

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

HUGH NIBLEY

Semester 2, Lecture 41
Mosiah 27–29
Alma’s Conversion
Mosiah’s Translating

Now this story about Alma’s conversion and confrontation with the angel is immensely important. It’s as important as anything in the Book of Mormon, and it’s directly applicable to us. These things concern us very closely. The issue to be decided is this: Which world shall we take seriously? What kind of name will we give the real one? This is not the real world. All you have to do is look at anything you want—stock market reports, the cone of time, or the newest book by James Gleick on chaos, which has become a very scientific study now. Beyond all rules and regulations of science you can think of, there is an element of chaos that must be accounted for. It’s very serious and very important, and it has become one of the major fields of science within the last couple of years or so. There’s a book by Gleick I would recommend to you; I haven’t finished it yet.

The experience of Alma [the Younger] and his friends is our experience. We must all decide how seriously we are going to take this side or the other side. He laughed at the other side and took it lightly. He wanted to make fun of it and have his fun here. How much does this count for? Let’s get started and see what happened to Alma. He was at the top of his form, on the top of a wave. He was the darling of the city; everybody was following him around. The [four] most important young men, the sons of the king, were with him, and he was the son of the high priest. They were going around raising hell. When he was at the top of his flight, all of a sudden (whether in a narrow street or outside, I don’t know) he was stopped cold. There was a shaking of the earth and dust in the air, confusion, and thunder. Obviously, there was an earthquake, but with it an angel stopped him dead in his tracks. Just like that! What a reversal! Talk about embarrassing moments; this is it. The angel caught him “dead to rights” here and rebuked him. You know what happened. How would you react to that? What could you reply to that? Talk about being caught off guard, humiliated, and turned upside down! The only thing he did is just stand there and go blank with a foolish look on his face. He was frozen stiff and couldn’t do anything—he was paralyzed. It’s just what you would do in such a situation. How would you handle it? You couldn’t handle it, because this is a complete reversal. Is he going to explain to the angel and try to talk himself out of it, or something like that? You don’t do that to an angel.

So the subject comes up here. Why do these rascals get to see an angel, and none of the rest of us do? This is very important. There are lots of people who have lived righteously all their lives, and none of them are going to see an angel. But you will notice throughout the Book of Mormon and elsewhere that angels only appear in times of great crisis to reverse the course of history. They turn it around. Whether it was the Angel Moroni to Joseph Smith, or the Angel Gabriel to Zachariah, it [the appearance] started things going in a reverse direction. It reaches a point where everything has to be changed, and this has great results.

What's going to follow from this is basic to the end of the Book of Mormon history. It was a very important thing that happened, and he was turned around. His three friends carried him home. If it was a pueblo type, it would be in the square in front of the house because Alma was the high priest. Or he would have a porch there, sort of an atrium. They brought him in the house, and a multitude gathered around. Everybody was talking at once when [Alma], a majestic figure, came out and said, what is going on here. Alma [the Younger] was "carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father [and they all started explaining to him]. And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them." I imagine they were breathless and everybody was talking at once, the way these things happen. But Alma, who had had plenty of guidance and revelations himself, knew exactly what had happened and said, Oh happy day! (a reaction they didn't expect).

Bring all the people 'round.
Put on the fire, my maidens fair!
Fetch water from the well
All of us shall feast this night
For my three sons are well.

(Ancient Scottish Ballad)

When the sons [in this ballad] finally came home, they were going to celebrate. It's the prodigal son [story], except these had come from the other world. They were spirits. That's another story; we won't go into that.

He [Alma the Younger] was dumb and out. As high priest, his father sent messengers to bring the priests. He gathered the brethren of the quorum to pray for Alma. He knew what the situation was. They prayed for two days, and then Alma finally bestirred himself and came out of it.

