

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 40

Mosiah 26–27

Believers and Apostates

Mosiah 26 is an enormously important chapter, and the first verse is very impressive. We mentioned it before. “Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people.” Well, the first thing we notice is the tremendous speed with which things move in the Book of Mormon. This generation was alive in the time of King Benjamin, and all that has happened. It impresses one how much has happened in how short a time.

Matthew Arnold, in what has been considered the greatest work of literary criticism in the English language, said there are four things that make Homer preeminently great. First, he is preeminently rapid; second, he is preeminently noble; third, he is preeminently simple and direct in content (what he tells); and fourth, he is preeminently simple and direct in language. By far the hardest of these to achieve, that no other great epic poet ever achieved, is the rapidity. Milton drags on all day just to have Satan turn around twice. But not Homer—he rushes along. And the Book of Mormon moves like an express train, right from the first chapter. Right from the first event at the beginning, Nephi plunges into it, and he never stops going. The book just moves like lightning all the way through. That’s a feat that nobody can accomplish who doesn’t know exactly what’s going on, or doesn’t have a document before him. Nobody can get away with that. Look at how much has happened, how much is going to happen, and how fast it happens. But it’s the situation that’s significant here. Notice this: “Being little children at the time he spake unto his people . . . they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.” Well, why shouldn’t little children believe the tradition of their fathers? What’s wrong with that? Most of the little children I know took it from me. In my family on both sides, the grandchildren have far stronger testimonies than the children did. Is being young going to stop you from getting a testimony? What went on here? The reason for it is very well explained here. What is happening here is this, and we will see that it comes out very clearly in this chapter. And notice Mosiah 24:4–7. The Lamanites and Nephites over a wide area started mingling freely and exchanging goods, services, and information. They were friendly, etc.

About 35–50 miles south on the main highway to Flagstaff from where you turn off at the gap there in Hopi land, there’s Waputka. It’s quite near the road, and it’s a very ancient ruin. It’s quite extensive, and all sorts of junk has been found there. It was the center of a network of roads or trails. There you find beads, pottery, basketwork, and metalwork that come from all over—from the Great Lakes region, from up in the North, from down in Central America, from the Central Plains. They find fragments of artifacts from everywhere. In other words, there was a great trading center; people traded very widely there. In ancient times they did move around that far north. We know they did this in the south because you find different types of work. All up and down the Andes and all through Mexico there’s all sorts of evidence of trade. It’s a very important thing, of course.

They had this business civilization here, and we are told in verse 7 that with the business civilization and prosperity, crime began to flourish. They began to increase in riches, in trade, in cunning, and in all manner of wickedness and plunder (sophistication). The connection is made quite clear, for example, a little later on in the case of the sons of Mosiah. Turn to Mosiah 27:7–8 for just for a moment to see what the situation is there. It tells us “they became a large and wealthy people.” And notice that the sons of no less than the great King Mosiah and the oldest son of Alma joined the hell-fire club, the smart-aleck club, and rejected the gospel completely. They wouldn’t take it from their parents. That’s a remarkable thing, isn’t it? But you notice what it was. It’s right in the same breath with their being a large and wealthy people. Then the next verse says that the kids weren’t taken in by religion anymore. With this sort of thing, it becomes a corrupt society. Verse 8: “Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma; . . . he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man.” These kids were rich, sophisticated, and cynical; they spoiled a lot of things.

Your special delectation business is not the flower of civilization, but of barbarism. It’s the way of the barbarians and was born of the wandering and plundering tribes of the Steppes. One of the first settlements of our Viking ancestors from the North was Elphinstone on the north coast of Scotland, where they had a mine. Genealogy now turns up that three Hugh Nibleys in succession were mayors of Elphinstone. I just discovered that less than a year ago. All sorts of things happened. But they went around plundering, looting, and taking everything they could. If you want to know what went on there, read the *Orkneyinga Saga* about the wonderful things they did. They plundered and looted and burned each others’ houses down, etc. But they always carried a set of scales with them for business—for weighing precious metals, jewels, gold, and things like that. They were traders every inch of the way, and trading, business, and looting all went together. To grab what you could grab was the idea. The chiefs of the tribes across the Steppes lived by plunder and exchange. There was the ring giver. Remember how *Beowulf* starts out. Everybody goes out and plunders. The king has the richest plunder. Then he divides it among them, and there is a good deal of argument about who has the most honor, etc. They got very clever in banking arrangements and in keeping their books. “You owe me so much, and I owe you so much.” In the barbaric societies, your *mead of honor* depended on your share of the mead. It’s a very interesting thing. The Egyptian word for it *iw^c* is a picture of a side thigh of beef that a person gets as his particular lot.

