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“Peaceable Followers of Christ” in Days of War and Contention

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From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war.¹

—President Ezra Taft Benson

How will wars flooding the earth today impact the future of our students’ lives? What state of mind and condition of heart is acceptable to the Lord in war? What brings inner peace in times of war and contention? As religious educators, we can help students recognize and develop the godlike attributes of exemplary individuals in the Book of Mormon who faced war and contention in their day. We can develop the same spiritual reservoir and degree of sanctification that many individuals in the Book of Mormon developed while living in wartime.

Living in mortality presents two options, two camps, in which we can enlist—the camp of the hard-hearted or the camp of the soft-hearted (see Alma 62:41). Elder Dallin H. Oaks, speaking of adversity stemming from war, said, “Wars seem to be inherent in the mortal experience. We cannot entirely prevent them, but we can determine how we will react to them. For example, the adversities of war and military service, which have been the spiritual destruction of some, have been the spiritual awakening of others.”²

We live in a day when those we teach may find themselves fighting either by choice or by the invitation of their government. Some of our students may have already experienced a tour of duty in which they saw

battles firsthand. It is a day when some we teach may be separated from loved ones in conflict or, in some instances, actually live in countries in which the blood of war has come to their neighborhoods. Many of our students know that war and carnage are taking place because of what they read in newspapers and hear and watch on television.

We are a people of peace and are commanded to “renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 98:16). However, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “There are times when we must stand up for right and decency, for freedom and civilization, just as Moroni rallied his people in his day to the defense of their wives, their children, and the cause of liberty.”³ Righteous Nephites went to war for similar reasons: “to support their lands, . . . houses, . . . wives, and their children, . . . their rights and their privileges, . . . and also their liberty, that they may worship God according to their desires” (Alma 43:9; see also vv. 30, 45, 47–49).⁴

Nevertheless, Elder Robert C. Oaks of the Second Quorum of the Seventy, a retired general, soberly reminded all of us, “War has a frightening ability to numb our Christian sensitivities.”⁵ As teachers, we have the privilege of inspiring students to avoid influences and behaviors that will numb their Christian sensitivities. We also have the privilege of helping them understand their role when faced with aggressive and confrontational forces. We can help students discover how disciples of Jesus Christ live in times of war and in moments of contention.

Coping with opposition at home or contending with an enemy in an armed battle, our students can still become men and women of righteousness. They can be right with the Lord at the same time they face the wrongs of a formidable enemy. They can be “peaceable followers of Christ . . . that have obtained a sufficient hope by which [they] can enter into the rest of the Lord” (Moroni 7:3). This article addresses a few principles that relate to becoming “peaceable followers of Christ.”

Enduring in Righteousness

Shortly after his father’s death, Moroni recorded, “And no one knoweth the end of the war” (Mormon 8:8).⁶ Students of the Book of Mormon recognize that Mormon and Moroni lived in some of the most disheartening days ever lived in and written about. Mormon and Moroni witnessed the entire destruction of their people. Mormon taught in places of worship on faith, hope, and charity, even though he lived among a people “strong in their perversion; . . . brutal, sparing

none," "without principle," a people continually "seeking for blood and revenge" (Moroni 9:19–20, 23). It may be helpful to point out to students some characteristics about Mormon's ability to endure in righteousness during a time of war and conflict.

Ammaron discerned the spiritual characteristics of Mormon and that he was "a sober child, . . . quick to observe" (Mormon 1:2).⁷ This disposition helped him with his unique and challenging experiences later in life. The word *sober* as used in the context of Mormon chapter 1 might include *restrained, serious, solemn, and calm*.⁸ Elder David A. Bednar commented on Mormon's spiritual capacity: "Your future success and happiness will in large measure be determined by this spiritual capacity. . . . When we are quick to observe, we promptly look or notice and obey. Both of these fundamental elements—looking and obeying—are essential to being quick to observe. And the prophet Mormon is an impressive example of this gift in action."⁹

Mormon learned in his youth to keep the commandments of God.¹⁰ His ability to differentiate between right and wrong and his moral courage to choose the right led him to become not only a young general but also a trustworthy representative of the Lord. It was the custom of the Nephites to appoint "some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy" (3 Nephi 3:19).

