Lesson 27
Alma 30–31

Anyone who has been a member of the LDS Church for a while is familiar with the story of Korihor—sufficiently familiar that we may read it too quickly. When we read quickly, we tend to skim over the text and “see” in it what is already in our heads rather than what it says. So take time to read through this story slowly, looking for places where it says things that you do not expect it to say. Those are places where you are likely to learn something new.

Since Alma 31 fits naturally with Alma 32–35 (lesson 28), I’m going to include it in those lesson materials rather than here.

Alma 30

Verses 6–12: The narrator interrupts his story about Korihor coming to the land of Zarahemla with five verses explaining that there was no law governing people’s belief because any such law would have broken the divine commandment against inequality. Why does he place that discussion of law where he does, in the middle of his introduction of Korihor?

How would forbidding some beliefs be contrary to the divine law of equality? What does it mean to be “on equal grounds”? What grounds does the writer have in mind? What is equality in them? Haven’t we already seen answers to these questions in earlier chapters?
**Verses 13, 15:** What is Korihor’s argument for his claim that we cannot know that there will be a Christ?

Why do you think the Book of Mormon uses the word *Christ* (derived from Greek) rather than the word *Messiah* (derived from Hebrew) when they both mean the same thing and the Nephite language was originally Hebrew?

**Verse 14:** What is the implication of describing prophecies as “foolish traditions of your fathers”?

**Verse 16:** Korihor says that their anticipation of forgiveness is “the effect of a frenzied [i.e., mad] mind.” What does he mean by that phrase? Of what is he accusing them?

**Verse 17:** Korihor teaches that we fare “in this life according the management of the creature,” that we prosper according to our genius (“strength of mind” in Webster’s 1828 dictionary) and conquer according to our strength. How would we say the same thing in today’s language?

Where do we find people teaching Korihor’s doctrine? Do we ever find it in church classes?

Given the way that Korihor says what he does, he seems to think that if we prosper according to our genius and conquer according to our strength, then there can be no Atonement. Is that a reasonable conclusion? In other words, is the Atonement incompatible with prospering by our minds and overcoming in strength? What alternative is there to that kind of prospering and conquering?

Whose genius and power can we rely on if not our own? Does this have anything to do with the question of grace and works? Which is Korihor preaching?
Verse 18: Korihor seems to connect his advice that people go ahead and commit crimes to his teaching that there is no life after death. The argument is something like this: (1) If there’s no life after death, then there’s no punishment for sin. (2) If there’s no punishment for sin, then we ought to do whatever we wish, for there is, in fact, no sin. (3) There is no life after death. (4) So we ought to do whatever we wish, for there is, in fact, no sin. Latter-day Saints disagree with his third assumption, that there is no life after death. But do we agree with the other assumptions? It isn’t difficult to find people who do not believe in life after death but who nevertheless live good, moral lives. What would they disagree with in Korihor’s argument?

Verse 20: In what sense were the people of Ammon wiser than the Nephites?

Did the people of Ammon behave in accordance with the law described in verses 7 through 11? Are tying Korihor up and taking him before the high priest and then (in verse 21; see also verse 29) deporting him from the country in accord with the law described in those verses?

Verses 23, 27–28: Here Korihor adds an element to his explanation of religion. What is it? Why might he think that explanation could work among the Nephites and the people of Ammon?

Verse 28: Korihor says that the people dare “not make use of that which is their own” for fear of the priests. Something has to have been happening that Korihor could interpret in that way. To what might he be referring?
Verse 29: Why do Giddonah and the chief judge refuse to respond to Korihor?

Verses 33–35: Why does Alma respond only to the accusation that he and the other priests glut themselves on the labors of the people?

Verses 39–41: Alma turns the tables on Korihor, saying in effect, “What evidence do you have that there is no God? I have all things as a testimony that there is, and so do you.” Is Alma making what philosophers call a cosmological argument (the existence of the world is evidence for God’s existence)? If not, what is he doing?

Verse 42: Is Korihor backing down a little here, or is he merely saying the same thing he said in verse 15—namely, that he believes only what can be seen?

Verse 44: Alma tells Korihor that he has had “signs enough.” Then he refers to three classes of signs: the testimonies of the prophets, the scriptures, and the natural world. He uses the phrase “all things” when he refers to the natural world. Does that show that he was using the phrase in the same way in verse 15? Why does he order these three in the way that he does?

Verse 48: Is Korihor beginning to backpedal here? Compare what he says in this verse to what he said at the end of verse 28. Is he changing his tune or not? What does he mean when he says, “I do not deny the existence of a God, but . . .”?

Verses 52–53: Can we believe Korihor’s story, or should we be suspicious of it? What does he mean when he says that he always knew there was a God but the devil deceived
him? Korihor says, “An angel told me there is no God.” But if an angel told him that, then that is evidence that there is a God, while if there is no God, then there probably wouldn’t be an angel to tell him that there isn’t. What is going on in Korihor’s speech?

He says that he taught Satan’s words so long that, in the end, he believed they were true. How does that happen to us?

**Verse 55:** How did Korihor get into this situation, in which he will return to his apostasy and his activities as an anti-Christ unless he is cursed? I doubt that any of those reading this book are anti-Christ. I doubt that many or any of us know someone who is the kind of anti-Christ we find in Korihor. So why is it important for us to know his story? It is tempting to ask what it tells us about other people, but it is more important to ask what it tells us about ourselves.

**Verse 60:** Mormon stops to editorialize, to tell us the conclusion he draws from this story. How was that conclusion relevant to his time? How is it relevant to ours?