



9-2-2002

## Captain Moroni's Wartime Strategies: An Application for the Spiritual Battles of Our Day

Richard J. McClendon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

McClendon, Richard J. "Captain Moroni's Wartime Strategies: An Application for the Spiritual Battles of Our Day." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 3, no. 3 (2002). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol3/iss3/24>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).



Painting by Arnold Friberg, *Captain Moroni and the Title of Liberty*

# Captain Moroni's Wartime Strategies: An Application for the Spiritual Battles of Our Day

*Richard McClendon*

*Richard McClendon is a visiting assistant professor of sociology and an adjunct professor of ancient scripture at BYU.*

---

As Mormon abridged the Nephite record, he included what he deemed most relevant for latter-day Israel, including stories of war. The so-called “war chapters” provide a rich resource of modern-day spiritual applications for teachers and students of the gospel (see Alma 43–62). One way to apply these chapters is to draw a parallel between the physical and the spiritual—between Moroni’s physical battles on the field and the spiritual battles that we face in our own lives today. To be more specific, we might ask these questions: (1) What *strategies* did Captain Moroni use to prepare and protect himself and his people from evil men such as Zerahemnah, Amalickiah, and Ammoron? (2) How can these strategies be implemented to build spiritual defenses of our own against Satan and the evil of our day?

Of course, we could identify numerous strategies; however, we will focus our attention on just five. First, Captain Moroni equipped those in his military with personal armor that shielded the “more vital parts of the body” (Alma 43:38). Second, Moroni extended the boundary of defense from the individual to the individual’s environment—that is, he made each city into a fortress that was protected by surrounding earthworks, trenches, and picket fences. Third, Moroni recognized that his enemy would be progressive while attempting to defeat and subject the Nephites. Therefore, he was in an ongoing mode to prepare and implement improved forms of defense to stay ahead of his enemy’s continuing efforts. Fourth, Moroni erected towers to overlook the fences surrounding each city. Not only were these

towers strategic places from which soldiers could fire stones and arrows at the enemy in the heat of battle but no doubt they were places from which watchman could see the enemy “while [they were] yet afar off” (D&C 101:54). Fifth, Moroni and his military captains used wisdom by not attacking the enemy in the enemy’s strongholds. Instead, the Nephites waited patiently for the proper time and place to make their offensive moves. Each of these strategies and its spiritual application for our lives will be discussed in this article.

### **Protecting Ourselves by Putting on Armor**

The year was 74 B.C. Alma and his companions had just led a mission to reclaim the apostate Zoramites. Many of these Zoramites were eventually converted and joined the people of Ammon in the land of Jershon. Angered by this movement and by Alma’s preaching of the word, the “more popular part” of the Zoramites joined themselves to the Lamanites and began enticing them to go to war against the Nephites (see Alma 35). Meanwhile, Moroni, a young visionary and chief captain of the Nephite military, wisely prepared his people for possible attacks. When word reached Moroni that the Lamanites, led by Zerahemnah, were on their way to invade the Nephites, he quickly deployed his army to the land of Jershon to rebuff them. As the Lamanites drew near the city, they saw that the Nephites had “breastplates and . . . arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing” (43:19). In great fear, the Lamanites made a hasty retreat.

Later, when Moroni learned that Zerahemnah’s army was moving to attack “the weaker part” of the Nephites in the land of Manti, he rallied his troops to head them off (43:24–25). In the ensuing battle, the “work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites” because of their nakedness. The heavy blows of the Nephite swords “brought death almost at every stroke. 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 armshields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites” (43:37–38). As the battle continued, its intensity increased with loss of life on both sides. Although less than half the size of the Lamanites, the Nephite army gained a major victory over their enemy (see Alma 43:51).

Humble Moroni attributed this miraculous victory to God's preserving hand and the faithfulness of the people. The inspiration of Moroni to supply his army with protective armor at this critical point played a key role in their preservation. Zerahemnah himself accredited the Nephite success to their armor, although he stubbornly refused to admit any divine intervention (see Alma 44:9).

This life-preserving strategy of protecting oneself by putting on armor is, of course, a powerful spiritual metaphor for our day. Paul's counsel to the Ephesians to "take unto [them] the whole armour of God" (see Ephesians 6:13) was reaffirmed for our generation when the Savior revealed the following:

Wherefore, lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all, that ye may be able to stand.

Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, which I have sent mine angels to commit unto you;

Taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of my Spirit, which I will pour out upon you, and my word which I reveal unto you, and be agreed as touching all things whatsoever ye ask of me, and be faithful until I come, and ye shall be caught up, that where I am ye shall be also. Amen. (D&C 27:15–18)

Spiritual armor, then, consists of such elements as truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit. Church leaders have provided valuable insight into how we may go about attaining and fitting ourselves with this type of armor. Elder M. Russell Ballard recently explained:

How do we put on the whole armor of God so that we may as Paul promises, "be able to withstand the evil day"? I like to think of this spiritual armor not as a solid piece of metal molded to fit the body, but more like chain mail. Chain mail consists of dozens of tiny pieces of steel fastened together to allow the user greater flexibility without losing protection. . . . There is not one great and grand thing we can do to arm ourselves spiritually. True spiritual power lies in numerous smaller acts woven together in a fabric of spiritual fortification that protects and shields from all evil.

It is a common expression to talk about the "chinks" in a person's armor. The definition of the word chink is "a crack, a cleft, . . .

a narrow opening.” Should an arrow strike exactly one of the chinks in one’s armor, a fatal wound can result.<sup>1</sup>

Elder Ballard went on to suggest six ways we can eliminate any chinks in our personal spiritual armor. These include relying on the protective power of both prayer and scripture study, drawing on the merciful grace of God, watching ourselves, not wasting the days of our probation, and remembering that reverence invites revelation.

As part of a series of questions, President N. Eldon Tanner illustrated how we clothe ourselves with God’s armor:

Are we studying the scriptures so that we can increase our knowledge and faith and testimony regarding the gospel? Do we keep the commandments? Are we honest and truthful in our dealings? Do we keep the Sabbath day holy? Do we observe the Word of Wisdom? Do we pay an honest tithing? Do we attend our meetings and respond to the calls made of us by our authorities? Are we virtuous and clean and pure in heart and mind and deed?

Do we fight against the evils around us—pornography, abortion, tobacco, alcohol, drugs? Do we have the courage to stand up for our convictions? Can we truly say we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Do we live peaceably with our neighbors and avoid gossip and backbiting and spreading unfounded rumors? Do we truly love our neighbors as ourselves?

If we can answer yes to these questions, then we will have on the whole armor of God, which will protect us from harm and preserve us from our enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, then, from these statements, there are a number of fundamental actions that if implemented daily constitute putting on the Lord’s armor. These things range from having personal prayer and studying the scriptures to loving others and being honest—in other words, simply living the gospel!

Another aspect concerning our modern-day armor deserves specific attention, as discussed by Elder Carlos E. Asay:

There is, however, another piece of armor worthy of our consideration. It is the special underclothing known as the temple garment, or garment of the holy priesthood, worn by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have received their temple endowment. This garment, worn day and night, serves three important purposes: *it is a reminder of the sacred covenants made with the Lord in His holy house, a protective covering for the body, and a symbol of the modesty of dress and living that should characterize the lives of all the humble followers of Christ.*

It is written that “the white garment symbolizes purity and helps assure modesty, respect for the attributes of God, and, to the degree it is honored, *a token of what Paul regarded as taking upon one the whole armor of God* (Ephesians 6:13; cf. D&C 27:15). . . . Garments bear several simple marks of orientation toward the gospel principles of obedience, truth, life, and discipleship in Christ.” . . .

The heavy armor worn by soldiers of a former day, including helmets, shields, and breastplates, determined the outcome of some battles. However, the real battles of life in our modern day will be won by those who are clad in a spiritual armor—an armor consisting of faith in God, faith in self, faith in one’s cause, and faith in one’s leaders. The piece of armor called the temple garment not only provides the comfort and warmth of a cloth covering, it also strengthens the wearer to resist temptation, fend off evil influences, and stand firmly for the right.<sup>3</sup>

When we think of putting on our personal armor, we need to recognize that it may be worthless unless it fits properly. The proper fitting of armor takes time and patience. President Boyd K. Packer emphasized that there is a special place where this fitting should be done. In speaking of “the shield of faith,” he said:

[The] shield of faith is not produced in a factory, but at home in a cottage industry. . . .

Our Father’s plan requires that, like the generation of life itself, the shield of faith is to be made and fitted in the family. No two can be exactly alike. Each must be handcrafted to individual specifications.

The plan designed by the Father contemplates that man and woman, husband and wife, working together, fit each child individually with a shield of faith made to buckle on so firmly that it can neither be pulled off nor penetrated by those fiery darts.