Anyway, these semi-nomads had to have their wealth portable because they were traveling around. It was the weather, the bad times, that forced them to move. It gets everybody moving, and everybody is plundering everybody else. That’s what happened in Lehi’s time in 600 B.C. All the world started moving; the whole ancient structure collapsed (we discussed that last semester). Everybody started to go looking for homes and colonizing. But their wealth had to be portable and in concentrated form—mainly precious metals and jewels. They were great on collecting those. Well, that’s the theme, the gold and the jewels, whether it’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or any of our prime-time TV—the detective and murder mysteries. Now drugs have a big part to play. But these valuable, small, mobile items are the soul of business, and they make for ferocious business customs, etc. They kept jealous accounts of what they gave and how much. It was always counted. And, of course, they dressed in gorgeous attire. We say “barbaric dress,” as far as that goes. And again, this was a necessity. As you can see from the *National Geographic*, the women among all this sort of people, including the Indians, traveled with all their personal wealth hung around their necks. It was usually in gold coins with holes through them; you see all

sorts of them. Among all the Asians and everywhere you go, you find this. All this splendor they carry around with them is characteristic. All their personal wealth was strung about their person, so that it was mobile. They could always put their hands on it.

By contrast, you notice that the inhabitants of the civilized cities, like the Ionian and Egyptian cities, were content with wearing a simple white or gray robe with a little tasteful decoration or fringe—that's all. They all wore basic white in Athens. In Rome you would know exactly what a person's status was. If it was brown or white, he was a servant. If it was white with a toga *picta* then he was a "big wheel." If it had a toga *clavata* on it, he was a senator. As I said, business is not the fine flower of civilization, nor is civilization the product of business. It's the other way around; it's essentially barbaric.

This is what happened to these people; this is what it is describing now. Let us proceed happily here. We got down to verse 5. It seems that every chapter is the most important, but this one tells us about the church—what the church is for and why we have to have a church. The problem is this, you will notice. "And now in the reign of Mosiah they [the dissenters] were not half so numerous as the people of God; but because of the dissensions among the brethren [inside the church itself; this is what caused the apostates to grow in number] they became more numerous [and finally they outnumbered them]. For it came to pass that they did deceive many [these outsiders deceived the members of the church; these apostates were able to get away with it—how?] with their flattering words." They came on strong with all sorts of flattering words—words flattering to the intellect like: "You can't believe that infantile stuff; you don't believe that stuff." Some of my friends don't believe the gospel, but the interesting thing is that they don't believe I believe it either. They can't believe that I actually believe this stuff. It's one of the tests. They're so naive about it; they don't know a blessed thing.

Verse 6: "They did deceive many with their flattering words, who were in the church, and did cause them to commit many sins; therefore it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church." If you are a member of the church and you have accepted some of this smooth talk and started misbehaving yourself, [you might say:] "We can't quibble about these things. This old puritanical strictness just doesn't go. We are an enlightened people; we're emancipated." If you had started that and were still a member of the church, then you would be admonished by the church, and they would tell you to get back on the track again. They didn't like that, of course. Notice that we have priests and teachers in verse 7. It was the teachers who would catch onto it first, of course. The teachers reported them to the priests. I guess we could call them "home teachers" in this case. Notice it says, "They were brought before the priests and delivered up unto the priests by the teachers; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the high priest." What could the priests do? The teachers wouldn't have anything to do with it. This is a "hot potato," and nobody will take it, you notice. It was handed to the priests, and they went up to Alma, the high priest. (Well, take it to the General Authority; he should know.) But Alma didn't know; this is another surprise in verse 9. Alma wasn't aware of what had been going on at all. Now that's a surprising thing. Why not? Shouldn't he have known that? Verse 9: "And it came to pass that Alma did not know concerning them; but there were many witnesses against them; yea, the people stood and testified of their iniquity in abundance."