Now the question is this: Why are we expected to invest in an unseen proposition? What evidence do you have for the other world at all? Is there any reason why you shouldn't celebrate here and make this the whole show? That was it as far as Alma [the younger] was concerned. I have an older brother the same way. Now he's coming around, but he was that way all his life. He was really a wild one and just pooh-poohed everything. He didn't exactly always disbelieve it all the way, but he made a big show. He reinforced himself in his position by making fun of things. You have to do that—you can't just take it indifferently. This happened here. Why should the average person believe in the other world? What experience does he have of it? Well, for one thing, he has a vacuum that disturbs him from time to time, no matter who he is. And then there's a tradition that moves into the vacuum. There have been connected stories going on all the time, but that's just tradition and the vacuum, etc. But we will see what explains this here.

They united their faith and prayers and brought him around. Then he came back and said, "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit." This sounds like "born again." Is he going to get out of it so easy after all those years of sneering and this sort of thing? Now all he has to do is have one experience and say, "Behold, I'm born again," and everything is all right. Don't worry. He's not getting out of it easy at all. The passage in Mosiah 28:4 is the one I was thinking of before. "And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners [this was after their conversion]. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities, suffering much

and fearing that they should be cast off forever.” They suffered the rest of their lives because of what they had done. And they put themselves to every extreme of effort and strain to preach the gospel. They were willing to undergo anything to wipe that out—when they asked to go on the mission, etc.

Mosiah 27:25: “And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind . . . must be born again.” Notice that it’s nothing less than being born all over again. We are so completely out of it when we are here. We cannot make the change without leaving the scene. You have to be born again. See, there’s the one world or the other; you can’t mix them. It’s a very hard thing, as Brigham Young said, as he tried to take the water on both shoulders. “The Latter-day Saint who tries to live in both worlds is torn apart.” There’s no such agony, no worse experience than that, and it happens to them here. As it explains here, “. . . yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness [a complete change], being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters.” They become new creatures; it’s an entirely different thing, as this explains.

If there’s another world open to us, why don’t we know about it? This explains why we don’t know about it. We are “miles” removed from any kind of interface here. To the people living in one, the other doesn’t exist. We’re not going to draw time cones here, but it’s very much like the time cone. Nothing can exist outside of the cone of time. If other worlds exist beyond the range of the speed of light in certain time and space, you can never know about it. All you can know about your existence is one single line (it’s monolinear), the line you happen to be on, where time and space meet. Of course, time is measured by space, and space is measured by time. But there’s just one line, and everything outside of that just isn’t there. It’s either past or future, and you’ll never know it’s there. There are absolute limits set to what you know by the speed of light. That’s the constant. It can go so far, and from that you structure your whole universe and all your experience. It turns out to be a very narrow cone of experience. The point is that everything outside of that you can know nothing about as long as you are in this life. You’d never know about everything that exists there. So don’t go making judgments that this is all there is. You have to cut loose from one or the other. Notice he says here that being in the other world, he had nothing to do with God’s world, the real world. We call this “the real world,” which it isn’t.

Verse 27: “I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.” That means “cut loose and forgotten.” There’s no easy going for apostates and never has been. They have to be in the one or the other. It bugs them and eats at them all the time. I’ve never known one of them that could be at ease with it. I’ve known some that were genial apostates, but they all came back. It’s a very interesting thing. Those that don’t must fight the Church and must be active about it. It won’t let them rest and leave them alone. That’s not so with other [churches]. If you change from Baptist to Methodist, it doesn’t make much difference. But once you’ve known the gospel (although nobody knows it very well), once you’ve had any experience with the possibility that this just might be so, it’s something you will never shake again.

Again the problem: All right, why doesn’t somebody give us a hint? Why don’t we hear a voice from the other side? Our dreams are crazy, silly dreams. They deal with trivia, as they should, unless you’re able to interpret them. But where do we have the dreams and visions of glory, of old returning, and angels coming to visit the earth? Where are they? Well, the point is obvious here: If we had easy contact with that, if that was open to us, this life would be no test at all. As the Book of Mormon tells us repeatedly, this life is a

probation. We are here being tested. You must be in quarantine for that. You are being watched through a one-way window, but you don't know that you are being watched necessarily. What you do here is your own behavior, and you are to be tested. In the Adam literature, when the three heavenly visitors depart and say, "We'll leave you alone now for a while," then Satan strikes. Then he says, "Now is the great day of my power," and he tells Adam they will never be back again. "Just some fakes will come back; don't worry about that. Now you are not being watched; now you can do what you want." If we were constantly being reminded, if we had visits by angels [it wouldn't be a test].

