought to put them away privily” “Privily” means secretly or out of the public eye.

4 But it came to pass that they did not; but they took them and bound them with strong cords, and took them before the chief judge of the land.

5 And the people went forth and witnessed against them—testifying that they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land, and also of all

the people that were in the land; and also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them; and many such things did the people testify against Alma and Amulek. Now this was done before the chief judge of the land.

verse 5 “they . . . also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them” These are charges previously made against Alma and Amulek by Zeezrom (See Alma 11:35). The charges are based upon misquoting and distortions.

6 And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken; and he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell.

verse 6 We have already witnessed the evolution of the miraculous conversion of Zeezrom (Alma 11:46; 12:1, 7-8), and we have previously speculated that the fact that the Spirit was able to touch him while he was literally in the process of confronting the servants of God suggests that he was a choice and righteous individual in the pre-existence. We are reminded of the apostle Paul, the elder and younger Almas, and the sons of Mosiah.

“his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt”
The term “harrow up” or “harrowed up” is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon. It means vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

7 And it came to pass that he began to cry unto the people, saying: Behold, I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God. And he began to plead for them from that time forth; but they reviled him, saying: Art thou also possessed with the devil? And they spit upon him, and cast him out from among them, and also all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek; and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them.

verse 7 “these men are spotless before God” Zeezrom pled before the people for the lives of Alma and Amulek.

“and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them” Zeezrom and other men converted to the gospel by the preaching of Alma and Amulek were cast out of the city and stoned. They then fled to the neighboring city of Sidom. There, Alma and Amulek will later (Alma 15:2) bring them tragic news. Their wives and children who remained in Ammonihah are about to be cast into the fire and burned to death (verses 8 through 14).

8 And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire.

verse 8 “**And they brought their wives and children together**” “They” are the hard-hearted people of Ammonihah. “Their” refers to those men who believed in the words of Alma and Amulek and had been cast out of the city and stoned. Their wives and children who were left behind in Ammonihah were cast into the fire and killed.

Alma and Amulek had warned the people of Ammonihah that the wicked would be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone (see verse 14). The wicked response of the people was to make certain that the *believers* were the ones to suffer by fire.

”they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also” Were scriptures in those days written on materials that would burn? Weren’t the significant records largely written on metal plates and stone monuments? While metal plates and stone monuments were used, another common type of record in Mesoamerica is the codex which is a record written on pages of tree bark or animal skins. This writing material was flattened so that the codices could be folded similar to the way in which a map folds.

In this verse the people of Ammonihah seal themselves up for destruction by shedding the innocent blood of those who believed in the word of God (Alma 10:23; 16:1-3).

9 And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

10 And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

verse 10 Just imagine the excruciating agony of watching this unimaginable scene. Amulek was obviously and justifiably shaken.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

verse 11 God permits the wicked to inflict suffering upon the righteous “that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (see also Alma 60:13; D&C 103:3 101:78, 93).

12 Now Amulek said unto Alma: Behold, perhaps they will burn us also.

13 And Alma said: Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

verse 13 Undoubtedly the Spirit had born witness to Alma that he and Amulek were in no immediate danger of being martyred.

14 Now it came to pass that when the bodies of those who had been cast into the fire were consumed, and also the records which were cast in with them, the chief judge of the land came and stood before Alma and Amulek, as they were bound; and he smote them with his hand upon their cheeks, and said unto them: After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?

verse 14 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:19.

15 Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire; neither has God saved them because they were of thy faith. And the judge smote them again upon their cheeks, and asked: What say ye for yourselves?

16 Now this judge was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon.

verse 16 “after the order and faith of Nehor” People within the order of Nehor were learned in language, attempted to lead the people astray, denied Christ, and denied that any prophet could foretell the future. They believed that every priest and teacher ought not to labor with their hands but rather ought to be supported by the people (Alma 1:3) and that all people would be saved and hence there was no need for repentance (Alma 1:4; 15:15). For additional information on the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8. It would be most useful to review this latter commentary before continuing.

“gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them” While we can easily understand the act of spitting upon a person as an act of ridicule or derision, we are not so intuitively familiar with the act of “gnashing” our teeth upon someone for the same purpose. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *gnashing* as, “a grinding or striking of the teeth in rage or anguish.” We are left to conjure up in our mind’s eye how this might have played out.

17 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek answered him nothing; and he smote them again, and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison.

18 And when they had been cast into prison three days, there came many lawyers, and judges, and priests, and teachers, who were of the profession of Nehor; and they came in unto the prison to see them, and they questioned them about many words; but they answered them nothing.

19 And it came to pass that the judge stood before them, and said: Why do ye not answer the words of this people? Know ye not that I have power to deliver you up unto the flames? And he commanded them to speak; but they answered nothing.

20 And it came to pass that they departed and went their ways, but came again on the morrow; and the judge also smote them again on their cheeks. And many came forth also, and smote them, saying: Will ye stand again and judge this people, and condemn our law? If ye have such great power why do ye not deliver yourselves?

verse 20 “If ye have such great power why do ye not deliver yourselves?”

If you have great powers given you of your God, why don't do deliver yourselves from this prison?

21 And many such things did they say unto them, gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them, and saying: How shall we look when we are damned?

verse 21 These leaders from the order of the Nehors did not believe, even for one moment, they would ever be damned. Having apparently no fear of retribution the people continue their mockery, saying in effect: “And how do you suppose we will look after we are damned?”

22 And many such things, yea, all manner of such things did they say unto them; and thus they did mock them for many days. And they did withhold food from them that they might hunger, and water that they might thirst; and they also did take from them their clothes that they were naked; and thus they were bound with strong cords, and confined in prison.

23 And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for many days, (and it was on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) that the chief judge over the land of Ammonihah and many of their teachers and their lawyers went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords.

verse 23 What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1.

The “land of Ammonihah” is area surrounding the city of Ammonihah.

24 And the chief judge stood before them, and smote them again, and said unto them: If ye have the power of God deliver yourselves from these bands, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words.

verse 24 “If ye have the power of God deliver yourselves . . . and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people” These words of the chief judge bring to mind the devil’s temptation of the Savior: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). When Alma and Amulek do finally invoke the Lord’s strength to deliver themselves from this prison, you will see that the effect was anything but the conversion of the Ammonihahite leaders. Rather they will be filled with great fear, and flee (verse 26). Such is a universal truth regarding those who ask for signs. No amount of signs will convince them.

25 And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; and when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet.

26 And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.

27 And it came to pass that so great was their fear that they fell to the earth, and did not obtain the outer door of the prison; and the earth shook mightily, and the walls of the prison were rent in twain, so that they fell to the earth; and the chief judge, and the lawyers, and priests, and teachers, who smote upon Alma and Amulek, were slain by the fall thereof.

28 And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ. And they straightway came forth out of the prison; and they were loosed from their bands; and the prison had fallen to the earth, and every soul within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, was slain; and they straightway came forth into the city.

29 Now the people having heard a great noise came running together by multitudes to know the cause of it; and when they saw Alma and Amulek coming forth out of the prison, and the walls thereof had fallen to the earth, they were struck with great fear, and fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions; and thus they did flee from the presence of Alma and Amulek.

Alma Chapter 15

1 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that city; and they departed, and came out even into the land of Sidom; and behold, there they found all the people who had departed out of the land of Ammonihah, who had been cast out and stoned, because they believed in the words of Alma.

verse 1 For a proposed location of the “land of Sidom” and its relationship to other neighboring lands and cities, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

2 And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children, and also concerning themselves, and of their power of deliverance.

verse 2 Don’t read this simple verse without pausing to consider the excruciating grief which the account of Alma and Amulek produced among those men. They had been stoned and driven out of Ammonihah, and now they learned they had lost their wives and children.

3 And also Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness, for he supposed that Alma and Amulek were no more; and he supposed that they had been slain because of his iniquity. And this great sin, and his many other sins, did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore, having no deliverance; therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heat.

verse 3 “Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness” There can be no doubt that Zeezrom was suffering extreme physical agony and mental remorse. We are reminded that the process of repentance and conversion may be exquisitely painful depending upon the convert’s behavior prior to his conversion.

As to the causative relationship between Zeezrom’s obvious mental anguish and his “burning fever” or “burning heat,” Mormon’s formulation is noted with interest but also with skepticism. A word of caution seems appropriate here. It is certainly not church doctrine that physical illness suffered by mortals is the result of sin. Joseph Smith wrote: “It is a false idea that the Saints will escape all the judgments, whilst the wicked suffer; for all flesh is subject to suffer, and ‘the righteous shall hardly escape.’ . . . It is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease or death, for all flesh is subject to death; and the Savior has said, ‘Judge not, lest ye be judged’” (*TPJS*, 162).

The term “harrow up” means to vex, or torment, or cause mental distress.

4 Now, when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage; and he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.

5 And it came to pass that they went immediately, obeying the message which he had sent unto them; and they went in unto the house unto Zeezrom; and they found him upon his bed, sick, being very low with a burning fever; and his mind also was exceedingly sore because of his iniquities; and when he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him.

verse 5 “he stretched forth his hand, and besought them” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *besought* as, “Entreated; implored; sought by entreaty.” That same dictionary defines *entreated* as, “Earnestly supplicated, besought or solicited; importuned; urgently requested. Prevailed upon by urgent solicitation.”

6 And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: **Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation?**

7 And he answered and said: **Yea, I believe all the words that thou hast taught.**

8 And Alma said: **If thou believest in the redemption of Christ thou canst be healed.**

9 And he said: **Yea, I believe according to thy words.**

10 And then Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: **O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ.**

11 And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk; and this was done to the great astonishment of all the people; and the knowledge of this went forth throughout all the land of Sidom.

12 And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.

verse 12 We may make an interesting observation from this verse. As with the two Almas, the apostle Paul, and the sons of Mosiah, once a previously wicked person is truly converted and has repented, they have a strong desire to bring repentance to others.

13 And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom, and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were desirous to be baptized.

verse 13 To “consecrate” means to set apart as holy. In our day we might say “ordain” rather than “consecrate.”

We have discussed previously that there is no evidence that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthoods existed among the Book of Mormon peoples until the time of the resurrected Jesus’s appearance to them in the land Bountiful. Thus these priests and

teachers held the Melchizedek priesthood. The titles *priests* and *teachers* describe their church duties and functions and not offices to which they were ordained.

14 And it came to pass that they were many; for they did flock in from all the region round about Sidom, and were baptized.

15 But as to the people that were in the land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people; and they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek to the devil; for they were of the profession of Nehor, and did not believe in the repentance of their sins.

verse 15 “of the profession of Nehor” Hopefully you have recently reviewed the commentary for Alma 8:8. If you have not, it would be well to do so now.

16 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek, Amulek having forsaken all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God, he being rejected by those who were once his friends and also by his father and his kindred;

verse 16 Regarding the sacrifices Amulek had to make in order to accept the call to serve the Lord, please see the commentary for verse 18 below.

17 Therefore, after Alma having established the church at Sidom, seeing a great check, yea, seeing that the people were checked as to the pride of their hearts, and began to humble themselves before God, and began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries to worship God before the altar, watching and praying continually, that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction—

verse 17 “seeing a great check” This refers to Alma’s and Amulek’s having observed a great cessation of worldly attitudes and behaviors.

“the people . . . began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries to worship God before the altar” Here we learn that one of the Nephite places of worship was the “sanctuary.” Altars for the offering of sacrifices were apparently found in both the temples and the sanctuaries. For a more complete discussion of the Nephite places of worship, see the commentary for Alma 16:13.

“that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction” A fascinating insight has been provided by David Bokovoy (“A Place of Deliverance: Altars in the Hebrew Bible and Book of Mormon,” FARMS Update, number 43, volume 21, 2001). In addition to being places of sacrifice, altars in ancient Hebrew culture have also served as places of asylum. In ancient Israel a person accused of committing a serious offense could flee to an altar to avoid immediate death. The Old Testament refers to this tradition in the so-called Covenant Code of Exodus: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not

in wait [if he committed the crime unintentionally], but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die (Exodus 21:12-14).

Later variants of this statute make clear that the places of refuge were cities appointed for that purpose (cf. Deuteronomy 19:1-7; Numbers 35:9-28; Joshua 20). In a city of refuge an accused person could find housing, food, and employment—none of which could be had at the altar. The original place of asylum, however, was the altar of God (see 1 Kings 1:50-51 and 2:28).

This information proves significant insight to an understanding of altars in Nephite society. The Nephites were obviously heirs to the customs and traditions of ancient Israel which have been preserved for us in the Hebrew Bible.

Note that this particular verse invokes Israelite custom by identifying the altar as a location of deliverance, a subtlety that provides further evidence that the Book of Mormon clearly reflects the traditions of antiquity.

18 Now as I said, Alma having seen all these things, therefore he took Amulek and came over to the land of Zarahemla, and took him to his own house, and did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord.

verse 18 Mormon's use of the phrase "land of Zarahemla" here likely has reference to the city of Zarahemla.

The text does not mention that Amulek had any family with him in the land of Sidom and even suggests that in accepting the call to serve the Lord he may have even had to give up his wife, children, and other family (see verse 16 and Alma 10:11). If this be the case, then it is no wonder Alma "did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord." Making righteous decisions does not always protect one from pain and suffering. Indeed, it may even cause pain. In Amulek's case, he was a man of the world (Alma 10:4) who doubtless had to pay a painful price made necessary by his previous behavior. He had sacrificed everything—home, family, friends, wealth—for his faith.

19 And thus ended the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 16

Scripture Mastery

Alma 16 (compare Alma 25:2-3) The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite invasion.

1 And it came to pass in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, on the fifth day of the second month, there having been much peace in the land of Zarahemla, there having been no wars nor contentions for a certain number of years, even until the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year, there was a cry of war heard throughout the land.

verse 1 “the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year, there was a cry of war heard throughout the land” There are several instances in the Book of Mormon, especially in the books of Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman, in which reference is made to wars being fought on specific dates. John L. Sorenson, in his article “Seasons of War, Seasons of Peace” (*Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 249-55) has suggested that these dates are not likely randomly distributed throughout the year. Rather, there were likely certain seasons when wars were fought and other times of the year when they were not. The wars seemed to be fought in a consistent and predictable seasonal pattern. Several reasons are proposed to account for this pattern:

1. Wars in “pre-technical” societies are usually launched at convenient and opportune times of the year.

2. The Nephite and Lamanite societies were largely agrarian. The soldiers were part-time warriors but full-time farmers. The armies were made up almost totally of the equivalent of today’s “reservists.” They were not available for war during the planting, cultivating, and harvest seasons. They had to labor in order to provide food for their families and for their armies (Alma 53:7). It follows then that war went on after the farm work was done and before the next planting season.

3. The Book of Mormon story likely took place in tropical Central America. The rainy season occurred at the same time as the North American summer and fall. These months were favorable for growing crops, but the rain made the land impassable. Hence, it would not have been possible to move soldiers and fight wars and live in field camps during these months. The months October through April were warmer and especially drier.

2 For behold, the armies of the Lamanites had come in upon the wilderness side, into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah, and began to slay the people and destroy the city.

verse 2 We will later learn that this attack on the Nephites in the city of Ammonihah was precipitated by events in the land of Nephi. As a result of the preaching of the sons of Mosiah and the group that went with them up to the land of Nephi, a large group of Lamanites had been converted. Those converts had also entered into a covenant not to take up arms against their fellow Lamanites. These “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” were attacked by the non-convert Lamanites and 1,005 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were killed as they prostrated themselves before their fellow Lamanites and refused to defend themselves. In their frustration and anger over having been, as they termed it, “manipulated” by the Nephite missionaries and “tricked” into killing their own brethren, the furious Lamanites decided to attack the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla.

Dr. John L. Sorenson has suggested a compelling model as to why the Lamanites “happened” to fall upon the city of Ammonihah. As one traveled from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla, according to Dr. Sorenson, there were at least two major routes (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). A traveler could pass northward through the mountainous wilderness past the head waters of the River Sidon through the land of Manti, down the river through the land of Gideon to Zarahemla. Or, one could descend westward to the pacific coastal plain and travel near the shore to the wilderness, west of Zarahemla. Following this latter route, entry into Zarahemla through the mountainous wilderness could only be made through a mountain pass. Dr. Sorenson postulates that Ammonihah might have been situated in the direct path of a Lamanite army entering Zarahemla by this latter route. Thus, those in Ammonihah caught the full brunt of the Lamanites’ vengeful anger.

3 And now it came to pass, before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah, and taken others captive into the wilderness.

verse 3 “before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah” One interesting feature of the Nephite armies is that, for the most part, they seem to have been formed from a militia mobilized from the general population and were not part of a standing army. “The bulk of the armed forces was probably drawn from the lower classes and was organized in ranks with fathers and brothers in similar units (see Mosiah 10:9). The captains likely were individuals with some special privileges. The chief captain over all the Nephite armies seems usually to have been of the tribe of Nephi. The militia was organized in response to a levy or request from the central government (see Alma 60:1-2)” (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 271-72).

4 Now it came to pass that the Nephites were desirous to obtain those who had been carried away captive into the wilderness.

5 Therefore, he that had been appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites, (and his name was Zoram, and he had two sons, Lehi and Aha)—now Zoram and his two sons, knowing that Alma was high priest over the church, and having heard that he had the spirit of prophecy, therefore they went unto him and desired of him to know whither the Lord would that they should go into the wilderness in search of their brethren, who had been taken captive by the Lamanites.

verse 5 “and his name was Zoram” There are three Zorams in the Book of Mormon. One was the servant of Laban who departed Jerusalem into the wilderness with the family of Lehi. Do not confuse the Zoram in this verse with the Nephite apostate who will later found the sect known as the Zoramites (see Alma 30:59; 31). The Zoram in this verse is a noble Nephite chief captain.

“And he had two sons, Lehi and Aha” It is interesting to note that the name Aha is Egyptian for “warrior” (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

6 And it came to pass that Alma inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And Alma returned and said unto them: Behold, the Lamanites will cross the river Sidon in the south wilderness, away up beyond the borders of the land of Manti. And behold there shall ye meet them, on the east of the river Sidon, and there the Lord will deliver unto thee thy brethren who have been taken captive by the Lamanites.

verse 6 It has been suggested that perhaps Alma used the Nephite interpreters, the Urim and Thummim, in his inquiring of the Lord. We know that he possessed the interpreters (see Mosiah 28:20; Alma 37:24).

7 And it came to pass that Zoram and his sons crossed over the river Sidon, with their armies, and marched away beyond the borders of Manti into the south wilderness, which was on the east side of the river Sidon.

8 And they came upon the armies of the Lamanites, and the Lamanites were scattered and driven into the wilderness; and they took their brethren who had been taken captive by the Lamanites, and there was not one soul of them had been lost that were taken captive. And they were brought by their brethren to possess their own lands.

9 And thus ended the eleventh year of the judges, the Lamanites having been driven out of the land, and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every

living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness.

verse 9 “Every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed” An interesting correlation has been drawn between the destruction of the city of Ammonihah and an ancient Israelite law which pronounced the fate of apostate cities (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 176-79). This law is found in Deuteronomy 13:12-16 and essentially it states: If, in a city inhabited by people of the house of Israel, certain apostate Israelites under the influence of Satan lead the people of the city astray, then you must investigate this tragic happening. If the fact is confirmed, then you must utterly destroy the city with swords and with fire. Also, the city shall not be built up again.

It is likely Alma knew about this ancient tenet of the law of Moses. While he did not have the power or perhaps the desire to decree the destruction of Ammonihah by a righteous Nephite army, he was careful to include in his record the factors that qualified Ammonihah for destruction, and he documented the fact of its destruction. He also justified the destruction as being according to divine law. Consider the following:

1. This law pertained to apostates—“certain men [who] are gone out from among you” (Deuteronomy 13:13). Alma made it clear that those members of the order of the Nehors were apostate Nephites: “If this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them” (Alma 9:23).

2. Alma made it clear that Ammonihah’s learned leaders, the followers of Nehor, had intended to lead their people away from the Lord (Alma 8:17).

3. Alma also placed the ultimate blame on Satan and his influence over the people of Ammonihah (Alma 8:9).

4. The law required a thorough investigation of the situation. Alma and Amulek accomplished this requirement. After once being rejected, Alma was commanded to return to warn the city that they would be destroyed if they did not repent (Alma 8:16). Then, acting as two witnesses (see Deuteronomy 17:6), Alma and Amulek were forced to watch the horrible burning of the innocent wives and children of the believers (Alma 14:9). Painful as this experience was, it did serve to seal the fate of the wicked city (Alma 14:11).

5. The prescribed mode of execution was the sword. The Lamanites did “slay the people and destroy the city” (Alma 16:2) presumably by the sword.

6. Finally, the law stated that the destroyed city “shall not be built again” (Deuteronomy 13:16). As for Ammonihah: “The people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years” (Alma 16:11). Apparently this prohibition against re-establishing the city did expire after a ritual cleansing period of seven years, and people did eventually move back to the city (Alma 49:1-2). Indeed, the destruction of

the city of Ammonihah seems to be a remarkable example of God's wrath and judgment.

This verse and the preceding one probably show evidence of Mormon's editing style (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:15-16). Mormon's editorial tendency is to consistently emphasize the fact that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer. It would seem that he is inclined to edit his stories so that this message is not lost. In verses 8 and 9 he concludes the story of Ammonihah by saying that every person in that city was slain, and every innocent bystander taken captive by the Lamanites was rescued. Note how, in these two verses, he fails to mention those other innocent bystanders, mentioned in verse 3, who were killed "around the borders of Noah." Mormon's tendency is to emphasize the moral message and "clean up" the historical facts so as not to interfere with the precision of his message. Mormon will later explain the defeat around the city of Noah as being due to military weakness (Alma 49:15).

These observations are pointed out, not in the spirit of criticism, but only for the interest of the reader. Mormon's moral message in this case, as they are throughout the Book of Mormon, is profoundly true. There can be no question that an act of God destroyed the Ammonihahites in retribution for their arrogance, brutality, and rejection of his prophets.

Our lives are often complicated jumbles of good and bad, fortune and failure. We have a tendency to attempt to make sense of them or to explain them. Perhaps a word of caution is appropriate about being overly simplistic. The prophet Mormon's tendency is to always emphasize that those who follow God are blessed, while those who reject him suffer. In day-to-day reality, there does, however, seem to be some degree of "mortal arbitrariness" in our successes and failures even though we may strive to be obedient believers.

10 But behold, in one day it was left desolate; and the carcasses were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness.

verse 10 Alma had predicted a Lamanite attack on Ammonihah (Alma 9:18).

It may be noted that today the acceptable spelling of "carcasses" is *carcasses*, though *carcasses* is also acknowledged in today's dictionaries.

11 Nevertheless, after many days their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth, and they were covered with a shallow covering. And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate.

verse 11 "it was called Desolation of Nehors" This name was given because so many of its inhabitants had been adherents to the false doctrines of Nehor.

For a discussion the “profession of Nehor” see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

12 And the Lamanites did not come again to war against the Nephites until the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus for three years did the people of Nephi have continual peace in all the land.

verse 12 A three-year period of peace, from the eleventh to the fourteenth years of the reign of judges, will end when a large Lamanite army attacks the land of Zarahemla. As with the Lamanite attack on Ammonihah, this attack early in the fifteenth year of the reign of judges will also be precipitated by events occurring in the land of Nephi (see Alma 28). Those Lamanites converted as a result of the efforts of the sons of Mosiah, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon, will leave the land of Nephi to settle in the land of Zarahemla. They will be pursued by a Lamanite army who will attack Zarahemla (see the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Alma 23 through 46*).

13 And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance to the people in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.

verse 13 “Preaching repentance” means preaching the principles of the gospel.

“temples . . . sanctuaries . . . synagogues” These are the Nephite places of worship.

We know of three temples in the Book of Mormon lands: (1) The temple in the city of Nephi was originally built under the direction of Nephi himself “after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things” (2 Nephi 5:16). Jacob preached his well-known sermons recorded in Jacob 2 and 3 in this new temple. This temple would later be restored by Zeniff and would serve the “Zeniffites” through the reigns of kings Noah and Limhi. (2) The temple in the city of Zarahemla is first referred to at the time King Benjamin was planning his speech from the tower (Mosiah 1:18) and was probably built during the reign of Mosiah, the father of Benjamin. (3) The temple in the land Bountiful is best known, of course, as the place where the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ will appear to the Nephites.

The “sanctuary” seems to have been a smaller version of the temple such as the one referred to in the city of Sidom (Alma 15:17). These likely contained an altar for the offering of sacrifices. We are told nothing further about these sanctuaries, but perhaps some speculation would not be harmful. When the Elder Alma returned to Zarahemla with his covenant group, he was given authority by the king to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:19). These “churches” or congregations met independently of one another. They likely did not have easy access to the temple in the city of Zarahemla. It might well have been that satellite temples or

“sanctuaries” were established to give these outlying congregations the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the temple under direction of ordained “priests.”

The word “synagogue” means “gather together.” The synagogues in the Book of Mormon were likely simply the places where the Nephites came together to be instructed in the gospel by their ordained “teachers.” See the commentary on the Book of Mormon’s use of the word *synagogue* or *synagogues* in the commentary for 2 Nephi 26:26 and Jacob 7:27.

14 And as many as would hear their words, unto them they did impart the word of God, without any respect of persons, continually.

verse 14 “without any respect of persons” Apparently all who would listen were invited into the congregations of the Nephites without regard to their ethnic background or social standing. Keep in mind the considerable ethnic mix found among the “Nephites” of Zarahemla. For a discussion of this topic, see the commentary for Alma 10:3.

15 And thus did Alma and Amulek go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work, to preach the word throughout all the land. And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites.

16 And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming—

verse 16 “there was no inequality among them” The Nephite saints during this period had apparently achieved a state of social and economic equality which we do not have even today. Perhaps in some ways they were spiritually more sophisticated than are we!

“the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land” Obviously the period just prior to the Lord’s mortal sojourn was a time of special spiritual endowment for people on the earth. The Spirit literally poured out his influence upon those who were prepared to respond. The period in which we now live is another time of special spiritual endowment as the earth is being prepared for his second coming (D&C 133:16-17).

17 That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

verse 17 “as a branch be grafted into the true vine” Christ is the vine. Men are the branches. If a man is grafted onto the true vine or accepts Christ and his gospel, then he brings forth much fruit. If the “branch” does not accept the Savior, then he withers and is cast into the fire (John 15:1, 5).

“that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God” For a discussion of the concept of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

18 Now those priests who did go forth among the people did preach against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be—

verse 18 If we can master things of the flesh, then the fruits or blessings of the Spirit will be ours. These include the flow of pure intelligence from God to man, godliness, and charity.

Note again the distinction between “stealing” and “robbing” (plundering). See the commentary for Mosiah 13:22.

19 Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.

verse 19 “Holding forth” here means “prophesying or preaching of.”

20 And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.

verse 20 “he would appear unto them after his resurrection” The year is about 78 BC. It would be more than one hundred years before the Savior’s appearance to the Nephites. It would be the descendants of these Nephites rather than these Nephites themselves who would actually witness the Savior’s visit.

21 And now after the church had been established throughout all the land—having got the victory over the devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord pouring out his blessings upon the people—thus ended the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 17

An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance—according to the record of Alma. Comprising chapters 17 to 26 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 17-26 The fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi

Alma 17:2-3 Alma encounters the sons of Mosiah returning from their mission and rejoices exceedingly to see his brethren.

Alma 17 Ammon at the waters of Sebus

One of the things about the BOM that is fun but can be a bit confusing is just how some of the stories relate to one another. Let me give you an example. In Alma chapter 1 through 16, we have just read of Alma's ministry in the Land of Zarahemla. Alma, you will recall, dealt with the murderer Nehor, fought with the Nephite dissident Amlici, fought wars with the Lamanites, and then preached to the people of the city of Zarahemla. He then traveled to preach in Gideon. He returned to Zarahemla to rest, but soon left to teach in Melek and then in Ammonihah. There, he first preached alone, became discouraged, tried to leave, but was turned back by an angel. He then preached with Amulek in Ammonihah and had an experience that was both wonderful and awful. He and Amulek then preached to the lawyer Zeezrom who, you will remember, was converted. Alma's ministry lasted about fourteen years from 92 BC to 78 BC.

Beginning here in Alma 17, we are now going to begin to study an entirely different story. It is that of the sons of Mosiah traveling up to the Land of Nephi and preaching among the Lamanites. Their ministry also lasted fourteen years from 92 BC to 78 BC. Most readers of the Book of Mormon fail to realize that these two stories—that of Alma's ministry in the Land of Zarahemla and that of the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi—occurred *simultaneously*. That fact is not immediately apparent as you read through the BOM. I have created a diagram that illustrates the temporal relationship of both of these stories. Please see the illustration, *Book of Mormon History Diagram Alma 1 through Alma 26*. Note that the story of Alma's ministry in Alma 1-16 occurs simultaneously with the account of the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in Alma 17-26. Most readers of the Book of Mormon fail to notice the few important interactions between these two stories.

I will describe one interaction by giving you a preview of an event we will encounter in Alma 24. There, we will read of the conversion of many Lamanites who will covenant to never again take up weapons of war and will begin to call themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Their fellow Lamanites will become so furious over their conversion to the gospel that they will attack them. Rather than fight or flee, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies will simply lie prostrate on the ground before their attackers, and 1,005 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies will be slain. The attacking Lamanites finally realize they have been killing their brother Lamanites and, predictably, they become furious at the Nephites for “making them” do such a reprehensible thing. As we might expect, they swear vengeance against the Nephites. They summon an army and set out for Nephite lands to seek revenge. Rather than marching to Zarahemla by the usual route—heading straight up through the wilderness and down the River Sidon basin, they skirt the wilderness on the coastal plain to the west and enter the land of Zarahemla from the northwest. Doubtless they wanted to fool the Nephites and make a surprise attack (see the illustration, *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). It just so happens that the first city they come to is Ammonihah. They destroy the city and slaughter everyone in it. But, wait a moment! We have already read of the destruction of Ammonihah in Alma 16! Now you know the story behind the destruction of that city by the Lamanites.

1 And now it came to pass that as Alma was journeying from the land of Gideon southward, away to the land of Manti, behold, to his astonishment, he met with the sons of Mosiah journeying towards the land of Zarahemla.

verse 1 “journeying towards the land of Zarahemla” It is likely that Alma and the sons of Mosiah encountered each other in the greater land of Zarahemla. Therefore the expression “land of Zarahemla” here refers to either the local land of Zarahemla immediately surrounding the city of Zarahemla or it refers to the city of Zarahemla itself.

Who would have accompanied the sons of Mosiah as Alma encountered them on the road between Gideon and Manti? They were accompanied by the “few” Nephite missionaries who accompanied them on their mission to the Lamanites (see verse 8). Even though the sons of Mosiah had brought a group of their Lamanite converts, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon out of the land of Nephi, they had left them in the wilderness near the city of Manti while they journeyed on to inquire about the appropriateness of bringing into the land of Zarahemla a large group of Lamanites (see Alma 27:14-16).

2 Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound

understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

verse 2 **“at the time the angel *first* appeared unto him”** (italics added) Recall that the same angel who appeared to Alma and the sons of Mosiah as they traveled about persecuting the church (Mosiah 27) later appeared to Alma to encourage him and send him back to the city of Ammonihah (Alma 8:14-15).

“Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren” There appears to be a uniquely joyful reunion that occurs between servants of the Lord who are reunited after a period of being apart. The unusual joy is contingent upon both parties having remained true in the faith. One example that comes to mind is a reunion between Joseph Smith and several elders on the banks of the Missouri River. Joseph was returning from Independence, Missouri, to Kirtland, Ohio. The elders were traveling toward Independence, preaching the gospel as they went. After a joyful reunion, Joseph received a revelation from the Lord directed to the faithful missionaries. In it the Lord told them: “ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 62:3). It would seem that this type of joyful earthly reunion is but a type of the greater reunion we will have one day with our Father in Heaven, with our Lord Jesus Christ, and with cherished friends and family members who have preceded us in death. In these reunions, the joy that may be experienced depends upon our ongoing faithfulness to the principles of the gospel.

“they had searched the scriptures diligently” The sons of Mosiah had been in the land of Nephi for fourteen years. Did they have the scriptures with them on their missionary journey? They certainly must have had copies with them. But in what form? Written on what kind of material? Your author is aware of no information that might help to answer these questions, but obviously the Nephites of that day had access to fully portable paper-like materials onto which copies of the scriptural materials from the brass plates of Laban were written.

3 But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.

verse 3 **“they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting”** Fasting under these circumstances may be referred to as preparatory fasting and is done in preparation for obtaining blessings from God (cf. Alma 17:9; 5:46; 8:26). There is a biblical precedent for this type of fasting. Moses fasted on the mountain for forty days before receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9).

“they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation” These are really one and the same. They both refer to the influence of the Holy Ghost which is invariably associated intimately with a testimony of Jesus. When the Spirit is teaching

us spiritual truths, we are said to have the “spirit of revelation.” When we teach these truths to others, and they receive our teachings by the influence of the Spirit, then we are said to have the “spirit of prophecy.” With this latter spirit we are able to teach “with the power and authority of God.” Note how verses 2 and 3 together provide us with the formula for obtaining the “spirit of prophecy”: (1) Search the scriptures diligently. (2) Pray and fast frequently. (3) Obey the Lord’s commands. This obedience was evident among all those who encountered each other while on the Lord’s errand.

4 And they had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites, having had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him.

verse 4 “many were brought before the altar of God” Mormon may have had either a figurative or a literal meaning in mind here. The altar was a place where an individual could enjoy the presence of God, perhaps in a temple or sanctuary (see the commentary for Alma 16:13). These were places of prayer, confession, covenant-making, safety, and sacrifice.

5 Now these are the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings, for they had many afflictions; they did suffer much, both in body and in mind, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, and also much labor in the spirit.

verse 5 “also much labor in the spirit” This expression apparently refers to spiritual trials. The process of acquiring spiritual strength is not an easy one. In mortality we are not buoyed up by the Spirit’s influence constantly. The required “labor” includes patience, long suffering, and doing good when we know in our minds that we should, but we may not necessarily feel like it in our hearts.

6 Now these were their journeyings: Having taken leave of their father, Mosiah, in the first year of the judges; having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people;

verse 6 “having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people” The text does not state explicitly until this verse that it was Mosiah’s desire that one of his sons accept his kingship. It was previously made clear that the people wanted Mosiah’s son Aaron to be their king (Mosiah 29:2).

7 Nevertheless they departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and took their swords, and their spears, and their bows, and their arrows, and their slings; and this they did that they might provide food for themselves while in the wilderness.

8 And thus they departed into the wilderness with their numbers which they had selected, to go up to the land of Nephi, to preach the word of God unto the Lamanites.

verse 8 “with their numbers which they had selected” We don’t know who or how many accompanied the four sons of Mosiah on their journey. We only know that it was a “small number” (see Mosiah 28:1).

9 And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

verse 9 “they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would . . . abide with them” Though it is not stated in this verse, subsequent verses suggest that at this time the missionaries were experiencing misgivings, discouragement, depression, and they were even considering turning back (see verses 10, 12; Alma 26:27).

“portion of his spirit” This expression, which is used commonly in our LDS culture today, originated largely in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, it is found only once in the Bible (2 Kings 2:9) and once in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 71:1). Other Book of Mormon references include Alma 18:35; 24:8; and 40:3. It refers simply to the influence of the Spirit.

“the baseness of the traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *baseness* as, “Meanness; vileness; worthlessness.”

We have learned that the Lamanites maintained a set of “traditions of their fathers” which included the idea that father Lehi exercised unrighteous dominion over his family in leading them out of Jerusalem. Later, Nephi treated Laman and Lemuel unfairly as they traveled in the wilderness and while they were crossing the sea. The Lamanites believed that the right to govern, the birthright, rightfully belonged to Laman and not to Nephi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37). They felt that when Nephi moved out of the land of their first inheritance and took with him the records of the people and the plates of Laban, he had robbed the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs (see also Mosiah 10:12-17).

10 And it came to pass that the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted.

11 And the Lord said unto them also: Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word; yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and

afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls.

verse 11 Here is a pertinent illustration of what we all might expect during our mortal sojourn. Obviously the Lord was mindful of the sons of Mosiah, and obviously the Lord's Spirit was with them and would protect them against mortal danger. Yet they are warned that they will experience hardship and affliction. So it is with all of us and even the most righteous among us.

12 And it came to pass that the hearts of the sons of Mosiah, and also those who were with them, took courage to go forth unto the Lamanites to declare unto them the word of God.

13 And it came to pass when they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, that they separated themselves and departed one from another, trusting in the Lord that they should meet again at the close of their harvest; for they supposed that great was the work which they had undertaken.

verse 13 "when they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites" We have made the point previously that the borders of the land may refer to the mountains of the land.

"great was the work which they had undertaken" This statement refers to the immense challenge that lay before the sons of Mosiah and their companions.

14 And assuredly it was great, for they had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands.

verse 14 "And assuredly it was great" It was likely the prophet Mormon who inserted this subtle editorial comment. Referring to the phrase in the previous verse, "great was the work which they had undertaken," Mormon betrays his admiration for these missionaries by saying, in effect, "They really had taken on themselves a formidable challenge!"

15 Thus they were a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols, and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers; notwithstanding the promises of the Lord were extended unto them on the conditions of repentance.

verses 14-15 It is interesting to observe how the Lamanites' hatred of the Nephites festered over the centuries. While this hatred may have had its foundations in the false teachings of the Lamanites' ancestors, it seems likely that its flames were

fanned anew by each generation of Lamanites as they observed the Nephites' superior culture and felt an inevitable inferiority. Also, it seems that evil is obliged to justify itself. The Lamanites justified their own greedy and evil deeds by pointing to a variety of supposed past wrongs done to them. See additional discussion of the Lamanites' "traditions of their fathers" in the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

verse 15 Again, the "curse of God" was not the dark color of their skin. Rather it was the loss of the gospel and the priesthood with its attendant blessings, including the opportunity to associated with others who were committed to the Lord and his gospel.

The "promises of the Lord" unto the Lamanites included:

1. the extraordinary mercy which the Lord was willing to extend to the Lamanites because of the incorrect traditions passed on to them by their forbears;
2. a promise that they will not be annihilated as a people—their days will be "prolonged in the land"; and
3. an eventual opportunity, especially in the "latter times," to accept the gospel and receive their salvation (Alma 9:16-17; Helaman 7:24; 15:11-12).

16 Therefore, this was the cause for which the sons of Mosiah had undertaken the work, that perhaps they might bring them unto repentance; that perhaps they might bring them to know of the plan of redemption.

17 Therefore they separated themselves one from another, and went forth among them, every man alone, according to the word and power of God which was given unto him.

verse 17 "every man alone" The reader should not pass by this verse without pausing to consider the fear that must have been in the heart of each of these missionaries as they ventured forth among these savage people without a companion!

18 Now Ammon being the chief among them, or rather he did administer unto them, and he departed from them, after having blessed them according to their several stations, having imparted the word of God unto them, or administered unto them before his departure; and thus they took their several journeys throughout the land.

verse 18 We have speculated previously that Aaron, and not Ammon, was the eldest of the sons of Mosiah (see the commentary for Mosiah 29:2). When the sons of Mosiah are listed, Ammon is usually mentioned first. Whether or not he was the eldest, he was certainly the natural leader of the group.

"according to their several stations" Ammon perceived their individual needs and blessed and taught or "administered" unto them accordingly.

19 And Ammon went to the land of Ishmael, the land being called after the sons of Ishmael, who also became Lamanites.

verse 19 There has been some interesting speculation regarding the land of Ishmael. Let us pose a question: What ever happened to the land and city of Lehi-Nephi after king Limhi and his people escaped from Lamanite bondage and abandoned it? It is clear that the Lamanites took it over. It may have become the Lamanite city of Nephi. Another idea, though, is that the Lamanites already had another chief city called the city of Nephi quite apart from the former Nephite city Lehi-Nephi (see the commentary for Jacob 2:28). They thus would not be likely to continue to call this abandoned Nephite city the *city of Nephi*. They would be more likely to change its name. Perhaps it became known as the land and city of Ishmael. It was a choice land, so the Lamanite king in the chief Lamanite city, the city of Nephi, may have given this land to his son Lamoni (who was a descendant of Ishmael) for his inheritance. So when the four sons of Mosiah on their missionary journey came into the land of Nephi some thirty-one years after king Limhi and his people departed, Ammon, like Zeniff in 200 BC, may have headed straight for the “land of our father’s first inheritance,” the former land and city of Lehi-Nephi—now the land of Ishmael. He found this land now occupied by king Lamoni. This land will later be referred to as “the land of their inheritance,” referring to Ammon and Lamoni (see Alma 21:18).

20 And as Ammon entered the land of Ishmael, the Lamanites took him and bound him, as was their custom to bind all the Nephites who fell into their hands, and carry them before the king; and thus it was left to the pleasure of the king to slay them, or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land, according to his will and pleasure.

21 And thus Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael; and his name was Lamoni; and he was a descendant of Ishmael.

22 And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people.

23 And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die.

verse 23 I have regarded this verse as suggestive evidence that Ammon had not left behind a wife and children in Zarahemla. Though no mention is ever made, it is certainly also possible that the missionaries were accompanied by their wives and perhaps their children.

24 And it came to pass that king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed; and he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife.

verse 24 “King Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon” On initially reading this verse, one may gain the impression that part of the story must have been left out here. In one moment a Nephite prisoner is brought before King Lamoni, and in the next

moment Lamoni is offering him one of his daughters to marry. Ammon is offered the opportunity to become part of the royal family! It seems likely that the Spirit had a role here in witnessing to the heart of Lamoni the true goodness of Ammon, but there may have been omitted occurrences which endeared Ammon to Lamoni.

“he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife” Again, the question of whether or not Ammon was accompanied by his wife surfaces. It is certainly possible that Lamoni had more than one wife, and he assumed that it would be appropriate for Ammon to take one of his daughters to wife.

25 But Ammon said unto him: Nay, but I will be thy servant. Therefore Ammon became a servant to king Lamoni. And it came to pass that he was set among other servants to watch the flocks of Lamoni, according to the custom of the Lamanites.

verse 25 “Nay, but I will be thy servant” Now it’s easy to become inappropriately light-minded here and say something like, “Naturally he would refuse—you should have seen his daughter!” Yet, a significant message is taught here. Positions of power and notoriety are not pursued by those who truly seek to emulate Christ. Rather, they seek ways to serve which will never attract public attention, avoiding the public eye. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, in the hour of his extremity on the eve of his crucifixion, washed his disciples’ feet. Such service has a profound influence on those who are privy to it, including the beneficiary, because the very service testifies of Jesus Christ!

26 And after he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the Lamanitish servants going forth with their flocks to the place of water, which was called the water of Sebus, and all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither, that they may have water—

verse 26 Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out (in a lecture to the Sunstone Symposium delivered May 10, 1988) that there are Egyptian words similar to “Sebus” that have such meanings as “bandit” or “to divide property between two parties” or “to take a drink” or “a mingling, a rumble, or a gang fight.” Any of these meanings would offer an interesting parallel to the story which took place at the waters of Sebus.

27 Therefore, as Ammon and the servants of the king were driving forth their flocks to this place of water, behold, a certain number of the Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the flocks of Ammon and the servants of the king, and they scattered them insomuch that they fled many ways. 28 Now the servants of the king began to murmur, saying: Now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren because their flocks were scattered by the wickedness

of these men. And they began to weep exceedingly, saying: Behold, our flocks are scattered already.

29 Now they wept because of the fear of being slain. Now when Ammon saw this his heart was swollen within him with joy; for, said he, I will show forth my power unto these my fellow-servants, or the power which is in me, in restoring these flocks unto the king, that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to believe in my words.

30 And now, these were the thoughts of Ammon, when he saw the afflictions of those whom he termed to be his brethren.

31 And it came to pass that he flattered them by his words, saying: My brethren, be of good cheer and let us go in search of the flocks, and we will gather them together and bring them back unto the place of water; and thus we will preserve the flocks unto the king and he will not slay us.

verse 31 “he flattered them by his words” Ammon was able to convince the king’s servants and gain their confidence.

32 And it came to pass that they went in search of the flocks, and they did follow Ammon, and they rushed forth with much swiftness and did head the flocks of the king, and did gather them together again to the place of water.

verse 32 “they did head the flocks” Obviously, in this context, to head the flocks is to herd, drive, or lead them.

33 And those men again stood to scatter their flocks; but Ammon said unto his brethren: Encircle the flocks round about that they flee not; and I go and contend with these men who do scatter our flocks.

34 Therefore, they did as Ammon commanded them, and he went forth and stood to contend with those who stood by the waters of Sebus; and they were in number not a few.

35 Therefore they did not fear Ammon, for they supposed that one of their men could slay him according to their pleasure, for they knew not that the Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of their hands; neither did they know anything concerning the Lord; therefore they delighted in the destruction of their brethren; and for this cause they stood to scatter the flocks of the king.

36 But Ammon stood forth and began to cast stones at them with his sling; yea, with mighty power he did sling stones amongst them; and thus he slew a certain number of them insomuch that they began to be astonished at his power; nevertheless they were angry because of the slain of their brethren, and they were determined that he should fall; therefore, seeing that they could not hit him with their stones, they came forth with clubs to slay him.

37 But behold, every man that lifted his club to smite Ammon, he smote off their arms with his sword; for he did withstand their blows by smiting their arms with the edge of his sword, insomuch that they began to be astonished, and began to flee before him; yea, and they were not few in number; and he caused them to flee by the strength of his arm.

38 Now six of them had fallen by the sling, but he slew none save it were their leader with his sword; and he smote off as many of their arms as were lifted against him, and they were not a few.

39 And when he had driven them afar off, he returned and they watered their flocks and returned them to the pasture of the king, and then went in unto the king, bearing the arms which had been smitten off by the sword of Ammon, of those who sought to slay him; and they were carried in unto the king for a testimony of the things which they had done.

verses 26-39 Brother Hugh Nibley wrote of this episode at the waters of Sebus:

All the Lamanites would drive their flocks to a particular watering place (verse 26). And when they got there, “a certain number of Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the . . . [king’s] flocks.” After the flocks of the king “scattered . . . and fled many ways,” the servants lamented that as a matter of course, “now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren” (verse 28). And they began to weep. What insanity is this, the king kills his own servants for losing a contest that had been acted out before? In fact, “it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus and scatter the flocks of the people,” keeping what they could for themselves, “it being a practice of plunder among them” (Alma 18:7). . . . It should be clear that we are dealing with a sort of game; a regular practice, following certain rules. . . . All this reminds us of those many ceremonial games in which the loser also lost his life, beginning with an Aztec duel in which one of the contestants was tethered by the ankle and bore only a wooden mace while his heavily armored opponent wielded a weapon with sharp obsidian edges. Then there were the age-old chariot races of the princes in which one was to be killed by the Taraxippus, and the equally ancient game of Nemi made famous by Frazer’s Golden Bough. Add to these such vicious doings as the Platanist, the Krypteia, and old Norse brain-ball, the hanging games of the Celts, and so on. But the closest are those known to many of us here, namely the bloody fun of the famous basketball games played in the great ball courts of the ceremonial complexes of Mesoamerica. In these games either the captain of the losing team or the whole team lost their heads (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 539-41).

Alma Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

Alma 18-19 Ammon and the conversion of King Lamoni and his household

1 And it came to pass that king Lamoni caused that his servants should stand forth and testify to all the things which they had seen concerning the matter.

2 And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders?

verse 2 “Surely, this is more than a man” Here is a profound lesson. A person who truly renders selfless and Christlike service becomes a type or symbol of Christ. He or she will seem to be “more than a man” to those who are blessed by the example of that service.

3 And they answered the king, and said: Whether he be the Great Spirit or a man, we know not; but this much we do know, that he cannot be slain by the enemies of the king; neither can they scatter the king’s flocks when he is with us, because of his expertness and great strength; therefore, we know that he is a friend to the king. And now, O king, we do not believe that a man has such great power, for we know he cannot be slain.

4 And now, when the king heard these words, he said unto them: Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren. Now this is the Great Spirit of whom our fathers have spoken.

5 Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit. Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit they supposed that whatsoever they did was right; nevertheless, Lamoni began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants;

verse 5 Apparently this “Great Spirit,” according to Lamanite tradition, was not a god to be loved and revered for his benevolence. Rather he was one to be feared for his supposed proclivity for seeking vengeance. They sought more to appease him than to worship him.

“Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit they supposed that whatsoever they did was right” Even though these Lamanites believed in this “Great Spirit,” that belief did not obligate them to any particular moral standard. This false God

did not hold them to any particular standard of righteousness or wickedness. This pernicious belief may be referred to as the “we-are-above-sin” philosophy and existed at various time during Nephite history (2 Nephi 28:8; Alma 1:4; 30:17; Mormon 8:31). Because they related to this false god, it is likely that Lamoni received little instruction from his parents during his childhood regarding questions of right and wrong. Yet, because of Ammon’s Christ-like example, Lamoni was immediately moved by the Spirit to a sense of guilt or conscience over his past wrong doings.

6 For he had slain many of them because their brethren had scattered their flocks at the place of water; and thus, because they had had their flocks scattered they were slain.

7 Now it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being a practice of plunder among them.

8 And it came to pass that king Lamoni inquired of his servants, saying: Where is this man that has such great power?

9 And they said unto him: Behold, he is feeding thy horses. Now the king had commanded his servants, previous to the time of the watering of their flocks, that they should prepare his horses and chariots, and conduct him forth to the land of Nephi; for there had been a great feast appointed at the land of Nephi, by the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

verse 9 “Behold, he is feeding thy horses” We have already discussed the problem of the horse in the Book of Mormon. Please see the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:25.

“chariots” A potential problem is raised by this verse. Critics of the Book of Mormon in the past have pointed out that this verse implies that a “chariot” must have wheels, especially a chariot drawn by a horse, and there is no firm evidence that the wheel was ever used in the Americas prior to the time of Columbus. “Ah-ha!” they say, “this must be evidence that the Book of Mormon is not historically accurate.” Because of this criticism, proponents of the Book of Mormon have scrambled for evidence that the wheel was used. Let us review a few points of fact. (1) First, there can be little doubt that Lehi and company were well acquainted with the concept of the wheel. In the Old Testament wheels and chariots were mentioned as early as the time of Moses in Egypt. There are several references to wheels and chariots in the book of Isaiah. (2) Just because the early Book of Mormon peoples knew about the wheel didn’t necessarily mean that they made use of them. (3) There is only one mention of “wheels” in the Book of Mormon—in 2 Nephi 15:28 in a verse taken from Isaiah’s writings. (4) While the “chariots” mentioned in the Book of Mormon probably had wheels, it is not possible to be certain. (5) It is interesting that several examples of wheeled figurines have been discovered in Mesoamerica dating to a period well before

Columbus (“Wheeled Figurines in the Ancient World,” John L. Sorenson, a FARMS reprint).

The above discoveries have blunted the criticism of some Book of Mormon detractors. Let us admit, however, that we may never find irrefutable evidence of the use of wheels for transportation in the Americas at the time of the Book of Mormon.

10 Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of Ammon, saying: Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them.

11 Now I surely know that this is the Great Spirit, and I would desire him that he come in unto me, but I durst not.

12 And it came to pass that when Ammon had made ready the horses and the chariots for the king and his servants, he went in unto the king, and he saw that the countenance of the king was changed; therefore he was about to return out of his presence.

13 And one of the king’s servants said unto him, Rabbanah, which is, being interpreted, powerful or great king, considering their kings to be powerful; and thus he said unto him: Rabbanah, the king desireth thee to stay.

verse 13 Ammon is addressed by the title “Rabbanah” which is interpreted as meaning “powerful or great king.” This title is identical to “Rabboni” meaning “master,” which was used by Mary Magdalene to address the resurrected Lord (John 20:16). The servant who so addressed Ammon knew he was not a king of any worldly kingdom and likely was suspicious he was *more* than merely a worldly king. *Rabbanah* resembles Hebrew words that derive from a common Semitic root *rbb* meaning “to be big or many.” Even though the Lamanites had strayed culturally from their Nephite cousins, they apparently still preserved elements of their Hebrew/Semitic language. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

14 Therefore Ammon turned himself unto the king, and said unto him: What wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king? And the king answered him not for the space of an hour, according to their time, for he knew not what he should say unto him.

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto him again: What desirest thou of me? But the king answered him not.

16 And it came to pass that Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, therefore he perceived the thoughts of the king. And he said unto him: Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in

order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?

17 I say unto you, what is it, that thy marvelings are so great? Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant; therefore, whatsoever thou desirest which is right, that will I do.

18 Now when the king had heard these words, he marveled again, for he beheld that Ammon could discern his thoughts; but notwithstanding this, king Lamoni did open his mouth, and said unto him: Who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things?

19 Ammon answered and said unto him: I am not.

20 And the king said: How knowest thou the thoughts of my heart? Thou mayest speak boldly, and tell me concerning these things; and also tell me by what power ye slew and smote off the arms of my brethren that scattered my flocks—

21 And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee; and if it were needed, I would guard thee with my armies; but I know that thou art more powerful than all they; nevertheless, whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee.

22 Now Ammon being wise, yet harmless, he said unto Lamoni: Wilt thou hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things? And this is the thing that I desire of thee.

verse 22 “Ammon being wise, yet harmless” The word “harmless” here carries the connotation of meek, quiet, and inoffensive. Though he was wise and possessed important spiritual insights with which he could bless most anyone he met, he was humble and not overly aggressive.

23 And the king answered him, and said: Yea, I will believe all thy words. And thus he was caught with guile.

verse 23 “he was caught with guile” Lamoni responded as Ammon had planned when Ammon asked the question in verse 22. Thus, Ammon had cleverly, or “with guile,” committed the king to listen to him. Lamoni had been “caught” by Ammon’s “guile.” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *guile* as, “Craft, cunning, artifice, clever, with ingenuity.” The word *guile*, at the time of Joseph Smith did not carry the negative meaning we may apply to it today.

24 And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness, and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

25 And he answered, and said unto him: I do not know what that meaneth.

26 And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?

27 And he said, Yea.

28 And Ammon said: This is God. And Ammon said unto him again: Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth?

verse 28 “And Ammon said: This is God.” Ammon here is referring to the “Great Spirit” in verse 26. Some have felt that Ammon’s statement here is misleading to Lamoni. He teaches Lamoni that the Great Spirit is God. Technically speaking, he is correct. At that time Jehovah did not have a body of flesh and bone, and he was a spirit.

29 And he said: Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens.

30 And Ammon said unto him: The heavens is a place where God dwells and all his holy angels.

31 And king Lamoni said: Is it above the earth?

32 And Ammon said: Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.

33 And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God?

34 Ammon said unto him: I am a man; and man in the beginning was created after the image of God, and I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true;

verse 34 “just and true” The word “just” means in accordance with God’s law.

35 And a portion of that Spirit dwelleth in me, which giveth me knowledge, and also power according to my faith and desires which are in God.

36 Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem.

37 And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth.

38 And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time.

39 But this is not all; for he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.

verses 36-39 Using the scriptures, Ammon taught Lamoni the gospel including the concepts of the creation, the fall, and the atonement. Elder Bruce R. McConkie referred to these as “the three pillars of eternity” and the “greatest events that have ever occurred in all eternity.” Elder McConkie went on to say, “If we can get an understanding of them, then the whole eternal scheme of things will fall into place, and we will be in a position to work out our own salvation . . . These three are the foundations upon which all things rest. Without any one of them all things would lose their purpose and meaning, and the plans and designs of Deity would come to naught” (“The Three Pillars of Eternity,” *BYU Devotional*, February 17, 1981).

Ammon’s method of teaching Lamoni follows an astute logic: In order to realize the need for the Savior’s atonement, one must understand from what it is we need to be saved. This is, of course, the fall of man. To understand the fall it is necessary to understand from what it was that Adam fell. This is the paradisiacal state in which all things in the garden were created—thus a need to understand the creation.

verse 39 “from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home.

40 And it came to pass that after he had said all these things, and expounded them to the king, that the king believed all his words.

41 And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hast had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people.

42 And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead.

43 And it came to pass that his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed; and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights; and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss.

verse 43 Lamoni’s comatose state began when he realized the identity of his Redeemer and his urgent need for his Redeemer’s mercy. This coma may be considered symbolic of the death of the natural man in preparation for being born again as a saint, a man of Christ. While Lamoni appeared to be in a coma for three days, his spirit was very much awake—all the time experiencing the pains of repentance and being taught the principles of salvation. Analogous experiences were had by the

younger Alma (Mosiah 27:18-25) and by Paul who lost his sight for three days (Acts 9:8-9). Each of these three-day experiences may be considered symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ whose body lay in the tomb for three days. An obvious difference between the experiences of these others and that of Christ, was that Christ was in no need of repentance and was the teacher and not the student.

Some have wondered about the dramatic conversion experiences of Lamoni, Paul, Enos, Alma, and the four sons of Mosiah. Can the rest of us ever hope for such an experience? Why can't we have such an experience? Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, ". . . except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments" ("Jesus Christ and Him Crucified," *Speeches of the Year*, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1976, 399). Though the dramatic experiences described in scripture "are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule (see the commentary for Alma 19:8, 34). For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are thousands and hundreds of thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle—much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life" (Benson, Ezra Taft, "A Mighty Change of Heart," *Ensign* 19 [October 1989]: 2-5).

Alma Chapter 19

1 And it came to pass that after two days and two nights they were about to take his body and lay it in a sepulchre, which they had made for the purpose of burying their dead.

2 Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her.

3 And it came to pass that Ammon did as he was commanded, and went in unto the queen, and desired to know what she would that he should do.

4 And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name;

5 Therefore, if this is the case, I would that ye should go in and see my husband, for he has been laid upon his bed for the space of two days and two nights; and some say that he is not dead, but others say that he is dead and that he stinketh, and that he ought to be placed in the sepulchre; but as for myself, to me he doth not stink.

verse 5 “others say that he is dead and that he stinketh” Obviously this coma-like state of Lamoni’s appeared to most observers to be very much like death.

6 Now, this was what Ammon desired, for he knew that king Lamoni was under the power of God; he knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from his mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness—yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul, yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God—

verse 6 “the light of the glory of God” The “light” spoken of here refers to eternal truths, doubtless emanating from the Lord Jesus Christ himself—the light of Christ. If the reader has an interest in the topic of light, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15, *The Concept of Light*.

7 Therefore, what the queen desired of him was his only desire. Therefore, he went in to see the king according as the queen had desired him; and he saw the king, and he knew that he was not dead.

8 And he said unto the queen: He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God, and on the morrow he shall rise again; therefore bury him not.

verse 8 “He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God” Just what is the nature of this peculiar coma-like state into which king Lamoni had lapsed? What does it mean to

“sleep in God?” Apparently it is a state in which the body and its higher functions are suspended so the spirit may become free of the body and become focused completely on the Holy Spirit and the revelations which he brings from heaven. This trance is indeed a special gift of the Spirit which the Lord may use in order to provide important revelation to man. “Freed from the fetters of a mortal body, man’s spirit can be ushered into the divine presence; it can hear what otherwise could not be heard and see what otherwise could not be seen—even the visions of eternity and even the Almighty himself” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 140). See also the commentary for verse 34 of this chapter.

9 And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said.

10 And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites.

verses 9-10 One LDS author has compared the queen’s reaction to the period of her husband’s coma to the incident when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead: “Martha, Lazarus’s sister, did not have the faith to understand what Jesus was teaching when he told her, ‘Thy brother shall rise again’(John 11:23). Not until she saw her brother walk out of the tomb did she realize that he was not referring to rising after the resurrection. Lamoni’s wife, on the other hand, established her beliefs after hearing only the testimony of Ammon and her servants. When Ammon told her that her husband would rise the next day, she responded, ‘I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said’ (Alma 19:9). It is not surprising that Ammon blessed her for her great faith” (Camille Fronk in “Show Forth Good Examples in Me,” *Studies in Scripture Volume Seven 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 321-24).

11 And it came to pass that she watched over the bed of her husband, from that time even until that time on the morrow which Ammon had appointed that he should rise.

12 And it came to pass that he arose, according to the words of Ammon; and as he arose, he stretched forth his hand unto the woman, and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou.

13 For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. Now, when he had said these words, his heart was swollen within him, and he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit.

verse 13 “I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name” One of the characteristics inevitably found in those who have experienced a mighty change in their hearts or have been converted to the gospel is a profound faith in Jesus Christ and an irresistible desire to testify of him.

14 Now Ammon seeing the Spirit of the Lord poured out according to his prayers upon the Lamanites, his brethren, who had been the cause of so much mourning among the Nephites, or among all the people of God because of their iniquities and their traditions, he fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren; and he was also overpowered with joy; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth.

15 Now, when the servants of the king had seen that they had fallen, they also began to cry unto God, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also, for it was they who had stood before the king and testified unto him concerning the great power of Ammon.

verse 15 “for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also” It would seem that the “fear” which came upon these servants, undoubtedly communicated by the Spirit of the Lord, was more reverence and awe than dread, terror, and fright.

16 And it came to pass that they did call on the name of the Lord, in their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth, save it were one of the Lamanitish women, whose name was Abish, she having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father—

verse 16 “even until they had all fallen to the earth” These servants also were privileged to participate in the experience of having a divinely-induced trance wherein they were taught and converted by the Spirit.

“Abish” See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

17 Thus, having been converted to the Lord, and never having made it known, therefore, when she saw that all the servants of Lamoni had fallen to the earth, and also her mistress, the queen, and the king, and Ammon lay prostrate upon the earth, she knew that it was the power of God; and supposing that this opportunity, by making known unto the people what had happened among them, that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God, therefore she ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people.

verses 16-17 “having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father . . . and never having made it known” The phrase “remarkable vision of her father” is obviously ambiguous. Just who had the vision? Did Abish see her father in a vision? Or did her father have a vision which he

shared with her? It would seem that the latter interpretation is more likely, though it is difficult to be certain.

One can only speculate as to Abish's private thoughts over these "many years" since her conversion. Might she have wondered why her father had been blessed with a "remarkable vision." Was there to be any purpose beyond her own conversion? Would she ever be able to share her joy with others? After all, aren't visions usually given by the Lord for specific purposes? Seeing the condition of the king and his court, she may well have thought, "This is it! This is the purpose for which I have been converted!"

18 And they began to assemble themselves together unto the house of the king. And there came a multitude, and to their astonishment they beheld the king, and the queen, and their servants prostrate upon the earth, and they all lay there as though they were dead; and they also saw Ammon, and behold, he was a Nephite.

19 And now the people began to murmur among themselves; some saying that it was a great evil that had come upon them, or upon the king and his house, because he had suffered that the Nephite should remain in the land.

20 But others rebuked them, saying: The king hath brought this evil upon his house, because he slew his servants who had had their flocks scattered at the waters of Sebus.

21 And they were also rebuked by those men who had stood at the waters of Sebus and scattered the flocks which belonged to the king, for they were angry with Ammon because of the number which he had slain of their brethren at the waters of Sebus, while defending the flocks of the king.

22 Now, one of them, whose brother had been slain with the sword of Ammon, being exceedingly angry with Ammon, drew his sword and went forth that he might let it fall upon Ammon, to slay him; and as he lifted the sword to smite him, behold, he fell dead.

verse 22 Seeing Ammon completely defenseless, this Lamanite decided to gain retribution for his slain brother.

23 Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord.

verses 22-23 There can be no doubt that the Lord can and does intervene at times to lengthen or shorten our sojourns in mortality when it suits his purposes. Part of the message of comfort which the Lord revealed to the prophet Joseph while he was a prisoner in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, was: "Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever" (D&C 122:9). However, we should probably not assume that every

death suffered by a mortal was willed by God. A thoughtful consideration of the nature of this mortal existence seems to leave room for the occurrence of accidental deaths as well (“mortal accidents”). It would seem that the Lord only infrequently orchestrates or micro-manages the deaths of mortals, and that for his specific purposes. Most often our mortal death is left to be the result of the nature of this frail mortal experience.

24 And it came to pass that when the multitude beheld that the man had fallen dead, who lifted the sword to slay Ammon, fear came upon them all, and they durst not put forth their hands to touch him or any of those who had fallen; and they began to marvel again among themselves what could be the cause of this great power, or what all these things could mean.

25 And it came to pass that there were many among them who said that Ammon was the Great Spirit, and others said he was sent by the Great Spirit;

26 But others rebuked them all, saying that he was a monster, who had been sent from the Nephites to torment them.

27 And there were some who said that Ammon was sent by the Great Spirit to afflict them because of their iniquities; and that it was the Great Spirit that had always attended the Nephites, who had ever delivered them out of their hands; and they said that it was this Great Spirit who had destroyed so many of their brethren, the Lamanites.

verses 25-27 Isn't it true that here on earth among us mortals there is a wide divergence in our abilities to discern situations having eternal implications? It seems clear that the essential yet variable ingredient is receptiveness to the promptings of the Spirit. When the Spirit is lacking, a mortal looks upon the handiwork of God and inevitably finds nothing of God in it. Mortal logic and intellect is absolutely unable to discern and perceive spiritual meaning. Here, some of the Lamanites in their inability to understand spiritual things made incorrect conclusions about Ammon. It is interesting that at the time of Enoch, some people who did not understand him called him a “wild man” (Moses 6:38).

28 And thus the contention began to be exceedingly sharp among them. And while they were thus contending, the woman servant who had caused the multitude to be gathered together came, and when she saw the contention which was among the multitude she was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto tears.

verse 28 Abish cried in her disappointment. Many of the Lamanites present could not see the obvious profound spiritual meaning of this event that she could see.

29 And it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O

blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

30 And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood; and when she had done this, she took the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose and stood upon his feet.

verse 30 “speaking many words which were not understood” It is difficult to know, in the context of this phrase, whether the queen was speaking in tongues—in the Adamic language, the language of God—or whether she was speaking their language, but speaking of concepts by the inspiration of the Spirit which were not understood by her listeners because of their profound doctrinal meaning.

31 And he, immediately, seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them, and to teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon; and as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord.

verse 31 “as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord” In the next verse we will learn that “there were many among them who would not hear his words.” We are not talking about acoustical phenomena here. Those who “heard his words” were not just those who were within earshot of his voice. They were those who chose to hear and accept his words. Similarly, those “who would not hear his words” were those who chose not to accept and believe them.

32 But there were many among them who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way.

33 And it came to pass that when Ammon arose he also administered unto them, and also did all the servants of Lamoni; and they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil.

verse 33 “they had no more desire to do evil” A statement by President Joseph F. Smith, as he spoke of his own conversion, is pertinent here: “I felt that I would not injure the smallest insect beneath my feet. I felt as if I wanted to do good everywhere to everybody and to everything. I felt a newness of life, a newness of desire to do that which was right. There was not one particle of desire for evil left in my soul” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 96).

34 And behold, many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them; and thus they had told them things of God, and of his righteousness.

verse 34 This remarkable story of the trance-like state that fell upon the household of Lamoni might seem to some to be peculiar. Is this a “teaching technique” or revelatory device unique to the Book of Mormon? Has the Lord employed this method for revealing information on other occasions to other people? Are similar experiences found elsewhere in the scriptures? There are indeed some anecdotes in the Bible that are more easily explained once we have read and understood the story of Lamoni and his household. On one occasion in the Old Testament Balaam fell “into a trance” and had “his eyes open[ed]” in order that he might see “the visions of the Almighty” (Numbers 24:16). The prophet Ezekiel reported that on one occasion as he sat in his house, “the hand of the Lord God fell there upon [him],” and he beheld “the visions of God” (Ezekiel 8:1-2). In the New Testament Peter “fell into a trance, and saw the heaven opened.” He then received the revelation in which the Lord extended the blessings of the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (Acts 10:10-11). It is significant that Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, received his call to preach to the Gentiles under similar circumstances. “While I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” (Acts 22:17-18).

35 And it came to pass that there were many that did believe in their words; and as many as did believe were baptized; and they became a righteous people, and they did establish a church among them.

verse 35 By what influence were Lamoni and his servants and many of the Lamanites converted? Was it the miraculous demonstrations of Ammon’s power that converted them? After all, they had been witness or at least had heard of Ammon’s phenomenal exploits at the waters of Sebus. They had seen the king and all his household fall into a trance and awaken converted to the gospel. They had watched as a would-be assassin fell dead as he raised his sword to kill the defenseless Ammon as he lay in a trance. Did all these miracles result in their conversion? Was it the angel who visited the younger Alma and the sons of Mosiah who converted them? Of course it was not. It was simply and completely the influence of the Spirit of God who converted all these people as they observed “the goings on” (Alma 5:46).

36 And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.

Alma Chapter 20

1 And it came to pass that when they had established a church in that land, that king Lamoni desired that Ammon should go with him to the land of Nephi, that he might show him unto his father.

verse 1 Recall that king Lamoni reigned in the land of Ishmael. Lamoni's father who was king over all the land reigned in the "land of Nephi." The term "land of Nephi" has two possible meanings. It refers to the general land south of the land of Zarahemla in which the Lamanites lived. It was made up the smaller lands of Ishmael, Shilom, Shemlon, Middoni, Mormon, Nephi, and others. The term "land of Nephi" also refers to the more specific land around the city of Nephi. Lamoni is here proposing that Ammon accompany him to the smaller land of Nephi from where his father reigned over all the general land of Nephi.

2 And the voice of the Lord came to Ammon, saying: Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi, for behold, the king will seek thy life; but thou shalt go to the land of Middoni; for behold, thy brother Aaron, and also Muloki and Ammah are in prison.

verse 2 Muloki and Ammah are presumably two of the "small number" that accompanied the sons of Mosiah on their mission (Mosiah 28:1). We will later learn that perhaps they were the only two who accompanied the sons of Mosiah (Alma 23:1).

For commentary on the derivation of the name Muloki, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

"Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi" As already mentioned, the Lamanite king over all the land, Lamoni's father, lived in the land and city of Nephi. See the commentary for Jacob 28:2 and for Alma 17:19 as to the plausible identity of this city and the identity of the former Nephite/Zeniffite city of Lehi-Nephi.

3 Now it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he said unto Lamoni: Behold, my brother and brethren are in prison at Middoni, and I go that I may deliver them.

4 Now Lamoni said unto Ammon: I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things. But behold, I will go with thee to the land of Middoni; for the king of the land of Middoni, whose name is Antiomno, is a friend unto me; therefore I go to the land of Middoni, that I may flatter the king of the land, and he will cast thy brethren out of prison. Now Lamoni said unto him: Who told thee that thy brethren were in prison?

5 And Ammon said unto him: No one hath told me, save it be God; and he said unto me—Go and deliver thy brethren, for they are in prison in the land of Middoni.

6 Now when Lamoni had heard this he caused that his servants should make ready his horses and his chariots.

verse 6 “make ready his horses and his chariots” If you wish to review the discussion of the “wheel” in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Alma 18:9.

7 And he said unto Ammon: Come, I will go with thee down to the land of Middoni, and there I will plead with the king that he will cast thy brethren out of prison.

8 And it came to pass that as Ammon and Lamoni were journeying thither, they met the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

9 And behold, the father of Lamoni said unto him: Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people?

verse 9 “Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people” You will recall that at the time of the episode at the waters of Sebus, king Lamoni was preparing to go to his father’s feast in the land of Nephi (Alma 18:9).

10 And he also said: Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar?

verse 10 “this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar” See the commentary for verse 13.

11 And it came to pass that Lamoni rehearsed unto him whither he was going, for he feared to offend him.

12 And he also told him all the cause of his tarrying in his own kingdom, that he did not go unto his father to the feast which he had prepared.

verse 12 All of the events surrounding the conversion of king Lamoni and his household occurred as Lamoni was preparing to go to his father’s feast and prevented Lamoni from attending the feast.

13 And now when Lamoni had rehearsed unto him all these things, behold, to his astonishment, his father was angry with him, and said: Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property.

verse 13 Why did the father of Lamoni harbor such explicit negative feelings for the Nephites? We have discussed previously the concept of “the traditions of their

fathers” in the commentary for Jacob 3:3-9. For the reader’s convenience, we will repeat that discussion here.

It is probably a mistake to think of the Lamanites as a benighted, hardened, indolent, and by nature a ferocious people. Certainly many among them were basically good, loving, gentle, and morally upright. Why then do we tend to form a contrary opinion about them as we read the Book of Mormon? Why do we intuitively regard them as an evil and loathsome people who are almost without redeeming qualities? What is the quality of this people that makes us think so negatively about them?

To understand the answer to these questions, it is vital to understand the so-called founding myth of the Lamanites. The Lamanites had deeply rooted in their culture a tradition of hatred of the Nephites. This profound legacy of hatred began at the time of Laman, Lemuel, Lehi, and Nephi, and was passed along from father to son. From the Lamanites’ point of view, this basic founding myth probably was told something like this: Our Father Lehi and our younger brother Nephi stole from us everything we ever wanted. We wanted to remain at home in Jerusalem, among our friends, and enjoy our cherished possessions. We didn’t want to leave and embark on the rather ill-defined mission that our father Lehi had decided upon. Lehi and Nephi were oppressive and uncaring. They would not listen to us. They forced us to go with them. They virtually robbed us of our homes, and told us lies about some far-away supposedly “promised” Land. They would not allow us to decide for ourselves. They unjustly robbed us of the right to govern ourselves. When we arrived at the great ocean, they commanded us to help build a boat. We did not want to help because we were frightened to try to cross the great water. Again, we were forced, not only to help with the building but also to embark on this seemingly hopeless journey. Once on the boat, we tried to forget our fears by organizing a little lighthearted revelry. Nephi thought that this would offend the Lord and would not allow it! Again he tried to rule over us. We believed that Nephi was leading us to some wilderness where he might dominate us and subject us to his will and pleasure. Just as Nephi tried to take away our freedoms and govern us against our will, so will all Nephites do the same to us. The only way we can stop them from doing this is to use force against them—to smite and kill them. It is our only hope for happiness!

This Lamanite tradition of hatred for the Nephites is often referred to in the Book of Mormon as “the tradition of their fathers” or “the iniquity of their fathers.” It dominated the relations between the two peoples throughout the Book of Mormon story. Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with it from an early uncritical age. It was firmly imbedded in their very bones, and it dominated their feelings and thoughts about the Nephite peoples. It virtually represented the national identity of the Lamanites, and with it the Lamanite leaders could stir their people up to anger (see Alma 43:7). It fueled the virtually continuous wars the Lamanites made against the Nephites. As the Nephites experienced the expression of this tradition of hatred, they generally came to perceive

the Lamanites as ferocious and hard. The Lamanites acted as if they felt nothing but hatred for the Nephites.

For an interesting exposition of this tradition of hatred uttered by a Lamanite king, read the letter written to Captain Moroni by Ammoron in 63 BC (Alma 54:15-24). Indeed, understanding the genesis of this heritage of hatred may even give us a measure of sympathy and understanding for the Lamanite peoples.

Perhaps king Lamoni was not a very apt pupil when all this indoctrinating was going on. Perhaps he had not learned to hate the Nephites quite as much as some other Lamanites did. Otherwise how would we explain his ready acceptance of Ammon, and why would he have been astonished that his father was angry with him for taking up with a Nephite?

14 Now the father of Lamoni commanded him that he should slay Ammon with the sword. And he also commanded him that he should not go to the land of Middoni, but that he should return with him to the land of Ishmael.

15 But Lamoni said unto him: I will not slay Ammon, neither will I return to the land of Ishmael, but I go to the land of Middoni that I may release the brethren of Ammon, for I know that they are just men and holy prophets of the true God.

16 Now when his father had heard these words, he was angry with him, and he drew his sword that he might smite him to the earth.

17 But Ammon stood forth and said unto him: Behold, thou shalt not slay thy son; nevertheless, it were better that he should fall than thee, for behold, he has repented of his sins; but if thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved.

verse 17 “if thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved” Is murder, the malicious and intentional shedding of innocent blood an unpardonable sin for which there is no forgiveness? Certainly there is no complete forgiveness and exaltation possible for the murderer (1 John 5:16-17; D&C 42:79). It is, however, possible for the murderer to eventually repent and receive the forgiveness which allows them to inherit the telestial degree of glory (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 520). Murder is not the unpardonable sin or the sin against the Holy Ghost; rather it is said to be the *unforgivable* sin. Only that individual who has received the “fulness of the priesthood”—who has had his calling and election made sure—is capable of committing the unpardonable sin. This latter individual is guilty of the unpardonable sin if he receives the “fulness of the priesthood” then turns altogether from the church and wars against it. For a more complete discussion of these sins, see *Three Most Abominable Sins*, volume 3, chapter 18 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

18 And again, it is expedient that thou shouldst forbear; for if thou shouldst slay thy son, he being an innocent man, his blood would cry from the ground to the

Lord his God, for vengeance to come upon thee; and perhaps thou wouldst lose thy soul.

verse 18 To “forbear” means to stop what you are doing. This is not to be confused with a “forebear” which is an ancestor.

“his blood would cry from the ground to the Lord his God” The very act of his murder would demand that justice be meted out to his murderer.

19 Now when Ammon had said these words unto him, he answered him, saying: I know that if I should slay my son, that I should shed innocent blood; for it is thou that hast sought to destroy him.

verse 19 The king says, in effect: “I do not intend to slay my son. I realize that he is innocent. It is you, Ammon, who is guilty of trying to destroy my son.”

20 And he stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon. But Ammon withstood his blows, and also smote his arm that he could not use it.

21 Now when the king saw that Ammon could slay him, he began to plead with Ammon that he would spare his life.

22 But Ammon raised his sword, and said unto him: Behold, I will smite thee except thou wilt grant unto me that my brethren may be cast out of prison.

23 Now the king, fearing he should lose his life, said: If thou wilt spare me I will grant unto thee whatsoever thou wilt ask, even to half of the kingdom.

24 Now when Ammon saw that he had wrought upon the old king according to his desire, he said unto him: If thou wilt grant that my brethren may be cast out of prison, and also that Lamoni may retain his kingdom, and that ye be not displeased with him, but grant that he may do according to his own desires in whatsoever thing he thinketh, then will I spare thee; otherwise I will smite thee to the earth.

25 Now when Ammon had said these words, the king began to rejoice because of his life.

26 And when he saw that Ammon had no desire to destroy him, and when he also saw the great love he had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Because this is all that thou hast desired, that I would release thy brethren, and suffer that my son Lamoni should retain his kingdom, behold, I will grant unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more—

27 And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee. For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken, and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni, therefore he was desirous to learn them.

verse 27 “**For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken**” The king was undoubtedly moved and intrigued not only by Ammon’s obvious concern and affection for Lamoni and for his lack of personal greed (verse 24), but also by Ammon’s accusing him of being a sinner in dire need of repentance (verses 17-18).

“**and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni**” Lamoni had had an opportunity to explain some gospel principles and bear his testimony when he explained the reasons for not attending his father’s feast.

28 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni proceeded on their journey towards the land of Middoni. And Lamoni found favor in the eyes of the king of the land; therefore the brethren of Ammon were brought forth out of prison.

29 And when Ammon did meet them he was exceedingly sorrowful, for behold they were naked, and their skins were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords. And they also had suffered hunger, thirst, and all kinds of afflictions; nevertheless they were patient in all their sufferings.

verse 29 From our comfortable armchairs, as we read the scriptures, we sometimes misconstrue, misinterpret, and misunderstand the persecutions heaped upon the Lord’s servants and, indeed, even upon the Lord himself. In a subtle way we tend to glamorize these persecutions, assuming and picturing in our mind’s eye that the Lord and his servants somehow maintained their dignity in their time of suffering. These, we imagine, were noble sufferings in the way they were dealt out and in the way they were endured. The real truth is that these afflictions were demeaning and insulting and degrading. During the Savior’s mortal sojourn, many took the opportunity to embarrass and humiliate him. The Roman soldiers, the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the common people, and even one of the thieves who was crucified beside him jeered at him, spat on him, hit him, and spoke blasphemously against him and profanely to him (Matthew 27:29-31, 39-44; Luke 22:63-65; 23:35-39).

“**they were patient in all their sufferings**” Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah had been faithful and steady and longsuffering in their trials. They did not allow their sufferings to embitter them.

30 And, as it happened, it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people; therefore they would not hearken unto their words, and they had cast them out, and had smitten them, and had driven them from house to house, and from place to place, even until they had arrived in the land of Middoni; and there they were taken and cast into prison, and bound with strong cords, and kept in prison for many days, and were delivered by Lamoni and Ammon.

verse 30 “it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people” They had fallen into the hands of the Amalekites and the Amulonites (see Alma 21:1-4).

The Amulonites were the devotees of the late Amulon, one of the priests of king Noah and a Nephite dissenter (see Mosiah 23:31-32). They were thus of mixed parentage. They had Nephite fathers (the priests of Noah) and Lamanite mothers (the Lamanite maidens whom these priests kidnapped and took to wife). Because of their superior education, they became leaders among the Lamanites. We have discussed previously the observation that Nephite dissenters tended to be more hard hearted and refractory to the truth than were the Lamanites (Alma 24:30).