But Alma didn't know about what was going on. Was he ever naive! But there were many witnesses against them. He was apparently reluctant to believe it; they had to pour on the witnesses. It took a lot of pressure to make Alma give in there. He was a real idealist,

wasn't he? He didn't want to get involved in this thing; yet he was the head of the church. He was troubled. The next verse tells that Alma was upset by this sort of thing. This is a common thing, too. A good example that I've cited before here is the duke in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. The duke wanted to know what was really going on in his kingdom, and the only way he could find out was to put on a disguise and go around and see. It was the same thing with Harun al-Rashid. He had his faithful servant Ja'far, who was a gigantic black man. To find out what was going on in the kingdom, he would disguise himself and go out by night and circulate. He'd visit all the gambling halls, etc. They did it for fun as much as anything because Harun al-Rashid was very much bored by what was going on. But the king has to disguise himself and go around if he wants to know what goes on. With King Lear it's the same thing when he is kicked out and no longer king. Then he goes out and mingles with some of the people in the cold winter time, poor Tom's a-cold, etc. He says, "If I had known what has been going on all this time . . ." But he was the king, and it never got to him. So it pays for kings to be demoted and look around a while. This is what happens.

Incidentally, I imagine that's why the British monarchy has remained so popular—they do get down and circulate. Today, Prince Charles is very much interested in social affairs and everything else. And what made the trouble is that Edward VIII got too sympathetic. He was Prince of Wales and he got too sympathetic with the Welsh coal miners. He found out what their troubles were and started feeling with them. Certain industrial interests didn't like that sort of thing, and there was a lot of trouble.

Well, anyway Alma didn't know, so you'll have to excuse him for not knowing. It took some pressure to convince him, but when he was convinced, he was upset. He was "troubled in his spirit," and said, Well, I'll have to take this to the king. He is passing the buck, too, see. Verse 11: "And he said unto the king: Behold, here are many whom we have brought before thee, who are accused of their brethren; yea, and they have been taken in divers iniquities." Now what can the church punish them for, and how can the church punish them? That's what this chapter is going to tell us. He doesn't know what to do about it, and neither does the king, because they are civil offenses. Here he says, "Therefore we have brought them before thee, that thou mayest judge them according to their crimes." See, they are civil offenses. If they commit a crime, the church doesn't punish them. The king punishes them; the government punishes them. If they haven't committed a crime, what can the church do about it? They are not criminals, so we're going to decide that.

What does the king do? He passes it on, too. It's a "hot potato" for him just as well. Verse 12: "But king Mosiah said unto Alma: Behold, I judge them not; therefore I deliver them [right back to you] into thy hands to be judged." So the king passes them right back to Alma again. See, the question is, "What action should I take?" The answer is that it's through the church that God intends to deal with men. The human race is admittedly lost and bemused. This is the closest exposition you will get of the purpose of the church. Why do we have to have a church? Why do you have to have a ship? Why do you have to have a house? Well, we have no choice but to live together is the reason. If we were living alone, we wouldn't need them. But we all have to live together. Even Cain had an entourage wherever he went. We are living in a community with each other, and we will see what comes of that.

Alma is not the typical boss, you'll notice. He isn't the manager that knows exactly what to do and does the wrong thing. The spirit of Alma was troubled—he was worried. He was afraid that he might do the wrong thing, a very humble man. Notice it says, "for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God." Well, how many leaders, bosses, managers are in constant fear that they will do wrong when they are faced with a problem? They may not know how to solve it, but the idea of doing wrong [doesn't bother them]. Nobody does wrong anymore, as you know. They deny all guilt no matter what they do. You may be caught with your hand in the till, but you deny every charge because the lawyers always tell you, "Only fools plead guilty—always say that you're innocent." But he was worried about it and "feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God . . . [so] he poured out his whole soul to God [this is where we take it—to the Lord, of course, and] the voice of the Lord came to him, saying: [this is in the manner of the Doctrine and Covenants; when Joseph Smith wanted to know he asked] . . . Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi." Now what about childish faith? What about being gullible, etc.? He believed in the "words alone." He saw no evidence, no proof, or anything like that. And it wasn't the words of God; it was the words of Abinadi alone that he believed in. What's going on here? Why is there merit in this?