Brigham Young said, "Pray that you never see an angel." He was talking historically. Almost everybody who saw an angel left the Church. They came back, but they had these terrible problems. It gave them inflated egos, etc. They thought they were somebody special. They were, but they couldn't take it. It would be very dangerous if we were exposed to the other world to any degree. Only people that are very humble can do that. Not us, we can't do that. We are not that humble. I mean some old Hopi or someone like that—like old Tom Kuyushva, the head of the Parrot Clan. He didn't know a word of English, but when he heard Brother Bushman talk for half an hour, he came up dressed in all his fine regalia and asked to be baptized. Brother Bushman said, "But you didn't understand; I've just been talking to you."

"I know, it's true; I know it's true in here," he said, and he had to be baptized. That's the way it is, but we are not in contact with those things because we don't live that way. Is there anything more distracting than the crazy world we live in? It has become one big, mad theater—one crazy TV show from beginning to end—everything from the savings and loan [problems] to the takeovers, the leverage buyouts, all the criminality everywhere, the drugs, the corruption in politics, the corruption in business, and the corruption in the military contracts. Everything is completely cockeyed. Don't think this is the real world. What a test for us all! Remember what the Lord told Enoch, "Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren" (Moses 7:36). We won't even let a little slit of light through from the other world. It terrifies us if we do; we don't want it at all. But why should we be committed to this? You've all heard it called "the rat race." You can call it what you want. It's silly enough; don't worry.

And that's the world that Alma was in. He was a playboy and all the rest of it. What a change this had to be! It had to be a complete change. We are being quarantined here, so don't expect visions, revelations, and glory. You are being tested all the time. You provide them [the spiritual experiences], and reading the scriptures is the same way. In a poem called *Die Huldigung der Künste*, Schiller said that a real intelligence brings enlightenment to what it studies; it doesn't just seek it there. You bring it with you. It's the same thing here with whatever we study. What is the word he uses? "An exalted spirit puts the greatness into life; it doesn't seek the greatness there." If it's to be there at all, you've got to put it there. And Alma does. You notice these great characters in the Book of Mormon. They work both ways. We are about to run into Nehor, and he is the opposite—a great man, a capable man going in the opposite direction.

He speaks now in the terms of the mysteries. Verse 28: "Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death . . ." He would rather die than go on, in other words, because he was reduced so low. After this humiliation, being shown what he was, being so guilty, and knowing what it was, he says he was "repenting nigh

unto death.” He would sooner die than go on, he felt so bad. “. . . the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God [it was a close call; the word *snatch* is a good one, isn’t it?] My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity.” This is the *epopteia*. This was the thing that was recited in the Jewish and Christian mysteries, when you go from the [darkness] to the day. It was imitated in the ancient temples in Egypt. You would go through darkness and trials and through three levels. Then in the final stage you went through a veil into a sunlit courtyard at noon day. Everything was white alabaster and absolutely dazzling in this celestial room. It was the same thing in the *epopteia* with the Greeks. You went into a room that was brilliantly lighted after you had been in the dark. It’s called the *epopteia*, “the seeing of the light,” the sudden vision that pops on you when you realize. This was dramatized in the Hellenistic Period under the Hermetic teachings. They adopted these things, mixed them up, imitated them, etc. That’s another story. But this is the language they use: “I was in the darkest abyss; but now I beheld the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.”