It takes the steady strength of a father to hammer out the metal of it and the tender hands of a mother to polish and fit it on. Sometimes one parent is left to do it alone. It is difficult, but it can be done.

In the Church we can teach about the materials from which a shield of faith is made: reverence, courage, chastity, repentance, forgiveness, compassion. In church we can learn how to assemble and fit them together. But the actual making of and fitting on of the shield of faith belongs in the family circle. Otherwise it may loosen and come off in a crisis.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the armor of God that Paul and, more recently, the Lord has counseled us to “put on” comes by way of keeping God’s commandments and establishing personal, temple, and home-centered gospel living. Much like Captain Moroni, who outfitted his forces with personal protection, parents must equip themselves and each child with celestial armor, knowing that many telestial battles lie ahead. Such armor will protect “the more vital parts” of our spiritual body and will, like Moroni, provide the lifesaving protection to “withstand the evil day”—or *the evil in our day*—and come off conquerors.

### Protecting Ourselves by Protecting Our Environment

Another strategy that Moroni employed as a defense for his people was to extend the boundary of protection from the individual to the surrounding environment. While Amalickiah was deceitfully acquiring Lamanite leadership and inciting them to war, Moroni was surrounding his people with protective defenses by preparing their cities and lands in a way that “never had been known among the children of Lehi” (Alma 49:8). Moroni initiated this work by digging up ridges of earth and placing stone walls around border cities and lands that he felt needed to be fortified and that would serve as key places of resort for his army (see Alma 48:8).

Soon after this, the Lamanites, freshly fitted with new armor themselves, smugly began to mobilize their forces and attack the city of Ammonihah, believing it to be an easy target. Unaware of Moroni’s new defensive infrastructure, they were stunned at what they saw as they drew near the city (see Alma 49:3–4). Recognizing they had been outwitted, they retreated and took their march toward the land of Noah, their chief captains covenanting along the way that they would destroy the people of that city (see 49:13). Once again, they were disappointed, as Moroni had fortified all of the cities in that region, including Noah. Nevertheless, because of their chief captain’s previous decree, they reluctantly began their assault. Mormon describes what happened:

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. . . .

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.” (Alma 49:18, 22)

At this point, Mormon summarizes by saying, “*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” (49:23; emphasis added). Imagine that! A ratio of one thousand to zero—pretty good odds! Of course, we know that some of the Nephites had been wounded, but because of their armor, these wounds were not fatal (see Alma 49:24). Once again, the Lamanites lost a major campaign and were forced to retreat to their homeland.

During the next few years of peace, Moroni continued to expand his civil defense program by constructing defensive earthworks around all the cities possessed by the Nephites. Picket fences built on top of timbers were erected on ridges of earth with towers overlooking these fences. Moroni also drove off the Lamanites who were living in the east wilderness back to their own lands. This military maneuver allowed the Nephites to have a clear east-west borderline of defense for their own lands (see Alma 50:1–11). At this point in the record, Mormon observes, “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” (Alma 50:23). This happiness was the by-product of the Nephites’ faith and obedience in God and their increased confidence in the civil protections provided by Moroni.