The great Krister Stendahl is now bishop of Lund and chief of the Swedish church. He was here at a luncheon and someone (namely me) quoted Joseph Smith as saying, "Nobody was ever damned for believing too much." Well, he found that extremely offensive. But when it comes to it, everybody believes too much. There's not a person here who believes a single thing that has been absolutely and completely proved—gravitation or anything else. You have to believe all sorts of things that you can't possibly prove, and everybody believes them. Well, what's the point here then? Because Alma believed in his words alone. I would emphasize *his*. You are blessed because of the things you choose to believe—not by the act of believing, not just by faith. You weren't blessed because you believed, but because you chose what to believe. Everybody chooses what to believe. The atheist is a very strong believer. He is the most passionate arguer you can possibly find, and the positivist. Where will you find greater faith and firm conviction than among economists? No two of them agree, but boy they can give you the straight thing. You find faith all around you. You must believe in something and everybody does. But the Lord said, blessed are you because of the things you chose to believe; you chose to believe in the things that Abinadi taught [paraphrased]. He could have chosen all sorts of other things. So it isn't that he was naive and gullible, but he was blessed because of what he chose to believe. It's up to you to choose what you'll believe. As I said, everybody does. You get that especially in politics. With one person, someone is a great man who can't sin. Another person will say, "What do you see in that crook?" This goes on everywhere; we have our convictions. But what he chose to believe were the words of Abinadi.

Verse 16: "And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them." See, "faith in the words alone." That seems awfully shallow, doesn't it, just to accept something on somebody's word? But they were not accepting it on somebody's word. They had chosen what they would believe. What rang the bell for them is what they believed, and [they were] blessed. And here's another thing in verse 17. It is often asked, what authority, what priesthood did Alma have to do what he was doing here? He went ahead and did it alone, and here he is congratulated for it. He is congratulated for taking the initiative. "And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people." [The Lord] is going to accept them, but he went ahead and established a church. Having

the priesthood, he took the initiative, and the Lord said that's good. He doesn't want to command in all things. Verse 19: "And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed." We love to make moral judgments of others, but Alma didn't. He would not do that. He was blessed because he asked the Lord concerning those things.

Verse 20: "Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life." Alma was speaking for the church, and yet God always covenants with us as individuals, as we will see three verses after this. How could it be otherwise? Is there any virtue in membership? Can you be blessed because you are a member of anything? No. The Lord deals with you alone—only with the individual participant. It's like an orchestra, a choir, a faculty, or anything like that. It's a community, but everyone makes an individual contribution, and he deals alone with the Lord. We have it here: "Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life [it's between Alma and the Lord]; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep [then in the next verse he says, whoever is acceptable to me should be acceptable to you]. And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. For behold, this is my church [we're here all working together; if anyone wants to come back, he says the door is always open]; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive." If I forgive him, you must forgive him. So the door is always open here. With baptism [the Lord] will receive them again.

Verse 23: "For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created [I am the one that hath created them]; and it is I that granteth unto him [notice it is singular] that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand." He is not talking about the church as a whole here, but is speaking of the individual. He says, Alma, the deal is between you and me, and I'll grant to anyone that believes unto the end a place at my right hand. It's a personal relationship. I'll grant to that individual who believes on me a place at the right hand. That's the Atonement, the *yeshivah*, sitting down with God. That's the word that's translated as atonement in the Old Testament. When you go in and sit down with God, that's *yeshivah*; that's an atonement, when you become *at one*.

Verse 24: "For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand." It's one hundred percent up to the Lord himself. He will make the decision; he will decide who is righteous and who isn't. As he says in Isaiah, Don't tell me who are my sheep and who are not. Don't tell me who are the people of God—who are the good people and the bad people. That's for me to decide; that's not for you to decide [paraphrased]. It's the easiest thing in the world to say, "Are you on the Lord's side? We are God's people. This is the Lord's university." Calling this "the Lord's university" used to make Harvey Taylor furious when he came here. He thought that was a gross insult to the Lord. Not because of the quality of this or any other university, but we had no right to say it. Let the Lord say that if that's so. We shouldn't pin that medal on ourselves. We have no right to put medals on ourselves that way.