The text is silent concerning the origin of the Amalekites. We have encountered two “Amaleki’s” thus far in our study of the Book of Mormon. One was the prophet-custodian of the plates at the time of King Benjamin (Omni 1:12, 23; Words of Mormon 1:3, 10). The other Amaleki was one of the men who traveled from Zarahemla with Ammon to rescue the people of king Limhi (Mosiah 7:6). It is unlikely the Amalekites descended from either of these Nephites. We have learned, through the efforts of modern scholars, that the Amalekites are the same as the Amlicites (see an important discussion of the Amalekites in the commentary for Alma 21:2). Both the Amalekites and the Amulonites were of the order of the Nehors (Alma 21:4; 24:28-29). For a discussion of the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

Camille Fronk has concluded in her article “Show Forth Good Examples in Me” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 328-29), that Ammon may well be seen as a type of Christ. She points out that the temptations placed before Ammon were similar to those which would later be placed before Christ by Satan. Ammon was offered gifts which would satisfy his carnal appetites—Lamoni’s daughter and a life of ease (Alma 17:24). In an analogous way, so will Satan tempt the fasting Christ to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4). The Lamanites mistakenly thought that Ammon was a God. He could have taken advantage of their ignorance and become their ruler (Alma 18:21). Christ was tempted to show his power and gain instant popularity and worldly glory (Matthew 4:5-7). Ammon was offered worldly riches by the king over all the Lamanites (Alma 20:23). So did Satan offer Christ the wealth of all the earth if Christ would but worship him (Matthew 4:8-10). Obviously both Ammon’s and Christ’s eyes were fixed on a larger mission.

Alma Chapter 21

An account of the preaching of Aaron, and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites. Comprising chapters 21 to 26 inclusive.

We have read the account of Ammon's missionary experience to this point in the story. We now return to the point where the brothers separated from one another at the beginning of their mission, and we will follow Aaron as he goes forth to preach.

1 Now when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, behold Aaron took his journey towards the land which was called by the Lamanites, Jerusalem, calling it after the land of their fathers' nativity; and it was away joining the borders of Mormon.

verse 1 "Jerusalem . . . was away joining the borders of [the land of] Mormon" For speculation as to the relationship of the various Lamanite lands, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*. See also the article, *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

2 Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem.

verse 2 "the Amalekites and the people of Amulon" In a compelling article ("Alma's Enemies—The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 14, number 1, 2005, 108-117), J. Christopher Conkling has proposed and defended the idea that the Amalekites are not, in fact a new group. Rather, they are the same as the Amlicites (Alma 2-3). This observation is based on two types of evidences we will describe here. First, there exist heretofore little-noticed features of the text that suggest these groups are the same. Second, there are spelling variations in the original handwritten manuscripts written by Oliver Cowdery which suggests that beginning in Alma 21, the spelling of the name of this group changed from its original Amlicites.

The book of Alma begins with Nehor (Alma 1) and quickly moves to a major Nephite threat by the Nephite apostate Amlici, a devotee of Nehor. Amlici and his army are defeated, Amlici is killed, and this Amlicite army seems to disappear (Alma 2), but Alma spends the entire next chapter (Alma 3) telling about the threat and mark of the Amlicites, after their disappearance. This seems to be a lot of detail about a past threat. Alma 3 reads more like a warning and an introduction to a problem than a comment about a problem no longer present. Then 18 chapters later, here in this particular verse, Aaron runs into another group of apostate Nephite troublemakers, the Amalekites. As Alma mentions this group in this verse, he throws their name into the narrative almost

casually as if the reader were already fully aware of who they are. Upon reading this verse for the first time, most readers are probably unaware that they have met yet another new group, one with no given origin. At first this casual introduction of a new group called Amalekites might not bother us since the Book of Mormon often takes a shotgun approach to its abbreviated historical record, where names are noted without introduction, including the crucial name Mormon itself (see Mosiah 18:4). However, there are no instances in the Book of Mormon text where a *group* is introduced without explanation or introduction—the Amalekites are the only exception.

Chronologically, the Amlicites and Amalekites fit together perfectly; they never overlap. Alma tells of his problems with a large group of obstinate Nephite dissenters called Amlicites, who are after the order of Nehor and allied with the Lamanites. We will read further of Aaron and Ammon, who are in the Lamanite lands at the same time period, telling of their problems with another formidable Lamanite ally after the order of Nehor, a people whose name—*Amalekites*—is spelled much like the name Amlicites. They both pursue the same kinds of goals during the same time period, and they cause the same problems. Both groups are Nephite dissenters. One group is introduced as if it will have ongoing importance. The other is first mentioned as though its identity has already been established. To be sure, the text reads more clearly if these groups are one and the same. John L. Sorenson recognized this strong similarity some years ago and speculated that “it is possible that they [Amalekites] constituted the Amlicite remnant . . . their new name possibly arising by ‘lamanitization’ of the original” (“Peoples of the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow et al., 194).

Dr. Royal Skousen, editor of the long-term Book of Mormon critical text project has also suggested that these two groups are the same. He has noted spellings in the original manuscripts which are intermediate between *Amlicite* and *Amalekite* such as *Amalicate*, *Amaleckite*, *Amelekite*, *Amalickite*, and *Amelickite*. Dr. Skousen commented that the spelling of this name is rather loose and that many of the common letters, especially the c and the k are interchanged freely. Overall, there is little support of the idea that the Amlicites and Amalekites were two separate groups.

What are the implications of this idea that the Amlicites and Amalekites are the same group? First, we can now see that Alma’s warnings in Alma 3 were concerning a threat and problem that Alma felt he was going to have to deal with for the rest of his life. Theoretically Alma could have begun his record with the travels of the sons of Mosiah, but he apparently felt the need to introduce the major conflict faced by both the missionaries sent to the Nephites (Alma and Amulek) and those sent to the Lamanites (the sons of Mosiah) before the record could adequately explain the trials of any group. The great battles during Alma’s reign were against Lamanite armies allied with or led by Nephite apostates such as the Amlicites. Alma 43:6 will state “As the Amalekites [Amlicites] were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were,

in and of themselves, therefore, [the dissenter] Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites.” And Alma 43:13 ties all these groups together in the final battles before Alma’s departure: “Thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah [Amulonites].” Further, when we read of the atrocities encountered by the missionary sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites—including the slaughter of the 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24:21-22)—perhaps we will be more likely to notice that Alma’s mention of the true villains is in line with the book’s structure: “The greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.” And among the converts to the truth “were none who were Amalekites [Amlicites] or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel” (Alma 24:28-29).

“Jerusalem” This wicked city of Jerusalem will be among those cities destroyed at the time of Christ’s crucifixion. The text will explain that Jerusalem and cities like it were destroyed “to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:7).

There is a subtle problem suggested by this verse when it is correlated with other verses in the Book of Mormon. Verse 1 of this chapter (Alma 21) suggests that the very first place Aaron traveled to do missionary work was to the city of Jerusalem. We would therefore assume that he traveled there during the first year of the reign of judges, which was the same year he and his brothers departed Zarahemla on their mission to the Land of Nephi. Aaron traveled to Jerusalem, a city which we are told in this verse, had been built in part by Amalekites (actually Amlicites). Yet we do not encounter Nehor (the spiritual father of Amlici and the Amlicites) until the first year of the reign of judges (Alma 1), and we do not encounter Amlici and the Amlicites until the fifth year of the reign of judges (Alma 2). How could the Amlicites have helped build the city of Jerusalem to which Aaron traveled during the first year of the reign of judges, if the Amlicites did not begin as a group until the fifth year of the reign of judges? There seem to be two possible answers, both of which may well be applicable:

1. The record tells of many activities of the missionaries before Aaron reached Jerusalem and never says that he arrived there in the very first year (see Alma 17:6-18). Perhaps he arrived there several years after the beginning of his mission to the Land of Nephi. After all, only a very few incidents are recorded from a mission lasting fourteen years.

2. It seems likely that the problems with both Nehor and Amlici may have been ongoing for several years by the first year of the reign of judges. It seems unlikely that

Amlici could rise to prominence with almost half the population's support, undertake a lively national election, receive an illegitimate coronation, raise a large army, move major parts of the Nephite population, form alliances with the Lamanites, and manage three major battles all in one year (see Alma 2:2-3:25). Even modern dictators with advanced transportation and mass communications have not accomplished all that in a single year. It seems likely that the slow building up of a power base and the forging of foreign alliances may have been going on for years before.

I have received the following personal communication from Dr. John L. Sorenson regarding the modern-day geographic correlates between the city of Jerusalem and today's Lake Atitlan (the likely correlate of the "waters of Mormon"):

About 35 miles west of Guatemala City lies Lake Atitlan, at about 5100 feet elevation. Its position in relation to other Book of Mormon centers, its size, its scenic beauty, and associated traditions have led to a degree of consensus among serious students of the Book of Mormon that it can be identified as the "waters of Mormon" (Mosiah 8:4-8, 30; Alma 5:3; Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 1985, 176-77, 223-25).

In the last few years this correlation has been strengthened in the light of new information. Benitez and Samayoa (2000) first reported ruins of stone buildings at an underwater site they dubbed "Samabaj." The remains were some 17 meters beneath the surface near the south shore. Subsequently, further ruins in the same area of the lake, some at a deeper level, were found. With support from the [Leon] Reinhard Foundation, the Scripps Institute of Oceanography has now (spring, 2007) completed a high-resolution map of the entire lakebed using advanced technology. A series of submerged village ruins can be seen arranged around a major portion of the lake at multiple levels. Several pyramids and at least three stelae [stone pillars or monuments] have also been located.

The suggestion has been made that volcanic intrusions beneath the lake have at times forced the bed, and thus the water, to rise with catastrophic suddenness. Ceramics recovered by divers suggest that these ruins date in part to the Late Preclassic period (probably around the time of Christ—personal communications to Dr. Sorenson from J. E. Clark, L. Reinhart, and T. Rollins). The position of the ruins means of course that the lake level was once much lower than any level known in modern times, and that ecological circumstances in the Lake Atitlan basin were drastically different at that time.

A Book of Mormon correlation to this phenomenon is reported in Alma 21:1-2 and 3 Nephi 9:7. Around 90 BC a "great city" named Jerusalem was built by Lamanites and dissident Nephites not far from the city of Nephi. An aquatic feature adjacent to this Jerusalem was apparently part of the body of water called at a different point on its shore the "waters of Mormon" (Mosiah 18:30; Alma 21:1). Around AD 30, during the catastrophic destruction that took place among the Lehites at the time of the death of

Jesus Christ in Palestine, this city of Jerusalem was suddenly overwhelmed by “waters . . . [that came] up in the stead” of the city (3 Nephi 9:7). The geographical correlation that I follow (and have done for the past 35 years, long before any subsurface ruins had been discovered) places the Book of Mormon city of Jerusalem on the southwest shore of these “waters of Mormon,” within a few miles of “Samabaj.”

The agreement between the flooding of Book of Mormon Jerusalem and the rise of the waters of Lake Atitlan over the Lake Atitlan ruins is striking. There is no evidence of any comparable submergence phenomenon elsewhere in Mesoamerica. This correspondence is thus not simply a minor parallel between text and archaeology but actually is support for the overall geographical correlation that places the land of Nephi in highland southern Guatemala.

3 Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations.

verse 3 “the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder” These Nephite dissenters seem to be unable to contain their hatred for the believing Nephites and for the truth, both of which they had betrayed.

4 And it came to pass that Aaron came to the city of Jerusalem, and first began to preach to the Amalekites. And he began to preach to them in their synagogues, for they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors.

verse 4 “synagogues after the order of the Nehors” It is interesting that the Amalekites and Amulonites and the Lamanites among whom they lived had not rejected religion. They had their own religion, by means of which they promulgated their apostate doctrines.

5 Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people?

6 Thou also sayest, except we repent we shall perish. How knowest thou the thought and intent of our hearts? How knowest thou that we have cause to repent? How knowest thou that we are not a righteous people? Behold, we have built sanctuaries, and we do assemble ourselves together to worship God. We do believe that God will save all men.

verse 6 **“We do believe that God will save all men.”** This is the same philosophy that was taught by Satan in the pre-existence (Moses 4:1) and by the Nephite apostate Nehor (Alma 1:4). One might well wonder why they thought it was necessary to build synagogues and sanctuaries and assemble themselves to worship if all men would be saved without any effort. Why bother? Isn't it fascinating to observe that apostates tend to maintain the “form of godliness”?

Note the Amalekite's (Amlicite's) questions in verses 5 and 6. Is it not true even today that false religious groups maintain an ostensibly open-minded and ecumenical attitude. Yet, this same accommodating and considerate attitude is often not extended to the messengers of the true gospel.

7 Now Aaron said unto him: Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?

8 And the man said unto him: We do not believe that thou knowest any such thing. We do not believe in these foolish traditions. We do not believe that thou knowest of things to come, neither do we believe that thy fathers and also that our fathers did know concerning the things which they spake, of that which is to come.

verse 8 Those who do not possess the Spirit of God inevitably deny the reality of prophecy and revelation. Even many who professionally function as Bible scholars today do not acknowledge the possibility of biblical prophets' being able to accurately foretell events in the future. A related phenomenon is often seen wherein false religions insist on a closed canon and deny that ongoing revelation is a possibility.

9 Now Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and that there could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood.

10 And it came to pass as he began to expound these things unto them they were angry with him, and began to mock him; and they would not hear the words which he spake.

11 Therefore, when he saw that they would not hear his words, he departed out of their synagogue, and came over to a village which was called Ani-Anti, and there he found Muloki preaching the word unto them; and also Ammah and his brethren. And they contended with many about the word.

verse 11 **“there he found Muloki . . . and also Ammah and his brethren”** Other than the four sons of Mosiah (Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni), Muloki, and Ammah, the names of the others in the missionary company, if indeed there were any others, are not given in the text. As mentioned previously, we also are not given to

know exactly how many there were. This verse implies that Ammah might have had some type of special relationship or association with others of the group.

12 And it came to pass that they saw that the people would harden their hearts, therefore they departed and came over into the land of Middoni. And they did preach the word unto many, and few believed on the words which they taught.

13 Nevertheless, Aaron and a certain number of his brethren were taken and cast into prison, and the remainder of them fled out of the land of Middoni unto the regions round about.

14 And those who were cast into prison suffered many things, and they were delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon, and they were fed and clothed.

15 And they went forth again to declare the word, and thus they were delivered for the first time out of prison; and thus they had suffered.

16 And they went forth whithersoever they were led by the Spirit of the Lord, preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted.

17 And it came to pass that the Lord began to bless them, insomuch that they brought many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, they did convince many of their sins, and of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

verse 17 “the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct” See the commentary for Alma 20:13. Any Lamanite accepting the truth at that time would have to disavow these firmly held “traditions of their fathers.” It is therefore obvious that he ran the risk of rejection and persecution from both family and friends.

For the remainder of this chapter we will return to the account of Ammon. More about Aaron and his brethren later.

18 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni returned from the land of Middoni to the land of Ishmael, which was the land of their inheritance.

verse 18 Why would the land of Ishmael be referred to as “the land of their inheritance,” referring to both Ammon and Lamoni? See the commentary for Alma 17:19. We know that the land of Ishmael had been originally established by the sons of Ishmael, and doubtless Lamoni was a descendant of those sons of Ishmael. Ammon was a son of King Mosiah. Ammon’s great grandfather was Benjamin’s father, Mosiah (sometimes referred to as Mosiah I). This is the Mosiah who, as king over the Nephites in the land of Nephi, first led the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12). We might be inclined to assume that this elder Mosiah was a descendant of Nephi, though we don’t really have sufficient information about the early kings of the Nephites in the land of Nephi to make that conclusion. It seems unlikely that the senior Mosiah was a literal descendant of the sons of Ishmael. Thus,

we may conclude that the land of Ishmael was at least the literal land of Lamoni's inheritance and very possibly the literal land of Ammon's inheritance.

19 And king Lamoni would not suffer that Ammon should serve him, or be his servant.

verse 19 It is apparent that the Lamanite people in the land of Ishmael had come to respect Ammon even more than they did their own king, Lamoni (see Alma 18:13). It is instructive to observe Lamoni's reaction to this reverence given to his friend Ammon. Was he jealous? Did he seem to resent Ammon's popularity? After all, he could have demanded that Ammon become his servant. Compare the account of King Saul's jealousy when David became more beloved of the people than he (1 Samuel 18:14-16, 28-29). Here is a profound concept: Those who are truly converted to Christ and his gospel are disinclined to feel envy and jealousy for others of God's children. They are not threatened by another's talents and abilities. They are only interested in seeing the kingdom go forth and benefit by the talents and gifts of all who are willing to consecrate their strengths and abilities. They are also interested in the spiritual and temporal welfare of each of the other members of the kingdom to the exclusion of their own welfare. They strive to live the two "greatest commandments"—to love their God and their fellow men. They lose their desire for worldly recognition and reward. As they do so, they are often viewed as being "more than a man" (Alma 18:2) to those whom they love and serve.

20 But he caused that there should be synagogues built in the land of Ishmael; and he caused that his people, or the people who were under his reign, should assemble themselves together.

21 And he did rejoice over them, and he did teach them many things. And he did also declare unto them that they were a people who were under him, and that they were a free people, that they were free from the oppressions of the king, his father; for that his father had granted unto him that he might reign over the people who were in the land of Ishmael, and in all the land round about.

verse 21 "they were free from the oppressions of the king, his father" Prior to the encounter on the road to Middoni, apparently Lamoni ruled his people in the land of Ishmael under governance his father. As a result of Ammon's sparing the life of the king, Lamoni was given sovereign authority over his people by his father (see Alma 20:26).

22 And he also declared unto them that they might have the liberty of worshiping the Lord their God according to their desires, in whatsoever place they were in, if it were in the land which was under the reign of king Lamoni.

verse 22 Obviously Lamoni allowed complete freedom of religious expression to all under his direct rule.

23 And Ammon did preach unto the people of king Lamoni; and it came to pass that he did teach them all things concerning things pertaining to righteousness. And he did exhort them daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God.

Alma Chapter 22

Scripture Mastery

Alma 22 Aaron and the conversion of the father of Lamoni who was king over all the land

1 Now, as Ammon was thus teaching the people of Lamoni continually, we will return to the account of Aaron and his brethren; for after he departed from the land of Middoni he was led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi, even to the house of the king which was over all the land save it were the land of Ishmael; and he was the father of Lamoni.

2 And it came to pass that he went in unto him into the king's palace, with his brethren, and bowed himself before the king, and said unto him: Behold, O king, we are the brethren of Ammon, whom thou hast delivered out of prison.

verse 2 The phrase "whom thou hast delivered out of prison" modifies, of course, "we . . . the brethren" and not *Ammon*.

3 And now, O king, if thou wilt spare our lives, we will be thy servants. And the king said unto them: Arise, for I will grant unto you your lives, and I will not suffer that ye shall be my servants; but I will insist that ye shall administer unto me; for I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon; and I desire to know the cause why he has not come up out of Middoni with thee.

verse 3 "we will be thy servants" This willingness to serve is an earmark of the followers of Jesus Christ. See the commentary for Alma 17:25.

"I will not suffer that ye shall be my servants; but I will insist that ye shall administer unto me" Obviously the heart of Lamoni's father had been softened and prepared since his initial encounter with Ammon and his son Lamoni. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* defines the word *administer* as "to contribute; to bring aid or supplies; to add something; as, a shade administers to our comfort." To administer, in this context, would also include *to teach*.

"I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon" Obviously the king is still wondering and marveling over the incident on the road to Middoni when Ammon gained a clear advantage over him and could easily have killed him, yet he only asked for favors for Lamoni, the king's son, and for Ammon's brethren (Alma 20:20-24). He asked for nothing for himself, though clearly he was in a position to do so.

4 And Aaron said unto the king: Behold, the Spirit of the Lord has called him another way; he has gone to the land of Ishmael, to teach the people of Lamoni.

5 Now the king said unto them: What is this that ye have said concerning the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, this is the thing which doth trouble me.

verse 5 “this is the thing which doth trouble me” It seems likely that when Ammon and Lamoni encountered the old king on the road to the land of Middoni, that Lamoni’s account or his own conversion included reference to the Spirit of God (Alma 20:12), a concept with which the king was completely unfamiliar. This had troubled him, or caused him to wonder and seek for more knowledge, as the Spirit is often inclined to do to any spiritually responsive person.

6 And also, what is this that Ammon said—If ye will repent ye shall be saved, and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day?

verse 6 We do have record of Ammon’s making reference to the concept of salvation and damnation when Ammon and Lamoni encountered the king on the road to Middoni (Alma 20:17-18). We also have record of Ammon’s warning the king he should not kill his son Lamoni lest he lose his soul. We do not, however have record of Ammon’s specific warning to the king that if he did not repent he would be cast off. Obviously, though, the record we do have is an edited version of all that happened.

The “last day” is a term for the formal day of judgment.

The reader may wish to notice the example of antithetic parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

If ye repent ye shall be saved,
and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day

7 And Aaron answered him and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? And the king said: I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe.

verse 7 It should not be surprising to learn that the Amalekites, in a pattern characteristic of apostate religion, continued to worship God in their own way. They maintained the “form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (JS-H 1:19).

While the king here implies that he has not previously believed in God, we will learn that he does in fact believe in a “Great Spirit” according to Lamanite tradition (verse 9-11).

8 And now when Aaron heard this, his heart began to rejoice, and he said: Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God.

verse 8 In this setting Aaron's testimony was undoubtedly most poignant and powerful.

9 And the king said: Is God that Great Spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem?

10 And Aaron said unto him: Yea, he is that Great Spirit, and he created all things both in heaven and in earth. Believest thou this?

verse 10 Again, we may ask whether or not Aaron is misleading the king by agreeing that God is that "Great Spirit." At the time of this episode, Jesus Christ or Jehovah had not yet been resurrected and was, in fact, "a Great Spirit."

11 And he said: Yea, I believe that the Great Spirit created all things, and I desire that ye should tell me concerning all these things, and I will believe thy words.

12 And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.

verse 12 "he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king" Again, we are reminded that Ammon and his fellow missionaries carried with them copies of those scriptures found on the brass plates of Laban.

13 And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.

verse 13 "laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state" A careful study of the Book of Mormon text, infrequently reveals a grammatical inconsistency. If the word "man" in the first sentence of this verse is used in its singular sense, then the phrase ought to read "laying the fall of man before him, and *his* carnal state. If a plural meaning was intended, then this verse is correct, but the next verse should begin: "And since man had fallen *they* could not merit anything of themselves."

14 And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.

verses 12-14 Aaron used the same "missionary discussions or lessons" in teaching the king that his brother Ammon had used with the king's son Lamoni. That is

he explained the creation of the earth, the fall of Adam, and the atonement of Jesus Christ (see Alma 18:36-39).

verse 14 Here in one verse is an eloquent explanation of the doctrines of the fall and the atonement. Keep in mind the dual meaning of the fall of man. It refers to the fall of Adam and the fall of each individual man. Here in this verse, the latter meaning is intended. Every man save one, who has lived on the earth, has sinned. Every man has violated the law of justice and is therefore unqualified, on his own merits, to return to God's presence. He may repent, but without help his repentance cannot fully satisfy the demands of the law. He is inextricably bound by the "bands of death." He is in a hopeless state. However help is available. Through the atoning process, Christ was enabled to "make up the difference" between what the law demands and what man can do for himself. Our "works" are insufficient. Only through the grace of Christ—his willingness to bail us out when we are not fully deserving of his help—are we exalted. What must we do to qualify? We must believe on his name, repent constantly of our sins, join his church, accept his doctrine, and strive to live the commandments that are a vital part of his doctrine. Then we must endure to the end.

"the grave shall have no victory" This terminology—that of Christ's having "victory" over the grave—likely originated with the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 25:8). If the grave were victorious, then man would never be resurrected, but would remain a spirit forever.

15 And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.

verse 15 In this verse the king asks a vital question then answers it himself! The question: "What shall I do that I may be born of God?" The answer: Forsake all things of the world and concentrate instead on matters of the eternities.

"having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast" To *root out* is to eradicate; to extirpate; to remove; to exterminate.

"I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom" Do you recall the important concept or doctrine known as the "doctrine of Christ"? Take a few minutes and review this concept in the introductory comments for 2 Nephi 31. One of the important principles of this doctrine is desiring "with full purpose of heart . . . with real intent" to live in the celestial kingdom. See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 31:13. What a powerful lesson we can learn from the story of the conversion of Lamoni's father! Previously the king had been willing to give up half of his kingdom to Ammon to save his physical life (Alma 20:23). Now that he understands the concept of eternal life,

he is willing to give up *all* his kingdom and *all* his possessions to obtain it. We will later learn that he was also willing to give away all his sins (verse 18). How often are our commitments to spiritual things cautious, tentative, measured, half-hearted, and wavering. Consequently the blessings received by these half-committed individuals are only a shadow of what they might have been. Contrast this experience of Aaron's with the Savior's experience when he was approached by the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30).

16 But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and wilt bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

verse 16 Here Aaron outlines the steps that the king must take in order to obtain a testimony of God and a testimony of the gospel.

There is a touch of irony in Aaron's counsel to the king. Undoubtedly the king has been bowed down to on numerous occasions but has never had to bow down to anyone.

"call upon his name in faith" This is a most specific command, and there is nothing vague about it. It means both to pray to him with the determined attitude to obey him.

"then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest" The hope of eternal life is a gift of the Spirit. It may be granted only by the Spirit through personal revelation, and it is given only to those who are deserving of it.

17 And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

18 O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

verse 18 Here is an example of a sincere prayer offered by an agnostic. He is praying to someone of whose existence he is not certain. He manifests the essential motivation which all who would be exalted must attain. They must want to be exalted so badly that they are willing to forsake all their sins to achieve it. To "give away all [one's] sins" is to take upon oneself a "broken heart and contrite spirit." For a discussion of this important concept, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 9:20.

"he was struck as if he were dead" For a discussion of this peculiar spiritual trance, see the commentaries for Alma 19:8 and Alma 19:34.

19 And it came to pass that his servants ran and told the queen all that had happened unto the king. And she came in unto the king; and when she saw him lay as if he were dead, and also Aaron and his brethren standing as though they had been the cause of his fall, she was angry with them, and commanded that her servants, or the servants of the king, should take them and slay them.

20 Now the servants had seen the cause of the king's fall, therefore they durst not lay their hands on Aaron and his brethren; and they pled with the queen saying: Why commandest thou that we should slay these men, when behold one of them is mightier than us all? Therefore we shall fall before them.

21 Now when the queen saw the fear of the servants she also began to fear exceedingly, lest there should some evil come upon her. And she commanded her servants that they should go and call the people, that they might slay Aaron and his brethren.

22 Now when Aaron saw the determination of the queen, he, also knowing the hardness of the hearts of the people, feared lest that a multitude should assemble themselves together, and there should be a great contention and a disturbance among them; therefore he put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth, and said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength.

verse 22 Again, this episode is symbolic of the death of the natural man and spiritual rebirth. The Spirit of God was the agent through which these things were accomplished.

23 Now this was done in the presence of the queen and many of the servants. And when they saw it they greatly marveled, and began to fear. And the king stood forth, and began to minister unto them. And he did minister unto them, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord.

24 Now there was a multitude gathered together because of the commandment of the queen, and there began to be great murmurings among them because of Aaron and his brethren.

verse 24 "Murmurings" are threats and complaints.

25 But the king stood forth among them and administered unto them. And they were pacified towards Aaron and those who were with him.

26 And it came to pass that when the king saw that the people were pacified, he caused that Aaron and his brethren should stand forth in the midst of the multitude, and that they should preach the word unto them.

verses 27-35 In these verses the prophet Mormon gives an overview of the geography of the lands of the Book of Mormon. While it is not possible to be certain of

the exact location of the lands in absolute terms, it is instructive to learn of their relative locations. To assist in this, we have created the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*. See also the *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

27 And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land, who were in all the regions round about, which was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west, and which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west, and round about on the borders of the seashore, and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west—and thus were the Lamanites and the Nephites divided.

verse 27 The phrase “running from the east towards the west” refers to the narrow strip of wilderness and not to the river Sidon. This wilderness is usually referred to in the Book of Mormon text as “the wilderness.” This is the only time it is referred to as the “narrow strip of wilderness.” In what way was this dividing line “narrow”? Presumably it is narrow as one might view it on a map. The narrow strip of wilderness is described as running not only from “the sea east even to the sea west,” but also “round about on the borders of the seashore.” This apparently implies that rather than being simply a narrow band of wilderness, this area fans out on the seashores as illustrated on the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

Considerable effort has been expended in trying to correlate the lands of the Book of Mormon with the geography of the Americas and therefore attempt to locate a specific site that is most compatible with the lands of the Book of Mormon. At the time of this writing, the most widely accepted work is that of John Sorenson and his “limited geography” theory (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990]).

One objection to brother Sorenson’s work stems from the fact that the specific land he designates as Book of Mormon land is situated along a northwest/southeast axis rather than north/south as described in the Book of Mormon. Dr. Sorenson’s explanation of this “problem” may be capsulized as follows (please refer to the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*): Specific compass directions are obviously a problem as we deal with Dr. Sorenson’s proposed Central American site for the Book of Mormon. For example as one proceeds from the area of Zarahemla through the narrow neck of land, one actually travels mostly to the west and northwest whereas the Book of Mormon text refers to that direction as “northward.” The solution is probably found in the Hebrew convention of naming directions. The Israelites of Palestine derived directions as though standing with their backs to the Mediterranean Sea, facing the desert to the east. “Yam” (“sea”) meant “seaward” or “west,” for the

Mediterranean lay in that direction, while “qedem” (“fore” or “front”) meant “straight ahead” or “east.” Then “Yamin” (“right hand”) meant “south,” while “shemol” (“left hand”) denoted “north.” In fact we don’t know what Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi did call their directions since the first terms for directions appear only hundreds of years after their first landing (Mosiah 7:5; 9:14). By the same convention as used in ancient Palestine, Lehi’s party may have referred to directions based on the seashore which runs northwest-to-southeast. Thus by that convention, their directions would be forty-five or more degrees off the actual compass directions. What would they call “qedem,” intending eastward, would actually mean northeast or even almost north and so on. It is interesting that in the Mayan languages of Mesoamerica, “south” meant “on the right hand” and north “on the left,” corresponding to the Hebrew convention. Also in the ancient Mayan culture, the Gulf of Mexico was the “east sea” while the Pacific Ocean is the “west sea.”

Other interesting observations have recently been reported. If nothing else, these illustrate the relativism of directions in the ancient Near East. For example, The Egyptians oriented themselves by facing south, toward the source of the Nile. Not only were the Book of Mormon plates written according to the “learning of the Jews” but also in the “language of the Egyptians.” Thus, one of the terms for “south” (in Egyptian) is the term for “face,” and the word for “north” is probably related to a word which means “back of the head.” The word for east is the same as for left, and west is the same word as right (William J. Hamblin, “Directions in Hebrew, Egyptian, and Nephite Language,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 183-85).

28 Now, the more idle part of the Lamanites lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents; and they were spread through the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers’ first inheritance, and thus bordering along by the seashore.

verse 28 “the place of their fathers’ first inheritance” This refers to the place of disembarkation and the original settlement of father Lehi’s family in about 589 BC.

Brother Hugh Nibley has added to our knowledge of the concept of a land of inheritance:

Eduard Meyer says that all [Israel’s] power and authority went back originally to the first land-allotments made among the leaders of the migratory host [tribes of Israel led in the wilderness by Moses and later Joshua] when they settled down in their land of promise. Regardless of wealth of influence or ability, no one could belong to the old aristocracy who did not still possess “the land of his inheritance.” This institution—or attitude—plays a remarkably conspicuous role in the Book of Mormon. Not only does Lehi leave “the land of his inheritance” (1 Nephi 2:4) but whenever his people wish to establish a new society they first of all make sure to allot and define the lands of their

inheritance, which first allotment is regarded as inalienable. No matter where a group or family move to in later times, the first land allotted to them is always regarded as “the land of their inheritance,” thus Alma 22:28; 54:12-13; Ether 7:16—in these cases the expression “land of first inheritance” is used (Mormon 2:27-28; 1 Nephi 13:15; Alma 35:9, 14; 43:12; Jacob 3:4; Alma 62:42; Mormon 3:17). This is a powerful argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon both because the existence of such a system is largely the discovery of modern research and because it is set forth in the Book of Mormon very distinctly and yet quite casually (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 100).

29 And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them. And thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites; nevertheless the Nephites had taken possession of all the northern parts of the land bordering on the wilderness, at the head of the river Sidon, from the east to the west, round about on the wilderness side; on the north, even until they came to the land which they called Bountiful.

verse 29 *Whither* means “to what place?” Whithersoever has the same meaning.

“thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites” Because there were wilderness areas inhabited by Lamanites both to the east and west of Zarahemla, the Nephites were indeed nearly surrounded by Lamanites. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

30 And it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla, it being the place of their first landing.

verse 30 **“it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation”** It, here, refers to the land Bountiful.

“Desolation” This land was so named not because it was geologically desolate, but because it had become uninhabited as a result of the great Jaredite civil war.

“it being the place of their first landing” Here we learn that the land of Desolation, probably along its eastern coast, was the disembarkation site of the people of Zarahemla or the Mulekites (see also Helaman 6:10). Apparently they did not settle in the north but traveled southward where they were eventually found by the Nephites (Omni 1:14).

31 And they came from there up into the south wilderness. Thus the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come from the land northward for food.

32 And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward.

verse 32 “it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea” The “narrow neck of land” is an important geographical feature of the Book of Mormon. There has been considerable speculation as to exactly how wide the land is at its narrow neck. Was it in fact sufficiently narrow that a Nephite, by walking or running, could cross it, from the sea on the east to the sea on the west, in thirty-six hours? There is some ambiguity in this phrase from verse 32. What, for example, exactly is “the line Bountiful and the land Desolation.” We might assume that it is the border between the land Bountiful in the south and Desolation in the north. Also, between exactly which two points is our hypothetical Nephite required to travel during this day and a half? The phrase does not say “from the east sea to the west sea.” Rather, it says “from the east to the west sea.” Let us consider a few facts that might be stirred into the speculation equation here.

1. First, one episode in the Book of Mormon story suggests that one might cross through the narrow neck and never realize that you are in, in fact, a narrow neck of land. At one point, when Limhi and his people were languishing in bondage in the land of Nephi, Limhi dispatched a group of men to find Zarahemla. In attempting to do so, they passed through the narrow neck without realizing they had done so. They assumed they were still on the route between the land of Nephi and Zarahemla (Mosiah 21:25-28). This suggests that the narrow neck was sufficiently wide that it was not immediately visually obvious how narrow it was.

2. Second, it is apparent that a well-conditioned human can travel considerable distances on foot in thirty-six hours. Dr. John Sorenson has reported instances of men traveling up to five hundred miles in six days, and even up to 161 miles in twenty-four hours! (“A Day and a Half's Journey for a Nephite,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 187-88).

3. Finally, keep in mind that the distance across the narrow neck might be wider than the “day and a half's” distance, since we cannot be certain that the starting point on the east was at the sea. The journey might have begun some distance inland. See also the commentary for Helaman 4:7.

33 And it came to pass that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from the east unto the west sea, and thus the Nephites in their wisdom, with their guards and their armies, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, that thereby

they should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward.

verse 33 “from the east unto the west sea” Here again is that same expression as expressed in the previous verse. Apparently the borders of the land Bountiful extend “from the east unto the west sea.” This suggests that the eastern border of Bountiful was inland from the east sea coast. Also, could it have been this distance (from Bountiful’s eastern border to the west sea) that was a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite?

34 Therefore the Lamanites could have no more possessions only in the land of Nephi, and the wilderness round about. Now this was wisdom in the Nephites— as the Lamanites were an enemy to them, they would not suffer their afflictions on every hand, and also that they might have a country whither they might flee, according to their desires.

verses 33-34 Obviously the Nephites did not want to be completely surrounded by their enemies for military and political reasons. Thus the Nephite land Bountiful was fortified and did extend to cover all possible routes from the south (land of Zarahemla) to north (land of Desolation).

35 And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren.

verse 35 We are reminded that the author or first person in these chapters is the prophet Mormon.

Alma Chapter 23

verse 1-3 The story of the king's conversion illustrates what great things can happen when the truth is first accepted by a nation's ruler. It is, of course, usually the poor and humble of the earth who embrace the gospel first.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation among all his people, that they should not lay their hands on Ammon, or Aaron, or Omner, or Himni, nor either of their brethren who should go forth preaching the word of God, in whatsoever place they should be, in any part of their land.

verse 1 “nor either of their brethren” This verse implies that only two missionaries accompanied the four sons of Mosiah on their mission. We learned previously that “a small number” accompanied them (Mosiah 28:1). If there were only two, then they were Muloki and Ammah (Alma 20:2).

The possessive pronoun in “their land” refers, of course, to “all his [the king's] people” and not the missionaries. The several pronouns in the next verse are easily sorted out.

2 Yea, he sent a decree among them, that they should not lay their hands on them to bind them, or to cast them into prison; neither should they spit upon them, nor smite them, nor cast them out of their synagogues, nor scourge them; neither should they cast stones at them, but that they should have free access to their houses, and also their temples, and their sanctuaries.

3 And thus they might go forth and preach the word according to their desires, for the king had been converted unto the Lord, and all his household; therefore he sent his proclamation throughout the land unto his people, that the word of God might have no obstruction, but that it might go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers, and that they might be convinced that they were all brethren, and that they ought not to murder, nor to plunder, nor to steal, nor to commit adultery, nor to commit any manner of wickedness.

verse 3 “the wicked traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

4 And now it came to pass that when the king had sent forth this proclamation, that Aaron and his brethren went forth from city to city, and from one house of worship to another, establishing churches, and consecrating priests and teachers throughout the land among the Lamanites, to preach and to teach the word of God among them; and thus they began to have great success.

verse 4 The missionaries went about “establishing churches, and consecrating priests and teachers.” In other words, they were establishing and organizing new congregations of believers.

5 And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, yea, thousands were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites; and they were taught the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time.

verse 5 The “traditions of the Nephites” are reviewed in the commentary for Enos 1:14. Briefly they included the belief that father Lehi was brought out of Jerusalem, led through the wilderness, and brought to a choice and promised land—all by the hand of God. This land could be possessed only by those who keep the “commandments of God” which included the law of Moses (Alma 9:8- 14). The Nephite “traditions” included the concept that the birthright was rightly bestowed by Lehi upon Nephi rather than upon his eldest son, Laman. Also contained in these traditions was a belief in the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ including a belief in his future mortal advent, atonement, and resurrection (Mosiah 25:12).

“the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time” Keep in mind that Mormon is the author here. The “present time” refers to *his* day. These “records and prophecies” included not only the brass plates of Laban but also the teachings and prophecies of the great Book of Mormon prophets Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, and Benjamin. Whether or not they carried with them the prophecies of these Book of Mormon prophets in written form is not known. Certainly all of these scriptures were taught and well known among the believing Book of Mormon peoples.

6 And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

verse 6 The essential meaning of this verse is: “As sure as the Lord liveth . . . the converted Lamanites never did fall away.” The construction of this verse is interesting. It contains much parenthetical material between the phrases “as sure as the Lord liveth” and “many of the Lamanites . . . were converted unto the Lord [and] never did fall away.”

In a real sense every conversion to the gospel is a “miracle”—that is, a phenomenon manifesting evidence of divine intervention. Each conversion involves direct personal revelation from God through the Spirit of God.

7 For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren.

8 Now, these are they who were converted unto the Lord:

9 The people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Ishmael;

10 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Middoni;

11 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the city of Nephi;

12 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Shilom, and who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the city of Lemuel, and in the city of Shimnilom.

13 And these are the names of the cities of the Lamanites which were converted unto the Lord; and these are they that laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war; and they were all Lamanites.

verses 8-13 We learn that the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (see below in verse 17) hailed from seven different Lamanite lands or cities (Ishmael, Middoni, city of Nephi, Shilom, Shemlon, city of Lemuel, and city of Shimnilom).

14 And the Amalekites were not converted, save only one; neither were any of the Amulonites; but they did harden their hearts, and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land wheresoever they dwelt, yea, and all their villages and all their cities.

verse 14 We have previously discussed the fact that the “Amalekites” were really the Amlicites, Nephite dissenters discussed in Alma 2-3 (see the commentary on Alma 21:2). The Amulonites were descendants of the priests of Noah. Won't it be interesting to one day learn the identity and story of the one Amalekite (Amlicite) who was converted?

15 Therefore, we have named all the cities of the Lamanites in which they did repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, and were converted.

16 And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished.

verse 16 The king consulted with Aaron and with several of the newly-converted and ordained Lamanite priests.

17 And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites.

verse 17 “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” The precise meaning of this name is not known. Intuitively we might interpret this name as meaning “against Nephi and Lehi.” Other meanings are, however, are possible and more likely:

1. The 1828 edition of the Webster’s Dictionary gives the meaning of *anti* as “like” or “mirror image of.” Hence, the name may mean something more like “with or like Nephi and Lehi.” This meaning of this name becomes ever more meaningful if you will take a moment to review the commentary for both Jacob 3:3-9 and Mosiah 28:2. These Lamanite converts sought to emulate or become like Nephi and Lehi.

2. Others have suggested that this group of convert Lamanites chose a name that would identify them as descendants of Lehi but not descendants of Nephi—hence, Anti-Nephi-Lehies. In other words, they were “Lehies” by not through Nephi.

3. The word “Anti” of “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” may be a reflex of the Egyptian *nty*—“he of, the one of.” Thus, rather than having the sense “against,” it has the meaning “the one of Nephi and Lehi.”

This same group will later become known as “Ammonites” or the “people of Ammon” after the leader of the missionaries who had converted them. We will learn, as is suggested in verse 6, that this group remained faithful to the end and never did fall away (Alma 27:27).

18 And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them.

verse 18 “the curse of God did no more follow them” These converted Lamanites had the gospel and the priesthood, and they were no longer cut off from the presence of God. It might be presumed that over time the mark of the curse, the dark skin, would also be removed—a change that might be expected to take a few generations.

As we learn more of these Lamanites, we will learn that it is not necessary to wait until the millennium for a righteous people to form and enjoy the association of a peaceful, unified, and blessed society—indeed, a Zion society.

Alma Chapter 24

Scripture Mastery

Alma 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons and covenant not to make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain.

1 And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who were in the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and who were in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about, who had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren.

verse 1 There is an unmistakable and inevitable tendency for the wicked to resent and hate the righteous and to contend against them. It is also perhaps somewhat ironic that the “Amalekites [Amlicites] and the Amulonites” were not, by heredity actually Lamanites. Rather they were both from the line of Nephite dissenters.

2 And their hatred became exceedingly sore against them, even insomuch that they began to rebel against their king, insomuch that they would not that he should be their king; therefore, they took up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

3 Now the king conferred the kingdom upon his son, and he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

verse 3 Here is compelling evidence that the “diplomatic” part of the mission of the sons of Mosiah spoken of in the commentary for Mosiah 28:2 has been successful with the Lamanite king. He has overcome in his own life the traditions of his fathers. He is even giving his son, who is heir to his throne, a name which likely means “with Nephi and Lehi” (see commentary for Alma 23:17). The spiritual or gospel aspect of their mission was obviously successful with the Lamanite king as well.

4 And the king died in that selfsame year that the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God.

verse 4 “the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God” It is evident that the “Lamanites” consisted of both Nephite dissenters (Amlicites and Amulonites) and some hereditary Lamanites with the former goading the latter to hatred against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

5 Now when Ammon and his brethren and all those who had come up with him saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren, they came forth to the land of Midian, and there Ammon met all his brethren; and from thence

they came to the land of Ishmael that they might hold a council with Lamoni and also with his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi, what they should do to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

6 Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren; nay, they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not.

verse 6 Here is evidence of the complete conversion of these people. Knowing that it might well cost them their mortal lives, they held firmly to their eternal convictions which included a love for their Lamanite brethren and a complete faith in the Lord's promises.

“also their king commanded them that they should not” This king is their new king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the brother of king Lamoni.

7 Now, these are the words which he said unto the people concerning the matter: I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers.

verse 7 **“these are the words which he said unto the people”** These are the words of the king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

“the traditions of our wicked fathers” See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

8 And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites.

verse 8 Here, again, is that expression unique to the Book of Mormon, “a portion of his Spirit.” It means simply the influence of the Holy Ghost.

9 And behold, I also thank my God, that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins, and of the many murders which we have committed.

10 And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.

verse 10 **“he hath forgiven us of those . . . murders which we have committed”** We have discussed the question of whether or not a person can be forgiven for committing murder (see the commentary for Alma 20:17). The willful and premeditated taking of another human life has been referred to in the scriptures as the “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). A person guilty of this type of murder may repent but he can never receive a kingdom higher than the telestial kingdom—he cannot be exalted.

We therefore have good reason to believe that these new converts had been guilty of a lesser sin—such as slaying innocent people in unrighteous wars (see *Three Most Abominable Sins*, in volume 3, chapter 18, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. The remorse they felt, however, was so strong that they felt that complete repentance required a special offering to the Lord, “a testimony to God” (verse 8). Thus, they vowed to never again take up arms in combat.

We will learn that after these people travel with Ammon and the sons of Mosiah to Zarahemla, they will be granted an extraordinary exemption from active military duty on condition they would help to sustain the Nephite armies with provisions (see Alma 27:23-24). This is somewhat surprising since generally ancient peoples were absolutely obligated to take up arms in defense of their tribe or nations (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11; 15:4). However, we will learn that the exemption granted to the people of Ammon is consistent with ancient Israelite law which placed a high civic obligation on all citizens to contribute, as appropriate, to the defense of their country, their God, their religion, and their people. The laws of Deuteronomy afforded humanitarian exemptions for people under variable circumstances. One of the circumstances that would excuse a man from being a soldier in war was if he was “fearful and fainthearted because of the transgressions he had committed” (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah VIII, 3, 4a). Even though the Talmud was written long after Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem, it often reflected older oral material, especially from Deuteronomy. Certainly the Nephites would have recognized that the profound fears of the Ammonites who were afraid to break their oath rendered them unsuitable for military duty under such a rule. Consistent with ancient Israelite law, their exemption was granted only “on condition that they will give us [the Nephites] a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies” (Alma 27:24).

11 And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain—

12 Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren.

13 Behold, I say unto you, Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren; for perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.

verse 13 Notice that the believers in that day were fully conversant with the concept of the atonement and they begged for forgiveness through Christ’s atoning

blood. And through his precious blood, their sins were forgiven them, though that blood would not be shed for a century or so.

14 And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations.

verse 14 “he has made these things known unto us beforehand” “Beforehand” refers to before Christ’s mortal ministry (see Alma 39:17-19).

“by his angels” It seems likely here that the king is referring to Ammon and his brethren as “angels.”

“plan of salvation” For a discussion of this interesting term see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6.

15 Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby.

verse 15 “he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby” It is clear that these Anti-Nephi-Lehies have come to an understanding that the Lord is willing to completely forgive them for their prior transgressions even though many of them had taken the lives of their brethren.

16 And now, my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords, yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright, as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day; and if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved.

17 And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth.

18 And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands.

verse 18 *Vouching* is bearing witness; giving testimony or full attestation.

We learn that the covenant the Anti-Nephi-Lehies made with God included more than just their commitment never to take up their weapons in battle. They also committed themselves to “give unto” their brothers rather than “take away” from them; and to “labor abundantly with their hands” rather than “spend their days in idleness.”

19 And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace.

verse 19 “**thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace**” One wonders if this is not an example of a “typo” made by the prophet Mormon. It obviously was not possible to erase a mistake from the gold plates. Rather than cross out the error, he simply corrected himself and went on (see Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 210).

It is instructive to note that the Book of Mormon writers speak positively of the steadfastly-maintained covenants of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies not to bear arms, yet it also teaches that military action taken in self defense is justifiable. The prophet Mormon will yet have something to say on this issue: “Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you” (Mormon 7:4).

20 And it came to pass that their brethren, the Lamanites, made preparations for war, and came up to the land of Nephi for the purpose of destroying the king, and to place another in his stead, and also of destroying the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi out of the land.

21 Now when the people saw that they were coming against them they went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in this attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them, and began to slay them with the sword.

22 And thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God.

23 Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right hand or to the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—

24 Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren

who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the things which they had done.

25 And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.

verse 25 This verse refers to the attacking Lamanites and not to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

“they came down even as their brethren” These attacking Lamanites were so disgusted at having slain many of their defenseless brethren, that they also discarded their weapons and prostrated themselves before the remainder of the force of invading Lamanites.

26 And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.

verse 26 The selfless actions of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies resulted in the conversion of many of the invading Lamanites—more than 1,005, the number of Anti-Nephi-Lehies who had been slain. This incident is a dramatic example of the compelling motivating power of “righteous suffering” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 26:24).

27 And there was not a wicked man slain among them; but there were more than a thousand brought to the knowledge of the truth; thus we see that the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people.

28 Now the greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.

verse 28 Here it is confirmed that the real spirit of this attack was provoked by the Amlicites and Amulonites who were dissenting Nephites and not Lamanites by birth.

29 Now, among those who joined the people of the Lord, there were none who were Amalekites or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel.

verse 29 The new converts among the invading force of Lamanites were true Lamanites by birth, that is, descendants of Laman and Lemuel or perhaps the sons of Ishmael. They were not the apostate dissenter Nephites. The latter were actually descendants of Nephi or Jacob or Joseph or Sam or Zoram.

30 And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things.

verse 30 This verse is a comment by the prophet Mormon. In early church history, a member once vowed that he would never do the church any harm if he were to leave it. Joseph counseled him: “You don’t know what you would do. . . . Before you joined the church you stood on neutral ground. When the gospel was preached, good and evil were set before you. You could choose either or neither. There were two opposite masters inviting you to serve them. When you joined this church you enlisted to serve God. When you did that you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it. Should you forsake the Master you enlisted to serve, it will be by the instigation of the evil one, and you will follow his dictation and be his servant” (*Juvenile Instructor* 27:492). When Ammon and his brethren taught the gospel to the Lamanites, those Lamanites had the advantage of being on neutral ground. They had the ability to be objective about the gospel message. They could choose to accept or reject it. The dissenting Nephites, the Amalekites and Ammulonites, had no such advantage. They were disinclined to admit their own mistakes when their fellow Nephites taught them the poignant and discerning truths of the gospel.

An individual can never remain stagnant in his relationship to God once he has received a witness of the Spirit. At any subsequent moment he must either be progressing toward light and eternal life or sinking into darkness toward spiritual death. President Harold B. Lee taught: “A testimony isn’t something you have today, and you are going to have always. A testimony is fragile. It is as hard to hold as a moonbeam. It is something you have to recapture every day of your life” (*Church News* [15 July 1972] 4).

Alma Chapter 25

1 And behold, now it came to pass that those Lamanites were more angry because they had slain their brethren; therefore they swore vengeance upon the Nephites; and they did no more attempt to slay the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi at that time.

verse 1 The attacking Lamanites had done something they knew in their hearts was wrong. Rather than admit their guilt, however, they sought to justify themselves by blaming the Nephites who had converted the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

2 But they took their armies and went over into the borders of the land of Zarahemla, and fell upon the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, and destroyed them.

verse 2 The land of Ammonihah seems to have been in the northwest of the land of Zarahemla (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). Dr John L. Sorenson has suggested that the Lamanites seemed to have chosen to make a “flank” attack. They avoided coming straight north into the land of Zarahemla but traveled instead along the western coastal plain. They entered Zarahemla through the mountain pass connecting the coastal plain with the land of Zarahemla. Along this route, the first Nephite city they would have first encountered was Ammonihah (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 241). As you know this proved to be most unfortunate for the people of Ammonihah (see Alma 16:1-11).

This destruction of the wicked of Ammonihah is an example of a prophecy that will be written by the prophet Mormon: “It is by the wicked that the wicked are punished” (Mormon 4:5).

3 And after that, they had many battles with the Nephites, in the which they were driven and slain.

verse 3 Mormon’s account here of “many battles” (see also Alma 27:1) does not completely square with the account in Alma 16:6-9 wherein the Lamanites were defeated in one decisive battle. This discrepancy is probably the result of Mormon’s trying to edit the account of two complex interacting stories.

4 And among the Lamanites who were slain were almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, who were the priests of Noah, and they were slain by the hands of the Nephites;

5 And the remainder, having fled into the east wilderness, and having usurped the power and authority over the Lamanites, caused that many of the Lamanites should perish by fire because of their belief–

verse 5 “And the remainder” These were the descendants of Amulon and his brethren who escaped death at the hands of the Nephites. They “caused that many of the Lamanites [who had been part of the attacking party] should perish by fire because of their belief.” After their defeat by the Nephite army, many of the invading Lamanites, because of their own afflictions, were “stirred up in remembrance” of the preachings of Ammon and Aaron and their brethren. They became convinced that the power of God was with the Nephites, and they were persuaded to believe that the sons of Mosiah had been teaching the truth after all (see the following verse). The Amulonites, however, remained steadfast in their wickedness. They held positions of leadership over the Lamanites and exercised their authority in a tyrannical manner, even executing many of the Lamanites because of their beliefs in Christ.

6 For many of them, after having suffered much loss and so many afflictions, began to be stirred up in remembrance of the words which Aaron and his brethren had preached to them in their land; therefore they began to disbelieve the traditions of their fathers, and to believe in the Lord, and that he gave great power unto the Nephites; and thus there were many of them converted in the wilderness.

7 And it came to pass that those rulers who were the remnant of the children of Amulon caused that they should be put to death, yea, all those that believed in these things.

verses 5-7 The prophet Abinadi, as he was being burned to death, had cried out a prophecy that some among the seed of Amulon would, in the future, cause many people to suffer death by fire because of the people’s belief in Jesus Christ: “Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they [those who suffer death] believe in the salvation of the Lord their God” (Mosiah 17:15).

8 Now this martyrdom caused that many of their brethren should be stirred up to anger; and there began to be contention in the wilderness; and the Lamanites began to hunt the seed of Amulon and his brethren and began to slay them; and they fled into the east wilderness.

9 And behold they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites. Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass, which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should suffer death by fire.

verse 9 “they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites” The prophet Mormon is the author or first person here. “This day” refers to his day. This verse thus makes the remarkable suggestion that even in Mormon’s day the remnants of the

Amulonites were regarded as legendary enemies among the Lamanites and were hunted by them.

“Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass” Abinadi had prophesied of the descendants of Amulon and his brethren: “Ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities. Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts. And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire” (Mosiah 17:16-18).

10 For he said unto them: What ye shall do unto me shall be a type of things to come.

verse 10 Mormon quotes the prophet Abinadi. This quote is found in Mosiah 13:10. The following verse suggests that this statement of Abinadi refers to the righteous Lamanites who were martyred for their beliefs, rather than to the descendants of Amulon. The previous verse (verse 9) refers to the descendants of Amulon.

11 And now Abinadi was the first that suffered death by fire because of his belief in God; now this is what he meant, that many should suffer death by fire, according as he had suffered.

12 And he said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death, in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain, even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts; and now behold, these words were verified, for they were driven by the Lamanites, and they were hunted, and they were smitten.

verse 12 Again, here is a reiteration of Abinadi’s prophecy found in Mosiah 17:16-18.

13 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that they could not overpower the Nephites they returned again to their own land; and many of them came over to dwell in the land of Ishmael and the land of Nephi, and did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

verse 13 **“many of them . . . did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi”** Hugh Nibley has pointed out: “For many years it was only because Nephite dissenters stirred them up that the Lamanites came to war against the Nephites. It was hardened Lamanite troopers who had sworn vengeance upon the Nephites [verse 1] who, upon returning from a campaign, of their own free will went over in large numbers [and joined with the Anti-Nephi-Lehies]” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Volume 7, 344-45).

14 And they did also bury their weapons of war, according as their brethren had, and they began to be a righteous people; and they did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes.

verse 14 “they did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes” Though these Lamanites had been defeated by the Nephites and forced to surrender, it is apparent that their conversion was far more that a conversion of convenience and coercion.

15 Yea, and they did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them.

16 Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come.

verses 15-16 These two verses contain what is probably the clearest statement in all the scriptures on the law of Moses as a “type” or symbol of the mission of Jesus Christ. The faithful among the Book of Mormon people observed the law of Moses while looking forward to the coming of Christ. They knew that salvation did not come through the law of Moses, rather through Christ. Yet the law strengthened their faith in Christ and taught them of him. The reader may review the many ways in which the law of Moses pointed to or contained types of Christ in the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4. See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

verse 16 “they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come” For a review of the relationship of faith and hope, see “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Consider the advantages we have today over these early valiant and faithful brethren. They had no access to eye-witness accounts of the mortal ministry and miracles of Jesus as we do today. The mortal Christ would not be born for several decades. They had only their incomparable faith and consummate hope that the Christ would indeed be born some day.

17 And now behold, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni, and their brethren did rejoice exceedingly, for the success which they had had among the Lamanites, seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers, and that he had also verified his word unto them in every particular.

verse 17 “**seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers**” See Alma 17:9-11. The sons of Mosiah had prayed unto the Lord that they might become instruments in the hands of the Lord to bring many of their Lamanite brethren to a knowledge of the truth.

Alma Chapter 26

Scripture Mastery

Alma 26:9-12 Ammon is rebuked by his brother Aaron for boasting. Ammon retorts: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom.

Alma 26:22 Ammon teaches that a man cannot understand the principle of the Lord's mercy or any other of the mysteries lest he repent and bring forth good works.

Alma 26:29-30 Ammon teaches that he and his brothers suffered all manner of afflictions, that perhaps they might be the means of saving some soul.

This chapter contains Ammon's report of his fourteen-year mission among the Lamanites with his two brothers and others.

1 And now, these are the words of Ammon to his brethren, which say thus: My brothers and my brethren, behold I say unto you, how great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started from the land of Zarahemla that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?

verse 1 "My brothers and my brethren" Ammon differentiates among those in the missionary group. His "brothers" were Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and his "brethren" were Muloki, Ammah, and perhaps others.

2 And now, I ask, what great blessings has he bestowed upon us? Can ye tell?

3 Behold, I answer for you; for our brethren, the Lamanites, were in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God! And this is the blessing which hath been bestowed upon us, that we have been made instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work.

verse 3 "darkest abyss" See the commentary for Mosiah 27:29.

4 Behold, thousands of them do rejoice, and have been brought into the fold of God.

5 Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garners, that they are not wasted.

verse 5 "And they shall be gathered into the garners" A *garner* is a granary or a place where grains are stored.

verses 6-7 These verses refer to those Lamanite converts who joined the church during the missionary excursions of the sons of Mosiah.

6 Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

verse 6 “neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds” To be “harrowed up” is to be vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

7 But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day.

verse 7 Again, “they” are those Lamanites converted during the mission of the four sons of Mosiah.

“he will raise them up at the last day” He will raise them up on the morning of the first resurrection—they will be resurrected with a celestial body.

8 Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever.

verse 8 This verse is, itself, a brief psalm or hymn of praise.

9 For if we had not come up out of the land of Zarahemla, these our dearly beloved brethren, who have so dearly beloved us, would still have been racked with hatred against us, yea, and they would also have been strangers to God.

10 And it came to pass that when Ammon had said these words, his brother Aaron rebuked him, saying: Ammon, I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.

verse 10 Perhaps Ammon was somewhat at fault here, yet it may be difficult to draw a line between expressing joy and boasting.

11 But Ammon said unto him: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.

verse 11 “my heart is brim with joy” This is the only use in all the scriptures of this rather novel and charming expression.

12 Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things;

yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever.

verse 12 “Yea, I know that I am nothing” We might intuitively object to this self-indictment of Ammon’s. It would be difficult to argue that this valiant and noble missionary was “nothing.” After being favored with a grand vision of the eternities and the power and majesty of God, Moses said: “I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.” Is this true? Is man nothing? It might be argued that the natural man—mortal man without the influence of the Spirit of God is “nothing,” particularly when compared to what he might become with the heavenly endowments that are available to him. Or, we might also argue that a man, when thoroughly converted to Christ tends to selflessly forget self and focus all his attentions on others. Hence, he is relatively “nothing” compared to his concern for others.

13 Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice?

verse 13 “how many . . . has he loosed from the pains of hell” Being “loosed from the pains of hell” has a dual meaning. Through Jesus’s atonement a man may escape the pains of hell here in mortality. That is, he may be absolved or forgiven of all the guilt and misery which sin may bring. Also, after this mortal phase, he may avoid going to the spirit prison where the unrepentant sinners inevitably will find themselves. In the spirit prison “there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:13).

“they are brought to sing redeeming love” This phrase means simply that they are thoroughly converted—their hearts are fundamentally changed. As we have discussed previously (commentary for Alma 5:9), this expression is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon, indeed unique to the prophet Alma. He describes the thoroughly converted individual as one who is apt to “sing the song of redeeming love” or more simply as in this verse “sing redeeming love” (see also Alma 5:9, 26).

“the power of his word which is in us” Here is an important theme found in the account of the mission of the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 17:3-4) and will continue, in a negative way, through the account of the antichrist Korihor in chapter 30. We will then learn more of this concept in the account of the mission of Alma to the Zoramites. Alma will teach that preaching the word of God has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5). Alma will eloquently pray that he might have a greater ability to preach to gospel (Alma 29:1). He will then teach the Zoramites of the importance of nourishing the word of God in our hearts (Alma 32:28).

14 Yea, we have reason to praise him forever, for he is the Most High God, and has loosed our brethren from the chains of hell.

verse 14 Here Alma refers to Jesus Christ as “the Most High God.”

15 Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, he has brought them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation; and they are encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love; yea, and we have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work.

verse 15 “Everlasting salvation” means, of course, exaltation. A “bounty” is a generous gift.

16 Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

verse 16 Obviously Ammon feels he has “bragging rights,” but he is not boasting of his own accomplishments. Rather, he is rejoicing in his Lord.

verses 17-19 Now Ammon recalls the time before his conversion and before the conversion of his brothers and Alma.

17 Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

18 Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

19 Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

verse 19 Ammon is obviously still spiritually cringing and awe-struck over how he and his rebellious brothers and friends escaped “the sword of his justice.” He is still a bit incredulous as to how they received instead the Lord’s mercy.

To *consign* is to deliver up. Despair is a state of hopelessness.

20 Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

verse 20 “almost as it were” This peculiar phrase includes the subjunctive mood. It is placed between two phrases and implies the use of metaphor. The phrase that follows “almost as it were” is figurative and not intended to be taken literally (see

also Alma 2:27; Mormon 1:7). Ammon's soul does not literally flee, but we have no trouble understanding his meaning.

The atonement of the merciful Lord overcame death ("that everlasting gulf of death") and sin ("[the] misery [of sin]"), and gave us the opportunity to be exalted ("even to the salvation of our souls").

21 And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

verse 21 The "natural man" is man without the influence of the Spirit of God. Such a man cannot possibly understand eternal things—things of the Spirit. Paul wrote: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The penitent are, of course, the repentant. *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *penitent* as, "Suffering pain or sorrow of heart on account of sins, crimes or offenses; contrite; sincerely affected by a sense of guilt."

22 Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

verse 22 "mysteries of God" For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the "mysteries of God" see the commentary for Alma 12:9. Perhaps the pertinent definition here is spiritual truths that may be understood only through divine revelation—by the help and influence of the Spirit of God.

"unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed" The faithful will not only have an opportunity to learn the "mysteries of God," but they will also be empowered to teach them to others so effectively that some will want to repent and accept the gospel.

23 Now do ye remember, my brethren, that we said unto our brethren in the land of Zarahemla, we go up to the land of Nephi, to preach unto our brethren, the Lamanites, and they laughed us to scorn?

verse 23 "and they laughed us to scorn" Hugh Nibley observed: "One might expect Ammon, the super-swordsman of the Book of Mormon to whom no man or platoon of men can stand up, to wade in and teach the Lamanites a lesson; so when he proposes to go with a few companions among the Lamanites as a missionary,

everybody 'laughed us to scorn,' as he reports it" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 486-87).

24 For they said unto us: Do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth? Do ye suppose that ye can convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning? Now my brethren, ye remember that this was their language.

verse 24 "the traditions of their fathers" See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

"ye remember that this was their language" Ammon says, in effect, "I know that you remember that these are the things they were saying."

25 And moreover they did say: Let us take up arms against them, that we destroy them and their iniquity out of the land, lest they overrun us and destroy us.

verse 25 Ammon is still speaking of those who scoffed at him prior to his mission to the Lamanites. These scoffers said, in effect, "Never mind preaching to them. Instead let us arm ourselves and destroy them."

26 But behold, my beloved brethren, we came into the wilderness not with the intent to destroy our brethren, but with the intent that perhaps we might save some few of their souls.

27 Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success.

verse 27 "When our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back" See Alma 17:9-11 and the commentary for Alma 17:9.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "There are times when you simply have to righteously hang on and outlast the devil until his depressive spirit leaves you. . . . To press on in noble endeavors, even while surrounded by a cloud of depression, will eventually bring you out on top into the sunshine" ("Do Not Despair" *Ensign* [Nov 1974] 4:65-67).

28 And now behold, we have come, and been forth amongst them; and we have been patient in our sufferings, and we have suffered every privation; yea, we have traveled from house to house, relying upon the mercies of the world—not upon the mercies of the world alone but upon the mercies of God.

verse 28 “we have . . . been forth amongst them” Be certain you notice this delightful expression. We often speak of “going forth.” But seldom do we speak of “being forth.”

29 And we have entered into their houses and taught them, and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues and taught them; and we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks; and we have been stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison; and through the power and wisdom of God we have been delivered again.

verse 29 “we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues” The word *synagogue* here likely simply means place of worship.

30 And we have suffered all manner of afflictions, and all this, that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul; and we supposed that our joy would be full if perhaps we could be the means of saving some.

verse 30 Saving “some soul” implies saving a single individual, while “saving some” implies more than one. It makes little difference, of course, what specific hopes the missionaries had. We are taught that we will enjoy great eternal joy if we are instrumental in the exaltation of even one soul (D&C 18:15-16).

31 Now behold, we can look forth and see the fruits of our labors; and are they few? I say unto you, Nay, they are many; yea, and we can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us.

verse 31 “we can witness of their sincerity because of their love” “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). And what are their fruits? “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

32 For behold, they had rather sacrifice their lives than even to take the life of their enemy; and they have buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their brethren.

33 And now behold I say unto you, has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites.

34 For behold, they would take up arms against their brethren; they would not suffer themselves to be slain. But behold how many of these have laid down their lives; and we know that they have gone to their God, because of their love and of their hatred to sin.

verse 34 Here Ammon refers to his fellow Nephites in the first sentence. The second sentence refers to the converted Lamanites.

“hatred to sin” Today we would probably rather say “hatred toward sin” or “hatred of sin.”

35 Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began; yea, and my joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.

verse 35 “he has all power” God can do any righteous thing that can be done.

“all wisdom” Wisdom may be defined as the application of knowledge based upon the eternal best interest of those involved.

“he is a merciful being . . . to those who repent and believe on his name” Is the Lord merciful to the unrepentant sinner? Certainly he loves the sinner and weeps over him, but the specific gift of mercy is extended only to the righteous and penitent. The gift of mercy is the applying to an individual the full benefits of Christ’s atonement which results in that individual’s eventual exaltation. This gift is merciful because it is never fully deserved or earned even by the most righteous. In this latter context, we might refer to the gift of mercy as an example of the *grace* of God. The term *grace* also implies something given that is not fully deserved. But grace, specifically, is the love God has for his subjects. But it particularly refers to that aspect of his love that he readily expresses and applies, though it is not fully merited.

36 Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast; for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo. Yea, blessed is the name of my God, who has been mindful of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land; yea, I say, blessed be the name of my God, who has been mindful of us, wanderers in a strange land.

verse 36 The phrase “this is my life” might also have been worded “he is my life” referring, of course, to God—in this case probably Jesus Christ.

“this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body” Ammon seems to refer here to all Book of Mormon peoples, both Nephites and Lamanites, who are separated from the main body of Israel wandering in a distant “strange” land. An alternate definition of “this people” may be the Lamanites who have been “lost” from the main body of Israel by sin and disobedience.

37 Now my brethren, we see that God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth. Now this is my joy, and my great thanksgiving; yea, and I will give thanks unto my God forever. Amen.

Alma Chapter 27

1 Now it came to pass that when those Lamanites who had gone to war against the Nephites had found, after their many struggles to destroy them, that it was in vain to seek their destruction, they returned again to the land of Nephi.

verse 1 “after their many struggles to destroy them” It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “after their many struggles *for* to destroy them” (italics mine). This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see Matthew 23:5).

“it was in vain to seek their destruction” The Nephites as a nation still enjoyed the protection of the Lord. They were a covenant people living in a promised land. As such they could not be destroyed as long as they were obedient to the Lord.

2 And it came to pass that the Amalekites, because of their loss, were exceedingly angry. And when they saw that they could not seek revenge from the Nephites, they began to stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; therefore they began again to destroy them.

verse 2 As verse 1 mentions, the war-party of Lamanites is now back home—in the land of Nephi. As we might expect, there was no softening in the hearts of the apostate Nephites, the Amalekites. Their very obsession and purpose becomes to war against the things of God. They began to make military raids on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

3 Now this people again refused to take their arms, and they suffered themselves to be slain according to the desires of their enemies.

4 Now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction among those whom they so dearly beloved, and among those who had so dearly beloved them—for they were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction—therefore, when Ammon and his brethren saw this great work of destruction, they were moved with compassion, and they said unto the king:

Verse 4 You will recall that the Lamanite king is Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the brother of Lamoni.

5 Let us gather together this people of the Lord, and let us go down to the land of Zarahemla to our brethren the Nephites, and flee out of the hands of our enemies, that we be not destroyed.

6 But the king said unto them: Behold, the Nephites will destroy us, because of the many murders and sins we have committed against them.

7 And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?

8 And the king said unto him: Yea, if the Lord saith unto us go, we will go down unto our brethren, and we will be their slaves until we repair unto them the many murders and sins which we have committed against them.

9 But Ammon said unto him: It is against the law of our brethren, which was established by my father, that there should be any slaves among them; therefore let us go down and rely upon the mercies of our brethren.

verse 9 “It is against the law . . . established by my father, that there should be any slaves” Ammon’s father Mosiah had said: “I desire that this land should be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32).

10 But the king said unto him: Inquire of the Lord, and if he saith unto us go, we will go; otherwise we will perish in the land.

11 And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said unto him:

12 Get this people out of this land, that they perish not; for Satan has great hold on the hearts of the Amalekites, who do stir up the Lamanites to anger against their brethren to slay them; therefore get thee out of this land; and blessed are this people in this generation, for I will preserve them.

13 And now it came to pass that Ammon went and told the king all the words which the Lord had said unto him.

14 And they gathered together all their people, yea, all the people of the Lord, and did gather together all their flocks and herds, and departed out of the land, and came into the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla, and came over near the borders of the land.

verse 14 And they (the anti-Nephi-Lehies) gathered together all their people . . . and departed out of the land (of Nephi).

“the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla” See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto them: Behold, I and my brethren will go forth into the land of Zarahemla, and ye shall remain here until we return; and we will try the hearts of our brethren, whether they will that ye shall come into their land.

verse 15 “we will try the hearts of our brethren” This charming phrase means, “We will inquire as to the willingness of our people to allow you to enter and live among them.”

16 And it came to pass that as Ammon was going forth into the land, that he and his brethren met Alma, over in the place of which has been spoken; and behold, this was a joyful meeting.

verse 16 “over in the place of which has been spoken” See the account of this reunion between Alma and the sons of Mosiah in Alma 17:1-4

17 Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth.

verse 17 “Now the joy of Ammon was so great” The *joy* spoken of here is a specific spiritual experience that can only be provided to man through the agency of the Spirit of God—it is a gift of the Spirit. It is not an experience of the world. It is distinct from happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, fun, or gratification. It can be experienced in its fulness only by exalted beings (D&C 93:33). Yet as is obvious in this verse and in the two verses that follow, there are remarkable degrees of joy a man may experience in this life. As we might suppose, it may only come in conditions of righteousness, during active striving to be obedient.

“even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth” Apparently the process of being in tune with the Spirit can be physically enervating (see also 1 Nephi 1:7; 19:20; Daniel 10:8; Moses 1:9-10; JS-H 1:20).

18 Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness.

19 Now the joy of Alma in meeting his brethren was truly great, and also the joy of Aaron, of Omner, and Himni; but behold their joy was not that to exceed their strength.

20 And now it came to pass that Alma conducted his brethren back to the land of Zarahemla; even to his own house. And they went and told the chief judge all the things that had happened unto them in the land of Nephi, among their brethren, the Lamanites.

21 And it came to pass that the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land, desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

22 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: Behold, we will give up the land of Jershon, which is on the east by the sea, which joins the land Bountiful, which is on the south of the land Bountiful; and this land Jershon is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.

verse 22 Plays on words, especially with names, are very common in the Hebrew Bible. That such plays on words found their way into the Book of Mormon, seems evident from the name *Jershon* in this verse. *Jershon* appears to be derived

from the Hebrew root meaning to “inherit,” the root being *yro*. Thus, *Jershon* could mean “inheritance.” If this line of reasoning is correct, then a wonderful play on words in this verse is developed: “This land *Jershon* [namely, inheritance] is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.” There are other references to *Jershon* as a land of inheritance in the Book of Mormon—see also Alma 35:9 and Alma 35:14.

The *-on* ending of *Jershon* is typical of other place-names belonging to the ancient Near East. Wilhelm Boree, in his outstanding study, *The Ancient Place-names of Palestine*, cites fully eighty-four ancient Canaanite place-names with the ending *-on* in biblical and extrabiblical sources. The Book of Mormon place-name *Jershon*, then, is right at home with a number of other biblical and extrabiblical place-names.

23 And behold, we will set our armies between the land *Jershon* and the land *Nephi*, that we may protect our brethren in the land *Jershon*; and this we do for our brethren, on account of their fear to take up arms against their brethren lest they should commit sin; and this their great fear came because of their sore repentance which they had, on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness.

24 And now behold, this will we do unto our brethren, that they may inherit the land *Jershon*; and we will guard them from their enemies with our armies, on condition that they will give us a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies.

verse 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies would be taxed, undoubtedly a reasonable and fair amount, to assist in defraying the extra cost of protecting them.

The granting, by the Nephite government, of an exemption from military duty to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is consistent with ancient Israelite law (John W. Welch, in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 357-61).

Normally, ancient peoples were absolutely obligated to take up arms in defense of their tribe or nation. Saul called upon “all Israel” to take up arms against the Ammonites and the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11; 15:4). Threats and curses were pronounced upon anyone who would not join in the battle. Saul once sent messengers to marshal the troops after he symbolically cut a yoke of oxen into pieces in view of the people and proclaimed. “Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen” (1 Samuel 11:7).

The same basic duty to serve in the army existed in Nephite law and society. Indeed, Moroni had power to punish any person in the land of Zarahemla who would not “defend [his] country” (Alma 51:15; see 46:35). Like Saul, he symbolically portrayed the brutal fate of those who would not fight (see Alma 46:21-22). Under extreme and desperate circumstances, this duty fell even upon old men, women, and children (see Mosiah 10:9; Alma 54:12).

How, then, could the able-bodied people of Ammon be granted exemption? There may be several reasons. Their reasons for not fighting were obviously righteous and bona fide. But beyond that, the justification of their military exemption may have been based on four specific provisions in the law of Moses:

1. The absolute duty to go to war applied only in fighting against an enemy. Deuteronomy 20:1-2, which instructs the Israelite leader to speak to his troops in a holy tongue when they go up to battle against an enemy, was interpreted in the Talmud as not applying in a conflict against other Israelites, for as the scripture says, “Against your enemies but not against your brethren, not Judah against Simeon nor Simeon against Benjamin” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah VIII, 1, 42a). Of course, the Talmud was written long after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, yet it often reflected older oral material.

2. The laws of Deuteronomy also afforded humanitarian exemptions for those who had recently married, built a new house, planted a new vineyard, or were “fearful and fainthearted” (see Deuteronomy 20:5-9; 24:5; compare Judges 7:3). Since everyone going into battle was likely “fearful and fainthearted,” the exemption undoubtedly had a narrower meaning in actual practice. Otherwise, nearly everyone would have been exempt. Indeed, as the Talmud explains, this expression in Deuteronomy “alludes to one who is afraid because of the *transgressions* he had committed” (*Ibid.*, 3, 4a, italics added). If a soldier would cower in the face of enemy battle because of his previous sins (fearing that his sins prevented God from defending him or that he might die a sinner), he was deemed unfit for battle. Certainly the Nephites would have recognized that the profound fears of the people of Ammon who were afraid to break their oath rendered them unsuitable for military duty under such a rule.

3. The Talmudic rabbis further limited the exemption for the fearful and fainthearted to voluntary exploits of the king. In a compulsory war of national defense, however, even the fainthearted were obligated to go into battle. A similar distinction may have contributed to the people of Ammon’s feeling, several years later, that they could no longer claim their exemption in the face of the extreme compulsory war then threatening the Nephites’ entire existence. Moved by compassion and no longer afraid, they were willing to take up arms (see Alma 53:13). Only Helaman’s fear that they might lose their souls if they were to violate their oath stopped them. So they sent their sons into battle instead. See the account of the military excursions of the sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—the sons of Helaman—in Alma 53, 56-58.

4. The men who remained at home, however, continued to support the war behind the lines. Their exemption was granted only “on condition that they will give us [the Nephites] a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies” (Alma 27:24). This arrangement is especially noteworthy because the Talmud likewise holds that those who are exempted from military service under the law of Moses are

“only released from actual fighting, but not from serving in the rear: They must furnish water and food and repair the roads” (*Ibid.*, 2, 43a).

The rare exemption granted to the Ammonites was logical, religiously motivated, and consistent with ancient Israelite law.

25 Now, it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he returned to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and also Alma with him, into the wilderness, where they had pitched their tents, and made known unto them all these things. And Alma also related unto them his conversion, with Ammon and Aaron, and his brethren.

verse 25 Can you imagine how many times Alma must have told the story of his conversion in his years of service as high priest of the people. Perhaps one day we will be honored to hear the story from his own lips!

26 And it came to pass that it did cause great joy among them. And they went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession of the land of Jershon; and they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after.

27 And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end.

28 And they did look upon shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence; and they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren; and they never did look upon death with any degree of terror, for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection; therefore, death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it.

verse 28 “death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it”

This terminology seems to have originated with the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 25:8) and was repeated in the writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 15:54). Usually the idea implicit in this phrase as used by Isaiah and by Paul is held to be that Christ claimed victory over death, as his atonement guarantees resurrection for all men. Thus, death can claim no victory over men. This verse suggests an additional meaning. An abiding faith and hope in Jesus Christ helps to comfort the fear of the individual who faces the proximate inevitability of his own death.

Neal A. Maxwell taught: “When we have appropriate hope of receiving eternal life (Alma 13:29), and we retain that hope through faith (Alma 25:16), then we will—even though we love life, family, and friends have ‘no terror of death’ ‘because of [our] hope and views of Christ and the resurrection’ (Alma 27:28). Indeed, true hope springs directly from our ‘views of Christ’” (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 44).

29 Therefore, they would suffer death in the most aggravating and distressing manner which could be inflicted by their brethren, before they would take the sword or cimeter to smite them.

verse 29 What is a “cimeter”? It is probably a curved sword which is today referred to as a scimitar or scimiter. This form of the word “cimeter” is unique in the scripture to the Book of Mormon. See the commentary for Enos 1:20 for information on the cimeter.

“Them” refers to their Lamanite brothers.

30 And thus they were a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord.

Alma Chapter 28

1 And now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, and a church also established in the land of Jershon, and the armies of the Nephites were set round about the land of Jershon, yea, in all the borders round about the land of Zarahemla; behold the armies of the Lamanites had followed their brethren into the wilderness.

verse 1 Apparently members of the Nephite armies were deployed in two separate ways in order to protect the people of Ammon against pursuing Lamanites. First, they were placed “round about the land of Jershon.” The land of Jershon was a limited land within the larger land of Zarahemla—like a “state” within a country. Second, they were assigned to guard the “borders round about the land of Zarahemla” where invading Lamanites would be likely to cross. It would not have been necessary to patrol the entire length of the border, since it is likely that there were but a limited number of practical routes by which men could enter Zarahemla. It would have been necessary to secure only these few.

2 And thus there was a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad.

verse 2 “Abroad” here may be interpreted “far and wide.”

3 Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi; nevertheless, the Lamanites were driven and scattered, and the people of Nephi returned again to their land.

4 And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi—

5 Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain.

6 And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer.

verse 6 “a sorrowful day . . . a time of much fasting and prayer” It would seem that the ancient Hebrews and the Nephites practiced fasting in a context somewhat different from the way we practice it today. It was, for example, practiced at times of grieving and sorrowing, and it seems to have been part of their funeral custom. In the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon, we read of fasting associated with

mourning on behalf of the dead (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12; Alma 30:2). On one occasion David evidenced his grief at Abner's death by fasting (2 Samuel 3:35).