As prophet-historians, Moroni and his father knew the ramifications when their people indulged in iniquity and forgot their God, both individually and as a nation. Their physical and spiritual endurance, knowing the end result for an unrepentant people, are fine examples of those who endured in righteousness. Mormon wrote to Moroni after an intense and difficult loss to the Lamanites: "And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God" (Moroni 9:6).

Notwithstanding the difficulties of their ministry, Mormon and Moroni never lost an understanding of Satan's destructive desires. Peaceable followers of Jesus Christ distinguish the brotherhood of men (our brethren) from the motives of Satan (our enemy). Satan "maketh war with the saints of God" (D&C 76:29), a hauntingly pervasive truth that needs to be remembered as man prepares to fight man. Mormon and Moroni knew that if their people conquered Satan's temptations individually, then peace would prevail, and contention would subside for the entire nation. Previous generations (see 4 Nephi) confirmed

their hope in the possibility of lasting peace, thus strengthening their spiritual endurance. As our students become sober like Mormon, quick to observe, obedient, trustworthy, and diligent, they will be able to endure in righteousness in days of conflict. They can experience, as Elder Oaks suggested, a “spiritual awakening” rather than “spiritual destruction.”

Praying Mightily

To successfully handle the contention and aggressions of war requires a heart and mind dependent upon God. There are several examples in the Book of Mormon of men relying upon God for support rather than putting their “trust in the arm of flesh” (2 Nephi 4:34). Helaman, in physical distress during war and unable to obtain sufficient food and men, turned to the Lord in mighty prayer for support: “We did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us. . . . And it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; . . . 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” (Alma 58:10–11).

Alma was “a man of God” (Alma 2:30) who sought earnestly to defend his people from Lamanite violence and hostility. Alma was also a man who had to “contend mightily” (Alma 2:29) with a bloodthirsty Nephite dissident and slay him with the sword. The intention and condition of his heart and mind were manifested in the battle. Alma desired to “preserve his people from being destroyed” (Alma 2:21). He sought to defend his people, their rights, and their moral agency. This great prophet-leader also encouraged mighty prayer in which “the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them” (Alma 2:28).

Naturally, the scene of the approaching enemy and the vastness of their numbers transformed the urgency of the Nephite situation and their individual and collective reliance upon God for deliverance. Alma also turned to the Lord in mighty prayer. Note the language of peace and the depth of sincerity in the prayer uttered by Alma in this difficult position: “O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people” (Alma 2:30). Fighting face to face with an enemy who was trying to destroy his life, Alma pleaded to save the lives of others, demonstrating a pure instinct of one converted to the Lord’s gospel.

Captain Moroni was “a man that did not delight in bloodshed” (Alma 48:11) yet saw much of it. He was “a man who was firm in the faith of Christ” (v. 13), manifesting his dependence on the Lord. He

also prayed for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his people. After hoisting the title of liberty, "he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God" (v. 13). "He was a man of a perfect understanding" who "did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country" and "whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed" (vv. 11–12).

Grounded in the faith of Jesus Christ, Captain Moroni defended his people, their rights, and their religion. He sustained the Nephite tradition to never give offense and to raise the sword only against aggressive enemies (see vv. 13–14) after having approached the Lord in fervent prayer for his help and guidance. Under such gospel-principled leadership, the Nephites experienced happiness. His example resonated with his son Moronihah and the rising generation who "did pray unto the Lord their God continually," remembering "how great things the Lord had done for them . . . [delivering] them out of the hands of their enemies" (Alma 62:50–51).

Nephi, who lived with opposing and contentious family members (later to become war-driven), described "[waxing] bold in mighty prayer before [the Lord]" (2 Nephi 4:24), having learned at an early age to call upon him (see 1 Nephi 2:16). He confronted his two unbelieving brothers, who had been disputing over their father's teachings, with the simple inquiry, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 15:8). Nephi understood that disputations with one another and the hardness of men's hearts were a direct result of failing to inquire of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 15:2–3). His brothers, never learning the lesson, became "past feeling" (1 Nephi 17:45), and "did seek to take away [Nephi's] life" (2 Nephi 5:2), for which Nephi "did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of [his] brethren" (2 Nephi 5:1).