Verse 25: "And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me." And if they absolutely refuse, he will deal with them personally again. Notice the second trump, the second resurrection. What's wrong with having to wait a few years in eternity? You are willing to wait for a second resurrection—six months or something like that—you'll graduate a little later? What's the difference? There's all the difference in the world. The second

resurrection is a different type of experience—a different type of resurrection. You'll be resurrected, of course, but it's a different environment and a different setting. You're a different type of person from those who come out in the first resurrection. It's not a matter of timing at all. What's going on here is a matter of quality. Verse 26: "And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed." Remember, we mentioned that before? I was nice to you, but you would not. I warned you, but you would not. I commanded you, but you would not. It's the same thing; they would not be redeemed. There's nothing he can do; he is not going to infringe on their agency. Verse 27: "And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them." They thought they could fool him and that they would be recognized anyway. No, I knew what was going on, he'll say; you never fooled me. That's why he says, "I will confess unto them that I never knew them," because they were never behaving; they tried to pull a fast one. Remember, they say, God will beat us with a few stripes and then everything will be all right. He won't notice what's going on here [paraphrased]. "And they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." This is explained later in the Book of Mormon.

Then here is the answer to the question. The teachers asked the question, "What will we do with these guys?" The priests asked the question. Then they asked it to Alma. Alma took it to the king, and the king turned it back to Alma. He said, "I don't know; what will we do?" So Alma asked the Lord, and this is the answer to the question: What do you do with members of the church who deny their testimonies and make trouble? This happens in the church all the time. There are people who don't want to belong but want to stay in. I know lots of people who are that way because they will lose their audience and have no prestige. Nobody will listen to them once they are out of the church. They always want to be connected with the church so they can get an audience. If they weren't panning the church, they never could get anybody out. All you have to do is start jumping on the church and then you can get somebody interested; they'll listen to you. So they always bring that up; they always keep the church in the picture. People who write books against it, etc., always want to keep their membership—Fawn Brodie, for example. You can't find anything more hostile than her book. How many of you know Fawn Brodie's work *No Man Knows My History*? She wrote the book that became the standard work on Mormonism [for the world], although it's a fraud. But an interesting thing [happened after] she wrote this withering book. When Russell Rich was back East in the New England Mission, she was very sick. Her husband phoned them to come and administer to her. It was a terrible night, and they had to drive eighty miles in an awful storm. They said, "Well, she doesn't believe it."

Her husband said, "Don't ask that—just come." He was Jewish. They went out and said to her, "You don't believe in this sort of thing. Why did you call us?"

She said, "But I do believe it." She was very sick, so they administered to her and brought her around. The next time they visited her, she came up to them with a cigarette in her hand and said, "Wasn't I silly the other night?" This is the sort of thing you deal with. So what do you do with people like that? They are still members, but they are not cooperating. This is the answer: "Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day." The only thing you can do is excommunicate them; there's nothing else. No punishment, no penalty, no sentence—just excommunication. It's what they want, after all.

But if a person has committed a sin, “if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also. Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me [this is the good news of the gospel—it is the gospel of repentance; we are repenting perpetually here; if you are not repenting, you are not improving]. And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses [he forgives you, too, and you must take his word for it]; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor’s trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.” If he says he has repented, but he hasn’t really repented, do you refuse to forgive him? No, that’s not for you to judge. He has condemned himself then. You know he’s a hypocrite and has made trouble for a long time. He says, “Oh, I’m repenting all right” because he wants to get back into the church and have some influence. You forgive him his trespasses. The Lord says, “Forgive him.” He has condemned himself if he says he has repented and hasn’t; you must take his word for it. Then if he hasn’t, if he has been lying, he takes the consequences. He has brought himself under condemnation.

Verse 32: “Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people [he will be struck off the records]. . . . And it came to pass when Alma had heard these words he wrote them down that he might have them [like the Doctrine and Covenants and like the 1QS here], and that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God.” Remember, he established churches far and wide. He couldn’t be in all of them. There were various churches. That’s why he established the preachers, etc. For his particular branch of the church that he lived in, he wrote down the record for them. There were many communities of like-minded people.

Verse 34: “And it came to pass that Alma went and judged those that had been taken in iniquity, according to the word of the Lord.” It had to be their acts. The church is not a corporation that answers for my beliefs. That’s what St. Augustine taught. He said, whatever the most people believe, we can believe, and believe it without any doubt at all. He also said, I know that I’m a Christian because I’m received by them. In any community that receives me, I’m sanctified. I receive my testimony because I identify myself with the church. Of course, this is the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The church as an institution is its own proof, it’s own evidence of divinity. The theological is actually secondary. You come onto that quite a bit. It’s the other way around: I am a member of the church because I believe, but I don’t believe because I’m a member of the church. In Catholic countries it’s very common that people believe what they can because of the church.