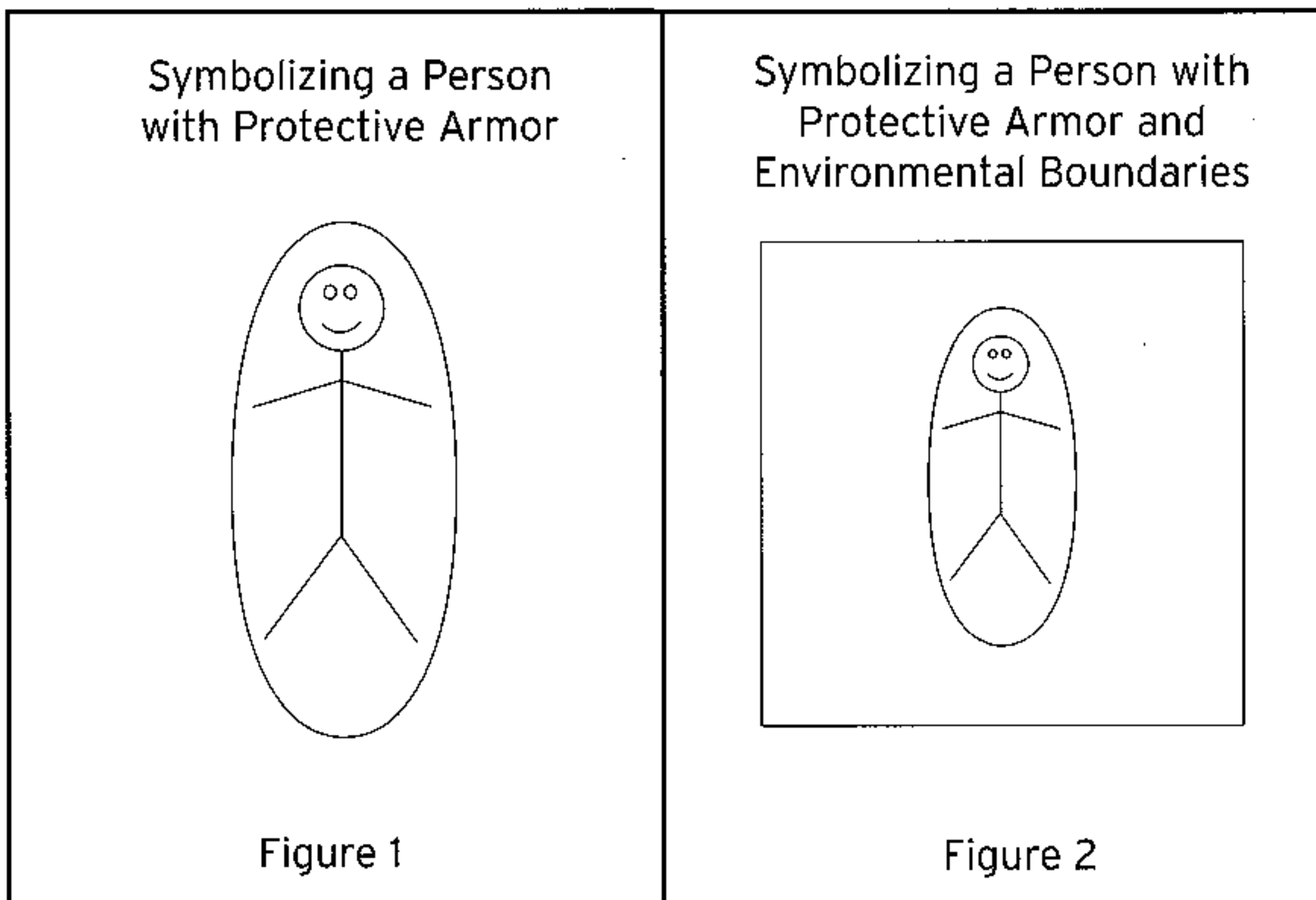
What application does this story have for us? In the Doctrine and Covenants, we read, “But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved; but among the wicked, men shall lift up their voices and curse God and die” (D&C 45:32). To stand in holy places is the modern equivalent of Moroni’s city and land defense strategy. We must establish holy places of safety for ourselves where the Spirit of the Lord can reside and where worldly influences cannot penetrate.

President Ezra Taft Benson identified some of these places of resort when he taught: “Holy men and holy women stand in holy places, and these holy places include our temples, our chapels, our homes, and the stakes of Zion, which are, as the Lord declares, ‘for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth’ (D&C 115:6).”<sup>5</sup>

More recently, President James E. Faust admonished: “As we recall the commandment to stand in holy places, we should remember that beyond the temple, the most sacred and holy places in all the world should be our own dwelling places. Our homes should be committed and dedicated only to holy purposes. In our homes all of the security, the strengthening love, and the sympathetic understanding that we all so desperately need should be found.”<sup>6</sup>