Praying mightily may have as much reference to frequency as to sincerity (see Ether 2:13–15). While engaged in building a ship to cross a mighty ocean, Nephi "did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto [him] great things" (1 Nephi 18:3). The sons of Mosiah "had given themselves to much prayer, . . . therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation" (Alma 17:3).¹¹ Joseph Smith said, "If you . . . exercise fervent prayer and faith in the sight of God always, He shall give unto you knowledge by His Holy Spirit, yea by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now."¹²

Our students must take responsibility for what they pray for and how frequently they address Father in Heaven. Mormon warned it is "counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of

heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such” (Moroni 7:9). The examples of Helaman, Alma, Captain Moroni, Nephi, and the sons of Mosiah reflect an unflinching dependency upon the Lord. Identify with students the descriptive words of those who pray with a heart and mind dependent upon the Lord (e.g., “pour out,” “bowed himself . . . praying mightily,” “waxing bold,” “oft,” “much prayer,” “cried unto,” “kneeled down”). Encourage them to discover the blessings and assurances God had granted unto these men and their people in times of war as well as personal distress and family disputations.

Our students today can also have blessings and assurances granted as they “[cry] unto him in mighty prayer” (Enos 1:4). Praying mightily to him in moments of urgency will largely reflect having prayed sincerely to him in moments of solitude. Establishing a pattern of persistent and purposeful prayer will further instill the attitudes and behaviors representative of a peaceable follower of Christ, even when our students are face to face with an enemy or find themselves in a contentious situation.

Lay Hold upon the Word of God

One result of war and contention is misery. One way to ensure our safe “course across that everlasting gulf of misery” is to “lay hold upon the word of God” (Helaman 3:29). Mormon credited the Church’s prosperity in days of conflict and political turmoil to “their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God” (Alma 49:30).¹³ No wonder conspiring Lamanites and apostate Nephites who attempted to subjugate faithful Nephites held the word of God in disdain and sought to destroy the records “which contained the holy scriptures” (Alma 14:8; see also Enos 1:14).

Power and happiness are granted unto those who lay hold upon the word of God. Captain Moroni acknowledged to Zerahemnah that the Nephites had been strengthened in their cause to defend themselves because of the “maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which [they] owe[d] all [their] happiness” (Alma 44:5). So it is today. Great effort is made in maintaining and disseminating the word of God. Latter-day Saints have imperatives regarding the word of God: to rely on or trust in the word of God, to know the word of God, and to preach the word of God.

A particular example of relying upon the word of the Lord is Captain Moroni. As the responsibilities of the Nephite army fell upon Moroni’s shoulders when he was twenty-five (see Alma 43:17), he met

a degenerate and ferocious Lamanite army led by Nephite dissenters. To locate the whereabouts of this debased army, Moroni appealed to the prophet Alma and asked him to "inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves." Moroni responded promptly to "the word of the Lord [that] came unto Alma" (Alma 43:23–24). Moroni had the spiritual characteristics of not only seeking the word of the Lord but also trusting it, as given by the Lord's servant (see D&C 1:38). This is a spiritual characteristic essential for disciples today.

Mormon and Abinadi are examples of knowing the word of God. Mormon was familiar with the prophecies and teachings of Abinadi and Samuel the Lamanite (see Mormon 1:19). Through the records of previous prophets and the influence of his father, Ammaron, and others not mentioned, Mormon prepared and placed himself in a position to be familiar with the dealings of God in previous generations. Not only was he an instrumental record keeper, but he was influenced by the content.

Abinadi's knowledge of the word of God is evident when he was before wicked King Noah and his pretended priests. Their contentious and murderous spirits did not disrupt him. He was bold and direct, courageous and specific in what the Lord needed him to do—call the people of Noah to repentance. In many teaching situations his delivery and setting often overshadowed what he specifically taught, but Abinadi is an example of one who knew the word of God, both written and revelatory. Remarkably, he extensively quoted scriptures from the writings and prophecies of Moses and Isaiah, especially the Ten Commandments and the messianic prophecies.

Abinadi had a purpose, a people, and a message. He was placed among a specific group of people at an appointed time that he might reclaim them and teach them the plan of salvation. Our students also have a purpose, a people, and a message. They will be placed in a variety of situations and locations throughout their lives. To what extent they influence the minds and hearts of their fellow men in those situations and locations will largely rest on how the word of God has influenced their hearts and minds.