Now here is the “doctrine of the two ways.” We have to move on here. Verse 37: “Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church; and they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many. And now all these things did Alma and his fellow laborers do who were over the church, walking in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things, suffering all manner of afflictions, being persecuted by all those who did not belong to the church of God.” Look at this! Alma, with all his authority and everything else, was being persecuted. They were going around teaching the others, and they were given a bad time. They were greatly outnumbered now. They caused a lot of dissent and concern, cutting all these people off from the church, etc. There was real trouble here, and they had enmity wherever they went, as it says here, “being persecuted by all those who did not belong to the church of God.” There was no obvious advantage in membership

anymore, was there? You see all these guilty people. As we said from Rachfoucauld yesterday. “We can forgive those who wrong us, but never those we have wronged.” The apostates are really bitter, as you know. These were bitter apostates, and they were numerous now.

Verse 39: “And they did admonish their brethren; and they were also admonished.” You notice it wasn’t a case of dominant and submissive here. Just last night I was reading a very interesting thing in Philo of Alexandria. (Nobody ever reads Philo.) He said, “Equality is the mother of righteousness.” That’s a very interesting thing because it’s inequality that starts men fighting among themselves, abusing each other, being ambitious and competitive climbers, and making up mean stories about each other. My youngest son, to his great surprise, has ended up managing a large hotel in Guam and some other things with it. He said, “Ninety-five percent of the problem of management is these troubles that people make for each other—all this sniping that is going on, all this ambition, etc.” He never took a business course in his life or anything like that, but the Japanese owners found that they could trust him, so they put everything onto him. He said, “That’s the whole thing all day long. If it wasn’t for that, management would be a breeze. But it’s all the personalities, all this bitterness that goes on.”

It says here that they admonished their brethren and were also admonished by them, so it’s this equality [that’s important]. There’s not somebody laying down the law to you, and you laying down the law to somebody below you. You lick his boots and somebody else licks yours. It’s not that at all. It was this equality, and we are going have a lot about that. That word *equality* occurs a great many times in the Book of Mormon. But I like that from Philo: “Equality is the mother of righteousness.”

“And they were also admonished, every one by the word of God, according to his sins, or to the sins which he had committed, being commanded of God to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things.” This is the way you hold on; this is the way they kept going, to pray to God without ceasing. How do you do it? Incidentally, Is this what the Arabs call the *fatra*. The *fatra* is when you never stop mentioning the name *God*, no matter whatever you do all day long. Well, that’s when you are sawing, or walking, or doing any repetitive action, you just keep saying, “Allah, Allah, Allah.” What does it mean by “praying without ceasing”? Well, simply that you continue the practice of prayer. It’s like saying, “They went on having breakfast every morning without ceasing.” That doesn’t mean they ate breakfast all day and all night, but they did it without ceasing. Or “he constantly brushed his teeth” doesn’t mean he did it twenty-four hours a day. The interesting thing is that in a Semitic language like Arabic, the only way you can say *continually*, or *go on doing a thing* is *lā zalla* or *lam yazil/mā zalla*, *he did not cease*. *Mā zalla yaktubu*, “he did not cease writing,” means he wrote from time to time, or he wrote regularly. *Lā zalla/mā zalla* means “he didn’t cease studying.” We have these practices we continue at. You might say, “He continued to take his medicine.” It’s one aspirin a day, he continues. It doesn’t mean constantly. When it says, “they continued in prayer without ceasing,” that doesn’t mean they had a monastic fanaticism here, or anything like that.