7 And thus endeth the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi;

8 And this is the account of Ammon and his brethren, their journeyings in the land of Nephi, their sufferings in the land, their sorrows, and their afflictions, and their incomprehensible joy, and the reception and safety of the brethren in the land of Jershon. And now may the Lord, the Redeemer of all men, bless their souls forever.

verse 8 “sufferings . . . sorrows . . . incomprehensible joy” Is it not true that these three summarize the experience of those involved in diligent service of the Lord in this mortal world? Perhaps missionary work is especially likely to be associated with these emotions.

9 And this is the account of the wars and contentions among the Nephites, and also the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites; and the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges is ended.

10 And from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass the destruction of many thousand lives; yea, it has brought to pass an awful scene of bloodshed.

11 And the bodies of many thousands are laid low in the earth, while the bodies of many thousands are moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth; yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo.

verse 11 To “molder” is to decay, to waste away, to crumble into dust.

“because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo” These phrases refer to those who know about the Lord's promises of eternal joy or eternal condemnation promised to the righteous and the unrighteous, and they have not lived up to the Lord's commandments. The term “endless wo” does not mean that suffering continues forever. Rather “endless” refers to God's suffering. God is *endless*, and that suffering which occurs at his hand is referred to as God's suffering or *endless* suffering, referring not to the duration of the suffering but rather to its initiator (see D&C 19:10-12).

12 While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness.

verses 11-12 To our dispensation the Lord has given what has been called the “law of mourning”: “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection. And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them; and they that die not in me, wo unto them, for their death is bitter” (D&C 42:45-47).

13 And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men.

verse 13 “how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression” Because of tremendous differences in the diligence of men in keeping the laws of God, there is a broad disparity in the level of righteousness among men.

Another meaning is important here. A righteous community characteristically shares among its members a feeling of equality and mutual respect. As sin and transgression make themselves more evident among a people, there is a shift from an egalitarian to a ranked and stratified society (Alma 4:11-12; 5:54; 3 Nephi 6:11-14). This concept of a class system is based on the righteousness or unrighteousness of individuals within the system according to the laws of God. In this type of “class system,” those in the “upper class” yearn and labor for the welfare of those in the “lower class.” Among the upper class charity is the manner of dealing with others in the system.

In the world, however, class systems are commonly based on worldly criteria which include wealth versus poverty, education versus ignorance, refined culture and manners versus baseness. These systems are based on pride and not charity. The widening gulf between these classes, as for example between the elite class and the commoner, has been, in the world’s history, a major factor leading to the eventual collapse of societies.

14 And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord; and thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life.

verse 14 “the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord” That is, in the Lord’s “class system,” there exists a noble and magnificent calling for all men to serve diligently in the Lord’s vineyard in order to lift those in the “class” below them.

“and joy because of the light of Christ unto life” The concept of joy has been referred to many times in the Book of Mormon text. True joy is a very specific, and not at all a generic, concept. Joy is, in the ultimate sense, a gift given to man by the Spirit

of God. It can only be earned through persistent righteous living. It is the same joy that the Father and the Son experience. There are, of course as there are for all gifts of the Spirit, worldly imitations such as “happiness” or “pleasure.” These worldly facsimiles are not inherently evil or wicked. They may even be wholesome and uplifting. They do, however, lack that abiding and soul-affirming quality found in true joy. True joy can only come from the Lord. It is divine compensation for satisfactory spiritual progress. Joy is figuratively the “ice cream cone” the Lord gives us for obeying him.

Another spiritual gift related to joy which is also given by the Spirit of God to those who have paid the price is peace—the peace of God. This is the quiet assurance that one’s course in life is pleasing in the sight of God (D&C 19:23; 59:23). Those who experience this peace also experience the spiritual gift of hope. They enjoy the state we may refer to as the “rest of the Lord” (see the discussion of the gift of hope in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*).

Alma Chapter 29

Scripture Mastery

Alma 29:1-3 O that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart.

Alma 29:4 Alma teaches that the Lord granteth unto men according to their desires.

Alma 29:9-10 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it.

Now Mormon abruptly shifts gears and inserts a remarkable soliloquy of the prophet Alma. Alma 29 is often referred to as “Alma’s Psalm.”

1 O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

verse 1 Here Alma laments that he cannot do more to make people accept the only plan that will result in their exaltation. Yet, he knows that God grants salvation or damnation to people only according to their own desires (verse 4). And he repents of aspiring to be more than he really is (verses 6-7).

What is an angel? It is a messenger sent by God or Satan to minister or teach. Those sent by God teach by the power of the Holy Ghost. The different types of angels include:

1. Resurrected beings having celestial bodies of flesh and bone. They have obviously come forth in the “first resurrection,” since that is the only resurrection that has already commenced. They therefore have earned and received their celestial glory, their celestial bodies, and they can appear in glory. Perhaps they are also permitted to withhold their glory as they appear.

2. The “spirits of just men made perfect” (D&C 76:69; 129:3). These are righteous individuals who have died and have been assigned to a state of paradise but have not yet been resurrected. They are assured that they will inherit the celestial glory. Because of their righteousness, they are allowed to appear in the glory they will possess when they are resurrected.

3. Translated beings. These are individuals who have lived their mortal sojourn, had their calling and election made sure, and have been called to take upon themselves a terrestrial-like body and continue to serve the Lord among mortals. As they minister on the earth they are likely not distinguishable from other mortals. For a more complete discussion of translated beings, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 28:6-10 and *Doctrine of Translation* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17.

4. Pre-existent spirits.

5. Satan or one of his spirit colleagues. Obviously the title “angels” is a misleading euphemism here. These may actually appear “in glory” as angels of light since they know how to fake the light or glory of God.

2 Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

verse 2 The “plan of redemption” would undoubtedly include the concepts of the fall of man, the atonement of the Savior, and obedience to the laws of God.

Alma admits to a temptation to superimpose his will upon the agency of man—that is, he feels so strongly that men would be happy here on earth and beyond if they would only accept Jesus Christ and his gospel, that sometimes he finds himself wishing he could speak so powerfully (“as with the voice of thunder”) that men’s agency would be momentarily suspended and they would all be persuaded to accept the gospel and joint with God’s earthly kingdom.

“that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth”

Contemplate for a moment what the world would be like if all of its inhabitants would live the principles of the gospel and look forward joyously to their exaltation.

3 But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.

verse 3 Here, Alma apologizes to the Lord for desiring more ability than the Lord has given him.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented on this verse: “The truth about foreordination also helps us to taste of the other deep wisdom of Alma. He said we ought to be ‘content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto’ each of us (Alma 29:3). If, indeed, the things allotted to each of us have been divinely customized, then why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?” (*But for a Small Moment*, 101).

4 I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

verse 4 “I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God” We have encountered the verb “harrow up” or “harrowed up” previously in our study of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 9:47; Alma 14:6; 15:3). In all instances in the Book of Mormon, thus far, to “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress. The meaning in this verse is different. According to Webster, one archaic meaning of the

verb “to harrow” is to despoil or to take away the value of a thing. This meaning seems applicable here. Alma says in effect, “I ought not, by my own vain or selfish desirings, try to alter the firm decree of a just God.”

“the firm decree of a just God” And just what is this “firm decree of a just God”? It is that every man possesses his unfettered agency, and that he will reap eternal happiness or sorrow according to his exercise of that agency.

“I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire” Here is a sobering thought. A man’s “desire” has little to do with his momentary wishes or statements of preference. Rather his “desire” is what he *truly is in his heart*. Ultimately a man is judged by his desire—what really lies deep within his heart. A man’s thinking, feelings, words, and actions (his behaviors) are inevitably determined by what is in his heart. No amount of pretense, excuse, deceit, ostentation, or rationalization can hide what is really there. A man may try to deceive others by acting this way or that way, but ultimately what truly lies in his heart will manifest itself through his behaviors. The Lord’s judgment of a man will thus always be based on that man’s real desires, and that judgment or decree is “unalterable.”

An individual who has yielded his heart to God, overcome his natural self, and willed himself to obey will eventually be born of the Spirit. He will be changed from his carnal and fallen state. He will experience a change of heart. That man will desire eternal life for all of the right reasons. His heart and his motivations will be pure. There will be nothing of selfishness or self aggrandizement. He will not simply prefer to live with God; he will *long* to be there. He will have a consuming desire for the things of God. He will have lost all desire to sin. He it is who is granted “according to his desire”—knowing that he will not ask amiss. The Lord will see to it that “it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). The Lord has said of him: “Whatsoever things [he] shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto [him]” (3 Nephi 27:28).

Is it possible that a man might ask amiss? That is, might a man request an eternal benefit which is incompatible with those desires that are truly found in his heart? The prophet Samuel wrote, “The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Ultimately, the Lord’s judgments will be based, not upon what a man says, or upon what a man may think he wants, but rather upon what a man *is*.

5 Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

verse 5 “I know that good and evil have come before all men” Mortality offers to all people, once they are beyond the age of accountability, ample opportunities to knowingly decide between good and evil.

“he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless” Those below the age of accountability, and those whose mental capacities render them unable to judge between good and evil, are not responsible.

“but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires” President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “We are free to choose, but we are not free to alter the consequences of those choices” (*Come Unto Christ*, 40). The primary determinant of a man’s choices and behavior is his *desires*—who and what he really is. Ultimately a man’s desires will be made overtly manifest in his outward behavior. In the unusual case of a man whose desires, whether they be good or evil, are not manifest due to circumstances beyond his control, a just God will reward or punish that individual as if he had actually manifest those desires (D&C 137:5-9). Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote: “The laws of God can reward a righteous desire or attitude because an omniscient God can determine it. If a person does not perform a particular commandment because he is genuinely unable to do so, but truly would if he could, our Heavenly Father will know this and will reward that person accordingly. Upon the same principle, evil thoughts or desires are sinful under the laws of God even though not translated into the actions that would make them punishable under the laws of man. Similarly, if a person performs a seemingly righteous act but does so for the wrong reasons, such as to achieve a selfish purpose, his hands may be clean but his heart is not pure. His act will not be counted for righteousness” (*Pure in Heart*, 12-13).

6 Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?

7 Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?

8 For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.

verse 8 Alma teaches that God grants gospel knowledge including spiritual insights unto his children according to his divine wisdom. This likely applies to nations as a whole and to each individual. We will receive that portion of his word we are prepared to receive. We have already learned that “he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.” Also “they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction” (Alma 12:9-11).

“the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word” From other scriptures we have learned that the gospel will be

preached unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Revelation 14:6-7) and that it will go to all nations in their own language (D&C 90:11). Here we learn that the people of each nation will hear the gospel declared by their own people—“of their own nation and tongue.”

9 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me; yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.

verse 9 Here, Alma reaffirms the idea that he has no desire to seek for callings from the Lord that may bring him notoriety or some other selfish benefit. He is content with and indeed glories in “that which the Lord hath commanded” him.

10 And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me.

verse 10 “I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me” It is unlikely that Alma, even to the end of his mortal life, ever ceased shaking with panic over how close he had come to eternal damnation in those months and years prior to his miraculous conversion.

11 Yea, and I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did deliver them out of bondage.

12 Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage.

verses 11-12 By recalling here the captivity of his ancestors in the land of Helam and the land of Nephi, Alma is actually following a commandment of the Lord delivered to him by the angel who participated in his dramatic conversion. That angel told him: “Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16).

13 Yea, and that same God did establish his church among them; yea, and that same God hath called me by a holy calling, to preach the word unto this people, and hath given me much success, in the which my joy is full.

14 But I do not joy in my own success alone, but my joy is more full because of the success of my brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi.

verse 14 Here, Alma refers, of course, to his brethren the sons of Mosiah.

15 Behold, they have labored exceedingly, and have brought forth much fruit; and how great shall be their reward!

16 Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy.

17 And now may God grant unto these, my brethren, that they may sit down in the kingdom of God; yea, and also all those who are the fruit of their labors that they may go no more out, but that they may praise him forever. And may God grant that it may be done according to my words, even as I have spoken. Amen.

verse 17 “that they may sit down in the kingdom of God” Alma yearns aloud for the sealing up to eternal glory of his friends, the sons of Mosiah.

“that they may go no more out” This particular “they” refers to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—those Lamanites converted during the ministrations of the sons of Mosiah. This phrase means: May the converted Lamanites always remain faithful and never again wander off the strait and narrow path.

Alma Chapter 30

Scripture Mastery

Alma 30 The Antichrist Korihor leads many from the truth. He is eventually brought before Alma, the chief judge in Zarahemla, who is the governor over all the land. Korihor brazenly refuses to be persuaded by Alma's testimony and asks for a sign as the reality of God. Accordingly, he is struck deaf and dumb. Realizing his predicament, Korihor then claims, conversing of course by writing, that he has been deceived by the Devil who appeared before him in the form of an angel, and he pled with Alma to lift the curse from him. Alma perceived that he would resume his evil proselyting if the curse be lifted, and he refused and had him cast out. Korihor was then reduced to begging and he is eventually trampled and killed while in the land of the Zoramites.

Alma 30:60 The devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

Alma 30 concerns itself with the antichrist Korihor and even provides us with an account of his teachings. One might well wonder why Mormon thought these materials sufficiently important that an entire chapter ought to be dedicated to an evil man and his teachings. Obviously Mormon did feel justified, and we will explore the possible reasons as we go along.

Brother Gerald N. Lund in his article "An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon" (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 107-28) has suggested that one possible purpose of chapter 30 is to serve as a scriptural "foil". A "foil," according to Webster, is something used "to enhance by contrast." Brother Lund mentions the example of a jeweler who displays his diamonds on black velvet in order to provide an enhancing background or foil for the gems. He points out that this account of the "evil missionary," Korihor is sandwiched between the account of the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites and Alma's great mission to the Zoramites.

If we examine Korihor's "doctrines," we learn that the same false philosophies he espoused are rampant in the world today. Perhaps this is another valid reason why Mormon was inspired to include this rather detailed account of the beliefs of a wicked man in the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson wrote: "The Book of Mormon . . . 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 are 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" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 56).

The essence of Korihor's beliefs are found in Alma 30:13-24. Korihor was, first of all, an atheist.

How might we explain atheism? It would seem there are at least two major factors involved:

1. First, with each giving in to your natural self (each sin), there occurs an incremental insensitivity to the influence of the Spirit of God. With repeated sins, one may become completely taken up by things of the world. Things an individual can experience with his five physical senses become all important. In fact, they are the only things that matter. With repeated sin, there also occurs a progressive insensitivity to things of the Spirit. Spiritual things eventually become unimportant, and even the object of skepticism and scorn. One becomes completely unable to feel spiritual impressions and promptings. "The only things that are real are things of the world, things I can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Everything else is imagination."

This leads to the religious philosophies of *rationalism*, *empiricism*, and *cynicism*. Rationalism is the philosophical doctrine that reason alone is the source of knowledge. Empiricism is the philosophic doctrine that all knowledge comes only through the physical senses, through physical evidences, through observations. Cynicism is simple a tendency to doubt the existence and therefore reject the very existence of the spiritual and supernatural realms. According to the cynic, every account of a "spiritual" experience or impression is subterfuge. It is self delusion. A captivation by worldliness also leads to a belief in *naturalism*. Naturalism is the belief that all phenomena are explained by laws of science and that all theological, spiritual, or supernatural explanations are therefore without value.

What constitutes reality? To the incorrigible sinner, the here and now of this life is the only reality. There is nothing beyond this life. There is no life after death. When a man dies, that is the end of him. Here in this life, people will succeed or fail solely based upon their own strengths and ingenuity. This leads to a belief in the "law of the jungle"—the survival and success of the fittest, and only the fittest.

There is no God and hence no revelation, there exists no set of divine laws. There is no absolute right or wrong, no good or evil. None of us is in jeopardy of eternal punishment. Therefore we may behave as we please without fear of eternal consequences. We may ignore those rules or "commandments" ecclesiastical leaders use to brow beat us. Moral standards and values come only from human experience. The ethical standards so derived are often called "situational ethics." This is the philosophy of *relativism*. Relativism is a theory of knowledge, truth, or morality in which there is no absolute. The standard of judgment, then, varies with each individual and his or her situation and environment.

2. The promptings of the Spirit of Christ, though blunted, never disappear completely. Therefore when an individual becomes caught up in sin and therefore rejects all things spiritual, there remains an inevitable element of subconscious fear for

one's eternal future. This fear often leads to an urgent, defensive need to self justify. "How naive and unsophisticated to actually believe in such things as God or an afterlife." "Are you an adult? Do you require someone to tell you what you can and cannot do? If I want to sleep with my girlfriend, and it does no harm to anyone, then I will. What can be wrong with that? There is no God. There are no valid commandments."

The fear of the eternal future and the need to justify self is particularly strong if the individual is an apostate who once accepted, but now rejects, the truth.

This may lead to the adoption of the philosophy of *humanism*. Humanism may be defined as a system of thought or action in which human interests, values, comforts, needs, and dignity predominate. In fact, they are the only criteria by which judgments can be made. Human beings are the supreme reality in a natural world.

Humanism usually rejects the importance of a belief in God. The humanist may have become purely atheistic, or he even may remain undecided, and uncaring or unbothered by the question of whether or not there is a God. He may be in the category we refer to as agnostic. "If, by chance, there is a heaven and a God who chooses who enters his heaven and who does not, then he will judge me for my value as a human being, and not for my belief in him." A fear of death and the eternal future lie at the origin of this philosophy. Humanism is merely a cover-up and attempt at self-justification.

Korihor preaches that man ought to be free rather than be bound down and limited by any type of authority placed over him (verses 23-24). This argument here is intended to appeal to the natural man within all of us. We all have a natural tendency to resent any type of restraint or authority placed over us. We want to be "free." The individual hiding his underlying fear likes to point out to others just how they are enslaved by religious law. Korihor says in effect, "Look at yourselves. You are slaves to your ancestors. You are a victim of the so-called commandments." Since misery loves company and a fellowship of like believers (actually unbelievers) can be of great comfort to the sinner, Korihor hopes that people will respond with an indignant attitude: "Like heck I am. Let me show just how 'enslaved' I am." He may provoke others to demonstrate their unfettered "freedom." We might term this philosophy *liberationism*, a theology which stresses freedom from any restraints. You may notice that we have postulate several names for the philosophy or philosophies of the individuals who have wholly gone over to worldliness. They are all related and all share in the same "etiology and pathogenesis" (these are medical terms that mean "cause" and "sequence of development").

Finally, Korihor generalizes from his own experience (verse 24). He assumes that what is true for him is true for everyone else. If he doesn't know, then he assumes no one else can either.

As you read the arguments proffered by Korihor in chapter 30 against the truth, notice their familiar ring. You have heard them before. He raises most all the points apostates usually raise. His arguments have been referred to as the “arguments of apostasy.”

For additional insight, see also the following commentary on Korihor. See also the accounts of three other well-known Book of Mormon apostates in the commentary on Alma 1:2. Brother S. Michael Wilcox has proposed six “articles of no faith” which he defines as follows:

1. A man cannot know of things to come (verse 13).
2. A man cannot know things he cannot see (verse 15).
3. Every man prospers according to the law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest. Only those things are beneficial that bring comfort, pleasure, notoriety, etc. (verse 17).
4. Whatever a man does is okay—there is no absolute truth or law; all things are relative (verse 17).
5. When a man is dead, that is the end (verse 18).
6. Either there is no God, or God is unknown to man, and who cares anyway (verse 28)?

1 Behold, now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, yea, and also after the Lamanites were driven out of the land, and their dead were buried by the people of the land—

2 Now their dead were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered—but it came to pass after they had buried their dead, and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer, (and it was in the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) there began to be continual peace throughout all the land.

verse 2 “also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer” See the commentary for Alma 28:6 for a discussion of the custom of fasting in this situation.

3 Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.

verse 3 “the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses” There is general agreement that the Nephites understood and lived the ethical portion of the law of Moses, the ten commandments. Apparently they also participated in the ordinances of blood sacrifices and burnt offerings (see Alma 34:10; 4 Nephi 1:12). It is also clear that the Nephites were given to understand the law of Moses as a type

and a shadow of the great and last blood sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 9:19).

The rhetorical question may be asked, “Were the Nephites Jews or Christians?” They were obviously both. They were as Jewish as Jesus himself. Jesus continued to observe the law of Moses until it was fulfilled upon his death and resurrection. In the first chapter of the gospel of Mark, Jesus not only healed the leper but purified him and sent him to the temple to make sacrifices according to the law of Moses. There is evidence that Jesus went up to Jerusalem regularly to observe the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Passover. Jesus also, obviously, understood the deadness of the law of Moses without his own vital atoning sacrifice and death.

We will also learn it is likely the Nephites also understood and observed the Lord’s commandments to gather periodically at the temple to celebrate the Jewish festivals. If you have an interest in this topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*.

4 And thus the people did have no disturbance in all the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

5 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace.

6 But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

verse 6 Here we are introduced to Korihor. The sentence structure of this verse suggests that the word “Anti-Christ” is being used as an adjective. However, the upper case “A” provides evidence that it is intended here as a name or title rather than an adjective. For a discussion of some of the characteristics and beliefs of Korihor, see the introductory discussion for this chapter.

It is interesting to note that the name Korihor probably has Jaredite origins. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 5-6 “in the commencement of the seventeenth year” “in the latter end of the seventeenth year” Randall P. Spackman has defended the idea that the Nephite year could be divided in half. The first half is referred to in the Book of Mormon as “the commencement,” while the latter half is the “latter end” (“Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 4).

7 Now there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

verse 7 A law that favors one set of religious beliefs over another would, naturally, favor one group of people over another. Then it would “bring men on to unequal grounds.”

It is interesting that the people of Zarahemla enjoyed the right of free speech much as we do today. Their “Bill of Rights” was apparently received under the inspiration of God, just as we believe ours was today. Our rights today, of course, are guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

8 For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

verse 8 Here Mormon makes an editorial comment. He is quoting Joshua 24:15 which was apparently well-known in his day as it is today.

9 Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him.

10 But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

verse 10 We have already learned that capital punishment was practiced among the Nephites as it had been among their Hebrew ancestors. Note also, once again, the differentiation between “robbery” and “stealing” (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:22 and the commentary for Helaman 3:12).

The major tenets of the law of Moses were obviously the law of the land.

11 For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man’s belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying:

verses 13-15 Korihor here expounds a type of rationalistic or empiricistic philosophy. These philosophies include the idea that knowledge cannot be gained by any other means than through the natural senses. Also the universe is regarded as an inanimate, self-acting, and self-perpetuating system, and there is no real underlying purpose in the existence of the universe.

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

verse 13 Note here Korihor's use of Brother Wilcox's "first-temptation" strategy (see the commentary for Alma 1:2). Korihor uses such rhetoric as "ye that are bound down" and "why do ye yoke yourselves"?

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

verse 16 Korihor believes that "a frenzied mind" and "this derangement of your minds" are simply terms for unnecessary guilt. See also the commentary for verse 22 below.

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

verse 17 "every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature" In a naturalistic universe such as that advocated by Korihor, there would be no laws of God to break. There would be no accountability to a higher power. There would be no need for an atonement. People would not be motivated in their actions by the fear or love of God. Instead people's actions would be motivated by the law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest. Hedonistic philosophies would be appropriate: live for today, for tomorrow we die, and there is nothing after death. The phrase "management of the creature" refers to what directly benefits a man in temporal or worldly ways; i.e. what gives him pleasure, comfort, notoriety, and status.

Obviously Korihor's teachings would be readily received by a worldly society. The concept of "nihilism" refers to a denial of any life after this mortal one. If there were no life after this one, one might make a persuasive argument for immoral behavior. Why not be immoral? Why not just rejoice in pleasure and wickedness? What is there to restrain us? When a man dies, that is the end.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

verse 18 “causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness” Once a man identifies an intellectual rationale for his behavior he tends to become proud of his special intellectual insights. What a great victory for Satan! Not only are these intellectual rationalizers wicked, but they are proud of their wickedness—they “lift up their heads in their wickedness.” And why not? Man is the supreme being.

“leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms” This phrase may refer to the ritual prostitutes of both sexes such as those that were part of some apostate religious cults in the ancient Middle East. These took part in the fornication that was part of the religious ritual of those cults.

19 Now this man went over to the land of Jershon also, to preach these things among the people of Ammon, who were once the people of the Lamanites.

20 But behold they were more wise than many of the Nephites; for they took him, and bound him, and carried him before Ammon, who was a high priest over that people.

verse 20 Why was Korihor bound and carried before Ammon? We have already referred to the Nephites’ Bill of Rights which allowed a man to believe and to preach anything he wanted so long as he did not urge the people to unlawful acts. We can only assume that he was guilty of the latter. Or, the people of Jershon simply saw the danger in Korihor’s teachings and wanted no association with him. They desired that Ammon or even Alma should deal with him.

21 And it came to pass that he caused that he should be carried out of the land. And he came over into the land of Gideon, and began to preach unto them also; and here he did not have much success, for he was taken and bound and carried before the high priest, and also the chief judge over the land.

verse 21 The high priest Ammon ordered Korihor out of the land of Jershon.

The reader should bear in mind that Alma was the high priest over the entire Nephite land, the greater land of Zarahemla. Keep in mind the two separate meanings of the name “land of Zarahemla.” Most often it refers to the entire Nephite-occupied land north of the land of Nephi and south of the land Desolation. Also, it may refer to the limited land surrounding the city of Zarahemla and controlled by that city—a small land within the greater land of Zarahemla. Other lands within the greater land of Zarahemla include Gideon, Jershon, Manti, and others. In each of these small lands is found a city of the same name. Each individual smaller land within the greater land of Zarahemla apparently had its own high priest and chief judge.

The land of Gideon is that land near the city and land of Zarahemla to the south and on the east side of the River Sidon. People passed through Gideon as they traveled southward from the city of Zarahemla to reach the land of Manti or as they “went up” to the land of Nephi. We will learn that the high priest of the land of Gideon is named Giddonah.

22 And it came to pass that the high priest said unto him: Why do ye go about perverting the ways of the Lord? Why do ye teach this people that there shall be no Christ, to interrupt their rejoicings? Why do ye speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?

verse 22 The high priest (Giddonah) asks Korihor why he is trying to destroy the faith of the believing Nephites, especially since they are obviously receiving so much joy from their belief in Christ. In the following verses, Korihor will ignore the issue of his personal motives, but he will provide two reasons why he believes the people have come to believe in these “false” ideas. First, he contends they have been indoctrinated or propagandized by their parents (the “foolish traditions” of their fathers). Secondly, they have been brainwashed by false religious leaders who are motivated by the hope of personal gain or power. Korihor contends that this type of indoctrination is most harmful as it leads to guilt and shame. As mentioned in the commentary for verse 16, he refers to these unnecessary psychological hang-ups—guilt and shame—as “derangement” or a “frenzied mind.”

23 Now the high priest’s name was Giddonah. And Korihor said unto him: Because I do not teach the foolish traditions of your fathers, and because I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads, but be brought down according to thy words.

verse 23 “I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them” Here Korihor again employs the “first-temptation” strategy to appeal to that natural-man tendency within all of us to resist any type of confinement or enslavement. He also cleverly uses the debunking approach (see the commentary for Alma 1:2) and attempts to undermine the credibility of the Nephites’ priesthood leaders by referring to those good men as “ancient,” referring to their well-crafted laws as “foolish,” and questioning their motives.

We need only ask ourselves, “Who is truly free?” Is it the individual who accepts Christ and his gospel—which gospel enables him to achieve the ultimate fulfillment of becoming like God? Or is it that man who resists the “enslavement” of the gospel plan, and unwittingly falls into Satan’s trap?

24 Ye say that this people is a free people. Behold, I say they are in bondage. Ye say that those ancient prophecies are true. Behold, I say that ye do not know that they are true.

verse 24 “I say that ye do not know that they are true” Here Korihor follows the familiar pattern of doubters. He generalizes from his own experience. He assumes that what is true of him is true of everyone else. Because he doesn’t know, he assumes that no one else can. It is a defense born of his ambivalence. Perhaps he dares not admit that anyone else can believe because deep down he fears they might be correct in their beliefs.

25 Ye say that this people is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent. Behold, I say that a child is not guilty because of its parents.

verse 25 Note the subtlety of Korihor’s approach. The “parent” to which Korihor alludes is Adam. It is entirely true that an individual is not guilty because of the transgressions of a parent. Hence, Korihor equates the doctrine of the fall with being punished for the sins of a parent. We know, and Korihor knew as well, that those “penalties” which man suffers as the result of Adam’s sin (separation from God and physical death) are erased through Christ’s atonement. Man will only be punished for his own sins and not for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith, 2).

26 And ye also say that Christ shall come. But behold, I say that ye do not know that there shall be a Christ. And ye say also that he shall be slain for the sins of the world—

27 And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.

verse 27 For a reminder as to the particulars of “the foolish traditions of your fathers” see the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

“*your fathers*” (italics added) Korihor was likely a descendant of the Mulekites, or perhaps the Jaredites, rather than of father Lehi. See the commentary for Alma 1:2. See also verse 31 which contains the phrase “silly traditions of *their* fathers” (italics added).

“**ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands**” Korihor calls into question the motives of the Nephite priesthood leaders. He accuses them of seeking for riches—practicing priestcraft. People with evil motives have difficulty acknowledging pure motives in

others. Actually, we will learn from Alma that Korihor knew that this accusation was not true (see verse 35).

28 Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do according to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God—a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

verse 28 “they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests” Korihor accuses the Nephite priesthood leaders of practicing unrighteous dominion—making the Nephites feel that all they produced by their own labors was rightly owed to the church and not intended for their own use.

29 Now when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart, yea, when they saw that he would revile even against God, they would not make any reply to his words; but they caused that he should be bound; and they delivered him up into the hands of the officers, and sent him to the land of Zarahemla, that he might be brought before Alma, and the chief judge who was governor over all the land.

verse 29 “when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“he would revile even against God” To *revile* is to blame or to address with contemptuous language.

We will learn in the next verse that Korihor was guilty of blasphemy. Blasphemy is of two types: (1) speaking or acting offensively to or about the divine, and (2) claiming the attributes or prerogatives of Deity. Korihor was guilty of the first type because of his reviling against God.

30 And it came to pass that when he was brought before Alma and the chief judge, he did go on in the same manner as he did in the land of Gideon; yea, he went on to blaspheme.

31 And he did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers, accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people.

32 Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people.

verse 32 “Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people” Alma discerns that Korihor is deliberately lying and twisting the truth. Though we do not know the specific origins of Korihor, Alma here implies that he lived close enough to the city and land of Zarahemla to have been well acquainted with things happening there.

33 And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time.

34 And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren?

35 Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? And now, believest thou that we deceive this people, that causes such joy in their hearts?

36 And Korihor answered him, Yea.

verses 37-40 As mentioned, Alma has perceived that Korihor is lying. Now, in his questioning, he will now catch Korihor in the act of telling even more lies.

37 And then Alma said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

38 And he answered, Nay.

39 Now Alma said unto him: Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come.

verse 39 Alma has certainly encountered many unbelievers in his travels and is certainly not intimidated by Korihor. It is likely that Alma’s main concern was that Korihor might lead astray the innocent and unwary.

40 And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only.

verse 40 This question by Alma is brilliant and catches Korihor in a major inconsistency. Korihor has taught that people should believe only that which they can experience with their senses or otherwise prove to be true. Then Korihor unequivocally states that he believes there is no God. If Korihor were consistent in his beliefs, then he could not believe there is no God, because he cannot prove there is no God.

Just how might any person go about proving there is no God? Brother Gerald N. Lund illustrates the difficulty of such an endeavor:

Since the scriptures claim that God dwells in the heavens, the first task the person would have is to examine every cubic inch of the heavens (the universe), to see if there was a God. But even that impossible task creates a new set of problems. First of all, it would have to be an examination in the fullest sense of the word. Human beings see only visible light, which is a tiny portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. If by see we mean only what the eye can register, God would be totally missed if he exists at another frequency of the light spectrum. In other words, suppose God were at the ultraviolet or infrared frequencies. This person looking for God would miss him completely. But examining every inch of the universe across the fulness of the electromagnetic spectrum still wouldn't provide irrefutable proof. Suppose the person marked out the universe in a grid and began to search it systematically, square by square, from A to Z, and doesn't find God in any of the squares. Could that person then say there was no God? No! What if God was in square L when the searcher started in square A, but by the time that person reached square L, God had moved back to square B or C? Let's put it simply. Korihor says he will only believe what can be seen or proven. Yet he says he believes there is no God. To prove there is no God, a person would have to perceive (in the fullest sense of the word) every cubic inch of the entire universe simultaneously! In other words, one would have to be a god in order to prove there is no God. And yet Korihor blithely denies any belief in God's existence. In other words, Korihor is acting as much on faith (not righteous faith, but belief based on evidence that cannot be seen) as are those who believe there is a God. No wonder Alma accuses Korihor of having a 'lying spirit' (Alma 30:42)" ("An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon," *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 107-28, 123-24).

Indeed, it is wholly impossible to argue effectively the position that there is no God.

41 But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true?

verse 41 "I have all things as a testimony" Those who are responsive to the Spirit are prompted to see evidence of God's existence in almost every object and situation in their lives.

42 Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God.

verse 42 "Behold, I know that thou believest" Alma is not merely using a technique of formal debate here. Rather, he knows by prophetic insight and

discernment that Korihor does suspect that there is a God. In verse 52, Korihor will confirm that Alma had perceived the truth.

How does one come to believe in God when they have “put off the Spirit of God”? After all, is not the Spirit of God the only influence capable of revealing eternal truths to man? It is likely that Korihor’s belief in God was largely an intellectual ambivalence about the question of whether or not there is a God, a nagging suspicion that there was in fact a higher being, a grudging acquiescence and acknowledgment that even worldly logic suggests that the existence of God is highly plausible. There may even have been a prior witness given to Korihor by the Spirit which he now denies but still remembers.

43 And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

verse 43 In making this statement, Korihor is lying yet again. If, at this point, Korihor had been shown undeniable evidence of God’s existence, he would not have accepted it. He was unresponsive to the promptings of the Spirit and hardened against the truth. Though he asks for proof, he does not want proof, nor would he believe it if it were shown him.

Jesus was unequivocal in his condemnation of sign seekers. He said “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4). Joseph Smith affirmed this principle, saying it “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). Joseph here suggests that those with an inclination to seek after carnal pleasures are also likely to be those who seek for signs in religious matters. Why is this so? Those who follow a pattern of repeatedly satiating their physical desires become invariably insensitive to subtle promptings of the Spirit—they develop spiritual blindness. They respond only to physical sensations. They communicate only on a physical level. They prefer the here and now rather than things of eternity. They strive to meet the needs of me rather than you.

Almost all heavenly signs are given as a reward for great faith to further strengthen those who manifest that faith (D&C 63:11). In asking for a sign, Korihor likely knew this principle and assumed there would be no sign. Then he would feel that he had more evidence for his own position. The doubting sign seeker is only rarely afforded the opportunity to witness a miracle. In these unusual instances the sign usually takes the form of a divine judgment upon the doubter (Alma 30:48-56).

44 But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee,

yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.

verse 44 Here Alma summarizes the means given by God to man here in mortality, through which God intends that man learn of him: (1) the testimony of others, particularly the prophets; (2) the scriptures; (3) the grand design of nature itself.

Alma concludes his thoughts here with that memorable statement, “All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it” (see also Moses 6:63).

“all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth . . . and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form” Alma’s statement makes it clear that he knew something about astronomy. It is interesting that the 16th-century Spanish historians who lived in Mesoamerica (Ixtlilxochitl and Sahagun) recorded that an ancient culture in Mesoamerica, the Tultecas, were men of science who understood things pertaining to astronomy. Some believe that the Tultecas were the Nephites (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 169). Somewhat later, the classic Mayans (AD 200 to AD 900) went to great lengths to erect observatories in order to study astronomy.

45 And yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? And he said: Yea, I will deny, except ye shall show me a sign.

46 And now it came to pass that Alma said unto him: Behold, I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed.

47 But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction, by thy lying and by thy flattering words; therefore if thou shalt deny again, behold God shall smite thee, that thou shalt become dumb, that thou shalt never open thy mouth any more, that thou shalt not deceive this people any more.

verse 47 “behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction” Note that Alma uses the same justification here in warning Korihor that Nephi used in 1 Nephi 4:13 for the killing of Laban (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:13).

“by thy lying and by thy flattering words” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

48 Now Korihor said unto him: I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.

verse 48 Notice that when the heat is on, Korihor changes his previous frankly atheistic philosophy for more of an agnostic one. In effect he says, “I’m not saying God could not exist; I’m just saying I don’t believe he does.”

49 Now Alma said unto him: This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance.

50 Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma.

verse 50 “Korihor was struck dumb” The following verse indicates that Korihor was not only stuck “dumb” but also deaf and dumb.

John W. Welch has discovered an ancient practice, in the Mediterranean world, of cursing a person with speechlessness. These curses have usually been found associated with legal proceedings, that is, one litigant (opponent in a lawsuit) would write a curse against the other litigant in hopes that one deity or another would receive and act upon it. They would ask the gods to bind the tongue of the legal opponent so the opponent would lose the lawsuit. The litigant writing the curse would thus hope to receive an advantage in the legal proceeding. The earliest of these written curses date to the fifth century BC, not far from the time of Lehi. The speechlessness of Korihor, and the stunning of Sherem (Jacob 7) were precisely the kinds of signs or restraints that people in the ancient Mediterranean world expected a god to manifest in a judicial setting when false accusations or unfair ploys placed an innocent party at a distinct disadvantage. The stricken litigant, exposed by a god through illness or accident, would sometimes then confess his guilt. In hopes of appeasing the offended god, a punished litigant would inscribe in stone a clear profession of his newly admitted faith and would warn others not to disdain the gods. Similarly, God was seen as an active participant in the courts of Hebrew law in biblical times, and the trials of Sherem and Korihor show the same use of confession. Sherem recanted his public teachings, confessed the truth of God who had intervened against him, admitted his error, and expressed concern that he would never be able to appease God (see Jacob 7:17-19). We will read of Korihor’s penitence in the ensuing verses (FARMS Update in *Insights* [October 1998], 2).

51 And now when the chief judge saw this, he put forth his hand and wrote unto Korihor, saying: 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?

verse 51 “In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign?” Probably sensing Korihor’s distress at finding himself deaf and dumb, the chief judge says, in effect, “Why are you so upset? What did you expect? When you so foolishly

ask for a sign, what did you expect Alma to do? Was he supposed to afflict someone else to prove to you that God lives?”

52 And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak; and I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God.

verse 52 “I always knew that there was a God.” What a remarkable, and moving, confession!

53 But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown God. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me.

verse 53 “the devil hath deceived me” Lest we assume that Korihor was an innocent victim of Satan’s deception, let us keep in mind an important principle taught by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “Lucifer does not come personally to every false prophet, as he did to Korihor, any more than the Lord comes personally to every true prophet, as he did to Joseph Smith. Such an appearance—either of God on the one hand or of Satan on the other—is, however, the end result of full devotion to the respective causes involved. In each instance an earthly representative, by obedience to the laws that are ordained, may see the face of the master he serves” (*Millennial Messiah*, 72).

“I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind” Korihor’s teachings appealed to the carnal minds of those whom he taught. You can be sure they were pleasing unto Korihor’s carnal mind as well.

54 Now when he had said this, he besought that Alma should pray unto God, that the curse might be taken from him.

55 But Alma said unto him: If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people; therefore, it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will.

56 And it came to pass that the curse was not taken off of Korihor; but he was cast out, and went about from house to house begging for his food.

57 Now the knowledge of what had happened unto Korihor was immediately published throughout all the land; yea, the proclamation was sent forth by the chief judge to all the people in the land, declaring unto those who had believed in

the words of Korihor that they must speedily repent, lest the same judgments would come unto them.

58 And it came to pass that they were all convinced of the wickedness of Korihor; therefore they were all converted again unto the Lord; and this put an end to the iniquity after the manner of Korihor. And Korihor did go about from house to house, begging food for his support.

59 And it came to pass that as he went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram—and as he went forth amongst them, behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.

verse 59 The Zoramites were a group of Nephite separatists who followed an apostate named Zoram. This verse was probably written by Mormon, in part, as a segue between Alma 30 and Alma 31. In chapters 31 through 35, we will study the account of Alma's mission among the Zoramites.

60 And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

verse 60 “**And thus we see**” The prophet Mormon concludes with a powerful lesson. Those who give their soul to Satan will ultimately be abandoned by him. He has no ability to love and no ability to create a familial or fraternal support system.

Alma Chapter 31

Scripture Mastery

Alma 31-35 Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites.

Alma 31:5 Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

In this chapter we will encounter the Nephite apostate Zoram. In the book of Mormon text, he is the fourth of the charismatic, learned, and eloquent former Nephites who were successful in leading many Nephites from the truth. All four have some things in common. For example, they all denied that Christ would come. It may be a useful review to consider each of these briefly in turn.

Sherem lived in the days of the prophet Jacob and the account of his ministry is found in Jacob 7. He taught that salvation came through the law of Moses (Jacob 7:7). He denied the possibility of prophecy but then proceeded to prophesy himself: “I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be” (Jacob 7:9). After asking for a sign and being struck down by the Lord, he recanted his apostate teachings, confessed Christ, and died.

Nehor lived at the time of the younger Alma, and we read of him in Alma 1. He taught the doctrine of universal salvation for all men: “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). He advocated a paid ministry and introduced priestcraft among the Nephites. After slaying the elderly Gideon, he was executed, but not before he acknowledged the falsity of his teachings.

Korihor was the only person specifically referred to as “Anti-Christ” in the Book of Mormon. He also lived at the time of Alma the younger, and we read of him in Alma 30. He denied the existence of anything that could not be experienced with the physical senses. He advocated the law of the jungle (“every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime”—Alma 30:17). He asked for a sign and was struck deaf and dumb. He blamed his apostasy on a deceptive vision in which Satan appeared to him in the form of an angel. Korihor appealed for removal of the sign but was denied. He was later trampled to death while begging for food in the land of the Zoramites.

We are never given Zoram’s lineage, though it is possible he descended from Laban’s servant of the same name. He, with his followers, had apostatized from Alma’s church of Christ.

1 Now it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was

their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

verse 1 “leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols”

What were the specific gods or idols the Zoramites worshiped? The answer is found in verse 24: gold, silver, and all manner of fine goods. Idol worship has been common in all ages of the world and is common today. Each idol worshiper creates his own idols from things of the world. The Lord said of people in our dispensation: “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol” (D&C 1:16).

2 For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

3 Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites.

verse 3 Each of the “which’s” in this verse refer to the land Antionum, except for the final “which.” It refers to the wilderness. It may seem difficult to visualize the relative location of this land. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

4 Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites.

verse 4 The “correspondence” spoken of here likely refers to a military treaty. While Alma sorrowed greatly because of the iniquity of the Zoramites, the possibility of their combining forces with the Lamanites against the Nephites was also an issue of national security. The Nephites’ fears were well-founded as we will later learn (see Alma 35:10; 43:4).

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

verse 5 One of the grand themes of the entire book of Alma is that the preaching of the word of God is mightier than politics or the sword or intellectual logic and reasoning in establishing peace and goodness among a people. Indeed, the word of God is a most powerful influence in bringing people to the gospel and church of

Jesus Christ. The reason is simple: The Spirit is committed to bear witness to those potentially responsive souls who hear the word of God preached to them and who seek to know the truth.

“it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” How might we define the *word of God*? It is simply all of the communication that passes from God to all the intelligences in his universe. This communication is initiated by God intentionally and for his good purposes. We are reminded again and again in scripture that God’s primary yearning for his creatures is that they return home to live with him forever in the celestial heaven following this mortal phase. And indeed, we gain the sense from the scriptures that it is a powerful yearning (Moses 1:39). There is nothing arbitrary about the information he makes available to us. His “word” is made available to us for a purpose. It is intended to bring us home to him if we will seek for it, come to truly understand it, and respond to it. Some other attributes of the word of God described in scripture include: It is the foundation for faith (Alma 5:11-13; Romans 10:17). It may lead one to Christ (Helaman 3:29-30). It heals the wounded soul (Jacob 2:8). It spiritually nourishes the soul (Moroni 6:4).

What type of information is included in the word of God? Into what categories might we divide this information, this communication? In simple fashion, and somewhat arbitrarily, we may separate his word to us into: (1) his commandments, his ongoing instructions and ministrations, and (2) his doctrines. His word is communicated to us through his prophets, and he intends that we have constant touch with his prophets while we are here on earth. This word may be passed along to us orally from living prophets or in written scripture, from prophets past. We must also include those communications that occur from God to us as individuals. These arrive via the influence of the Holy Ghost and are referred to as inspiration or revelation.

It is possible that a man may live out his mortal experience literally awash in the word of God, and yet not perceive even a particle of it and therefore not benefit from it. A man can take full advantage of the word of God only through the merciful intervention of the Spirit of God. It is only through the Spirit’s instrumentality that man may come to understand and realize the significance of God’s word. The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to render God’s word understandable and therefore influential to us here on earth. The Spirit’s ministrations are not available to us without cost. What must we pay? We must acknowledge the existence of the Spirit’s influence, seek for that influence, and live worthy of it through our striving to live the commandments of God. Then we must also labor diligently to acquire God’s word through scripture, through his prophets, and through other prayerful strivings and ponderings. Also, we must labor diligently to attune our life to his teachings.

And what is the *virtue* of the word of God? Virtue, in this context, is the beneficial effect, the enabling power—that which makes things happen. In short it is that quality of the word of God that brings us home to him. Considering the separate categories of the

word of God, it is obvious how his commandments and his ongoing instructions and ministrations work in bringing us back to him. We must strive to obey him, and we must remain close to him so that we may receive his succor. This obedience brings to us vital spiritual growth during which he blesses us with incremental divine attributes—blessings given beyond that which we merit. We cannot successfully negotiate this mortal phase without his ongoing help. For further discussion of spiritual growth see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume one, chapters 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit*—and 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

But what about his *doctrines*? Do they have power in our lives? Do they help bring us home to him? Do they have *virtue*? We may simply define God's doctrine as the way things are and the way things work in God's universe. In a broader sense, we may define God's doctrine as all of his teachings. In this sense doctrine is virtually identical to the word of God. In a more limited sense, doctrine is the truth about God. It is the concepts, the principles, the characteristics of God and all things surrounding him. Doctrine includes all of the characteristics of his plan of salvation. Doctrine includes the truths about all of the dynamics of God's universe—how things work, how they fit together, how they interact.

An oft-neglected characteristic of doctrine is its force and influence in our spiritual lives. A study of the doctrine, enriched and enabled by the Spirit of God, eventually brings one to marvel over the consistency, the logic, and the majesty of the doctrine. A persistent study of the doctrine leads, almost inevitably to a testimony of the truth of it all. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior" (*CR*, October 1986, 20). In short, a study of true doctrine leads to conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church.

As Alma consider the approach he ought to utilize with the rebellious Zoram and his followers (and who would doubt that he discussed this approach with his missionary companion Amulek), the decision was made that they would try to bring the Zoramites to Christ through teaching them the doctrine. Alma hoped that hearing the doctrines might lead to the Zoramites' being nudged by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and to their desiring to know more.

6 Therefore he took Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons.

verse 6 It is interesting to note that this mission of Alma and company to the Zoramites took place about one year prior to Alma's supposed death.

7 Now the eldest of his sons he took not with him, and his name was Helaman; but the names of those whom he took with him were Shiblon and Corianton; and

these are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites, to preach unto them the word.

verse 7 “Corianton” It is of interest to learn that names that begin with “Co” or “Ko” are common in the Mayan language. There are other names in the Book of Mormon that begin with the same prefix: Cohor, Korihor, and Coriantumr.

8 Now the Zoramites were dissenters from the Nephites; therefore they had had the word of God preached unto them.

9 But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses.

verse 9 We already know that the Nephites offered sacrifices and kept the law of Moses. We often equate the offering of sacrifices with the law of Moses, but did not Adam and Abraham offer sacrifices? Could it be that the offering of sacrifices is a part of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ? A statement of Elder Bruce R. McConkie is interesting in this regard: “We cannot always tell . . . whether specific sacrificial rites performed in Israel were part of the Mosaic system or whether they were the same ordinances performed by Adam and Abraham as part of the gospel law itself.” Speaking of the Nephites, Elder McConkie continued: “Since they held the Melchizedek priesthood and there were no Levites among them, we suppose their sacrifices were those that antedated the ministry of Moses and that, since they had the fulness of the gospel itself, they kept the law of Moses [only] in the sense that they conformed to its myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions” (*Promised Messiah*, 427). If sacrifices are a part of the fulness of the gospel, why do we not offer them today? We do indeed live the law of sacrifice, as anyone who has made sacred covenants in the temple can attest.

10 Neither would they observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation.

verse 10 “the performances of the church” We may interpret the word “performances” as the commanded behaviors or rituals.

11 Yea, in fine, they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances; therefore, for this cause, Alma and his brethren went into the land to preach the word unto them.

verse 11 To “pervert” is to distort, corrupt or lead astray.

verses 12-23 The Zoramite ritual described in these verses is uncharacteristic of people with a Hebrew origin. Perhaps this is further evidence of influence from other indigenous cultures among whom the Zoramites may have intermarried (see also the commentary for Jarom 1:6).

Rodney Turner has described the religion of the Zoramites as, “false, superficial, undemanding, impotent, and Christless.” He has also observed: “The religion of the ancient Zoramites in the Book of Mormon is paralleled by much of the religion practiced in our modern world. . . . Consequently, the message of God’s prophets to that misguided people is as relevant now as it was over two thousand years ago. . . . While religious illusions [such as those held by the Zoramites and their modern-day counterparts] may serve us in time, they will fail us in eternity” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 16*).

12 Now, when they had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld;

verse 12 “they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together” Synagogues in the Book of Mormon are simply places of worship. The English word *synagogue* consists of a prefix and a root. The prefix *syn* means together. The root *ago* is a verb which means to gather or to bring together. It is interesting to note that in this verse the phrase “gather themselves together” appears in close association with the term “synagogue.”

The Zoramites seem to have been a relatively sophisticated and enterprising group who had moved into this land and probably had taken over from other less sophisticated inhabitants (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, volume 8, 542-44*).

13 For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head, and the top thereof would only admit one person.

14 Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying:

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

verse 15 “thou wilt be a spirit forever” Here is evidence of their antichrist and false beliefs. They did not believe the teachings of the prophets—that God would condescend to come to earth and minister among men.

16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be

thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

verse 17 “thou hast elected us that we shall be saved” For a discussion of the true doctrine of election, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

This doctrine sounds a note that is all too familiar in the religious world today. The teachings of historical Christianity, such as that accepted by the Protestants (Evangelicals), is just that. They maintain that once an individual has confessed Christ, he is saved in heaven forever (see the three chapters in the section titled *Salvation* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4).

18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

verses 16-18 The Zoramites believed that God had singled them out for special blessings and spiritual insights. They were more blessed than their former Nephite brethren. Does this sound familiar? Do the Zoramites have any modern-day counterparts? How about some of the fundamentalist apostate groups who have separated themselves from the LDS Church. Some of them feel that they are privileged to know a “higher law” or “higher doctrine” than those who are committed to the Church.

For further discussion of what it really means to be a chosen people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

19 Now it came to pass that after Alma and his brethren and his sons had heard these prayers, they were astonished beyond all measure.

20 For behold, every man did go forth and offer up these same prayers.

21 Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand.

verse 21 The Rameumptom apparently was a type of praying stand at the top of a stairway. This design is suggestive of the standard motif of the ancient Central American ceremonial centers, the tall towers or pyramids with their steep stairways (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 542-44).

22 Now, from this stand they did offer up, every man, the selfsame prayer unto God, thanking their God that they were chosen of him, and that he did not lead

them away after the tradition of their brethren, and that their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about.

verse 22 *Selfsame* means the very same; identical.

“things to come, which they knew nothing about” The Zoramites denied the reality of prophecy.

23 Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.

verse 23 Rodney Turner wrote of the Zoramites’ almost comical form of worship:

Their choral exercise in vanity sufficed to appease their God and permitted them to freely indulge themselves. Having been predestined to holiness and salvation, they had no need for daily prayer or obedience to restrictive commandments. The issue of life after death had been fully and happily settled; they could get on with the things of this world. Such is the underlying assumption of every ‘Sunday religion.’ It renders God a practical irrelevance. He exists, but he need not be taken too seriously. [These] false doctrines . . . were both predictive and representative of those apostate religious beliefs—Christian and non-Christian—that shroud the world in spiritual darkness in these latter days (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni 18-19*).

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

verses 24-28 See the discussion on idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

30 O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

verse 30 Alma is certainly disgusted and spiritually tormented by the wickedness of the Zoramites. Might there be a suggestion here also that his physical health is not good?

31 O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people.

verse 31 “comfort my soul in Christ” There is considerable comfort available to us who are struggling here in mortality. It comes from Christ and may be experienced by those who know and love him through the mediation of the Holy Ghost.

32 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ.

33 Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.

verses 31-33 Alma apparently anticipates ridicule, scorn, rejection, and even persecution as the group proselytes among the Zoramites. We sense that Alma is not certain he personally can tolerate it, perhaps because of his physical condition.

34 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

35 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

verse 35 “their souls are precious” Just exactly why is the worth of souls so great? Not only does each soul have infinite potential, but each has been bought with an infinite price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), even “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19). Having offered these explanations, we must remind ourselves that human logic seems to fall short in trying to explain the love the Father and the Son have for each of us.

“many of them are our brethren” (emphasis mine) We know that the Zoramites are dissenters from the Nephites (see verse 8). Apparently the “brethren” Alma is referring to are those former Nephites who are of Nephite, Lamanite, or

Mulekite ancestry. People in these three categories are typically referred to in the text of the Book of Mormon as “brethren” (Mosiah 1:5; 7:2,13; Alma 24:7-8). We may well wonder about those living among the Zoramites who are not considered their “brethren.” Again, it is likely that when the Zoramites first settled this land, they took over from former indigenous inhabitants.

36 Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

verse 36 “he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him” This phrase implies some type of physical ordinance, perhaps involving the striking of his hands together, by which Alma set his brethren apart to their callings and bestowed upon them the Holy Spirit. An alternate explanation is that *clapped* is an alternative form of *thrust* or *placed* his hands upon the heads of his co-workers and set them apart for their missionary labor.

37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

verse 38 “he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ” We will all suffer afflictions in mortality, but we hope, as Elder Neil A. Maxwell phrased it, that, “the sour notes are lost amid a symphony of salvational sounds” (*Not Thy Will, but Thine*, 119).

Alma Chapter 32

Scripture Mastery

Alma 32 Alma's Lecture to the Zoramites on Faith

Alma 32:21 Alma's lecture on faith: Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things.

Alma 32:27-29 Awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words.

This chapter contains a discourse delivered to the Zoramites by the prophet Alma on the principle of faith. The scriptures that contain this oft-discussed principle can sometimes be confusing. This is perhaps because more than one concept in scripture is referred to as faith. Two of these concepts are fundamental and vital. There is even a third concept. Though this third concept is important, it is less commonly referenced than the other two. For a review of these separate concepts of faith, the reader is urged to read and study the following three chapters in volume 1 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* before commencing your study of Alma 32: (1) chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*, (2) chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and (3) chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. The background afforded by these three chapters is essential if one is to fully understand and learn from Alma 32.

There exist a few "givens" necessary to our acquisition of faith. These include: (1) Understand that God *wants* you to believe on his word and act on his word (verse 22). (2) The candidate must be humble (verse 6), that is, he must suspend judgment and be teachable. (3) God will provide each of us access to spiritual truth regardless of our station in life (verse 23). (4) One cannot know with certainty at first (verse 26).

1 And it came to pass that they did go forth, and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets.

verse 1 "began to preach the word of God unto the people" Basic to the process of acquiring and exercising faith is hearing the word of God (the commandments), being impacted by it to some degree, and acting on it (obeying).

2 And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the poor class of people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel—

verse 2 "they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel" The poor among the Zoramites were not welcomed in churches of the more affluent Zoramites. Dr. Hugh Nibley, with an evident twinkle in his eye, wrote of the Zoramites:

Now these Zoramites had their virtues as well as their vices, as every society does if it is to survive for a month or more. They were strong-minded, independent people who went off to found their own nation and in so doing showed themselves exceedingly enterprising and industrious. A disciplined people, they turned out the ablest military officers that Moroni ever had to contend with (Alma 43:6, 44; 48:5). Enjoying great prosperity, they were strict in their religious observances, giving fulsome [excessive or insincere] thanks to God for his goodness in fervid [enthusiastic or glowing] personal testimonies every week, and preserving an atmosphere of high respectability with *unswerving adherence to proper dress standards* (Alma 32:2) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 344-45, italics mine).

3 Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness; therefore they were poor; yea, they were esteemed by their brethren as dross; therefore they were poor as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart.

verse 3 “They” refers to the poor Zoramites. “Dross” (*Dr-aw-s*) is waste matter; refuse; any worthless matter separated from the better part.

4 Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking, of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world.

verses 3-4 “poor in heart” The phrase “poor in spirit” found in Matthew 5:3 appears to mean humble and spiritually full. Nevertheless, the phrase “poor in heart,” in this context, means depressed and spiritually impoverished.

5 And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?

6 And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.

verse 6 “he turned him about” It is difficult to know clearly the referents of these two pronouns. We do know that Alma was speaking with the “one who was the foremost [poor Zoramite] among” the others. It seems likely that as Alma was addressing “the people upon the hill Onidah, the multitude of poor Zoramites

approached from a direction different than Alma was facing. Thus, as this spokeman spoke to Alma, they apparently were initially not standing face to face. The “he” seems most likely to refer to Alma. Alma turned himself about to face the spokesman. Alma was able to discern that this spokesman, whose demeanor was representative of that of the poor multitude that had just approached, was truly humble because of the afflictions he had undergone.

Humility is a vital pre-requisite to acquiring faith and, indeed, a pre-requisite to making any spiritual progress. What exactly is humility? As with other eternal principles, humility has a temporal definition as well as an eternal one. In a worldly sense, humility means teachable, coachable, willing to consider alternate ideas, and willing to change. The eternal attribute of humility is all of this and more. It may be acquired only by personal revelation. It is a gift of the Spirit. It is the ability to perceive oneself in an eternal perspective—as a child of God who desires above all else to return to his rightful eternal home. It includes a realization of the critical dangers and pitfalls along the way—a realization that you are utterly lost without a Redeemer and a profound gratitude for the Savior’s unspeakable suffering and love. The individual with this richer form of humility is willing to alter his behavior, indeed to repent, in any way necessary to accomplish his goal.

At this early stage, perhaps these poor Zoramites had mostly achieved the worldly variant of humility. How does one progress from humility as the world defines it to its eternal counterpart? By putting the word of God to the test or “experimenting upon the word.” No gift of the Spirit comes without diligent striving—without deliberate and diligent obedience. This includes assiduously seeking to learn of Christ and his atoning death through study and through prayer and then a deliberate and unswerving obedience to his commandments.

The opposite of humility is pride. We may define pride as the absence of responsiveness to the Spirit of God and a virtually total captivity by influences of the world. The proud are “natural men” unaffected by the Spirit. They are inevitably caught up in the world’s definition of themselves. The worldly influences upon them are all-consuming. Indeed, there appear to be no other pertinent or effective influences, other than worldly ones, active in their lives. They see themselves purely as the world defines them. They also see themselves in competition with all others in pursuit of the world’s “limited” prizes. The scarcity mentality dominates their thinking. They desire the things of the world, and they do not want to wait. They want them now. They are willing to compete with their fellow human beings for them. Eternal considerations are not only unimportant but silly, naïve, and a waste of time. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

7 Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them:

verse 7 Alma then turned away from the crowd of more wealthy Zoramites. He perceived them as being beyond spiritual repair. He turned his attentions to the poor and penitent Zoramites.

8 I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.

9 Behold thy brother hath said, What shall we do?—for we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God.

verse 9 “thy brother” This phrase refers to the spokesman of the multitude of poor Zoramites mentioned in verse 5. He was humble enough to plead for spiritual counsel on behalf of the group.

10 Behold I say unto you, do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only?

verse 10 Alma implies that true worship and seeking after truth is an inward quest and has less to do with outward ritual. Even in the Church today there is some danger of coming to measure our success largely by the accomplishment of goals; by the completion of our assignments and obligations; or by those behaviors that manifest our obedience. The true measure of a man’s success in spiritual matters is the feelings, insights, and longings of his heart.

11 Moreover, I would ask, do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week?

verse 11 “ye must not worship God only once in a week” Alma is saying, “Do you believe you should only worship God once a week?”

verses 12-16 There is a tendency for success in worldly matters to lead to a damning self-satisfaction. The man with abundant worldly possessions is often content with his worldly success and disinclined to seek for life’s higher meaning. He is happy to rest comfortably in his own self-sufficiency. We may say he has become *proud* (see the definitions of humility and pride in the commentary for verse 6). The apostle Paul wrote: “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

Is the poor man who has few material possessions and acquisitions more inclined to seek for eternal meaning in life? Perhaps some are more inclined, almost as if by default—they have failed to find satisfaction in other areas of their lives. Certainly

there are many among the poor, however, who come to hunger even more for worldly satisfactions because of their deprivation and poverty. Their humility may be squelched by their resentment of those with more abundant means.

There is an unmistakable implication in these verses that the man who is inclined to seek for eternal meaning regardless of his worldly circumstances is particularly blessed. These choice individuals may be found among the world's poor or among the wealthy or anywhere in between (see verse 25).

12 I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble.

verse 12 Just what is the “wisdom” these poor Zoramites had learned through being cast out of their synagogues? Wisdom may be defined as a true eternal perspective and priorities that accord with that perspective. To repeat, it is the ability to prioritize, from a true eternal perspective. It is the ability to clearly separate what is important from those things of lesser importance. Obviously this form of wisdom is not the same as the secular form of wisdom. This spiritual wisdom must be earned as incremental gifts of the Spirit by obedience to gospel laws.

These poor Zoramites had likely learned that they are vulnerable and not completely self-sufficient. They, and indeed we all, are utterly dependent, in some ways, upon someone else. After being taught the gospel, they will learn that it is Jesus Christ upon whom they are ultimately dependent for their eventual salvation.

Certainly there exists an apostate form of wisdom. What is it? It is most certainly intellectualism. Intellectualism is the vigorous seeking after secular knowledge while disavowing the existence of spiritual knowledge.

13 And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved.

verse 13 “**sometimes**” Alma will teach in this and the following verse that only some of those who are compelled to be humble will seek repentance. Most blessed is he who recognizes—independent of his circumstances—the necessity of repentance after being taught the gospel.

“**whosoever repenteth shall find mercy**” Here is a reminder that the mercy of God is not extended unconditionally to the unrepentant.

14 And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word?

15 Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.

verses 14-15 To reiterate: there is potential virtue in poverty, as it sometimes leads to spiritual responsiveness. A higher form of responsiveness or humility is independent of one's socioeconomic status. It is to hear the word of God and be so moved by the word itself that one is humbled to the point of obedience.

16 Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe.

verse 16 “blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble” Can a person really be forced or compelled to be humble or to submit to God's will? God would never, nor could he ever, force a person against his will. This phrase, by implication, cautions the individual who will only submit to God's will after repeated reminders of his need for help in obtaining relief of afflictions, adversities, and deprivations. It is more desirable to act rather than be acted upon—to be proactive—in one's obedience to gospel law than to be compelled by circumstances.

How would you define “stubbornness of heart”? It is an inability or an unwillingness to respond to the promptings of the Spirit. Some level of responsiveness to the Spirit's promptings is universally available—potentially at least—to all in the form of the spirit or light of Christ (Moroni 7:16, D&C 93:2). For a more thorough discussion of this concept, see “The Spirit or Light of Christ” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 5, *The Holy Ghost*.

There are certainly gradations or degrees of “stubbornness.” Consider, in this context, the resurrected Savior's counsel to the Nephites gathered at the temple in Bountiful: “Blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am” (3 Nephi 12:1-2). It would seem that some individuals have the gift to believe, while others need evidence, clues, and inducements to believe because they are by nature stubborn in their skepticism. Evidence, logic, and some spiritual intuition all have a role in the testimonies of each and every one of us.

17 Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe.

verse 17 Rodney Turner wrote: “The sign-seekers, the God-tempters presume to put the Almighty on trial by challenging him to prove his own existence. . . . In their pride, the Korihors of this world set up the preconditions under which they may condescend to believe. But it is all a sham; their insistence on signs is not meant to foster faith but to justify doubt” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 21*).

Sign seekers are the prototypical “natural men.” A good example of sign seekers is found in the New Testament Jews and Greeks. Paul wrote: “For the Jews require a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Adam Clarke explained:

There never was a people in the universe more difficult to be persuaded of the truth than the Jews: and had not their religion been incontestably proved by the most striking and indubitable miracles, they never would have received it. This slowness of heart to believe, added to their fear of being deceived, induced them to require miracles to attest to every thing that professed to come from God. They were a wicked and adulterous generation, continually seeking signs, and never saying, “It is enough.” They looked for a Messiah who came in the person of a conquering military hero, and they did not respond to the lowly Jesus of Nazareth. The Greeks also, “could not believe that proclaiming supreme happiness through a man that was crucified at Judea as a malefactor could ever comport with reason and common sense; for both the matter and manner of the preaching were opposite to every notion they had formed of what was dignified and philosophic. . . . Thus Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness (*Clarke’s New Testament Commentary, 2:195*).

18 Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it.

verse 18 “he hath no cause to believe” The type of belief here is that type of belief that is not available to physical confirmation.

Alma teaches that experiencing a phenomenon with one’s physical senses causes the individual to “know” or have a secular or physical knowledge of that phenomenon. This type of knowledge eliminates the need for unsubstantiated belief. If one acts according to a phenomenon that has been confirmed by physical senses, then there is no faith involved. If a man sees a rake in his driveway, he will step over it to avoid tripping and falling. His stepping over the rake involves no faith—he does not exercise his faith.

19 And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression?

verse 19 Now Alma shifts gears and speaks of knowing and believing spiritual truths. He distinguishes between “knowing” and “believing” spiritual truths. *Belief*, as mentioned here, fits into the category of so called “whispered testimonies.” These are those subtle inclinations to believe resulting from the spirit of Christ. They are testimonies—spoken or written—by the Lord’s servants, or the non-verbal testimonies resulting from observing God’s handiwork. These are universally available prompters for all to obey.

Alma implies here that it is possible to “know”—not just believe—spiritual truths such as the will of God. And indeed it is. If one acts on this type of belief—that is, if one repeatedly obeys a principle of which he is no physical proof but only a spiritual whispering, then that principle will begin to be revealed to him, and he will then—incrementally over time—begin to “know” the spiritual truth. The initial obedient action based on this type of belief is, by definition, manifesting one’s faith. We may call this type of faith “deliberate faith.” The spiritual “knowledge” that results is yet another type of faith we may refer to as “revealed faith.”

Here, Alma is making the point that he who *knows* God’s will (he has had the principle revealed to him by virtue of his having exercised his deliberate faith) is under greater condemnation if he fails to obey than he who only in the stage of unsubstantiated “belief” See “Belief or Hope” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. To reiterate, the individual who “knows” a spiritual truth has had that truth revealed to his soul as a consequence of his deliberate obedience to the word of God.

20 Now of this thing ye must judge. Behold, I say unto you, that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other; and it shall be unto every man according to his work.

verse 20 “it is on the one hand even as it is on the other” We might interpret this phrase as follows: With the Lord, all things are done in perfect fairness. Each man is judged based on what level of spiritual knowledge he possesses. The man’s behaviors or “works” will inevitably be determined by what he truly knows in his heart. He will be judged according to who he truly is—by the “desires of his heart” (Alma 29:4).

21 And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

verse 21 We must keep in mind that faith is an action word. It is the deliberate doing—the deliberate obeying—when all we have is a spiritual inkling, an unsubstantiated belief and hope that we’re doing the right thing. This verse outlines the basic conditions in which a person may manifest faith. They have an imperfect

knowledge (an unsubstantiated belief) in that they believe in and hope for things that they have not seen. But that imperfect knowledge and hope is not by itself faith. It is the precursor to faith. It creates the setting in which deliberate faith will begin to produce revealed faith.

The reader will note that this verse is incomplete, in that it does not mention the actual manifestation of faith, the deliberate obeying of the pertinent spiritual truth or principle. This is the basic form of faith, the “deliberate faith.” Again, see the three chapters referenced above that discuss the concept of faith. This type of faith is deliberately obeying when the individual is motivated only by an imperfect and subtle knowledge and subtle hope he is doing the right thing. This deliberate obedience is the very power that enables the process of spiritual growth to occur. The individual who is able to manifest this faith, that is, deliberately obey the commandments, may or may not possess much of a belief, expectation, or hope that his actions will lead to a spiritual conviction. He may have only a faint desire to believe, a faint hope that the word of God he has heard is true. The essence of this fundamental form of faith is his deliberate obedience. It is his action. Hence, this type of faith is, indeed, an action word.

The individual’s subtle inclination and expectations are referred to here as his “belief” or his “hope.” This should not be confused with the spiritual gift of hope. This latter “hope” is a gift received by those who have already exercised their deliberate faith and have begun to receive revealed faith in the form of the spiritual gift of reassurance that they are on the path toward their celestial salvation.

The expectation—the “belief” or “hope”—spoken of in this verse might even contain an element of honest doubt since it is not a sure knowledge. This doubt does not negate the beneficial and motivating force of this hope. Truman Madsen once reported a statement by Hugh B. Brown: “No one has ever had an authentic assurance unless he has served an apprenticeship in doubt” (Interview with Jerry Johnston, *Deseret News*, November 1989).

Elder Boyd K. Packer wrote: “Faith, to be faith, must go beyond that for which there is confirming evidence. Faith, to be faith, must go into the unknown. Faith, to be faith, must walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness” (*Faith*, 40-44). The actual faith is the deliberate walking into the darkness.

This verse is also a reminder that exercising deliberate faith is only an exercise of true faith if it based on “belief” or “hope” in things “which are *true*.” Acting according to a belief in false concepts is hardly true faith.

Now we are ready to truly understand this verse.

“faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things” The setting in which deliberate faith (deliberate obedience) may be productively manifest is when you have an inkling or subtle belief in a true principle but not a perfect knowledge of that principle. This subtle and imperfect knowledge of things is not, by itself faith. Rather, it is the setting in which deliberate obedience—deliberate faith—may be productively manifest.

“if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” If you are manifesting deliberate faith (deliberate obedience), then you have a subtle belief or hope in true principles you do not know for certain. Again, the deliberate faith is not the subtle hope for things which are not seen. The deliberate faith is the action of deliberate obedience.

22 And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word.

verse 22 **“God is merciful unto all who believe on his name”** The Lord wants you home. The only way you can return home is to act on your whispered testimonies—your subtle beliefs and hopes—and exercise deliberate faith by deliberately obeying the Lord’s commands. Then he will deal mercifully with you and reveal to you gifts of the Spirit over and above those you actually deserve. These gifts of the Spirit become your revealed faith and produce fundamental changes in your heart, your priorities, and your inclination to obey in the future.

23 And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times which confound the wise and the learned.

verse 23 The word of God—the “rules and regulations” for spiritual growth and returning to your celestial home—are available to all of God’s children young and old, male and female.

24 And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye are afflicted and cast out—now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true—

verse 24 **“I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true”** Alma seems to say, “Please understand that I am not passing judgment on you because of your obvious situations of poverty (their living in poverty is “that which is true”). I am not impugning the value of your inclinations toward repentance because you are poor.”

25 For I do not mean that ye all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves; for I verily believe that there are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might.

verse 25 Alma says, “I know some of you would be humble and teachable regardless of your economic circumstances—even if you were people of means.”

26 Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.

verse 26 “[faith] was not a perfect knowledge” The Lord reminds us that our initial inclinations to obey are subtle—not perfect knowledge. This statement may refer to more than just our initial inclinations or beliefs that result in our obedience. It may also refer to the very earliest stages of developing revealed faith. At that stage, our revealed faith is not “perfect knowledge.” And while we are here on earth, our revealed faith may well result in a strong testimony or powerfully-felt knowledge, but the nature of mortality is that it won’t become “perfect knowledge.” That will not come until we kneel at the feet of Christ and see him in his full majesty.

“even so it is with my words” Initially our impressions of the words of God—written or spoken—are subtle and do not immediately create a compelling need to obey.

“Ye cannot know of their surety at first” The Lord urges us to have patience. Initially, we act on subtle impressions. It is often painful and difficult to muster the discipline to do so—to obey. Incrementally and eventually, the gifts of the Spirit consequent to our deliberate obedience begin to have a cumulative and positive effect. The sum total of these accumulated gifts of the spirit comprise our “revealed faith.” Our revealed faith produces in us a greater facility and inclination to obey. We become more strongly inclined to obey. It becomes less difficult. We become “new creatures.” There is no shortcut to acquiring this revealed faith. We must be patient and settle for gradual, “line upon line,” incremental growth.

We will learn in the next verse that the process deliberately obeying when you are motivated by a subtle and imperfect spiritual knowledge is referred to as “experimenting upon the words of Christ.”

verses 27-34 Alma will now introduce the metaphor of planting and nourishing a seed. In this metaphor, the seed is initially the word of God—the subtle inkling or belief that it is true. In particular the seed is the testimony of Christ recorded by every prophet of God since the world began. An individual must first decide whether or not he desires to believe in the word of God. If he decides in the affirmative, then according to Alma’s metaphor, he has planted the word in his heart and the scene is set for the manifestation of deliberate faith. As he experiments upon the word or puts the word to the test—exercises his deliberate faith by deliberately obeying the Savior’s commands—he is said to be nourishing the seed. The seed then blossoms or flourishes and becomes revealed faith—a sequential and incremental accumulation of gifts of the Spirit.

27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than

desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

verse 27 “experiment upon my words” Here is the grand key for the acquisition of revealed faith—indeed, for all spiritual progress. It is a fail-safe technique. It is to deliberately obey—to exercise deliberate faith—in the Lord’s words.

If one should “try-out” or “test” a principle that is not true, there will be no spiritual confirmation. The Spirit will provide no witness or conviction. No revealed faith will be granted as a gift of the Spirit. Progress will occur and spiritual gifts will be given only when we “experiment upon”—act upon or obey—principles of truth.

The Savior declared, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). This means that when you deliberately obey, one of the gifts of the Spirit that results from your obedience is a testimony that the principle you’re obeying is true and is of God.

“no more than a desire to believe” This is the very beginning of faith, the very first step. As one studies the words of Christ, a perfectly neutral attitude or a negative one will not likely lead to the exercise of faith. One must have a positive desire to believe based on a subtle inkling or subtle belief that it is true. While an element of doubt may always exist since one cannot see with one’s senses, it is vital to make a conscious effort to suspend disbelief.

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

verse 28 As an individual experiments upon the word by deliberately obeying (manifesting his deliberate faith) and finds spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment in his experimentation, according to the metaphor of the seed, the seed begins “to swell” within that individual’s breast; it “enlarges” that individual’s soul. He is fulfilled by the revelation to his soul of gifts of the Spirit. His obedience therefore “enlightens” his spiritual understanding. It is thus “delicious” to him. His faith or confidence in the word is thus enhanced.

Joseph Smith certainly found principles of eternal truth to be sweet and delicious. He once said: “This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these

things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more” (*TPJS*, 355).

29 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

verse 29 Keep in mind that obey the words of the Lord will result in gifts of the Spirit—spiritual growth. The sum total of this spiritual growth is a man’s revealed faith. In this verse, the Lord speaks of this revealed faith. Here he teaches that it is unlikely the spiritual understandings of any mortal will “grow up” to perfect knowledge here on earth. The Lord reminds us of the necessity of continuing to strive without a perfect knowledge until we complete this “second estate.”

30 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.

verse 30 “will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow” One note of some interest is these words were omitted from this verse in all of the early editions of the Book of Mormon, beginning with the 1830 edition, and were not restored until the 1981 edition. They are, however, found in the original manuscript and in the printer’s manuscript. At some point in the copying process, most likely the type setter set the words “And now behold,” and when he looked down, his eye went to the next occurrence of “And now, behold” in the following verse. Thus these words were omitted. See also the interesting discussion of the misplacement of Alma 13:16 which probably occurred while Alma 13 was being abridged by the prophet Mormon.

As we deliberately strive to obey, the fruits of this deliberate faith—the profound blessings and changes it produces in us—will become evident. The faith that will be strengthened here is revealed faith.

31 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.

verse 31 “every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” The true word of God is a “good seed.” Obedience to that word results in a man’s becoming more like the God who uttered the word.

32 Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.

verse 32 If one “experiments upon” principles that are not true, then no spiritual confirmation will come. No gift of faith—revealed faith—will result. No spiritual growth will occur.

33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

verse 33 “it swelleth and sprouteth” Alma’s point here, which is made more fully in the next verse, is that once the seed sprouts, one can see it with “one’s eyes.” Speaking more literally, when spiritual growth occurs you will sense it powerfully with, as it were, your physical senses. Though we may speak of this as “perfect knowledge,” it is not a “black or white” process. It is an ongoing and continuing process to approach the point of “perfect faith.” As we approach perfect faith, however, it is clear that the word of God will be regarded, more and more, as a settled truth. There will be less and less trouble accommodating it in our behavior. It is exciting to contemplate that our progress along the road to perfect faith is marked by incremental acquisitions of nearly perfect knowledge.

34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because ye know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

verse 34 Our faith in the Savior can eventually grow until it is “perfect” knowledge at which time it ceases to be faith. Might this occur even while we are yet in mortality? Might our need for deliberate obedience—for deliberate faith become dormant? It is unlikely that our faith in spiritual things will ever become “perfect” and thus “dormant” while we are yet in mortality.

35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?

verse 35 “is not this real” As we progress in our faith, our spiritual progress—the light we radiate to the universe—will become very “real” and discernible to each of us. For a discussion of this spiritual light, see *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.

verse 36 “neither must ye lay aside your faith” Here Alma seems to say, “Please know that you should never stop exercising your deliberate faith. You must maintain a continued commitment to ‘experimenting upon the words’ of Christ.”

37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.

verse 37 The seed that was planted eventually sprouts to become a tree. Some eternal principles will eventually become so real to us that our knowledge may be said to be perfect in those principles. Then we will no longer have to exercise “deliberate faith” in those principles. Indeed, it is not possible for us to exercise faith in them since our knowledge is perfect. However, the acquisition of “revealed faith” is an ongoing and continual process. We must never stop striving to gain more of this type of faith. Revealed faith is simply the sum total of the gifts of the spirit, the attributes of Christ, that we have earned through our obedience. We must continually nourish the tree with much care, that is, continue to diligently obey the commandments. Then the tree “will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.” That fruit is a powerful faith—revealed faith—in the Lord Jesus Christ, even faith unto salvation.

38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

verse 38 A modicum of “revealed faith,” even when obtained based upon the exercise of sound principles, may be lost if it is not continually nourished. Please remember there are no plateaus in spiritual growth. If you are not progressing, then you are digressing.

39 Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

verse 39 “your ground is barren” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *barren* as, “Not producing plants; unfruitful; sterile; not fertile; or producing little; unproductive.” Here, the phrase “your ground is barren” means that you have stopped striving to obey, you have failed to continue “experimenting upon the words of Christ.” You have stopped nurturing your revealed faith. What you have left of revealed faith—accumulated gifts of the Spirit—will surely melt quickly away.

40 And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life.

verse 40 “An eye of faith” is a proper attitude, it is the eye of the heart. Surely one day we will all be blessed to see with our eyes what we now only see with our hearts.

“ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life” This statement means you will never inherit celestial glory.

41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.

42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.

verse 42 “because of your diligence and your faith and your patience” The process of obtaining faith unto exaltation will not be an easy one. We will all be tested in our decision to obey the Lord’s commands. Moroni has warned us that we will “receive no witness until after the *trial* of your faith” (Ether 12:6, italics mine).

The fruit that is “sweet above all that is sweet” and “white above all that is white” and pure above all that is pure” is the promise of exaltation in the presence of our Savior.

43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

Alma Chapter 33

1 Now after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith.

verse 1 “whether they should believe in one God” The Father designated Jesus Christ to be our God. The Savior possesses all of the characteristics of the Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority.

2 And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them.

3 Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?

verse 3 The ancient Israelite prophets Zenos and Zenock are mentioned in this verse and in verse 15. We know very little of these prophets. We do know that they lived “since the days of Abraham” (Helaman 8:19). An interesting verse in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 10:16) suggests that the Nephites actually descended from the prophets Zenos and Zenock. It is likely that Zenos and Zenock were descendants of ancient Joseph the son of Abraham. The prophet Zenock was apparently martyred for his beliefs (Alma 33:15-17), as was Zenos (Helaman 8:19). For further commentary on the prophet Zenos, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

verses 4-11 Zenos teaches that the real issue is not where or when one prays but how and to whom. These verses are referred to as the thanksgiving psalm of Zenos. Perhaps Alma knew this ancient poem well enough to recite it from memory.