It is our charge as religious instructors to help students understand the gospel so they can identify doctrines and principles, explain them, and testify of them. Elder Lance B. Wickman of the Seventy reminded Latter-day Saints, "Seasons of conflict do not change the message of the gospel."¹⁴ If anything, seasons of conflict should instill a greater urgency to share the gospel.

A particular example of preaching the word of God in a season of conflict is Alma.¹⁵ Though he had military experience—including hand-to-hand combat—Alma knew that the power of the word fostered real change. Alma gave up the judgment seat to “preach the word of God [to his people] . . . , seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19). In this way, he represented the Savior as a peaceable follower and honorable bearer of the standards of heaven. His labors bore fruit. He went from standing face-to-face and sword-to-sword with Amlici near the river of Sidon during a battle to standing face-to-face and hand-in-hand in the river Sidon with those who had repented (see Alma 2:29, 34–35; 3:3; 4:4). The river Sidon was a scene of bloodshed, later to become a place of baptism.

Alma spent the rest of his life preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ among a people shrouded in war and contention (see Alma 36:24). “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” (Alma 43:1). Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “By preaching righteousness, our missionaries seek to treat the causes of war.”¹⁶ Alma and his sons likewise attempted to ease the ramifications of war by preaching the word of God. Mormon recognized that Alma, “being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them” (Alma 35:15), gathered his sons “separately” to address “things pertaining unto righteousness” (Alma 35:16). This they did at a time when war and contention were flooding their civilization.

Mormon interposed accounts of Alma’s words to his sons—Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton—before returning to the “account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites” (Alma 43:3).¹⁷ Notwithstanding their level of spiritual maturity or past behaviors, all three sons were told to go forth and declare the word—soberly, boldly, and truly—that they may “bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them” (Alma 42:31; see also 37:47; 38:10–15).

Our missionary labors directed by prophets and apostles parallel Alma’s charge to his sons. In Alma’s day, as in our day, youth and single adults may serve in both fields of labor—as servants devoted to the ministry and as servants protecting the ministers. Captain Moroni was supported by the Lord physically while facing a fearsome enemy with weapons, while “Helaman and his brethren . . . did preach the word of God, and . . . baptize[d] unto repentance” (Alma 48:19).

As teachers, we would not want to draw a polar distinction between Alma, Captain Moroni, and Helaman. They relied upon the revelations of God and left an exemplary legacy of gospel living and gospel preaching in days of war and contention (see Alma 48:17–19). There is only one field of labor—"to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). This labor was accomplished as they wielded both the sword of truth and the sword of war.

Unprincipled men and the ravages of war destroy the souls of men, while the labors of gospel-oriented military personnel and missionaries save souls. There are times to bury weapons and times to wield the sword in honorable defense (see note 4). We should remember, however, that the sword of truth is never buried.

As our students rely upon the word of God, know the word of God, and preach the word of God, they will be assured and strengthened in times of conflict. They can be "clasped in the arms of Jesus" (Mormon 5:11) when others are throwing their arms up in chaos and confusion. Defining moments with the Savior will fortify them in their confrontations with the adversary. Such moments in coming to know the goodness of the Savior and his word, in private and in class, will strengthen them as they live in a war-driven and contentious generation.

Self-Control and Long-Suffering

Enduring suffering with patience increases one's degree of self-control. The victory is not subjecting our fellow brother to our will or giving into the enticing of the evil one, but rather submitting our will to the will of the Savior. The victory may be best defined in Captain Moroni, who did not glory in "shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, in resisting iniquity" (Alma 48:16).

Peaceable followers of Jesus Christ do not desire others to be destroyed or brought into subjection—they desire for themselves and for others an opportunity to repent and be free. Growing in degrees of self-control and long-suffering positively affects our thoughts, words, and actions as we work out our own salvation and help extend the message of salvation to others. This is a lesson learned by Ammon and Alma but not understood by individuals such as Amlici and Amalickiah.

"Much pleased" with Ammon, King Lamoni desired Ammon to "take one of his daughters to wife" (Alma 17:24). Although not against marriage, Ammon declined. He submitted to the timing and will of the Lord. He labored for the souls of men. As he did so, aggressive

and murderous enemies of the king challenged him. Courageously he defended the king's flocks and servants with the sword. Nonetheless, Mormon describes this valiant missionary as being "wise, yet harmless" (Alma 18:22). This is an interesting description, as he had to physically confront an enemy.