There is your definition of “eternal torment.” You might ask, “Well, how could he be out of it? It was eternal. If his soul was racked with eternal torment, he would still be there, wouldn’t he?” No, he said, I’m out of it now, “I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.” That means the torment by nature is *eternal*. Anybody who qualifies for it will get it from now to the end of time. It’s there all the time, not that you have to suffer it all the time. This is one of the errors of Christian theology: It’s eternal torment. Once you go to hell, it’s eternal—forever and forever. Well, he had been as most people who go to hell, but it’s not eternal. He gets out of it now.

Verse 30: “He remembereth every creature of his creating [that is good news—he will make himself manifest unto all]. Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. It’s future, you notice, and everybody is going to be included in this sooner or later. It sounds like Stephen Hawking writing about being outside of the cone of time and nothing exists. Everything out of the sphere of influence is lost and astray. Think of some of the men who have everything in this world. In the old classic *Citizen Kane*, there was the man who had everything, and who had nothing. Oedipus is a classical example of the man. “Nobody didn’t envy his fabulous good luck, but look at him.” And you know the poem “Richard Cory.” He walked down the street in the New England *Spoon River Anthology*. Everybody in town envied him, the rich, proud man. “And Rich Cory, one calm summer night/ Went home and put a bullet through his head.” He wasn’t happy after all, although he had everything and everybody envied him. And Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar and Nimrod. In the scriptures the Lord gives the idea of the man who had increased his farm goods, expanded his land, and had a great estate. He had insured himself against the future and said, my soul, take your ease. Your future is guaranteed. You have all sorts of investments. Then the voice came to him and said, “Thou fool—this night shall thy soul be required of thee.”

I think of Hisham, the mightiest palace an Arab ever built, just outside of Jericho down there. It belonged to the DiGianni brothers, and they took us down there. It’s closed—you never can see it. I don’t know whether they’ve made a tourist exhibit of it now or not. But the prince took twenty-seven years to build it, and it was going to be the finest palace in the world. It was the finest palace; it was magnificent. We have no idea how expensive and luxurious it was. The night he was to enter it for the housewarming, there came a great earthquake. He had a heart attack and died, and the palace was completely destroyed. They were to have this big housewarming, and everybody was to come. After twenty-

seven years, poof, that's what happened. This is the idea of the man who has everything. If you have everything, you are going to be awfully disappointed. You're not going to have anything after all. Notice who are those? [People] "who live without God in the word." It is possible to be utterly deserted—to live without God. He wants to reach you, but you don't have to [cooperate]. People do live without God. This generation is certainly doing it. "And they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye." They will try to avoid the issue right up to the end, not wanting to face up to it. Eventually, they will have to. Shrink, tremble, quake, and not want to have to look him in the eye. Of course, that's the worse thing that could possibly happen to you—more terrifying than anything else, we are told.

Then from this time forward, Alma began to be a zealous teacher. He became alien to the one world. You must be alien to the one or the other. If you are really in the gospel, [you are alien to the world]. See how the early Saints were always persecuted, etc. Why were people so upset? Why did they attack them? Why did they say and do these terrible things? They didn't worry about anybody else that way. But from the very first, it bothered them terribly. Something was wrong there. So Alma went traveling around the country, just as his father had done, and preaching everywhere he went. He was going to try to make amends here. He traveled around the country "preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them." Now this is it. He was a smart boy; you'd think they'd at least receive him for what he was and respect him. Maybe it was his background as the old friend. But now, they were mad at him now; he had betrayed them. They [the believers] are in a tiny minority by now. He had been just going with the majority. Remember the scripture says, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." That's what he was doing. No wonder he was popular, everybody was cheering him. He was telling them what they wanted to hear. If you tell people what they want to hear, then you will be their friend, and you will win the election. So it was here, but now he was extremely unpopular. They didn't want him anywhere. They started kicking him around here.