Brother John W. Welch has called our attention to a most interesting fact of uncertain significance (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 331-32). This poem of Zenos contains, ten times, the word *hear* in various tenses. This is made especially interesting by the fact that a few of the important prayer sermons in the Book of Mormon which call upon God, especially when seeking atonement, also contain the pattern of a significant word’s being repeated ten times. For example, The word *Lord*, in expanded form occurs ten times in King Benjamin’s speech (seven times as “Lord God,” and three times as “Lord Omnipotent”). The word *Lord* also appears exactly ten times in the psalm of Nephi, which also deals with the atoning embrace of God (see 2 Nephi

4:16-35), and the words *Lord* and *Son* are each mentioned precisely ten times in Alma's speech on the plan of redemption and atonement in Alma 12-13. The phrase *O Lord* is found exactly ten times in Alma's prayer in Antionum, when he called upon God for strength in bringing souls to Christ (Alma 31:26-35). Brother Welch wonders if all this might have something to do with the ten commandments, which date to preexilic Israel. Certainly we cannot be sure that Zenos, Nephi, Benjamin, or Alma were aware of this numerological character of their texts, and we cannot conclude with certainty that all preexilic Israelites placed religious importance on counting to ten, especially in connection with prayer and atonement. It seems unlikely that Joseph Smith was aware of this phenomenon.

4 For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.

verse 4 "thou didst turn them to me" Zenos was reconciled to his enemies by the principle of charity.

5 Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me.

6 And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.

7 And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

8 Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

9 Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.

10 Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

verse 10 "thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction" Obviously, in the name of justice, God will not always deal with a righteous man's enemies as he did in verse 4, that is, by reconciling a man with his enemies.

11 And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

verse 11 It is comforting to learn that even to a righteous prophet, afflictions can lead to a greater fervency or sincerity as he prays to the Father.

This verse is one of many in the Book of Mormon indicating clearly that the Book of Mormon prophets understood clearly the nature of the godhead and the separate identities of the Father and the Son.

“thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son” “Thy judgments” are the demands of the law of justice. After all we can do, we still cannot earn our own salvation according to the law of justice. We depend utterly and completely upon the mercy of our Savior.

12 And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?

verse 12 When Alma refers to “those scriptures,” which specific scripture does he have in mind? The brass plates of course.

13 Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.

14 Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

15 For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—

16 For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.

verse 16 **“because they will not understand thy mercies which thou has bestowed upon them because of thy Son”** Among its many blessings, the atonement brings peace of mind. It not only cleanses us, but it consoles us. Occasionally the leaders of the Church today encounter members who, by all accounts, have repented and should feel peace in their souls. The members confess, however, that they still live with troubled consciences. While believing in Christ and his atonement, some people have innocently, but incorrectly, placed limits on his regenerative powers. They have somehow converted an infinite atonement (see the commentaries for 2 Nephi 9:7 and Alma 34:8-10) into a finite one. They have taken the atonement and circumscribed it with an artificial boundary that somehow falls short of their particular sin. Stephen Robinson observed: “I have learned there are many who believe Jesus is the Son of God and that he is the Savior of the world, but they do not believe that he can save them. They believe in his identity, but not in his power to cleanse and to purify and to save. To have faith in his identity is only half the principle. To have faith in his ability and in his power to cleanse and to save, that is the other half” (*Believing Christ*, 26).

In a sense, these saints have adopted their own parameters of justice and mercy. C. S. Lewis observed: “I think that if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves.

Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal that him” (*Quotable Lewis*, 221). The Savior’s loving offer, “My peace I give unto you” (John 14:27), transforms itself from some abstract hope to a profound personal reality. At such a time we receive not only of the cleansing power, but also the consoling power of the atonement. Paul spoke of this blessing: “Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thessalonians 2:16). The invitation was extended by the Savior during his mortal ministry: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). Nephi spoke of those glorious days when “the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them [the righteous]; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace” (2 Nephi 26:9).

17 And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death.

verse 17 We know from other scripture that the prophet Zenos was killed for his beliefs (Helaman 8:19). This verse suggests that Zenock also was martyred. For more information on the non-Biblical prophets mentioned in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16, 1 Nephi 19:10, and the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

18 But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

19 Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live.

verse 19 Moses, of course, knew of the coming Christ and prophesied of him though we find no such specific prophecy in the Bible.

“a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live” Here is yet another reference to the incident described in Numbers 21:4-9 when the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the Israelites (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:41 and 2 Nephi 25:20). Moses set a serpent of brass upon a pole, and each Israelite bitten by a serpent was saved if he looked upon the pole. The pole, of course, was a type of Christ.

20 But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

verse 20 “and this because of the hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

22 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

23 And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.

verse 23 “it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting light”

We might well compare this tree to the “tree of life whose fruit is more precious and most desirable above all other fruits” (1 Nephi 15:36). We have learned that the tree of life symbolizes Jesus Christ himself and carries with it the promise of exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

Alma’s metaphor, carefully considered, suggests that the individual who plants the seed of the word of God in his heart and who then nourishes the seed by his deliberate obedience to gospel law, becomes himself the tree. That is, he becomes endowed with an abundance of “revealed faith”—the attributes of Christ—and he is exalted.

“**may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light**” The most onerous burden is the burden of sin. Through Christ this may be lifted from us. Other vicissitudes of this mortal experience may also become burdensome. From these also we may find relief in Christ.

“**And even all this can ye do if ye will**” Each man has his agency.

Alma Chapter 34

Scripture Mastery

Alma 34 Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ.

Alma 34:8-10 It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Alma 34:11-12 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another.

Alma 34:14-17 Amulek's teachings on mercy "which overpowereth justice." Mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety.

Alma 34:18-27 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks . . . in your houses . . . over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies . . . against the devil . . . over the crops of your fields . . . over the flocks of your fields . . . pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Alma 34:32-34 Amulek to the Zoramites: This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. I beseech of you that you do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end.

The major doctrinal theme of Amulek's discourse to the Zoramites in chapter 34 is the infinite atonement of Christ. We have previously discussed the dual nature of the fall. The two essential root causes of the fall include:

1. Adam and Eve's transgression (the fall of Adam and Eve). This resulted in two major consequences:

a. man's being subject to physical death. This physical death is only a temporary penalty since all mortals will be automatically resurrected as a consequence of the Savior's atonement.

b. man's being cast out of God's presence—spiritual death. This spiritual death is called the "first death" and is also temporary since all mortals will return to the presence of God (at least long enough to be judged) because of the Savior's atonement.

Hence we learn that the Lord's atonement automatically and without any effort or virtue on the part of man completely eliminated the consequences of Adam's transgression.

2. The sins of each individual (the fall of you). These sins result in the individual's being unworthy to re-enter God's presence. This spiritual death is called the

“second death,” as it is permanent unless something is done about the individual’s sins—unless they are forgiven. In addition to automatically removing the consequences of Adam’s transgression, the atonement also made it possible for each individual to be absolved of his own sins and therefore become worthy of the celestial kingdom based on his repentance and obedience.

What if there had been no atonement made? It is clear that mankind would have remained in a lost and fallen state (2 Nephi 9:6-9; Alma 12:22). Once we had suffered physical death, we would have remained spirits and would not have been resurrected. Also, we would all have become vulnerable eternally to Satan’s influences. In that state—being a spirit without hope of resurrection and having no opportunity to grow spiritually—we would eventually fit into the label of “sons of perdition.” Each of us is desperately dependent upon Christ’s atonement.

One might wonder about the justice of our suffering, even temporarily here on earth, for Adam’s transgression. We do have to live out of the presence of God during our mortal span of years, and then each of us suffers the pains of a mortal death. Is it fair that one man should suffer for another’s indiscretion? We know that God is perfectly just, and one man is never held accountable for another’s actions. Adam’s fall was likely foreordained and it is possible that we who came to earth willingly covenanted to accept the fall’s temporary negative consequences (physical and first spiritual death) as a condition of having the opportunity of having this vital mortal experience and earning the ultimate reward—that of eternal life.

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had spoken these words unto them he sat down upon the ground, and Amulek arose and began to teach them, saying:

2 My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us.

verse 2 At the very root of the Zoramites’ apostasy lay the loss of their testimony of Christ. According to their faulty doctrine, God had already elected them to be saved while others around them were elected to be cast down to hell (Alma 31:16-17). Thus, as they reasoned, no Redeemer was necessary. They viewed God as an absolutely omnipotent being operating by his arbitrary whim alone and unrestricted by any laws. We know that God does not operate as an absolute Monarch. He works in harmony with laws to which even he is beholden (D&C 88:36-38). Thus, he cannot lie (Ether 3:12). He cannot “look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16). He cannot forgive sins without repentance (Alma 11:37; 42:24). If he were to do any of these things—that is, violate his own eternal law—he would cease to be God (Alma 42:13, 22, 25).

3 And as ye have desired of my beloved brother that he should make known unto you what ye should do, because of your afflictions; and he hath spoken somewhat unto you to prepare your minds; yea, and he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience—

verse 3 “he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience” Alma’s exhortation to faith is found in Alma 32. In man’s quest for faith, it is inevitably necessary for each to learn patience. We must each learn to wait upon the Lord and trust in him. He knows the end from the beginning, and he also knows each of us. If we are faithful and patient, he will ultimately do with us as he wills. What greater blessing could there be than this?

4 Yea, even that ye would have so much faith as even to plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness.

verse 4 “plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness” These Zoramites desperately needed to answer for themselves the critical question asked in verse 5: Does the truth abide with the Son of God or not? The only way possible to answer this question is to “experiment” upon the words of Christ. This includes the following specific steps:

1. Develop a sincere desire to know the truth (plant the seed in your heart).
2. Study the word of God including the scriptures and the writings of the prophets (nourish the seed).
3. Accept his word or his gospel exercising a modicum of belief or faith, and then live it (another way of nourishing the seed).
4. Watch for an enlargement of faith (“revealed faith”—receiving, by personal revelation, attributes of Christ) through the Spirit.

5 And we have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ.

verse 5 How might you re-word Amulek’s “great question” for clarity of understanding? How about: Will this Jesus Christ of whom we have spoken actually come to earth? And when he does, will he actually be the anointed one, the Savior of all mankind?

6 And ye also beheld that my brother has proved unto you, in many instances, that the word is in Christ unto salvation.

verse 6 Amulek’s “brother,” of course, is Alma. It would not have been possible for Alma to have “proved,” in any scientific sense, that Christ is indeed the author of salvation. The words “proved” and “prove” here and in the following verse might be interpreted as *testified* or *testify*.

7 My brother has called upon the words of Zenos, that redemption cometh through the Son of God, and also upon the words of Zenock; and also he has appealed unto Moses, to prove that these things are true.

verse 7 For a review of the prophets Zenos and Zenock, see Alma 33:3 including its commentary.

8 And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

verse 8 Amulek knew because he had received personal revelation through the medium of the Spirit of God.

9 For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

verse 9 “it is expedient that an atonement should be made” We usually associate with the word “expedient” such meanings as useful, appropriate, advantageous, convenient, a means to an end. The atonement is all of these things and more. We know, of course, that it was absolutely necessary to prevent all men from being lost among the sons of perdition.

“all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost” The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” (natural self) nature and is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. Man by nature is “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Mosiah 16:3; Alma 42:10). This natural self is rendered even more poignant and dangerous by our having, here on earth, a mortal body. Hence, we may refer to this “natural” tendency here on earth as the “natural man.” Because of this fallen nature, every man will sin, and thus he absolutely cannot return to God’s presence unless an atonement is made. See the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

The doctrine that man is the literal offspring of divine parents is not found in the Book of Mormon but was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith after the book’s publication. While each individual has some tendencies of the “natural man,” we know that if each man will fully repent he will be endowed with the very nature of God—both the spirit and the flesh. This is eternal life.

10 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

verse 10 “great and last sacrifice” Certainly the Savior’s sacrifice is the greatest of all sacrifices. But is it to be the final sacrifice, chronologically speaking? It is not, as it turns out. The scriptures speak of at least one, and perhaps two, offerings or sacrifices to be made at a time apparently yet in the future. For example, D&C 13 refers to the fact that the Aaronic priesthood “shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.” Also D&C 84:31 refers to “an acceptable offering and sacrifice” to be offered by the sons of Moses and Aaron “in the house of the Lord,” referring to the temple to be built in Jackson County. The nature of these sacrifices is not entirely clear. It seems clear that the “sons of Levi” and the “sons of Moses and Aaron” are the latter-day bearers of the priesthood. After the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, the priestly Levites became lax in their religious obligations and because of their bad example, the rest of the nation became remiss in their duties. Malachi pointed out that the sacrifices they offered to the Lord were the worst of the flocks or even stolen animals rather than the best. Thus, because the priests were unrighteous, their sacrifices were unacceptable, and the Lord promised that when he comes again, he will purge the Levites that they may yet offer an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3:1-3). The nature of this “offering and sacrifice” is also not entirely clear. It may not be an actual animal sacrifice. Perhaps it will simply be works of righteousness.

The sacrifice of the Savior certainly may be said to be the “great and last” sacrifice in terms of its ultimate and eternal significance.

“not a sacrifice of man” Jesus Christ was more than a man, more than merely human.

“infinite and eternal sacrifice” What is an “infinite and eternal sacrifice”? What is an “infinite atonement”? Actually the Savior’s atonement is infinite in a number of ways. For a comprehensive review of the ways in which his atonement is infinite, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:7. For a more complete discussion, see “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

11 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay.

verse 11 The blood of one man can never atone for the sins of another. It is not “just,” that is, it does not satisfy the law of justice for one man to pay for any crime or sin of another. Indeed, in a strict sense the Savior did not really pay the debt to the law of justice incurred by our sins. This false notion arises from the practically universal use of the “financial” or “money” metaphor of the atonement. It would be impossible for Jesus to satisfy anyone’s sense of justice by “paying” for someone’s sins himself. That he actually paid for our sins is a common misunderstanding that exists both in and out

of the Church. The idea that he did pay for them is referred to as the “balancing the books” or the doctrine of “quid pro quo”—this much suffering for that much sin. This is a sectarian notion which falls short of explaining exactly the Savior’s ability to extend his mercy to us.

Instead of paying for our sins, he paid an unfathomable price in Gethsemane and on the cross. In this way, he perfected his empathy for each of us. He thereby qualified himself to be able to intervene on our behalf in spite of our unworthiness if we are able to abide by his law and repent of our sins. He became the perfect judge who is able to weigh, with perfect equity and fairness, the worthiness of each of us. He can do this because he knows us intimately. He knows the trials, vicissitudes, and mitigating circumstances of each of us because he experienced what each of us has experienced (Hebrews 2:18; 2 Nephi 9:21; Alma 7:11-12).

12 But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.

verse 12 “the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered” It is clear that capital punishment was practiced among the Book of Mormon peoples (see also Alma 46:35; 62:9). Although it appears that capital punishment was practiced among the Nephites largely with punitive intent, a statement by Alma indicates that there was a prophylactic or preventive purpose as well: “Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?” (Alma 42:19). There were also specific legal guidelines for carrying out capital punishment. Mormon explained, “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 6:24). Jaredite and Nephite records contain examples of people who practiced capital punishment unrighteously (e.g., Ether 10:6; 3 Nephi 1:9; 6:23; Moroni 1:2).

Is the practice of capital punishment doctrinal? Certainly it was in Old Testament times when the law of Moses was the gospel standard (Exodus 31:14-17; Leviticus 24:17). But what about today? Did capital punishment end with the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the law of Moses? Charles W. Penrose wrote: “This divine law for shedding the blood of a murderer has never been repealed. It is a law given by the Almighty and not abrogated in the Christian faith. It stands on record for all time—that a murderer shall have his blood shed. He that commits murder must be slain. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (“Blood Atonement: As Taught by Leading Elders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” [Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*], 1916, 23). The Lord instructed the prophet Joseph Smith that capital punishment is an appropriate judgment for those guilty of murder: “And again, I say, thou shalt not kill; but he that killeth shall die” (D&C 42:19). But he made the application of capital punishment subject to the laws of civil government: “And it shall come to

pass, that if any persons among you shall kill they shall be delivered up and dealt with according to the laws of the land” (D&C 42:79).

“infinite atonement” Again, for a summary of why the Savior’s atonement was an “infinite atonement,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:7. See also “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

verses 13-16 Please do not take these verses for granted. They are vital and contain some of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of the atonement found in all of the scripture. There is no clear explanation of this vital doctrine found in the Old Testament, and a study of the New Testament has led to much confusion (see also 2 Nephi 2:6-13; 2 Nephi 9:6-16; Alma 42:13-26; and Mormon 9:13-14).

13 Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away.

verse 13 “then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood” The Savior’s atonement meant the end of animal sacrifice. He has asked instead that we offer to him “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:19-20). See a discussion of this important gift of the Spirit in “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

14 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

verse 14 “this is the whole meaning of the law” The very purpose of the law of Moses was to point to Christ (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Without Christ the law of Moses was a shadow without substance. “The law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15).

“every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice” A *whit* is the smallest part or particle imaginable. Each and every part of the law of Moses pointed to the Savior and his atonement.

Also, the Savior’s atonement is so vital, so central, so pivotal, that all things, even the smallest particle in the universe looks to the atonement for salvation.

“and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” From the time of Adam’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, prophets taught that the Lamb of God, God’s Only Begotten Son, will one day be sacrificed to answer the demands of a higher law (Moses 5:5-9; 2 Nephi 2:5-7). That sacrifice will make

God's plan of redemption operative in bringing about the salvation of all people. The sacrificial offerings characteristic of the law of Moses foreshadowed the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and will end when it is accomplished. Thus, the Savior's atoning sacrifice will fulfill the law of Moses and will be the "great and last sacrifice."

15 And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

verse 15 "this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice" For the definition of the law of mercy, see the commentary for verse 16. The word *bowels* here utilizes an archaic meaning of the word implying that the Savior's mercy is one of his most central and characteristic qualities. *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bowels* as, "The seat of pity or kindness; hence, tenderness, compassion."

"bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance"

To exercise faith unto repentance is to deliberately change one's pattern of behavior from that of disobedience to obedience to the laws of God. The atonement has made repentance possible—that is, the atonement has made it possible that our repentance and obedience will result in forgiveness of our sins. The atonement has enabled the Savior to extend his mercy to those of us who change their pattern of behavior from disobedience to obedience—exercise "faith unto repentance"—thus making possible our exaltation in the kingdom of God.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

verse 16 "mercy can satisfy the demands of justice" This phrase refers to the law of mercy which may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, the transgressor is rendered ineligible to enter the celestial presence of God or, indeed, any kingdom of glory after this life. However, if the individual who transgressed the law will sincerely repent and strive to live the gospel of Christ, then the Savior will intervene on his behalf. The end result will be exaltation for the repentant sinner.

This mercy does indeed "encircle them in the arms of safety." "Them" refers to "all those who shall believe on his name" (verse 15).

"the arms of safety" This is the only place in all scripture where this metaphor is used for salvation in Christ. The outstretched arms are, of course, those of Jesus himself (Mormon 5:11; 6:17), who stands always ready to cleanse and embrace the

repentant. The arms of Christ are also referred to metaphorically as “the arms of mercy” (Mosiah 16:12; Alma 5:33) and “the arms of [Christ’s] love” (2 Nephi 1:15; D&C 6:20).

“he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” What becomes of those who, here in mortality, have no faith in the Savior and who do not repent? What does it mean to be “exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice”? These will not benefit from the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. They must face directly and without any divine help the consequences of the law of justice. They must endure the requisite suffering themselves. They must pay, or at least begin to pay, for their own sins. Regarding these tragic souls, Bruce C. Hafen has written:

I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice. For that reason, paying for our own sins will not bear the same fruit as repenting of our sins. Justice is a law of balance and order and it must be satisfied, either through our payment or his. But if we decline the Savior’s invitation to let him carry our sins, and then satisfy justice by ourselves, we will not yet have experienced the complete rehabilitation that can occur through a combination of divine assistance and genuine repentance. Working together, those forces have the power permanently to change our hearts and our lives, preparing us for celestial life (*The Broken Heart*, 7-8).

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you;

verses 18-27 In these verses, Amulek seems to be referring to the prophet Zenos’s “thanksgiving psalm.” Alma had previously referred to the same psalm in Alma 33:4-11. Zenos taught that the real issue is not where or when one prays but how and to whom. It is not the *form* of one’s prayer that matters most but the real *substance*. It is not one’s outward decorum but rather what lies deep within one’s heart. The human or “natural man” element within each of us would have us be self-sufficient and independent beings who need no one else. Ultimately, however, each of us is completely dependent upon our Savior. It is right and proper that we call upon the Father in his name regarding every aspect and in every circumstance of our lives, both temporal and spiritual. Perhaps it may seem ironic to some, but this dependence is not weakness. It is true spiritual strength. In our daily walk we should find ourselves yearning continually for the things of God.

18 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save.

19 Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him.

20 Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks.

21 Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

verse 21 Just How often ought we to pray? One must first differentiate between formal prayers and informal prayers. Formal prayers consist of specific styles and conventions. Such prayers include giving thanks for one's meals, family, and individual prayers, the invocation and benediction at church meetings, and the baptism and sacrament prayers. Informal prayers are characterized by a spiritual attitude and a constant sense of the presence of divinity. These are not offered at set times, and, indeed, may and should be offered constantly. Jesus counseled the twelve disciples and the multitude to "pray always" (3 Nephi 18:15, 18). The multitude was told that "they should not cease to pray in their hearts" (3 Nephi 20:1).

The question may be asked, then, how often is an individual obligated to offer formal prayers to Heavenly Father? The prophet Joseph Smith provided counsel in this area, and he happens to agree with Amulek. He taught that we should pray three times a day: "You must make yourselves acquainted with those men who like Daniel pray three times a day toward the House of the Lord" (*TPJS*, 161). Evidently, Joseph Smith was making reference to Daniel 6:10: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God." There is evidence that Joseph Smith and his family practiced this teaching. Eliza R. Snow recorded that "three times a day he had family worship; and these precious seasons of sacred household service truly seemed a foretaste of celestial happiness" (Jayann Morgan Payne, "Eliza R. Snow, First Lady of the Pioneers." *Ensign* [September 1973] 3:62-67). According to Eliza Ann Carter, "When I was living at Hyrum Smith's, I thought that he was the best man I ever saw. He was so kind to his family, and he prayed in his family three times a day" (Lucinda Snow. "A Biographical Sketch." *Women's Exponent* [15 April 1897] 25:134-135).

22 Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.

23 Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

24 Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.

25 Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

26 But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.

verse 26 The word "wilderness" here likely implies privacy or seclusion.

27 Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

verse 27 Here is a verse that defines the difference between formal prayer and informal prayer. In the latter type of prayer, we must cry unto him “continually”—in other words, we must pray constantly.

28 And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.

verse 28 Here is a sobering reminder. An individual can make great strides in living the commandments of the gospel to the point where the Spirit grants him an abiding testimony of Jesus (faith). He can also be granted by the Spirit that calm assurance that he will indeed be exalted (hope). Yet, until he comes to possess that yearning that others share in these same blessings that he enjoys (charity), he may not realize the fulfillment of his potential blessings. It is not enough to simply yearn or pray for the welfare of others. We must also take action and bless them ourselves.

“ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith” For a discussion of the concept of hypocrisy, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 13:5.

29 Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men.

verse 29 “Dross” as it is used here is the scum which forms on the surface of molten metal. It is discarded as waste.

30 And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance.

verse 30 To “bring fruit unto repentance” is to evidence by your behavior that you have repented.

31 Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

verse 31 **“now is the time and the day of your salvation”** Amulek likely refers here to the period of mortality.

“if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” With each instance of true repentance, the Savior’s mercy is extended. To those spiritually responsive souls, this may also be accompanied by a spiritual confirmation or witness of that mercy—that Christ lives and that his mercy truly comes from him.

32 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

verse 32 Some have been critical of this verse suggesting it is too restrictive. These maintain the following: If “this life” refers to only the mortal life, then this verse teaches a doctrine that is too restrictive and too severe. It seems to eliminate the opportunity for post mortal repentance. After all, is it not true that those who fall short of paradisiacal glory by their misdeeds on earth will be assigned, at death, to the spirit prison where they will have an opportunity to repent and earn their way into one of the degrees of glory—even perhaps the celestial degree? Thus, these critics maintain, the probationary period (“this life”) should be extended to include not only our mortal sojourn but also the time spent in the spirit world. Is this verse too restrictive when interpreted literally? Are these critics of this verse correct in their criticism? Probably they are not.

Let us review the essential elements of the transition between this mortal life and the world of spirits as we understand them today. At death, each person is subjected to a “partial judgment” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). If he has accepted Christ and his gospel and has diligently tried to live and persist in keeping the commandments—or if in Christ’s infallible judgment the man is, in his heart, truly a celestial being (D&C 137:5-9)—he will be assigned to paradise. If he has placed things of an eternal nature second to things of the world, and, in Christ’s judgment, he would not be comfortable in the celestial heaven, then he will be assigned to spirit prison. Those who did not hear and have an opportunity to accept the gospel—who would have accepted it had they heard it—will either be assigned to paradise or to a favored position in the spirit prison where they will not suffer “hell” and will quickly hear and accept the gospel and then be assigned to paradise (D&C 137:5-9). Those who have never heard the gospel who would not have accepted it had they heard it will be so judged and assigned to the spirit prison (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

For those who are privileged to be placed in a state of paradise, their probationary state is over—they have completed their mortal trial. They will not fall to a lower state but will inherit a celestial body at the resurrection. Those who are assigned to spirit prison will suffer personal torment as they begin to pay for their sins themselves and are refined to the point where they repent and accept Jesus and his gospel. Ultimately these will repent and confess Christ and be rescued by his mercy. They will then be resurrected with either a terrestrial or a telestial body and abide forever in those

respective glories. It is unlikely that these individuals will be able to progress while in the spirit prison to the point of being able to eventually inherit celestial glory. A few others will never repent. They will remain “filthy still” and be cast into outer darkness to live forever with the devil as sons of perdition.

There are other pertinent considerations as we attempt to interpret this verse. We have previously noted that the Book of Mormon teaches a simplified version of the post mortal experience. As we consider Amulek’s teachings, we must also keep in mind that the nature of the spirit world in his day, before the resurrection of Jesus, was different than it is today. At the time of Alma and Amulek there existed “a great gulf” (Luke 16:26) between those in “paradise” and those in “prison” (sometimes referred to as “outer darkness”—see Alma 40:13). Following the Savior’s resurrection, he bridged this gulf and made it possible for some of the spirits in paradise to preach the gospel to those in prison (D&C 138).

Also we must keep in mind that a man’s death does not alter his basic nature. A man carries into the spirit world the same basic attitudes, personality, and character he has developed both in the premortal life and on earth. When we came into this earth life, we brought with us inclinations and disinclinations, abilities, weaknesses, and attitudes which we developed in the premortal world. Similarly, we pass into the spirit world with the same basic qualities we acquired while on earth. If we lived upon this earth with a hunger for righteousness and a desire for things of the spirit, we will have those same proclivities restored to us in the world of spirits. Contrariwise, if the objects of our primary affections on this earth were materialism and things of the flesh, we cannot expect to be differently oriented when we arrive in the spirit world. Thus, Amulek, in verse 32 stresses the need for repentance in this life.

Now, let us analyze Alma 34:32. If we interpret “this life” as referring only to this mortal existence, then is this verse of scripture literally true? For those who are assigned to paradise, the verse is literally true. At the end of this mortal life, their probation is over. They have succeeded in preparing themselves to meet God, and they will inevitably receive this privilege. For virtually all of those assigned to the spirit prison, this verse is also literally true. At the end of this mortal life for most of them, the dye is cast. They will live in prison and while there earn a degree of glory, but it will not be the one in which God resides. Alma 34:32 might need qualification only for those hypothetical few who are assigned to spirit prison but who are able to persist through the agonizing “hell” of the refining process and succeed to the point of receiving a celestial body though it is unlikely that such individuals even exist. Consistently, the Book of Mormon prophets taught that physical death seals the fate of the wicked. Whether or not they knew the details of the transition between this earth life and the world of spirits (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26) is not made clear in the text.

33 And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

verse 33 I acknowledge without explanation the unusual construction of the phrase “if we do not *improve our time* while in this life” (italics added). The difficulty centers on the phrase “improve our time.” Perhaps an alternative for “time” here might be spiritual condition, spiritual character, or spiritual self.

“then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” Just when is this “night of darkness wherein there can be no [more] labor performed”? The “night of darkness” begins either at the moment of resurrection to a lesser kingdom (Alma 41:5) or at the moment of being cast into outer darkness with Satan.

34 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

verse 34 “That awful crisis” is the moment of the Lord’s judgment.

This verse may be interpreted in two distinct ways. Some might interpret it as meaning that a man’s death produces no fundamental change in his inclinations toward good or evil. This is indeed a true principle and is a statement of the “law of restoration” which Alma teaches in Alma 41:3-6. A careful analysis of this verse in conjunction with the verse that follows, however, suggests that this is not Alma’s intended meaning here. Rather his main point seems to be that people must seek the Spirit of God in this life or else the spirit of the devil will have power over them, and they may be overwhelmed by him.

“That eternal world” refers to the world of spirits.

35 For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.

verse 35 It might be argued that “the spirit of the devil” is automatically present when a man possesses nothing of the Spirit of God. In actuality, this “spirit of the devil” is the unchecked “natural self” impulses of man. Repeated and prolonged periods of exposure to this absence of the Spirit of God inevitably lead to subjection to the “spirit of the devil.” Joseph Smith taught: “The devil has no power over us only as we permit

him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power” (TPJS, 181). This void of the spirit may become habitual—a pattern difficult to alter. “They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). The phrase “spirit of the devil” seems a bit misleading here and appears more metaphorical than literal. The “spirit of the devil” has little to do with the man Satan. Rather, as stated above, it is the unbridled and unopposed natural self of man that has taken control of the individual because of the individual’s consistent refusal to repent and obey.

36 And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.

verse 36 “the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell” Does God really dwell in the hearts of righteous people? In April 1843, the prophet Joseph Smith preached in Ramus, Illinois and addressed a miscellany of differing subjects. He seemed to be answering a variety of questions. We don’t have access to the questions, but we do have the answers. Apparently in response to a question something like: Can the Father and the Son really get into our hearts and dwell there? His answer: “The idea that the Father and the Son dwell in a man’s heart is an old sectarian notion, and is false” (D&C 130:3). Obviously we are dealing here with figurative language. The influence of the Father and the Son, through the mediation of the Spirit of God, can indeed dwell in our hearts—that is, it can influence profoundly our very feelings.

“the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out” This phrase may well apply to those spirits in paradise—the so-called “just men made perfect” (D&C 76:69)—as well as to those who are admitted into the celestial kingdom. Those who qualify for celestial glory will indeed “sit down” or reside in his kingdom permanently—“to go no more out.”

verses 37-38 Now Amulek will provided an excellent “sum and substance” type summary of his teachings.

37 And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye should remember these things, and that ye should work out your salvation with fear before God, and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ;

38 That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust,

and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you.

verse 38 “contend no more against the Holy Ghost” The apostle Paul used colorful terminology in giving this same counsel. He said, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

39 Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing.

verse 39 “he rewardeth you no good thing” Here Amulek utilizes a peculiar form of speech called antenantiosis which is discussed in the commentary for Jacob 4:8. He could have said, “he rewardeth you bad things.” Instead he used the negated opposite, “no good thing.” His intent is to emphasize the inevitability of horrible and evil consequences—torment, captivity, and damnation.

40 And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them;

41 But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.

verse 41 “rest from all your afflictions” There is more to this phrase than is initially apparent. For a discussion of the concept of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

Alma Chapter 35

1 Now it came to pass that after Amulek had made an end of these words, they withdrew themselves from the multitude and came over into the land of Jershon.

verse 1 Beyond this verse we will read nothing further about the activities of Amulek. He will be quoted by Helaman (Helaman 5:10) and Aminadab (Helaman 5:41), and he will be referred to by Moroni as an example of faith (Ether 12:13). We are left to wonder how, where, and with whom he spent his later years.

2 Yea, and the rest of the brethren, after they had preached the word unto the Zoramites, also came over into the land of Jershon.

verse 2 You will recall that the land of Jerson was the dwelling place of the people of Ammon, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

3 And it came to pass that after the more popular part of the Zoramites had consulted together concerning the words which had been preached unto them, they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft; therefore they would not hearken unto the words.

verse 3 The “more popular part of the Zoramites” are the Zoramite majority or the mainstream Zoramites who are here contrasted with the poor Zoramites who accepted the gospel.

“they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft” This same phrase is found in the New Testament when Paul’s missionary efforts threatened the idol makers in Ephesus who were angry because their “craft is in danger to be set at nought” (Acts 19:27). Zoram led his people “to bow down to dumb idols” (Alma 31:10). Perhaps part of the priestcraft of the Zoramite leaders involved the making and selling of idols. The preaching of Alma and Amulek threatened to interfere with this lucrative enterprise. Perhaps, also, the Zoramite church hierarchy were supported by donations from the Zoramite church members. Any exodus from their church threatened to decrease the amount of money they could collect.

4 And they sent and gathered together throughout all the land all the people, and consulted with them concerning the words which had been spoken.

5 Now their rulers and their priests and their teachers did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people.

verse 5 “Desires” may be better rendered *motives*. “Privily” means *in secret* or *secretly*. The Zoramite leaders were trying to ascertain which, among their people, had

supported and accepted the teachings of the missionaries. So they surveyed the people in a way that did not betray the leaders motives to the people being surveyed.

6 And it came to pass that after they had found out the minds of all the people, those who were in favor of the words which had been spoken by Alma and his brethren were cast out of the land; and they were many; and they came over also into the land of Jershon.

verses 5-6 Hugh Nibley has pointed out: “The Zoramites, as we have seen, had a thought-police, ‘therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people,’ and forthwith deported ‘those who were in favor of the words . . . spoken by Alma’” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Volume 7, 350-51).

7 And it came to pass that Alma and his brethren did minister unto them.

8 Now the people of the Zoramites were angry with the people of Ammon who were in Jershon, and the chief ruler of the Zoramites, being a very wicked man, sent over unto the people of Ammon desiring them that they should cast out of their land all those who came over from them into their land.

9 And he breathed out many threatenings against them. And now the people of Ammon did not fear their words; therefore they did not cast them out, but they did receive all the poor of the Zoramites that came over unto them; and they did nourish them, and did clothe them, and did give unto them lands for their inheritance; and they did administer unto them according to their wants.

verse 9 Note again the association of the city of Jershon with the concept of land of inheritance (see the commentary for Alma 27:22).

10 Now this did stir up the Zoramites to anger against the people of Ammon, and they began to mix with the Lamanites and to stir them up also to anger against them.

11 And thus the Zoramites and the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of Ammon, and also against the Nephites.

verse 11 One of the reasons Alma and his missionary group had traveled to Antionum to preach to the Zoramites was to prevent the Zoramites from entering into a “correspondence” or military treaty or alliance with the Lamanites. Obviously this aspect of Alma’s plan had not succeeded.

12 And thus ended the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

13 And the people of Ammon departed out of the land of Jershon, and came over into the land of Melek, and gave place in the land of Jershon for the armies of the Nephites, that they might contend with the armies of the Lamanites and the

armies of the Zoramites; and thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges; and an account shall be given of their wars hereafter.

verse 13 The city of Melek may well have been selected for the physical security it offered the people of Ammon. The Nephite army had committed themselves to the protection of the conscientious-objector people of Ammon. See the suggested location for the city of Melek on the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. See also the *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon*. To the southwest Melek is secured by a range of impassable mountains, and to the northeast, the city of Zarahemla, the Nephite stronghold provided protection.

Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *betwixt* as, "Between; in the space that separates two persons or things."

14 And Alma, and Ammon, and their brethren, and also the two sons of Alma returned to the land of Zarahemla, after having been instruments in the hands of God of bringing many of the Zoramites to repentance; and as many as were brought to repentance were driven out of their land; but they have lands for their inheritance in the land of Jershon, and they have taken up arms to defend themselves, and their wives, and children, and their lands.

verse 14 "but they have lands for their inheritance in the land of Jershon" Again, the association of the concept of a land of inheritance is seen in association with the land of Jershon (see the commentary for Alma 27:22).

15 Now Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them; and having been to declare the word, or sent to declare the word, among all the people in every city; and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

16 Therefore, he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness. And we have an account of his commandments, which he gave unto them according to his own record.

verse 16 "And we have an account of his commandments, which he gave unto them according to his own record" This statement by the author Mormon may be referred to as a "colophon." A colophon is a statement of authorship and an indication or explanation of what is to come. This statement serves as the header for Alma chapters 36 through 42. Please review the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3 in which Dr. Hugh Nibley explains the meaning of the colophon and teaches that they are characteristic of ancient Egyptian documents.

In the past several years there have been discovered several pieces of evidence connecting the Book of Mormon text with the Jewish pilgrimage festivals. See the supplementary article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech*. One article ("The Sons of the Passover," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 196-98) suggests a relationship between the traditional Israelite observance of Passover and Alma 36-42. "Passover, of course, commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt by the power of God. As part of this celebration, fathers would gather their sons in accordance with Exodus 10:2, which told the Jews 'to tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt.' . . . After gathering his family the father then instructed his sons and answered their questions. . . . Each of Alma's admonitions to his sons, Helaman (Alma 36-37), Shiblon (Alma 38), and Corianton (Alma 39-42), does this precisely, each in his own way. Alma's admonitions to his three sons which follow in chapters 36-42 may well have been spoken in conjunction with a Nephite observance of the feast of the Passover."

Alma Chapter 36

[The commandments of Alma to his son Helaman. Comprising chapters 36 and 37.](#)

Scripture Mastery

Alma 36-37 Alma counsels his son Helaman

Alma 36:3 Alma to his son Helaman: I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

Alma 36:17-21 Alma recalls for his son Helaman the account of his conversion. There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains and nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

Chapters 36 through 42 consist of Alma's counsel to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton following his return from preaching to the Zoramites. Chapters 36 and 37 are directed to his eldest son Helaman.

Chiastic parallelism or chiasmus is a form of Hebrew poetry. For a review of this and other types of Hebrew poetry see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. Basically it consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order, and then repeating them in reverse order. The central idea of the passage is placed at the turning point where the first half ends and the second half begins.

John W. Welch has pointed out that verses 1 through 30 of this chapter contain a "masterfully crafted chiasm . . . which centers on the turning point of Alma's life, which was when he called upon Jesus Christ for forgiveness." He also commented, "Alma 36 was one of the first chiasms I discovered within the Book of Mormon in 1967. Many years later, it still remains one of my favorites. It is a masterpiece of composition, as good as any other use of chiasmus in world literature, and it deserves wide recognition and appreciation. I cannot imagine that its complex and purposeful structure happened unintentionally. Its sophistication as a piece of literature definitely shows Alma's skill as a writer." Commenting further on Alma's writing skill, Brother Welch opined, "If an author uses chiasmus mechanically, it can produce rigid, stilted writing. . . . Alma, however, does not simply stick a list of ideas together in one order and then awkwardly and slavishly retrace his steps through that list in the opposite order. His work has the markings of a skillful, painstaking writer, one completely comfortable with using this difficult mode of expression well." Undoubtedly Alma learned the use of chiasmus as part of a long literary tradition which began with Old Testament prophets.

If the reader wishes to read a charming summary of Brother Welch's first discovering the chiastic poetry form in the Book of Mormon while he was serving a

mission in Regensburg, Germany in 1967, please see “The Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 20, *Joseph Smith*.

This writing style was first discovered in the 1820s by two British scholars (John Jebb in 1820 and Thomas Boys in 1824 and 1825). They both published books about their new recognition of this form of parallelism in the Bible. There is little reason to believe that the young and unlettered Joseph Smith was aware of these books or, even if he were, that he would have been sufficiently equipped to create elaborate and meaningful passages utilizing a form rather foreign to his own culture’s way of thinking and writing.

I will make no effort to report here Doctor Welch’s complete analysis of the chiasmic structure of Alma 36. However, I thought it might be of interest to the reader to illustrate the general structure of this fascinating chapter. There are seventeen key elements, each repeated twice. The verse numbers are indicated in parentheses:

- a My son give ear to my **words** (1)
- b Keep the commandments and ye shall **prosper in the land** (1)
- c Do as **I have done** (2)
- d Remember the **captivity** of our fathers (2)
- e They were in **bondage** (2)
- f He surely did **deliver them** (2)
- g **Trust in God** (3)
- h **Supported in trials, troubles, and afflictions** (3)
- i **Lifted up at the last day** (3)
- j **I know this not of myself but of God** (4)
- k **Born of God** (5)
- l **I sought to destroy the church** (6-9)
- m **My limbs were paralyzed** (10)
- n **Fear of being in the presence of God** (14-15)
- o **Pains of a damned soul** (16)
- p **Harrowed up by the memory of sins** (17)
 - q I remembered **Jesus Christ, a son of God** (17)
 - q’ I cried, **Jesus, a son of God** (18)
 - p’ **Harrowed up by the memory of sins no more** (19)
 - o’ Joy **as exceeding as was the pain** (20)
 - n’ **Long to be in the presence of God** (22)
 - m’ **My limbs received strength again** (23)
 - l’ **I labored to bring souls to repentance** (24)
 - k’ **Born of God** (26)
 - j’ Therefore **my knowledge is of God** (26)
 - i’ and **raise me up at the last day** (28)
- h’ **Supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions** (27)

- g' **Trust in him** (27)
- f' He will **deliver me** (27)
- e' As God brought our fathers out of **bondage** and captivity (28-29)
- d' Retain in remembrance their **captivity** (28-29)
- c' Know **as I do know** (30)
- b' Keep the commandments and ye shall **prosper in the land** (30)
- a' This according to his **word** (30)

The reader should particularly note the repetition of Jesus Christ as the Son of God at the precise center of the chapter. Note also that elements h and h' are both marked by the same triplet "supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions." Most dramatically, n and n' contrast the agony of Alma's suffering (verse 12) with his joy following his conversion (verse 20). Indeed, he makes the contrast very explicit: "Yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain" (verse 20, italics added). This overt comparison strongly supports the idea that Alma consciously created the chiasmic structure of this chapter in order to strengthen these linkages.

Chiasmus can occur in any literature, but it only becomes meaningful when its degree of *chiasticity*, to coin a phrase, is high. When the chiasmic format is truly complex and concise, we are most justified in supposing that the author intentionally followed the pattern. At least fifteen criteria, including objectivity, purposefulness, climax, centrality, boundaries, length, density, and balance as described here, demonstrate that the chiasmus in Alma 36 can best be explained only if Alma learned it as part of a long literary tradition extending back to Old Testament prophets.

For a complete analysis of this chiasmic composition, see Brother Welch's article "A Masterpiece: Alma 36" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 114-31.

1 My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.

verse 1 "inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" Alma apparently intends that this prospering "in the land" is both a temporal and a spiritual prospering. Evidence for this is seen in verse 30 where he uses antithetical parallelism to emphasize this concept. There he says, "inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence."

2 I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.

verse 2 Shouldn't this verse say, "he surely did deliver them from their afflictions" rather than "in their afflictions." The chiasmic structure of this verse suggests that "in their afflictions" refers to the Israelites' captivity or bondage. They were in

bondage and none could rescue them save God himself. Similarly, they were afflicted and none other than God could save them.

3 And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 3 To be “lifted up at the last day” is to be exalted in the celestial kingdom.

verses 4-26 These verses contain the Book of Mormon’s second of three accounts of the story of the conversion of Alma. The first was found in Mosiah 27:8-37 and the third will be found in Alma 38:6-8. For a comparison of these three accounts, see the commentary for Mosiah 27:8-37.

4 And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but of God.

verse 4 Alma emphasizes that his faith in God and his knowledge of the truth of the gospel is not knowledge acquired by temporal means. It is rather personal revelation through the medium of the Spirit of God.

5 Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things; but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself.

verse 5 “not of any worthiness of myself” Alma acknowledges that his own miraculous conversion, and that of the sons of Mosiah, was not the result of their own worthiness. Rather it was brought about by an all-knowing God for reasons perhaps known fully only to God himself. Certainly, at least in part, it was to further his work among the Nephite and Lamanite peoples.

6 For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

7 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

8 But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel.

9 And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God.

verse 9 Here is a most solemn warning given by the angel. The exact meaning of his warning, however, is not entirely clear from this verse. Verse 11 suggests that

Alma took from the angel's warning the meaning that if he did not desist in his efforts to destroy the church he would be destroyed—either temporally or spiritually. If the verse is read carefully, however, this is not quite its meaning. An alternative meaning is: Cease immediately in your efforts to destroy the church of God, even if it means being destroyed yourself. This latter meaning is corroborated by Mosiah 27:16 which contains another account of the angel's issuing this warning: "I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off."

10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.

11 And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

verse 11 "seek no more to destroy the church of God" This is the third mention of this command given to Alma by the angel of God (see also verses 6 and 9). This three-fold repetition creates a powerful emphasis.

12 But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

verse 12 "Eternal torment" is not torment that goes on forever. Rather *Eternal* is a name for God. *Eternal* torment is God's torment.

To be "racked" is to be severely afflicted. To be "harrowed up" means to be vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

verse 13 "I did remember all my sins and iniquities" We have learned that in the day of judgment, we "shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt" (2 Nephi 9:14).

14 Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

verse 14 "In fine" means in summary or in conclusion.

“the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” To *rack* is to torment; to torture; to affect with extreme pain or anguish. This was Alma’s expression before completion of the conversion process. After his conversion, his feelings were quite the opposite: “I saw . . . God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels . . . and my soul did long to be there” (verse 22).

15 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

verse 15 “Soul and body” means spirit and body. Alma was so chagrined over his previously sinful ways, that he wished he might be annihilated and thus avoid having to stand before God to be judged for his misdeeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

verse 16 Guilt is that emotional and spiritual anguish experienced by mankind because of having “set at defiance the commandments of God” (Alma 5:18). Guilt is to the spirit what physical pain is to the body. For another scriptural description of guilt, see Mosiah 2:38. The *divine* form of guilt is termed “godly sorrow” and is a gift of the Spirit which God intends as a motivator toward repentance and obedience. For a discussion of godly sorrow, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:29. See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 3, *Godly Sorrow*.

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

verse 17 For the meaning of “harrowed up” see the commentary for verse 12.

“Jesus Christ, a Son of God” Alma was tormented by his sins. Only when he remembered that his father had spoken of the atonement of Christ and then called upon Jesus Christ did his agony begin to change.

In the introduction to this chapter the fascinating work of John Welch on the poetic structure of Alma 36 was mentioned. Brother Welch commented upon this verse and verse 18 as follows: “I am especially impressed with the repetition of the name “Jesus Christ, Son of God” at the very center of the chapter. This unquestionably had deep significance for Alma. It is one of the best examples of any ancient author succeeding in placing the most important concept at the central or turning point of his passage. By this, the structure of the chapter powerfully communicates Alma’s personal experience, for the central turning point of his conversion came precisely when

he called upon the name of Jesus Christ and asked for mercy. Nothing was more important than this in Alma's conversion—neither the appearance of the angel, nor the prayers of his father and the priests. Just as this was the turning point of Alma's life, he makes it the center of his magnificent composition" (*Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 118).

18 Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

verse 18 "in the gall of bitterness" *Gall* is a bitter and poisonous herb. "Its juice is commonly thought to be the "hemlock" poison which Socrates drank" (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*). When the word is used in the Bible, it is usually interpreted to mean poison. In the Old Testament, gall is often mentioned in association with wormwood which a plant with a bitter taste. It is interesting that the specific phrase "gall of bitterness" is found in only one scriptural verse outside the Book of Mormon—Acts 8:23. Perhaps both Alma and Paul were quoting the phrase from an unknown Old Testament period source.

verses 17-18 Brother John W. Welch comments further: "At the absolute center [of this chapter] stand the words 'atone,' 'mind,' and 'heart,' bordered by the name of Jesus Christ. The message is clear: Christ's atonement and man's responding sacrifice of a broken heart and willing mind are central to receiving forgiveness from God" (*Ibid.*, 127).

19 And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

20 And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

21 Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

22 Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

verse 22 "saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God" John W. Welch has pointed out that this phrase and others in the Book of Mormon text provide a remarkable example of internal textual consistency in the Book of Mormon (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 21-23). In this verse, Alma is quoting father Lehi. Some twenty-one words are quoted verbatim from 1 Nephi 1:8. This is not surprising since Alma had charge of the small plates of Nephi and thus had ready access to Lehi's words (see

Alma 37:2). In describing his joy, Alma thought of Lehi's experience in 1 Nephi 1:8 and quoted verbatim these twenty-one words. It is interesting, in this context, to recall the method of translation used by Joseph Smith as he brought forth the book of Mormon. He dictated his translation to a scribe pausing only to allow the scribe to complete the recording. Once recorded, he did not go back and review or revise the text. At the beginning of each translation session, he simply began exactly where he had left off in the previous session without going back to review.

How then might we explain the twenty-one word phrase that is shared by these two verses, particularly since they are separated by hundreds of pages of text, and they were dictated weeks apart? The answer is that it was Alma who looked back in the record and found the quote of father Lehi. It was not Joseph Smith. Joseph was merely the translator and not the writer or editor. There are other examples of this same phenomenon in the Book of Mormon. For example, compare Helaman 14:12 with Mosiah 3:8. Also compare 3 Nephi 8:6-23 with 1 Nephi 19:11-12. Perhaps this observation has not struck you as very interesting. If it has not, then just try quoting any twenty-one words of Lehi without looking!

In a similar manner King Benjamin established a law containing five proscriptions: murder, plunder, theft, adultery, and any manner of wickedness. This list which first appears in Mosiah 2:13 reappears in seven other verses in the Book of Mormon: Mosiah 29:36; Alma 23:3; 30:10; Helaman 3:13; 6:23; 7:21; and Ether 8:16.

23 But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

verse 23 "Born of God" means thoroughly converted.

24 Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

25 Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors;

26 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God.

verse 26 Verse 4 above indicates that Alma's testimony is not of man, but rather is of the Spirit. This verse refers to Alma's converts: "Many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know." Alma's converts also have a testimony born of the Spirit of God.

27 And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

28 And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

verse 28 “I know that he will raise me up at the last day” Alma has a “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20) which is a gift of the Spirit given to those who are worthy. It is likely that he has had his “calling and election made sure.” For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7, and see also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

29 Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

verses 28-29 The angel who orchestrated the miraculous conversion of Alma told him never to forget the captivity of his fathers and the Lord’s goodness in delivering them: “for they were in bondage and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16).

30 But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his word.

verse 30 “inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” This statement had practical and temporal implications for the Nephites. Their continued survival in the land depended on their strict adherence to the laws of God.

The structure of this verse additionally suggests that if a man prospers “in the land,” he prospers both temporally and spiritually.

Alma Chapter 37

Scripture Mastery

Alma 37:6-7 By small and simple things are great things brought to pass, and small means, in many instances, doth confound the wise.

Alma 37:35-37 Alma to his son Helaman, Remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good.

Chapter 37 consists of the continued counsel of Alma to his son Helaman. Alma will challenge each of his three sons to obey the commandments, to be an example to others, and to proclaim the gospel. To Helaman, however, he will give additional responsibilities.

1 And now, my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me;

verse 1 “the records which have been entrusted with me” These include the Nephite records (the small plates of Nephi and the collection of plates referred to as the large plates of Nephi), the plates of brass, and the twenty-four plates containing a record of the Jaredites. The other sacred artifacts entrusted to Helaman were the interpreters or Urim and Thummim, and the Liahona.

Apparently Alma had first offered the sacred records to Nephihah, his successor as chief judge. When Nephihah refused to take possession of them, they were given to Helaman (see Alma 50:38).

2 And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept.

verse 2 Alma commands Helaman to write and continue the record. Helaman’s record will begin with Alma 45 and extend through Alma 62. The final chapter in the book of Alma, Alma 63, was written by Helaman’s brother Shiblon with heavy editing by the prophet Mormon.

“it is for a wise purpose that they are kept” There are two major purposes for the Nephites’ records. We will read of these purposes in verses 8-10, 14, 18-19.

3 And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning—

verse 3 The plates of brass, of course played a major role in the spiritual lives of the Book of Mormon peoples. These plates were their scripture, and undoubtedly many copies of the brass plates were made and distributed among the people. We might easily review the contents of the brass plates by reviewing 1 Nephi 4-5 and the commentary for the verses in those two chapters. The contents of the plates of brass may be summarized as follows:

1. the five books of Moses

2. the prophecies of many Israelite prophets down to the prophet Jeremiah. We know that many prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah were contained on the brass plates (1 Nephi 5:13), but it is likely that the entire book of Jeremiah was not contained on the brass plates, as he was a contemporary of the prophet Lehi. Lehi and his family might well have left Jerusalem prior to Jeremiah's completion of his writings.

3. a genealogy of Lehi's ancestors. We have previously enumerated several features of the brass plates that are not found in the Old Testament. Thus the plates of brass constituted a more comprehensive scriptural record than the Bible as we know it today (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:11-14 and 1 Nephi 13:23 and its commentary). We also know that the plates of brass were written in the language of the Egyptians (see Mosiah 1:4 and its commentary).

4 Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.

verse 4 This is an intriguing verse. It suggests that the content of the brass plates will be preserved and handed down until it is finally delivered to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people." What do you suppose this means exactly? Certainly one of the ways by which the people of our day have and will be exposed to the messages on the brass plates is through the Book of Mormon, since the Book of Mormon prophets had the brass plates and often depended on them for their sermons and writings. Perhaps one day, in addition, the brass plates themselves will be restored to the earth and the knowledge thereon will be available to all who would avail themselves of the opportunity to learn from them (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 103; and *Millennial Messiah*, 113). The prophet Lehi once uttered a prophecy similar to the one in this verse (1 Nephi 5:18).

5 And now behold, if they are kept they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness; yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ.

verse 5 "if they are kept they must retain their brightness" It seems likely that Alma intended a double meaning here. To be "kept" is to be properly cared for. If

the plates are properly preserved, they will not tarnish and will maintain their luster. Also, if they are properly valued and cherished, they will always retain their spiritual brightness and remain a source of continuing spiritual satisfaction.

“yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ”

Alma then prophesies that the plates of brass will, indeed, retain their spiritual brightness, as will other plates of divine provenance (including the Book of Mormon).

6 Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

verse 6 “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass”

Here is an important principle. In a man’s personal spiritual progress, for example, the small inch by inch and “line upon line” steps he takes eventually accrue incrementally and result in “great” end results. It is by being faithful and diligent in the small and menial tasks that we eventually receive magnificent spiritual gifts. President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “To do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all mankind, is the truest greatness” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 285-86).

7 And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

verses 8-10 The Nephite records had two important purposes. First, they had been and would yet be used to teach the Lamanites and the Nephites. The second major purpose will be given in verses 14 and 18: to show forth God’s “power unto future generations” (see also verse 19).

8 And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.

verse 8 “they have enlarged the memory of this people” It is interesting to note that all of the plates in the possession of Alma have been used by the Nephite peoples as their scriptures. This includes likely more than just the plates of brass. It will one day be interesting to learn exactly by what mechanism the large and small plates and the plates of Ether might have been made available to the people.

The scriptures “enlarge” our memory by reminding us of our covenants and obligations in the kingdom of God here on earth. King Benjamin suggested the inevitable results when a people has no opportunity to have their memories enlarged by scripture: “Even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been

like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct” (Mosiah 1:5).

9 Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

verse 9 Obviously Ammon and his brethren carried with them on their mission personal copies of at least some of the materials contained on the brass plates of Laban. Further, the “incorrect traditions” of the Lamanite fathers would have been more easily corrected by the Lamanites’ having access to the small and large plates of Nephi.

10 And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer?

verse 10 “they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them” “They” refers to the scriptural records on the plates. “Them” refers to Lamanites who might be converted to the gospel of Christ in the future.

11 Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear.

verse 11 “these mysteries are not yet fully made know unto me” The full impact of the brass plates and other plates on future generations had not yet been made known to Alma, therefore he will “forbear,” or say nothing further on the matter.

12 And it may suffice if I only say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God; for he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works, and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

verse 12 “he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works” God’s perspective is an omniscient and eternal one. He invariably knows what is ultimately best for each of us. Thus, “he doth counsel in wisdom.”

“his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round” These phrases refer to a rich and vital concept. We are all governed by God’s law. That law is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action there is an identical consequence. These results follow without respect to

person. It has always been thus, in Adam's day just as in ours and in the eternities to come. Thus, "his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round."

A "straight" path seems to be the Book of Mormon metaphor for the righteous use of time. The word *straight* means "direct, right (correct), or not bent or curved." The use of the word *straight* in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

13 O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.

verse 13 "If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence" Here again is the now familiar "promise/curse" of the Book of Mormon. The earliest reference to this promise from the Lord is in 1 Nephi 2:20: "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise."

14 And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him, that he may show forth his power unto future generations.

15 And now behold, I tell you by the spirit of prophecy, that if ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan, that he may sift you as chaff before the wind.

verse 15 "ye shall be delivered up unto Satan" What is the essence of being "delivered up unto Satan"? It is simply to lose access to the Spirit of God. Such a man is helpless and defenseless. It is inevitable that he will eventually find himself fully captive to the devil.

Alma's analogy of being sifted "as chaff before the wind" is apt. This process is also called winnowing or threshing. In this particular case the righteous are the wheat, and those without the Spirit of God are the worthless waste materials—the husks, the chaff. The latter cannot resist the "wind." They will be separated from the righteous and taken captive by Satan.

16 But if ye keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you, (for you must appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them) behold, no power of earth or hell can take them from you, for God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words.

verse 16 Alma urges his son Helaman to seek the Lord's help in just how he might best superintend the sacred plates.

17 For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers.

18 For he promised unto them that he would preserve these things for a wise purpose in him, that he might show forth his power unto future generations.

verse 18 Keep in mind that "these things" include the Nephite records (the small plates of Nephi and the collection of plates referred to as the large plates of Nephi), the plates of brass, the twenty-four plates containing a record of the Jaredites, the interpreters or Urim and Thummim, and the Liahona.

19 And now behold, one purpose hath he fulfilled, even to the restoration of many thousands of the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; and he hath shown forth his power in them, and he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved.

verse 19 "One purpose hath he fulfilled" Alma refers again to the mission of Ammon and his brethren to the Lamanites (verse 9).

"he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved" Alma knew from his study of the small plates of Nephi the account of Nephi's vision, and he knew the prophecies contained therein pertaining to the future of the Nephites and Lamanites (1 Nephi 12; see also 1 Nephi 15:5). The Nephites will eventually be destroyed, and the Lamanites will be preserved.

20 Therefore I command you, my son Helaman, that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words, and that ye be diligent in keeping the commandments of God as they are written.

21 And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, all their murders, and robberings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters.

verse 21 "those twenty-four plates" These of course are the plates found by the expedition sent out by King Limhi from the land of Lehi-Nephi (see Mosiah 21:25-28). The expedition had set out to locate the land of Zarahemla, but instead they bypassed Zarahemla, passed through the narrow pass (through the narrow neck of land), and came upon the land Desolation, the site of the great final wars of the Jaredites. Here they discovered the twenty-four plates which had been prepared and buried by Ether. Doubtless they had been hidden in such a way that they would be

discovered. These plates were later translated by king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin, and they will yet be abridged by Moroni and become part of the plates of Mormon, the book of Ether. Perhaps a review of the article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*, would be helpful at this point.

“that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works . . . may be made manifest unto this people” There were certain things in the Jaredite record that Alma wanted taught to the Nephites as useful negative lessons. We will learn that there were also some things in the Jaredite record that Alma did not want revealed to the Nephite peoples (see verses 27, 29, 32).

“and that ye preserve these interpreters” We have previously discussed the interpreters in the commentary for Mosiah 8:13. For review and for the convenience of the reader, we will repeat that discussion here. We understand the “interpreters” to be the “Urim and Thummim,” two special stones prepared by God and used by prophets for receiving revelations and for translating scriptural records written in a language unknown to the prophet. God’s prophets who are allowed to use the Urim and Thummim have been referred to as “seers.” The term “interpreters” is unique to the Book of Mormon. The name “Urim and Thummim” is the transliteration of two Hebrew words which mean “lights” and “perfections.” The *-im* ending on both words apparently represents the Hebrew masculine plural suffix. The term “Urim and Thummim” is not found in the Book of Mormon text. For a detailed physical description of the interpreters, see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A.

Is there more than one set of interpreters in ancient scripture? There are at least two and possibly three or more. The brother of Jared was the first to receive a set (Ether 3:22-28). Joseph Smith, of course, possessed the interpreters, and we are told that his were the same that had been in the possession of the brother of Jared (D&C 17:1). Where did king Mosiah get his? There is no mention of Lehi and his party’s bringing these stones with them. Some have suggested that Mosiah obtained his from his father and grandfather, Benjamin and Mosiah. This idea originates with the account of the elder Mosiah’s translating the Mulekite’s large stone “by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20-21). Were king Mosiah’s interpreters the same as those given to the brother of Jared? It is possible, but it seems unlikely they were, unless the early Mulekites found them among the artifacts previously belonging to the Jaredites and handed them down to eventually be delivered by the people of Zarahemla to Mosiah. Abraham received a set of interpreters (Abraham 3:1). Either Abraham’s set was passed along or Moses received another (Exodus 28:30). The fate of this set or these sets is unknown. There are several other mentions of this type of device in the Old Testament (Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65).

22 For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness, yea, work secret murders and abominations; therefore the Lord said, if they did not repent they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.

verse 22 “the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness” Alma is here referring to the Jaredites. The Lord had warned them through their prophets that if they did not repent, they would be destroyed.

23 And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.

verse 23 “I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone” The punctuation of this phrase suggests that “Gazelem” is the servant. The stone is the Urim and Thummim. If a comma were placed following the word servant, then the phrase might suggest that the title Gazelem referred instead to the stone. Perhaps it refers to both. It is interesting to recall that Jesus gave to Simon Peter the title “stone”: “And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone” (John 1:42). The title “Gazelem” in this verse may refer to any seer or prophet, but it has been suggested that it might be a direct reference to Joseph Smith. In the Doctrine and Covenants (pre-1981 editions only), Joseph Smith is called “Gazalam” (note the different spelling), which is perhaps a variant spelling of Gazelem.

“that I may discover unto my people . . . the works of their brethren” The word “discover” here means reveal.

24 And now, my son, these interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying:

25 I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.

verse 25 Here Alma seems to be quoting some scriptural source which is not available to us today.

26 And now, my son, we see that they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed, and thus far the word of God has been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us.

verse 26 Alma is still referring to the Jaredites.

27 And now, my son, I command you that ye retain all their oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall keep from this people, that they know them not, lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.

verse 27 Alma commanded his son Helaman to “retain” or keep secret the specific mechanisms of the secret combinations of the Jaredites—the oaths, covenants, and agreements. This, of course, was to guard against their potentially seductive effects on any who might receive them.

These forbidden secret writings were undoubtedly found on the twenty-four plates along with the more useful materials. So what was Helaman to do in order to comply with this wise commandment from his father? Obviously he would allow the plates to be seen and handled only by those who understood and agreed to comply with Alma’s edict. Was Helaman true to his charge? We know that secret combinations will eventually arise among the Nephites organized by Gadianton and others. Did the oaths and covenants of these secret Nephite combinations originate with these twenty-four Jaredite plates? We will learn that they did not. Helaman was diligent in guarding the plates (see Helaman 6:25-26).

Peradventure means by chance or perhaps.

28 For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed.

verse 28 The destruction of the wicked Jaredites had left a curse upon all of the land of the Book of Mormon. The Lord had given a clear warning to the brother of Jared that the wicked should be “swept off” the land (Ether 2:8-9).

For a discussion of the concept of being “fully ripe” in iniquity, see comments on “ripe for destruction” under the subtitle “Pride Operates at Various Levels” under the title “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

“therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed” The Lord expresses his desire that the Nephites not fall under the same fate as had the Jaredites.

29 Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people, and only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them; and ye shall teach them to abhor such wickedness and abominations and murders; and ye shall also teach them that these people were destroyed on account of their wickedness and abominations and their murders.

30 For behold, they murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities; and the blood of those whom

they murdered did cry unto the Lord their God for vengeance upon those who were their murderers; and thus the judgments of God did come upon these workers of darkness and secret combinations.

31 Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe.

verse 31 “before they are fully ripe” To be fully ripe is for a wicked man to progress far enough in wickedness that his judgment is sealed against him.

32 And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity.

verse 32 “teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity” This is not just so much rhetoric. Those who have progressed spiritually to a certain point are spoken of as being sanctified, and they have actually lost their disposition to commit sin (Mosiah 5:2).

33 Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

34 Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls.

verse 34 “Teach them to never be weary of good works” Is it possible to become weary of doing good works? It is if we undertake good works for incorrect reasons—if our motivations for doing good are largely arbitrary or self-serving ones. We are in danger of wearying of good works if we do good works just because we have decided to, or because we have set a goal and we are sticking doggedly to that goal, or because we are involved in this or that achievement or excellence program. On the other hand, we never tire of good works if they are properly motivated. We are properly motivated when the Spirit of God abides in us and moves toward acts of charity toward others.

“such shall find rest to their souls” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

35 O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.

verse 35 The verb *to remember* in Hebrew texts means far more than the mere mental recall of information. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means “to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . . Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance

with divine injunctions. . . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, failing to remember God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy” (Louis C. Midgley, “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb *to remember* in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; Moroni 4:3).

36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

verse 36 Praying always entails constantly being conscious of God and his plan of salvation. It consists of having a continual attitude which directs us during every waking moment of mortality, of maintaining a spiritual posture of thankfulness and reliance on the Lord, of desiring the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Brigham Young noted that to pray always is to live as we pray: “I do not know any other way for the Latter-day Saints than for every breath to be virtually a prayer for God to guide and direct his people. . . . Every breath should virtually be a prayer that God will preserve us from sin and from the effects of sin” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*. Ed. John A. Widtsoe. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977, 43-44). The scriptures enumerate the blessings of praying always: “Pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him” (3 Nephi 18:15); “I will pour out my Spirit upon you” (D&C 19:38); “I [will] unfold [truth] to [your] understanding” (D&C 32:4); and pray always “that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:17).

37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 37 In an interesting article by Angela Crowell (“Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon, Part 1,” *Zarahemla Record*, Nos. 32-33 [1986]:2-9) a Hebrew poetic form known as merismus is described. With this form Hebrew poets could express a broad concept by a pair of narrower adjectives. For example “young and aged” equals everybody (Job 29:8) and “sea and dry land” equals the universe (Psalm 95:5). In this verse the same form is seen. The use of “night” and “morning” conveys the concept of “all the time.”

verses 38-47 Alma gives counsel to his son Helaman regarding the Liahona, the device provided to Lehi and his party as they traveled in the wilderness. Some

interesting insight on how the expanded family of Lehi used the Liahona is obtained from these verses. We have previously discussed this concept in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:10. For the reader's convenience, we will reproduce much of that commentary: The Liahona was a gift of God, made by his very hand (2 Nephi 5:12), that worked solely by the power of God. It functioned only in response to the faith and diligence of those who followed it. Alma teaches that the Liahona seemed a "temporal" thing of "small means," and accordingly there was a constant tendency for Lehi's people to take it for granted, in fact, ignore it. Apparently this device did not seem entirely new and unfamiliar to Lehi's party, rather it seemed unremarkable and ordinary. Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out why this might have been so. He reported evidence that the tradition in Hebrew culture of divining with arrows is well established. Hebrews believed that for many types of decisions, including finding their way through uncharted territory, the Lord's influence would intervene if they used arrows in a type of divining ritual ("The Liahona's Cousin," a FARMS reprint). Evidently, then, to Lehi's group the Liahona seemed just another device with which they could seek the Lord's will through the use of arrows—just another "pair of dice," as it were. Apparently they often did not take it seriously and were careless in giving heed to its advice. Alma will teach his son Helaman that this carelessness and disobedience of those in Lehi's party contributed to their having to wander eight years in the wilderness: "They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions" (verse 41). Alma will also teach that the Liahona was a type or symbol of Christ (Alma 37:44-45) in that Lehi's party had but to follow its words and directions to be led to the promised land. Similarly, if we follow the words of Christ we will be led to a much better promised land.

It is natural to try to picture the specific appearance of this device. That is not possible, of course, because we only have this cursory description. Apparently the round ball of brass did not have a complete spherical shell and was at least in part hollow since the pointer spindles were "within the ball." There was obviously some type of gap or window in the shell that allowed visualization of the spindles or pointers. A spindle is a slender rod or pin, a headless arrow. On these pointers a special writing would appear from time to time, clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers. See the speculative illustration, *Liahona*.

38 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.

verse 38 This unusual device is not given a name in the Book of Mormon until this verse when it is referred to as the Liahona. In previous verses it has been referred

to as “the compass,” “the ball,” the director,” or the “round ball of curious workmanship.” Though many meanings have been suggested for the term “Liahona,” Dr. Nibley’s favorite is “God is our guide” (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

39 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness.

40 And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

verse 40 “it did work for them according to their faith in God” Here is a reminder that miracles occur as a result of faith, and they are not given to instill faith. See *Miracles in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 20.

“if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done” For a discussion of why the Liahona had two spindles instead of just one, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:10. Also see the illustration, *Spindles of Liahona*.

41 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

verse 41 Dr. Hugh Nibley favors a re-punctuation of this verse to make its meaning more clear. He would render it, “Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means (albeit it did show unto them marvelous works), they were slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence.” The meaning seems clear: Though Lehi’s people enjoyed daily demonstrations of God’s power, the device by which that power operated seemed quite ordinary. Thus, in spite of the “marvelous works” it showed them, they tended to neglect it (Hugh Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” a FARMS reprint).

Alma’s purpose seems clear here. He is drawing an analogy between Lehi’s journey in the wilderness and fallen man’s journey through life. In life man is expected to recognize his fallen and unfulfilled state and develop a hunger and thirst for a higher, eternal purpose to life. This higher purpose can only be perceived through diligence, obedience, and faith.

42 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

verse 42 Here we learn the interesting fact that the reasons for the prolonged wanderings of Lehi and his family in the wilderness included their lack of faith and lack of obedience.

43 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

verse 43 “these things are not without a shadow” This rather awkward phrase may be restated: “These events and happenings have symbolic meaning.”

44 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

verse 44 “this compass” The Liahona was a temporal “type” or “shadow” of the Savior just as was Moses’s fiery serpent previously referred to (1 Nephi 17:41; Numbers 21:4-9). The Liahona and the brass serpent offered the believers temporal sustenance, while the Savior offers to the penitent spiritual respite.

“it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ . . . as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass” This is an interesting verse which might bear some discussion. Is it really “easy” to live the gospel of Jesus Christ? One might argue that the principles and commandments are very straight forward and uncomplicated and can be understood and lived by anyone. If it is so simple, then, why do many falter in their attempts? Clearly it is the influences of the world that appeal to the “natural man” tendency within each of us that pulls us in the wrong direction. When the influence of the Spirit of God is abiding firmly within our hearts, then living the gospel and avoiding sin is “easy.” But here is another pitfall. Maintaining the influence of the Spirit is hardly a passive process. It is in fact a most demanding and rigorous process that requires a pro-active and constant striving and reaching and deliberate obeying.

“straight course to eternal bliss” “straight course to the promised land” Here the word *straight* must be understood in the sense of “direct,” much like the English sentence “She went straight to the boss.” These two uses of the word *straight* (as opposed to *strait*) in this verse are appropriate as discussed in the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

45 And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

verse 45 **“is there not a type in this thing?”** Alma asks Helaman whether or not Helaman sees a metaphor or analogy in the story of the Liahona applicable universally to all of us.

“beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” A vale is a tract of low ground between hills; a valley. This “vale of sorrow” is this earth life. The “far better land of promise” is eternal life in God’s presence. The expression “land of promise” actually has a dual meaning. First, it is a physical place to live where God blesses his children temporally. Second, it has spiritual significance in the fact that God blesses his children with experiences which lead them back to eternal life. The concept of the promised land on earth is therefore symbolic for a “far better land of promise”—heaven.

46 O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever.

47 And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober. My son, farewell.

verse 47 **“look to God and live”** Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet aptly wrote: “Just as Peter needed to keep his eyes on the Son of God in order to walk on the surface of the water of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:22- 32); just as Peter summoned the lame man at the Gate Beautiful with the words, ‘Look on us’ (Acts 3:4); even so does our Master invite us to look to him, to fix our gaze and fasten our hearts and souls upon him. Dedicated discipleship entails looking straight ahead to our Lord and Savior, giving little or no heed to the divergent and demanding voices of the world. Jesus pleads: ‘Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not’ (D&C 6:36). As we look to him and to him only we come to enjoy that abundant life which he brought (see John 10:10)” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 3, 283).

Alma Chapter 38

The commandments of Alma to his son Shiblon.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 38 Alma counsels his son Shiblon

Alma 38:12 Alma to his son Shiblon: Use boldness, but not overbearance.

Alma 38:14 Alma to Shiblon: Do not say, O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness.

1 My son, give ear to my words, for I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.

2 And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end.

3 I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.

4 For I know that thou wast in bonds; yea, and I also know that thou wast stoned for the word's sake; and thou didst bear all these things with patience because the Lord was with thee; and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.

5 And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 5 “as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions” Does this promise apply to this mortal life or to the life to come? Undoubtedly it applies to both. We read in Matthew: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28- 30). John the Revelator wrote: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Speaking of righteous men, Isaiah wrote: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” All of this is not to say that if a man is sufficiently righteous, he may expect to be blessed to avoid life’s vicissitudes. Every man,

regardless of his righteous living, may expect mortality to be a vigorous experience strewn with ample numbers of difficulties. But if he truly believes in and loves his Savior and regularly feels and expresses gratitude for his atoning death, and if he strives to follow his example, he will become well acquainted with the Savior's peace, comfort, and love. He will be able to brook his hardships with the calm assurance of someone who has come to know that this life is not the real life—that the real life is the one which follows. When it is confirmed to a man that he will live with his Father again, when hardships arise, he will be resilient by virtue of his relationship with the Lord and with the Lord's Spirit.

To be "lifted up at the last day" is to be exalted in the celestial kingdom.

6 Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me; for if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things.

7 But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people; yea, and I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me, and his voice was as thunder, and it shook the whole earth.

8 And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.

verse 6-8 These verses contain the third of three accounts of the story of the conversion of Alma found in the Book of Mormon. The first two are found in Mosiah 27:8-37 and Alma 36:4-26. This particular account, intended for his son Shiblon, is the briefest of the three. For a discussion of the comparison of these three accounts see the commentary for Mosiah 27:8-37.

9 And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn of me that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.

verse 9 "he is the life and the light of the world" If you have spent some time pondering over D&C 88—the revelation referred to as the Olive Leaf—then I hope you have concluded with me that the subject of the relationship between the Savior and the natural laws and physical energies of the universe including the physical energy of light is a most complex one that I'm not sure we are given to fully understand. God is the law of our universe. He is the source of all power in the universe. By virtue of him we have a universe. Everything in our universe operates by power which emanates from him.

Even the natural laws of the universe operate by his power. By virtue of his power, the sun, the moon, the stars, rocks, tulips, light, electricity, water, etc., all exist. Their molecules and atoms exist and function because of his power. Their electrons spin around their protons and neutrons by virtue of his law or power. Indeed all energy in the universe originates with God. Thus, he is in all things. For our purposes, Jesus Christ is given to be God of our world and innumerable other worlds. He has all that his Father has. He is our God. Thus, Christ is “in all and through all things.” In other words, his influence, this universal energy of which we have spoken, which emanates from him is intimately involved in all things, both animate and inanimate, indeed they exist and function because of Christ and his power. Indeed, he is, in both a spiritual and physical way “the light and the life of the world.” See *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

The attributes attributed to the Savior in this verse might also be used as titles for him. These include “the life,” “the light of the world,” “the word of truth,” and “righteousness.”

10 And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

verse 10 He who is “temperate in all things” uses restraint and moderation in speech and behavior.

11 See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

12 Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.

verse 12 “see that ye bridle all your passions” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bridle* as, “To restrain, guide or govern; to check, curb, or control.”

13 Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom.

14 Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.

15 And may the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people. Be sober. My son, farewell.

Alma Chapter 39

The commandments of Alma to his son Corianton. Comprising chapters 39 to 42 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 39 Alma counsels his son Corianton on sexual sin.

Alma's approach to his errant son is instructive. He certainly shows him love and concern, but he also teaches him the doctrines of the kingdom. Is it realistic to expect a "preaching" approach to be helpful here (Alma 31:5)? Evidently so. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior" (CR, October 1986, 20).

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?

verse 1 "the steadiness of thy brother" Alma is referring here to Shiblon.

2 For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites. Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.

verse 2 "thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom"

We have all previously observed the sequence of events culminating in serious sin. Inevitably the Spirit of the Lord teaches to those responsive to his ministrations humility and meekness. A loss of this responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit starts the tragic descent of the individual destined to commit serious sin. This unresponsiveness to or "loss" of the Spirit leads invariably to an inclination to rely less on the arm of the Lord and more on the arm of flesh. Then occur feelings of self-sufficiency, haughtiness, and even boasting in one's supposed strengths. From here it is only a short distance—all downhill—to succumbing to all manner of worldly temptations.

3 And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

verse 3 "Isabel" Isabel appears to have been an outcast from polite Nephite society. She was probably a Nephite woman who lived among other "wicked harlots"

(see verse 11) in a notorious district of the land. Brother Hugh Nibley pointed out that “Isabel was the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians” (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 542). For additional commentary on the derivation of her name, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

4 Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted.

5 Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

verse 5 In this verse Alma identifies the three most abominable sins in the sight of God. They are (in order of gravity) denying the Holy Ghost, shedding innocent blood—murder, and committing sexual sin.

The unpardonable sin. Denying the Holy Ghost is the ultimate blasphemy, even the unpardonable sin. It consists of willful rebellion by a man who has reached a lofty state of spiritual development. The man has had the heavens opened to him and has come to “know God” and possess “perfect light” (*TPJS*, 357-58). Yet, he comes out in open rebellion against the Lord and his kingdom. Such a person is incapable of repenting. He is a traitor to God and is sealed up to Satan as surely as the sons of God are sealed up to Christ. He has “denied the Only Begotten Son of the Father, having crucified him unto [himself] and put him to an open shame” (D&C 76:35). Unpardonable means that it cannot be paid for, either by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ or by the personal suffering of the sinner. The only sin that is unpardonable is the sin against the Holy Ghost. The individual guilty of this sin shall not be forgiven and will become forever a son of perdition. Indeed, it would have been “better for [him] never to have been born” (D&C 76:32).

Which people here in mortality are capable of committing such a sin, and what behavior can result in this awful penalty? Joseph Smith taught that before an individual could commit this sin, he must “have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him. . . . He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it” (*TPJS*, 358). Such a person must have received knowledge and power beyond what the vast majority of us have received. Spencer W. Kimball taught: “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 23). It seems likely that the individual who qualifies is he who has entered into the highest priesthood covenants which can be entered into here in mortality. Then he must be found guilty of more than mere passive dissent. He must come out in open rebellion against the Church and kingdom and even against the Savior himself. He rebels against the Savior to the point that he seeks after

the blood of Christ and if possible he would shed his blood anew. This sequence must be executed in mortality. An individual cannot become a son of Perdition in the post-mortal spirit world. Joseph Smith taught, “A man cannot commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body” (*TPJS*, 357).

Only those who commit this sin will know the nature of this torment and its duration. “The end thereof, neither the place thereof, nor their torment, no man knows; neither was it revealed, neither is, neither will be unto man, except to them who are made partakers thereof . . . wherefore, the end, the width, the height, the depth, and the misery thereof, they understand not, neither any man except those who are ordained unto this condemnation” (D&C 76:45-46, 48). Once an individual is condemned to become a son of Perdition, the penalty is final. The Prophet Joseph taught that it is incorrect to teach that the sons of perdition will be redeemed at some future day (*TPJS*, 24).

The unforgivable sin. The sin of murder or the “shedding of innocent blood” will be discussed in the commentary for the next verse.

6 For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness.

verse 6 “whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness” Murder is the deliberate, cold-blooded killing of another without justification. This is not an unpardonable sin as discussed in the commentary for verse 5, yet it is referred to as being an “unforgivable” sin. It is *unforgivable* in that the redemptive blood of Christ is not at first available to those who, aware of God’s law, have maliciously shed the blood of innocents. We are taught that deliverance comes only after the murderer personally atones with much personal suffering—in some unknown way and for some unknown length of time. Then and only then will the Lord’s mercy be extended to him, and he will be delivered from hell. He will receive a kingdom of glory. He will not, however be exalted. He will not obtain eternal life in the kingdom of God. Rather he will be saved in a lesser kingdom, usually the telestial kingdom. Thus, his spiritual death or his separation from God, is permanent. It is clear then why murder is referred to as a “sin unto death,” referring to spiritual death. The Lord said: “He that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world, nor in the world to come” (D&C 42:18). The murderer will never find complete forgiveness. He will never live in the presence of God. He will never be exalted.

Murderers, although they cannot be forgiven, may be pardoned. When, like King David (see Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27-31), they have suffered for their sin and have paid the full demands of justice to “the uttermost farthing” (Matthew 5:26), they may then

confess Christ, turn to him, and through his atonement be pardoned. That is, they will not become innocent, but their suffering will end. As David was promised that his soul would not be left forever in hell, so other murderers who turn to Christ after suffering for their sins will not be left forever to suffer in hell. They will eventually be redeemed from the power of Satan and receive some degree of glory—likely the telestial. We might say that they are “guilty but set free.”