In chapter 27 the persecutions get pretty bad, and this is very important. Here we recognize the source of pride and haughtiness. “And now it came to pass that the persecutions which were inflicted on the church by the unbelievers became so great that the church began to murmur [they didn’t like it], and complain to their leaders

concerning the matter [this was going too far]; and they did complain to Alma. And Alma laid the case before their king, Mosiah. And Mosiah consulted with his priests.” So they had another conference on these things. This is the clue to the apostasy, for example, the Donatists, etc. How do you handle them? The usual thing was persecution, just wipe them out. St. Augustine recommended it. The Donatists were making trouble because they had a different doctrine. They believed people weren’t living the pure life of the early church, and the Donatists were strict old-fashioned Christians. St. Augustine recommended solving the Donatist problem by killing them all, so 400,000 Donatists were slaughtered in North Africa because they practiced Christianity in too strict a manner.

Question: What exactly did Mosiah’s priests do?

Answer: They were appointed and anointed by Alma. They were a council. He brought them and they consulted together. They were appointed to lead the churches, and they came together to have a conference. Alma was the high priest. He was one of the priests of Noah, but it wasn’t Noah that made him that.

Verse 2: “And it came to pass that king Mosiah sent a proclamation throughout the land round about that there should not any unbeliever persecute any of those who belonged to the church of God.” And no member of the church should persecute anybody. “And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men.” There’s your theme of equality. If we’re going to have righteousness and judgment, there should be an equality among all men—a very hard thing to achieve. Are you going to achieve this just by making rules? No, it doesn’t work, as we will see, but this is the best you can do. “That they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support.” This shows where the inequality comes from; it’s an economic thing. They should labor with their own hands, and that means that we do not have a professional priesthood. Back a little ways, we are told that the priests also labored for their support. This recognizes the source of this pride and haughtiness. Remember, the people of the church were following the old order of Alma. Alma went out and established his model church in the wilderness, where they were all humble and equal—just like the Qumran community. We saw that they were driven out; then they came to Zarahemla. When he established the church there at the request of the king, it was on that order with that same humility, and with the rule that everybody should labor with his own hands, including the officers. This is what they found offensive, and this is what led them to persecuting, etc. This is what led to the pride and haughtiness of those who were more successful because the others weren’t striving for success.

Verse 5: “Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support.” Well, that they didn’t like at all; this equality was much too austere, much too old-fashioned. A rich Hopi would be something to laugh at. There is no such thing. A Hopi can’t possibly get rich. “If one has corn, we all have corn, and that’s it,” they say. And [the people in Zarahemla] had no professional clergy either. And what did they abound in? “They did abound in the grace of God.” We are promised that if we do that sort of thing, but we’re not willing to trust it, as Brigham Young said. There are people that say, “I trust the Lord, but I feel better with money in the bank.” That may be true, but that’s not the way the Lord wants it.

Verse 6: “And there began to be much peace again in the land. . . . And the Lord did visit them and prosper them, and they became a large and wealthy people.” There is the paradox again, that these people who don’t set their hearts on wealth and don’t strive for it at all become a large and wealthy people. Brigham Young said, “I could easily make this the richest people in the world, but I’m afraid it would destroy them.” It says they were a large and wealthy people; it doesn’t say they had great fortunes among them. Do you realize that in 1987 we almost doubled the number of billionaires in this country from 29 to 49—a million dollars a thousand times. They must have worked overtime to have a billion dollars, if you can imagine that. How could you earn \$10,000 a minute during the working day? It must be awfully hard work—making shoes, etc.

Now this is what the situation was: “Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them [well, they were in a large and wealthy nation; their fathers were the leaders of the church and the kingdom, and they shared the wealth], he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words [very clever, a great talker and very popular], and did speak much flattery to the people [it’s like a Beverly Hills party where everybody speaks so flattering to everybody else]; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.” He was the glass of fashion; he was the Alcibiades; he was the Beau Brummell. Everybody imitated Alma apparently. This is the sort of thing that happens at the height of fashion. Verse 9: “And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people.” Now, this was the public. Well, why wasn’t he locked up for this? Why wasn’t he punished? He was the son of Alma, mind you, and he got the sons of Mosiah to doing the same thing. Why weren’t they locked up? Their parents had the highest authority in the state. Was it because they were being spoiled? They must have been spoiled in the first place. Alma neglected some things because he didn’t know about the troubles in the church, etc. But they went around secretly, too, making it even worse. “For he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church [what a strange thing; why would he do that? Well, just ask hundreds of apostates; I know plenty of them], and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king.”