Verse 33: "... confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God [he didn't fight back, you notice]. And four of them [with him] were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni." Now we come to the great *Ammon*, one of the great characters of the Book of Mormon. The oldest son of Mosiah was Ammon, who would have been the king and the priest. "And they traveled throughout all the land of Zarahemla . . . zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church." This is another thing—when people are "born again" [in other churches], they feel no guilt or anything about their past. When Charles Colson became an evangelist overnight after being a real criminal—planning murders and everything else—he was asked on TV, "Aren't you going to make it up to some of the people you have damaged? Aren't you going to apologize?"

"No, I'm born again—I'm pure," he said. I heard this personally. He had no feelings of guilt whatever. But not these people. You have to make it up. "You go not hence until you have paid the uttermost farthing." You have to pay every penny before you're going to get out of it.

Verse 36: "And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer." After all, it was good. God turned this evil into good, and this is a thing that often happens. He turns what would be calamity into an all the more glorious victory, and this is what happened. They

were instruments in the hands of God because look at the experiences and background they'd had. We know of cases in the Church like that—of really wicked people who have been converted and done great good. There are some very notable ones, and the other way around. “And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.” Everything was all right. To worry is sin and folly, and hanging back from the action is also. It was the *good news*, the gospel, they were preaching now. Talk about happy endings! After all this hectic story, they published peace and good tidings and [told people that] the Lord is reigning after all.

They were helping people and doing what they could, but their thoughts went further. How about the Lamanites; can't we help them out, too? Remember Enos prayed for his own people, and then he prayed for the Lamanite brethren, too. He said they might as well be included. Of course, we find them all mixed up here. So they got that idea. “They took a small number with them and returned to their father, the king, and desired of him that he would grant unto them that they might . . . go up to the land of Nephi that they might preach the things which they had heard, and that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites.” Their father was very cautious because they had been stung. The one thing that kept the peace was a very wide buffer zone between them. They had to travel through quite a wilderness to get to the Lamanites (remember it's a big country). They weren't in constant conflict, as they were when they were bordering, as in Central America, where they had the line of division between them and they had the borders they had to fortify and all that trouble. They had trouble then, but here they had no trouble with them. [Mosiah] didn't want any trouble; he was very cautious and didn't want to let them go at first. Here's his policy: “They did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi. And the Lord [finally] said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life.” So they were following a very cautious policy. They didn't want to mingle too closely with the Lamanites. But they [Alma and the sons of Mosiah] were so filled with this idea: Let's go see if we can do this for the Lamanites—if it happened to us it can happen to them.

Question: Could you go back to verse 28 in the last chapter and explain Alma's use of the words “everlasting burning”?

Answer: Oh yes, in verse 29 he says “eternal torment.” Well, that's the *everlasting* part; it's always available. But he mentions this later on. He says, “It is like the burning of a real fire.” It consumes you and constantly gnaws on you. You can never get it out of your system. It's like a fever, which he explains later on. It's also made very clear that this is a metaphor, a figure [of speech]. It's the best thing you can find to call it. Yet how near is it to real burning; this is the interesting point. In physiology a real fever can be stirred up by certain states of mind, etc. You can think yourself into a high temperature—this sort of thing. These things are connected, but *burning* is the best image you can use. It doesn't mean that he is going to be in flames surrounded by elegant imps with tridents, etc. But it means that as long as he lives hereafter, no matter what progress he attains, he will always have that awareness and always have that guilt with him. It will hold him back forever. Well, there are things we have all done that it would better if we hadn't done. We will regret them forever. They will hold you back no matter what happens hereafter. So let's make the best of it from here on out. What do you say? The burning is a figure [of speech], and he has a good deal more to say about that a little later on.