Ammon's self-control and long-suffering became even more apparent when he came before a silent and stunned king. In a second opportunity to gratify a "natural man" tendency, Ammon told the king, "Whatsoever thou desirest which is right, that will I do" (Alma 18:17). He was submissive in a situation where it would have been very easy to be manipulative. They knew he had great power; some were even convinced he was "the Great Spirit" (Alma 18:3). Ammon understood his purpose for living among the Lamanites was to "be an instrument in the hands of God to bring [them], if it were possible . . . to the knowledge of the truth" (Alma 17:9). Evidence that Ammon understood his purpose is further illustrated, by the story of when he met Lamoni's father.¹⁸ His exemplary level of self-control is directly correlated with his love of the truth and long-suffering toward the children of God.

Alma also developed this striking characteristic of self-control. After years of war, Alma (along with Amulek) witnessed the dreadful scene of innocent women and children being thrown into the fire in Ammoniah. Alma's response to the awful event reveals his long-suffering and his love as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Amulek represented the reaction many believers would have: "Let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames" (Alma 14:10). Alma responded, "The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand" (Alma 14:11).

There was nothing inherently wrong with Amulek's desire. He wanted to save people from the flames. In a very difficult position, however, Alma followed the will of the Lord instead of the natural instincts of man (see Alma 14:17–19). His discipline and spiritual maturity, his heed to spiritual promptings, and his acceptance of the will of the Lord are exemplary of the character and nature of God himself. When threatened and tortured physically and emotionally by the chief judge and officers of Ammoniah, Alma and Amulek nobly "answered them nothing" (Alma 14:18). Here they followed the composure of the Savior, who would years later stand before the mocking Herod, who questioned the Savior "in many words," but our Lord "answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9).

Alma faced Korihor approximately eight years later. Here again, Alma showed great self-control in dealing with a man who had a provocative and sign-seeking spirit. He did not want the power of God to condemn Korihor but rather to change Korihor. Alma desired Korihor to repent, not to be struck dumb. He patiently bore Korihor’s “swelling words” and false accusations by trying to help him understand that “all things denote there is a God” (Alma 30:31, 44). Only after an honest attempt to redeem the anti-Christ did Alma exercise the condemning judgment by the power of God.

Godly patience and long-suffering became qualities of Ammon and Alma and complemented their peaceable walk among the children of men. Their example of self-control is pertinent to our growth as representatives of the Savior in a day of horrible tragedies and alarming injustice. Their example is pertinent in a day of lust and lying, in a day of individuals seeking power, position, and prestige. Peaceable followers of Jesus Christ do not seek to get gain or take advantage of their brethren. They seek to be “instruments in the hands of God” (Alma 35:14). They know personally that self-control and long-suffering give them true freedom—freedom from the natural man—and makes them a blessing to their fellow man.

Spiritual Preparation to Make and Honor Covenants Brings Happiness

Spiritual preparation helps our students “make and keep sacred covenants.”¹⁹ Honoring covenants not only brings the protecting power of the Lord but genuine happiness. Happiness is a theme throughout the Book of Mormon.²⁰ Nephi, after leaving his angry and murderous brothers, declared, “We lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

The reasons for Nephi’s declaration may be summarized in the following: they “believed in the warnings and the revelations of God” (2 Nephi 5:6), they “did observe to keep the . . . commandments of the Lord in all things” (2 Nephi 5:10), they “did build a temple” (2 Nephi 5:16). The temple is a symbol of a covenant people and prepares one to meet the challenges of mortality, such as contention and war. Nephi had “wars and contentions with [his] brethren,” though living in a state of happiness (2 Nephi 5:34). Their covenants fortified them when they were confronted by their hostile brethren.

The phrase “there never was a happier time” (Alma 50:23) is tucked in the middle of the Book of Mormon war chapters. Why would Mormon insert such a comment when the record clearly describes

rebellion, death, and terror in the past, present, and future? Drawing from recorded history and personal experience, Mormon recorded two reasons this happiness was possible.

First, in the war's respite, while Amalickiah was "obtaining power by fraud and deceit," Captain Moroni was "preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God" (Alma 48:7). He understood that faithfulness brought deliverance (see Alma 50:22). Captain Moroni was planting in the hearts of his countrymen the principle of freedom, hoisting the title of liberty "upon every tower which was in all the land" and inviting them to "come forth in the strength of the Lord" (Alma 46:36, 20). Every time the Nephites prepared for an attack "in the strength of the Lord," they prevailed (see 3 Nephi 4:10).