They were going together as a group, a gang of young men. The Egyptians called them a *jam*^c. There was lots of trouble like this in Egypt on the village and town level. The Wisdom Literature is full of it. There were these gangs of young fellows that went around disturbing things and having their fun, because they were full of spirits, etc. You remember, “Two households, both alike in dignity/ In Fair Verona . . .” Just kids, the Capulets and the Montagues were having their public brawls in the street, having their parties and their wild goings on, raiding each other, etc. Then there was Alcibiades and the “Hell-Fire Club” that caused an awful lot of trouble in Athens. He was the flaming youth of the time. It’s another familiar social phenomenon, in other words. Right at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire, it got so bad that Augustus, the first emperor, established the *iuventus*, which were youth clubs, all over the empire around the Mediterranean. Young men were required to join one. They included athletic and educational activities. They made a big thing of the cult of the membership with rings, tokens, etc., to interest the youth. Some of them went pretty wild later. They wore their badges and signs and had wild haircuts. In Crete the sign of this particular society that spread all over the island was to go stark naked. That was not a very good defense, but

they were showing how smart aleck they were. They defied all conventions and everything else. This is a familiar phenomenon in the ancient world, the *iuventus*.

Verse 11: “And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them.” The only thing that would stop them would be an angel. Their fathers couldn’t do any good. They could appeal. You appeal to such people again and again, but it’s not going to help. “. . . and he descended as it were in a cloud.” This is an interesting thing. We mentioned before that what makes a miracle a miracle is timing. The damning up of the Jordan was a seasonal affair. The drying up of the Red Sea—where the bitter lakes come, when the wind blows, etc.—had happened before. The bubbling up of the waters where the crippled man was going to be healed, etc. These things do happen, but they happen at just the right time. There were the quails at Sugar Creek. When the pioneers crossed, they were going to starve to death. All of sudden came this tremendous group of quails that were perfectly tame, and that saved their lives. The quails do that from time to time. Or there were the grasshoppers and the seagulls. That was a rare event, but it does happen in the course of nature. But it’s the timing of it that makes it a miracle; it happens just when you want it to happen. Well, healing, for example. People get well; they recover from things like cancer. But when it correlates very closely with an administration, that makes it a miracle. It’s the same thing here. There was an earthquake; it was earthquake country. The earth shook, and there was a lot of dust in the air. There was a cloud and a voice of thunder. It seems to be one of those periodic earthquakes. “And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.”

These [miracles] are correlated, you see. They are correlated from the other side. When the Lord or somebody else can see a comet on a collision course with something, you can predict or prophesy it. You know when it’s going to happen. You see it happening already; it has happened as far as you are concerned. It’s absolutely certain. In the miraculous, the element of time is a very important thing. Here it just happened, and “they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.” But Alma understood. He passed out, and the angel gave him a good dressing down and talking to. “Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it [period? no], save it is the transgression of my people.” And you are transgressing, Buster. Notice that it is not an absolute promise that since it is [the Lord’s] church nothing shall overthrow it. It doesn’t say that at all. It says, “and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.” That can overthrow it, but we forget that. We say we have a guarantee, etc.

Here’s a long sermon without scriptures. It says that Alma had “prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth [Alma was terribly worried about his son. He couldn’t appeal to him directly. It didn’t do any good, so all he could do was pray to the Lord, just as he prayed about the other wayward members of the church]; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith. And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.”

Just as Moroni cites the scripture to Joseph Smith, he cites past history here. They do that for our profit and learning, as we read from Isaiah. Verse 16: “Now I say unto thee: Go,

and remember [these are the things within recent history that he would remember; this isn't Moses crossing the Red Sea or even Lehi leaving Jerusalem; this is things he knew about from the experience of his father] the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam [where Alma was in charge] . . . for they were in bondage and he has delivered them. And now 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." It's very interesting here. Why are apostates not satisfied to go their own way? Even if he wanted to be cast out, he was told not to seek to destroy the church.

Verse 28: "And now Alma and those that were with him fell again to the earth [the earth was shaking and giving them a bad time], for great was their astonishment; for with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth." Thunder always goes with an earthquake. But again, it's this correlation. We mentioned that before—the idea from the *Talmud* that when men misbehave nature responds. The girls danced, and if they missed that there was all this trouble and upset of nature. "This progeny of evil comes of our debate, of our dissension." If men misbehave themselves, nature will misbehave. You can see why, because they are setting themselves against nature.