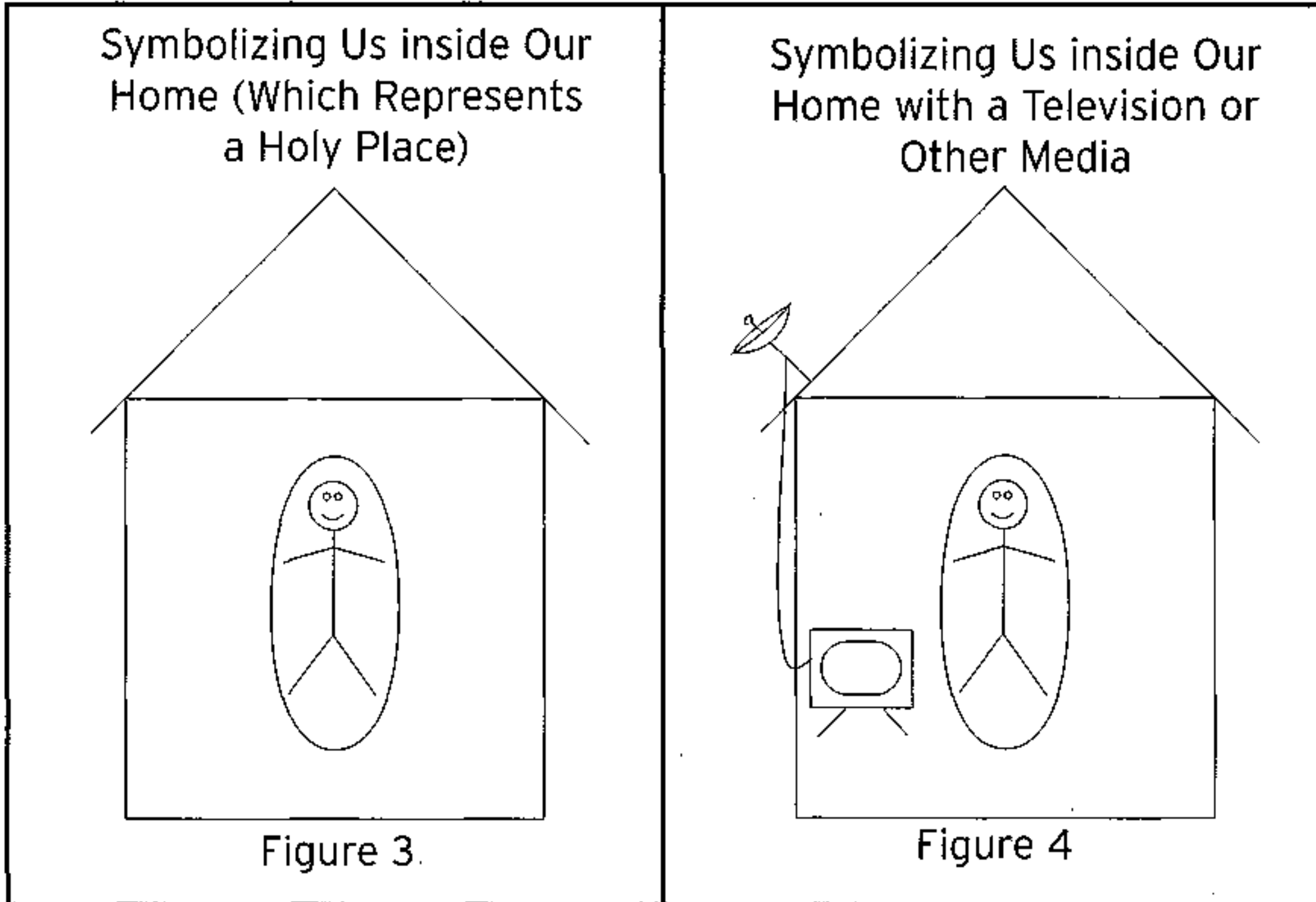
Earlier, I discussed the great success the Nephites had by putting on personal armor. Here, with the addition of environmental boundaries like trenches and walls surrounding their cities, the Nephites’ success was unmatched, for as Mormon put it: “[They] had all power over their enemies.” It is this same level of spiritual power that should be our goal. Truly, to have all power over evil, with zero spiritual fatalities, would truly bring us, as it did the Nephites, our happiest times.

When I teach about these two war strategies in the classroom, I like to illustrate their modern spiritual application by sketching a simple diagram on the whiteboard. First, I draw a stick figure of a person with a circle around it (see figure 1). This illustration represents each of us clothed with personal armor. Next, I draw a larger rectangle surrounding the figure to symbolize environmental borders much like the city walls that Moroni built (see figure 2). This visual represents us standing in holy places like our homes, temples, or churches.



With these models in front of the classroom, the students can then visualize and discuss what might represent their modern spiritual armor as well as their holy places of resort. They can also see how the combination of these two strategies will lead to unequalled spiritual protection for themselves, just as it did for the Nephites.

Now, here is another lesson. I help students recognize that once our personal and environmental defenses are in place, the only way Satan can have any hope of success is by sneaking his message *inside* our defenses, thus weakening the inner vessel. To illustrate this, I add another feature to my previous drawing—that of a roof on top of the rectangle (see figure 3). This drawing represents each of us inside a holy place we call our home. I might then draw a television or some other media device to demonstrate how Satan may covertly send propaganda via our communication lines (television, magazines, Internet, music), thereby weakening us from the inside out and deceiving us into breaking down our borders of safety and removing our armor (see figure 4). Hence, even though we may invest many hours of time in building strong personal and environmental borders, we can quickly lose them if we are not vigilant in censoring what comes inside our homes through the media.