We have discussed the deliberate, cold-blooded, and unjustified killing of one human being by another. There are obviously various degrees of murder and hence various degrees of guilt. The Lord will judge. Spencer W. Kimball wrote: “Even among willful murderers there are grades and categories. . . . There are those who kill in drunkenness, in rage, in anger, in jealousy. There are those who kill for gain, for power, for fear. There are those who kill for lust. They certainly will suffer different degrees of punishment hereafter” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 129-30.)

Is it possible to shed innocent blood and end up being cast into outer darkness with Satan and his angels? Of course. If a murderer or an individual guilty of other less abominable sins remains unrepentant throughout his sojourn in the spirit world—remains “filthy still”—and steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the Savior and his atoning sacrifice, then he will become a son of perdition.

The apostle John taught: “There is a sin unto death . . . and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16-17). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “There are sins for which there is no forgiveness [denying the Holy Ghost and murder], neither in this world nor in the world to come. There are sins which utterly and completely preclude the sinner from gaining eternal life. Hence there are sins for which repentance does not operate, sins for which the sinner must suffer and pay the full penalty personally” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 231).

Denying the Holy Ghost is a sin that is both unpardonable and unforgivable. The shedding of innocent blood is unforgivable and pardonable. Both are sins unto death (spiritual death or permanent separation from God). There are still other sins that are pardonable *and* forgivable. The Savior spoke of these when he said, “I the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death” (D&C 64:7). Sexual sin, though most abominable in the sight of God, fits into this latter category.

“it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness . . . it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness” This phrase implies that while it may not be easy for the murderer to obtain forgiveness, it is possible. We have already learned in the discussion above that forgiveness to the point of inheriting a lesser degree of glory may eventually occur, but complete forgiveness to the point of exaltation cannot occur.

7 And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good.

verse 7 “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime”

Sexual sin. It seems clear that we are not given a full understanding of just why it is that sexual sin is so serious. It may be forgivable and pardonable, but it is indeed the third most serious sin behind only the sin against the Holy Ghost and murder. The answer as to why it is so serious seems to lie in the fact that one who commits sexual sin is tampering with the procreative powers. Note, in the following scripture, the vast importance of the gift of eternal procreation. Speaking of those who enter into the “new and everlasting covenant,” particularly those who have this covenant “sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise,” the Lord said: “They shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (D&C 132:19-22).

If an individual fails to qualify for this marvelous exaltation, then that will be the “end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:4). The key phrases “continuation of the seeds,” “they shall have no end,” and “increase” all suggest the concept of continuing power of procreation. This procreative power is the power that separates God from the angels. He has allowed and offered the temporary use of this power to men and women here in mortality. The manner in which we make use of this privilege and the attitudes we develop and hold regarding this power determine whether we will have the opportunity to possess it during the eternities. The misuse of this power is consequently a most critical and dangerous offense.

Speaking of those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “The man and the woman who engage in this ordinance of matrimony are engaging in something that is of such far-reaching character, and is of such vast importance, that thereby hangs life and death, and eternal increase. Thereupon depends eternal happiness, or eternal misery. For this reason, God has guarded this sacred institution by the most severe penalties, and has declared that whosoever is untrue to the marriage relation, whosoever is guilty of adultery, shall be put to death. This is scriptural law, though it is not practiced today, because modern civilization does not recognize the laws of God in relation to moral status of mankind. The Lord commanded, ‘Whosoever sheddeth innocent blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’ Thereby God has given the law. Life is an important thing. No one has any right to take life, unless God commanded it. The law of God as to violation of the marriage

covenant is just as strict, and is on a parallel with law against murder notwithstanding the former is not carried out” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 273).

We understand “adultery” to mean a sexual sin committed by a couple when at least one of the two has entered a covenant of marriage either in or out of the temple. When neither of the two is married, we often refer to their sin as “fornication.” Is fornication just as grave a sin as adultery? The First Presidency in 1942 stated: “The Lord has drawn no essential distinctions between fornication, adultery, and harlotry or prostitution. Each has fallen under his solemn and awful condemnation” (Grant, Heber J., J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and David O. McKay. “The Message of the First Presidency.” *Improvement Era* [Nov 1942] 45:758). President Harold B. Lee taught that “the Master used interchangeably the words *adultery* and *fornication* in defining sexual impurity, and it has been severely condemned in every dispensation by authorized church leaders” (*Stand Ye In Holy Places*, 332).

Joseph Smith wrote: “If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom” (*HC*, 6:81). Although this statement was later modified by President Spencer W. Kimball who added the words “and remains unrepentant” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 350), there can be no mistaking the gravity of sexual sin.

While repentance is possible for sexual sins, the process is most rigorous and demanding. It is vital that one who is attempting to repent experience true “godly sorrow” (see the discussion of godly sorrow in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29; see also the following paragraph). Repentance requires confessing the sin to one’s bishop and a permanent forsaking of the sin. Even then the process is not complete. President Kimball wrote concerning this process: “There must be a washing, a purging, a changing of attitudes, a correcting of appraisals, a strengthening toward self-mastery. And these cleansing processes cannot be accomplished as easily as taking a bath or shampooing the hair, or sending a suit of clothes to the cleaner. There must be many prayers, and volumes of tears” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 155). The fully repentant sinner will “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Making restitution for sexual sins is most difficult because it is not possible to restore virtue in a physical sense. However, virtue can be restored spiritually through complete repentance and through the power of Christ’s atonement. Restitution may also be made through diligent service to others in the kingdom of God.

The sexual relationship has been compared to a horse. They both are beautiful, magnificent, and meant to serve man, but you must maintain control. Give either their head and they will run with you. It is profoundly true that giving in to sexual urges outside of marriage almost always destroys love, whereas, bridling passion increases love.

One sound bit of counsel is: “Don’t go to Caiaphas’s palace.” We often think we are wise enough and strong enough to control our urges, and we find ourselves in

places and situations where we are overwhelmed. The apostle Peter refused to believe that he would ever betray the Lord (Luke 22:31-34). But then he went to Caiaphas's palace, and rest is history.

“I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good” To “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress. The soul must be harrowed up in order to truly repent of serious sin. Only the truly distressed soul can experience the type of sorrow that is essential for true repentance. This sorrow may be referred to as “godly sorrow.” It is a heart-felt realization that one has tampered with and placed in serious jeopardy one’s eternal welfare. It is the genuine conviction that one’s behavior has tragically betrayed one’s eternal potential and has been a devastating disappointment to one’s Father in heaven. It is the agonizing realization that one’s eternal life hangs precariously in the balance. In order to achieve this state, it is necessary to sink into the depths of humility and recognize deep within one’s soul that without God and Christ one is lost. One must also recognize that without Christ it is impossible to repent. One must “turn to the Lord with all [one’s] mind, might, and strength” (see verse 13). “Godly sorrow” is ultimately a gift of the Spirit, granted to the worthy sufferer through the process of personal revelation by the Holy Ghost. It is the very same feeling that beset Alma during the process of his miraculous conversion. He summarized the experience: “I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed. . . . I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. . . . I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments” (Alma 36:11-13).

8 But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

9 Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

verse 9 “cross yourself in all these things” One early meaning of the verb “to cross” is to contradict or be inconsistent with. Our natural appetites may *cross* our moral principles or standards. None of us in mortality is ever completely free of the “natural man” tendencies within each of us. It is man’s “natural” tendency to be drawn toward worldly pleasures and travel down worldly paths. To do the unnatural things is to “cross” oneself. We “cross” ourselves when we turn away from, or contradict, our worldly lusts and seek instead for righteousness. In scripture to “cross” oneself is the same as to “take up one’s cross.” To his disciples in Jerusalem, Christ said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). On another occasion he counseled: “It is better that ye should deny

yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast in hell” (3 Nephi 12:30).

10 And I command you to take it upon you to counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel.

11 Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. 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.

verse 11 President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “The Lord says if we labor all our days and save but one soul, how great will be our joy with him; on the other hand how great will be our sorrow and our condemnation if through our acts we have led one soul away from this truth” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:314).

12 And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities;

verse 12 “Command thy children to do good” Some of us who have experienced times of rebellion in our children might be inclined to smile over this injunction. Those of us who bear battle scars in our struggles to rear righteous children might doubt the effectiveness of this “authoritarian” approach. However, we have learned that Alma was not guilty of using merely a “cook book” or general approach with his sons. We have seen how Alma, in counseling his sons, approached each one differently as he urged them to keep the commandments, as he taught them the doctrines of the kingdom, and as he bore testimony to them. He was sensitive to the individual needs of each of them.

13 That ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly; but rather return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done.

verse 13 “return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done” Here is an important part of the repentance process—to make restitution to any who might have been offended. Regarding this concept, President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “Does repentance consist of sorrow for wrong doing? Yes, but is that all? By no means. True repentance only is acceptable to God; nothing short of it will answer the purpose. Then what is true repentance? True repentance is not only sorrow for sins, and humble penitence and contrition before God, but it involves the necessity of turning away from them, a discontinuance of all evil practices and deeds, a thorough reformation of life, a vital change from evil to good, from vice to virtue, from

darkness to light. Not only so, but to make restitution, so far as it is possible, for all the wrongs we have done, to pay our debts, and restore to God and man their rights—that which is due to them from us. This is true repentance, and the exercise of the will and all the powers of body and mind is demanded, to complete this glorious work of repentance; then God will accept it” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 100-101).

14 Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you.

verse 14 What can we take with us? Divine attributes—characteristics we have “earned” by our obedience to God’s law, relationships, and our memories seem to comprise a reasonably complete list. What can we not take with us? Material possessions, fame, social status.

15 And now, my son, I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people.

16 And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.

17 And now I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?

verse 17 This verse implies that Corianton had expressed doubts about Messianic prophecies. He had probably given voice to his doubts in much the same words that doubters would use today: “How is it possible for you to know so much about this Jesus Christ when you say he won’t even be born until many years from now?”

18 Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children?

19 Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?

verses 17-19 A simple yet profoundly important perspective the Book of Mormon has afforded us is that Christian prophets have taught *Christian* doctrine and administered *Christian* ordinances since the days of Adam (Jacob 4:4). Biblical prophecies and text have been sufficiently altered that the world does not hold this

concept (see, however, Luke 24:25-27). It is generally believed that Christianity with its concepts and ordinances began at the time of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

Here, Alma explains to his son Corianton that it should not be impossible to believe in Christ just because he has not yet appeared on earth in his mortal ministry. It is just as easy for the Lord to send prophets to the earth with the “good news” *before* Christ’s mortal advent as it is for him to send prophets following his mortal ministry.

Alma Chapter 40

Scripture Mastery

Alma 40 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the spirit world and resurrection.

Alma 40:11-14 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection. Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

1 Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead.

verse 1 “I perceive that thy mind is worried” We will learn that Corianton has developed several questions about the doctrine. He has begun to doubt. Though we don't know the sequence of events in Corianton's particular situation, we would consider it perfectly typical and predictable that one who commits serious sin loses the Spirit and begins to doubt?

2 Behold, I say unto you, that there is no resurrection—or, I would say, in other words, that this mortal does not put on immortality, this corruption does not put on incorruption—until after the coming of Christ.

verse 2 Christ was the first to be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20). In this verse the mortal body is referred to as “this mortal” or “this corruption.” The mortal body is “corruption” in that it is subject to disease and aging and decay and death. The eternal body is referred to as “immortality” or “incorruption.”

3 Behold, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. But behold, my son, the resurrection is not yet. Now, I unfold unto you a mystery; nevertheless, there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth them save God himself. But I show unto you one thing which I have inquired diligently of God that I might know—that is concerning the resurrection.

verse 3 “Now, I unfold unto you a mystery” Alma's intent here seems to be to discuss—beginning in verse 6—what he has learned from God regarding the world of spirits—the state of the soul between death and resurrection. It is this information about “which [he has] inquired diligently of God that [he] might know.”

4 Behold, there is a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed.

verse 4 “Now when this time cometh no one knows” Alma does not intend to give any details about the sequence or timing of the resurrection. Indeed we will learn that his understanding of this sequence was imperfect. His intention, rather is to discuss mainly the spirit world (see verse 9).

5 Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

verse 5 Though it is not Alma's intention to discuss the sequence of the resurrection, that sequence is reviewed in the introductory commentary for verses 16-20 of this chapter.

verses 6-7 Alma understands that in the resurrection the body and spirit are reunited. He then asks, in these next two verses, a logical question: What becomes of the spirit of man between the time of his death and his resurrection?

6 Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection.

verse 6 Between the time of a man's death in mortality and his resurrection he lives in the world of spirits, the so-called spirit world. For a discussion of this phase of our eternal life *The Spirit World in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13.

7 And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?

verse 7 “Souls of men” here refers to the spirits of men. This same meaning for “soul” and “souls” also pertains in verses 11, 14, 18, 21, and 23 of this chapter. This usage is different from the more specific definition of the soul of man given to us by revelation in this final dispensation. This latter, more correct, definition of the soul is the combination of the man's spirit and his body (D&C 88:15-16).

8 Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.

verse 8 Again, for a discussion of the sequence of the resurrection see the introductory comments for verses 16-20 of this chapter.

“time only is measured unto men” The scriptures teach us that in the worlds to come “there shall be time no longer” (D&C 84:100; 88:110). This is a tantalizing piece of information, but conceptually it is difficult to digest and understand at this stage of our development.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell enriched our understanding of time: “And when the gossamer veil called time is too much with us, let us recall that ere long time will be no more. Time is measured only to man anyway (see Revelation 10:6; Alma 40:8; D&C 84:100). Meanwhile, let us make allowance for the rapidity with which time seems to pass especially when we are happy. Jacob found it so; ‘And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her’ (Genesis 29:20). On such a scale, each of us has but ‘a few days’ left in mortality” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 10).

9 Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what cometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know.

10 And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man.

11 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

verses 11-12 These verses and also 2 Nephi 9:38 suggest that “all men,” both good and evil, at the moment of their death, are taken home to God—doubtless our Lord Jesus Christ—perhaps to have a private audience with him to be assigned to either the state of peace or “paradise” or to the state of misery, the “spirit prison.” Alma’s wording here is similar to that found in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Is this really the correct order of events after death? Do we really enter into the presence of God as soon as we die? This verse has led some to believe that the post-mortal spirit world is identical to the premortal spirit world where we lived in the presence of God. For a discussion of this question and for a summary of what is known about the spirit world, see *The Spirit World*, a chapter in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* referenced above.

verse 12 “a state of rest, a state of peace” It is obvious that the righteous departed spirits in paradise are free of worldly troubles, the vicissitudes of life, and the shackles of a corrupt and infirm body. It is likely that these spirits will enjoy the vigor and enthusiasm which was characteristic of them in their prime of life. Their mortal trial

is over. They are sealed up to inherit eternal life in the celestial kingdom. Rather than simply resting, however, they will be involved in the work of the Lord, particularly missionary work. All who do not qualify for the state of paradise will be assigned spirit prison where they will begin their labors to work out their own eternal future.

13 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.

verse 13 “the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house” “Their house” might be interpreted as “their spirit.” While it is true that some of the spirits in the spirit prison are so wicked that the devil virtually has taken possession of them and has his way with them, this phrase likely has reference to all of those spirits that enter into the spirit prison. Does Satan really take possession of all those spirits who enter the spirit prison? To some extent all who enter the spirit prison have succumbed to the “natural man” tendencies within all of us and to the temptations of Satan and to the pulls of the mortal world. Keep in mind the relationship between Satan and the *natural self* of each man. Satan did not create it, but he encourages its abuse.

“cast into outer darkness” Again, assuming that this verse applies to all who enter the spirit prison and not just the most wicked among them, this “outer darkness” is not the same place as the “outer darkness” where Satan and the sons of Perdition will live eternally. Rather, in this verse, this phrase refers simply to the spirit prison. Here, there will be “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” as the unrepentant sinners, who failed to take full advantage of the Savior’s atonement here in mortality, undergo the buffetings of Satan and become cleansed of their sins in preparation for their receiving a degree of glory. They will, eventually, automatically receive the privilege of resurrection. Thus, a part of Christ’s atonement does automatically apply to them—the overcoming of physical death. However, the part of the Savior’s atonement that overcomes spiritual death only applies to those who repent of their sins and live the commandments. Thus, the unrepentant sinners must be turned over to the buffetings of Satan and begin to pay the price for their own sins. In this manner they become partially cleansed of their sins and begin to become prepared to receive a degree of glory. It is during this painful process that misery is experienced which results in “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Of the exquisite pain and remorseful realization that is experienced here, Joseph Smith taught: “The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits (where they go after death) is [the knowledge] that

they [have] come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers" (*TPJS*, 310-11). Thus, hell or "outer darkness" is both a place and a state of mind.

In addition to remorse, experienced in the spirit prison, there are other reasons the spirit prison is referred to as "hell." For those individuals in spirit prison, there is only one way to avoid being cast into eternal outer darkness with Satan and his angels forever. It is to repent and accept Christ. It would not be surprising to learn that these individuals are advised of a temporal deadline for that repentance and coming to Christ. Many of them have a long way to progress as they repair their lives. They therefore must suffer much pain of self denial. Please keep in mind that there is no arbitrary or purely punitive suffering in God's universe. The "hell" or pain they experience is completely productive and necessary.

14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

verse 14 This verse describes the frame of mind of some of those in the spirit prison. There seems to be little hope and much of despair among (some of) them. These are likely those spoken of in the previous verse whose "house" (spirit) has been lost to the devil. They are "in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them." This is a particularly poignant and pitiable state and is probably analogous to that of the one third of the hosts of heaven in the pre-existence who were cast out with Satan. They know well their final destiny, and they desperately fear its coming. There is scriptural evidence that those in the clutches of the devil know and fear their destiny. In the country of the Gergesenes, the Savior encountered two who were possessed by devils. Upon recognizing the Lord, the evil pair cried out: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29). It seems clear that these two also were in "a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them."

One meaning of this verse is self-explanatory but worth emphasizing. All spirits will remain in the spirit realm until their resurrection.

15 Now, there are some that have understood that this state of happiness and this state of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection. Yea, I admit it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul and their consignation to happiness or misery, according to the words which have been spoken.

verse 15 It is apparent that Alma understands the true meaning of the term resurrection—the reuniting of the spirit with its eternal body (see verse 18). Here he allows that the process of death and the passage of the spirit to either paradise or prison might be termed a “first resurrection” of sorts.

verses 16-20 Before attempting a discussion of these verses, let us review what is known through modern-day revelation about the sequence of the first and second resurrections: Not everyone is resurrected at the same moment. There is a pre-defined order in which man is resurrected. The apostle Paul said, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man *in his own order*” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23, italics added).

Actually there are two separate resurrections, the first and the second. The first resurrection is also called the “resurrection of life” or the “resurrection of the just.” The second resurrection is also referred to as the “resurrection of damnation” (3 Nephi 26:5) or the “resurrection of the unjust” (D&C 76:17).

The first resurrection is divided into two parts: the “morning of the first resurrection” and the “afternoon of the first resurrection.” Those who merit a celestial body come forth in the “morning” of the first resurrection. These are they who once resided in paradise, those who bore the title “just men made perfect,” those referred to as “the just” (D&C 76:17), meaning that they are justified, ratified, sealed, and approved of God. These are they who have had their calling and election made sure—they who have received the promise by revelation that they shall be equal with him in power, might, and dominion (see D&C 76:95). For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Calling and Election Made Sure* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16. Those who come forth in this resurrection will live with God and enjoy “eternal life” which is God’s life.

The morning of the first resurrection began at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, and it is likely continuing at the present time. The final phase of the “morning” of the first resurrection is the major resurrection that will occur at the time of Christ’s second coming just prior to the Millennium. Of course, those who live during the Millennium and merit celestial glory will receive their celestial bodies during the millennial period (see D&C 132:19).

Those who will inherit a *terrestrial* body arise in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The afternoon of the first resurrection begins some time after the onset of the Millennium and ends before the end of the one thousand years. As mentioned, it is during this phase that those bound for the terrestrial glory will receive their bodies. These are referred to as “Christ’s at his coming” (D&C 88:99). These are they “who have received their part in that prison which is prepared for them, that they might

receive the gospel, and be judged according to men in the flesh” (D&C 88:99). These have accepted Christ but not to the degree that would exalt them.

The second resurrection begins at the end of the Millennium. The first to come forth in the second resurrection are those who have accepted Christ and have been cleansed of their sins and have thus earned the celestial glory. Then, finally, those who have earned no glory and who are destined to spend the rest of eternity with Satan in outer darkness come forth with their bodies. Even “hell” or the spirit prison cannot purge these of their filth. They were given a sure witness and knowledge of heaven’s secrets, but they denied it all and came out in open rebellion striving to destroy the Lord and his church. Thus they “crucify Christ afresh.”

16 And behold, again it hath been spoken, that there is a first resurrection, a resurrection of all those who have been, or who are, or who shall be, down to the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

verse 16 Alma here seems to suggest that the “first resurrection” includes “all” men, both the righteous and the wicked, who died between the time of Adam and the time of Christ. Through modern revelation we have learned a more correct understanding of the first resurrection as discussed above.

17 Now, we do not suppose that this first resurrection, which is spoken of in this manner, can be the resurrection of the souls and their consignation to happiness or misery. Ye cannot suppose that this is what it meaneth.

verse 17 Here Alma simply makes the point that the “partial judgment” or the assignment to paradise or prison which occurs immediately after death is not to be referred to as a resurrection.

Brigham Young gave us an interesting additional insight into the resurrection. He taught that no man on the earth holds the keys of the resurrection. “We have not, neither can we, receive here the ordinance and the keys of the resurrection. They will be given to those who have passed off this stage of action and have received their bodies again. . . . They will be ordained by those who hold the keys of the resurrection, to go forth and resurrect the saints, just as we receive the ordinance of baptism, then the keys to baptize others for the remission of sins. This is one of the ordinances we cannot receive here, and there are many more” (*JD*, 15:137). It is fascinating to learn that those who have been resurrected will assist with the “ordinance” of the resurrection.

18 Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body, of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ.

verse 18 The term “resurrection” is very specific and refers to reuniting of the “soul” (actually the spirit) with the eternal body.

19 Now, whether the souls and the bodies of those of whom has been spoken shall all be reunited at once, the wicked as well as the righteous, I do not say; let it suffice; that I say that they all come forth; or in other words, their resurrection cometh to pass before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of Christ.

verse 19 Alma here acknowledges that he is not sure when the various groups will be resurrected. He then speculates, incorrectly as it turns out, as to the sequence of resurrection. He teaches that all who lived up to the time of Christ, both righteous and wicked, will be resurrected “before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of “Christ.” We must keep in mind that each prophet can only teach according to his own light and understanding, and one prophet’s understanding of any given doctrine may be greater or less than that of another prophet living at another time. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “It is evident that Alma’s understanding of the extent of the resurrection at the time the Savior came forth from the dead was limited, therefore he stated only his opinion” (*The Improvement Era* [July 1954] 57:495).

We now know from modern revelation that the only individuals who were resurrected with Christ were the saints—those destined to inherit the celestial kingdom (see Mosiah 15:22; D&C 138:12).

20 Now, my son, I do not say that their resurrection cometh at the resurrection of Christ; but behold, I give it as my opinion, that the souls and the bodies are reunited, of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven.

verse 20 Alma’s “opinion” or spiritual intuition on this specific point is accurate. The first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous who died between the days of Alma and the time of Christ does indeed begin shortly after the resurrection of the Savior (Matthew 27:52-53).

21 But whether it be at his resurrection or after, I do not say; but this much I say, that there is a space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

22 Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets.

verse 22 Here, the law of restoration is introduced. We will learn more of this concept in chapter 41.

23 The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

verse 23 This verse conjures up the image of the resurrection as a retrieval and piecing together of the various parts of our mortal bodies when we were in our physical prime. However, we know that man will be resurrected with an eternal body that is celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or one which is suited only to live in outer darkness. Hence, each man will receive his “proper and perfect” body depending on his worthiness. These eternal bodies may be presumed to be fundamentally different than those in which we abide during mortality. For a more complete discussion of the specifics of resurrection, see the subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” the section titled “The Great Final Judgment” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

“all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” Elder Neal A. Maxwell expanded our understanding of the “all things” which shall be restored:

At the judgment we will not only have the Book of Mormon’s prophesied “bright recollection” and “perfect remembrance” of our misdeeds (see Alma 5:18; 11:43); the joyous things will be preserved too. . . . Among the “all things [that] shall be restored” (Alma 40:23) will be memory, including eventually the memory of premortal events and conditions. What a flood of feeling and fact will come to us when, at a time a loving God deems wise, this faculty is restored! Surely it will increase our gratefulness for God’s long-suffering and for Jesus’ atonement! Hence one of the great blessings of immortality and eternal life will be the joy of our being connected again with the memories of both the first and the second estates (*Men and Women of Christ*, 132).

24 And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets—

verse 24 We will learn that the “law of restoration” includes both a temporal and a spiritual restoration. The resurrection is the temporal restoration, while the spiritual restoration consists of those blessings, powers, and gifts which a man may eventually receive depending upon his performance during this probationary period. More about the law of restoration in chapter 41.

25 And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God.

verse 25 In what sense will the righteous “shine forth in the kingdom of God”? Joseph Smith wrote of the eventual fate of the righteous. “Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the

resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power (*TPJS*, 346-47).

We know that the resurrection will endow all men (except the sons of perdition) with a measure of glory proportionate to their individual spiritual capacities. Even the glory of the telestial—the least of the Father’s kingdoms—“surpasses all understanding” (D&C 76:89). All immortals must be enveloped in glory if they are to enjoy any degree of his presence in eternity. To receive a fulness of the Father’s “consuming fire” is to be bathed in celestial powers. It is, said the Prophet Joseph, to “come to dwell in unity, and in all the glory and everlasting burnings of the Gods” (*TPJS*, 172-73). To do this, we must be able to comprehend the Lord’s fulness (D&C 88:67). Hence, the degree to which we can endure the presence of God determines the degree to which we can become one with him. It also determines our capacity for happiness or joy (D&C 93:33; 76:96-98; Helaman 5:44; cf. 1 Peter 1:8).

26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup.

verse 26 This verse seems to describe those who will go with Satan to outer darkness.

“and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup” A wicked man “drink[s] the dregs of a bitter cup” when he receives the justice and judgment of God.

There are a number of instances in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “and they drink the drugs of a bitter cup.” The word *drugs* was corrected by the typesetter, and it therefore was changed to dregs in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

Alma Chapter 41

Scripture Mastery

Alma 41 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the law of restoration.

Alma 41:10 The law of restoration: Wickedness never was happiness.

What must a man do in order to one day stand justified before God? The answer to this question defines our doctrine of *justification*.

Before continuing, let us review the law of justice which is essential background for our understanding the concept of justification (for a more complete discussion, see *The Law of Justice in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12). This law sets a standard for all of God's actions relative to the eternal fate of each of his creatures. It holds that in their quest for their eternal reward, none of his creatures—none of his intelligences—will ever be unfairly accorded an advantage over another. And, no one of his creations will ever be penalized without that penalty's being fully deserved and wholly appropriate. The law of justice is the law of perfect fairness. This law is best known for one of its tenets in particular. This tenet holds that for every violation of God's law a penalty must be paid. This law is very exact. If even one sin is committed, and complete payment is not made, the individual guilty of the sin cannot qualify for entry back into God's presence. A man is said to be "justified" or "reconciled to God" when all penalties are paid. He is then brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified.

Since all have sinned, appropriate payment must be made for each of us. How is this payment made? There are only three theoretical ways to meet the demands of the law of justice and become justified and hence exalted. First, a man may try to keep the law perfectly and never get into debt to the law. This is referred to as trying to become "justified by the law." Obviously no man except Jesus Christ has ever lived without sin, therefore we know that it is impossible to become justified by the law.

Secondly, a man may pay the debts produced by his sins by suffering himself. While a man may be required to begin to pay for his own sins through his own suffering, man is incapable of paying his own debt to the point of complete justification or exaltation. In spite of man's best efforts, some debt will remain (Mosiah 13:28).

Thus there is only one practically valid way for a man to meet the demands of the law of justice. It is to allow another qualified individual to intercede on his behalf and to plead his case for him. This is made possible by a law which is closely related to the law of justice. This is the law of mercy. The essence of the law of mercy may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, a debt is incurred and payment must be made (this is a restatement of the law of justice). The

individual who transgressed the law does not need to make the payment himself if he will sincerely repent and if another person is willing and able intercede on his behalf. The intercessor must qualify himself to the satisfaction of those who enforce the demands of justice. He must be perfectly qualified to judge those for whom exceptions to the law of justice must be made. He must be the perfect judge, and his judgments must be fair and based upon intimate knowledge of each individual situation. Obviously that qualified individual is the Savior, and he qualified himself during the awful hours of his atonement. During that ordeal he came to have perfect empathy for all of mankind and therefore qualified himself to judge each individual child of God. The law of mercy does not take away from the law of justice, rather it is an essential addition to it (see Alma 42:24-25).

Just one further note about the law of justice. When an unrepentant sinner dies, he finds himself outside the atoning power of Jesus Christ. He must then reside in the spirit prison. There he will suffer the “hell” of beginning to pay the debt himself. Even though it is impossible for him to make complete payment or restitution himself, his efforts and motivation for doing so will then be judged. Most such people will eventually repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then Christ’s atoning influence will produce a state of partial justification which will enable them to inherit a degree of glory—either the terrestrial or telestial kingdom. Those few who remain unrepentant and in a state of rebellion will go with Satan to become sons of Perdition forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

Alma’s son Corianton is heavy with sin, and Alma perceives that he has considerable doubts about the doctrines that set out the requirements for exaltation. In the following verses, Alma teaches his son the doctrine of justification. He does this by teaching the principle or law which he calls the “law of restoration.” The apostle Paul referred to this same principle or law as the “law of the harvest” (“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”—Galatians 6:7).

What is the law of restoration? When Latter-day Saints hear the term *restoration*, they typically think of the latter-day return of the Church and gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. Book of Mormon prophets, however, use this term in a different sense. They teach that each individual will receive both a temporal restoration and a spiritual restoration which they deserve and have earned. Simply stated, this law holds that in the resurrection all men will be raised to that level of glory commensurate with the lives they lived in mortality. Each man will be judged by his works and the intentions of his heart. If a man’s works and the desires of his heart in this life are good, then in the judgment the man will be restored to that which is good. If his works and desires are evil, then in that last day, evil will be restored to him. That which a man sends out shall be returned to him in kind. The terms “good” and “evil” are not arbitrary ones. Thoughts and actions that are “good” conform to the laws of God—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those that are “evil” fail to conform. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the universal standard by which all mankind will be judged. Is this fair?

Have all men had the opportunity to learn this standard, to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ? Isn't it true that some mortals have lived and died and never even heard of Christ and his gospel? The essence of Christ and his gospel is available and ever has been available to all men who live on the earth or who have ever lived on the earth through the Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost teaches all men who are receptive to his whisperings the eternal standard by which they shall be judged, indeed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, we may ask the question: What are the essential characteristics of a man that will determine the outcome in his judgment? Certainly they are his behaviors or “works” and the true desires or intentions of his heart. Now we must add yet a third characteristic, his receptivity to the promptings of the Spirit of God. The man who is receptive to the teachings of the Spirit is changed in his heart. The true desires of his heart center on conforming to the gospel of Christ. These desires will be manifest in his actions or works. The net result will be a gradual and steady spiritual progression. He will become more like God. The amount of spiritual progress a man makes, in absolute terms, here on earth may well form the basis of the judgment of all-knowing God. For any individual, however, the amount of progress he makes will be affected by the progress he made in the pre-existence and by the circumstances he encountered here on earth. God in his omniscience will judge and judge fairly.

Another aspect of the principle of restoration is that a man's death does not alter his basic nature. A man carries into the spirit world the same basic attitudes, personality, and character he has developed on earth. When we came into this earth life, we brought with us inclinations, abilities, weaknesses, and attitudes we developed in the premortal world. Similarly, we pass into the spirit world with the same basic qualities which we acquired while on earth. If we lived upon this earth with a hunger for righteousness and a desire for things of the spirit, we will have those same proclivities “restored” to us in the world of spirits. Contrariwise, if the objects of our primary affections on this earth were materialism and things of the flesh, we cannot expect to be differently oriented when we arrive in the spirit world.

verses 1-4 These verses contain Alma's explanation of the law of restoration which he refers to also as the “plan of restoration.” In these verses Alma explains that the resurrection is considered a part of the “law of restoration.” It is the temporal part of the law of restoration. There is also a spiritual aspect of the law of restoration. We will receive good for good and evil for evil. Our condition and rewards hereafter shall be directly related to the manner in which we lived during this mortal life.

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the restoration of which has been spoken; for behold, some have wrested the scriptures, and have gone

far astray because of this thing. And I perceive that thy mind has been worried also concerning this thing. But behold, I will explain it unto thee.

verse 1 Apparently Corianton had expressed to his father Alma his disgruntlement at the idea that a loving God would punish his sinful children.

“some have wrested the scriptures” To “wrest” the scriptures is to distort or change their meaning—to derive meaning from them that was not intended by the Lord.

There are a number of instances in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase. In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “some have arrested the scriptures.” The word *arrest* was allowed to stand by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. By the 1837 edition, it was changed to *wrest*, as is found in our present edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

2 I say unto thee, my son, that the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself.

verse 2 As previously mentioned, the resurrection is a part of the law of restoration, indeed it is the temporal restoration. Each individual will be resurrected with that body he deserves—i.e. a celestial body, a terrestrial body, a telestial body, or a body suited only for perdition or outer darkness.

3 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

verse 3 There is also a spiritual restoration. Those blessings and rewards people merit “according to their works” and the “desires of their hearts” will be restored to them in the life to come.

“the desires of their hearts” Hugh Nibley commented on this verse: “The test for this life is not for knowledge; it is not for intelligence, or for courage, or for anything like that. That would be a huge joke. None of us knows very much, none of us is very brave, none of us is very strong, none of us is very smart. We would flunk those tests terribly. As Alma said, we are only to be tested on one thing—the desires of our heart

(Alma 41:3); that is what we are really after. And in that way we betray ourselves completely. Anyone who knows the signs, who knows what to look for—not just our Heavenly Father, but even a good psychiatrist . . . can spot it just like that. You yourself can see your own life; you can test yourself.” Brother Nibley continued on to describe the only two things we need to be good at. These are also the only two things we will be tested on. They are whether or not “we can forgive” and whether or not “we can repent. These are the two things the angels envy us for” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 300). The concept of “the desires of [our] hearts” does not refer to our prejudices, our preferences, our whims, or our inclinations. Rather it refers to what we really are at our core. We will not be judged by what we want. Rather, we will be judged by just exactly who and what we are—by the desires of our hearts (see D&C 137:9).

4 And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame—mortality raised to immortality—corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on one hand, the other on the other—

verse 4 “corruption to incorruption” “Mortal bodies are corruptible bodies; that is, they are subject to physical change and decay, corruption means mortality; incorruption means immortality. Speaking of the resurrection, Abinadi said, ‘This mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption’ (Mosiah 16:10)” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 163).

“all things shall be restored to their proper order” Things are restored to their proper order when a man receives eternal rewards perfectly commensurate with what he really is in his heart of hearts. The practical importance of the law of restoration, or the restoring all things to “their proper order” will be emphasized by the prophet Moroni in Mormon 9:3-4: “Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with [God] under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.” Also we read in D&C 88:21-24: “And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom. For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory; therefore he is not meet for a kingdom of glory. Therefore he must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory.”

When the “dust” of the judgment has settled and each man is assigned to his eternal place, will all be happy? Will there be any in the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms who might have succeeded in the celestial degree of glory? Will there be any whose assignment to a lesser glory is a self-perceived eternal tragedy? We know that God will reward each individual according to the “desires of his heart” (Alma 29:4; D&C 137:9) which means that each will receive according to what he really *is* at his very center. But will there be some who might have changed their hearts, by repenting of their sins, but failed to do so? Perhaps so. “. . . of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest [the most painful] are these: ‘It might have been’” (John Greenleaf Whittier).

It does, however, seem likely that all will be resurrected and assigned to that kingdom wherein will ultimately be content and fulfilled. No one will live eternally where he doesn’t belong. There he would be most unhappy and uncomfortable among people of like minds.

5 The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

verse 5 “when the night cometh” The “night” referred to here is the same as the “night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” referred to in Alma 34:33. It is not death, but rather it is eternity following the resurrection.

6 And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.

7 These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil.

verse 7 “they are their own judges” We read in the scriptures about those who will pass formal judgment upon us. These include the Savior (2 Nephi 9:41) and Christ’s original apostles (D&C 29:12; Matthew 19:28). We also read of being brought to stand before the judgment bar of God following our resurrection (2 Nephi 33:15). These are formal judgments, almost ritual judgments intended to declare and make eternal record of our eternal destinies. In the ultimate sense, however, man is his own judge. The sum total of his deeply-held beliefs, his heart’s desires, and his works become written into his soul so that he actually dictates his own eternal destiny. We will stand before our Savior and the Twelve and before the judgment bar of the Father already judged by what we have become.

8 Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved.

9 And now behold, my son, do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin.

10 Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

verse 10 “wickedness never was happiness” This is a profound truth that is true in absolute terms. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “We have the responsibility of living this gospel. It is impossible for one who has received a testimony of this work and holds membership in the Church to be truly happy and not live the gospel. I have seen people who have drifted away from the Church, who have become inactive, and I have seen them brought back into activity, and the testimony of all of them is to the effect that during periods of inactivity there is something lacking—they are not happy inside, they are not satisfied. Men are that they might have joy (see 2 Nephi 25), but [true] joy and happiness come only through living the principles of the gospel. There is no happiness in wickedness, no happiness in sin, no happiness in inactivity. And there is no safety in inactivity. If we want to be happy, if we want to be secure in our testimonies and in our faith and in our membership in the Church, we must live the gospel, we must try to build up the kingdom, we must shoulder our part of the responsibility in helping to carry this message to the nations of the earth” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 339-340). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “Without realizing the inherent inconsistency, some want happiness along with worldliness—which cannot be. We “are free to choose,” and choose we will, either subtly or dramatically. But the alternatives and consequences will not change” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 100).

Lest we get to thinking that our eternal fate is already cast in stone, let us be reminded that man is able to change his basic nature. Through obedience to God’s law, a man may change at his very core. As he obeys the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his “natural self” is gradually purged out of him, and he indeed becomes a new creature—born again. He becomes more like God. Hence, by the law of restoration, he upgrades his eternal reward.

We have claimed here that “wickedness never was happiness.” Yet, we have claimed that each and every individual will eventually be assigned to an eternal reward where he will fit and be happy for all eternity. As Alma addresses his son here, he is speaking of this mortal existence and the effects of sin on those negotiating this mortal state. In an eternal heaven of glory (celestial, terrestrial, or telestial), it is apparent that each individual will come to equilibrium and come to conclude that he is in the right place and will be for all eternity.

11 And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

verse 11 “in the gall of bitterness” For a discussion of this colorful phrase, see the commentary for Mosiah 27:29.

“in a state of nature . . . in a carnal state . . . in the gall of bitterness . . . in the bonds of iniquity” These phrases all denote the same thing. They all refer to a natural man who fails to respond to the influence of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. It would seem that one cannot suffer a greater loss in mortality than to lose the Spirit of the Lord. To be without the Spirit is to be in a wholly carnal state. As this verse suggests, it is to be “without God in the world” and, therefore “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.”

“they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented on this phrase: “In a world in which more and more people ignore the first commandment and live ‘without God in the world,’ we see in those lives a fatal separation from reality. First of all, to live ‘without God in the world’ is, said Alma, a condition ‘contrary to the nature of happiness’ (Alma 41:11). Having gone wrong as to the first commandment, everything else is then askew, including relationships with others. As for such souls, their mortal lives are ‘no more than a night in a second-class hotel’ (Saint Teresa of Avila)” (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 27-28). Elder Maxwell’s reference to the “first commandment” here refers to the Lord’s commandment that we love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength.

12 And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature?

verses 13-14 It has been observed that these following two verses are strongly chiasmic in their style. For a review of this and other types of Hebrew poetry see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. See also the introductory comments for Alma 36.

In these two verses, the chiasmic twist is creatively elegant: After listing four pairs of terms, Alma then pairs two lists of four terms and reverses their order at the same time (Welch, John W. “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.” *BYU Studies* 10:1 [1969], 69-84).

a **good** for that which is **good**;

b **righteous** for that which is **righteous**;

c **Just** for that which is **just**;

d **merciful** for that which is **merciful**.

Therefore, my son, see that you are
 d' **merciful** unto your brethren;
 c' deal **justly**,
 b' judge **righteously**,
 a' and do **good** continually;
 and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea,
 d'2 ye shall have **mercy** restored to you again;
 c'2 ye shall have **justice** restored unto you again;
 b'2 ye shall have a **righteous** judgment restored . . . and
 a'2 ye shall have **good** rewarded unto you again.

13 O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful.

14 Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

verse 14 “ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again” According to the law of restoration, the merciful shall receive mercy, and those who deal justly shall receive justice. The “agains” in this phrase refer to second application of these virtues. The first application is when an individual manifests the virtue. The second application is when that virtue is returned to him as a blessing from the Lord.

We usually refer to God’s justice as something that comes to the wicked. Justice is also meted out to the righteous wherein they receive positive blessings.

“**ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again**” For further discussion of the concept of “righteous judgment” see “Just What Did Happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

15 For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.

verse 15 This verse contains a succinct statement of the “law of the harvest” or the “law of restoration.”

Alma Chapter 42

Scripture Mastery

Alma 42 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the atonement, justice, and mercy.

Alma 42:22 Alma teaches his son Corianton the principle of justice. If there is no repentance, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law.

In this chapter Alma addresses the topic of the delicate balance between justice and mercy.

1 And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.

verse 1 “I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind”

Alma is gentle and diplomatic as he addresses his doubting son. Apparently Corianton is having trouble accepting a fact that should have been intuitively obvious to him: A just God must impartially mete out rewards or punishments to his children based on their obedience or disobedience to eternal gospel principles. One can just imagine Corianton’s verbalized concerns. His figurative pendulum has swung too far to the side of mercy and away from justice. We can almost hear him say, “If God is loving and merciful, how can he, at the same time, be demanding and coldly cruel. How can he mete out punishment to man. He knows we are weak. He is kind and merciful, and would not punish his beloved creations.”

There’s nothing out of date in this type of logic. One need only consider the doctrine of Evangelical or conservative Protestants today. For them, in order to be saved one need only confess Christ. Then it matters little what you do next. Protestants today clearly evidence an apostate imbalance in the issue of justice and mercy.

Corianton is like many of us sinners. He prefers to concentrate only on God’s mercy and compassion and ignore the fact that the Father is also a God of justice. Corianton was guilty of a grave sin, and justice demanded serious consequences. I suppose it is not surprising that Corianton was not inclined to plead for the Lord’s mercy. Rather, he is questioning the fairness of his justice.

“the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner” See *The Law of Justice* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12.

2 Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee. For behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground,

from whence they were taken—yea, he drew out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life—

verse 2 “to till the ground, from whence they were taken” This phrase refers to that fact that the bodies of Adam and Eve were formed of the “dust of the earth.” Thus they were driven out of the garden to till that “dust” or “ground.”

“he drew out the man” This expression is clarified in Genesis 3:24: “So he drove out the man” (emphasis mine). This phrase suggests that Adam and Eve were reluctant to leave the security of the garden and therefore had to be driven out. Oliver Cowdery apparently misread the original manuscript when he was making the printer’s manuscript. He read, in the original manuscript, “he drove out the man” and copied it as “he drew out the man.”

“he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life” What are “cherubim”? We have previously discussed this question. We will repeat that discussion for the convenience of the reader: Many animals and plants live in God’s presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God’s presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92). In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes Seraphim in God’s presence. Joseph refers to them as “bright, shining seraphs” (emphasis added). Joseph also taught that God dwells in “everlasting burnings” and that righteous beings (human and animal) dwell with him in a state of continual burning or glory (*TPJS*, 372-73, 347, 361). Another type of winged heavenly creature is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth. An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the *human* family and are assigned to guard holy places, and that the descriptions of their non human parts (“wings”) is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their “wings” are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

3 Now, we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit—

verse 3 “the man had become as God” Adam and Eve had “partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” We might ask, “Is this tree literally a plant, or is ‘the tree’ symbolic of something else?” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “The account is speaking figuratively. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree

of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved [or perhaps broke whatever laws were involved] so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.” (“Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign*, June 1982, 15). Adam had become “as God” only in the specific sense of being able to understand the difference between good and evil. There remained considerable distance between him and the fulness of the Father.

“lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever” We are taught that if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life in their fallen state, they would have lived forever in their sinful mortal state eternally alienated from God. Are we also to regard the tree of life in the Garden of Eden as a literal tree, or is it a symbol contained within an allegorical account of the Garden of Eden? Certainly here, just as in the visions of Lehi and Nephi, the tree of life is not just a plant. It is symbolic of the Savior and the message of the eternal gospel which emanates from him. Perhaps the cherubim were dispatched to prevent Adam and Eve from having access to the ordinances and teachings of this gospel which might have somehow led to an untimely and inappropriate eternal extension of their mortal state.

4 And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.

verse 4 “a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God” The “probationary time” through which each of us must pass includes not only our mortal lives on earth but also the period of time that some will spend in the “spirit prison.” Those blessed to be assigned to “paradise” need no further probationary state since they have already completed their probation. The fact that it is possible to repent *after* this mortal life (in the spirit prison) is not emphasized in the Book of Mormon.

5 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.

verse 5 This verse proposes a hypothetical situation which could never have come to pass because the word of God has stated otherwise. If Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life, they would have lived forever in sort of suspended state of eternal agony where they were guilty of sin but unable to repent. They would have a type of immortal body. Though they had transgressed in the garden and knew right from wrong, there would be no mortal period of probation available to them. There would be no opportunity to be tried and to repent. They would be unable to earn their exaltation. The rest of us would also suffer. We would be stuck in our pre-existent, unembodied state. Thus, “the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.”

6 But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man.

verse 6 “it was appointed unto man to die” It is essential that all men die physically and spiritually. All men must die a physical death in order to gain victory over mortality. Without death there can be no resurrection and eternal glory. Also men must die a spiritual death. They must be cut off from the presence of God. This provides an opportunity for men to be tried and tested outside of God’s presence. And although many will be lost in the process, it does give to some the opportunity of returning to the presence of God. Because of Adam’s transgression, both types of death came upon mankind.

Keep in mind the dual nature of the fall. The phenomenon of the fall includes:

1. the fall of Adam and Eve. This fall resulted in physical death and spiritual death (the “first death”). Both of these are temporary as the Lord’s atonement automatically absolves each man of both of these consequences. Each man will be resurrected and all will return to the presence of God following this life at least long enough to be judged.

2. the fall of each individual, also termed “the fall of man” or “the fall of you and me.” The consequences of the fall or sin of each individual—spiritual death (the “second death”)—is “permanent.” That is, it is not automatically removed because of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. It requires persistent repentance and obedience, indeed “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7).

“therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth” This phrase speaks of man’s being “cut off from the tree of life” and “cut off from the face of the earth.” What do these phrases mean? Actually, — both phrases speak of man’s being cast out of the Garden of Eden. And they had to be cast out in two general ways—physically (temporally) and spiritually. As has been previously stated, it essential that all men die. “Therefore,” as they were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they “were cut off from the tree of life.” They were cast physically out of the garden. It is also essential that all men be tested in a mortal environment—outside of the presence of God. So, all men must “be cut off from the face of the earth.” The “face of the earth” is the presence of God in Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, they were spiritually driven out of the presence of God.

“man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man” This phrase would be literally true only if there had been no atonement. The word “forever” here means they were truly fallen and would remain permanently so lest they be rescued or redeemed.

7 And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

verse 7 “our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” See the commentary for the previous verse.

“they became subjects to follow after their own will” The man of the world seeks to do his own will; to satisfy his own lusts; and to seek that which is immediately satisfying. The spiritual man seeks to do the will of the Father; to defer his own desires to the promptings of the Spirit; and to patiently await the Lord’s pleasure in all things.

8 Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

verse 8 “it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death” It was not expedient that Adam be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and thus avoid the fall which would frustrate the “great plan of happiness”—another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6).

9 Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

verse 9 “as the soul could never die” Here again the “soul” refers to a man’s spirit which is absolutely and eternally indestructible. Since the spirit of man will last forever and since by virtue of the fall it is left without a body and cut off from the presence of God, it is imperative that man’s spirit be rescued or redeemed.

10 Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

verse 10 The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” nature and is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. Robert L. Millet wrote: “No, of course we do not believe, with Calvin, in the moral depravity of men and women. No, we do not believe, with Luther, that man, because of his carnality and depravity, does not even have the power to choose good over evil. And we do not believe that children are born in sin, that they inherit the so-called sin of Adam either through sexual union or by birth. Rather, children are conceived in sin: meaning first, that they are conceived into a world of sin, and second, that conception is the vehicle by which the effects of the fall (not the original transgression, which God has forgiven) are transmitted to Adam’s posterity. To say that

we are not punished for the transgression is not to say that we are not subject to and affected by it. . . . Adam's fallen nature is passed on to his children and thereby from generation to generation. Thus, sin is implanted in man's nature at conception, just as death is implanted at the same time. Both of these—death and sin—are present only in seed form at conception, and therefore a child is neither dead nor sinful when born. Death and sin do, however, come to pass as a result of man's nature as he grows up. Sin comes naturally, just as does death" (*Life in Christ*, 24-25).

It is important to acknowledge here the natural self of every man. This natural self did not magically come into being at the moment of the fall of Adam and Eve. Indeed, this natural self has always existed. Please see *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self"* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

11 And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 11 "laying it aside" That is, assuming that the Redeemer would never atone for our sins. We know that the unavoidable and inevitable fate of all men, in this instance, would be to become sons of perdition forever (see 2 Nephi 9:8-9).

12 And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience;

verse 12 Adam and Eve brought upon themselves their fallen state through their "own disobedience." According to the law of justice, they had to be punished. In addition all other men, including all of Adam and Eve's posterity, are or will be guilty of sin. Hence each man falls of his own accord. Thus, each man experiences a spiritual death because of his own disobedience. Since man is not capable of paying the entire price demanded by the law of justice himself, a Redeemer is essential.

"And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state" Alma is still postulating the hypothetical state of there being no Savior or Redeemer—"laying it aside."

It is important to understand that Adam and Eve were noble and proven leaders who, in the premortal state, fought valiantly on the side of righteousness. Adam, or Michael the Archangel, in the first estate was captain of the heavenly hosts who cast Satan and his fallen angels out of heaven (JST Revelation 12:7). Adam and Eve were hand-picked to lead the human family. They were the best qualified among all of the children of God. They did not, indeed they would not, do anything to destroy the plan of God. They were foreordained to fall, and their disobedience or transgression in the garden was deliberate and necessary. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden as immortal beings. Christ inherited an immortal nature from his Father. Adam, Eve, and Christ were the only beings who possessed immortality by their very natures. They

alone had the option to live on indefinitely or to die. They each realized the necessity of choosing to die. “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25). Adam’s choosing to become mortal enabled us, his offspring, to be born into mortality. Jesus explained, “I lay down my life, that I take it up again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again” (John 10:17-18).

13 Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.

verse 13 The phrase “the plan of redemption could not be brought about only on conditions of repentance” actually means that the plan of redemption *could only* be brought about by conditions of repentance.

“except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice” The phrase “these conditions” refers to the state of fallen man’s being irretrievably lost without repentance. If men were exalted without having to repent, then mercy would destroy justice. The law of justice would be no longer valid and binding—a situation that cannot be.

“Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.” Is it possible that God could ever cease to be God? If God were to become arbitrary and impulsive rather than just and consistent, would he continue to be God? He would not. Joseph Smith explained: “It is . . . necessary, in order for the exercise of faith in God unto life and salvation, that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in him; for without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction; for they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the judge of all the earth would not do right, and thus fear or doubt, existing in the mind, would preclude the possibility of the exercise of faith in him for life and salvation. But when the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity is fairly planted in the mind, it leaves no room for doubt to get into the heart, and the mind is enabled to cast itself upon the Almighty without fear and without doubt, and with the most unshaken confidence, believing that the Judge of all the earth will do right” (*Lectures on Faith*, 4:13).

God’s power actually derives from those whom he governs (D&C 63:59). If God were to fail to be just, then his creations would disavow him. He would then lose his power and cease to be God. God is God because he possesses all the attributes of godliness. He is unfailingly just. His law is absolute. This idea is communicated by the scriptural phrase, “his course is one eternal round.” God will always and inevitably be a God of justice. Hence, in actuality, he can never cease to be God, though it is

theoretically possible for him to do so. Exalted beings do not apostatize. They do not backslide.

We thus understand clearly why men cannot be saved, as many contemporary Christian denominations proclaim they can—solely by the grace or mercy of God, without repentance and obedience. This erroneous doctrine isolates one of the attributes of Deity, that of mercy or grace, at the expense of others—especially justice—and thus robs God of the very nature of godliness.

14 And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence.

verse 14 “they were in the grasp of justice” Fallen man is indeed in the grasp of the law of justice. Without proper repentance and without a redeemer, they are “consigned . . . forever to be cut off from his presence.” Again, we are also reminded that without the application of the law of mercy, when man is subject only to the law of justice, he is forever lost (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

15 And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

verse 15 “the plan of mercy” This is the law of mercy and is defined in the commentary for verse 1 of this chapter. Without the atonement, the law of mercy could never be applicable to man. Why? Because the law of mercy, in order to become active in the lives of humankind, demands that it (the law of mercy) be administered by a perfect judge. And if the Lord Jesus Christ had not atoned, there would not have existed a perfect judge (Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18; John 5:22). See *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19.

“demands of justice” Just who or what is it that enforces the law of justice? See a discussion of this topic in *The Law of Justice* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12.

16 Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.

verse 16 “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” This phrase teaches the important truth that an individual cannot completely repent of sin without experiencing punishment. President Spencer W. Kimball quoted this scripture in a priesthood meeting of general conference and then taught the brethren: “Ponder on that for a moment. Have you realized that? There can

be no forgiveness without real and total repentance, and there can be no repentance without punishment. This [law] is as eternal as is the soul. . . . Please remember these things when somebody comes before you who has broken the laws of God. It is so easy to let our sympathies carry us out of proportion; and when a man has committed sin, he must suffer. It is an absolute requirement—not by the bishop—but it is a requirement by nature and by the very part of a man” (CR, April 1975, 115).

There is nothing of arbitrariness in the plan of our Father in heaven. He does nothing for purely punitive purposes. He does not mete out suffering without productive purpose. We might classify the suffering of sin into two categories. First, the sinner who makes no effort to repent—he who merely languishes in sin inevitably suffers some remorse. There is no happiness in sin (Alma 41:10). Indeed, there is inevitably unhappiness in sin. The second type of suffering occurs when man attempts to change—to repent. A man cannot repent without subduing and overcoming his natural self. And this overcoming is always painful. It requires real effort, and it hurts. It is an important form of suffering.

“affixed opposite to the plan of happiness” Just as there is a plan for man’s ultimate happiness (exaltation), there also exists “unhappiness.” For him who violates the laws of justice and fails to repent in an optimal and timely manner, there are also eternal consequences or provisions—an eternal plan. These will receive a lesser eternal reward. While this lesser reward may not actually result in a man’s eternal unhappiness, it fails to provide its recipients with the full measure of happiness experienced by the fully obedient. We may thus refer to these aspects of the Lord’s plan of salvation as the plan which is “opposite to the plan of happiness” or the plan of unhappiness.

17 Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?

verse 17 This verse implies that the concepts of law, sin, and punishment are intimately interdependent upon one another. Intuitively it is easy to understand that if law didn’t exist, there would be no sin. Hence, “How could he sin if there was no law?” Also if no punishment existed for disobedience of the law, then the law would be a useless sham. Hence, “How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” A law cannot actually exist without consequences for obedience and disobedience to the law.

What is the relationship between God and the law? Is God the author of law? It may well be true that there is an eternal or natural law that governs the universe to which even God is subject. It is logical to suppose that God was not the author of this law. Though God may not have invented the law, for us the Father and the Son are the law. They are the very prototype, the supreme exemplars, the epitome of the law. They have drawn upon eternal resources to make the law applicable to us. It is for this

reason that we refer to the law as God's law. And we refer to those laws also as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is one type of law we might call "regulatory" law. There may at first seem to be a certain element of arbitrariness in these law. These are laws given so the Church may function as an organization or perhaps so that we might learn obedience and humility and thus grow toward godhood. Examples of the latter include many of the highly specific laws given to ancient Israel in Moses's day and to us today. We must be baptized by one having authority. We must join with others in his Church and then support and become subject to the organization of the Church. These so called regulatory laws are a vital part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We presume God has authored these laws for our benefit to lead us to happiness.

18 Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man.

verse 18 "remorse of conscience" Just what is conscience? It seems to be the direct consequence of possessing the light of Christ or the spirit of Christ, that small inclination given to all men to yearn and seek for a higher meaning here in mortality. It would not be surprising to learn that this spirit of Christ is provided to all men by the Holy Ghost himself. In fact, the spirit of Christ may well be a modicum of responsiveness to the influence of the Spirit of God which is received by each and every individual at their birth. It inclines each man to yearn subtly for truth and righteousness. When our behavior is inconsistent with this spirit of Christ, we then suffer the "remorse of conscience." ". . . of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest [the most painful] are these: 'It might have been'" (John Greenleaf Whittier).

Is it possible for a man to bury or nullify the light of Christ through his own disobedience, so that its influence is no longer felt? Most certainly it is.

19 Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?

verse 19 Alma supposes another hypothetical situation: If the law decreeing that a murderer must die had never been given, then would a man be afraid to commit murder? He would not.

20 And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin.

verse 20 One of the purposes of the law is to provide man with the motivation and incentive to obey. Part of our motivation to obey is our fear of punishment should we disobey. President Harold B. Lee taught: "Think about that for a moment. If there were no opposition to good, would there be any chance to exercise your agency or right to choose? To deny you that privilege would be to deny you the opportunity to grow in knowledge, experience, and power. God has given laws with penalties affixed so that

man might be made afraid of sin and be guided into paths of truth and duty (see Alma 42:20)” (*Stand Ye In Holy Places*, 219-20).

21 And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?

verses 22-26 To understand these next five verses, it is vital that you understand the “law of justice” and the “law of mercy.” See the discussion of these laws in the introductory commentary for chapter 41.

22 But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

verse 22 “**But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed**” The previous verse postulates the hypothetical situation: “And if there was no law given.” If this were the case, then there would be no such thing as justice or mercy simply because the law did not exist. There can be no law of justice or law of mercy if there is no law. This verse sets the situation right. There is a law, and the law of justice does exist—there is “a punishment affixed.”

“**there is . . . a repentance granted**” The opportunity to repent is granted unto man.

“**which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law**” Since man, if left alone with the law of justice, cannot fully repent to the point of his exaltation, the law of mercy must exist as an addendum to the principle of repentance, hence—“repentance mercy claimeth”—the law of mercy claims the principle of repentance as an integral part of itself. If there were no law of mercy, man would indeed be left alone with the law of justice—“justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment.” Man left alone with the law of justice is lost, since it is not possible for man to completely pay the debts he incurs to the law of justice.

“**if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God**” If there were no justice and mercy, God would cease to be God. To review the line of logic whereby God would cease to be God, review the commentary for verse 13.

23 But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into

the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

verse 23 “But God ceaseth not to be God” The law of justice and the plan of mercy are alive and well.

“mercy claimeth the penitent” The Lord’s mercy is extended to the sincerely repentant. We become beneficiaries of God’s mercy only if we submit to his gospel and repent of our sins.

“mercy cometh because of the atonement” By some mysterious and awful process in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, the Savior qualified himself to be able to absolve us of our sins even when, according to the law of justice, we do not completely deserve that absolution.

“and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” Through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, all men will be resurrected as a free gift.

“and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged” Again, this verse, if taken literally, might be confusing. It is true that following their resurrection, all men will stand before God to be judged. But it is also true that this event is probably more of a formal or ritual judgment which will stand as an eternal witness for or against each man. The literal judgment takes place at the moment of resurrection since each man comes forth in the resurrection with that type of body which clearly indicates the place of his eternal abode.

“to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice” While it is true that we will be judged according to our works and according to the law of justice, it is also true that the Lord’s mercy will be extended and considered in our judgment.

24 For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

25 What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God.

verse 25 As stated by verse 24, the Savior paid for the sins of men in a way that will not rob justice. His atonement requires that men repent in order to qualify for the payment he has made in their behalf. If men do not repent then the law of justice alone claims them. The Savior’s administering of the law of mercy is perfectly fair, perfectly equitable, and perfectly acceptable for all of God’s creatures. Those who enforce the demands of justice are fully content with the Savior’s judgments. When Jesus appeals for an exception to the law of justice for any individual, that exception is granted without reservation. Among these enforcers there is no sense of the law of justice’s being robbed or violated.

President John Taylor explained how justice and mercy relate to one another in the atonement of Christ: “Is justice dishonored? No; it is satisfied, the debt is paid. Is righteousness departed from? No; this is a righteous act. All requirements are met. Is judgment violated? No; its demands are fulfilled. Is mercy triumphant? No; she simply claims her own. Justice, judgment, mercy and truth all harmonize as the attributes of Deity . . . in this great, grand, momentous, just, equitable, merciful and meritorious act” (*The Mediation and Atonement*. Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1950, 167).

For a discussion of the phrase “God would cease to be God,” see the commentary for verse 13 of this chapter.

26 And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery.

verse 26 “prepared from the foundation of the world” In this commentary, we have always interpreted the expression “from the foundation of the world” as referred to our premortal existence when plans were made for the creation and existence of this world and the other worlds of our Father. In this case, the Father’s great plan of happiness was not specifically prepared for this round of creation but has certainly predated our round of our Father’s creative adventure. It has always existed and has always applied to every God and his rounds of creation.

God’s “great and eternal” plan which was “prepared from the foundation of the world” consists of both the plan of happiness and that part of the plan which we may call the plan of unhappiness.

27 Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds.

verse 27 “whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come” The Savior is the tree of life and the waters of life. We partake of the fruit of the tree of life, we eat the bread of life, and we drink the waters of life when we come to him and commit ourselves to strive to obey him and become like him. The Lord himself would later, during his mortal ministry, refer to himself as the “living waters” (John 4:4-42).

Man has his unfettered agency, but the eternal laws of God will never bend or break. It is absolutely true that no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds” Here again is a verification of the law of restoration. See also the following verse. This law may be simply summarized: The quality of our eternal lifestyle is contingent upon what is in our heart (what we actually *are*) because our obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel reflects our hearts’ desires.

28 If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God.

verse 28 “in his days” This phrase refers to a man’s probationary state—mortality and the spirit world.

29 And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance.

verse 29 Alma here advises Corianton to quit worrying so much about the doctrinal questions and start worrying more about his sins and his need for repentance.

30 O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility.

verse 30 Sway here means influence; weight; or authority. It would seem that we must each have firmly implanted in our hearts and minds both the principles of justice and the mercy. How do we hold them in proper balance? We strive and struggle to keep the commandments, yet we must realize that it is not enough. We must humbly acknowledge that without the Lord’s mercy we are lost. This latter realization should truly bring us “down to the dust in humility.”

31 And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen.

verse 31 There is good evidence that Corianton’s repentance was complete. We have good reason to believe that he returned to the ministry and full fellowship in the church. We will read of Corianton’s labors about one year hence: “Thus ended the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. Yea, and there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God” (Alma 49:29-30). We will also read of him some twenty years later, and we will note that he is still doing the work of the Lord: “And it came to pass in the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, Shiblon died also, and Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship,

to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land” (Alma 63:10).

Alma Chapter 43

Scripture Mastery

Alma 43-62 A period of war—the account of the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni.

Alma 43-44 The Amalekite (Amlicite) Zerahemnah joins his army with the Zoramites and comes against the Nephite army initially in the land of Jershon and later near the land of Manti. Zerahemnah is scalped by a Nephite soldier after refusing Alma's offer to enter a covenant of peace. Zerahemnah's army is soundly defeated and finally they enter into the covenant of peace.

War Principles

Chapter 43 begins the section of the Book of Mormon often referred to as the war chapters (Alma 43-62). An oft-asked question is, "Why is so much of the Book of Mormon account dedicated to war? Why does the Lord feel it important that we learn so much about the wars fought among Book of Mormon peoples during the years 70-55 BC?" With tongue-in-cheek, some have suggested that it is simply Mormon's fascination with Captain Moroni. After all, he did name his son after him. It seems more likely that there are important gospel principles that have to do with conflict among peoples—principles only pertinent in times of war. We may refer to these as the War Principles, and it is obvious the Lord feels we need to learn them. One application of these principles is to set the righteous criteria for justifying a country's entering a war—for deciding whether or not there is justification for war in the eyes of God.

We will summarize the War Principles which seem most pertinent (acknowledgment is given to S. Michael Wilcox [personal communication] for much of this material):

1. The attitudes with which an individual or a nation enters a war are critical. If a person or a people goes to war because of anger and hatred, they lose their objectivity and become easy to control. A contemporary example is the radical Muslim suicide bombers. They are whipped up in their anger against the Jews and against the United States to the point where they will even sacrifice their lives for their cause. They are in bondage to their leaders. You will notice it is not the leaders of the extremist Muslim organizations that are committing suicide. Rather, it is those whom they have provoked to anger and hatred. Other examples are the masters of hate and anger, Osama Bin Laden and Adolph Hitler.

Those who enter a war must evidence a healthy reluctance to go to war. They must not be eager to take the lives of their enemies. It is rare that God justifies an offensive war.

2. Motives are critical. If a person or group is motivated by the lust for power—the need to put their enemies in bondage, or the desire to compel their enemies to change their religion—they are not justified. Religious wars are never justified.

In Alma 46 we will encounter a summary of Captain Moroni's motives for entering into a war. On a flag he calls the "title of liberty," Moroni will write, "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children" (Alma 46:12-13). If an individual or a nation must go to war to defend their lands, houses, children, wives, rights, liberties, and their freedom to worship then they are justified.

3. Avoid violation of the "law of the third offense." See the commentary for Alma 43:46. For the convenience of the reader, I will briefly summarize this law here. If a people is attacked by an aggressor nation, then the people under attack should not go out to battle without the Lord's approbation. That approval may only be obtained after the people under siege have extended an offer of peace, not once but three times. Thus, this law may also be termed the "law of fourth offense." Furthermore, if the enemy attacks then repents and begs forgiveness, then they should be forgiven—not only once but "seventy times seven." Finally, if an enemy trespasses and does not repent, they should be forgiven three times. If they do not repent on the fourth occasion, then this matter should be brought before the Lord who will exact compensation in his own way and bless those who have been trespassed against.

The Lord, however, has counseled that in this dangerous world, a pre-emptive strike may at times be justified in "times of exigency" (D&C 134:11).

4. You must respond to a threat according to the danger. In order to assess the danger you must know your enemy. A good example is Mohandus Ghandi during his effort to win independence for India from England. By knowing the relative honor of his enemy, he was able to successfully choose the correct response to their repressive hegemony.

5. A righteous people should make certain they are led by a man of God.

6. The most critical factor in a nation's remaining safe and secure is unity and righteousness and not armaments. God will protect us and fight our battles if we are obedient to him and worship him. The worldly must depend on armaments, but God does not. The critical factor determining whether or not a people is blessed with divine protection is their righteousness and not their military might (Alma 44:4)

7. When a wicked nation fights against another wicked nation, the Lord does not intervene, and they may well be left to destroy each other. This principle is applicable and pertinent to the United States of America; particularly since the nation who has sinned against the greater light will be held most responsible by the Lord (see Helaman 7:23-24).

8. A righteous minority may prove to be the salvation of their nation (Alma 62:40).

9. The occurrence of war is usually not the responsibility of any particular single man. Yet, each man must choose his own response to war. He can become hardened,

mean, cruel, and vengeful, or he can humble and submissive to the Lord. Each man is responsible for his response to the war.

Captain Moroni and Covenant Making

The central character in chapters 43 through 62 of the book of Alma is the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni. One LDS scholar Thomas R. Valletta has suggested, in his article “The Captain and the Covenant” (*The Book of Mormon: Alma the Testimony of the Word*, 223-48) that it is impossible to understand and fully appreciate Moroni without understanding the phenomenon of covenant making and Moroni’s commitment to the covenants he had made. Without the perspective of the vital importance of covenants, one might well suppose Moroni to be just another charismatic demagogue who sought to persuade his people according to his own personal agenda. Moroni was no demagogue. Instead, he viewed his world from the perspective of covenant theology. He is the prototype covenant keeper. Moroni’s whole character and behavior typified his commitment to his covenants with the Lord.

For a discussion of the concept the covenants which the Lord enters into with his people, see *Covenants and Covenant Making in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3.

The Methods of Warfare in the Book of Mormon

Historians of war divide the human experience of war into two broad categories, pre-modern warfare and modern warfare, with the transition between the two having occurred in Europe in the sixteenth century. William J. Hamblin, a professor of history at Brigham Young University, has studied the Book of Mormon in the context of his knowledge regarding ancient warfare and has discovered that on general principles and specific details, the Book of Mormon accurately describes an ancient system of warfare, in fact pre-modern warfare “despite the fact that Joseph Smith lived in the age of modern, or technical, warfare” (“The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 523-43. See also Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990]).

Those characteristics of pre-modern warfare evident in the Book of Mormon that distinguish the ancient form from more modern technical warfare include the following:

1. Ancient societies usually viewed warfare as inevitable, and thus they devoted most government resources to the military and maintained a martial mentality among the citizenry, who themselves constituted the bulk of the army.
2. Pre-modern warfare was always bound by certain environmental constraints, including the limitations of the human body, the terrain, the climate, and animal resources. Consistent with that fact, Book of Mormon accounts of war often explicitly speak of the constraints placed on the various armies by human, geographical, and

seasonal circumstances. Significantly, Book of Mormon armies did not use animals during war, a situation that differed from much of the ancient world but reflects exactly what archaeologists have discovered about ancient Mesoamerican warfare.

Weaponry mentioned in the Book of Mormon is likewise consistent with weapons used elsewhere in antiquity. In this regard the Book of Mormon most closely parallels Mesoamerican use of war technology, which lacked many of the elements, such as coats of mail and cavalry, that distinguished warfare in the ancient Near East.

3. Ancient warfare, which generally involved the entire society in its economic and social implications, was usually organized communally under the command of an elite hereditary military aristocracy. This also appears to be the case in the Book of Mormon. Military operations in the Book of Mormon also accurately reflect what is currently known about warfare throughout antiquity. War usually included complex preparations, an emphasis on marching to ensure that both supplies and men arrived in timely fashion at the correct locations, some guerrilla warfare, spies, a council of war, and a necessity of group cohesion on the battlefield—all elements of Book of Mormon warfare. Additionally, the pattern of organizing Book of Mormon armies in a decimal system (hundreds, thousands, ten thousands) is also found in ancient Israel and elsewhere in the ancient world.

4. Emphasis in the Book of Mormon on personal oaths of loyalty and of surrender is also typical of the ancient world, a fact that represents “perhaps the greatest distinction between modern and ancient international affairs” (*Ibid.*, 526).

5. Another major difference between modern and pre-modern warfare is that war in antiquity was characterized by its religious connections, while war in modernity has become a secularized affair. In the Book of Mormon, actions and beliefs associated with military culture (God’s frequent intervention in battles on behalf of the righteous, consultation with prophets over military matters, the code of purity typified by Helaman’s stripling warriors, to name a few examples), are representative of a ritualistic and sacral (pertaining to sacred rites) approach to warfare, paralleling patterns in the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica.

1 And now it came to pass that the sons of Alma did go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them. And Alma, also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth.

verse 1 Recall that Alma has just completed his counseling of his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. This counseling apparently took place while all of them were in the land of the Zoramites. This verse states that Alma and his missionary group continued, or perhaps completed, their labors among the Zoramites.

2 Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and

revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called.

verse 2 “after the holy order of God by which they were called” This phrase refers to the Melchizedek priesthood (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2 and Alma 13:1).

3 And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 3 Here Mormon announces that he is changing his emphasis. To this point in the book of Alma, Mormon has stressed the missionary labors of Alma and the four sons of Mosiah. Beginning at this point and extending through Alma chapter 62, Mormon will write mostly about the wars between the Nephites and Lamanites.

If we step back and look at the book of Alma, we note that Alma 1-42 describes the priestcrafts, pride, materialism, socioeconomic inequality, and other forms of apostasy and social disruption. Alma 43-62 then describes the wars and civil disruptions that lead to a corruption and collapse of the civil government. A similar sequence of apostasy, social problems, government corruption, and wars is prophesied for our time—the last days prior to the Savior’s second coming (D&C 45:16-46; Mormon 8:26-41). The wars facing the saints in the latter days may be more spiritual and less physical. The prophet Nephi wrote of the latter days: “I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few . . . [and] the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God. . . . And [the saints] were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (1 Nephi 14:12-14). President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of this same latter-day war: “I testify that as the forces of evil increase under Lucifer’s leadership and as the forces of good increase under the leadership of Jesus Christ, there will be growing battles between the two until the final confrontation. As the issues become clearer and more obvious, all mankind will eventually be required to align themselves either for the kingdom of God or for the kingdom of the devil. As these conflicts rage, either secretly or openly, the righteous will be tested. God’s wrath will soon shake the nations of the earth and will be poured out on the wicked without measure. . . . But God will provide strength for the righteous and the means of escape; and eventually and finally, truth will triumph” (“I Testify,” *Ensign* [November 1988]:87).

Mormon knew of the wars and other chaos that would beset those of the latter days, and he included in the book those things he believed would be of most help to the saints of our day.

If the Book of Mormon is a guide to help us in this latter-day conflict, what lessons do we learn from studying its pages? We do not learn much about the technical aspects of military tactics, but we do learn, in considerable detail:

1. accounts of the exercise of great faith;

2. the Lord's protection of his people;
3. inspired counsel from great warrior-prophets;
4. small groups of righteous contending successfully against much larger armies;
5. the folly of war; the destructive effects of evil leaders;
6. destruction of people brought on by their own iniquity;
7. the relationship of the degree of spiritual righteousness to vulnerability in war.

In short the book teaches us the fundamental nature of the battle, and it gives hope to the Lord's people.

“in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges” The events that occurred between Alma 35:13 and this verse occurred in the “eighteenth year of the reign of the judges.” In the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon they are assigned the date, “about 73 BC” Based on Mosiah 29:44 and other dates based on the years “of the judges” the date for these chapters probably ought to be changed to “about 74 BC.”

4 For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon.

verse 4 “the Zoramites became Lamanites” When Alma initially set off on his missionary journey to the Zoramites, he had two important goals. They were spiritual and political. He certainly wanted to reclaim the spiritually straying Zoramites and bring them back into the fold of Christ. He desired also to politically re-align the Zoramites with Zarahemla and the Nephites. If they were to form a treaty with the Lamanites, then they would become a strategic threat to the national security of the Nephites. As we note here, Alma's fears were justified. Though the Nephite missionaries had made many converts among the Zoramites, particularly among their poor, they had failed to win the hearts of the Zoramite leaders. From a purely diplomatic perspective their mission had failed.

5 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader.

verse 5 The ancestry of Zerahemnah is unknown. Dr. Hugh Nibley suggests he may have been an Amalekite (Amlicite)—see also the commentary for the following verse. It will become apparent that Zerahemnah's motivation for going to war is his hatred of the Nephites and his hunger for power. Dr. Nibley writes:

The Zoramites now severed all connection with the Nephites and considered themselves as being officially Lamanite. They invited the Lamanite hordes to move in and occupy their country as the first major move against the Nephites. At their head came the Lamanite commander-in-chief, the Amalekite (Amlicite) Zerahemnah. The

Amalekites were Nephite dissenters of an earlier day, and like most dissenters were more bitter against the Nephites and “of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were” (Alma 43:6). Zerahemnah had seen to it that all the key commands in the army had gone to Amalekites like himself or to equally ferocious Zoramites (Alma 43:6). So we see the Nephites being punished for their own wickedness in more ways than one; in fact the Lamanites appear at times as no more than the simple-minded tools of Nephite or ex-Nephite wickedness. Certainly Zerahemnah was using them as his cat’s paw, “for behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power” (Alma 43:8). Another familiar story—the hate campaign as a means to personal power. Zerahemnah worked on the Lamanite resentment of the people of Ammon [the Anti-Nephi-Lehies], whom they regarded as traitors (Alma 43:11)—conveniently overlooking the fact that his own people were dissenters from the Nephites—and in time found himself in command of a huge coalition army against the Nephites, who understandably felt themselves desperately threatened (Alma 43:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 296-97).

6 And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites.

verse 6 “the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were” One’s disposition refers to one’s nature, desires, inclinations, or feelings.

We have encountered two “Amaleki’s” thus far in our study of the Book of Mormon. One was the prophet-custodian of the plates at the time of King Benjamin (Omni 1:12, 23; Words of Mormon 1:3, 10). The other Amaleki was one of the men who traveled from Zarahemla with Ammon to rescue the people of king Limhi (Mosiah 7:6). It is unlikely that the Amalekites descended from either of these Nephites. It is likely that the Amkalekites are the same group as the Amlicites (see the commentary for Alma 21:2). The father of these “Amalekites” was probably, therefore, Amlici. We are told nothing concerning him. It is probable that he was a Nephite apostate and of the order of Nehor (Alma 21:4; 24:28-29). For a discussion of the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

7 Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs.

8 For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

verses 7-8 “**this he did that he might usurp great power over them**” *Them* in this phrase refers to the Lamanites, not the Nephites. Zerahemnah was not by birth a Lamanite. In this verse we learn that he lusted for power not only over the Nephites, but also over the Lamanites. Zerahemnah knew that if the Lamanite warriors under his leadership were motivated by anger and hatred, then they would be easy to control—they would become pawns in his hand and readily do his bidding (see the comments on the “War Principles” in the introductory commentary for this chapter).

9 And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires.

verse 9 Again, we are reminded of the Nephites’ belief that their continued security depended on their continued righteous adherence to their covenants: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13).

10 For they knew that if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites, that whosoever should worship God in spirit and in truth, the true and the living God, the Lamanites would destroy.

11 Yea, and they also knew the extreme hatred of the Lamanites towards their brethren, who were the Anti-Nephi-Lehis, who were called the people of Ammon—and they would not take up arms, yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it—therefore, if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites they would be destroyed.

12 And the Nephites would not suffer that they should be destroyed; therefore they gave them lands for their inheritance.

verse 12 You will recall that the people of Ammon had been moved from the land of Jershon to Melek for their own safety and to allow the Nephite army to use the land of Jershon as a staging area for battle (Alma 35:13).

13 And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah.

14 Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites; and thus the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren, even unto bloodshed.

verse 14 “Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites” The antecedent of this phrase is the final phrase in the previous verse—“the descendants of the priests of Noah.” This verse intends to say that the descendants of the priests of Noah, in and of themselves, were almost as numerous as the Nephites. If all of the other groups mentioned in verse 13 are added, then the Nephites are far outnumbered by the Lamanites.

“the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren” We learn here that the Nephites were righteous in their motives for war (see the introductory commentary for this chapter). They were not eager to go to war. Rather, they manifested a healthy reluctance.

15 And it came to pass as the armies of the Lamanites had gathered together in the land of Antionum, behold, the armies of the Nephites were prepared to meet them in the land of Jershon.

16 Now, the leader of the Nephites, or the man who had been appointed to be the chief captain over the Nephites—now the chief captain took the command of all the armies of the Nephites—and his name was Moroni;

verse 16 Dr. Hugh Nibley wrote of Moroni:

At this moment the twenty-five-year-old Moroni appears on the scene, a military genius if there ever was one. He introduced improvements in armor to make his people far more than a match, man for man, for the enemy (Alma 43:19-21); he arranged the Jershon defense zone (Alma 43:22), and being on the defensive and greatly outnumbered, was particularly diligent in keeping a sharp lookout on all enemy movements, at the same time inquiring of the holy prophet Alma (after what is now known to have been an ancient custom in Israel) regarding the enemy’s plan of battle, “whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites” (Alma 43:23). On the other hand, the Lamanite campaign was directed by Amalekite [Amlicite] and Zoramite officers, whose knowledge of Nephite military secrets and methods would have given them an enormous advantage over any commander but Moroni. Right at the outset his foresight had robbed them of their first and logical objective—the buffer land of Jershon (Alma 43:22) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 297-298).

17 And Moroni took all the command, and the government of their wars. And he was only twenty and five years old when he was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites.