Captain Moroni's true legacy is in his effort to prepare the minds and hearts of his people to be faithful to God so they could meet the challenges of war and contention before them. His relentless efforts in "preparations for war" (Alma 50:1) further strengthened the people's confidence in having physical advantages over their enemies. Captain Moroni's armies "did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them" (Alma 50:12). Likewise, by not neglecting spiritual and physical preparations to face the adversary, we gain assurance of the Lord's protection in times of war and contention. Today, leaders of nations emphasize physical preparation while neglecting spiritual preparation of the heart and mind and failing to enter into a covenant with God.²¹

Second, "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" by "their enemies" (Alma 46:15; 48:10). Here Moroni had an experience similar to that of King Benjamin and his people. He invited the people to enter into a covenant with the Savior and take his name upon them (see Alma 46:20–21). They "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" (Alma 46:21). Moroni's people covenanted not to forsake God.²² Contrast the covenant not to forsake God with the oath of Amalickiah, who "was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood." This ungodly man was angry "because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people" (Alma 49:27). By entering into covenants with the Lord, we receive his power and protection. Ordinances and their associated covenants prepare and sustain our minds and hearts as we

face the vicissitudes of mortality. We cannot overstate to our students the importance of entering into covenants with the Lord and then honorably keeping those covenants.

Perhaps Amalickiah's initial attacks humbled the Nephites. "The people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them" (Alma 49:28). Through their humility and gratitude, they were reminded of the power of their covenants and of Moroni's prophetic statement: "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" (Alma 46:18).

As religious educators, we can help our students understand the importance of fortifying their homes and nations by establishing defenses against enemies of sword and enemies of spirituality. Peace and joy are possible in times of ominous political and social forecasts. Interrupters to peace and joy are conquered individually and collectively by keeping the commandments of the Lord and entering into sacred covenants. As these interrupters are conquered, happier times prevail.

Remembering the Brotherhood of Man

War and contention in any situation, at any level, is an engagement against *our brethren*. No matter how cold and degenerate a people may become, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man remain eternal truths. Mormon, speaking of Captain Moroni and his people having to shed the blood of their brethren, interjected this significant attribute of all peaceable followers of Jesus Christ: "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" (Alma 48:23; emphasis added; see also Mosiah 28:3). Peaceable followers of Jesus Christ contend "with their brethren" (Alma 48:21).

Converted Lamanites declared, "If *our brethren* seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords . . . ; and if *our brethren* destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved" (Alma 24:16; emphasis added). Pahoran, under the difficulty of an insurrection and in answering Captain Moroni's censure, proclaimed: "We would not shed the blood of *our brethren* if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us" (Alma 61:11; emphasis added). The sons of Helaman, in preparing to enter a "terrible battle," reminded

their leader, “We would not slay *our brethren* if they would let us alone” (Alma 56:49, 46; emphasis added).

The term *enemy* or a variation is used over fifty times in the Book of Mormon. We cannot ignore a formidable enemy undermining the truth, mercy, and justice of the plan of redemption. Nor can we excuse the wicked deeds of tyrants, dictators, and terrorists. However, we can be judicious in how we use the term *enemy* and in what context. Satan, of course, is the “enemy to all righteousness” (Alma 34:23) who seeks to gain “possession of *the hearts of the people*” (3 Nephi 2:2; emphasis added). He is “the author of all sin,” not just of a particular nation or people. “And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness . . . from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men” (Helaman 6:30). President Hinckley reiterated: “Treachery and terrorism began with [Satan]. And they will continue until the Son of God returns to rule and reign.”²³

Conclusion

Our students can face the terrors of war with peace of mind and heart if they acknowledge the influence of the evil one and develop greater understanding of God as our Father. They can be worthy representatives of the Savior in times of war and contention. They too will experience a spiritual awakening, endure in righteousness, pray mightily, trust in the word of the Lord, gain self-control with long-suffering, and prepare to make and honor sacred covenants. Help students understand that amid wars and conflicts, such as those recorded in the Book of Mormon, men and women on both sides can change and recognize a need for a Redeemer. Help them discover that even in events of bloodshed and chaos, people can be awakened to the love of God.