Remember, in Alma 50, the Nephites were doing very, very well. They suffered no major problems as long as they continued to keep the commandments of the Lord and to support Moroni's call to liberty.

Unfortunately, a couple of civil factions sprang up, the first being in the city of Morianton. This disturbance was eventually quelled (see Alma 50:25–36). Then, the king-men began an antigovernment movement that distracted the Nephites just enough to allow them to be blindsided by the Lamanites, who invaded the land of Moroni (see Alma 51). Sadly, even though Moroni spent a tremendous amount of time and money in preparing the Nephites with personal armor and border protections against an outside enemy, the growing pride from within remained unchecked and led to unnecessary loss of life. Moroni knew that such inward vessel problems were the primary cause of their conflicts with the Lamanites in the first place (see Alma 60). Unless these types of dissensions were suppressed, in the end it would not matter how superior his outside defenses were (see Alma 51:16).

In much the same way, how many of us faithfully put on the armor of God by way of daily prayer and scripture study; how many of us build a holy environment to live in by decorating our homes with uplifting furnishings, all sorts of family and Church pictures, and a “Families Are Forever” cross-stitch, only to turn around and unwittingly allow the adversary in through undisciplined television viewing or Internet surfing? Like Moroni, we must eliminate these inner vessel conflicts and allow only wholesome media to be present. If we do these things and continue to maintain our personal armor and borders of safety, we can be assured that “the very powers of hell [will be] shaken forever” in our behalf (Alma 48:17).

### **Protecting Ourselves by Continuing to Improve Our Defenses**

Like any great leader, Moroni was always thinking ahead, wondering how and where his enemy might strike next. He knew that the enemy would not rest and that they would not stop in their efforts to think of new ways to attack and subdue his people. He knew that the personnel in Amalickiah’s “Department of War” were working overtime. He knew that unless he continued to be innovative in his own wartime preparations, the Nephites would lose their liberties.

For example, during the battle between Zerahemnah and Moroni, the Nephites initially outfitted themselves with personal armor, whereas most of the Lamanites had no such protection. The outcome was a Nephite victory (see Alma 43). Years later, when Amalickiah sent his first wave of forces to attack the Nephites, he copied the Nephites’ previous example and upgraded his own army with personal armor (see Alma 48). Meantime, Moroni had continued improving his forces by building defense structures around key cities he believed would be at

risk for attacks. This vigilance had an immediate payoff, as the Nephites again shouted the cry of victory! The lesson here is simple: If Moroni had stood idle—thinking that personal armor would *always* be enough to protect his people—the outcome might have been significantly different. Had the “new and improved” Lamanites met them on “equal grounds,” the probability of a Nephite defeat would have been high, especially in light of the disposition and size of the Lamanite army.

Like Moroni, we need to update our spiritual defenses continually to stay ahead of Satan's plans. He will not rest and will persistently apply newly upgraded ways of deceiving and defeating us. As society advances in technology and information, the adversary will adopt these advancements for his own purposes. President James E. Faust remarked: “I think we will witness increasing evidence of Satan's power as the kingdom of God grows stronger. I believe Satan's ever-expanding efforts are some proof of the truthfulness of this work. In the future the opposition will be both more subtle and more open. It will be masked in greater sophistication and cunning, but it will also be more blatant. We will need greater spirituality to perceive all of the forms of evil and greater strength to resist it.”<sup>7</sup>

Though Satan's increasing assault on society is manifest in many ways, none is more rampant than his utilization of technology and media. For example, when I was in high school in the late 1970s, I don't recall many people in my hometown owning a VCR; nor were there a lot of video rental stores. If people wanted to watch a movie, they usually had to wait a few weeks for it to come to their local theater or drive-in and even longer to see it on television. In addition, movie rating and television programming standards were relatively strict in enforcement against immoral content.

Today, things are much different. With the advent of DVD systems, Internet streaming, and satellite dish networks, VCRs are beginning to be a thing of the past. Technology provides us with instantaneous access to all types of media, including that with morally dangerous content. The adversary has led a charge not only to relax media standards but even to subvert them. What was once classified as pornographic is now nothing more than what a typical person sees while strolling down the aisle of a local video store.

How are we to defend ourselves against this and other modern forms of attack? Spiritually speaking, if we stand idle without improving upon the same defense strategies we once used, we risk coming up short. Consequently, we must be progressive in extending our strength.