18 And it came to pass that he met the Lamanites in the borders of Jershon, and his people were armed with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war.

verse 18 “Cimeter” is an early variant spelling for a word that is more commonly today spelled as “scimitar.” A cimeter or scimitar is a highly curved, single-edge saber, which is usually used for slicing or hacking. Some critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested that the presence of the scimitars in the Book of Mormon is anachronistic. They base their criticism on the mistaken notion that the scimitar originated with the Muslims in AD 1000 to 1200. There is, however, much evidence that the scimitar did, in fact, exist in the ancient Near East in the bronze age (Brent Merrill, an unpublished FARMS reprint). It is interesting to note that the cimeter is not mentioned after 51 BC, despite the fact that there are several references to swords and bows. Perhaps the cimeter fell out of use after that time.

19 And when the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, or that Moroni, had prepared his people with breastplates and with arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing—

20 Now the army of Zarahemnah was not prepared with any such thing; they had only their swords and their cimeters, their bows and their arrows, their stones and their slings; and they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were naked, save it were the Zoramites and the Amalekites;

21 But they were not armed with breastplates, nor shields—therefore, they were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites because of their armor, notwithstanding their number being so much greater than the Nephites.

22 Behold, now it came to pass that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Antionum into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone.

verse 22 Manti is a city up river from the city of Zarahemla. It is likely located not far from the head waters of the River Sidon. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

23 But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness Moroni sent spies into the wilderness to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

verse 23 Old Testament scriptures include many examples of belief in the necessity of obtaining divine approval through the Lord's prophet before entering into battle (Judges 7:9-14; I Samuel 28:5-6; 30:8; II Samuel 5:19-26; I Kings 8:44; 22:5, 7-8). In modern scripture the Lord affirms this principle: "And again this is the law I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord commanded them" (D&C 98:33).

24 And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

verse 24 Manti was one of the cities in the south of the land of Zarahemla, reasonably near the west sea. Here we learn that Manti is the first of four Nephite cities to be attacked by the Lamanites. It will eventually be captured. We will also learn that it will be the last to be liberated. Apparently at the time of this invasion, the land of Manti was not well defended, and the Lamanites chose this place to "commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people."

25 Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means a part of the Lamanites should come into that land and take possession of the city, took the remaining part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti.

26 And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land should gather themselves together to battle against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites.

verse 26 "to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties" In this chapter we will encounter a few verses which are premonitory to Moroni's well-known "title of liberty" (e.g., verses 30, 45, 47, and 48).

27 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his army should be secreted in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon, which was on the west of the river Sidon in the wilderness.

verse 27 To be *secreted* is to be concealed.

28 And Moroni placed spies round about, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

29 And now, as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land;

30 And he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore, he found by his spies which course the Lamanites were to take.

verse 30 “he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem”

Here Mormon inserts an almost half apology by Moroni for the use of espionage, which he realizes is intended to take advantage of the less sophisticated Lamanites. But since “it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty . . . therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem.” The ensuing episode shows what a stickler Moroni was for fair play.

31 Therefore, he divided his army and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah;

32 And the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti.

33 And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them.

verses 31-33 Without knowing the specific topography of the land surrounding the city of Manti, it is not possible to picture exactly how Moroni planned to trap the invading hordes of Lamanites. It is obvious, however that he cleverly deployed his troops on both sides of the river, hoping to trap them as they crossed the river. See the Illustration: *Moroni's Military Strategy against Zerahemnah*.

Dr. Hugh Nibley has summarized this military excursion and made it easier to understand by dividing it into phases:

1. Zerahemnah, marches toward Manti, which he thinks is undefended, passes the hill Riplah on the north and begins to ford the river Sidon.

2. Lehi, concealed “on the south of the hill Riplah” comes out of hiding and attacks Zerahemnah’s rear.

3. The main Lamanite force turns and engages Lehi on the east side of the river Sidon.

4. Thwarted by the superior armor of the Nephites, the Lamanites with heavy losses, seek security on the other side of the river Sidon.

5. Lehi accelerates their withdrawal and flight into and across the river by pressing them hotly in the rear. Once the Lamanites have crossed the river, Lehi’s army then prevents them from recrossing by deploying on the east bank of the river.

6. On the west side of the river Moroni and his army have been awaiting the Lamanites in the west Valley.

7. The Lamanites try to break through to Manti but are met by Moroni's reserves.

8. Lamanite numbers begin to prevail until Moroni rallies his forces, and the Lamanites fall back toward the Sidon again.

9. The entire Lamanite force is concentrated on the west bank of the Sidon, where Moroni is able to encircle them.

10. Moroni, perceiving the Lamanite perplexity, immediately stops the battle and approaches Zerahemnah for a conference.

(*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 299-301).

34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came up on the north of the hill, where a part of the army of Moroni was concealed.

35 And as the Lamanites had passed the hill Riplah, and came into the valley, and began to cross the river Sidon, the army which was concealed on the south of the hill, which was led by a man whose name was Lehi, and he led his army forth and encircled the Lamanites about on the east in their rear.

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about and began to contend with the army of Lehi.

37 And the work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites, for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke.

38 While on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords and the loss of blood, they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breastplates, and their arm-shields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.

verse 38 “they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites” Here is another possible example of a “typo” by the prophet Mormon as he engraved onto the plates of Mormon. There was obviously no eraser or “white out” which he might use, and thus an error had to be corrected simply by re-engraving a visible correction.

39 And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon.

40 And they were pursued by Lehi and his men; and they were driven by Lehi into the waters of Sidon, and they crossed the waters of Sidon. And Lehi retained his armies upon the bank of the river Sidon that they should not cross.

verse 40 “they crossed the waters of Sidon” The Lamanites had encountered the armies of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon. The Lamanites were driven from that site of initial encounter toward the west into the river Sidon, which they crossed.

“that they should not cross” Lehi’s forces were then deployed on the east bank of the river Sidon to prevent the Lamanites from recrossing once they encountered Moroni’s army on the west of the river. Thus, most were trapped on the west side of the river between Moroni’s forces and the river.

41 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army met the Lamanites in the valley, on the other side of the river Sidon, and began to fall upon them and to slay them.

42 And the Lamanites did flee again before them, towards the land of Manti; and they were met again by the armies of Moroni.

43 Now in this case the Lamanites did fight exceedingly; yea, never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceedingly great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning.

44 And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger.

45 Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

verse 45 “they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children” Elder Neal A. Maxwell used this phrase out of context and provided each of us with food for thought: “Though we all may have other causes, all that we hold dear is bound up in our homes and we, too, are in the midst of a fierce battle” (*That My Family Should Partake*, 29-30).

“rites of worship” Some have felt that this expression should more correctly have been rendered “right to worship,” though “rites [ordinances and rituals] of worship” does also have a plausible meaning.

46 And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch

as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

verse 46 This verse has reference to the so-called “law of third offense” which was followed by ancient Jew and even Romans and was intended to prevent non-defensive warfare. To be guilty of the “first offense” is to retaliate when initially attacked by your enemy. Similarly, to be guilty of the “second offense” is to retaliate when attacked the second time by your enemy. The Lord has demanded exceeding patience of us when we are attacked. Moroni was aware of and adhered to the ancient law of war which has been reiterated in modern revelation (see D&C 98:32-37). This law may be summarized as follows: If a people is attacked by an aggressor nation, then the people under attack should not go out to battle without the Lord’s approbation. That approval may only be obtained after the people under siege have extended an offer of peace, not once but three times. Thus, this law may also be termed the “law of fourth offense.” Furthermore, if the enemy attacks then repents and begs forgiveness, then they should be forgiven—not only once but “seventy times seven.” Finally, if an enemy trespasses and does not repent, they should be forgiven three times. If they do not repent on the fourth occasion, then this matter should be brought before the Lord who will exact compensation in his own way and bless those who have been trespassed against.

Apparently the Nephites were aware of this law because it was written in their scriptures—“for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers.”

One message to the people of the latter days from the “war period” of the Book of Mormon is that if there must be war, then it must be entered into for the right reasons if the people desire the blessings of God.

47 And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.

verse 47 Some have expressed surprise that Moroni, a faithful “man of Christ,” was so entangled in military matters—he was also a man of the sword. Mormon has made it clear that captain Moroni “did not delight in bloodshed” and believed that he should never “raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their [the Nephites] lives” (Alma 48:11, 14).

48 And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage.

49 And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage.

50 And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon.

51 Now, the Lamanites were more numerous, yea, by more than double the number of the Nephites; nevertheless, they were driven insomuch that they were gathered together in one body in the valley, upon the bank by the river Sidon.

52 Therefore the armies of Moroni encircled them about, yea, even on both sides of the river, for behold, on the east were the men of Lehi.

53 Therefore when Zerahemnah saw the men of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon, and the armies of Moroni on the west of the river Sidon, that they were encircled about by the Nephites, they were struck with terror.

54 Now Moroni, when he saw their terror, commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood.

Alma Chapter 44

1 And it came to pass that they did stop and withdrew a pace from them. And Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you.

verse 1 Dr. Hugh Nibley provides us with a telling portrait of captain Moroni and his attitude about war:

How did Moroni go about making war? First of all, the people humbled themselves: “They were free from wars and contentions among themselves.” War was not a solution to internal unrest. They were reluctant “to contend with their brethren . . . sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood . . . and . . . they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world . . . unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:20-23). When Moroni had immobilized a guard house with a gift of wine, he refused to follow up the ruse, because he said it would be an “injustice” to perform a shameful act of taking advantage of a drunken enemy (Alma 55:19). Moroni was especially keen to watch for even the slightest tendency of the enemy to give up; he was hypersensitive to that moment in the battle when the enemy falters, and the instant that came, when he sensed they were weakening, he would propose a stop to the fighting to talk things over (Alma 52:37-38). “We do not desire to be men of blood,” he tells them on the battlefield; “ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you. . . . We have not come . . . that we might shed your blood for power.” “We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites, if they would stay in their own land. We would not shed the blood of our [Nephite] brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us. We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God” (Alma 61:10-12). He detested the power game that some men play; “I seek not for power,” he says often, “but to pull it down. I seek not for the honor of the world” (Alma 60:36). He thinks more kindly of the Lamanite invaders than of the ambitious men on his own side. He says it is “the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred . . . while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world” (Alma 60:32). He fought against people being “known by the appellation of king-men . . . and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility . . . they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren” (Alma 51:21). Inequality—that was the enemy in Moroni’s eyes. When he raised the Title of Liberty, it was to teach his people to think of themselves as the poor and outcast of Israel (Alma 46:18, 23-24), not as a proud army with banners—reminding them that the rent garment could very well be their own condition (Alma 46:21) if they tried to match the enemy’s own machismo” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 522-23).

Captain Moroni's attitudes about war adhere to the War Principles outlined in the introductory commentary for Alma 43. He did indeed maintain a healthy reluctance to fight against and kill even his enemies.

2 Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage. But this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion.

verse 2 “this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion” Moroni reveals that one underlying cause of this attack by Zerahemnah and his forces is religious persecution. Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: “Those lacking religious commitment sometimes resent it in others” (*Plain and Precious Things*, 68).

3 But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith.

4 Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.

verse 4 “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him” This is a remarkable testimony of Moroni's faith given under very stressful circumstances. This statement of Moroni is consistent with the War Principle number 6 discussed in the introductory commentary for Alma 43. The righteousness, and not the military might, of a people is the critical issue determining whether or not the people will enjoy the blessing of divine protection.

5 And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, and by the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children, by that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country; yea, and also by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness; and by all that is most dear unto us—

verse 5 “rites of worship” As was mentioned in the commentary for Alma 43:45, this expression perhaps should probably have been rendered “right to worship.” “Rights” would seem to be more consistent with the context, which refers to the freedom to worship as they desired.

“maintenance of the sacred word of God” As mentioned in volume 2, chapter 3 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine—Covenants and Covenant Making*, often “word” means “covenant.” Thus “maintenance of the sacred word of God” is synonymous with keeping one’s eternal covenants. The Book of Mormon teaches that those who keep the commandments of God—the “words” of God—actually enter into a covenant with him. Those who live according to the words of God and thus keep their covenants will have eternal life. One Bible scholar has noted that words such as *covenant*, *law*, *word*, and *oath* are used virtually synonymously in the Old Testament. He points out that the earliest designation for the Decalogue or Ten Commandments was the “Ten Words.” Also: “The theological usage of the ‘word’ of God may . . . be very closely bound up in its very origin with the covenant” (G.E. Mendenhall, “Covenant.” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1962, 1:716). Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: “A covenant is a sacred promise, as used in the scriptures, a solemn enduring promise between God and man. The fulness of the gospel itself is defined as the New and Everlasting Covenant” (“Covenant,” *Ensign* [May 1987] 17:22-25).

Another concept which adds to our understanding of the profound significance of the “words of God” was taught by Mormon when he commented on Alma’s mission to reclaim the Zoramites. Mormon said: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). Obviously the *word* of God exerts a powerful effect upon the thoughts and behavior of the individual who obeys that word. The spiritual gifts given to the obedient are given according to the covenant which characterizes the commandments.

6 Yea, and this is not all; I command you by all the desires which ye have for life, that ye deliver up your weapons of war unto us, and we will seek not your blood, but we will spare your lives, if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us.

7 And now, if ye do not this, behold, ye are in our hands, and I will command my men that they shall fall upon you, and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies, that ye may become extinct; and then we will see who shall have power over this people; yea, we will see who shall be brought into bondage.

8 And now it came to pass that when Zerahemnah had heard these sayings he came forth and delivered up his sword and his cimeter, and his bow into the hands of Moroni, and said unto him: Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children; but take our

weapons of war, and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness; otherwise we will retain our swords, and we will perish or conquer.

verse 8 “Zerahemnah . . . delivered up his sword and his cimeter, and his bow into the hands of Moroni” For a discussion of the “cimeter” see the commentary for Alma 43: 18. It is interesting to learn that Zerahemnah was armed with a bow, a sword, *and* a cimeter. The cimeter is mentioned eleven times in the Book of Mormon. All references except the earliest one, Enos 1:20, mention it in conjunction with the sword.

Zerahemnah came forward not because he believed that God had delivered him and his army into the hands of the Nephites. Rather he came forward because he had to. His surrender was mandated by his dire circumstances.

The taking of an oath in that day was solemnly regarded as binding even by the wicked Zerahemnah. Note that he refuses to enter an oath that he knows he cannot keep.

9 Behold, we are not of your faith; we do not believe that it is God that has delivered us into your hands; but we believe that it is your cunning that has preserved you from our swords. Behold, it is your breastplates and your shields that have preserved you.

10 And now when Zerahemnah had made an end of speaking these words, Moroni returned the sword and the weapons of war, which he had received, unto Zerahemnah, saying: Behold, we will end the conflict.

11 Now I cannot recall the words which I have spoken, therefore as the Lord liveth, ye shall not depart except ye depart with an oath that ye will not return again against us to war. Now as ye are in our hands we will spill your blood upon the ground, or ye shall submit to the conditions which I have proposed.

verse 11 “I cannot recall the words which I have spoken” Moroni here assures that under no other circumstances than that of making a covenant of peace are Zerahemnah and his warriors going to get out of this alive! He will not “recall” or take back his ultimatum.

12 And now when Moroni had said these words, Zerahemnah retained his sword, and he was angry with Moroni, and he rushed forward that he might slay Moroni; but as he raised his sword, behold, one of Moroni’s soldiers smote it even to the earth, and it broke by the hilt; and he also smote Zerahemnah that he took off his scalp and it fell to the earth. And Zerahemnah withdrew from before them into the midst of his soldiers.

verse 12 The suggestion has been made in the past that the “scalping” tradition of the American Indian might have had its roots in this incident in the Book of Mormon. Apparently this practice had its roots with the white man of the seventeenth century AD

rather than with the native American Indians. When some of the early colonists offered money for the scalps of dead Indians, some unscrupulous white men killed Indians just for their scalps. Accordingly the Indians began to kill and scalp white men in retaliation.

13 And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by, who smote off the scalp of Zerahemnah, took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice:

14 Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace.

15 Now there were many, when they heard these words and saw the scalp which was upon the sword, that were struck with fear; and many came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and entered into a covenant of peace. And as many as entered into a covenant they suffered to depart into the wilderness.

16 Now it came to pass that Zerahemnah was exceedingly wroth, and he did stir up the remainder of his soldiers to anger, to contend more powerfully against the Nephites.

17 And now Moroni was angry, because of the stubbornness of the Lamanites; therefore he commanded his people that they should fall upon them and slay them. And it came to pass that they began to slay them; yea, and the Lamanites did contend with their swords and their might.

18 But behold, their naked skins and their bare heads were exposed to the sharp swords of the Nephites; yea, behold they were pierced and smitten, yea, and did fall exceedingly fast before the swords of the Nephites; and they began to be swept down, even as the soldier of Moroni had prophesied.

19 Now Zerahemnah, when he saw that they were all about to be destroyed, cried mightily unto Moroni, promising that he would covenant and also his people with them, if they would spare the remainder of their lives, that they never would come to war again against them.

verse 19 It is interesting to note that Zerahemnah, minus his scalp, is never heard from again in the Book of Mormon.

20 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that the work of death should cease again among the people. And he took the weapons of war from the Lamanites; and after they had entered into a covenant with him of peace they were suffered to depart into the wilderness.

21 Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites.

22 And it came to pass that they did cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea.

23 And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands.

24 And thus ended the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written upon the plates of Nephi.

verse 24 This verse is an editorial comment or colophon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3) by Mormon and marks the end of the record of Alma. We will now begin the study of the record of Alma's eldest son, Helaman.

Alma Chapter 45

The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days. Comprising chapters 45 to 62 inclusive.

Helaman is the author of Alma 45 through 62. The final chapter of Alma, chapter 63 will be written by Helaman's brother Shiblon with heavy editing by the prophet Mormon.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy.

verse 1 "They did fast much and pray much" Most of the world's armies celebrate victory by getting drunk. It is worthwhile to note that Moroni's army celebrated with fasting and prayer.

2 And it came to pass in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma came unto his son Helaman and said unto him: Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept?

verse 2 After returning from his missionary journey to the Zoramites, Alma counseled with Helaman and gave him charge of the records. He had also counseled him on the vital and sacred nature of those records (Alma 36-37).

3 And Helaman said unto him: Yea, I believe.

4 And Alma said again: Believest thou in Jesus Christ, who shall come?

5 And he said: Yea, I believe all the words which thou hast spoken.

6 And Alma said unto him again: Will ye keep my commandments?

7 And he said: Yea, I will keep thy commandments with all my heart.

8 Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land.

9 But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known; yea, what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say.

10 And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred

years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief.

11 Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct—

verses 10-11 The spiritual deterioration and eventual destruction of the Nephites actually will occur somewhat sooner than Alma foresees here. They will become a hopelessly wicked people by about AD 326 and they will be destroyed by a great and final destructive battle in AD 385. While the Book of Mormon peoples will never really become extinct, certainly they will suffer a destruction of their culture, and they will cease to exist as a Nephite people.

12 Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

verse 12 “from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come” Following Christ’s appearance in the western hemisphere there were many years of general righteousness among the people. This was the “golden age” of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200 (“three generations”). During this idyllic period men “did deal justly one with another” and “there were not rich and poor, bond and free” (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite “mini-millennium.” During the “fourth generation” the people will begin to wax strong in iniquity.

13 And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi.

14 But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled.

verses 9-14 In light of this prophecy by Alma, one might be tempted to say, “Well, so much for the promised land.” Dr. Hugh Nibley provided informative insight into the phenomenon of a “promised land”:

The term “promised land” has a nice upbeat sound that we like very much, but the great promise is worded as a curse: “Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe . . . for this is the cursing and the blessing of

God upon this land” (Alma 45:16). When Lehi’s party had barely left Jerusalem, Nephi had a vision in which he “looked and beheld the land of promise.” And what did he see? “A mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise,” and horrible destruction and desolation (1 Nephi 12:4). Obviously one is not home-free when he has set foot upon the land of promise. Quite the opposite; from then on he must watch his step and control the impulse to do whatever he pleases and “have it all.” For “God has sworn in his wrath” that what went on in other lands should not go on here. There are nations that were old when Nephi left Jerusalem and whose cultures and languages, customs, manners, and traditions still survive. They have all paid a high price in human suffering as they go along from folly to folly and disaster to disaster, but they are still there. It is not so in the New World, where great civilizations vanish without even leaving us their names, and where no high civilization has survived. It is significant that with all the warning and promising, only one penalty is ever mentioned, and only one means of avoiding it. “Prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently; . . . and . . . by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up to repentance” (Jarom 1:11-12). The penalty is destruction; the deliverance, repentance (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 505-6).

Dr. Nibley in another place gave further insight into the responsibilities inherent in being blessed with a “promised land”:

The Nephites and Lamanites each received a promise in the beginning, and each promise contained two parts, a promise of bliss and a promise of woe, “for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land” (Alma 45:16). In the Dead Sea Scrolls every covenant which promises a blessing if kept, promises a corresponding curse if broken, for a contract in which either party should be bound to no conditions whatever would be meaningless (see 2 Nephi 2:5-10). For the Lamanites the penalty of their backsliding is that they shall be scattered and smitten and driven by the Gentiles; the reward of their faith is that they are to survive all their afflictions and in time become the Lord’s own people again. For the Nephites the promised reward of faith is that nothing on earth can without their own will and action in any way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This tremendous guarantee is matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the contract. Since they never became fully ripe in iniquity as did the Nephites, the Lamanites were allowed to remain in the land, paying for the privilege by taking a terrible beating: “Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you. . . . Because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” (2 Nephi 4:6-7). It was an unconditional promise of survival (Jacob 3:5-9; Helaman 7:24; 15:14-17). No such promise was given the Nephites, and

Enos was told that though the Nephites might perish, still the Lamanites would survive to receive his record (Enos 1:13, 16). (*Ibid.*, volume 7, 389-90.)

15 And now it came to pass that after Alma had said these things to Helaman, he blessed him, and also his other sons; and he also blessed the earth for the righteous' sake.

16 And he said: Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.

verse 16 “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” Isn't this is a rather discouraging pronouncement? It actually should not be if one understands the law of justice and the principle of justification. Please take a moment and review the commentary for Mosiah 14:11. Since “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance,” a mechanism is established to help us imperfect sinners. For further insight into this concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 12 and 17—*The Law of Justice and Justification and Sanctification*.

17 And now, when Alma had said these words he blessed the church, yea, all those who should stand fast in the faith from that time henceforth.

18 And when Alma had done this he departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of.

19 Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause we know nothing concerning his death and burial.

verses 18-19 These verses have given rise to speculation, apparently both in the church of Alma's day and in the church today, that Alma may have been translated by the Lord. Alma was “taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses.” Was Moses translated? Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “Moses, like Elijah, was taken up without tasting death, because he had a mission to perform. . . . and it had to be performed before the crucifixion of the Son of God, and it could not have been done in the spirit” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:107, 110). Here President Smith refers to the mission Moses performed on the mount of transfiguration when he appeared before the Savior, Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1-13). President Smith further

commented: “It is a very reasonable thought to believe that both Moses and Alma, like Elijah and John, were translated to accomplish some work which the Lord had in store for them at some future day” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:38).

What does it mean to be translated? See a discussion of the doctrine of translation in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17, *Doctrine of Translation*. In this chapter you will read of several ancient non-biblical documents that also suggest that Moses was translated.

20 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Helaman went forth among the people to declare the word unto them.

21 For behold, because of their wars with the Lamanites and the many little dissensions and disturbances which had been among the people, it became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them, yea, and that a regulation should be made throughout the church.

22 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth to establish the church again in all the land, yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches.

23 And now it came to pass that after Helaman and his brethren had appointed priests and teachers over the churches that there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman and his brethren;

verse 23 “there arose a dissension among them” A significant political movement is beginning to arise here that will play a major role in the remainder of the Book of Mormon story. For a discussion of this movement, see the introductory comments for Alma 46. This movement will result in bitter contention and dissension in the Nephite culture. It will involve such evil minded characters as Amalickiah and Pachus.

Lynn D. Wardle wrote of dissension in the Book of Mormon: “Dissension is often caused by pride. Often dissension is encouraged by self-promoting, wicked demagogues like Amalickiah and Pachus. Frequently they are supported by other ambitious people who see dissent as the fast track to fame and glory or power (Alma 46:4-5; 51:5-8; 61:3-4, 8). Clearly, however, not all who are misled by such persons are of the same venal (corrupt) character (as the re-conversion of many dissenters shows). As a byproduct of pride, dissent simply seems as inevitable in the fallen world as the cycle of humility-obedience-prosperity-pride-destruction that is described repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon” (“Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 69).

24 But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words, to walk uprightly before God.

verse 24 “they grew rich in their own eyes” How easily men succumb to the temptations of materialism in every age! This phrase is a well-stated condemnation!

“give heed to their words” The final “their” in this verse refers, of course, to Helaman and his brethren and not to the materialistic Nephites.

Alma Chapter 46

Scripture Mastery

Alma 46 Captain Moroni's Title of Liberty

Alma 46:12-13 Captain Moroni's title of liberty: In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.

Alma 46-51 Amalickiah, a large and strong man, conspires to be king. He is defeated by Captain Moroni and goes over to the land of the Lamanites. By deception and murder, he becomes the king of the Lamanites and marries the Lamanites queen. He swears an oath to drink the blood of Moroni and leads a large Lamanite army against him and his Nephite army. Amalickiah is eventually killed when Teancum steals into his camp and puts a javelin through his heart. Amalickiah is succeeded by his brother Ammoron.

Typically, following a major war, those who are victorious enjoy a period of post-war economic boom. This likely occurred among the Nephites following their victory over Zerahemnah and his Lamanite army. Many of the Nephites prospered and began to enjoy their prosperity. As might be predicted, along with their material wealth came a desire for more and more of the same. Many became proud and lifted up and began to lust after material things. They turned away from the church and away from considerations of the Spirit toward things of the world. Their tendency was to ignore the admonitions of Helaman, the new spiritual head of the nation, who became alarmed as many "grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches" (Alma 45:24). Helaman's unyielding position became a great annoyance to those people whose hearts were set on the things of the new prosperity, and they formed an opposition party. The Nephites thus came to be divided into two socioeconomic classes, an "elite" class, later to be called the "king-men" and a "common" class, which will later come to be known as the "freemen." Each class had its own disparate interests.

The "king-men" included those who were wealthy, those of high birth some of whom desired to become king themselves. They also included those who sought for more influence over the people. These power seekers included the "lower judges of the land." These were "in favor of kings . . . and were supported by those who sought power and authority over [other] people" (Alma 51:8). The label "king-men" will not actually be applied to this group until some six years hence (Alma 51). Initially this group had no semblance of organization. Rather these individuals or small groups of them created "many little dissensions and disturbances . . . among the people" (Alma 45:21). Then appeared Amalickiah (as had Amlici before him—see Alma 2), a dynamic leader who fused these selfish and greedy Nephite factions into a unified political entity.

Amalickiah was determined and ruthless and cared little for his followers. He, of course, desired to be king. He would stop at nothing and will even eventually enter into secret negotiations with the king of the Lamanites to overthrow the Nephite government. Initially he could count on the support of those among the Nephites who were of the “king-men” persuasion. Some of these had been made “exceedingly wroth” by “the words of Helaman and his brethren” to the point that they were even “determined to slay them” (Alma 46:1-2). Eventually his support among the Nephites will dwindle, and he will be forced to seek out the Lamanites to assist him in achieving his aspirations.

Those who opposed the king-men will eventually come to be called the “freemen” (Alma 51). These were the Nephites, often to be found outside the wealthy class, who supported their government and opposed any efforts to overthrow it. They supported Moroni in his opposition to the dangerous coalition led by Amalickiah. The specific title “freemen” also will not be used until six years later in Alma 51. The title “freemen” was not simply a political designation. These Nephites also were inclined to accept and honor their sacred eternal covenants.

Perhaps the very essence of the difference between the king-men and the freemen is their view of equality. Mosiah had warned the people: “Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king, for thus saith the Lord: ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, nor one man think himself above another; therefore I say unto you that it is not expedient for you to have a king” (Mosiah 23:7). Mosiah also had said: “And I am not better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust (Mosiah 2:26). It is clear that captain Moroni also had almost an obsession for equality, and believed that without it there could be no freedom. Brother Hugh Nibley also shares Moroni’s passion for the importance of equality. Speaking of this equality, Brother Nibley wrote:

Jacob gives us some rules: “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17). It is not the wealth but the inequality that does the damage. Of unequal distribution Jacob says, “Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other” (Jacob 2:21). Benjamin recognizes the same danger of acquisitiveness: “I . . . have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; neither have I suffered . . . that ye should make slaves of one another. . . . And even I myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you” (Mosiah 2:12-14). “For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being . . . for all riches which we have of every kind?” (Mosiah 4:19). And when Alma organized his church, “they were all equal, and they did all labor. . . . And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had” (Alma 1:26-27). The main theme is obvious: “For thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man think himself above another” (Mosiah 23:7). “I desire that the inequality should be no more in this land . . . but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man enjoy his rights and

privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32). For this reason, Mosiah laid down the kingship in favor of a system of judges, as a more egalitarian order (Mosiah 23:7). But the great obstacle to freedom was not government but money; to maintain their liberty, Alma’s people “were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength” (Alma 1:26). (How could they be equal in wealth, we ask today, if no two of them were equal in strength?) Under the law of Mosiah and the judges, “there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds” (Alma 30:7). “Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege . . . but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him” (Alma 30:9) or to put him at a disadvantage, for the idea was that “all men were on equal grounds.” So even Alma, the high priest and chief judge of the land, allowed people to go around preaching atheism. The righteous can preserve their liberty only by remembering the words of the patriarch Jacob in all humility, in all humility considering themselves despised and rejected in the manner of the youthful Joseph (Alma 46:24-27) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 515-17).

One typical model of the king-men described in the text of the Book of Mormon before the label “king-men” is applied is that of the Zoramites (see Alma 31).

1 And it came to pass that as many as would not hearken to the words of Helaman and his brethren were gathered together against their brethren.

verse 1 These were the king-men who resented Helaman’s interference with their materialistic lifestyle. Undoubtedly Helaman’s preaching pricked their consciences so that they were most uncomfortable in his presence.

2 And now behold, they were exceedingly wroth, insomuch that they were determined to slay them.

verse 2 Among the broader class of “king-men” were those who were inclined toward violence and terrorism. We will learn in the next verse that this militant subgroup was led by Amalickiah. The final “them” in this verse refers, obviously, to the followers of Helaman.

3 Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and a strong man; and his name was Amalickiah.

verse 3 Of all the characters yet to appear in the Book of Mormon, one of the most dangerous yet to appear is Amalickiah. Brother J. M. Sjodahl suggested that Amalickiah may well have been of Mulekite origin:

Mulek is one of the very interesting words in the Book of Mormon. It was the name, or the title, of the young son of Zedekiah, who, with his attendants, as stated in a previous chapter, escaped from the Babylonians, when Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem, about 599 BC. . . . It was also the name of a city on “the east borders by

the sea shore” (Alma 51:26). There was a land called Melek “on the west of the river Sidon” (Alma 8:3), which name is, clearly, but a variant of Mulek. From these words others are formed, such as Muloki (Alma 20:2), Amulek (Alma 8:21), and Amaleki and Amalickiah (Omni 30, Alma 46:3) (*An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, 138).

Amalickiah’s object was obviously to become king, and as we have noted he started out as head of the most violent of the factions of the king-men, organized in anger and “gathered together against their brethren . . . exceedingly wroth . . . determined to slay them” (verses 1-2).

Hugh Nibley described Amalickiah:

This man was really quite a charmer, “a man of many flattering words,” who won a great personal following and “led away the hearts of many people” (Alma 46:10). “A large and a strong man” of imposing presence (Alma 46:3); to a powerful and persuasive rhetoric he added the fierce resolve of one who “had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni,” his chief opponent (Alma 51:9). Shrewd and calculating, “a man of cunning device” (Alma 46:10), he knew how to preserve himself: “He did not come down himself to battle” (Alma 49:11). Amalickiah was willing to pay any price in blood to gain his objective, for “he did care not for the blood of his people” (Alma 49:10). His plan was skillfully conceived and executed (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 331-32).

Amalickiah had solid support among “those who were in favor of kings . . . those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people” (Alma 51:8). His diabolical career, marked by a thirst for glory and power, will follow the pattern one might expect of Satan were he granted the blessing of a mortal probation.

4 And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power.

verse 4 “they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land”

By promising high office and power, Amalickiah added to his followers a host of ambitious local officials, “lower judges of the land . . . seeking for power.” These were the same lawmen who had plotted against Helaman’s father, Alma, when he had been the head of the state, and of whom Alma had said, “The foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges” (Alma 10:27).

5 And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people.

6 Thus they were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions, notwithstanding the preaching of Helaman and his brethren, yea, notwithstanding their exceedingly great care over the church, for they were high priests over the church.

verse 6 “for they were high priests over the church” Helaman was the chief priest or chief high priest. He and his brethren were high priests after the order of Melchizedek.

7 And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites, and their great rejoicings which they had had because of their deliverance by the hand of the Lord.

verse 7 “there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

“thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites” This movement led by Amalickiah posed a very dangerous threat to a government that had barely succeeded in making a precarious peace with a foreign enemy of vastly superior forces.

As mentioned, this coalition would later be called the “king-men.” They were those who “because of their exceedingly great riches” opposed government controls (Alma 45:24), those who considered themselves the aristocracy “who professed the blood of nobility” (Alma 51:21), “the lower judges of the land, . . . seeking for power” (Alma 46:4), and local judges, officials, and other upper crust bound together by family ties as “kindreds,” whose boast was that they had “acquired much riches by the hand of [their] industry” (Alma 10:4, 3 Nephi 6:27).

8 Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one.

9 Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men.

verse 9 We will learn that the Nephite people were reluctant and sorry to have to take up arms against the Lamanites “because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; . . . [and] they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world” (Alma 48:21-23). This was Moroni’s attitude as well. Like Alma he insisted on designating the enemy as his “brethren,” and he meant it. We will also learn that most of the Lamanites were equally reluctant to go to war against the Nephites (Alma 47:2). Brother Hugh Nibley has thus cautioned us against regarding the Nephite-

Lamanite wars as situations of “the good people against the bad people.” Instead they are often examples of “the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 306).

10 Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous’ sake.

verse 10 “he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words” See verse 7.

“the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous’ sake” This refers to the covenant between God and the Nephite peoples: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). Again, this is the “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and *Covenants and Covenant Making* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3.

verses 11-22 These following twelve verses contain the memorable account of Moroni and his “title of liberty.” Please review the introductory commentary for Alma 43 which emphasizes Moroni’s covenant-theology orientation.

When the Nephites are threatened by the Nephite dissenter Amalickiah and his followers, Moroni feels the need to re-commit himself and his fellow Nephites to their most fundamental covenant which has its origins in God’s revelation to father Lehi: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). It is clear that captain Moroni interpreted this covenant promise literally and believed it implicitly. In ancient Israelite thought, the covenant was the very foundation for government.

In a pattern wholly consistent with ancient practice, Moroni ritualized this covenant by tearing his coat and writing upon it—“In memory or our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (verse 12). Hugh Nibley has called our attention to similar covenant rituals among ancient peoples (“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study.” *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989. 92-95). For example, Moroni’s tearing of his coat and demanding of his soldiers an oath of loyalty was typical Near Eastern military practice (deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, 214- 28).

Moroni then fastened the title of liberty to the end of a pole, dressed in his armor, and prayed mightily to the Lord for renewal of this vital covenant. He said: “Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ [enter into this covenant], shall be trodden down and destroyed until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (verse 18). Moroni then went out among the Nephites, inviting them to come and renew their covenants. They also rent their garments and cast them at the feet of Moroni to symbolize the fact that if they did not live up to their covenants, “the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments” (verse 12). It is obvious that the Nephites did not dichotomize their world into church and state as we do today. For them war was an all-important religious affair. They felt that God’s will was often revealed through the ordeal of battle. God could scourge and punish his people by the ravages of war, or he could march at the head of their army and give them the victory.

On a lighter note, it has been suggested that each of us, in the various circumstances and situations of our lives, has to decide whether to “fly our title of liberty” or to “keep our pearls in our pocket.” These pearls are, of course, those pearls we do not wish to “cast before swine.” In some circumstances we may come to feel that a principle of the gospel needs to be heard by all present. Even though you may not know whether you will be accepted or rejected, you may feel it necessary to “fly your title” and stick up for the gospel principle. Often times others will come to our support in that circumstance. There are people who will support, but they don’t dare be the first to raise their title of liberty. At other times you may feel that it is best to not bring up a gospel principle that is being violated, and you may decide to “keep your pearls in your pocket.”

11 And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

verse 11 Apparently Moroni was caught off guard by Amalickiah’s evil designs. Perhaps Moroni’s own guileless nature was simply slow to accept that any one could be guilty of such a vicious and deceitful plan.

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

verse 12 Brother Hugh Nibley added insight to the concept of the title of liberty:

We have in the Title of Liberty episode a clear and independent parallel to ancient Iranian tradition, for Moroni’s banner is just like the “Flag of Kawe” . . . the legendary founder of the Magi. . . . To liberate the people there rose up in Isfahan a mighty man, a blacksmith named Kawe, who took the leather apron he wore at his work

and placed it on the end of a pole; this became the symbol of liberation and remained for many centuries the national banner of the Persians as well as the sacred emblem of the Magi (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 214-17; see also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd edition [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 242; and Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 92-95).

13 And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

verse 13 “he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren” Conceptually, *liberty* is identical to *freedom*. Both must be clearly differentiated from the concept of agency (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*).

14 For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.

verse 14 The antecedent for this verse is the word “Christians” in the previous verse. As we have mentioned previously, the word Christ (and hence Christian) is of Greek origin—from the Greek Christos. There obviously was no Greek language or influence found on the Book of Mormon plates. The word therefore came from Joseph Smith’s culture. Joseph obviously, in his translation, came to a title for Christ and a title for his followers. The best words he had in his vocabulary for these titles were “Christ” and “Christian.” It is interesting that the term “Christian,” or whatever term the Book of Mormon peoples used, was used as a label of derision in Moroni’s day by those who did not belong the church. And yet, Mormon acknowledges that it was also a label accepted gladly by those who were in fact true believers, those who had taken upon themselves the name of Christ (verse 15).

15 And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.

verse 15 “those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ” In the Book of Mormon the making of covenants is usually connected with “taking the name of Christ” upon one’s self. This making of covenants includes the idea of “renaming” or being taken by adoption. In this case one takes upon one’s self the name of Christ and is adopted into his family, one becomes a son or daughter of Christ.

Anti-Mormons have pointed to this verse as a contradiction between the Book of Mormon and the New Testament. They point out that Acts 11:26 teaches that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” It is likely that Joseph Smith, in the process of translation perceived a title for the believers and used a term familiar to him. Additionally, Luke, in Acts, may well have referred to his own dispensation—this was the first time in his day that the term Christian was used. Certainly in those other dispensations who knew of and believed in Christ could have been called after his name. One scholar, actually an Evangelical, Craig L. Blomberg has pointed out an analogous situation in the book of Exodus (3:15) in which God seemingly reveals his name, “the LORD,” (“Yahweh” or “Jehovah”) for the first time to Moses, even though this term has frequently appeared already in Genesis. Blomberg argues that the earlier references are merely a “retrojection” of the title from Moses’s day into narratives of earlier times, since it was clearly the same God in each case.

16 And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored.

17 And it came to pass that when he had poured out his soul to God, he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land, and the land of liberty.

verse 17 The expression “in fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“he named all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land” In this verse it is difficult to know exactly which land is being named what. Hugh Nibley has suggested that Moroni’s intent here was, as was the custom in ancient Israel before a battle, to bless his own land and curse the land of his enemy. It seems that Dr. Nibley felt that by placing a comma between “land” and “Desolation” one might interpret this verse as meaning that Moroni called the enemy lands in the south “Desolation” and all the other lands “a chosen land” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 243).

An alternate interpretation would be that he regarded all the land south of the ancient Jaredite land of Desolation, held either by the Nephites (in the north) or by the Lamanites (in the south), as a covenant and blessed land.

18 And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions.

verse 18 “we, who are despised” Moroni here reminds his people to recognize their position as the meek and humble of the world—“we, who are despised.” Moroni regarded as the enemy the rich and well-born, the king-men whose “pride and nobility” Moroni boldly denounces (Alma 51:18).

19 And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:

verse 19 “waving the rent part of his garment in the air” Brother John A. Tvedtnes provided interesting insight on this verse:

It should first of all be pointed out that the author will contend, on the basis of the evidence to be given, that the Book of Mormon, in its English form as provided by Joseph Smith, is in many respects a nearly literal translation. Thus, many of the expressions found therein do not properly belong to the English language, but rather to the language from which the book was translated. Indeed, in most cases thus far investigated, Book of Mormon expressions which are ungrammatical in English are perfect Hebrews grammar. (In view of the fact that Joseph Smith did not know Hebrew in those early years, this is good evidence for the authenticity of the translation.) For example, in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, we read that “when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the *rent* [note that it did not say “rent part” as does our current edition] of his garment in the air.” When the word “rent” is used as a noun in English, it may refer to a hole caused by rending, but not, to my knowledge, to a portion of rent cloth; the unlikely usage of “rent” in English as a noun no doubt contributed to the fact that, in subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon, it was changed to read “rent part” (Alma 46:19). But the Hebrews would, in this instance, use but one word, *qera’*, “rent,” coming from *qara’*, for nouns, in Hebrew, are derived from roots—as are Hebrew verbs—by the addition of certain vowel patterns that distinguish them from other parts of speech (*BYU Studies*, volume 11, 50).

20 Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.

verse 20 “whosoever will maintain this title upon the land” Alternately we may phrase this, “whosoever will enter into the covenant this flag symbolizes.”

21 And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.

verse 21 “the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments” If these people forsake this covenant and forsake the Lord, they will be subject to a curse. Note that the curse is given here in the so-called “simile curse” form (for a

discussion of the simile curse, see the commentary for Mosiah 12:2-12). The curse is repeated in the same simile curse form in the following verse.

As we read these verses, we might tend to see this as merely a moment of great national feeling and patriotism among the Nephites. There is more here than mere patriotism. As Moroni rallies his forces, it is not to some partisan political cause but to the cause of their covenants with God. These Nephites were evidencing their feelings for the covenants they had made with the Lord. They felt deeply the necessity of keeping these covenants in order to be preserved in the land.

22 Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression.

verse 22 “covenant with our God that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression” Soldiers ran to Moroni and cast their rent garments at his feet as a sign that they had entered into the covenant—that if they should “fall into transgression,” God might “cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot.”

It is clear that these Nephites regarded this impending war with Amalickiah and the Lamanites as a “holy war.” They believed that wars occurred under divine direction; that wars were fought with the approval and help of God; and their wars often ended with offerings of thanks to God. The Nephites perspective of war accurately represented that of ancient Israel which centered its ideology of war on God himself. A perusal of the Old Testament makes this clear. Stephen D. Ricks wrote:

The Lord himself is described as a “warrior” and “the Lord strong and mighty . . . in battle” (Psalm 24:8). . . . The wars that Israel fought were “the Lord’s battles” (1 Samuel 18:17); indeed, among the lost books of ancient Israel is “the Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14). The enemies of Israel were the enemies of the Lord (see Judges 5:31; 1 Samuel 30:26), who assists Israel in battle (see Joshua 10:11; 24:12; 1 Samuel 17:45). The Lord was consulted (see Judges 20:18, 28; 1 Samuel 14:37) and sacrifice was offered (see 1 Samuel 7:9; 13:9, 12) before hostilities were initiated. When Israel went to war, its army was called “the people of the Lord” (Judges 5:11), “the people of God” (Judges 20:2), or “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26).

Combatants in the Israelite armies were expected to be ritually clean at the time they went out to battle. . . .

God insisted on strict observance of his commands when Israel was going to war. The consequences for violations could be devastating. They could suffer defeat in battle that could only be rectified by the punishment of the wrongdoer (see Joshua 7) (“Holy War: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near

East,” *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 103-17).

The “brethren” referred to here are obviously the Jaredites. Why would these Nephites refer to the Jaredites as their “brethren.” Perhaps there were people living among them who were descendants of the Jaredites (see the commentary for Ether 15:32). It is interesting that Anthon W. Ivins, who later became a counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, speculated that Coriantumr, the final Jaredite king, survived among the people of Zarahemla long enough to sire descendants (“Are the Jaredites an Extinct People?” *Improvement Era* 6 [November 1902]: 43-44). Perhaps captain Moroni himself was one of those descendants. In Hebrew the name Moroni means “one from Moron,” which was the Jaredite capital. Since it is simplistic to claim that Coriantumr was literally the last living person of the Jaredite nation, we might also add that others of Jaredite descent might have found their way among the Nephites.

“he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression” Hugh Nibley wrote: “treading on one’s garments while making a covenant” follows a “forgotten but peculiar old Jewish rite” (“Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon.” *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*. Editor John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989] 328-79).

verses 23-24 Captain Moroni desired to re-covenant his people to keep the commandments. As covenants are often made in association with ritual and symbolism, Moroni chose to tear his coat as a symbol of the covenant. He then invited his people to tear their coats in like manner. This tearing of his coat was intended to symbolize that if he and his people did not keep their covenants to obey the Lord’s commands, their coats would be torn by their brethren the Lamanites, and they would be trodden under foot and be imprisoned. Now, where did Moroni get the idea to tear his coat and to use it as the symbol of the covenant? Was it his own idea? Was there a scriptural precedent? Read on!

23 Moroni said unto them: Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain.

verse 23 We are about to learn the essential reason why Moroni chose the symbolism of a torn coat as he attempted to re-covenant his people.

“Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces” We learn that ancient Joseph’s coat of many colors was torn into many pieces by his resentful brothers. Is that true? Was Joseph’s coat torn by his brothers? If you check the

biblical account of the story of Joseph and his “coat of many colors” (Genesis 37), there are a few things that were “rent” but Joseph’s coat was not one of them. The Genesis account says nothing about Joseph’s coat being torn into many pieces. Perhaps the account of this story on the plates of brass was different in its detail, for apparently Joseph’s coat was torn into pieces. Dr. John A. Tvedtnes wrote:

Aside from Alma 46:23, the only document I know of that clearly indicates that the brothers tore Joseph’s garment is the thirteenth-century collection of earlier Jewish stories known as the Book of Jasher: “And they hastened and took Joseph’s coat and tore it, and they killed a kid of the goats and dipped the coat into the blood of the kid, and then trampled it in the dust, and they sent the coat to their father Jacob” (Jasher 43:13) (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Parry, Peterson, Welch, 236-37).

One cannot fail to note the parallel with Moroni’s soldiers, who cast their garments down “to be trodden under foot” (verse 22).

Could Joseph Smith have known that the coat of ancient Joseph had been torn into pieces by his brothers? He obviously could not have known from the Bible; and since the Book of Jasher could not have come to Joseph Smith’s attention until it was published in English in 1840, he could not have known from that source either. It is obvious, however, that this medieval Jewish document shares an ancient tradition also found in the Book of Mormon.

Moroni, here, uses Joseph’s torn coat as a powerful symbol. In addition to representing the possible destruction of each individual, were they to become disobedient, it represented also the separation and scattering of the house of Joseph. Moroni is attempting to save his people from the eternal effects of their sins by encouraging them to covenant to obey the commandments. The rending of his coat (Alma 46:12) and the making it the “Title of Liberty” was in similitude of Joseph’s brothers’ unknowingly rending Joseph’s coat. The coat became a symbol of the rending or scattering of the seed of Joseph.

The story of the ancient prophet Joseph was historical proof that jealousy and contention could lead to bondage, but that faithfulness to covenants with God leads to preservation and liberty. Anciently, Joseph was a symbol of freedom and liberty.

“let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain”

It is clear that a curse is implied in this phrase. Those who failed to keep the commandments would be cast into prison, sold, or slain. This is an example of the “prophetic symbolic curse,” other examples of which are found in the Bible and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (see Isaiah 20:2-4; Ezekiel 5:1-17; 3 Nephi 4:28-29; Alma 44:12-14).

There is also a certain spirit or attitude in which Moroni was asking the Nephites to commit themselves to defense of their Nephite lands. They were asked to recognize

their position as the meek and humble of the world in contrast to the rich and proud, the “king-men” whom Moroni denounces. They are invited to march under the tattered and torn garment of Moroni which represented the torn garment of ancient Joseph who was the outcast child who was stripped and beaten and sold into bondage in Egypt.

24 Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph; yea, let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death, for behold, he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. And he said—Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment.

verse 24 In this verse, Moroni continues the comparison with ancient Joseph by mentioning an interesting prophecy made by Jacob. Apparently, some time before his death, Jacob was shown a preserved remnant of the coat which he had previously given to his son Joseph. Jacob used that occasion to prophesy about the descendants of his son Joseph. Some would be preserved by the hand of God, and some would perish. Where might Joseph Smith have learned of this prophecy? Is it recorded in the Bible? It is not! All we have in the Bible is the account of Joseph’s brothers bringing Joseph’s coat soaked in goat’s blood to Jacob. Jacob concluded that his son had been killed by an “evil beast” (Genesis 37:31-35). It is, however, fascinating to learn that in ancient apocryphal literature, there are stories about preserved remnants of Joseph’s coat being shown to Jacob as proof that he was yet alive. Brother Hugh Nibley provides such an example:

The Nephite prophet Moroni tells a story, which he says was common property of his people, concerning the death of the patriarch Jacob (Alma 46:24-25). I have never come across this story except in Tha’labi—who in Joseph Smith’s America had access to Tha’labi? Tha’labi, a Persian in the tenth century AD, went about collecting old stories of the prophets from his Jewish neighbors. The story in barest outline is that when the garment of Joseph was brought to Jacob on his deathbed, he rejoiced because part of it was sound and whole, signifying that some of his descendants would always remain true; but he wept because another part of the garment was befouled and rotted away, signifying that part of his descendants that would fall away. The same story is told with the same interpretation in Tha’labi and in the book of Alma, in the latter significantly as a popular folk-tale. The presence of such a story among the Hebrews has been indicated in a recent study by a Jewish scholar, but could Joseph Smith wait until 1953 to read about it? (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 249).

John A. Tvedtnes has added another account which contributes to the tradition that Joseph’s torn coat was preserved:

The preservation of Joseph's garment is noted in the Zenahu La-Yosef, an Ethiopic manuscript from the Dabra Bizon monastery, in which Benjamin, eating with the Egyptian official he did not yet know to be his brother Joseph, told him of his lost brother and of his father Jacob's mourning: "He looks at his [Joseph's] garment stained in his blood. He puts it in front of him, and soaks it every day with the tears of his eyes." According to a Muslim tradition reported by as-Kisa'i, Jacob, before sending his sons to Egypt for the second time, gave "Joseph's shirt to Benjamin to wear, the one that had been brought to him spattered with blood" (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Parry, Peterson, and Welch, 237).

Here the preservation of the rent garment of ancient Joseph seems to have symbolized the covenants of God to preserve a posterity unto Jacob and Joseph. While those descendants of Joseph who reject the covenants through apostasy and dissension shall perish, God will preserve a remnant of the seed of Joseph. In verse 27 Moroni suggests that it might well be that the remnant of the seed of Joseph which shall perish are those who have dissented from the Nephites. We will learn, however, from the Book of Mormon, that by the time of the ultimate scattering of the Book of Mormon peoples in about AD 385, there will be no clear blood lineage distinction between Nephites and Lamanites.

Moroni's torn garment, then, just as the torn coat of Joseph, represented the covenants of God to preserve his people based on their obedience.

The word *remnant* is used often in the Bible and Book of Mormon. *Remnant* means a small part or fragment. The word in scripture is most often used to refer to a small part of the house of Israel. It seems feasible that its use in this context originated in the legend of Jacob's being shown, just prior to his death, a remnant of Joseph's coat that had been preserved.

25 Now behold, this giveth my soul sorrow; nevertheless, my soul hath joy in my son, because of that part of his seed which shall be taken unto God.

26 Now behold, this was the language of Jacob.

27 And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ.

verse 27 Mormon might well have inserted between the two sentences in this verse: "And, in case you're inclined to be smug . . ." He might also have added the important lesson that righteousness does not consist in only being identified with this or that nation, group, or church. The people are not to be considered righteous simply by virtue of being Nephites and not Lamanites.

Moroni viewed dissidents as covenant-breakers whose lack of trust in God and lack of concern for the community of the saints put the whole people in jeopardy. It is obvious that the chronicler Mormon agreed with him. They both saw dissension as the

root cause of Nephite problems (see Alma 51:16). This view is not difficult to understand since literally every enemy the Nephites engaged in the “war chapters” of Alma (chapters 43-62) were Nephite dissenters who had joined militarily with the Lamanites. It is obvious that Mormon wants us to learn the wickedness and dangers of dissention and dissenters, and of covenant-breaking and covenant-breakers.

28 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words he went forth, and also sent forth in all the parts of the land where there were dissensions, and gathered together all the people who were desirous to maintain their liberty, to stand against Amalickiah and those who had dissented, who were called Amalickiahites.

29 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah saw that the people of Moroni were more numerous than the Amalickiahites—and he also saw that his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken—therefore, fearing that he should not gain the point, he took those of his people who would and departed into the land of Nephi.

verse 29 Seeing that he had insufficient support among the Nephites, Amalickiah shows his true colors and leads away his most devoted followers to the land of the Lamanites to seek additional man-power support there.

30 Now Moroni thought it was not expedient that the Lamanites should have any more strength; therefore he thought to cut off the people of Amalickiah, or to take them and bring them back, and put Amalickiah to death; yea, for he knew that he would stir up the Lamanites to anger against them, and cause them to come to battle against them; and this he knew that Amalickiah would do that he might obtain his purposes.

31 Therefore Moroni thought it was expedient that he should take his armies, who had gathered themselves together, and armed themselves, and entered into a covenant to keep the peace—and it came to pass that he took his army and marched out with his tents into the wilderness, to cut off the course of Amalickiah in the wilderness.

32 And it came to pass that he did according to his desires, and marched forth into the wilderness, and headed the armies of Amalickiah.

verse 32 “and headed the armies of Amalickiah” The verb “head” here means to head off or to intercept.

33 And it came to pass that Amalickiah fled with a small number of his men, and the remainder were delivered up into the hands of Moroni and were taken back into the land of Zarahemla.

34 Now, Moroni being a man who was appointed by the chief judges and the voice of the people, therefore he had power according to his will with the armies of the Nephites, to establish and to exercise authority over them.

35 And it came to pass that whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, that they might maintain a free government, he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom.

verse 35 Please don't miss the subtle humor in this verse! Is there humor in the Book of Mormon? Brother Steven C. Walker has observed:

Perhaps the most unappreciated aspect of Book of Mormon concentration is its humor. That lack of appreciation probably testifies to the effectiveness of the humor, since its essence is understatement, a laconic refusal to push the punch line. I suspect that the tongue-in-cheek British laugh more than we Americans in reading the Book of Mormon. The high seriousness of its context can easily distract those used to more explicit humor from the smile on the face of the writer of such a statement as "Whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom . . . he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom" (Alma 46:35), or "Neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites" (4 Nephi 17), or "For if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite" (Alma 55:32) (*BYU Studies*, volume 20, Number 2, 202).

Some have been upset by Moroni's treatment of these dissenters. The Book of Mormon actually teaches a careful regard for the rights of dissenters to think and believe what they want to and a respect for their rights of conscience. Thus, "the law could have no power on any man for his belief" (Alma 1:17; 30:9). However, for their illegal actions dissenters could indeed be punished (Words of Mormon 1:15-16; Alma 1:16-18; 30:10-11). Moroni clearly endured a great deal of affliction without reacting coercively, and apparently without insisting on strict or speedy enforcement of the laws, precisely because he respected the rights of conscience of the dissenters. It has been said that Zion cannot be built by force. Many things (indeed, most important things) cannot be accomplished by compulsion. Moroni consistently used as little coercion as the circumstances required, asserting military force only as a last resort, and repeatedly allowing dissenters who had taken arms in rebellion to "escape" strict justice (Alma 46:35; 50:36; 51:20-21). Perhaps he believed that punishment and force could not convert their consciences. Repentance and conversion are matters of conscience. Because the conscience usually revolts when force is applied, force should be avoided whenever possible if the goal is to reclaim the dissenters, as it always should be (Lynn D. Wardle, "Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon" in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 65).

Brother Hugh Nibley has drawn an analogy between Moroni's campaigns and those of Simon Bar Kochba. Bar Kochba was the leader of the Jews in Palestine during

their insurrection against the Romans in AD 132-35. He raised a large army among the Jews and was initially successful in defeating the Romans. Eventually his army was defeated and he was killed in AD 135. Brother Nibley says:

Bar Kochba's war, like Moroni's, was a holy war, a "Messianic war." In the struggle for liberation, Bar Kochba found his hands full dealing with all kinds of people and problems. For one thing, he found that "some of the wealthier citizens" of a city were "evaders of national duties." Specifically, they were "disregarding the mobilization orders of Bar Kochba," who became exceedingly angry and issued dire threats against them, including even the death penalty. Compare this with Moroni in a like situation: "And it came to pass that whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, . . . he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom" (Alma 46:35). Bar Kochba had to deal with just such characters, and he did it in the same way. To the "brothers" (for so he calls them, as Moroni does all to whom he writes) in the city of En-Gedi, he personally wrote a letter in Hebrew that survives to this day: "To Masabala and to Yehonathan bar Be'ayan, peace. In comfort you sit, eat and drink from the prosperity of the House of Israel, and care nothing for your brothers." Moroni wrote a letter from the field: "To Pahoran, in the city of Zarahemla . . . and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war" (Alma 60:1). "Can you think to sit upon your thrones [today he might have used a more slang term] in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren?" (Alma 60:7). To such people Moroni issues a dire threat: "And I will come unto you, and . . . behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct" (Alma 60:27). If this sounds shockingly severe, the provocation was as terrible: Moroni, like Bar Kochba, was holding on by the skin of his teeth. . . . But if the secret of Moroni's success was his essential gentleness—he always called a halt to the fighting the instant the enemy, whom he called his "brethren," showed the least inclination to parley—it has often been said that Bar Kochba's undoing was the lack of such a redeeming quality. "His brutality, according to some sources, was manifested in the way he killed the revered Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'in, . . . whom Bar Kochba suspected of betraying the secrets of Bethar [a city under attack] to the Romans. This cruel act, according to the same sources, caused Bar Kochba's death, and the fall of Bethar" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 282-84).

36 And it came to pass also, that he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in all the land, which was possessed by the Nephites; and thus Moroni planted the standard of liberty among the Nephites.

37 And they began to have peace again in the land; and thus they did maintain peace in the land until nearly the end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges.

38 And Helaman and the high priests did also maintain order in the church; yea, even for the space of four years did they have much peace and rejoicing in the church.

39 And it came to pass that there were many who died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing.

40 And there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent in the land—but not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases, to which men were subject by the nature of the climate—

verse 40 “because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases” One of the 16th-century Spanish historians who wrote in Mesoamerica, in describing the “Tultecas,” a culture which some feel are the Nephites, said of them, “They invented the art of medicine . . . They were the wise men who discovered, who knew of, medicine; who originated the medical art” (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 149-50).

41 But there were many who died with old age; and those who died in the faith of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose.

Alma Chapter 47

1 Now we will return in our record to Amalickiah and those who had fled with him into the wilderness; for, behold, he had taken those who went with him, and went up in the land of Nephi among the Lamanites, and did stir up the Lamanites to anger against the people of Nephi, insomuch that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation throughout all his land, among all his people, that they should gather themselves together again to go to battle against the Nephites.

verse 1 “the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation throughout all his land” John L. Sorenson made an interesting observation regarding the Lamanite culture: “Rulers in the Lamanite system appear to have had more difficulty than Nephite rulers in binding component social groups into a common polity (Alma 17:27-35; 20:4, 7, 9, 14-15; 47:1-3). They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition, ideals, or an apparatus of officials (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Peoples”).

2 And it came to pass that when the proclamation had gone forth among them they were exceedingly afraid; yea, they feared to displease the king, and they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives. And it came to pass that they would not, or the more part of them would not, obey the commandments of the king.

3 And now it came to pass that the king was wroth because of their disobedience; therefore he gave Amalickiah the command of that part of his army which was obedient unto his commands, and commanded him that he should go forth and compel them to arms.

4 Now behold, this was the desire of Amalickiah; for he being a very subtle man to do evil therefore he laid the plan in his heart to dethrone the king of the Lamanites.

verse 4 “for he being a very subtle man” Just a reminder. The reader might wonder if being “a very subtle man” is indeed a negative quality. It usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Another meaning of “subtle,” however, is crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

5 And now he had got the command of those parts of the Lamanites who were in favor of the king; and he sought to gain favor of those who were not obedient; therefore he went forward to the place which was called Onidah, for thither had all the Lamanites fled; for they discovered the army coming, and, supposing that they were coming to destroy them, therefore they fled to Onidah, to the place of arms.

verse 5 “Onidah, to the place of arms” Apparently this city was the site of some natural resource which was useful in manufacturing weapons.

6 And they had appointed a man to be a king and a leader over them, being fixed in their minds with a determined resolution that they would not be subjected to go against the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that they had gathered themselves together upon the top of the mount which was called Antipas, in preparation to battle.

8 Now it was not Amalickiah’s intention to give them battle according to the commandments of the king; but behold, it was his intention to gain favor with the armies of the Lamanites, that he might place himself at their head and dethrone the king and take possession of the kingdom.

9 And behold, it came to pass that he caused his army to pitch their tents in the valley which was near the mount Antipas.

10 And it came to pass that when it was night he sent a secret embassy into the mount Antipas, desiring that the leader of those who were upon the mount, whose name was Lehonti, that he should come down to the foot of the mount, for he desired to speak with him.

11 And it came to pass that when Lehonti received the message he durst not go down to the foot of the mount. And it came to pass that Amalickiah sent again the second time, desiring him to come down. And it came to pass that Lehonti would not; and he sent again the third time.

12 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah found that he could not get Lehonti to come down off from the mount, he went up into the mount, nearly to Lehonti’s camp; and he sent again the fourth time his message unto Lehonti, desiring that he would come down, and that he would bring his guards with him.

13 And it came to pass that when Lehonti had come down with his guards to Amalickiah, that Amalickiah desired him to come down with his army in the night-time, and surround those men in their camps over whom the king had given him command, and that he would deliver them up into Lehonti’s hands, if he would make him (Amalickiah) a second leader over the whole army.

14 And it came to pass that Lehonti came down with his men and surrounded the men of Amalickiah, so that before they awoke at the dawn of day they were surrounded by the armies of Lehonti.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that they were surrounded, they plead with Amalickiah that he would suffer them to fall in with their brethren, that they might not be destroyed. Now this was the very thing which Amalickiah desired.

16 And it came to pass that he delivered his men, contrary to the commands of the king. Now this was the thing that Amalickiah desired, that he might accomplish his designs in dethroning the king.

verses 6-16 We will learn in these verses it would have been better for Lehonti and his men to have remained on the top of mount Antipas where they were safe. When they came down, they found themselves in serious trouble. In an analogous way, sometimes each of us in our lives is better off if we avoid exposing ourselves to evil influences. Satan's persuasive arguments are often subtle and enticing. Though we may become convinced that it is safe to "come down from the mount," we may, like Lehonti and his man, find ourselves in captivity. Thus, it is often better for us, figuratively speaking, to "remain on the top of mount Antipas."

For commentary on the Greek derivation of the name Antipas, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

17 Now it was the custom among the Lamanites, if their chief leader was killed, to appoint the second leader to be their chief leader.

18 And it came to pass that Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer poison by degrees to Lehonti, that he died.

verse 18 Here is a technique that Satan may use to trap us. As happened to Lehonti, Satan may seek to "poison [us] by degrees."

19 Now, when Lehonti was dead, the Lamanites appointed Amalickiah to be their leader and their chief commander.

20 And it came to pass that Amalickiah marched with his armies (for he had gained his desires) to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi, which was the chief city.

verse 20 "to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi" The Book of Mormon often refers to "lands" that both surround and bear the names of their chief cities. We may read, for example, of the lands and cities of Ammonihah, Bountiful, Desolation, Gideon, Helam, Jashon, Jerusalem, Lehi, Lehi-Nephi, Manti, Morianton, Moroni, Mulek, Nehor, Nephihah, Noah, Shem, Shilom. For a discussion, speculative though it may be, of the possible relationship of this city of Nephi to that city of Nephi originally established by the prophet Nephi, the son of Lehi, in 578 BC, see the commentary for Jacob 2:28.

21 And the king came out to meet him with his guards, for he supposed that Amalickiah had fulfilled his commands, and that Amalickiah had gathered together so great an army to go against the Nephites to battle.

22 But behold, as the king came out to meet him Amalickiah caused that his servants should go forth to meet the king. And they went and bowed themselves before the king, as if to reverence him because of his greatness.

23 And it came to pass that the king put forth his hand to raise them, as was the custom with the Lamanites, as a token of peace, which custom they had taken from the Nephites.

24 And it came to pass that when he had raised the first from the ground, behold he stabbed the king to the heart; and he fell to the earth.

25 Now the servants of the king fled; and the servants of Amalickiah raised a cry, saying:

26 Behold, the servants of the king have stabbed him to the heart, and he has fallen and they have fled; behold, come and see.

27 And it came to pass that Amalickiah commanded that his armies should march forth and see what had happened to the king; and when they had come to the spot, and found the king lying in his gore, Amalickiah pretended to be wroth, and said: Whosoever loved the king, let him go forth, and pursue his servants that they may be slain.

28 And it came to pass that all they who loved the king, when they heard these words, came forth and pursued after the servants of the king.

29 Now when the servants of the king saw an army pursuing after them, they were frightened again, and fled into the wilderness, and came over into the land of Zarahemla and joined the people of Ammon.

30 And the army which pursued after them returned, having pursued after them in vain; and thus Amalickiah, by his fraud, gained the hearts of the people.

31 And it came to pass on the morrow he entered the city Nephi with his armies, and took possession of the city.

32 And now it came to pass that the queen, when she had heard that the king was slain—for Amalickiah had sent an embassy to the queen informing her that the king had been slain by his servants, that he had pursued them with his army, but it was in vain, and they had made their escape—

33 Therefore, when the queen had received this message she sent unto Amalickiah, desiring him that he would spare the people of the city; and she also desired him that he should come in unto her; and she also desired him that he should bring witnesses with him to testify concerning the death of the king.

34 And it came to pass that Amalickiah took the same servant that slew the king, and all them who were with him, and went in unto the queen, unto the place where she sat; and they all testified unto her that the king was slain by his own servants; and they said also: They have fled; does not this testify against them? And thus they satisfied the queen concerning the death of the king.

35 And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.

verses 32-35 It would appear that women had rights of succession to the Lamanite throne, and once the king was dead, the rule passed to the queen. Amalickiah thus had to marry the queen to gain the throne. In extreme crises women also took up arms in war alongside their men (Alma 54:12; 55:17; Ether 15:15).

36 Now these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites, yea, having been instructed in the same knowledge of the Lord, nevertheless, it is strange to relate, not long after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites—drinking in with the traditions of the Lamanites; giving way to indolence, and all manner of lasciviousness; yea, entirely forgetting the Lord their God.

verse 36 “Now these dissenters” This phrase references those Nephite dissenters who were living among the Lamanites in the larger land of Nephi (see the previous verse). These would include Zoramites, Amalekites (Amlicites), Amulonites (descendants of the servants of King Noah), and others.

“these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites” It is obvious that shared experiences do not guarantee shared beliefs. Some may receive the same teachings, side by side with believers, and yet they themselves will emerge as non-believers.

“the traditions of the Lamanites” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

“giving way to indolence” *Indolence* is a colorful word that may be defined as habitual idleness; indisposition to labor; a love of ease; inaction or want of exertion of body or mind; an aversion to toil.

Alma Chapter 48

Scripture Mastery

Alma 48:11-13, 17 Moroni was a strong and a mighty man. If all men had been. and were. and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.

1 And now it came to pass that, as soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites.

verse 1 Amalickiah was able to stir up the war-weary Lamanites to a pitch of war-fever in spite of the fact that fighting a new war was hardly in their own best interest. He overcame their strong disinclination to fight by the masterful use of propaganda. Apparently towers were a conspicuous part of public architecture, used among other things for public presentations and announcements.

“from their towers” See the commentary for “tower” in Omni 1:22.

2 And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished his designs thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.

3 Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites.

4 For he was determined, because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage.

5 And thus he did appoint chief captains of the Zoramites, they being the most acquainted with the strength of the Nephites, and their places of resort, and the weakest parts of their cities; therefore he appointed them to be chief captains over his armies.

verse 5 John L. Sorenson has suggested that the Zoramites may have earlier played a formal military role among the Nephites before their defection (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Peoples”).

6 And it came to pass that they took their camp, and moved forth toward the land of Zarahemla in the wilderness.

verse 6 We have previously estimated the distance between the cities of Nephi and Zarahemla (see the commentary for Mosiah 24:25). This distance was probably about 250 miles. The distance as the crow flies would probably be more like 180 miles.

7 Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God.

8 Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land.

9 And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

verses 7-9 We note that Moroni's preparations for battle are always defensive. A preemptive strike was out of the question. He felt that the ultimate preparation for war was spiritual preparation since he knew that the Lord would never suffer a righteous people to lose in battle.

10 And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians.

11 And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery;

verse 11 **“he was a man of a perfect understanding”** The expression “perfect understanding” refers to spiritual comprehension or knowledge of truth. The scriptural word *wisdom* seems closely related and implies that the individual with perfect understanding or wisdom is able to see things from an appropriate eternal perspective. His perspective is not confined to this world only, but includes also a solid understanding of eternal principles. Moroni's perfect understanding or wisdom is given to man as a gift of the Spirit in response to his “experimenting upon the words” of Christ—his diligence in keeping his covenants and in searching the scriptures (Alma 17:2; 32:28). We may thus summarize the divine prescription for acquiring “perfect understanding”: Learn diligently and strive mightily to keep the covenants of God.

Moroni's understanding is “perfect” in that he understands fully the consequences of obeying and of disobeying his covenants.

It is obvious that the abridger of the plates, the prophet Mormon, was very impressed with Captain Moroni and may even have named his son after him. Mormon

himself was obviously a great military soldier and strategist, a factor which probably attracted him to Captain Moroni.

12 Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

13 Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.

14 Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.

verse 14 To “give an offense” is to attack preemptively. Implicit in this verse is the idea that the Lord expects a people to know their enemy and react to them according to the danger they pose (see the commentary on the War Principles in the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

verses 15-16 The following two verses outline what Moroni and the Nephite peoples expected of the Lord in return for their faithfully keeping their covenants.

15 And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger;

16 And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity.

17 Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.

18 Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God.

19 Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni; for they did preach the word of God, and they did baptize unto repentance all men whosoever would hearken unto their words.

verse 19 Let us keep in mind that in addition to captain Moroni, there were others who were equally valuable to the Nephite people. The others included “Helaman and his brethren.” It is obvious that Mormon is the writer and first person here, since we would not expect Helaman, the general author of Alma 45 through 62, to have mentioned himself in this context.

20 And thus they went forth, and the people did humble themselves because of their words, insomuch that they were highly favored of the Lord, and thus they were free from wars and contentions among themselves, yea, even for the space of four years.

verse 20 Again we see evidence, among the Nephites, of a healthy reluctance to fight their enemies, a reluctance which manifests their obedience to the War Principles outlined in the introductory commentary for Alma 43.

21 But, as I have said, in the latter end of the nineteenth year, yea, notwithstanding their peace amongst themselves, they were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.

22 Yea, and in fine, their wars never did cease for the space of many years with the Lamanites, notwithstanding their much reluctance.

23 Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God.

24 Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites.

25 Yea, they could not bear that their brethren should rejoice over the blood of the Nephites, so long as there were any who should keep the commandments of God, for the promise of the Lord was, if they should keep his commandments they should prosper in the land.

Alma Chapter 49

1 And now it came to pass in the eleventh month of the nineteenth year, on the tenth day of the month, the armies of the Lamanites were seen approaching towards the land of Ammonihah.

verse 1 We have discussed previously the consistent pattern of the timing of the wars fought in the Book of Mormon and the relationship of the Nephite calendar with our own calendar. Please review this material before continuing. It is found in the commentary for Alma 16:1.

You will recall that Ammonihah was the apostate Nephite city destroyed by a Lamanite army in about 81 BC, after its inhabitants had rejected the preaching of Alma and Amulek. The dead remained unburied for a time, and because of the resulting stench, the city came to be called the “desolation of Nehors.”

2 And behold, the city had been rebuilt, and Moroni had stationed an army by the borders of the city, and they had cast up dirt around about to shield them from the arrows and the stones of the Lamanites; for behold, they fought with stones and with arrows.

verse 2 “They had cast up dirt round about” For a discussion of the probable nature of these Nephite earthen fortifications, see the commentary on Alma 49:18, below.

3 Behold, I said that the city of Ammonihah had been rebuilt. I say unto you, yea, that it was in part rebuilt; and because the Lamanites had destroyed it once because of the iniquity of the people, they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them.

verse 3 “they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them” We will learn that the invading Lamanites were in for a nasty surprise.

4 But behold, how great was their disappointment; for behold, the Nephites had dug up a ridge of earth round about them, which was so high that the Lamanites could not cast their stones and their arrows at them that they might take effect, neither could they come upon them save it was by their place of entrance.

verse 4 “the Lamanites could not cast their stones and their arrows at them that they might take effect” The Lamanites were prevented from effectively using their stones and arrows as weapons.

We are not surprised by the Lamanites’ casting their stones, and this was likely done using a sling. The sling was spun in a circle over the warrior’s head before one side of the leather holder was released to allow the projectile to sail toward its mark.

But casting their arrows?? Surely Joseph Smith knew that Indians *shot* their arrows, but he could hardly have known anything about *casting* them. A primary war weapon among Mesoamerican peoples was the spear-thrower, or *atlatl* (the name of the device in Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Aztecs). If the reader has an interest, see illustrations and discussion in Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 131-32. See also William J. Hamblin, “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Ricks and Hamblin, 365-99, especially 388-89. This device consisted of an eighteen-inch long carved stick with a groove down one side and a notch at the end. A spear or arrow was laid in the notch with its blunt end against the notch. The warrior would then grasp the throwing stick or atlatl at the end away from the notch and cast the arrow using the stick as an extension of his arm for greater casting power. As the warrior launched the arrow, the arrow would separate from the groove and the last point of contact between the arrow and the atlatl was the notch. It is plausible to suppose that the Lamanites in the day of Moroni used atlatls to throw their arrows.

John Tvedtnes has pointed out that this expression could also stem from use of the Hebrew root *YRH*, which means “to throw.” When that word is applied to arrows in Bible usage, the English translation is “to shoot,” even though the Hebrew literally reads “to throw” (see, for example, 1 Samuel 20:20, 36-37).

“their place of entrance” An important part of the strategic defense system which Moroni had created was the concept of the “place of entrance.” This was the only access to the inside of the city, and it was well defended. For help in understanding this concept, see the commentary for Alma 49:18.

5 Now at this time the chief captains of the Lamanites were astonished exceedingly, because of the wisdom of the Nephites in preparing their places of security.

verse 5 “their places of security” What is the nature of this defensive fortification that results in “places of security”? This is the so-called trench and palisade structure discussed in the commentary for verse 18.

6 Now the leaders of the Lamanites had supposed, because of the greatness of their numbers, yea, they supposed that they should be privileged to come upon them as they had hitherto done; yea, and they had also prepared themselves with shields, and with breastplates; and they had also prepared themselves with garments of skins, yea, very thick garments to cover their nakedness.

verse 6 “they had also prepared themselves with shields, and with breastplates . . . and with garments of skins” Obviously the Lamanites had copied the armor they had seen the Nephites wearing. Previously the armor of non-Nephite

peoples had been inferior to that of the Nephites (see Alma 3:5; 43:19-37). See the discussion of armor in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Mosiah 21:7.

7 And being thus prepared they supposed that they should easily overpower and subject their brethren to the yoke of bondage, or slay and massacre them according to their pleasure.

8 But behold, to their uttermost astonishment, they were prepared for them, in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi. Now they were prepared for the Lamanites, to battle after the manner of the instructions of Moroni.

verse 8 “they were prepared for them” The Nephites were prepared to engage the attacking Lamanites. The “children of Lehi” would include all the Book of Mormon peoples.

9 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites, were exceedingly astonished at their manner of preparation for war.

10 Now, if king Amalickiah had come down out of the land of Nephi, at the head of his army, perhaps he would have caused the Lamanites to have attacked the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah; for behold, he did care not for the blood of his people.

verse 10 An attack against the well-fortified city of Ammonihah would have been futile and worse, even suicidal. The Lamanite chief captains quickly realized that. The Lamanites realized it was useless and unfair to send their ill-prepared soldiers against the city. Yet, if Ammonihah himself had been leading the Lamanite army, since he “did care not for the blood of his people,” he would have ordered an all-out attack.

11 But behold, Amalickiah did not come down himself to battle. And behold, his chief captains durst not attack the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah, for Moroni had altered the management of affairs among the Nephites, insomuch that the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them.

verse 11 “the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them” The Lamanites were frustrated and embarrassed over their utter failure to find a way to attack the effective fortress which the Nephites had built for themselves at Ammonihah. The phrase “their places of retreat” seem to refer to the fortifications of the Nephite city of Ammonihah. The phrase “they could not come upon them” refers to the fact that the Lamanites could not find a plausible way to attack the Nephites.

12 Therefore they retreated into the wilderness, and took their camp and marched towards the land of Noah, supposing that to be the next best place for them to come against the Nephites.

verse 12 The Lamanite chief captains, hoping to save face, hastily marched toward the town of Noah expecting it to be undefended. Then, before realizing that Noah also had been heavily fortified, the chief captains took an ill-advised oath that they would destroy the city.

13 For they knew not that Moroni had fortified, or had built forts of security, for every city in all the land round about; therefore, they marched forward to the land of Noah with a firm determination; yea, their chief captains came forward and took an oath that they would destroy the people of that city.

14 But behold, to their astonishment, the city of Noah, which had hitherto been a weak place, had now, by the means of Moroni, become strong, yea, even to exceed the strength of the city Ammonihah.

15 And now, behold, this was wisdom in Moroni; for he had supposed that they would be frightened at the city Ammonihah; and as the city of Noah had hitherto been the weakest part of the land, therefore they would march thither to battle; and thus it was according to his desires.

16 And behold, Moroni had appointed Lehi to be chief captain over the men of that city; and it was that same Lehi who fought with the Lamanites in the valley on the east of the river Sidon.

verse 16 Moroni had accurately predicted the scenario and had anticipated that the city of Noah would be attacked. Thus he had placed there one of his best captains, the battle-tested Lehi.

“Lehi who fought with the Lamanites in the valley on the east of the river Sidon” The reference here is to the battle of Moroni’s army with that of the Nephite dissenter Zerahemnah detailed in Alma 43-44.

17 And now behold it came to pass, that when the Lamanites had found that Lehi commanded the city they were again disappointed, for they feared Lehi exceedingly; nevertheless their chief captains had sworn with an oath to attack the city; therefore, they brought up their armies.

18 Now behold, the Lamanites could not get into their forts of security by any other way save by the entrance, because of the highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about, save it were by the entrance.

verse 18 **“highness of the bank . . . and the depth of the ditch”** Dr. F. Richard Hauck has suggested a plausible structure for these fortifications based upon his archeological investigations in the highlands of central Guatemala (“Ancient

Fortifications and the Land of Manti” *This People*, summer 1994, 46-55). If we were to cut a cross section of this defensive barrier or “ridge of earth,” an attacker would encounter, as he attacked the fortified city, an uphill slope leading to a trench. The trench was perhaps seven to ten feet deep and twelve feet wide with an outer sloping wall and an inner vertical wall. On the uphill side of this trench was a palisade of vertical timbers topped by “pickets” or sharp objects which made scaling the timber wall difficult. The vertical distance from the top of the inside embankment to the bottom of the ditch has been found by archaeologist David L. Webster to average 11 meters or about 35 feet, not counting any wooden palisade!

In another article, earthen embankment fortifications found in the area near Tikal in southern Mexico are described: “A trench is the most prominent feature of the earthworks. . . It had a continuous raised embankment along the south side . . . The earthworks extended a total of 9.5 kilometers. . . . The four-meter width of the trench posed an obstacle few Maya could have crossed by jumping. . . Over almost its entire length, outsiders would have had to run uphill to approach the trench, and they would have had to jump upwards, as well as across the trench, to get into the embankment which abutted the south lip. . . . That the trench was impassable is suggested by the fact that at four or five widely separated points along its length we found what appeared to causeways, placed there in order to cross it. At each of these there was an equivalent gap in the embankment. . . . The trench had been cut into limestone bedrock to a depth of three meters and that in its original state the walls of the trench had been nearly vertical. Clearly, anyone who might have fallen into it would have had some difficulty getting out” (“Defensive Earthworks at Tikal,” Dennis E. Puleston and Donald W. Callender, Jr., *Expedition* [Spring 1967], 40-48). Please see the illustration, *Trench and Palisade*.