In Alma 24 the Lamanites came against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. In this account, the evil hearts and intentions of men were softened, “swollen in them . . . ; and they came down even as their *brethren*, relying upon the mercies” of Jesus Christ (vv. 24–25; emphasis added). As our students rely upon the Lord’s mercies, they will valiantly meet the conflicts before them. This they will do with an attitude, state of mind, and condition of heart acceptable to the Lord. They will better see and understand that each of us is “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents,”²⁴ which will influence their “peaceable walk with the children of men” (Moroni 7:4). **RE**

Notes

1. In Conference Report, October 1986, 5.
2. "Adversity," *Ensign*, July 1998, 8.
3. In Conference Report, October 2001, 88.
4. The primary purpose of this paper is not to detail when it is appropriate to kill. The author suggests the following references regarding these topics: Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace," *Ensign*, May 2003, 78–81; Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign*, November 2001, 72–74. In addition, it may be helpful to consider the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "God said, 'Thou shalt not kill;' at another time He said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire" (*History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957], 5:135). Two days before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith declared: "There is one principle which is eternal; it is the duty of all men to protect their lives and the lives of the household, whenever necessity requires, and no power has a right to forbid it" (*History of the Church*, 6:605). Book of Mormon verses that justify when to go to war are Alma 43:9; 44:5; 46:12. See also President Boyd K. Packer's account of knowing through the Book of Mormon that he could serve in World War II "willingly and with honor" (in Conference Report, April 2005, 6).
5. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled—A Message of Peace for Latter-day Saints in Military Service* (DVD, 2005). This 57-minute production includes remarks from Presidents Gordon B. Hinckley and Boyd K. Packer and Elders Robert C. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman.
6. Joseph Smith declared, "The shedding of blood is entirely foreign to our feelings" (*History of the Church*, 2:122). Therefore, it will take great fortitude for us and our students to live in the last days. Mormon stood as a witness to the culmination of prophetic utterances by inspired men of the Nephite nation, prophets who knew and saw in vision the destruction of the covenant seed (see Mormon 3:16; 1 Nephi 12:19–23).
7. See also devotional address by Elder David A. Bednar given at Brigham Young University on May 10, 2005. (The address was adapted into an *Ensign* article, "Quick to Observe," December 2006, 30–36). Elder Bednar discusses Mormon's temperament and the importance of being "quick to observe."
8. See *World Book Dictionary* (Chicago: World Book, 1989), s.v. "sober."
9. Bednar "Quick to Observe," 32.
10. See 2 Nephi 2:3–4; Alma 37:35; 38:2.
11. In further discussing this principle with your students, you may wish to use Alma 37:37.
12. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:296.
13. This is an endorsement of Nephi's counsel to his wayward brothers: "Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction" (1 Nephi 15:24).
14. *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled*.

15. Alma preached to a people who “had fallen into great errors” and who held his authority to preach the gospel in contempt (Alma 31:9). He preached earnestly “the virtue of the word of God” trusting that “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” (Alma 31:5).

16. In Conference Report, April 1990, 94.

17. Alma chapter 35 explains the buildup that led to the Lamanite–Nephite war comprising chapters 43–62. Often we fail to put Alma’s counsel to his sons in context with what we call the “war chapters.” It may be helpful to address the war chapters (recounting approximately a seventeen-year war) as beginning in chapter 35, not excluding the seven chapters of Alma’s counsel to his three sons (36–42). Using these chapters, we may direct our students to discover additional principles in becoming peaceable followers of Jesus Christ.

18. Alma 20:8–27 describes Ammon’s calm courage in facing an angry and murderous man. Ammon boldly persuaded Lamoni’s father with skillful use of the sword, but did not seek to kill him or gain political power.

19. “Young Women Theme,” *Young Women Personal Progress: Standing as a Witness of God* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2001), 5.

20. The term *happiness* appears twenty-three times in the Book of Mormon and is found in seven out of the fifteen major books that comprise the record.

21. Political and military commentary on war stresses the physical conditions of personnel along with the power and preciseness of weaponry, but neglects the condition of the hearts and minds of the people. President Spencer W. Kimball pointed out this tendency: “When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God” (“The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 6).

22. King Benjamin’s people covenanted “to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things” (Mosiah 5:5).

23. In Conference Report, October 2001, 90.

24. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.