This is why the Lord blessed us with *living* prophets and Apostles. They are our chief captains. They foresee the enemy's plans and provide us with *updated* defense tactics not only for today's battles but also for tomorrow's as well. To illustrate, who can measure the added power given to the Saints when in 1979 and 1981 the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible and its companion volume of the triple combination were published and distributed? This inspired development provided a foundation that would fortify a new generation of Church members to withstand today's unique challenges. This example, of course, is only one of many in which the Lord, through His chosen servants, is in an ongoing mode of strengthening His Saints.

Knowing that Satan has and will continue to revise and improve his forces by modern means, we as Latter-day Saints must be like Moroni in our thinking and must stay abreast in our spiritual defenses. Moroni was proactive, vigilant, progressive, and innovative. He knew the scriptures. He knew the prophecies and promises. He was prayerful, and he stayed close to the Spirit. He received guidance from the Lord and His servants to foresee the enemy's plans and then acted accordingly (see Alma 43:23–25). We must do the same.

### **Protecting Ourselves by Erecting Watchtowers**

Part of Moroni's bulwark for protecting his cities was that of watchtowers. In Alma 50:4–5, we see that Captain Moroni "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. 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."

In ancient civilizations, watchtowers were a valuable, if not vital, aspect of military defensive strategy. With watchtowers in place, watchmen could see their enemy's movements and provide timely alerts for the inhabitants of their city to prepare for battle. Additionally, as was the case with the Nephites, watchmen could also use these towers as strategic places from which they could fire shots against the enemy as they drew near the city walls. Elder Ballard explains: "Often in the scriptures the Lord speaks of watchmen on the towers, and of watchtowers themselves. A watchtower is generally raised so that someone can climb to the top and see a greater distance. In this way they are alerted

to danger or threat much sooner than they would otherwise be. The same principle holds true in our lives. We can raise watchtowers that help us deal with threats before they actually descend upon us.”<sup>8</sup>

To the Saints in Missouri, the Lord gave a parable on the redemption of Zion that underscores the value of a watchtower: “*The watchman upon the tower would have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off; and then ye could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer*” (D&C 101:54; emphasis added).

Using watchtowers to see “the enemy while he [is] yet afar off” takes away one of the enemy’s most important strategies—the element of surprise. Satan delights in ambush and thereby takes us out before we are aware. Consequently, the Lord has provided us with several warning systems of alert, two of which are modern watchtowers and watchmen. These watchmen are our Church leaders, particularly the prophets and apostles. They receive relevant and timely alerts about Satan’s current and future plans of attack. Their warnings come to us at least twice a year during general conference as well as on other special occasions. It has been said: “Members of the Church today stand in a position to see clearly the enemy and how he works, because they have living prophets who speak the mind of God. They are therefore called by the Savior both to warn the wicked of the destruction that awaits them if they do not repent and to secure Zion and protect her inhabitants. Thus, the Lord refers to his authorized servants today as watchmen upon the towers (see Isaiah 62:6 and Ezekiel 33:2–9).”<sup>9</sup> Elder Bruce R. McConkie further explained: “In their capacity as elders, prophets, ambassadors, and ministers, the Lord’s agents are *watchmen* upon the tower. Their obligation is to raise the warning voice so that the sheepfold of Israel shall stand secure from the dangers and evils of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Doctrine and Covenants 124:45 details one of the most important promises given to those who follow these watchmen: “If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place.” To this, President Packer added: “Remember this promise; hold on to it. It should be a great comfort to those struggling to keep a family together in a society increasingly indifferent to, and even hostile toward, those standards which are essential to a happy family.”<sup>11</sup>

## Protecting Ourselves by Not Attacking Our Enemies in Their Strongholds

In Alma 52, we find Teancum anxious about taking back several of the Nephite cities that had been lost to the Lamanites previously in the war. After receiving direction from Moroni to retake the city of Mulek, Teancum began mobilizing his forces. However, as he commenced to march forth against the Lamanites, “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” (52:17). When Moroni later arrived and surveyed the situation, he realized the wisdom of Teancum: the only way the Nephites would have any chance of success against the Lamanites would be to get them away from their strongholds and meet them upon “fair grounds” (52:21). Moroni and his chief captains did just that; they devised an ingenious plan that lured the Lamanites away from their fortified city, which they were then able to recapture and occupy once again.