Another part of the defensive layout of the city was the so-called “place of entrance” already mentioned. This likely consisted of a corridor flanked by the defensive ridges of earth and timber palisades. At the end of the corridor was the only entrance gate into the city. Those in the corridor, then, became easy prey for those manning the defensive ridges. Please view the illustration, *Place of Entrance*.

Hugh Nibley added: “In a good description of a typical Nephite fortification (Alma 49:17-20) we are told that elevation was an important element of defense, the enemy being forced to climb up to the fort [or city], which was surrounded by a high bank and a deep ditch; an important feature was the ‘place of entrance’ where assailants were let into a trap and there cut down by the swords and slings of the most expert fighters in the place (Alma 49:20)” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 418-19).

19 And thus were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way, by casting over stones and arrows at them.

verse 19 Whether these stones were thrown by hand or propelled by slings or by some other means is not clear. It is possible that the arrows were shot from a bow, though they could have been cast (see the commentary for verse 4).

20 Thus they were prepared, yea, a body of their strongest men, with their swords and their slings, to smite down all who should attempt to come into their place of security by the place of entrance; and thus were they prepared to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

21 And it came to pass that the captains of the Lamanites brought up their armies before the place of entrance, and began to contend with the Nephites, to get into their place of security; but behold, they were driven back from time to time, insomuch that they were slain with an immense slaughter.

verse 21 By now the Lamanite captains were becoming desperate. Remember, they had taken an oath to destroy the inhabitants of the city of Noah. It is obvious that their savage and repeated assaults on the Nephites impregnable gate had become suicidal, and eventually “their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain” (verse 23).

22 Now when they found that they could not obtain power over the Nephites by the pass, they began to dig down their banks of earth that they might obtain a pass to their armies, that they might have an equal chance to fight; but behold, in these attempts they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them; and instead of filling up their ditches by pulling down the banks of earth, they were filled up in a measure with their dead and wounded bodies.

verse 22 “they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them” Again, see the commentary for Alma 49:4.

Apparently, the term “pass” here refers to the pathway down the “place of entrance.” It was this skillfully engineered defensive fortification that was the main object of the Lamanite army. It was here they concentrated their attack. They apparently used some type of device to try to excavate or dig into the banks of earth in order to gain entrance into the city. As they engaged themselves in this project they were easy targets for the Nephite soldiers within the city.

23 Thus the Nephites had all power over their enemies; and thus the Lamanites did attempt to destroy the Nephites until their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain; while, on the other hand, there was not a single soul of the Nephites which was slain.

24 There were about fifty who were wounded, who had been exposed to the arrows of the Lamanites through the pass, but they were shielded by their

shields, and their breastplates, and their head-plates, insomuch that their wounds were upon their legs, many of which were very severe.

verse 24 “their wounds were upon their legs” It is likely the Nephites avoided any armor that might restrict their mobility. The Nephite battles were battles of movement, and leg armor would restrict their movement. They had to move freely and quickly to survive. The Book of Mormon describes head-plates and breastplates and arm shields but no leg armor. Thus, the Nephite soldiers were wounded almost solely on their exposed legs.

25 And it came to pass, that when the Lamanites saw that their chief captains were all slain they fled into the wilderness. And it came to pass that they returned to the land of Nephi, to inform their king, Amalickiah, who was a Nephite by birth, concerning their great loss.

26 And it came to pass that he was exceedingly angry with his people, because he had not obtained his desire over the Nephites; he had not subjected them to the yoke of bondage.

27 Yea, he was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood; and this because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people.

verse 27 Amalickiah had been thwarted at every turn by this man Moroni. Foiled yet again, Amalickiah plunges into a monstrous rage and swears an awful and wicked oath—to drink the blood of Moroni.

28 And it came to pass, that on the other hand, the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies.

29 And thus ended the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

30 Yea, and there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent forth to preach among the people.

verse 30 “all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God” Again, we have reference to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Alma Chapter 50

1 And now it came to pass that Moroni did not stop making preparations for war, or to defend his people against the Lamanites; for he caused that his armies should commence in the commencement of the twentieth year of the reign of the judges, that they should commence in digging up heaps of earth round about all the cities, throughout all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

verse 1 Hugh Nibley comments:

Peace again brought prosperity (Alma 49:30), but Moroni was not idle. He launched out on an ambitious program of national fortifications, displaying his usual genius in the design and disposal of the strong places (Alma 50:1-6). First of all, it was necessary to remove a dangerous bulge or salient over on the east coast. [A military “salient” is a part of the battle line which bulges toward the enemy.] The area was cleared of Lamanites and settled by local people and colonists from Zarahemla (verses 7, 9). Thus was Moroni able to shorten and straighten his defense line (verse 8) and having determined the best possible course for the line, he proceeded to fortify it along its entire length from the east [sea] . . . to the west sea (verses 9, 11), again employing not a single wall but a defense in depth, including even the founding of new fortified towns at strategically located places “by the borders” (verses 13-15). At the same time he effected a gradual buildup of military power within the country (verse 10), though his principal concern was ever to keep the peace at home, knowing that it had “been their quarrelings, and their contentions . . . and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (verse 21) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 309-10).

2 And upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers, yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man, round about the cities.

3 And he caused that upon those works of timbers there should be a frame of pickets built upon the timbers round about; and they were strong and high.

verses 1-3 For a discussion of the nature of these Nephite defensive structures, see the commentary for Alma 49:18.

Pickets are sharpened or pointed stakes used for fortification.

4 And he caused towers to be erected that overlooked those works of pickets, and he caused places of security to be built upon those towers, that the stones and the arrows of the Lamanites could not hurt them.

verse 4 These strategically placed towers provided further protection as well as further offensive punch. See an illustration of these towers in the illustration, *Place of Entrance*.

5 And they were prepared that they could cast stones from the top thereof, according to their pleasure and their strength, and slay him who should attempt to approach near the walls of the city.

verse 5 To understand the fortification that made the casting of stones an especially effective defense strategy, see Alma 49:18 and its commentary.

6 Thus Moroni did prepare strongholds against the coming of their enemies, round about every city in all the land.

7 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his armies should go forth into the east wilderness; yea, and they went forth and drove all the Lamanites who were in the east wilderness into their own lands, which were south of the land of Zarahemla.

8 And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.

verse 8 That is, the northern border of the land of Nephi, the Lamanites' land, (and also the southern border of the greater land of Zarahemla) "did run a straight course from the east sea to the west."

Generally it is accepted that *straight* is the correct modifier when *straight* modifies the word *course* and especially when it placed immediately contiguous to *course* (Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32). See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And it came to pass that when Moroni had driven all the Lamanites out of the east wilderness, which was north of the lands of their own possessions, he caused that the inhabitants who were in the land of Zarahemla and in the land round about should go forth into the east wilderness, even to the borders by the seashore, and possess the land.

verse 9 As we speak of the "land of Zarahemla," we might be speaking of the entire Nephite land from the southern border to the northern border with the land Desolation. Or we might be referring to the more limited land surrounding the city of Zarahemla. The former may be referred to as the "greater" land of Zarahemla. In this verse, the more limited land is intended.

Moroni organized colonizers from among those in and around the city of Zarahemla to settle and defend the Nephite cities in the east wilderness.

10 And he also placed armies on the south, in the borders of their possessions, and caused them to erect fortifications that they might secure their armies and their people from the hands of their enemies.

verse 10 The phrase “in the borders” means in the areas or territories near the borders. As the reader now well knows, the term borders might also refer to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5).

11 And thus he cut off all the strongholds of the Lamanites in the east wilderness, yea, and also on the west, fortifying the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, from the west sea, running by the head of the river Sidon—the Nephites possessing all the land northward, yea, even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful, according to their pleasure.

verse 11 “the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi” This is the wilderness that ran east and west and divided the lands of Nephi on the south from the greater land of Zarahemla on the north. It ran from the sea east to the sea west. See the *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*. See also Alma 22:27 and Alma 27:14.

“even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful” Since the land Bountiful is located at the northernmost extremity of the Nephite land, this phrase might have more clearly stated “even all the land which was northward to the land Bountiful.”

12 Thus Moroni, with his armies, which did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them, did seek to cut off the strength and the power of the Lamanites from off the lands of their possessions, that they should have no power upon the lands of their possession.

verse 12 “his armies, which did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them” We will learn that the security and positive morale of Moroni’s soldiers was found, not so much in their ability to defeat their enemies, but in the faith that they would be “delivered at all times” if they kept “the commandments of the Lord” (verse 22). Moroni’s “works” were works of righteousness.

13 And it came to pass that the Nephites began the foundation of a city, and they called the name of the city Moroni; and it was by the east sea; and it was on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites.

verse 13 Moroni seems to fit into the category of city which Hugh Nibley refers to as “sudden cities.” He points out that both Jaredite and Nephite cities did not necessarily have to evolve over a long time. Rather they were built all at one time: “A city would be planned and built all at one time, like a house. Cities were not the product

of a slow gradual accretion from hamlet to village to town to city to metropolis . . . but, if we believe the Book of Mormon, they were built up all at once. Thus we read that ‘the Nephites began the foundation of a city, and they called the name of the city Moroni . . . and they also began a foundation for a city between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron . . . and they called the name of the city, or the land, Nephihah’ (Alma 50:13-14).” Brother Nibley also points to the fact that throughout much of the world’s history this is often the way cities have come into being (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, chapter 29, 411).

14 And they also began a foundation for a city between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron, joining the borders of Aaron and Moroni; and they called the name of the city, or the land, Nephihah.

15 And they also began in that same year to build many cities on the north, one in a particular manner which they called Lehi, which was in the north by the borders of the seashore.

16 And thus ended the twentieth year.

17 And in these prosperous circumstances were the people of Nephi in the commencement of the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

18 And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land.

verses 19-23 These following verses contain an editorial summary by Mormon in which he emphasizes the necessity of understanding the concept and process of making sacred covenants. It is abundantly clear that he wants us to maintain this vital perspective as we study these “captain Moroni chapters” or “war chapters” (Alma 43-62) in the Book of Mormon.

19 And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

verse 19 “And thus we see” This phrase seems to identify this verse’s editorial comment as having been written by Mormon. Grant R. Hardy and Robert E. Parsons commented on identifying the authorship of certain verses within the Book of Mormon. They observed:

Some passages can definitely be ascribed to Mormon: the abridgment of his contributions to the large plates (Mormon 1-7), his sermon and letters recorded by Moroni (Moroni 7-9), and the explanatory comments that he inserted into his narrative. In some of these interpolations he identifies himself (Words of Mormon; 3 Nephi 5:8-26; 26:6-12; 28:24; 4 Nephi 1:23), but it seems likely that the frequent ‘thus we see’

comments are also Mormon's attempting to stress matters of particular spiritual importance to his readers (see also Alma 24:19, 27; 50:19-23; Helaman 3:27-30; 12:1-2) (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, "Book of Mormon Plates and Records").

20 Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 20 Here again is a restatement of the so-called "promise/curse" of the Book of Mormon.

21 And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

verse 21 Mormon lists the causes of wars and destructions among the Nephites. Actually all are a form of pride or idolatry. See the discussion of idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

22 And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

23 But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges.

verses 22-23 Can a people maintain their righteousness and happiness even in an atmosphere of war and rumors of war? Apparently so!

24 And it came to pass that the twenty and second year of the reign of the judges also ended in peace; yea, and also the twenty and third year.

25 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges, there would also have been peace among the people of Nephi had it not been for a contention which took place among them concerning the land of Lehi, and the land of Morianton, which joined upon the borders of Lehi; both of which were on the borders by the seashore.

26 For behold, the people who possessed the land of Morianton did claim a part of the land of Lehi; therefore there began to be a warm contention between them,

insomuch that the people of Morianton took up arms against their brethren, and they were determined by the sword to slay them.

27 But behold, the people who possessed the land of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni, and appealed unto him for assistance; for behold they were not in the wrong.

28 And it came to pass that when the people of Morianton, who were led by a man whose name was Morianton, found that the people of Lehi had fled to the camp of Moroni, they were exceedingly fearful lest the army of Moroni should come upon them and destroy them.

29 Therefore, Morianton put it into their hearts that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water, and take possession of the land which was northward.

verse 29 “they should flee to the land which was northward” Morianton sought to leave the Nephite land and settle north of the land Bountiful in the lands previously inhabited by the Jaredites.

30 And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (which would have been a cause to have been lamented) but behold, Morianton being a man of much passion, therefore he was angry with one of his maid servants, and he fell upon her and beat her much.

verse 30 “which would have been a cause to have been lamented” Why would the departure and resettling of the people of Morianton have been “a cause to have been lamented”? See the commentary for verse 32.

31 And it came to pass that she fled, and came over to the camp of Moroni, and told Moroni all things concerning the matter, and also concerning their intentions to flee into the land northward.

32 Now behold, the people who were in the land Bountiful, or rather Moroni, feared that they would hearken to the words of Morianton and unite with his people, and thus he would obtain possession of those parts of the land, which would lay a foundation for serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea, which consequences would lead to the overthrow of their liberty.

verse 32 Both the people who were in the land Bountiful and Captain Moroni feared that the people in the lands north of Bountiful would enter into an agreement which would prove unfavorable to the Nephites. They felt this agreement might even “lay a foundation for serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea, which consequences would lead to the overthrow of their liberty.” Why were Morianton and his people not allowed the freedom to leave Nephite lands? Why did there seem to be restrictive emigration laws which limited their travel? It seems likely that Moroni feared that Morianton would add to his supporters among the people north of Bountiful and

thereby “lay a foundation for serious consequences.” Bountiful was a most important Nephite military base of that day. It was the northernmost and most important fortification of the northern border of Nephite territory during the days of Moroni. Its purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from getting boxed in by the Lamanites or other enemies to the north (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6-7). Moroni feared that Morianton would enter into a political or military agreement with the people in the far north which would be potentially harmful to the Nephites.

33 Therefore Moroni sent an army, with their camp, to head the people of Morianton, to stop their flight into the land northward.

verse 33 To “head” is to intercept.

34 And it came to pass that they did not head them until they had come to the borders of the land Desolation; and there they did head them, by the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.

verse 34 “narrow pass” Just exactly what is this “narrow pass” referred to here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Alma 52:9, Mormon 2:29, and Mormon 3:5)? It is apparent from these verses of scripture, that the pass is not the same as the narrow neck of land itself. Rather the pass is some kind of specific feature of and within the neck itself. It is clear that parties passed near the city of Bountiful to gain access to this pass from the eastern seashore area. Here a Nephite army led by Teancum intercepted Morianton’s fleeing group just as both groups arrived at a very specific point: “the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.” John L. Sorenson has provided a compelling solution to this puzzle. He suggests that the answer lies in a careful study of the specific geographic details of the isthmus of Tehuantepec (see the map, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting* and the supplemental article *Book of Mormon Geography*). Dr. Sorenson observes: “An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging a couple of miles wide and rising 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country running west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River.” This formation provides the only reliable year-round route from the east coast area of the land Bountiful “northward” into the land Desolation or to what is now Veracruz.

A great deal of land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as twelve feet in the rainy season. At times during that season this ridge pass would indeed lead “by the sea, on the west and on the east” for the water in the flooded basins would be on both sides of the ridge and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea with which the flood waters were continuous. Even in the dry season, the lower terrain is choked with thorny brush, laced with lagoons, and rendered impractical as a

customary route. This formation runs from near Minatitlan, the modern city on the Coatzacoalcos, west about twenty miles to the city of Acayucan (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 43).

35 And it came to pass that the army which was sent by Moroni, which was led by a man whose name was Teancum, did meet the people of Morianton; and so stubborn were the people of Morianton, (being inspired by his wickedness and his flattering words) that a battle commenced between them, in the which Teancum did slay Morianton and defeat his army, and took them prisoners, and returned to the camp of Moroni. And thus ended the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

verse 35 We will become quite well acquainted with this exceptionally brave Nephite captain, Teancum, in the ensuing chapters. It is perhaps no coincidence that his name is similar to a Quiche Mayan hero, captain Tecum, who fought against the Spanish intruders in AD 1524 (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 267). Tecum lived in Guatemala, probably near the site of the Book of Mormon City of Nephi.

36 And thus were the people of Morianton brought back. And upon their covenanting to keep the peace they were restored to the land of Morianton, and a union took place between them and the people of Lehi; and they were also restored to their lands.

verse 36 Here, the phrase “people of Lehi” refers to the Nephites in the land of Nephi with whom they had previously contended.

37 And it came to pass that in the same year that the people of Nephi had peace restored unto them, that Nephihah, the second chief judge, died, having filled the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God.

38 Nevertheless, he had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman.

verse 38 Alma previously had turned over the office of chief judge to Nephihah so Alma could concentrate on his priestly duties (Alma 4:11-18). In this verse, for the first time, we learn an interesting detail of Alma’s selection of Nephihah to be chief judge. We learn that Alma attempted to pass on the regalia of his office, including the sword of Laban, to Nephihah, possibly as a way of reinforcing Nephihah’s civil authority and uniting the people behind him. Nephihah had refused to accept these objects, and consequently Alma later gave them to his son, Helaman. With the sword of Laban in his possession, Helaman reestablished the church, served as high priest, and became the

great military commander who led the two thousand stripling warriors (Alma 45:22; 46:6; 53:18-22; 56). Thereafter, the priestly regalia were passed on and kept continuously by the religious leaders. It is apparent that the man who had possession of the sword of Laban was looked upon by the people as having authority.

39 Behold, it came to pass that the son of Nephihah was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, in the stead of his father; yea, he was appointed chief judge and governor over the people, with an oath and sacred ordinance to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime.

verse 39 It has been pointed out that the Nephite government, while a fair and righteous government, was not a democracy or anything like unto it.

The chief judge much more resembled a king than an American president. Once elected, he never again submitted himself to the people. After being proclaimed chief judge by the voice of the people, Alma enjoyed life tenure. When he chose to resign because of internal difficulties he selected his own successor (see Alma 4:16). . . . In the next succession, the judgeship passed to the chief judge's son and thence "by right" to the successive sons of the Judges (see Alma 50:39; Helaman 1:13).

Looking at the Book of Mormon as a whole, it seems clear that most of the principles traditionally associated with the American Constitution are slighted or disregarded altogether. All of the constitutional checks and balances are missing. When Judges were instituted, Mosiah provided that a greater judge could remove lesser judges. Also a certain number of lesser judges were empowered to try venal [open to bribery or other corruption] higher judges, but the book records no instance of impeachment. It was apparently not a routine working principle. All other limitations on government are missing. There was no written constitution defining ruler's powers. The people could not remove the chief judge at the polls, for he stood for election only once. There were not three branches of government to check one another, for a single office encompassed all government powers. The chief judge was judge, executive, and legislator rolled into one, just as the earlier kings had been (see Mosiah 29:13). In war time he raised men, armed them, and collected provisions (see Alma 46:34; 60:1-9). He was called interchangeably chief judge and governor (see Alma 2:16; 50:39; 60:1; and 3 Nephi 3:1). He was also lawmaker. There is no ordinary legislature in the Book of Mormon. Alma gave Nephihah the "power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given" (Alma 4:16). Any major constitutional changes, such as a return to formal kingship, so far as the record speaks, was the prerogative of the chief judge (see Alma 2:2-7; 51:1-7) (Richard L. Bushman, *BYU Studies*, volume 17, number 1, 14, 16).

40 Now behold, his name was Pahoran. And Pahoran did fill the seat of his father, and did commence his reign in the end of the twenty and fourth year, over the people of Nephi.

verse 40 The time of transition from one leader to another is a logical time for the opposition to rise up and oppose the new leader—wanting instead a different leader or an alternate form of government. We will learn that in this case the opposition, the “king-men,” do indeed rise up in opposition.

An interesting side note—Pahoran’s name probably should be spelled Parhoron. In the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the first four occurrences of this name were spelled Parhoron (see also Alma 52:2-3). There is good evidence to suggest that as Joseph came to unfamiliar proper names in his translating of the Book of Mormon, he spelled them out for the scribe (see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A).

Alma Chapter 51

In this chapter we will encounter two groups, the “king-men” and the “freemen.” We have discussed these previously. Please review that discussion in the introductory commentary for Alma 46 before proceeding.

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, they having established peace between the people of Lehi and the people of Morianton concerning their lands, and having commenced the twenty and fifth year in peace;

2 Nevertheless, they did not long maintain an entire peace in the land, for there began to be a contention among the people concerning the chief judge Pahoran; for behold, there were a part of the people who desired that a few particular points of the law should be altered.

verse 2 “there began to be a contention among the people concerning the chief judge Pahoran” This contention, as we will learn, was created by those of the elite class, the “king-men,” who have decided it would be in their best interest to change the form of Nephite government, by law, to a monarchy (verses 4-5). They have resolved to make a concerted effort toward this end. The opposition to this dangerous movement was led by the chief judge Pahoran, who “would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered” (verses 2-3). Pahoran was supported in this by a party calling themselves the “freemen” (verse 6). An election will be held with the result that: “the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen” (Alma 51:7).

Hugh Nibley added:

But the royalists had not played all their cards; their agitation had been timed to coincide with a move from the direction of their banished leader Amalickiah, who “had again stirred up the . . . Lamanites . . . and [was] preparing for war with all diligence” (Alma 51:9). Counting on Amalickiah’s aid, the beaten party “were glad in their hearts” of his approach, and “refused to take up arms” to resist it, being “wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty” who had given them a setback (Alma 51:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 311).

3 But behold, Pahoran would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered; therefore, he did not hearken to those who had sent in their voices with their petitions concerning the altering of the law.

4 Therefore, those who were desirous that the law should be altered were angry with him, and desired that he should no longer be chief judge over the land; therefore there arose a warm dispute concerning the matter, but not unto bloodshed.

5 And it came to pass that those who were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat were called king-men, for they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land.

verse 5 The “king-men” apparently regarded themselves as having been disinherited or disenfranchised when Mosiah abolished the kingship. The king-men are not necessarily of Nephite descent. They seem to constitute a distinct population with cultural features and a territory all their own. Perhaps they descended from Jaredite or Mulekite ancestry or from some other indigenous culture. John L. Sorenson wrote of them: “The king-men, inhabited a distinct region, for when Moroni ‘commanded that his army should go against those king-men,’ they were ‘hewn down’ and compelled to fly the ‘title of liberty’ standard ‘in their cities’ (Alma 51:17-20). This language confirms that they, like the Amlicites, had a base territory of their own and that it was a significant distance from the city of Zarahemla. Again, quite surely, it lay downriver” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, 16-17).

It is interesting that the archaeological records of Mesoamerica state that in the first century BC, a group of elite in Mesoamerica began to rally for control. By AD 200 their influence was much stronger. Years later, during the classic Mayan period, which extended to the tenth century AD, the elite hierarchy ruled totally in Mesoamerica (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 276).

6 And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the freemen had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.

verse 6 As opposed to the “king-men” who were the moneyed elite, the “freemen” were the common people who supported the government of the Nephites. The label “freemen” did not designate a political party or organization, rather it simply denoted the body of common citizens supporting Pahoran. They obviously also had a religious conviction in common as they “had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.”

7 And it came to pass that this matter of their contention was settled by the voice of the people. And it came to pass that the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen, and Pahoran retained the judgment-seat, which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty, who also put the king-men to silence, that they durst not oppose but were obliged to maintain the cause of freedom.

verse 7 “Pahoran retained the judgment-seat, which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty”

An interesting error was made in the transcription of this phrase which caused a subtle change in its meaning. The original manuscript stated that Pahoran’s victory “caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also among the people of liberty.” When Oliver was copying this phrase from the original manuscript onto the printer’s manuscript, he made an error. Instead of writing the word *among* he wrote the word *many*. Thus the printer’s manuscript then read: “which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many the people of liberty.” When the printer tried to read this, he saw that it wasn’t good English; and so he wrote in pencil right above *many* the word *of*, so that when he set the type he put in: “which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty.” Thus the phrase as it now reads implies that not all of the people of liberty rejoiced at the retention of Pahoran. This was not the intent of the phrase in the original manuscript (Royal Skousen, “The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

8 Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people.

9 But behold, this was a critical time for such contentions to be among the people of Nephi; for behold, Amalickiah had again stirred up the hearts of the people of the Lamanites against the people of the Nephites, and he was gathering together soldiers from all parts of his land, and arming them, and preparing for war with all diligence; for he had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni.

10 But behold, we shall see that his promise which he made was rash; nevertheless, he did prepare himself and his armies to come to battle against the Nephites.

verse 10 “that his promise” Critical evaluation of the original Book of Mormon text has revealed that this phrase is a case of accidentally dropping one of two adjacent *t*’s, which changed “that this promise” in the original manuscript to “that his promise” in the printer’s manuscript. All the printed editions have followed the error.

11 Now his armies were not so great as they had hitherto been, because of the many thousands who had been slain by the hand of the Nephites; but notwithstanding their great loss, Amalickiah had gathered together a wonderfully great army, insomuch that he feared not to come down to the land of Zarahemla.

verse 11 “Amalickiah had gathered together a wonderfully great army” As this phrase implies, the armies of the Lamanites were impressively large in numbers (see also Alma 2:24, 28; 49:6; Helaman 1:19). John L. Sorenson had observed: “Such a large population is even more difficult to account for by natural increase of the original

Laman-Lemuel faction [to a greater degree] than in the case of Nephi's group, for the eventual Lamanite absolute numbers are disproportionately high. None of this demographic picture makes sense unless 'others' had become part of the Lamanite economy and polity" (John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 28).

12 Yea, even Amalickiah did himself come down, at the head of the Lamanites. And it was in the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges; and it was at the same time that they had begun to settle the affairs of their contentions concerning the chief judge, Pahoran.

13 And it came to pass that when the men who were called king-men had heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against them, they were glad in their hearts; and they refused to take up arms, for they were so wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty, that they would not take up arms to defend their country.

14 And it came to pass that when Moroni saw this, and also saw that the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land, he was exceedingly wroth because of the stubbornness of those people whom he had labored with so much diligence to preserve; yea, he was exceedingly wroth; his soul was filled with anger against them.

verse 14 Moroni is incensed by this elitist dissension in time of national crisis, and he will seek and obtain "power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to death. For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction" (Alma 51:15-16).

We learn an interesting lesson from Moroni. It is obvious that he was long suffering and not easily provoked. He only resorted to slaying dissenters when the dissenters had undertaken to do something that immediately and seriously threatened the lives and liberties of the righteous innocent who would not agree with the dissenters. For example, he had not used military force against Amalickiah until Amalickiah had departed with his followers for the land of Nephi, where he intended to (and later did) strengthen the armies of the Lamanites and stir them up to attack the Nephites (Alma 46:30-31). Likewise, Moroni had not used force against Morianton until he attempted to lead his dissenting people to another land which, under the circumstances of the time, would have "serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea which . . . would lead to the overthrow of their liberty" (Alma 50:32). Again, as stated in this verse, Moroni did not use military force against the king-men until "the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land" (see *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, "Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon," 63).

15 And it came to pass that he sent a petition, with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it, and give him (Moroni) power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to death.

verse 15 “desiring that he should read it” One point of some interest but little importance is that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase as, “desiring that he should heed it.”

16 For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction. And it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people.

verse 16 Indeed dissent “had been hitherto” and would yet be “a cause of all their destruction.” Lynn D. Wardle has commented upon the phenomenon of dissent in the Book of Mormon:

Every reference to dissent portrays it as a problem, an evil condition, and a harbinger of even greater problems and evils. For example, [the younger] Alma was “a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God” because he “[caused] much dissension among the people” (Mosiah 27:9); the dissenters who joined the Lamanites “cause[d] much sorrow unto those Nephites who did remain in the land” (3 Nephi 1:28); dissent and intrigue caused the loss of Nephite land and cities (Alma 53:8); iniquity and dissensions caused the Nephites to be “placed in the most dangerous of circumstances” (Alma 53:9; 46:7). Frequently, the Book of Mormon notes that dissension directly led to war. Often it was the dissenters from the Nephites who “stirred up to anger” the Lamanites against the Nephites and caused them to “[commence] a war with their brethren” (Helaman 4:4; 11:24; see also Alma 46-47). The Gadianton robbers existed because of, and their success depended upon, “dissenters that went forth unto them” (Helaman 11:25; 3 Nephi 2:18; 7:12). It is no wonder that Mormon declared that contention among the Nephites was “a cause of all their destruction” (“Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 55).

17 And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty.

18 And it came to pass that the armies did march forth against them; and they did pull down their pride and their nobility, insomuch that as they did lift their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni they were hewn down and leveled to the earth.

verse 18 These supporters of Amalickiah have been portrayed as pacifists, and it has been suggested by some that Moroni was a bit too harsh in dealing with them. Hugh Nibley has pointed out:

The fiction has been diligently cultivated that Moroni on this occasion put all the pacifists to death. Those put to death were not those who had refused to take up arms to defend their country, but those who had taken up arms to attack it and who were on their way to join the enemy across the border, glad in their hearts when they heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against their country; they were dissenters to the enemy. Pacifists? They were all members of Amalickiah's army, armed to their teeth on their way to join the enemy when Moroni caught them. Armed violence, not pacifism, had been their program from the beginning. We can sum up the issue by referring to Alma 51:17: "And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty." It was a coalition of the important people, the persons who lifted the sword to fight against Moroni; it was a pitched battle, not an execution. If you had arms in your hands and were fighting, then if you didn't lay them down, if you didn't surrender (as in any war), you had to suffer the consequences. "Insomuch that as they did lift their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni they were hewn down. . . . And those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison" (Alma 51:18-19) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 98).

19 And it came to pass that there were four thousand of those dissenters who were hewn down by the sword; and those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period.

verse 19 It is certain that Moroni understood the limitations of using force against these king-men followers of Amalickiah. It is for this reason that he used force only as a last resort. He knew that coercion and force would never convert their consciences. By force he could stop the dissenters from doing irreparable damage to the Nephite people, but he knew the sword would never lead to repentance and conversion. These are matters of conscience. Because the conscience virtually always revolts when force is applied, force is ineffective in reclaiming dissenters.

"those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period" Obviously, there were periods when martial law was imposed in the Nephite society.

20 And the remainder of those dissenters, rather than be smitten down to the earth by the sword, yielded to the standard of liberty, and were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defense of their country.

verse 20 "upon their towers" See the commentary on "towers" in Omni 1:22.

21 And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men, that there were not any known by the appellation of king-men; and thus he put an end to the stubbornness and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren, and to fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.

verse 21 We may note here that those followers of Amalickiah who surrendered rather than be killed, were dealt with mercifully by Moroni. They were not executed for treason. They were only required henceforth to “fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.”

22 Behold, it came to pass that while Moroni was thus breaking down the wars and contentions among his own people, and subjecting them to peace and civilization, and making regulations to prepare for war against the Lamanites, behold, the Lamanites had come into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

23 And it came to pass that the Nephites were not sufficiently strong in the city of Moroni; therefore Amalickiah did drive them, slaying many. And it came to pass that Amalickiah took possession of the city, yea, possession of all their fortifications.

24 And those who fled out of the city of Moroni came to the city of Nephihah; and also the people of the city of Lehi gathered themselves together, and made preparations and were ready to receive the Lamanites to battle.

25 But it came to pass that Amalickiah would not suffer the Lamanites to go against the city of Nephihah to battle, but kept them down by the seashore, leaving men in every city to maintain and defend it.

26 And thus he went on, taking possession of many cities, the city of Nephihah, and the city of Lehi, and the city of Morianton, and the city of Omner, and the city of Gid, and the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore.

verse 26 “the city of Nephihah” It is likely that the mentioning of Nephihah in this verse as one of the conquered cities is an error. The previous verse suggests that Amalickiah flanked Nephihah because of its heavy fortifications. Also we know that Nephihah was captured much later (see Alma 58:61).

27 And thus had the Lamanites obtained, by the cunning of Amalickiah, so many cities, by their numberless hosts, all of which were strongly fortified after the manner of the fortifications of Moroni; all of which afforded strongholds for the Lamanites.

28 And it came to pass that they marched to the borders of the land Bountiful, driving the Nephites before them and slaying many.

verse 28 Hugh Nibley has contributed a colorful description of this “blitzkrieg” campaign of Amalickiah’s:

Amalickiah . . . was leading his greatest army yet into the weakest parts of the land and sweeping all before him. Bypassing the strongest places, he flanked the Nephites along the coast in a lightning move that knocked out the weaker fortified places one after another and sent the occupants fleeing like sheep from one collapsing fortification to the next as he “went on, taking possession of many cities” (Alma 51:26-28). It was a well-executed operation that spread panic and converted many of Moroni’s strong places into Lamanite bases (Alma 51:27). Then the inevitable happened. The Lamanites in their forward rush having overextended themselves met an unpleasant rebuff when their spearhead was blunted by a flanking blow of the wily Teancum, who after bringing their advance guard to a halt continued to harass the army with his highly trained and highly mobile troops (Alma 51:31). Then on a two-man night patrol such as able and enterprising generals sometimes fancy, Teancum himself slipped into Amalickiah’s tent and killed him in his sleep, after which he hurried back to his own headquarters and alerted his forces to an expected enemy attack at dawn (Alma 51:33-36) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 312-13).

29 But it came to pass that they were met by Teancum, who had slain Morianton and had headed his people in his flight.

verse 29 “who had slain Morianton and had headed his people in his flight” Again, the verb to “head” means to head-off or to intercept.

30 And it came to pass that he headed Amalickiah also, as he was marching forth with his numerous army that he might take possession of the land Bountiful, and also the land northward.

verse 30 Again we are reminded of the vital strategic importance of the city of Bountiful. It was the northernmost and most important fortification of the northern border of Nephite territory during the days of Moroni. Bountiful defended the “narrow pass” that led to the land northward (see the discussion of the “narrow pass” in the commentary for Alma 50:34). Bountiful’s military purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from getting boxed in by the Lamanites or other enemies on the north (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6-7). At this time Moroni feared that Amalickiah would enter into a political or military agreement with the people in the far north which would be potentially harmful to the Nephites.

31 But behold he met with a disappointment by being repulsed by Teancum and his men, for they were great warriors; for every man of Teancum did exceed the

Lamanites in their strength and in their skill of war, insomuch that they did gain advantage over the Lamanites.

32 And it came to pass that they did harass them, insomuch that they did slay them even until it was dark. And it came to pass that Teancum and his men did pitch their tents in the borders of the land Bountiful; and Amalickiah did pitch his tents in the borders on the beach by the seashore, and after this manner were they driven.

33 And it came to pass that when the night had come, Teancum and his servant stole forth and went out by night, and went into the camp of Amalickiah; and behold, sleep had overpowered them because of their much fatigue, which was caused by the labors and heat of the day.

34 And it came to pass that Teancum stole privily into the tent of the king, and put a javelin to his heart; and he did cause the death of the king immediately that he did not awake his servants.

verse 34 “Privily” means secretly or privately.

There is no indication in the text as to how the Lamanite camp was laid out. Possibly the commander’s tent was placed somewhere near the center of the camp, in a manner similar to those of ancient Israel. If this were the case, then Teancum’s killing of Amalickiah is even a more significant act than it first appears. Teancum was obviously a man of great courage, with a strong and independent spirit (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 274).

35 And he returned again privily to his own camp, and behold, his men were asleep, and he awoke them and told them all the things that he had done.

36 And he caused that his armies should stand in readiness, lest the Lamanites had awakened and should come upon them.

37 And thus endeth the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus endeth the days of Amalickiah.

verse 37 Teancum will now strengthen his own positions by digging in and awaiting reinforcements from Moroni (Alma 52:6-7). We will learn, however, that Moroni was pinned down on the west coast and could offer little assistance. Hugh Nibley added:

The Nephites with their inferior numbers were being forced to fight that kind of a war that all commanders dread—a war on two fronts. Ammoron, the brother and successor of Amalickiah, made the most of this advantage to himself and sent a strong diversionary force to occupy Moroni and if possible split the Nephite forces even more, while harassing them everywhere and keeping them off-balance by sallies and infiltrations from the numerous former Nephite strong places now held by the Lamanites (Alma 52:11-13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 313).

It is of interest to note that Teancum killed Amalickiah on the last day of the year (see also Alma 52:1). Note in verse 33 that the Lamanite soldiers were especially fatigued from their fighting and march in the “heat of the day.” Could this be a mistake? Would the days be hot near the last day of the year? Did the Nephite calendar correspond with ours today? Would this time of year correspond to the Nephite winter? Then why would the days have been hot? It is likely that the Book of Mormon story took place in tropical Mesoamerica, and thus these days might well have been hot. If Joseph Smith had simply made up the “golden Bible” on the basis of his own experience and the locality where he lived, as some critics believe, then the killing of Amalickiah by Teancum should have occurred during western New York’s windy, icy winter. And Joseph might have described this event as occurring in cold winter.

It is also worth noting that throughout Mesoamerica “omens were regularly . . . tied to events of the last, or first, day. . . . To awaken on the first day of a new year to find their leader dead would have been far more unnerving to [this] omen-conscious [people] than we moderns may appreciate” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 275).

Alma Chapter 52

Scripture Mastery

Alma 52 Captain Moroni and Teancum win an important battle over a powerful Lamanite army led by a Zoramite Captain named Jacob—they decoy him out of his stronghold in the city of Mulek.

1 And now, it came to pass in the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, behold, when the Lamanites awoke on the first morning of the first month, behold, they found Amalickiah was dead in his own tent; and they also saw that Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day.

verse 1 Obviously the charismatic Amalickiah had held together this Lamanite army by the force of his personality. His death led to immediate demoralization and despair, and panic began to spread among his troops. Regarding the technique of leadership of the Lamanite rulers, it has been observed: “They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition or ideals” (John L. Sorenson, “Book of Mormon Peoples.” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1).

2 And now, when the Lamanites saw this they were affrighted; and they abandoned their design in marching into the land northward, and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications.

3 And it came to pass that the brother of Amalickiah was appointed king over the people; and his name was Ammoron; thus king Ammoron, the brother of king Amalickiah, was appointed to reign in his stead.

4 And it came to pass that he did command that his people should maintain those cities, which they had taken by the shedding of blood; for they had not taken any cities save they had lost much blood.

5 And now, Teancum saw that the Lamanites were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken, and those parts of the land which they had obtained possession of; and also seeing the enormity of their number, Teancum thought it was not expedient that he should attempt to attack them in their forts.

6 But he kept his men round about, as if making preparations for war; yea, and truly he was preparing to defend himself against them, by casting up walls round about and preparing places of resort.

verse 6 “places of resort” In this context, a place of resort is a defensive retreat, somewhere the people might go for safety and security.

7 And it came to pass that he kept thus preparing for war until Moroni had sent a large number of men to strengthen his army.

8 And Moroni also sent orders unto him that he should retain all the prisoners who fell into his hands; for as the Lamanites had taken many prisoners, that he should retain all the prisoners of the Lamanites as a ransom for those whom the Lamanites had taken.

verse 8 Part of the strength of the Lamanite army lay in the vast numbers of troops. On the other hand the Nephite armies were smaller and more efficient. Thus each individual soldier was more vital to the Nephite army than was each man to the Lamanite army.

9 And he also sent orders unto him that he should fortify the land Bountiful, and secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side.

verse 9 Keep in mind the previously emphasized vital nature of the city of Bountiful as a fortification of the northeastern border of Nephite territory. Its purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from becoming boxed in by the Lamanites (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6-7).

For a discussion of the “narrow pass” see the commentary for Alma 50:34.

10 And Moroni also sent unto him, desiring him that he would be faithful in maintaining that quarter of the land, and that he would seek every opportunity to scourge the Lamanites in that quarter, as much as was in his power, that perhaps he might take again by stratagem or some other way those cities which had been taken out of their hands; and that he also would fortify and strengthen the cities round about, which had not fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.

verse 10 To “scourge” is to punish or inflict injury upon. Moroni commanded Teancum to look for opportunities to harass the Lamanites as much as possible and perhaps even a chance to damage them significantly.

“in that quarter” Apparently during this period the greater land of Zarahemla was divided into quarters. Teancum would now be working in the Bountiful quarter or northeast quarter (see also Alma 52:13; 53:8; 58:35). We also have reference to a Manti quarter or southwest quarter (Alma 43:25-26; 56:1-2, 9; 58:30). Moroni was in another “part” of the land (Alma 59:5-6), and may well have been their way of referring to the southeast quarter. We have no particular reference to the northwestern quarter though we might speculate that it might have been referred to as the Ammonihah or Noah quarter.

11 And he also said unto him, I would come unto you, but behold, the Lamanites are upon us in the borders of the land by the west sea; and behold, I go against them, therefore I cannot come unto you.

12 Now, the king (Ammoron) had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and had made known unto the queen concerning the death of his brother, and had gathered together a large number of men, and had marched forth against the Nephites on the borders by the west sea.

verse 12 Apparently Ammoron had been present in the land Bountiful when his brother was killed. He then immediately left to return to the land of Nephi and inform the queen, Amalickiah's widow, of the king's death. Once there, Ammoron gathered a powerful Lamanite army and advanced upon the southwest quadrant of the land of Zarahemla. Obviously Ammoron's strategy was to undermine the Nephite effectiveness in battle by forcing them to fight on two fronts.

13 And thus he was endeavoring to harass the Nephites, and to draw away a part of their forces to that part of the land, while he had commanded those whom he had left to possess the cities which he had taken, that they should also harass the Nephites on the borders by the east sea, and should take possession of their lands as much as it was in their power, according to the power of their armies.

verse 13 "to draw away a part of their forces to that part of the land" Ammoron's strategy was to draw part of the Nephite army away from the eastern territories into the southwest quadrant.

"he had commanded those whom he had left to possess the cities which he had taken" Ammoron had left his forces in the area near the east sea in order to return to the land of Nephi. He desired these forces to harass those Nephite easterners and continue to take over and hold their lands as they were able.

14 And thus were the Nephites in those dangerous circumstances in the ending of the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

verse 14 The "dangerous circumstances" were created by the Nephites' having to fight on two separate fronts.

15 But behold, it came to pass in the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, that Teancum, by the command of Moroni—who had established armies to protect the south and the west borders of the land, and had begun his march towards the land Bountiful, that he might assist Teancum with his men in retaking the cities which they had lost—

16 And it came to pass that Teancum had received orders to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and retake it if it were possible.

17 And it came to pass that Teancum made preparations to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and march forth with his army against the Lamanites; but he saw that it was impossible that he could overpower them while they were in their fortifications; therefore he abandoned his designs and returned again to the city

Bountiful, to wait for the coming of Moroni, that he might receive strength to his army.

18 And it came to pass that Moroni did arrive with his army at the land of Bountiful, in the latter end of the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

19 And in the commencement of the twenty and eighth year, Moroni and Teancum and many of the chief captains held a council of war—what they should do to cause the Lamanites to come out against them to battle; or that they might by some means flatter them out of their strongholds, that they might gain advantage over them and take again the city of Mulek.

verse 19 William J. Hamblin provides insight on this verse: “Actual battlefield operations usually represented only a small portion of a campaign. Scouts and spies reconnoitered for food, trails, and the location of enemy troops. Battle plans were generally made shortly before the enemy was encountered and frequently took the form of a council, as Moroni held in Alma 52:19” (“Book of Mormon, History of Warfare” In, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1).

20 And it came to pass they sent embassies to the army of the Lamanites, which protected the city of Mulek, to their leader, whose name was Jacob, desiring him that he would come out with his armies to meet them upon the plains between the two cities. But behold, Jacob, who was a Zoramite, would not come out with his army to meet them upon the plains.

verse 20 Hugh Nibley provides helpful insight into this verse and those which follow:

But how was a major city, superbly fortified by Moroni’s own foresight, to be taken? The first step was a logical one. It was the ancient custom of warfare to invite the occupants of a city to come out on the open plain and engage in a fair contest, or, as the Nephites put it, “upon fair grounds”; the Nephite commanders in issuing such an invitation to the comfortably ensconced opposition hardly expected the Lamanites to comply with a request so disadvantageous to themselves, but they thought it was worth a try and at any rate it was the conventional thing to do. Their next move was to try a decoy trick. Teancum allowed the Lamanites to discover a task-force of his moving along the coast and to give it chase; Moroni then slipped into the city behind them and overpowered the defenders, characteristically sparing all who yielded up their arms (verses 22-25). Then he too took the coast route on the heels of the Lamanites who were chasing Teancum. As a secondary diversion a small Nephite force under the [feared commander] Lehi had issued out of the main base at Bountiful and met the Lamanites head on (verse 27). Confused by this new development, the Lamanites sought counsel in safety by returning to Mulek, even as it occurred to them with a shock that in dashing forth they had left that city only lightly defended; and so their return to

Mulek turned into a wild race with the Nephites to see who would get there first (verse 27-28). Bent only on reaching home-base in safety, the exhausted Lamanites with Lehi hot behind them ran smack into Moroni's army coming up behind them. That was the last straw (verses 28-32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 314-15).

21 And it came to pass that Moroni, having no hopes of meeting them upon fair grounds, therefore, he resolved upon a plan that he might decoy the Lamanites out of their strongholds.

22 Therefore he caused that Teancum should take a small number of men and march down near the seashore; and Moroni and his army, by night, marched in the wilderness, on the west of the city Mulek; and thus, on the morrow, when the guards of the Lamanites had discovered Teancum, they ran and told it unto Jacob, their leader.

23 And it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did march forth against Teancum, supposing by their numbers to overpower Teancum because of the smallness of his numbers. And as Teancum saw the armies of the Lamanites coming out against him he began to retreat down by the seashore, northward.

24 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that he began to flee, they took courage and pursued them with vigor. And while Teancum was thus leading away the Lamanites who were pursuing them in vain, behold, Moroni commanded that a part of his army who were with him should march forth into the city, and take possession of it.

25 And thus they did, and slew all those who had been left to protect the city, yea, all those who would not yield up their weapons of war.

26 And thus Moroni had obtained possession of the city Mulek with a part of his army, while he marched with the remainder to meet the Lamanites when they should return from the pursuit of Teancum.

27 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue Teancum until they came near the city Bountiful, and then they were met by Lehi and a small army, which had been left to protect the city Bountiful.

28 And now behold, when the chief captains of the Lamanites had beheld Lehi with his army coming against them, they fled in much confusion, lest perhaps they should not obtain the city Mulek before Lehi should overtake them; for they were wearied because of their march, and the men of Lehi were fresh.

29 Now the Lamanites did not know that Moroni had been in their rear with his army; and all they feared was Lehi and his men.

30 Now Lehi was not desirous to overtake them till they should meet Moroni and his army.

31 And it came to pass that before the Lamanites had retreated far they were surrounded by the Nephites, by the men of Moroni on one hand, and the men of

Lehi on the other, all of whom were fresh and full of strength; but the Lamanites were wearied because of their long march.

32 And Moroni commanded his men that they should fall upon them until they had given up their weapons of war.

verse 32 Here is further running commentary from Hugh Nibley on this verse and the few which follow:

With his usual forbearance, Moroni waived total victory and spared all the Lamanites who would stop fighting him. But their leader was Jacob, a Zoramite who hated the Nephites as only a dissenter could hate; with an elite guard he tried to fight his way out of the sack but died in the attempt (verses 34-35). Moroni immediately offered the usual easy terms to his followers: "Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood" (verse 37). Even so, those who would not surrender were not killed but disarmed, bound, and marched off to the great central prison compound at Bountiful (verse 39). The prisoner of war problem was now becoming a very serious one for the Nephites. Their best solution was to put their prisoners to work, apparently because it was easy to guard them while at their labor, and because the Nephites were frightfully short of manpower (Alma 53:1). The work was mainly the conversion of Bountiful into a very strong "stalag" [a military camp established to manage prisoners of war], with ditch and breastwork, more of Moroni's ingenuity (Alma 53:3-5) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 315).

33 And it came to pass that Jacob, being their leader, being also a Zoramite, and having an unconquerable spirit, he led the Lamanites forth to battle with exceeding fury against Moroni.

34 Moroni being in their course of march, therefore Jacob was determined to slay them and cut his way through to the city of Mulek. But behold, Moroni and his men were more powerful; therefore they did not give way before the Lamanites.

verse 34 Obviously Jacob was almost desperate to get back to the safety and security of Mulek with his weary troops. Moroni and his army stood in the way.

35 And it came to pass that they fought on both hands with exceeding fury; and there were many slain on both sides; yea, and Moroni was wounded and Jacob was killed.

36 And Lehi pressed upon their rear with such fury with his strong men, that the Lamanites in the rear delivered up their weapons of war; and the remainder of them, being much confused, knew not whither to go or to strike.

verse 36 "knew not whither to go or to strike" These Lamanites, in their confusion, could not decide whether to retreat or to stay and fight.

37 Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood.

38 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had heard these words, their chief captains, all those who were not slain, came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and also commanded their men that they should do the same.

39 But behold, there were many that would not; and those who would not deliver up their swords were taken and bound, and their weapons of war were taken from them, and they were compelled to march with their brethren forth into the land Bountiful.

verse 39 Those who would not surrender were not killed but disarmed, bound, and marched off to the Nephites' central prison camp at Bountiful.

40 And now the number of prisoners who were taken exceeded more than the number of those who had been slain, yea, more than those who had been slain on both sides.

Alma Chapter 53

Scripture Mastery

Alma 53, 56-58 Helaman and his two-thousand stripling warriors

1 And it came to pass that they did set guards over the prisoners of the Lamanites, and did compel them to go forth and bury their dead, yea, and also the dead of the Nephites who were slain; and Moroni placed men over them to guard them while they should perform their labors.

verse 1 Again, we learn that the prisoners of war were becoming sufficiently numerous that caring for them was becoming a serious problem for the Nephites, as it occupied too many men in the process. Every available man was needed for fighting. Apparently the best solution was to put their prisoners to work because it was easier to guard them while they were at their labor. Their work was mainly the conversion of Bountiful into a fortified city with ditches and breastworks of timbers.

2 And Moroni went to the city of Mulek with Lehi, and took command of the city and gave it unto Lehi. Now behold, this Lehi was a man who had been with Moroni in the more part of all his battles; and he was a man like unto Moroni, and they rejoiced in each other's safety; yea, they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi.

3 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had finished burying their dead and also the dead of the Nephites, they were marched back into the land Bountiful; and Teancum, by the orders of Moroni, caused that they should commence laboring in digging a ditch round about the land, or the city, Bountiful.

4 And he caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers; and thus they did cause the Lamanites to labor until they had encircled the city of Bountiful round about with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height.

5 And this city became an exceeding stronghold ever after; and in this city they did guard the prisoners of the Lamanites; yea, even within a wall which they had caused them to build with their own hands. Now Moroni was compelled to cause the Lamanites to labor, because it was easy to guard them while at their labor; and he desired all his forces when he should make an attack upon the Lamanites.

verse 5 Within the city of Bountiful there was a major prisoner-of-war camp which the prisoners themselves—the captive Lamanites—had been forced to secure.

6 And it came to pass that Moroni had thus gained a victory over one of the greatest of the armies of the Lamanites, and had obtained possession of the city of Mulek, which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi; and thus he had also built a stronghold to retain his prisoners.

verse 6 “the city of Mulek, which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi” The Lamanites had taken control of the Nephite city of Mulek and had effectively fortified it to the point where it was a veritable fortress for the Lamanites. This verse should not be interpreted as suggesting that the city of Mulek was located in the land of Nephi (Lamanite territory). Rather, it was one of the best fortified Nephite cities.

The “stronghold to retain his prisoners” was located, as evidenced by verse 5, in the city of Bountiful.

7 And it came to pass that he did no more attempt a battle with the Lamanites in that year, but he did employ his men in preparing for war, yea, and in making fortifications to guard against the Lamanites, yea, and also delivering their women and their children from famine and affliction, and providing food for their armies.

verse 7 “delivering their women and their children from famine and affliction, and providing food for their armies” It seems most likely that the antecedent for the pronoun *their* in this phrase is “his men.” Though it is possible to read the verse so that the antecedent is “the Lamanites,” we know that Moroni did not retain any Lamanite women or children as prisoners—see Alma 54:3.

8 And now it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites, on the west sea, south, while in the absence of Moroni on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them, had gained some ground over the Nephites, yea, insomuch that they had obtained possession of a number of their cities in that part of the land.

verse 8 “on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them” Intrigue is a plot or scheme to accomplish some nefarious purpose by secret means. The intrigue here likely refers to the king-men’s rising up in opposition to Pahoran and the Nephite government. It is obvious that Mormon views the conflict between the Nephites and Lamanites from a spiritual context. He makes no mention here of the superior military strength of the Lamanites in the “west sea, south” area. He attributes the Nephite set backs to the dissensions among the Nephites. Again, as we have mentioned previously, Mormon believed literally in the “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon: The Lord was committed to defend his covenant people and protect them from being placed in bondage to any other people

when they were righteous, but not under other circumstances (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

Hugh Nibley observed: “No matter how wicked the ferocious and depraved the Lamanites might be (and they were that!), no matter by how much they outnumbered the Nephites, . . . they were not the Nephite problem. They were merely kept there to remind the Nephites of their real problem which was [the obligation] to walk uprightly before the Lord” (*Since Cumorah*, 376).

9 And thus because of iniquity amongst themselves, yea, because of dissensions and intrigue among themselves they were placed in the most dangerous circumstances.

The great story of the stripling warriors or the sons of Helaman begins at this point. It is probably unnecessary to remind the reader of their origins, but in case a brief review would be helpful: In Alma 23 we were introduced to a group of Lamanites, actually direct descendants of Nephi’s eldest brother Laman, who were converted through the missionary efforts of Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah. These righteous converts took upon themselves an oath to never again take up arms (Alma 23:7), and they called themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see the commentary on the possible meanings of this name in the commentary for Alma 23:17). In order to best protect these converts, who were committed to nonviolence, they were given the land of Jershon, and a Nephite army was charged with protecting them. They later became known as the people of Ammon (some authors have even referred to them as the “Ammonites”), and eventually they were removed to the land of Melek, a strategically-located area where the Nephites were better able to protect them.

10 And now behold, I have somewhat to say concerning the people of Ammon, who, in the beginning, were Lamanites; but by Ammon and his brethren, or rather by the power and word of God, they had been converted unto the Lord; and they had been brought down into the land of Zarahemla, and had ever since been protected by the Nephites.

11 And because of their oath they had been kept from taking up arms against their brethren; for they had taken an oath that they never would shed blood more; and according to their oath they would have perished; yea, they would have suffered themselves to have fallen into the hands of their brethren, had it not been for the pity and the exceeding love which Ammon and his brethren had had for them.

verse 11 “they never would shed blood more” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *more* as, “a second or another time; again.”

12 And for this cause they were brought down into the land of Zarahemla; and they ever had been protected by the Nephites.

verse 12 “they ever had been protected” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *ever* as “at all times; always; continually.

13 But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defense of their country.

14 But behold, as they were about to take their weapons of war, they were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren, for they were about to break the oath which they had made.

15 And Helaman feared lest by so doing they should lose their souls; therefore all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions, in their dangerous circumstances at this time.

verse 15 “all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions” The pacifist people of Ammon could only sit and watch as their Nephite brethren struggled militarily to hold their own against Lamanite invaders.

Helaman will later give additional explanation for why he felt so strongly that the people of Ammon should not break their oath not to bear arms: “for I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us” (Alma 56:8). Helaman also obviously believed literally in the promise/curse (see the commentary for verse 8) which held that God would strengthen the Nephites if they remained faithful. He believed that God would strengthen the Nephite armies if the people of Ammon would remain true to their covenant.

We often have the tendency to assume that the people of Ammon were pacifists. One author has questioned this conclusion (see Duane Boyce’s article “Were the Ammonites Pacifists?” in *Journal of the Book of Mormon and other Restoration Scripture*, volume 18, number 1, 2009, 33-47). Brother Boyce defines pacifism as “the opposition to all war, including war of self-defense, on moral grounds” (*Ibid.*, 33). By this definition participation in and support of all war is not permissible. Brother Boyce concludes that the people of Ammon were not really pacifists for the following reasons: (1) When they accepted the gospel and repented of their sins, they were not repenting of having fought wars in defense of their country. Rather, they repented of banditry, plunder, and murder of Nephites that had been motivated by hatred of those Nephites. (2) While the people of Ammon were living in the land of Jershon, they did not object to the Nephites’ waging war against attacking Lamanites. (3) They did reach a point where they were willing to take up arms again to assist the Nephites in defending their liberty. (4) They did not object to their sons’ entering the war against the Lamanites.

verses 16-19 We will learn that a total of 2,060 stripling warriors will fight against the Lamanites (see Alma 57:6). Incredibly, though all of them will be wounded, none will die (see Alma 57:25). We may wish to contrast this with the youth of the Church today. As they fight against the world and Satan, some seventy-five percent of them will die spiritually.

There are clues in these verses to the success of the sons of Helaman. For example, they were self motivated—fighting for the Nephite cause was their idea (verse 16); they entered into a covenant and they bound themselves to the cause (verse 17); and they picked a righteous leader and followed him with exactness (verse 19; see also Alma 57:21; 58:40). Others of their secrets may be found in later chapters. For example, they followed the advice of their mothers and stayed true to their heritage (Alma 56:47). These same keys to the success of the stripling warriors may well apply to the youth of the Church today.

16 But behold, it came to pass they had many sons, who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies; therefore they did assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites.

verse 16 “they called themselves Nephites” It is notable that even though this group of young men were the children of Lamanites, the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies,” they chose to call themselves “Nephites.”

17 And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage.

18 Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men, who entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country.

19 And now behold, as they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites, they became now at this period of time also a great support; for they took their weapons of war, and they would that Helaman should be their leader.

verse 19 “they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites” Not only had these 2,000 young men never been a problem to the Nephites, they now had an opportunity to be a great help to the Nephites. One might well ask: Of what real “support” could these 2,000 young untrained recruits be to the Nephite army since they had no experience in battle? It will become obvious in the two following verses that Mormon regarded their principle strength as being spiritual and not military. They were obviously mighty in spiritual strength.

20 And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

21 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.

verses 20-21 The protection which these young men will receive in battle is attributed directly to their righteousness. See the material on “holy wars” in the commentary for Alma 46:22.

22 And now it came to pass that Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea.

verse 22 The term *stripling* means an adolescent or one who is just passing from boyhood into manhood; a lad.

“to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea” Repeated, careful readings of the Book of Mormon text suggests that the terms “east sea” (or “sea east”) and “west sea” (or “sea west”) are likely designated names rather than ones that give local directions. This is similar to the North Sea’s present name, which names a sea south of Scandinavia and west of central Europe. Perhaps the Nephite historians derived the east sea and west sea names from the names the Mulekites gave the ocean they had just crossed when they first came to America (presumably first landing somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico) and from the name Lehi’s colony gave the Pacific Ocean that they had crossed (consistent with Helaman 6:10). Therefore, the seas’ names could have a correct directional meaning in only a few locations. As one moves about in Mesoamerica, the names west sea and east sea would lose all directional meaning. This concept helps when we read in this particular verse that “Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea.” We understand this to mean that he marched south to the borders of the Nephite lands by the Pacific Ocean (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “A Correlation of the Sidon River and the Lands of Manti and Zarahemla with the Southern End of the Rio Grijalva,” 45).

23 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 54

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year of the judges, that Ammoron sent unto Moroni desiring that he would exchange prisoners.

2 And it came to pass that Moroni felt to rejoice exceedingly at this request, for he desired the provisions which were imparted for the support of the Lamanite prisoners for the support of his own people; and he also desired his own people for the strengthening of his army.

3 Now the Lamanites had taken many women and children, and there was not a woman nor a child among all the prisoners of Moroni, or the prisoners whom Moroni had taken; therefore Moroni resolved upon a stratagem to obtain as many prisoners of the Nephites from the Lamanites as it were possible.

verses 4-14 To say that Moroni was inclined toward being candid and forthright is to understate the fact. He likely would have made a less effective diplomat than military commander. One cannot help but smile at his irrepressible candor. He is writing to Ammoron to negotiate a trade of prisoners, yet he cannot help including his honest feelings about Ammoron: “I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother” and “thou art a child of hell.” Then, just in case Ammoron did not catch the full flavor of his message: “Behold, I am in my anger.” Moroni’s forthrightness and integrity would not permit him to fail to express his honest feelings in most every situation.

4 Therefore he wrote an epistle, and sent it by the servant of Ammoron, the same who had brought an epistle to Moroni. Now these are the words which he wrote unto Ammoron, saying:

verse 4 Hugh Nibley wrote:

When the Lamanites finally suggested the exchange of war prisoners that he had been waiting for, Moroni sent them a ‘get-tough’ letter, deliberately taunting Ammoron . . . and insisting on receiving a Nephite prisoner with his wife and children in exchange for one Lamanite soldier. This three-to-one exchange was actually to the advantage of the Lamanites, who were eager enough to transfer the feeding of noncombatants from themselves to the Nephites, but Moroni wanted to get the best possible bargain by not appearing too eager and so got tough. The result was an exchange of insults between the chiefs with mounting tempers, and in the end the deal fell through. This was not to be the last time that Moroni’s hot temper ran away with him (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 315-16).

5 Behold, Ammoron, I have written unto you somewhat concerning this war which ye have waged against my people, or rather which thy brother hath waged against them, and which ye are still determined to carry on after his death.

6 Behold, I would tell you somewhat concerning the justice of God, and the sword of his almighty wrath, which doth hang over you except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands, or the land of your possessions, which is the land of Nephi.

7 Yea, I would tell you these things if ye were capable of hearkening unto them; yea, I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother have been, except ye repent and withdraw your murderous purposes, and return with your armies to your own lands.

8 But as ye have once rejected these things, and have fought against the people of the Lord, even so I may expect you will do it again.

9 And now behold, we are prepared to receive you; yea, and except you withdraw your purposes, behold, ye will pull down the wrath of that God whom you have rejected upon you, even to your utter destruction.

verse 9 “now behold, we are prepared to receive you” We are prepared to engage you in battle.

10 But, as the Lord liveth, our armies shall come upon you except ye withdraw, and ye shall soon be visited with death, for we will retain our cities and our lands; yea, and we will maintain our religion and the cause of our God.

verse 10 “as the Lord liveth, our armies shall come upon you except ye withdraw” By now the reader is likely sensitive to those phrases that indicate the taking of an oath. Here Moroni swears an oath to attack the Lamanites lest they agree to exchange prisoners on Moroni’s terms and then withdraw from the Nephite lands.

11 But behold, it supposeth me that I talk to you concerning these things in vain; or it supposeth me that thou art a child of hell; therefore I will close my epistle by telling you that I will not exchange prisoners, save it be on conditions that ye will deliver up a man and his wife and his children, for one prisoner; if this be the case that ye will do it, I will exchange.

verse 11 “it supposeth me that I talk to you concerning these things in vain; or it supposeth me that thou art a child of hell” Moroni says, in effect, “I don’t believe you are going to grant this request because I believe you a child of hell.” Again, we cannot help but chuckle over Moroni’s almost brutal candor.

12 And behold, if ye do not this, I will come against you with my armies; yea, even I will arm my women and my children, and I will come against you, and I will follow you even into your own land, which is the land of our first inheritance; yea,

and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life; and I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth.

verse 12 “the land of our first inheritance” This phrase seems to refer to the land of Nephi which the Nephites began to occupy within a few years of Lehi’s arrival in the promised land. The more specific term “the place of our fathers’ first inheritance” (see Alma 22:28) refers to a west coastal area of the land of Nephi where father Lehi and his family initially settled in about 589 BC. The concept of a “land of . . . first inheritance” was firmly established among ancient Israelite peoples. Hugh Nibley explained, referring to this same custom among Book of Mormon peoples:

No matter where a group or family move to . . . the first land allotted to them is always regarded as “the land of their inheritance,” thus Alma 22:28; 54:12-13; Ether 7:16; Mormon 2:27-28; 1 Nephi 13:15; Alma 35:9, 14; 43:12; Jacob 3:4; Alma 62:42; Mormon 3:17. This is a powerful argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon both because the existence of such a system is largely the discovery of modern research and because it is set forth in the Book of Mormon very distinctly and yet quite casually (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 100).

13 Behold, I am in my anger, and also my people; ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend ourselves. But behold, if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance.

verse 13 Again, “the land of our first inheritance” refers to the land of Nephi. Moroni threatens not only to drive the Lamanites out of Nephite territory but also to pursue them into their own lands and drive them out of those lands as well. He is obviously very angry!

Hugh Nibley has referred to Moroni as “high-spirited and short-tempered” and has even referred to this letter to Ammoron, written in anger, as “ill-advised.” Dr. Nibley, obviously a great admirer of Moroni, is then quick to point out Moroni’s many character strengths:

High-spirited and short-tempered he certainly was, as his ill-advised letters to Pahoran (Alma 60:1-36) and Ammoron (Alma 54:11-13) amply attest. But his magnanimous nature as a lover of peace and fair play always prevailed. He always calls the enemy his brothers, with whom he is loath to contend. You cannot ask for a less warlike spirit than that of an army who “were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites,” who waged war “for the space of many years, . . . notwithstanding their much reluctance”; who were “sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea . . . they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world” (Alma 48:21-23). In battle Moroni always calls an end to the fighting and proposes a settlement the moment the enemy shows signs of weakening (Alma 43:54; 44:1, 20);

and though surprise and deception are the essence of strategy, he refused to take advantage of an enemy who was too drunk to fight—that would be an “injustice” (Alma 55:19). He even made special excuses for sending spies behind enemy lines (Alma 43:27-30). With never a thought of punishing a beaten foe, Moroni sought no reprisals even after the gravest provocations. He was satisfied to take his defeated adversaries at their word and trust them to return to their homes or settle among the Nephites as they chose (Alma 44:6, 11, 19-20), even granting them Nephite lands for their rehabilitation (Alma 62:16-17). His attitude is well expressed in an exchange of letters with his friend Pahoran, who writes: “We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land. We would not shed the blood of our [Nephite] brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us. We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God”—which, indeed, in the Book of Mormon story it sometimes was (Alma 61:10-13). “We do not desire to be men of blood,” says Moroni on the battlefield; “ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you. . . . We have not come . . . that we might shed your blood for power” (Alma 44:1-2) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 353-54).

14 Now I close my epistle. I am Moroni; I am a leader of the people of the Nephites.

verse 14 “I am a leader of the people of the Nephites” Apparently one criterion by which the peoples of the Book of Mormon are categorized is who rules over them. Those who lived in the land of Zarahemla were not all pure descendants of Nephi. We know that they included at least some Zoramites, Lamanites (the people of Ammon), and Mulekites. Thus we read this peculiar phrase “the people of the Nephites.”

verses 15-24 Don’t try to read and understand Ammoron’s rejoinder without first reviewing the concept of the tradition of hatred which the Lamanites held against the Nephites (see the commentaries for Jacob 3:3-9 and 2 Nephi 1:28-29).

15 Now it came to pass that Ammoron, when he had received this epistle, was angry; and he wrote another epistle unto Moroni, and these are the words which he wrote, saying:

16 I am Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites; I am the brother of Amalickiah whom ye have murdered. Behold, I will avenge his blood upon you, yea, and I will come upon you with my armies for I fear not your threatenings.

17 For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren, insomuch that they did rob them of their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them.

verse 17 “For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren” Please recall that Ammoron and his brother Amalickiah were not Lamanites by blood. Rather they

were Nephite dissenters. Thus, he accuses Moroni, “your fathers did wrong *their* brethren” (italics added). He doesn’t include himself with the Lamanites. Please review also the Hebrew tradition of primogeniture in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37.

“rightly belonged unto them” One point of some interest but little importance is that in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon this phrase was, “rightfully belonged unto them.” As Oliver Cowdery copied the original manuscript to create the “printer’s manuscript,” he changed “rightfully” to “rightly.”

18 And now behold, if ye will lay down your arms, and subject yourselves to be governed by those to whom the government doth rightly belong, then will I cause that my people shall lay down their weapons and shall be at war no more.

19 Behold, ye have breathed out many threatenings against me and my people; but behold, we fear not your threatenings.

20 Nevertheless, I will grant to exchange prisoners according to your request, gladly, that I may preserve my food for my men of war; and we will wage a war which shall be eternal, either to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority or to their eternal extinction.

21 And as concerning that God whom ye say we have rejected, behold, we know not such a being; neither do ye; but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you.

verse 21 “but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you” Ammoron intends to say, “if there is such a being, then he is our God as well as your God, and he will judge which of us is in the wrong.”

22 And if it so be that there is a devil and a hell, behold will he not send you there to dwell with my brother whom ye have murdered, whom ye have hinted that he hath gone to such a place? But behold these things matter not.

23 I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem.

verse 23 Here the word *pressed* means forced against his will.

24 And behold now, I am a bold Lamanite; behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs, and to maintain and to obtain their rights to the government; and I close my epistle to Moroni.

verse 24 “behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs” The antecedent for “their” is “us” in the verse 21, referring to the Lamanite people. He intends to say, “this war hath been waged to avenge the wrongs which you have perpetrated against us, the Lamanites.”

verses 23-24 As is well known, when the words of the Book of Mormon were translated “by the gift and power of God,” there was no punctuation at all in the early

manuscripts, and that is the way the translated text was delivered to E.B. Grandin's print shop. Typesetter John Gilbert reported that when he sat down to prepare the text for publication, "every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end" (Royal Skousen, "John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon" in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, 402). So he added punctuation and paragraphing as he went along. He did a good job, especially for someone reading the book for the first time, but there are a few sentences that could have been punctuated in more than one way, with slightly different results. The punctuation of the Book of Mormon does not enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Hence from time to time there are some verses in which it may be worth considering alternate punctuation.

Verse 24 is just such an example. The word *behold* is a common interjection in the Book of Mormon that means something like "pay attention to what follows," and *behold* now may simply be an intensification of that idea (as in Helaman 7:29). But what if we were to shift the comma after *now* back one word? These two verses would then read: "I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem. And behold, now I am a bold Lamanite . . ." This emendation may be preferable because Ammoron's point is that once he was a Zoramite (allied with the Nephites) but now he is a Lamanite. In fact, he is now the king of the Lamanites (so the word *behold* may even be taken in the unusual sense of "look at me!"). This reading makes sense in the context of the passage as well: Ammoron is closing a belligerent letter to Moroni with a strong rejection of Nephite culture and everything associated with it. Another fact supports this suggested alternate punctuation. The original manuscript has a slightly different wording here: "And behold I am now a bold Lamanite . . ."

Alma Chapter 55

1 Now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle he was more angry, because he knew that Ammoron had a perfect knowledge of his fraud; yea, he knew that Ammoron knew that it was not a just cause that had caused him to wage a war against the people of Nephi.

2 And he said: Behold, I will not exchange prisoners with Ammoron save he will withdraw his purpose, as I have stated in my epistle; for I will not grant unto him that he shall have any more power than what he hath got.

3 Behold, I know the place where the Lamanites do guard my people whom they have taken prisoners; and as Ammoron would not grant unto me mine epistle, behold, I will give unto him according to my words; yea, I will seek death among them until they shall sue for peace.

4 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words, he caused that a search should be made among his men, that perhaps he might find a man who was a descendant of Laman among them.

verse 4 Apparently at this point in the Book of Mormon story, the Lamanites were physically distinguishable from the Nephites. Perhaps there were some language differences as well, though there is abundant evidence that the two groups had no major difficulties in communicating with each other.

5 And it came to pass that they found one, whose name was Laman; and he was one of the servants of the king who was murdered by Amalickiah.

6 Now Moroni caused that Laman and a small number of his men should go forth unto the guards who were over the Nephites.

7 Now the Nephites were guarded in the city of Gid; therefore Moroni appointed Laman and caused that a small number of men should go with him.

verses 8-15 These next eight verses present an almost comical picture of the Lamanites who appear somewhat naive and gullible. One gains the impression that the Nephites, at least in this instance, were more clever than the Lamanites. The final touch is put on this impression by verses 29 through 31 below.

Dr. Hugh Nibley puts his own delightful spin on Moroni's plan to free the Nephite prisoners held in the town of Gid:

[Moroni] planned a ruse to free the war prisoners held in the city of Gid. The trick exploited the well-known psychology of troops on permanent guard duty. Such troops must always be on the alert for what they never expect to happen and what, if they do their duty, never will happen. Their way of life becomes a stultifying bore, with the same dull routines from day to day and from week to week. Nothing offers a more welcome

release to such misery than a little nip now and then, or, better still, a party. A native Lamanite in the Nephite service answered the challenge of the Lamanite guards one evening with the announcement that his little party were escapees from the Nephites who had managed to get away with some of their wine. Of course the guards insisted on sampling the stuff on the spot and on the sly. The protest of its owners that they should keep it against the day of battle “only made them more desirous to drink of the wine” (Alma 55:10). It was a typical “G.I.” binge with everybody getting happily drunk at the guard-house since the stuff was doctored, “having been prepared in its strength” (Alma 55:13). While the guards were carousing and falling asleep, weapons were being thrown over the wall at certain places [to the Nephite prisoners within] under Moroni’s personal supervision, and the guards even “had they awakened” would have been out of a job (Alma 55:16-18) (*Since Cumorah*, 316).

8 And when it was evening Laman went to the guards who were over the Nephites, and behold, they saw him coming and they hailed him; but he saith unto them: Fear not; behold, I am a Lamanite. Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites, and they sleep; and behold we have taken of their wine and brought with us.

9 Now when the Lamanites heard these words they received him with joy; and they said unto him: Give us of your wine, that we may drink; we are glad that ye have thus taken wine with you for we are weary.

verse 9 Wine in Mesoamerica “was probably made from the maguey plant or from other similar plants. The maguey plant is a relative to the century plant and has a large center with the appearance of a giant pineapple. The unfermented pulp juice is processed into tequila or mescal” (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 174).

10 But Laman said unto them: Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle. But this saying only made them more desirous to drink of the wine;

verse 10 “Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle” It is apparent that the Lamanites, and perhaps the Nephites as well, used their “wine” to prepare themselves for battle. Obviously the wine could only impair their physical functioning but was likely used to “enhance” their bravery. Note in the following verse that “wine” was part of the Lamanite rations which were intended to “strengthen [them] to go against the Nephites.”

11 For, said they: We are weary, therefore let us take of the wine, and by and by we shall receive wine for our rations, which will strengthen us to go against the Nephites.

12 And Laman said unto them: You may do according to your desires.

13 And it came to pass that they did take of the wine freely; and it was pleasant to their taste, therefore they took of it more freely; and it was strong, having been prepared in its strength.

14 And it came to pass they did drink and were merry, and by and by they were all drunken.

verse 14 The phrase “by and by” means soon, presently, in a short while.

15 And now when Laman and his men saw that they were all drunken, and were in a deep sleep, they returned to Moroni and told him all the things that had happened.

16 And now this was according to the design of Moroni. And Moroni had prepared his men with weapons of war; and he went to the city Gid, while the Lamanites were in a deep sleep and drunken, and cast in weapons of war unto the prisoners, insomuch that they were all armed;

17 Yea, even to their women, and all those of their children, as many as were able to use a weapon of war, when Moroni had armed all those prisoners; and all those things were done in a profound silence.

18 But had they awakened the Lamanites, behold they were drunken and the Nephites could have slain them.

19 But behold, this was not the desire of Moroni; he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people from destruction; and for this cause he might not bring upon him injustice, he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness.

verse 19 “he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness” As we might have predicted, Moroni again does the decent thing and refuses to take advantage of these drunken Lamanites.

20 But he had obtained his desires; for he had armed those prisoners of the Nephites who were within the wall of the city, and had given them power to gain possession of those parts which were within the walls.

21 And then he caused the men who were with him to withdraw a pace from them, and surround the armies of the Lamanites.

22 Now behold this was done in the night-time, so that when the Lamanites awoke in the morning they beheld that they were surrounded by the Nephites without, and that their prisoners were armed within.

23 And thus they saw that the Nephites had power over them; and in these circumstances they found that it was not expedient that they should fight with the Nephites; therefore their chief captains demanded their weapons of war, and they brought them forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, pleading for mercy.

verse 23 “their chief captains demanded their weapons of war, and they brought them forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, pleading for mercy”

The Lamanite chief captains saw the hopelessness of their situation. They demanded that their own Lamanite soldiers deliver to them their weapons. Then, these Lamanite captains brought the weapons forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, begging for mercy.

24 Now behold, this was the desire of Moroni. He took them prisoners of war, and took possession of the city, and caused that all the prisoners should be liberated, who were Nephites; and they did join the army of Moroni, and were a great strength to his army.

25 And it came to pass that he did cause the Lamanites, whom he had taken prisoners, that they should commence a labor in strengthening the fortifications round about the city Gid.

26 And it came to pass that when he had fortified the city Gid, according to his desires, he caused that his prisoners should be taken to the city Bountiful; and he also guarded that city with an exceedingly strong force.

27 And it came to pass that they did, notwithstanding all the intrigues of the Lamanites, keep and protect all the prisoners whom they had taken, and also maintain all the ground and the advantage which they had retaken.

28 And it came to pass that the Nephites began again to be victorious, and to reclaim their rights and their privileges.

29 Many times did the Lamanites attempt to encircle them about by night, but in these attempts they did lose many prisoners.

30 And many times did they attempt to administer of their wine to the Nephites, that they might destroy them with poison or with drunkenness.

verses 29-30 At this point the Lamanites attempted to utilize some the tricks the Nephites had used, including the wine-trick, but the Nephites were pretty well on to them.

31 But behold, the Nephites were not slow to remember the Lord their God in this their time of affliction. They could not be taken in their snares; yea, they would not partake of their wine, save they had first given to some of the Lamanite prisoners.

verse 31 “They could not be taken in their snares” The Nephites knew of the Lamanite subterfuge and would not be taken in by the “snares” of the Lamanites.

32 And they were thus cautious that no poison should be administered among them; for if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite; and thus they did try all their liquors.

verse 32 “**thus they did try all their liquors**” Nephites tested all of the Lamanite wine by forcing a Lamanite prisoner to drink it first. If the Lamanite prisoner lived, then the Nephites knew the wine was safe.

33 And now it came to pass that it was expedient for Moroni to make preparations to attack the city Morianton; for behold, the Lamanites had, by their labors, fortified the city Morianton until it had become an exceeding stronghold.

34 And they were continually bringing new forces into that city, and also new supplies of provisions.

35 And thus ended the twenty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 56

The sons of Helaman (the 2,000 stripling warriors) are mentioned in only four chapters of the Book of Mormon: Alma 53, 56, 57, and 58. It is interesting to note that of these four chapters, only Alma 53 is narrated in the third person by Mormon who abridged the large plates of Nephi. In Alma 56-58, Mormon elects to provide us with the account of the sons of Helaman from the original source, which is a letter from Helaman to captain Moroni. With the exception of one verse of personal commentary (Alma 56:52) Mormon lets us see their battles through the pen of the man who witnessed the courage of these 2,000 stripling warriors first hand.

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, on the second day in the first month, Moroni received an epistle from Helaman, stating the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land.

verse 1 What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1.

“the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land” Helaman wrote his letter from the southwest quarter of the greater land of Zarahemla.

2 And these are the words which he wrote, saying: My dearly beloved brother, Moroni, as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare; behold, my beloved brother, I have somewhat to tell you concerning our warfare in this part of the land.

verse 2 “And these are the words which he wrote, saying” Obviously Mormon wrote verse 1 and also this particular phrase. Helaman’s letter to Moroni begins in this verse with the salutation, “My dearly beloved brother, Moroni.” His letter extends through Alma 58:41 and is evidently quoted verbatim except for a single third-person comment by Mormon in Alma 56:52.

“as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare” Helaman intends to say that he regards Moroni to be his brother both in spiritual and military affairs.

3 Behold, two thousand of the sons of those men whom Ammon brought down out of the land of Nephi—now ye have known that these were descendants of Laman, who was the eldest son of our father Lehi;

4 Now I need not rehearse unto you concerning their traditions or their unbelief, for thou knowest concerning all these things—

verse 4 If the reader desires a review of the origins of these two thousand young men, see the commentary for Alma 53:9.

5 Therefore it sufficeth me that I tell you that two thousand of these young men have taken their weapons of war, and would that I should be their leader; and we have come forth to defend our country.

6 And now ye also know concerning the covenant which their fathers made, that they would not take up their weapons of war against their brethren to shed blood.

7 But in the twenty and sixth year, when they saw our afflictions and our tribulations for them, they were about to break the covenant which they had made and take up their weapons of war in our defense.

verse 7 “our tribulations for them” Helaman speaks of “our tribulations on their behalf.”

8 But I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us, insomuch that we should not suffer more because of the fulfilling the oath which they had taken.

9 But behold, here is one thing in which we may have great joy. For behold, in the twenty and sixth year, I, Helaman, did march at the head of these two thousand young men to the city of Judea, to assist Antipus, whom ye had appointed a leader over the people of that part of the land.

10 And I did join my two thousand sons, (for they are worthy to be called sons) to the army of Antipus, in which strength Antipus did rejoice exceedingly; for behold, his army had been reduced by the Lamanites because their forces had slain a vast number of our men, for which cause we have to mourn.

11 Nevertheless, we may console ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their country and of their God, yea, and they are happy.

12 And the Lamanites had also retained many prisoners, all of whom are chief captains, for none other have they spared alive. And we suppose that they are now at this time in the land of Nephi; it is so if they are not slain.

verses 13-15 Dr. Hugh Nibley feels that Helaman included a map in his letter to Moroni. His belief is based upon these three verses in which Helaman seems to be referring to an enclosed map (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 317-18).

13 And now these are the cities of which the Lamanites have obtained possession by the shedding of the blood of so many of our valiant men;

14 The land of Manti, or the city of Manti, and the city of Zeezrom, and the city of Cumeni, and the city of Antiparah.

15 And these are the cities which they possessed when I arrived at the city of Judea; and I found Antipus and his men toiling with their might to fortify the city.

16 Yea, and they were depressed in body as well as in spirit, for they had fought valiantly by day and toiled by night to maintain their cities; and thus they had suffered great afflictions of every kind.

verse 16 The army of Antipus had obviously experienced set back after set back in their campaign to maintain Nephite control of the cities in the southwest quadrant of the land. They had, in fact, lost control of every city but two—Judea and an unnamed city near the west coast.

17 And now they were determined to conquer in this place or die; therefore you may well suppose that this little force which I brought with me, yea, those sons of mine, gave them great hopes and much joy.

verse 17 The men of Antipus were discouraged and depleted to their last. Their back was “to the wall.” They had committed themselves to hold the city of Judea or die. Obviously the arrival of Helaman and his two thousand young soldiers was a real morale booster for those Nephites under Antipus. Antipus’s army had been working feverishly to fortify the city of Judea.

18 And now it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Antipus had received a greater strength to his army, they were compelled by the orders of Ammoron to not come against the city of Judea, or against us, to battle.

19 And thus were we favored of the Lord; for had they come upon us in this our weakness they might have perhaps destroyed our little army; but thus were we preserved.

20 They were commanded by Ammoron to maintain those cities which they had taken. And thus ended the twenty and sixth year. And in the commencement of the twenty and seventh year we had prepared our city and ourselves for defense.

21 Now we were desirous that the Lamanites should come upon us; for we were not desirous to make an attack upon them in their strongholds.

verse 21 While the Nephites by this time felt pretty good about their chances of successfully defending the city of Judea with its incomplete fortifications, they were not sufficiently strong to succeed in an offensive initiative.

22 And it came to pass that we kept spies out round about, to watch the movements of the Lamanites, that they might not pass us by night nor by day to make an attack upon our other cities which were on the northward.

verse 22 The Nephites maintained a careful watch hoping to catch the Lamanite forces in open field, believing that this would give them a better chance for victory.

23 For we knew in those cities they were not sufficiently strong to meet them; therefore we were desirous, if they should pass by us, to fall upon them in their

rear, and thus bring them up in the rear at the same time they were met in the front. We supposed that we could overpower them; but behold, we were disappointed in this our desire.

verse 23 “they were not sufficiently strong to meet them” The Nephites in the more northern cities were not sufficiently strong to withstand an attack by the Lamanite army.

“we were disappointed in this our desire” The Lamanites remained in their well-fortified captured cities.

24 They durst not pass by us with their whole army, neither durst they with a part, lest they should not be sufficiently strong and they should fall.

25 Neither durst they march down against the city of Zarahemla; neither durst they cross the head of Sidon, over to the city of Nephihah.

26 And thus, with their forces, they were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken.

verses 23-26 Obviously a stalemate had developed with neither side being sufficiently confident to initiate an attack.

27 And now it came to pass in the second month of this year, there was brought unto us many provisions from the fathers of those my two thousand sons.

verse 27 Obviously the garrison in this quarter of the land depended on Zarahemla or Melek for provisions. It might also be concluded that the terrain in this area was unsuitable for raising sufficient food to sustain the large army. We also note that the closest significant population center where appreciable food could be raised was Zarahemla, and that the distance to Zarahemla was not sufficiently large so as to preclude transport of the needed provisions (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “A Correlation of the Sidon River and the Lands of Manti and Zarahemla with the Southern End of the Rio Grijalva,” 149).

28 And also there were sent two thousand men unto us from the land of Zarahemla. And thus we were prepared with ten thousand men, and provisions for them, and also for their wives and their children.

29 And the Lamanites, thus seeing our forces increase daily, and provisions arrive for our support, they began to be fearful, and began to sally forth, if it were possible to put an end to our receiving provisions and strength.

verse 29 To sally forth is to rush out, as a body of troops, from a fortified place to attack besiegers.

Hugh Nibley adds his comments:

The boys continued getting packages from home, and then two thousand new recruits arrived from the capital. At this the Lamanites began to grow uneasy in the face

of what looked like a Nephite buildup, and so it was possible to stage another decoy act by giving it a new twist. The two thousand sons of Helaman were instructed to escort a supply-train up the coast, knowing that the Lamanite spies from the city of Antiparah would be sure to spot them. Naturally it was a chance not to be missed for the Lamanites, and at any rate the supplies had to be stopped. So they took a calculated risk and sent out a large force in pursuit of the two thousand who moved briskly and kept out of reach, following instructions. Even when the Lamanites learned that another Nephite force was pursuing them they continued the chase of the two thousand, for they expected a situation like that and felt strong enough to cope with it—"Even . . . when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them . . . they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us" (Alma 56:30-37). In the hot pace that the three armies were setting each other nobody dared relax or turn to either side; but when the straining troops of Antipus started stepping on Lamanite heels the Lamanite army turned to face them with overpowering numbers (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 318).

30 Now when we saw that the Lamanites began to grow uneasy on this wise, we were desirous to bring a stratagem into effect upon them; therefore Antipus ordered that I should march forth with my little sons to a neighboring city, as if we were carrying provisions to a neighboring city.

31 And we were to march near the city of Antiparah, as if we were going to the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore.

verse 31 "the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore" This city is never named in the text. Please see the map, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. On this map, this city is referred to as simply "city."

32 And it came to pass that we did march forth, as if with our provisions, to go to that city.

33 And it came to pass that Antipus did march forth with a part of his army, leaving the remainder to maintain the city. But he did not march forth until I had gone forth with my little army, and came near the city Antiparah.

verse 33 "leaving the remainder to maintain the city" Antipus, you will recall, marched forth from the city of Judea, leaving part of his army behind to maintain Judea.

34 And now, in the city Antiparah were stationed the strongest army of the Lamanites; yea, the most numerous.

35 And it came to pass that when they had been informed by their spies, they came forth with their army and marched against us.

36 And it came to pass that we did flee before them, northward. And thus we did lead away the most powerful army of the Lamanites;

37 Yea, even to a considerable distance, insomuch that when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, with their might, they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us; and, as we suppose, it was their intent to slay us before Antipus should overtake them, and this that they might not be surrounded by our people.

verse 37 “pursued their march in a straight course” Generally it is accepted that straight is the correct modifier when straight modifies the word *course* and especially when it placed immediately contiguous to course (Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32). See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

38 And now Antipus, beholding our danger, did speed the march of his army. But behold, it was night; therefore they did not overtake us, neither did Antipus overtake them; therefore we did camp for the night.

39 And it came to pass that before the dawn of the morning, behold, the Lamanites were pursuing us. Now we were not sufficiently strong to contend with them; yea, I would not suffer that my little sons should fall into their hands; therefore we did continue our march, and we took our march into the wilderness.

40 Now they durst not turn to the right nor to the left lest they should be surrounded; neither would I turn to the right nor to the left lest they should overtake me, and we could not stand against them, but be slain, and they would make their escape; and thus we did flee all that day into the wilderness, even until it was dark.

41 And it came to pass that again, when the light of the morning came we saw the Lamanites upon us, and we did flee before them.

42 But it came to pass that they did not pursue us far before they halted; and it was in the morning of the third day of the seventh month.

verse 42 We will learn that this unexpected stopping of the Lamanite army will pose a dilemma for Helaman. Perhaps the army of Antipus had caught up with the Lamanites and had engaged them in battle. If Helaman and his young warriors continued running, they might be leaving the army of Antipus without their expected and needed support. On the other hand, if the Lamanites stopped for the sole purpose of deceiving Helaman and making him think that Antipus had caught up with them, and if Helaman ordered his forces back against the Lamanites, he might be sending them into a trap. We will learn that he will leave the decision up to his “sons.”

43 And now, whether they were overtaken by Antipus we knew not, but I said unto my men: Behold, we know not but they have halted for the purpose that we should come against them, that they might catch us in their snare;

44 Therefore what say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle?

45 And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites.

46 For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army of Antipus.

verse 46 “as I had ever called them my sons . . . they said unto me: Father” Helaman says here, “Because they were young and I was in the habit of referring to them as sons, they called me “father.”

“Behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall” The remarkable reason behind this bravery is found in the next verse. They had a simple and unquestioning faith in the things their mothers had taught them!

47 Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

verse 47 It will ever be true that good and righteous men die in battle. How did the mother of these stripling warriors dare teach their sons “that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them”? We may assume that the Lord had communicated with the mothers and confirmed through the Spirit that he would protect them provided they were obedient and faithful. For these young men the Lamanites were less the enemy and more a test of obedience. The Lamanites were the fire in which these young men would be refined. The real enemy was the possibility of wavering in their faith in the power of God to deliver them.

48 And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.

verse 48 “We do not doubt our mothers knew it” In the commentary for Alma 54:23-24, we discussed that fact that the punctuation of the text of the Book of Mormon does not enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Please review that commentary. We may speculate about the meaning of this verse which may be altered somewhat by a change in punctuation. As the verse now stands, it appears that the young men are expressing confidence in their mothers’ testimonies: “We do not doubt [that] our mothers knew it.” But with a break in the middle—either a semicolon or a period—the meaning changes slightly: “We do not doubt; our mothers knew it,” which implies something along the lines of “We do not doubt, because our mothers knew it.” Or even, “We do not doubt. After all, our mothers knew.” This amended punctuation fits the context better. The previous verse makes it clear that God’s promise of deliverance depended on the faith of the young men themselves rather than on the

belief of their mothers. And indeed, in the next chapter Helaman credits their miraculous preservation to their own lack of doubts (Alma 57:21, 26-27).

49 And it came to pass that I did return with my two thousand against these Lamanites who had pursued us. And now behold, the armies of Antipus had overtaken them, and a terrible battle had commenced.

50 The army of Antipus being weary, because of their long march in so short a space of time, were about to fall into the hands of the Lamanites; and had I not returned with my two thousand they would have obtained their purpose.

51 For Antipus had fallen by the sword, and many of his leaders, because of their weariness, which was occasioned by the speed of their march—therefore the men of Antipus, being confused because of the fall of their leaders, began to give way before the Lamanites.

52 And it came to pass that the Lamanites took courage, and began to pursue them; and thus were the Lamanites pursuing them with great vigor when Helaman came upon their rear with his two thousand, and began to slay them exceedingly, insomuch that the whole army of the Lamanites halted and turned upon Helaman.

verse 52 “Helaman came upon their rear” Note that all the way through Helaman’s letter to Moroni (Alma 56:2 through Alma 58:41), Helaman refers to himself in the first person. However, in this verse, and in only this verse, there is an unexplained change to the third person. In the printer’s manuscript of the original edition of the Book of Mormon, it appeared that the word “I” appeared before Helaman but was crossed out. It appears likely that the text should read “I Helaman came upon their rear with my two thousand . . . the Lamanites halted and turned upon me” (“Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” Stan Larson, a FARMS reprint). As the current text now stands, we would have to suggest that perhaps this verse is an editorial comment by the prophet Mormon.

53 Now when the people of Antipus saw that the Lamanites had turned them about, they gathered together their men and came again upon the rear of the Lamanites.

54 And now it came to pass that we, the people of Nephi, the people of Antipus, and I with my two thousand, did surround the Lamanites, and did slay them; yea, insomuch that they were compelled to deliver up their weapons of war and also themselves as prisoners of war.

55 And now it came to pass that when they had surrendered themselves up unto us, behold, I numbered those young men who had fought with me, fearing lest there were many of them slain.

56 But behold, to my great joy, there had not one soul of them fallen to the earth; yea, and they had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men

known to have fought with such miraculous strength; and with such mighty power did they fall upon the Lamanites, that they did frighten them; and for this cause did the Lamanites deliver themselves up as prisoners of war.

57 And as we had no place for our prisoners, that we could guard them to keep them from the armies of the Lamanites, therefore we sent them to the land of Zarahemla, and a part of those men who were not slain of Antipus, with them; and the remainder I took and joined them to my stripping Ammonites, and took our march back to the city of Judea.

Alma Chapter 57

1 And now it came to pass that I received an epistle from Ammoron, the king, stating that if I would deliver up those prisoners of war whom we had taken that he would deliver up the city of Antiparah unto us.

verse 1 It is obvious that Ammoron knew that he did not have sufficient man power to hold the city of Antiparah against the now powerful Nephite army. He hoped to strike a bargain with Helaman, yet he was now dealing from a position of weakness rather than a position of strength. He attempted a clever ploy and offered to surrender the city in exchange for all of the Lamanite prisoners taken by the Nephites.

2 But I sent an epistle unto the king, that we were sure our forces were sufficient to take the city of Antiparah by our force; and by delivering up the prisoners for that city we should suppose ourselves unwise, and that we would only deliver up our prisoners on exchange.

verse 2 "we would only deliver up our prisoners on exchange" Helaman was not taken in by Ammoron's sly attempt to at deception. Helaman proposes his own plan for prisoner exchange. He would exchange one Lamanite prisoner for the release of one Nephite prisoner held captive by the Lamanites.

3 And Ammoron refused mine epistle, for he would not exchange prisoners; therefore we began to make preparations to go against the city of Antiparah.

verse 3 So Ammoron called off the prisoner exchange.

4 But the people of Antiparah did leave the city, and fled to their other cities, which they had possession of, to fortify them; and thus the city of Antiparah fell into our hands.

verse 4 "the people of Antiparah did leave the city" The Lamanite defenders of the city abandoned the city when they realized their hopeless plight. The Nephites took control of Antiparah without having to engage anyone in battle.

5 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

6 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year, we received a supply of provisions, and also an addition to our army, from the land of Zarahemla, and from the land round about, to the number of six thousand men, besides sixty of the sons of the Ammonites who had come to join their brethren, my little band of two thousand. And now behold, we were strong, yea, and we had also plenty of provisions brought unto us.

7 And it came to pass that it was our desire to wage a battle with the army which was placed to protect the city Cumeni.

8 And now behold, I will show unto you that we soon accomplished our desire; yea, with our strong force, or with a part of our strong force, we did surround, by night, the city Cumeni, a little before they were to receive a supply of provisions.

verse 8 Helaman organized a military blockade of Cumeni and cut the supply line for the Lamanites in the city.

9 And it came to pass that we did camp round about the city for many nights; but we did sleep upon our swords, and keep guards, that the Lamanites could not come upon us by night and slay us, which they attempted many times; but as many times as they attempted this their blood was spilt.

10 At length their provisions did arrive, and they were about to enter the city by night. And we, instead of being Lamanites, were Nephites; therefore, we did take them and their provisions.

verse 10 “instead of being Lamanites, were Nephites” Helaman implies that his Nephite guards surprised the Lamanites who were delivering provisions to the Lamanites in the city of Cumeni. They captured the Lamanites and the provisions they were delivering.

11 And notwithstanding the Lamanites being cut off from their support after this manner, they were still determined to maintain the city; therefore it became expedient that we should take those provisions and send them to Judea, and our prisoners to the land of Zarahemla.

12 And it came to pass that not many days had passed away before the Lamanites began to lose all hopes of succor; therefore they yielded up the city unto our hands; and thus we had accomplished our designs in obtaining the city Cumeni.

verse 12 Helaman’s blockade was successful. He had starved the Lamanites out and forced them to surrender.

verses 13-18 Hugh Nibley has a delightful way of succinctly summarizing the historical events in the Book of Mormon and, at the same time, adding his own editorial spice:

By now the Nephites were simply swamped with prisoners of war, who, seeing the embarrassment of their captors, began to stage prison riots, for behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs” and had to be bloodily suppressed. A very large body of prisoners was being escorted back to the capital by crack Nephite troops when they collided with a Lamanite army escorting a large supply train . . . The [Nephite] guards forgot about their prisoners and high-tailed

it back to Helaman's headquarters or command post to report the new danger; only just as they arrived there they found the headquarters company hotly engaged with the advanced elements of the same Lamanite army, and were able to join in the fighting just in time to turn the tide and save the command post" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 319-20).

13 But it came to pass that our prisoners were so numerous that, notwithstanding the enormity of our numbers, we were obliged to employ all our force to keep them, or to put them to death.

14 For behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs, or whatsoever thing they could get into their hands, insomuch that we did slay upwards of two thousand of them after they had surrendered themselves prisoners of war.

15 Therefore it became expedient for us, that we should put an end to their lives, or guard them, sword in hand, down to the land of Zarahemla; and also our provisions were not any more than sufficient for our own people, notwithstanding that which we had taken from the Lamanites.

16 And now, in those critical circumstances, it became a very serious matter to determine concerning these prisoners of war; nevertheless, we did resolve to send them down to the land of Zarahemla; therefore we selected a part of our men, and gave them charge over our prisoners to go down to the land of Zarahemla.

verse 16 We will learn that those chosen to escort the prisoners to Zarahemla were some from among the 2,060 of the sons of Helaman. They were led by Gid, and a more detailed account of this prisoner-transporting incident is found in verses 28-34 of this chapter.

17 But it came to pass that on the morrow they did return. And now behold, we did not inquire of them concerning the prisoners; for behold, the Lamanites were upon us, and they returned in season to save us from falling into their hands. For behold, Ammoron had sent to their support a new supply of provisions and also a numerous army of men.

18 And it came to pass that those men whom we sent with the prisoners did arrive in season to check them, as they were about to overpower us.

verse 18 "did arrive in season to check them" To check means to stop; to restrain; to curb.

19 But behold, my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately; yea, they were firm before the Lamanites, and did administer death unto all those who opposed them.

20 And as the remainder of our army were about to give way before the Lamanites, behold, those two thousand and sixty were firm and undaunted.

verse 20 Undaunted means not cowed by fear; intrepid.

21 Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them.

verse 21 “they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness” Obviously there is real power in obedience “with exactness.” The Lord has taught: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). Notice how the young warriors intuitively understood that obedience to their leaders was an extension of their obedience to God. Their obedience to their leader Helaman was immediate and exact. Would it have been possible to obey God without obeying Helaman? Here is the ultimate test of obedience: to show one’s allegiance to a perfect and infallible God by how we obey those less than perfect who are called to lead us.

22 And now behold, it was these my sons, and those men who had been selected to convey the prisoners, to whom we owe this great victory; for it was they who did beat the Lamanites; therefore they were driven back to the city of Manti.

23 And we retained our city Cumeni, and were not all destroyed by the sword; nevertheless, we had suffered great loss.

24 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had fled, I immediately gave orders that my men who had been wounded should be taken from among the dead, and caused that their wounds should be dressed.

25 And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, there was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.

verse 25 Each and every one of the 2,060 sons of Helaman had been wounded, but not one had been killed!

26 And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.

27 Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.

28 And now it came to pass that after we had thus taken care of our wounded men, and had buried our dead and also the dead of the Lamanites, who were many, behold, we did inquire of Gid concerning the prisoners whom they had started to go down to the land of Zarahemla with.

29 Now Gid was the chief captain over the band who was appointed to guard them down to the land.

30 And now, these are the words which Gid said unto me: Behold, we did start to go down to the land of Zarahemla with our prisoners. And it came to pass that we did meet the spies of our armies, who had been sent out to watch the camp of the Lamanites.

31 And they cried unto us, saying—Behold, the armies of the Lamanites are marching towards the city of Cumeni; and behold, they will fall upon them, yea, and will destroy our people.

verse 31 “the armies of the Lamanites are marching towards the city of Cumeni” It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “the Lamanites are a marching towards the city (*italics added*).” This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see John 21:3).

32 And it came to pass that our prisoners did hear their cries, which caused them to take courage; and they did rise up in rebellion against us.

33 And it came to pass because of their rebellion we did cause that our swords should come upon them. And it came to pass that they did in a body run upon our swords, in the which, the greater number of them were slain; and the remainder of them broke through and fled from us.

34 And behold, when they had fled and we could not overtake them, we took our march with speed towards the city Cumeni; and behold, we did arrive in time that we might assist our brethren in preserving the city.

35 And behold, we are again delivered out of the hands of our enemies. And blessed is the name of our God; for behold, it is he that has delivered us; yea, that has done this great thing for us.

36 Now it came to pass that when I, Helaman, had heard these words of Gid, I was filled with exceeding joy because of the goodness of God in preserving us, that we might not all perish; yea, and I trust that the souls of them who have been slain have entered into the rest of their God.

verse 36 “the rest of their God” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

Alma Chapter 58

Helaman continues his letter to Moroni.

1 And behold, now it came to pass that our next object was to obtain the city of Manti; but behold, there was no way that we could lead them out of the city by our small bands. For behold, they remembered that which we had hitherto done; therefore we could not decoy them away from their strongholds.

2 And they were so much more numerous than was our army that we durst not go forth and attack them in their strongholds.

3 Yea, and it became expedient that we should employ our men to the maintaining those parts of the land which we had regained of our possessions; therefore it became expedient that we should wait, that we might receive more strength from the land of Zarahemla and also a new supply of provisions.

verse 3 Again, a stalemate had developed. Both the Nephites and the Lamanites were safely holed up behind the Moroni-designed fortifications, and the Lamanites were simply too numerous for the Nephites to consider an attack. The Nephites were badly in need of additional men and provisions.

4 And it came to pass that I thus did send an embassy to the governor of our land, to acquaint him concerning the affairs of our people. And it came to pass that we did wait to receive provisions and strength from the land of Zarahemla.

verse 4 Apparently the “embassy”—the person or persons that Helaman dispatched to communicate with Pahoran in the city of Zarahemla did not immediately report back to Helaman. Otherwise he would have learned that Pahoran had serious problems of his own in the capital which prevented him from sending aid to the forces of Helaman. We will learn of these problems in Alma 61.

5 But behold, this did profit us but little; for the Lamanites were also receiving great strength from day to day, and also many provisions; and thus were our circumstances at this period of time.

6 And the Lamanites were sallying forth against us from time to time, resolving by stratagem to destroy us; nevertheless we could not come to battle with them, because of their retreats and their strongholds.

verse 6 “the Lamanites were sallying forth against us from time to time” This tactic of harassment was one which the Lamanites had learned from the Nephites. Hugh Nibley observed: “As in all long wars, the two opponents in their methods, armaments, tricks, and appearance come to be more and more alike, for an enemy may

not be allowed safely to monopolize any technical advantage for long” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 321).

7 And it came to pass that we did wait in these difficult circumstances for the space of many months, even until we were about to perish for the want of food.

8 But it came to pass that we did receive food, which was guarded to us by an army of two thousand men to our assistance; and this is all the assistance which we did receive, to defend ourselves and our country from falling into the hands of our enemies, yea, to contend with an enemy which was innumerable.

9 And now the cause of these our embarrassments, or the cause why they did not send more strength unto us, we knew not; therefore we were grieved and also filled with fear, lest by any means the judgments of God should come upon our land, to our overthrow and utter destruction.

verse 9 “Embarrassments” are problems or difficulties. The failure of Pahoran to send sufficient reinforcements or supplies was deeply troubling to Helaman and his forces. They even began to grieve and despair.

10 Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, yea, and also give us strength that we might retain our cities, and our lands, and our possessions, for the support of our people.

11 Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him.

verse 11 “our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us” Helaman and his forces were somewhat comforted by the Lord, yet apparently some doubts lingered on. At least they took courage to the point of mounting an offensive against the Lamanite stronghold in the city of Manti.

12 And we did take courage with our small force which we had received, and were fixed with a determination to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty.

verse 12 “to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty” The wording of this verse suggests that Helaman and his forces had reflected on the fundamental covenants they had entered into with the Lord—the so-called “promise/curse”—at the encouragement of Moroni. To review this concept see the introductory commentary for Alma 43 (see also Alma 46).

13 And thus we did go forth with all our might against the Lamanites, who were in the city of Manti; and we did pitch our tents by the wilderness side, which was near to the city.

verse 13 “by the wilderness side” One side of the city of Manti faced the wilderness. This was the wilderness separating the larger land of Nephi from the larger land of Zarahemla. It was therefore from this direction that the Lamanites’ supplies from the land of Nephi arrived in the city of Manti. In order for Helaman’s plan to work, he had to insolently (boldly—even in a haughty, disrespectful manner) deploy his relatively small number of forces in a highly visible location which produced a threat of cutting off the Lamanites’ supply line.

14 And it came to pass that on the morrow, that when the Lamanites saw that we were in the borders by the wilderness which was near the city, that they sent out their spies round about us that they might discover the number and the strength of our army.

verse 14 The Lamanite spies were easily able to discover the small size and obvious vulnerability of the Nephite forces.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that we were not strong, according to our numbers, and fearing that we should cut them off from their support except they should come out to battle against us and kill us, and also supposing that they could easily destroy us with their numerous hosts, therefore they began to make preparations to come out against us to battle.

16 And when we saw that they were making preparations to come out against us, behold, I caused that Gid, with a small number of men, should secrete himself in the wilderness, and also that Teomner and a small number of men should secrete themselves also in the wilderness.

verse 16 To “secrete” is to hide or conceal in a secret place.

17 Now Gid and his men were on the right and the others on the left; and when they had thus secreted themselves, behold, I remained, with the remainder of my army, in that same place where we had first pitched our tents against the time that the Lamanites should come out to battle.

18 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come out with their numerous army against us. And when they had come and were about to fall upon us with the sword, I caused that my men, those who were with me, should retreat into the wilderness.

verse 18 The third of the army, with which Helaman remained, had to beat a very hasty retreat indeed, since being caught by the large Lamanite force would have meant certain annihilation.

19 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did follow after us with great speed, for they were exceedingly desirous to overtake us that they might slay us; therefore they did follow us into the wilderness; and we did pass by in the midst of Gid and Teomner, insomuch that they were not discovered by the Lamanites.

20 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had passed by, or when the army had passed by, Gid and Teomner did rise up from their secret places, and did cut off the spies of the Lamanites that they should not return to the city.

21 And it came to pass that when they had cut them off, they ran to the city and fell upon the guards who were left to guard the city, insomuch that they did destroy them and did take possession of the city.

22 Now this was done because the Lamanites did suffer their whole army, save a few guards only, to be led away into the wilderness.

23 And it came to pass that Gid and Teomner by this means had obtained possession of their strongholds. And it came to pass that we took our course, after having traveled much in the wilderness towards the land of Zarahemla.

verse 23 “Gid and Teomner by this means had obtained possession of their strongholds” The Lamanite strongholds in Manti were captured by Gid and Teomner.

Apparently Helaman had begun his hasty retreat in a southward direction but eventually turned in a more northerly direction toward the city of Zarahemla.

24 And when the Lamanites saw that they were marching towards the land of Zarahemla, they were exceedingly afraid, lest there was a plan laid to lead them on to destruction; therefore they began to retreat into the wilderness again, yea, even back by the same way which they had come.

25 And behold, it was night and they did pitch their tents, for the chief captains of the Lamanites had supposed that the Nephites were weary because of their march; and supposing that they had driven their whole army therefore they took no thought concerning the city of Manti.

verse 25 “supposing that they had driven their whole army therefore they took no thought concerning the city of Manti” The Lamanite chief captains wrongly assumed they were pursuing the entire Nephite army. They did not consider that part of the army might have been left behind to capture the city of Manti.

26 Now it came to pass that when it was night, I caused that my men should not sleep, but that they should march forward by another way towards the land of Manti.

27 And because of this our march in the night-time, behold, on the morrow we were beyond the Lamanites, insomuch that we did arrive before them at the city of Manti.

28 And thus it came to pass, that by this stratagem we did take possession of the city of Manti without the shedding of blood.

29 And it came to pass that when the armies of the Lamanites did arrive near the city, and saw that we were prepared to meet them, they were astonished exceedingly and struck with great fear, insomuch that they did flee into the wilderness.

verse 29 Having been out-smarted, the defeated and discouraged Lamanites fled into the wilderness back to the land of Nephi taking with them many Nephite hostages—women and children.

30 Yea, and it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did flee out of all this quarter of the land. But behold, they have carried with them many women and children out of the land.

31 And those cities which had been taken by the Lamanites, all of them are at this period of time in our possession; and our fathers and our women and our children are returning to their homes, all save it be those who have been taken prisoners and carried off by the Lamanites.

32 But behold, our armies are small to maintain so great a number of cities and so great possessions.

verse 32 Obviously, though the Nephites again had possession of all of their lands, their hold on their lands was a bit tenuous because of the scant number of their occupation forces.

33 But behold, we trust in our God who has given us victory over those lands, insomuch that we have obtained those cities and those lands, which were our own.

verse 33 Helaman expresses his conviction that righteousness on the part of the Nephites will ensure God's protection over them.

34 Now we do not know the cause that the government does not grant us more strength; neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength.

verse 34 “neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength” We will learn in Alma 61 of a major insurrection and

rebellion against the government of Pahoran in Zarahemla mounted by the king-men. Pahoran was driven out of Zarahemla and forced to seek refuge in the land of Gideon. Why did the most recent reinforcements from Zarahemla not have more insight into these developments? Why were they not able to inform Helaman of the precarious political situation in Zarahemla? Apparently these difficulties were in an early state of development when these men left the capital, and they lacked insight into the situation beginning to unfold there.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has perceived another interesting lesson from this verse. He wrote: “Even while in deep difficulties, those of deep faith are generously disposed, as was reflected in Helaman’s report to Moroni from the battle front: ‘Behold, we do not know but what ye are unsuccessful . . . if so, we do not desire to murmur. . . . But behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies’ (Alma 58:35, 37)” (*A Wonderful Flood of Light*, 66- 67).

35 Behold, we do not know but what ye are unsuccessful, and ye have drawn away the forces into that quarter of the land; if so, we do not desire to murmur.

verse 35 Keep in mind that Helaman is writing to Moroni who is fighting in another quarter of the land. Helaman knows there are more men available in Zarahemla. Here he says to Moroni, “I am puzzled as to why I’m not receiving more men and supplies. Perhaps you are having so much trouble in your quarter that all of the men and supplies are going to you. If that is the case, then we certainly gladly accept that as a valid reason why we are receiving no help.”

“**we do not desire to murmur**” Helaman offers an apology for being negative. Notice how Helaman, who is in the process of complaining to Moroni, is doing so in a meek and humble way so as not to show disrespect for the chief governor Pahoran or to offend his chief commander Moroni. President Harold B. Lee taught: “The men under you will never be loyal to you if they see that you are disloyal to those who preside over you” (“Loyalty,” Address given to Seminary and Institute personnel at Brigham Young University July 8, 1966).

36 And if it is not so, behold, we fear that there is some faction in the government, that they do not send more men to our assistance; for we know that they are more numerous than that which they have sent.

verse 36 “**there is some faction in the government**” Perhaps Helaman is beginning to learn of the events in Zarahemla. He says to Moroni, “If you also are not receiving men and supplies, then something is obviously wrong in Zarahemla.”

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more

common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer's manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer's manuscripts, this phrase read "there is some fraction [part of the whole] in the government." The word *fraction* was corrected by the typesetter, and it therefore was changed to *faction* (a group within a larger organization producing strife or dissension) in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

37 But, behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies.

verse 37 Helaman expresses his faith, though one can almost feel the uncertainty and insecurity with which he is struggling.

38 Behold, this is the twenty and ninth year, in the latter end, and we are in the possession of our lands; and the Lamanites have fled to the land of Nephi.

39 And those sons of the people of Ammon, of whom I have so highly spoken, are with me in the city of Manti; and the Lord had supported them, yea, and kept them from falling by the sword, insomuch that even one soul has not been slain.

40 But behold, they have received many wounds; nevertheless they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free; and they are strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day; yea, they do observe to keep his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments continually; and their faith is strong in the prophecies concerning that which is to come.

verse 40 "they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free" The oft-mentioned "promise/curse" of the Book of Mormon has also been referred to as the Nephite "freedom thesis." As long as the covenant people were obedient they would remain free and not find themselves in bondage to another people. The disobedient, of course, have no such promise (K. Douglas Bassett, "Nephi's Freedom Thesis and the Sons of Helaman," *The Book of Mormon: Alma The Testimony of The Word*, 291-303).

41 And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma.

Alma Chapter 59

Scripture Mastery

Alma 59-61 Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla, asking for reinforcements. When they don't arrive, Moroni writes again and threatens to march on Zarahemla if help is not sent. Pahoran responds by informing Moroni, by letter, of the rebellions in Zarahemla.

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, after Moroni had received and had read Helaman's epistle, he was exceedingly rejoiced because of the welfare, yea, the exceeding success which Helaman had had, in obtaining those lands which were lost.

verse 1 “Moroni . . . was exceedingly rejoiced because of the welfare . . . which Helaman had had” Note here that the prophet Mormon is again writing as the first person. In this unusual phrase “rejoiced” is used as an adjective meaning something like happy, pleased, or delighted. “Welfare” is a noun which here means that Helaman had fared well or had experienced success.

2 Yea, and he did make it known unto all his people, in all the land round about in that part where he was, that they might rejoice also.

verse 2 In his own humble and self-effacing way, Moroni sang the praises of Helaman for all to hear.

3 And it came to pass that he immediately sent an epistle to Pahoran, desiring that he should cause men to be gathered together to strengthen Helaman, or the armies of Helaman, insomuch that he might with ease maintain that part of the land which he had been so miraculously prospered in regaining.

verse 3 “that part of the land which he had been so miraculously prospered in regaining” Here is another unusual word usage. “Prospered,” ordinarily, is an intransitive verb (one that is not used with a direct object) that means to thrive, flourish, to be successful or fortunate. There is another archaic definition that renders *prosper* a transitive verb (one that is used with a direct object). It means something like to make successful, fortunate, or blessed with success. It is this latter definition that applies here to the word “prospered.” Helaman had *prospered* the land. Though it is not said here, the Lord had *prospered* Helaman in allowing him his military successes.

4 And it came to pass when Moroni had sent this epistle to the land of Zarahemla, he began again to lay a plan that he might obtain the remainder of those possessions and cities which the Lamanites had taken from them.

verse 4 Now was the time when Moroni would begin a major offensive to recapture those Nephite cities held by the Lamanites. An integral part of his plan was that those cities already held by the Nephites would remain so.

5 And it came to pass that while Moroni was thus making preparations to go against the Lamanites to battle, behold, the people of Nephihah, who were gathered together from the city of Moroni and the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton, were attacked by the Lamanites.

verse 5 At this time the Lamanites had possession of the cities of Moroni, Lehi, and Morianton. Some of the Nephites from those cities had fled to the city of Nephihah hoping to find some security. We will learn that they found no such thing.

6 Yea, even those who had been compelled to flee from the land of Manti, and from the land round about, had come over and joined the Lamanites in this part of the land.

verse 6 “even those who had been compelled to flee from the land of Manti, and from the land round about” The use of the phrase “even those” here might lead one to assume that Mormon was referring, in this verse, to Nephites from the city of Manti. He is not, of course. Instead he is referring to those Lamanites who returned to the city of Manti after pursuing Helaman and his forces in the wilderness only to find Manti firmly in the possession of Gid, Teomner, and Helaman. They had probably returned to their homes in the land of Nephi and then subsequently been dispatched by Ammoron to Captain Moroni’s southeast quarter of the Nephite land.

7 And thus being exceedingly numerous, yea, and receiving strength from day to day, by the command of Ammoron they came forth against the people of Nephihah, and they did begin to slay them with an exceedingly great slaughter.

8 And their armies were so numerous that the remainder of the people of Nephihah were obliged to flee before them; and they came even and joined the army of Moroni.

9 And now as Moroni had supposed that there should be men sent to the city of Nephihah, to the assistance of the people to maintain that city, and knowing that it was easier to keep the city from falling into the hands of the Lamanites than to retake it from them, he supposed that they would easily maintain that city.

verse 9 Moroni had mistakenly assumed: (1) that Pahoran had sent reinforcements to the city of Nephihah to secure it against attack from the Lamanites, and (2) that those who defended Nephihah, having the advantage of his own ingenious defensive fortifications, could easily defend the city against a hostile takeover.

Moroni’s grand plan assumed that all of those cities which had been taken back by the Nephites would remain in Nephite hands. This would allow him to concentrate

on a strategem to take back those cities held by the Lamanites. This capture of Nephihah by the Lamanites and the pouring into his camp of Nephite refugees from Nephihah meant that his plans were in ruins.

10 Therefore he retained all his force to maintain those places which he had recovered.

verse 10 Moroni did not anticipate having to use his own forces to defend the city of Nephihah. Instead he felt he had but to defend the cities which his own forces had taken plus concentrate on his offensive plans.

11 And now, when Moroni saw that the city of Nephihah was lost he was exceedingly sorrowful, and began to doubt, because of the wickedness of the people, whether they should not fall into the hands of their brethren.

verse 11 To say that Moroni was “exceedingly sorrowful” is something of an understatement and perhaps a bit of a mis-statement as well. His grand plan for wresting the Nephite cities in the southeast quarter of the land from the Lamanites lay in shambles. He was more than sorrowful. He was certainly furious and frustrated. One can almost picture him, in his anger, casting about for reasons as to why this disaster might have happened. It occurred to him that the wickedness of the Nephites in Nephihah might have been in part responsible for their defeat at the hands of the Lamanites. Undoubtedly he was correct in his assessment of the worthiness or lack thereof the Nephites in Nephihah.

12 Now this was the case with all his chief captains. They doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people, and this because of the success of the Lamanites over them.

verse 12 One can also picture his chief captains standing about Moroni shaking their heads in agreement so as not to further anger him.

13 And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country.

verse 13 And while he is applying blame for the fall of Nephihah, he might as well blame the government. We will learn that, in his anger, he will write a letter accusing Pahoran of less than honorable motives and of various misdeeds. Moroni undoubtedly would later regret writing the letter in anger. He eventually discovers that Pahoran had not been at fault and that his motives were pure. Your author finds it comforting and refreshing that this larger-than-life character, Moroni, is after all quite human. In this incident, I feel Moroni would agree today that he had been carried away by his anger to some unwise excesses.

Alma Chapter 60

This chapter consists of a letter Moroni wrote to Pahoran in the city of Zarahemla. Hugh Nibley, an obvious admirer of Moroni, never-the-less has referred to this letter as “ill-advised” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 353-54) and has been somewhat critical of Moroni’s writing this condemning and accusatory letter before he had obtained enough of the facts. Brother Nibley writes:

Heavy-hearted (“exceedingly sorrowful”) for the loss of Nephihah, Moroni wrote another letter to Pahoran, “the chief judge and the governor over the land (verse 1),” in which he appears as a very tired commander indeed, following up a serious military blunder with an equally deplorable political one. The letter seethes with the resentment of the man at the front for the easy-living ways of the “VIP’s” back at the capital—the old misunderstandings between the “office” and the “field.” He starts out by reminding the governor of his duty to supply the armies in the field, and reminds him that both he and Helaman have suffered from short supplies from the beginning. He admits his ignorance of the situation and asks for information, and yet he cannot resist passing judgment with a peevish and quite unjustified charge of negligence: “We desire to know the cause of this . . . neglect; yea . . . of your thoughtless state (verse 6).” He goes on to charge deliberate mismanagement: “Ye have withheld your provisions (verse 9),” and incompetence: “for ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently. . . . Ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance (verse 10).”

This is getting serious, but there is worse to come. Swept on by the momentum of his pent-up emotions, the frustrated commander, who has just seen his favorite project for ending the war go to pot, piles one accusation on another. The government officials, he claims, in their comfortable offices, “sit upon [their] thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor (verse 7)” (a wonderful expression), and have trusted in the goodness of God to justify their neglect, and blandly attributed the calamities overtaking the soldiers in the field not to their own high and mighty indifference but, of all things, to the wickedness of the poor soldiers themselves and other suffering victims of the war. The politicians are responsible for the disasters and setbacks of the war, for “the wickedness . . . first commenced at our head (verse 15),” back in the days when the king-men threw the nation into turmoil at the beginning of the war: It was “the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us” that opened the door to the murderous Lamanites; nay, they “are [still] seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men.” Moroni even goes so far as to hint that Pahoran himself is one of those power-seekers, and worse still, “we know not but what ye are also traitors to your country (verse 18).” . . . Moroni may only have suspicions, but what he suspects is the very worst. He becomes scathingly sarcastic as he describes the fat government

officials complacently sitting in idleness, surrounded by hordes of lazy slackers like themselves, “tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands around about . . . who are falling by the sword (verse 22).” The picture may seem overdrawn to us, and yet it probably was not, for that is actually the way things are in wartime.

Moroni’s next step was to charge the head of the state with immoral behavior and call upon him to repent. But now comes the height of his indiscretion, for after lecturing the governor like a “Dutch uncle,” Moroni promises him a good spanking, and ends up threatening open rebellion: “And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom . . . I will come unto you. . . . I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct (verse 27).” This is not as bad as it sounds, for he is not attacking those in authority but those who have usurped it, namely that power-seeking faction he knows so well. Still, the same Moroni who had begun his letter with a profession of ignorance and a request for information can now bring the flat accusation and fling a challenge at the governor: “I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear, . . . and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss (verse 28).” Carried along in the spirit of his eloquence, he shifts from vague references to troublemakers to placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of the people to whom he is writing: “and, except ye do minister unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword (verse 30).”

It seems strange that this man who had deplored more than anything else the contentions and dissensions among the Nephites as the principal cause of their misfortunes in war, should now propose to add to the turmoil by stirring up insurrection. But Moroni was bursting with pent-up emotions and the accumulated memories of reverses that could have been avoided and operations that could have ended the war had the necessary support been forthcoming from home. He knows, as Helaman suspects, that someone in high places is working against him, and for his noble and idealistic nature the thought that anyone should make capital of the miseries of others was simply maddening—yet he had seen that sort of thing going on in the capital all his life. “The Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities (verse 31),” he writes to Pahoran. He does not blame the Lamanites—they are only doing what they think is right, “it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred (verse 32);” the real enemy is as ever the private citizen or public official seeking to promote himself: “Your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world (verse 32).” Finally Moroni goes all out: the Lord has commanded him, he says, to go up in battle against the governors if they do not repent (verses 34-35)! He closes with what might be called Moroni’s watchword: “I seek not for power, but to pull it down” (verse 36).

It was, to say the least, not the most tactful letter in the world, but Moroni's patience was worn out. Also, it turned out, he was right—on every point but one. And that point was an important one: he had accused the wrong man. Aside from that, he had the situation correctly sized up—his long experience with the king-men had not been for nothing (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 323-25).

1 And it came to pass that he wrote again to the governor of the land, who was Pahoran, and these are the words which he wrote, saying: Behold, I direct mine epistle to Pahoran, in the city of Zarahemla, who is the chief judge and the governor over the land, and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war.

2 For behold, I have somewhat to say unto them by the way of condemnation; for behold, ye yourselves know that ye have been appointed to gather together men, and arm them with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind, and send forth against the Lamanites, in whatsoever parts they should come into our land.

3 And now behold, I say unto you that myself, and also my men, and also Helaman and his men, have suffered exceedingly great sufferings; yea, even hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and all manner of afflictions of every kind.

4 But behold, were this all we had suffered we would not murmur nor complain.

5 But behold, great has been the slaughter among our people; yea, thousands have fallen by the sword, while it might have otherwise been if ye had rendered unto our armies sufficient strength and succor for them. Yea, great has been your neglect towards us.

6 And now behold, we desire to know the cause of this exceedingly great neglect; yea, we desire to know the cause of your thoughtless state.

7 Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren—

verse 7 “sit upon your thrones” Thrones? Pahoran was not a king, rather he was a governor of a republic. Would he have had a throne? The Nephite leader still sat on a “judgment seat,” and undoubtedly still had a throne of sorts to sit on while officiating in his office. It seems most likely that, in his anger and frustration, Moroni was using a slang expression with much negative implication. Had Moroni been a man of coarser expression we can just imagine what word he might have used in place of “thrones.”

“in a state of thoughtless stupor” Moroni is cutting in his criticism. Stupor is a state of intellectual insensibility; suspension of sensibility; moral stupidity; heedlessness; or inattention.

8 Yea, even they who have looked up to you for protection, yea, have placed you in a situation that ye might have succored them, yea, ye might have sent armies unto them, to have strengthened them, and have saved thousands of them from falling by the sword.

9 But behold, this is not all—ye have withheld your provisions from them, insomuch that many have fought and bled out their lives because of their great desires which they had for the welfare of this people; yea, and this they have done when they were about to perish with hunger, because of your exceedingly great neglect towards them.

10 And now, my beloved brethren—for ye ought to be beloved; yea, and ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently for the welfare and the freedom of this people; but behold, ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance; yea, for known unto God were all their cries, and all their sufferings—

11 Behold, could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain.

12 Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness? I say unto you, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain; for I say unto you, there are many who have fallen by the sword; and behold it is to your condemnation;

verse 12 “if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain” Captain Moroni has asked an interesting question: “Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness?” Moroni is trying to pin the responsibility for the deaths of many righteous Nephites on Pahoran and his government who he mistakenly thinks has been shirking his duties. But we may take another lesson from Moroni’s question. The vicissitudes of mortality do not necessarily happen to the wicked. The nature of this mortal existence is that there occur to all people, regardless of their spiritual qualifications or lack thereof, what we might call “mortal accidents,” hardships that are not deserved. It is the nature of this mortal experience. See *Adversity and Suffering in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1.

13 For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain 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.

verse 13 “the rest of the Lord their God” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

14 And now behold, I say unto you, I fear exceedingly that the judgments of God will come upon this people, because of their exceeding slothfulness, yea, even the slothfulness of our government, and their exceedingly great neglect towards their brethren, yea, towards those who have been slain.

15 For were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies that they could have gained no power over us.

16 Yea, had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; yea, were it not for these king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, at the time we were contending among ourselves, if we had united our strength as we hitherto have done; yea, had it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us; had they been true to the cause of our freedom, and united with us, and gone forth against our enemies, instead of taking up their swords against us, which was the cause of so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, if we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies, for it would have been done, according to the fulfilling of his word.

17 But behold, now the Lamanites are coming upon us, taking possession of our lands, and they are murdering our people with the sword, yea, our women and our children, and also carrying them away captive, causing them that they should suffer all manner of afflictions, and this because of the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men.

18 But why should I say much concerning this matter? For we know not but what ye yourselves are seeking for authority. We know not but what ye are also traitors to your country.

19 Or is it that ye have neglected us because ye are in the heart of our country and ye are surrounded by security, that ye do not cause food to be sent unto us, and also men to strengthen our armies?

20 Have ye forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? Yea, have ye forgotten the captivity of our fathers? Have ye forgotten the many times we have been delivered out of the hands of our enemies?

21 Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?

22 Yea, will ye sit in idleness while ye are surrounded with thousands of those, yea, and tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands round about in the borders of the land who are falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding?

23 Do ye suppose that God will look upon you as guiltless while ye sit still and behold these things? Behold I say unto you, Nay. Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also.

verse 23 “**God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleaned**” Here, Moroni attributes a statement to God which we do not find in our present-day scripture. This particular verse of scripture formed the basis of an important address by a latter-day prophet. In a solemn assembly at general conference April 6, 1986, Ezra Taft Benson was sustained by members of the Church as the prophet, seer, and revelator, and president of the church. In his opening address at that conference, President Benson told of the urgent need for church members to “cleanse the inner vessel” (note that he changed the adjective “inward” found in Alma 60:23 to “inner”). By this he meant that each of us ought to make specific changes in our personal lives. He said, “We will be lengthening our stride in the future. To do so, we must first cleanse the inner vessel by awaking and arising, being morally clean, using the Book of Mormon, and conquering pride.” In commencing that cleansing, he declared, “The Book of Mormon has not been, nor is it yet, the center of our personal study, family teaching, preaching, and missionary work. Of this we must repent” (“Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986:4-7). During Christ’s mortal ministry, he metaphorically accused the scribes and Pharisees of cleansing the outer vessel (to maintain a righteous public appearance) but leaving their inner vessel (their heart and mind) corrupt and wicked (Matthew 23:25-28). If the inward or inner vessel is cleansed through repentance, then the outer vessel is automatically cleaned. If one is truly righteous, he need not worry about appearances.

24 And now, except ye do repent of that which ye have done, and begin to be up and doing, and send forth food and men unto us, and also unto Helaman, that he may support those parts of our country which he has regained, and that we may also recover the remainder of our possessions in these parts, behold it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great head of our government.

25 And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom, and strive to strengthen and fortify our armies, and grant unto them food for their support, behold I will leave a part of my freemen to maintain this part of our land, and I will leave the strength and the blessings of God upon them, that none other power can operate against them—

26 And this because of their exceeding faith, and their patience in their tribulations—

27 And I will come unto you, and if there be any among you that has a desire for freedom, yea, if there be even a spark of freedom remaining, behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct.

verse 27 “I will stir up insurrections among you” An insurrection is a rising against civil or political authority; the open and active opposition by a group to the execution of law in a city or state.

28 Yea, behold I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear; and it is according to his commandments that I do take my sword to defend the cause of my country, and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss.

29 Behold it is time, yea, the time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defence of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.

verse 29 “bestir yourselves” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bestir* as, “to put into brisk or vigorous action; to move with life and vigor.”

Today, we spell the word defense with an “s” rather than a “c” as is used here. Obviously, in the early nineteenth century, “defence” was a proper spelling. It is found in some eleven verses in the present edition of the Book of Mormon. The word “defense” (with an “s”) is not found in the Book of Mormon. *Defence* is used today in Great Britain.

30 Behold, I wait for assistance from you; and, except ye do administer unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword, insomuch that ye can have no more power to impede the progress of this people in the cause of our freedom.

31 For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people.

32 Behold, can you suppose that the Lord will spare you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites, when it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred, yea, and it has been redoubled by those who have dissented from us, while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world?

verse 32 “traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17. Moroni says that the Nephites cannot blame the Lamanites, as they are only defending the traditions of their fathers. Rather the blame rests upon Pahoran and the Nephites in government.

33 Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. Behold, the Lord saith unto me: If those whom ye

have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them.

34 And now behold, I, Moroni, am constrained, according to the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God; therefore I would that ye should adhere to the word of God, and send speedily unto me of your provisions and of your men, and also to Helaman.

35 And behold, if ye will not do this I come unto you speedily; for behold, God will not suffer that we should perish with hunger; therefore he will give unto us of your food, even if it must be by the sword. Now see that ye fulfil the word of God.

36 Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country. And thus I close mine epistle.

verse 36 “I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country” If there is a concise statement or slogan that embodies the essence of the prophet Moroni, then this is it!

Alma Chapter 61

This chapter is Pahoran's answer by letter to Moroni. Hugh Nibley offers his appraisal of Pahoran:

Fortunately the man thus wrongly accused was a governor worthy of his high office, as his wise, temperate, and constructive reply reveals. Instead of getting on his high horse, Pahoran reacted to Moroni's withering onslaught by telling him that he had a right to be upset, as he himself is (verse 2), and that instead of resenting such language addressed to himself he understands Moroni's intention perfectly and rejoices in his greatness of heart (verse 9). As a matter of fact, Moroni has made a pretty good estimate of the situation, for there were indeed plenty of important people in the capital who were only too pleased to see the great Moroni in trouble—"who do joy at your afflictions;" what is more, Moroni had correctly guessed who they were—the old power-seekers, who had actually been able to take over the government by clever propaganda, "for they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people," and being in office had succeeded in intimidating the opposition, "and have daunted our freemen" (verses 2-4). They had forced the president, Pahoran, to leave town, but in doing so he had energetically rallied as many supporters as he could (verse 5), and was sure that the masses of the people, who had always followed Moroni, were still behind him, and that the ruling clique did not dare risk a test of strength in the field (verse 7) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 326-27).

1 Behold, now it came to pass that soon after Moroni had sent his epistle unto the chief governor, he received an epistle from Pahoran, the chief governor. And these are the words which he received:

2 I, Pahoran, who am the chief governor of this land, do send these words unto Moroni, the chief captain over the army. Behold, I say unto you, Moroni, that I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul.

3 But behold, there are those who do joy in your afflictions, yea, insomuch that they have risen up in rebellion against me, and also those of my people who are freemen, yea, and those who have risen up are exceedingly numerous.

verse 3 Though Pahoran does not refer to them by name, those who rebelled against him are the king-men. For a review of the origins and identity of this troublesome group, see the commentary for Alma 1:2 and for Alma 51:5.

"those of my people who are freemen" This verse is a bit ambiguous and may initially be interpreted as implying that some of the freemen among the Nephites had also risen up in rebellion. A closer consideration, however, suggests that the king-men had risen up in rebellion against both Pahoran and his people, the freemen.

4 And it is those who have sought to take away the judgment-seat from me that have been the cause of this great iniquity; for they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people, which will be the cause of sore affliction among us; they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen that they have not come unto you.

verse 4 “they have withheld our provisions” These king-men have seized sufficient power that they are in a position to withhold those supplies which had been intended for the forces of Moroni and Helaman.

“they . . . have daunted our freemen” To *daunt* means to intimidate or to make afraid. Apparently the freemen were so discouraged and disheartened that they would not come out into the field of battle to the aid of Moroni and Helaman.

5 And behold, they have driven me out before them, and I have fled to the land of Gideon, with as many men as it were possible that I could get.

6 And behold, I have sent a proclamation throughout this part of the land; and behold, they are flocking to us daily, to their arms, in the defense of their country and their freedom, and to avenge our wrongs.

7 And they have come unto us, insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us are set at defiance, yea, insomuch that they do fear us and durst not come out against us to battle.

verse 7 “And they have come unto us, insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us are set at defiance” Seeing so many freemen gathering to Gideon has caused the king-men to be “set at defiance”—that is, they have assumed a defensive and cautious posture rather than an openly aggressive one.

8 They have got possession of the land, or the city, of Zarahemla; they have appointed a king over them, and he hath written unto the king of the Lamanites, in the which he hath joined an alliance with him; in the which alliance he hath agreed to maintain the city of Zarahemla, which maintenance he supposeth will enable the Lamanites to conquer the remainder of the land, and he shall be placed king over this people when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites.

Hugh Nibley previews the coming verses:

Who the new government were becomes apparent when we learn that upon seizing the capital they had abolished democratic government and set up a monarchy, and, as might be expected, immediately entered into negotiations with the king of the Lamanites. It was the old royalist [or king-men] crowd that Moroni knew so well (verse 8). Pahoran, who was as much for popular government and as little interested in personal power as Moroni himself, proposed a plan for restoring the old government. But first of all as a civil officer he explored every possibility of avoiding violence. Like

Moroni, he would, he says, gladly suffer the Lamanites if they would let him: “We should not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land” (verse 10). This is no self-righteous accusing, since every battle in Moroni’s time was fought on Nephite, not on Lamanite, soil. So far is Pahoran from patriotic heroics that he declares, “We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage, if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us” (verse 12), and he insists that one should take to the sword only when words have failed (verse 14). But “the spirit of God” is “the spirit of freedom” (verse 15), so what was he to do now? Even in this dire emergency he hesitates to use force, being “worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren” (verse 19). Like Moroni sparing the drunken guards, he is more concerned with doing what is just than anything else, and it is Moroni’s letter, he says, that has made up his mind for him, since it declares that the Lord wants action (verse 20). So, full of fight and ginger, he and his supporters join up with a small task-force of Moroni’s that had marched to meet them, and as soon as Moroni raised his Title of Liberty the people flocked in ecstatic thousands to the well-known banner. Moroni and Pahoran, now fast friends, made a triumphant progress through the land, culminating in a battle in which the army of King Pachus and his supporters was quickly beaten (Alma 62:3-8) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 327-28).

9 And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart. I, Pahoran, do not seek for power, save only to retain my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free.

verse 9 This reply of Pahoran’s is to be treasured as one of the fine examples of self-effacement, meekness, and humility in the scriptures. Moroni had attacked Pahoran rather vigorously in his letter, yet Pahoran’s reply is written with a quiet and calm spirit without any attempt to retaliate against Moroni.

verses 10-21 In these verses Pahoran will outline for Moroni his plan for recapturing control of the Nephite government.

10 And now, behold, we will resist wickedness even unto bloodshed. We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land.

verse 10 Pahoran’s plan for recapturing control of the government is based on a generally defensive strategy rather than an aggressive and preemptive one. He makes it clear that he will “will resist wickedness even unto bloodshed” meaning that he regards bloodshed even in a military context as “wickedness” which should be avoided if at all possible.

11 We would not shed the blood of our brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us.

12 We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us so to do.

13 But behold he doth not command us that we shall subject ourselves to our enemies, but that we should put our trust in him, and he will deliver us.

14 Therefore, my beloved brother, Moroni, let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, yea, such as rebellions and dissensions, let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom, that we may rejoice in the great privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God.

verse 14 “let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words” Among the first principles of the righteous exercise of priesthood authority is the principle of persuasion (D&C 121:41-43). We should use words whenever possible to encourage a necessary change in another’s behavior. These words should be offered in the spirit of long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love unfeigned (D&C 121:41).

“Whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words . . . let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom” There will always be times when patient persuasion fails. Then we are obliged simply to turn away unless those who will not be persuaded are bent upon destroying our country and church or placing those of our country or church in bondage. When we are faced with those who would take away our freedom or those who would destroy our country and church, then we are justified in taking up the sword.

15 Therefore, come unto me speedily with a few of your men, and leave the remainder in the charge of Lehi and Teancum; give unto them power to conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of freedom which is in them.

verse 15 “according to the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of freedom” Commenting upon the relationship between the Spirit of God and the spirit of freedom, President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The Founding Fathers knew that ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 599).

16 Behold I have sent a few provisions unto them, that they may not perish until ye can come unto me.

17 Gather together whatsoever force ye can upon your march hither, and we will go speedily against those dissenters, in the strength of our God according to the faith which is in us.

18 And we will take possession of the city of Zarahemla, that we may obtain more food to send forth unto Lehi and Teancum; yea, we will go forth against them in the strength of the Lord, and we will put an end to this great iniquity.

19 And now, Moroni, I do joy in receiving your epistle, for I was somewhat worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren.

verse 19 Obviously Pahoran had exercised considerable patience and long-suffering in dealing with the rebellious king-men faction among the Nephites. Now, however, his limit has been exceeded, and he has chosen the strategy of military force.

20 But ye have said, except they repent the Lord hath commanded you that ye should go against them.

21 See that ye strengthen Lehi and Teancum in the Lord; tell them to fear not, for God will deliver them, yea, and also all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free. And now I close mine epistle to my beloved brother, Moroni.

verse 21 The natural leadership abilities of Pahoran are apparent here as he wisely counsels his chief military commander Moroni.

Alma Chapter 62

1 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle his heart did take courage, and was filled with exceedingly great joy because of the faithfulness of Pahoran, that he was not also a traitor to the freedom and cause of his country.

verse 1 Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented upon the effect Pahoran's reply to Moroni had on the chief military commander:

Pahoran's was not a resentful rejoinder lamenting the fact that Moroni was foolish without the facts. Pahoran did not engage in sarcasm or bitterness by lamenting that things were at least as rough for him as they were for Moroni and the army. He could have been sarcastic, saying he no longer had any throne to sit upon "in a state of thoughtless stupor." He could have justifiably boiled over at the accusation of his being a traitor, telling Moroni to do his job as chief captain and that Pahoran would do his job as governor. Instead, this exchange permitted these two leaders to rally themselves and their forces to retake the city. Moroni, when he received Pahoran's reply, indicated that his "heart did take courage," and that he rejoiced "because of the faithfulness of Pahoran" (*Meek and Lowly*, 24-25).

2 But he did also mourn exceedingly because of the iniquity of those who had driven Pahoran from the judgment-seat, yea, in fine because of those who had rebelled against their country and also their God.

verse 2 "In fine" means in conclusion or in summary. Here Mormon states that Moroni mourned over those who had driven Pahoran from office, in fact over all those who had rebelled.

3 And it came to pass that Moroni took a small number of men, according to the desire of Pahoran, and gave Lehi and Teancum command over the remainder of his army, and took his march towards the land of Gideon.

4 And he did raise the standard of liberty in whatsoever place he did enter, and gained whatsoever force he could in all his march towards the land of Gideon.

verse 4 Brother Hugh Nibley comments: "This was the third time that his Title of Liberty had been called out to put down a royalist coalition, timed to take advantage of a great national crisis; yet he pardoned without penalty or punishment all who would prove their loyalty by willingness 'to take up arms in defence of their country'" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328).

5 And it came to pass that thousands did flock unto his standard, and did take up their swords in the defense of their freedom, that they might not come into bondage.

verse 5 “did take up their swords” One weapon described by Mesoamerican historians is called the macuahuitl. Although some critics of the Book of Mormon have argued that the macuahuitl is merely a club studded with obsidian, there is documentation of several witnesses of this instrument describing it clearly as a sword (Matthew Roper, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 [1996], 150-58; see also Brother Roper’s “Swords and Cimeters in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 [1999], 34-43).

6 And thus, when Moroni had gathered together whatsoever men he could in all his march, he came to the land of Gideon; and uniting his forces with those of Pahoran they became exceedingly strong, even stronger than the men of Pachus, who was the king of those dissenters who had driven the freemen out of the land of Zarahemla and had taken possession of the land.

7 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran went down with their armies into the land of Zarahemla, and went forth against the city, and did meet the men of Pachus, insomuch that they did come to battle.

8 And behold, Pachus was slain and his men were taken prisoners, and Pahoran was restored to his judgment-seat.

9 And the men of Pachus received their trial, according to the law, and also those king-men who had been taken and cast into prison; and they were executed according to the law; yea, those men of Pachus and those king-men, whosoever would not take up arms in the defense of their country, but would fight against it, were put to death.

verse 9 We may be assured that the Nephite law dealt fairly and reasonably with these king-men. Those who were executed not only failed to take up arms in support of their government, but also took up arms and fought against their government with the intent of bringing it down. Though the Nephite law and its enforcement were fair, these king-men had clearly picked the wrong time to break this law as is evidenced in the following verse.

10 And thus it became expedient that this law should be strictly observed for the safety of their country; yea, and whosoever was found denying their freedom was speedily executed according to the law.

verse 10 In times of national crisis and emergency, it was necessary to strictly enforce the laws for the “safety” or security of the country.

11 And thus ended the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; Moroni and Pahoran having restored peace to the land of Zarahemla, among their own people, having inflicted death upon all those who were not true to the cause of freedom.

12 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Moroni immediately caused that provisions should be sent, and also an army of six thousand men should be sent unto Helaman, to assist him in preserving that part of the land.

13 And he also caused that an army of six thousand men, with a sufficient quantity of food, should be sent to the armies of Lehi and Teancum. And it came to pass that this was done to fortify the land against the Lamanites.

14 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran, leaving a large body of men in the land of Zarahemla, took their march with a large body of men towards the land of Nephihah, being determined to overthrow the Lamanites in that city.

15 And it came to pass that as they were marching towards the land, they took a large body of men of the Lamanites, and slew many of them, and took their provisions and their weapons of war.

verse 15 “they took a large body of men of the Lamanites” The verb “to take” here obviously means to engage in battle and defeat. Brother Nibley comments: “[Moroni’s] first interest was to retake Nephihah, lost by his own miscalculation, and during the operation who should assist him but Pahoran, familiarizing himself with the war’s problems at first hand. On the way to Nephihah, the two commanders ran into a special task-force of Lamanites and defeated it. What followed showed that the tide of war was turning and there was a new spirit in the air—Moroni’s patience and humanity in dealing with the defeated was beginning to bear fruit. For, instead of making prisoners of the beaten Lamanites, Moroni permitted all of them who would accept the usual covenant (about four thousand of them) to go off and settle peaceably among the people of Ammon! (verse 17) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328).

16 And it came to pass after they had taken them, they caused them to enter into a covenant that they would no more take up their weapons of war against the Nephites.

17 And when they had entered into this covenant they sent them to dwell with the people of Ammon, and they were in number about four thousand who had not been slain.

verse 17 Brother Nibley comments on these converted Lamanites: “If the Nephites are not all good, the Lamanites are by no means all bad. For many years it was only because Nephite dissenters stirred them up that the Lamanites came to war against the Nephites. It was hardened Lamanite troopers who had sworn vengeance upon the Nephites (Alma 25:1) who, upon returning from a campaign, of their own free

will went over in large numbers 'and did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi' (Alma 25:13). It was fierce tribesmen with a long record of savagery and bloodshed who suddenly decided to bury their weapons and became the most righteous people in the New World (Alma 24:19). It was also the Lamanite veterans of a long war who later went over in droves to join them, becoming overnight model Nephite citizens (Alma 62:17, 29)" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 344-45).

Moroni and Pahoran obviously had great confidence in the oral covenant or oath which the Lamanites made in this instance.

18 And it came to pass that when they had sent them away they pursued their march towards the land of Nephihah. And it came to pass that when they had come to the city of Nephihah, they did pitch their tents in the plains of Nephihah, which is near the city of Nephihah.

19 Now Moroni was desirous that the Lamanites should come out to battle against them, upon the plains; but the Lamanites, knowing of their exceedingly great courage, and beholding the greatness of their numbers, therefore they durst not come out against them; therefore they did not come to battle in that day.

20 And when the night came, Moroni went forth in the darkness of the night, and came upon the top of the wall to spy out in what part of the city the Lamanites did camp with their army.

verse 20 To climb to the top of a wall from the outside of a Nephite-fortified city must have been a daunting task. See the commentary for Alma 49:18. No wonder the attacking Nephites needed strong cords and ladders to be let down from the top of the wall (described in the following verse).

21 And it came to pass that they were on the east, by the entrance; and they were all asleep. And now Moroni returned to his army, and caused that they should prepare in haste strong cords and ladders, to be let down from the top of the wall into the inner part of the wall.

22 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his men should march forth and come upon the top of the wall, and let themselves down into that part of the city, yea, even on the west, where the Lamanites did not camp with their armies.

23 And it came to pass that they were all let down into the city by night, by the means of their strong cords and their ladders; thus when the morning came they were all within the walls of the city.

24 And now, when the Lamanites awoke and saw that the armies of Moroni were within the walls, they were affrighted exceedingly, insomuch that they did flee out by the pass.

verse 24 “insomuch that they did flee out by the pass” Here the “place of entrance” of this Nephite city is referred to as “the pass.” See the commentary for Alma 49:18.

25 And now when Moroni saw that they were fleeing before him, he did cause that his men should march forth against them, and slew many, and surrounded many others, and took them prisoners; and the remainder of them fled into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

26 Thus had Moroni and Pahoran obtained the possession of the city of Nephiah without the loss of one soul; and there were many of the Lamanites who were slain.

27 Now it came to pass that many of the Lamanites that were prisoners were desirous to join the people of Ammon and become a free people.

verse 27 Brother Nibley comments: “Plainly everybody was getting rather tired of war when thousands of Lamanite warriors began to see the light—that the people of Ammon were the really sensible people after all. And so the wicked Lamanites, who had made life a hell for the Nephites for as long as anyone could remember, whose territories and resources still remained intact and unravaged by war, and who still outnumbered the Nephites by an immense margin, were dismissed without even a reprimand, and in short order became model citizens of the Nephite realm (verse 29). This also solved the vexing prisoner of war problem” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328-29).

28 And it came to pass that as many as were desirous, unto them it was granted according to their desires.

29 Therefore, all the prisoners of the Lamanites did join the people of Ammon, and did begin to labor exceedingly, tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind; and thus were the Nephites relieved from a great burden; yea, insomuch that they were relieved from all the prisoners of the Lamanites.

30 Now it came to pass that Moroni, after he had obtained possession of the city of Nephiah, having taken many prisoners, which did reduce the armies of the Lamanites exceedingly, and having regained many of the Nephites who had been taken prisoners, which did strengthen the army of Moroni exceedingly; therefore Moroni went forth from the land of Nephiah to the land of Lehi.

31 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Moroni was coming against them, they were again frightened and fled before the army of Moroni.

32 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army did pursue them from city to city, until they were met by Lehi and Teancum; and the Lamanites fled from Lehi

and Teancum, even down upon the borders by the seashore, until they came to the land of Moroni.

33 And the armies of the Lamanites were all gathered together, insomuch that they were all in one body in the land of Moroni. Now Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites, was also with them.

34 And it came to pass that Moroni and Lehi and Teancum did encamp with their armies round about in the borders of the land of Moroni, insomuch that the Lamanites were encircled about in the borders by the wilderness on the south, and in the borders by the wilderness on the east.

35 And thus they did encamp for the night. For behold, the Nephites and the Lamanites also were weary because of the greatness of the march; therefore they did not resolve upon any stratagem in the night-time, save it were Teancum; for he was exceedingly angry with Ammoron, insomuch that he considered that Ammoron, and Amalickiah his brother, had been the cause of this great and lasting war between them and the Lamanites, which had been the cause of so much war and bloodshed, yea, and so much famine.

36 And it came to pass that Teancum in his anger did go forth into the camp of the Lamanites, and did let himself down over the walls of the city. And he went forth with a cord, from place to place, insomuch that he did find the king; and he did cast a javelin at him, which did pierce him near the heart. But behold, the king did awaken his servants before he died, insomuch that they did pursue Teancum, and slew him.

verse 36 Teancum had previously slain Amalickiah, Ammoron's brother. Now Teancum gives his life shortly after killing Ammoron.

37 Now it came to pass that when Lehi and Moroni knew that Teancum was dead they were exceedingly sorrowful; for behold, he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many exceedingly sore afflictions. But behold, he was dead, and had gone the way of all the earth.

38 Now it came to pass that Moroni marched forth on the morrow, and came upon the Lamanites, insomuch that they did slay them with a great slaughter; and they did drive them out of the land; and they did flee, even that they did not return at that time against the Nephites.

39 And thus ended the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus they had had wars, and bloodsheds, and famine, and affliction, for the space of many years.

40 And there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi; nevertheless for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared.

verse 40 President Spencer W. Kimball taught that God had given a special promise to the Nephites which applies to all the peoples of America. This promise was that if they would remain sufficiently righteous, they would not have to fight (“The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign* [June 1976] 6:3-6). Gerald Hansen Jr. observed: “The irony of the wars in the book of Alma is that the Nephites were righteous enough to win the wars, but not righteous enough to prevent them from taking place” (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. 278). The principle here is that a righteous minority may save a nation from destruction.

41 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.

verse 41 “many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility” Regarding the nature of the Lord’s chastening, Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Afflictions can soften us and sweeten us, and can be a chastening influence. We often think of chastening as something being done to punish us, such as by a mortal tutor who is angry and peevish with us. Divine chastening, however, is a form of learning as it is administered at the hands of a loving Father (Helaman 12:3)” (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 39).

42 And it came to pass that after Moroni had fortified those parts of the land which were most exposed to the Lamanites, until they were sufficiently strong, he returned to the city of Zarahemla; and also Helaman returned to the place of his inheritance; and there was once more peace established among the people of Nephi.

verse 42 “there was once more peace established among the people of Nephi” An interesting pattern may be discerned in the Book of Mormon. Here a period of peace follows the death of the Nephite dissenter Ammoron. When we look at the truly vicious villains in the Book of Mormon, the record shows that beginning with Laman and Lemuel they came almost exclusively from the Nephite groups. Ammoron was a Nephite-Zoramite (Alma 54:23-24), and thus so were his brother Amalickiah and his son Tubaloth. Others of these vicious dissenters of Nephite or Mulekite origin were: Sherem, Noah and his priest Amulon, Nehor, Amlici, the people of Ammonihah, Korihor, the Zoramites, Jacob (Alma 52:20), Pachus and the king-men (Alma 51:5-8; 62:6), Morianton (Alma 50:25-36), Paanchi (Helaman 1:3-7), Kishkumen and Gadianton (Helaman 1:9-12; 2:4-14), and probably Zerahemnah. Even when the record calls

some of these lesser-known villains such as Tubaloth (see the commentary for Helaman 1:16) and Coriantumr “Lamanites” or even “bold Lamanites,” we have already been told that their true parentage was Nephite or Mulekite (see the commentary for Helaman 1:15 and 16). To be sure, the Nephites did not consider the Lamanites to be peaceful neighbors, and these unrighteous Lamanites did send armies from time to time to attack the Nephites, but there is no mistaking that the record emphasizes that the majority of the time, it was the Nephite dissenters who were the true “hard hearts” who continually stirred up, recruited, and inspired the reluctant Lamanites to go into battle (see Alma 21:3; 23:13-15; 24; 27:2-3; 43:44; 47:1-6; 48:1-3; 52:1-4; 62:35-38; 63:14-15; Helaman 1:14-33; 4:4). Indeed here in this verse we learn that within two verses of the death of the dissenting Nephite Ammoron, the great Nephite-Lamanite wars were over (see Alma 62:36-38), and the peace was not broken for another eight years when more Nephite dissenters will stir up Lamanite hearts yet again (see Alma 63:14-16).

43 And Moroni yielded up the command of his armies into the hands of his son, whose name was Moronihah; and he retired to his own house that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace.

44 And Pahoran did return to his judgment-seat; and Helaman did take upon him again to preach unto the people the word of God; for because of so many wars and contentions it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church.

verse 44 “because of so many wars and contentions it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church” Apparently during this time of dissension, war, and national crisis, there had been something of a general apostasy from the church. The church organization needed to be set in order and the people re-taught and rebaptized.

45 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth, and did declare the word of God with much power unto the convincing of many people of their wickedness, which did cause them to repent of their sins and to be baptized unto the Lord their God.

46 And it came to pass that they did establish again the church of God, throughout all the land.

47 Yea, and regulations were made concerning the law. And their judges, and their chief judges were chosen.

verse 47 Also the organization of government had deteriorated and needed to be re-established and reorganized.

48 And the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceedingly rich.

49 But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him.

50 Yea, they did remember how great things the Lord had done for them, that he had delivered them from death, and from bonds, and from prisons, and from all manner of afflictions and he had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.

51 And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper in the land.

52 And it came to pass that all these things were done. And Helaman died, in the thirty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 63

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Shiblon took possession of those sacred things which had been delivered unto Helaman by Alma.

verse 1 “Shiblon took possession of those sacred things which had been delivered unto Helaman by Alma” Shiblon the son of the younger Alma and the brother of Helaman. Shiblon’s brother Helaman, of course, had just died. The “sacred things” include the plates, the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the director or Liahona.

Shiblon’s record will only last through verse 11 of this chapter. Then possession of the records will be assumed by Helaman, the son of Helaman.

2 And he was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God; and also did his brother.

verse 2 “and also did his brother” It is not clear whether this has reference to Shiblon’s brother Helaman or to his other brother Corianton. The latter had taken his father Alma’s counsel to heart. He had repented and had returned to the ministry (Alma 42:31).

3 And it came to pass that Moroni died also. And thus ended the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 3 Moroni died at a surprisingly young age. We know that he had been twenty-five years old in 74 BC (Alma 43:17), and he died in 55 BC—at an age of about forty-four years!

4 And it came to pass that in the thirty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, there was a large company of men, even to the amount of five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children, departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward.

verse 4 “the land which was northward” The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to, as it is in this verse, as the “land which was northward” or simply the “land northward” (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place it is referred to as the “northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the “great city of Jacobugath” (3 Nephi 9:9). Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 97-107) suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today. The

ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 BC and fell about AD 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan might have played a role in the Book of Mormon includes the fact that between 55 BC to AD 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found (see also Alma 63:7-8; Helaman 3:3-4, 12; 3 Nephi 7:12).

According to Dr. John L. Sorenson: “In former times the floor of the Valley of Mexico was occupied by a set of lakes that were greater in combined size than anything else in central Mexico. It was this lake system that allowed the Aztecs to facilitate movement of goods needed to support their great city” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 266-67).

This is same time period when, according to archaeologists, Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. Also the valley of Mexico contained many lakes, in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico.

5 And it came to pass that Hagoth, he being an exceedingly curious man, therefore he went forth and built him an exceedingly large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land northward.

verse 5 “Hagoth” For commentary on the Hebrew derivation of the name Hagoth, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“curious” The word *curious* in this verse means desirous to discover what is unknown; inquisitive.

6 And behold, there were many of the Nephites who did enter therein and did sail forth with much provisions, and also many women and children; and they took their course northward. And thus ended the thirty and seventh year.

verses 5-6 These verses contain the only mention in the Book of Mormon of shipbuilding and exploring by sea in the Nephites’ promised land. It so happens that on the west-sea side (Pacific) of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which qualifies by many criteria as the narrow neck of land, there are a pair of large, placid lagoons, over thirty miles long. They could have provided a sheltered place not only to construct Hagoth’s ships but also to master their use. In the mountains overlooking the lagoons, the Spaniards long afterward located timber that they found ideal for their own shipbuilding purposes. Also, it is generally agreed by Mesoamericanists that over a period of many centuries large seagoing rafts (de facto “ships”) from Ecuador actually came up the Pacific coast to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and beyond on trading expeditions (see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 268-69; Robert C.

West, "Aboriginal Sea Navigation between Middle and South America," *American Anthropologist* 63 [1961]: 133-35). No other spot north of Panama fits the Hagoth story as well as the Pacific coast "by the narrow neck of land."

7 And in the thirty and eighth year, this man built other ships. And the first ship did also return, and many more people did enter into it; and they also took much provisions, and set out again to the land northward.

8 And it came to pass that they were never heard of more. And we suppose that they were drowned in the depths of the sea. And it came to pass that one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not.

verse 8 So what became of Hagoth and the people on his ship? And what about those on the other ship? Obviously from this verse the Nephites supposed that they were lost at sea. But were they?

In the Church since its early days there has been considerable interest in the idea that these people sailed into the south Pacific and settled in the Hawaiian Islands or on the other Polynesian Islands or even in New Zealand. Joseph Smith was never known to have taught this idea, and apparently it originated with Elder George Q. Cannon, who is said to have received "a knowledge directly from the Lord" (Britsch, R. Lanier, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific*, 97-98).

It should be noted that the Church has never taken an official position on the connection between Hagoth and the Polynesians, but we have access to many statements by members of the Twelve and by presidents of the Church in direct support of this relationship. These have been summarized by Robert E. Parsons in his article "Hagoth and the Polynesians" in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 249-62. Following is a partial list of citations of those who have made statements about this possible relationship.

Elder Mark E. Petersen in general conference (*CR* [April 1962] 111-15); Elder Hugh B. Brown in his prayer during the laying of the cornerstone of the New Zealand temple (Cummings, David W., *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific*, 63); President David O. McKay in his dedicatory prayer at the New Zealand temple (*Church News*, 10 May 1958, 2, 6); Elder Gordon B. Hinckley ("Temple in the Pacific" *Improvement Era* [July 1958] 61:509); President Spencer W. Kimball in quoting former President Joseph F. Smith ("Official Report of the Samoa Area Conference Held in Pago Pago and Apia, Samoa," February 1976, 15); and President Brigham Young (Barber, Ian G. "Mormonism Among the Tangata Whenua," a paper delivered at the annual *Mormon History Association Conference*, Hawaii, June 1990, 12).

9 And it came to pass that in this year there were many people who went forth into the land northward. And thus ended the thirty and eighth year.

10 And it came to pass in the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, Shiblon died also, and Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship, to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land.

11 Therefore it became expedient for Shiblon to confer those sacred things, before his death, upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman, being called after the name of his father.

verse 11 Helaman, son of Helaman, was the record keeper and chief judge in the land of Zarahemla for the fourteen years prior to his death in 39 BC. Little is known of his personal affairs. He was given charge of Nephite historical records by his uncle, Shiblon, in 53 BC, and the book of Helaman in the Book of Mormon takes its name from him (“Helaman 3,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 2). Besides the plates, Helaman was of course also given charge of the other “sacred things” including the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the director or Liahona.

12 Now behold, all those engravings which were in the possession of Helaman were written and sent forth among the children of men throughout all the land, save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth.

verse 12 Copies of the scriptures were distributed widely. It was common practice to distribute copies of the scriptures among all the Nephites (see also Jacob 7:23; and Alma 14:1) who were continually encouraged by their leaders to read them. For example King Benjamin encouraged his sons to search the scriptures diligently (Mosiah 1:7), and Alma counseled the poor Zoramites to “search the scriptures” (Alma 33:2).

“save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth” The reader will recall that previously the younger Alma commanded his son Helaman to “retain” or keep secret the specific mechanisms of the secret combinations of the Jaredites—the oaths, covenants, and agreements. This, of course, was to prevent them from being disseminated among the Nephite people. These forbidden secret writings were undoubtedly found on the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah. These plates contained the record of the Jaredites which will be translated by the prophet Moroni and become the book of Ether.

13 Nevertheless, these things were to be kept sacred, and handed down from one generation to another; therefore, in this year, they had been conferred upon Helaman, before the death of Shiblon.

14 And it came to pass also in this year that there were some dissenters who had gone forth unto the Lamanites; and they were stirred up again to anger against the Nephites.

15 And also in this same year they came down with a numerous army to war against the people of Moronihah, or against the army of Moronihah, in the which they were beaten and driven back again to their own lands, suffering great loss.

16 And thus ended the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

17 And thus ended the account of Alma, and Helaman his son, and also Shiblon, who was his son.