Helaman showed this same kind of wisdom during the course of his military command. In Alma 58, we read that his army, which included the stripling warriors, had the objective of retaking the city of Manti. However, as he described it, the Lamanites “were so much more numerous than was our army that we durst not go forth and attack them in their strongholds” (Alma 58:2). After much prayer and after receiving strength and courage from the Lord, Helaman enticed the Lamanites out of their fortifications, much like Moroni, and thus accomplished his objective by regaining possession of the city of Manti.

The idea of entering into the enemy’s territory is a potentially dangerous thing, no matter what the objective. Like these great Nephite military leaders, we must be wise and cautious as we battle against evil. We especially need to stress this principle to the youth of the Church. Some of our young people who are sincere in their desire to help their wayward friends may unwittingly end up going into the enemy’s territory to try to bring them back to the gospel side of the line. They may think, “If I go to such and such a party, I can be a positive influence by not drinking and thus encourage my struggling friends who will see my good example.” Unfortunately, they don’t realize that by doing this they are entering into the adversary’s stronghold, and, like Teancum, Moroni, and Helaman, they must realize that the odds are against them.



President Spencer W. Kimball wrote in *The Miracle of Forgiveness*: “The difference between the good man and the bad man is not that one had the temptations and the other was spared them. It is that one kept himself fortified, and resisted temptation, and the other placed himself in compromising places and conditions and rationalized the situations. Hence it is obvious that to remain clean and worthy, one must stay positively and conclusively away from the devil’s territory, avoiding the least approach toward evil.”<sup>12</sup> President Kimball goes on to quote President George Albert Smith, who said: “My grandfather used to say to his family, ‘There is a line of demarkation, well defined, between the Lord’s territory and the devil’s. If you will stay on the Lord’s side of the line, you will be under his influence and will have no desire to do wrong; but if you cross to the devil’s side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter’s power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the Spirit of the Lord. . . . There is safety for us only on the Lord’s side of the line.’”<sup>13</sup>

Instead of trying to save our wavering friends by associating with them in the enemy’s strongholds, it is much better to meet them in safe territory. For our youth, this may be as simple as having them talk to a struggling friend one-on-one at school or some other place where there is a good or neutral environment. I have found that sometimes the best time to talk with a friend who is wavering is when we are simply by ourselves—away from the strongholds of others who would seek to influence us against the truth. The bottom line is that we all must be careful to avoid enemy territory as we go about our daily associations with others.

### **Faith and Obedience: The Foundation of Protection**

Although we do not know the exact reasons why Mormon decided to include a relatively large section of wartime stories in his record, we know one thing—they are there, and they must be important. If we take Nephi’s advice and liken these stories unto ourselves, applying them to our latter-day spiritual battles against evil, a rich world of parallels can be drawn.

This said, one last application should be noted. Truly, Captain Moroni was a master at implementing defensive strategies to protect his people. However, underlying it all, humble Moroni always recognized the direct relationship between the Nephites’ faith in Christ and the preserving hand of God in their wartime successes. From Moroni’s

early battles with Zerahemnah to the civil struggles with the king-men and on through his final assaults against Amalickiah and Ammoron, Moroni consistently attributed his successes to the Nephites' level of righteousness. In the end, it was God who had preserved them. It was He who guided the implementation of timely strategic defenses. Thus, the most important application of all may be to realize that no matter what spiritually defensive strategies we decide to use, we must employ them with faith in and obedience to God—just like Moroni. ■

---

## Notes

1. M. Russell Ballard, "Be Strong in the Lord, and in the Power of His Might," Brigham Young University devotional, 3 March 2002, [speeches.byu.edu/devo/2001-02/Ballardw02.html](http://speeches.byu.edu/devo/2001-02/Ballardw02.html).

2. N. Eldon Tanner, "Put on the Whole Armour of God," *Ensign*, May 1979, 46.

3. Carlos E. Asay, "The Temple Garment: 'An Outward Expression of an Inward Commitment,'" *Ensign*, August 1997, 19–20; emphasis added.

4. Boyd K. Packer, "The Shield of Faith," *Ensign*, May 1995, 8.

5. Ezra Taft Benson, "Prepare Yourselves for the Great Day of the Lord," in *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1981), 68.

6. James E. Faust, "Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?" *Ensign*, August 2001, 5.

7. James E. Faust, "The Great Imitator," *Ensign*, November 1987, 33.

8. Ballard, "Be Strong in the Lord and in the Power of His Might."

9. *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 240.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 832.

11. Boyd K. Packer, "The Twelve Apostles," *Ensign*, November 1996, 8.

12. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 231–32.

13. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, 232.