Mosiah 28:1: "... that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites [can't we help them?]-that perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God ...". If the Lord reigns, there's no cause for hatred. They were so happy at the end; they didn't worry anymore. God is in charge of things, and that being the case, why shouldn't we go to them? What have we got to worry about? Notice this: "... perhaps they might cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites [This is what their tradition was; they had this built-in, traditional hatred. It was a chance, and if there was any chance at all, they felt they should take it.], that they might be brought to rejoice in the Lord their God, that they might become friendly to one another." This is fraternizing with the enemy, isn't it? This is the only solution to the problem; we find this throughout the Book of Mormon. This is the basis of coexistence, not self-interest. You can prove self-interest. How many times Germany and France have gone to war, and England and France, where it could be shown. Just on the eve of the Civil War, a famous book was written, *The Impending Crisis of the South*, by Hinton Helper, in which he showed that there was no profit in it at all. He showed that neither side had anything to gain, that they would both lose terribly, and it would be an awful thing. But they went right ahead and did it. You can never stop people from fighting by showing them that it's in their best interest not to. It's in everybody's best interest not to go to war. Helper's book is the first really good statistical study showing that cotton had stopped paying off in the South and slavery had become a burden there. After all, it wasn't paying as well. And there were as many slaves in the North as there were in the South. They had nothing to gain by it. It's the same thing here, but hatred is stronger than self-interest. They will always do it [fight].

Was this a practical idea, you might ask, to go and preach to the Lamanites? Their father hesitated a long time; he wasn't so sure about it. How did it work out? This is a neglected leitmotif in the Book of Mormon here. What appeals to the simple mind is the military solution. You see that we're getting nowhere with that. You never get anywhere with that. It's just going to get worse and worse. We're doomed if we don't have a generous impulse and act on that. It's the impulse. You're doomed if you have to be in danger of starvation before you eat. You eat because you want to and feel it would be a nice thing to do. If you only drink when you are in danger of dehydration, you are not going to last long. You have to drink because you want to drink. It feels good, and you love to do it. In the same way you are doomed if you don't get rest until you are dropping from exhaustion. We do these things because they are the proper thing to do, and it works out. That's the way we should. It's the same way with this. We are doomed unless we yield to our friendly, generous impulses—the more magnanimous side of human nature—and agree to be friends. Otherwise, it's going to go on and on. We've seen that sort of thing, and the Lord has told us that. The Book of Mormon is a classic treatment of this particular subject, here with this and in the case of the great Ammon, of course. What is not in our interest isn't the first voice we [should] listen to; we have to listen to that other voice. We are doing our best to damper it now, and it's going to be disastrous.

Verse 2: "... that they might become friendly to one another [imagine becoming friends with those people; they are their brethren], and that there should be no more contentions in all the land which the Lord their God had given them." God had given the land to both of them. Why should they be fighting in it? And this overrides everything: "Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature." They were like Enos, who was completely worked up about that. When he got assurance of his salvation, then he couldn't let go. He prayed all the time for both his own people and the Lamanites. Alma was determined that no one would have to go through what he did. He had seen

hell. He had been there, and he wanted none of that. If he could possibly help it, nobody else would have to suffer that. That was the generous impulse that drove him here.

Verse 3: “Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thought that any soul should endure endless torment [what they got a taste of] did cause them to quake and tremble.” So they weren’t happy, settled, and redeemed so that they could go back home and enjoy themselves now because they were forgiven and everything was all right. Far from it. They were just beginning to work it off now. “And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners [after all their revelation, repentance, etc.]. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities, suffering much and fearing that they should be cast off forever.” Right to the end they were not safe home—they were fearing that. We are told in the Book of Mormon that God has prolonged our lives that we might have more chances to repent, because we are going to need every minute we can get. They were worried; they were not pleased with themselves.

We see in verse 5 that it was a dangerous undertaking. “And it came to pass that they did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi.” There was this long stand-off with the Lamanites. Mosiah was very cautious here. “And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words [so they did go]. . . . And they took their journey into the wilderness to go up to preach the word among the Lamanites.” Notice that a wilderness divided them from the Lamanites. There was a very useful gap there. Modern countries adjacent to each other are always fighting—Germany, Prussia, and Denmark, Germany and France. All border countries throughout the generations, wherever they are, have fought where there’s a border. If you want to read the ghastliest and bloodiest [accounts] about the most intimate and closest of borders, read the *Scottish Border Ballads*. It’s a volume of nothing but blood and horror about people who were friends and relatives, just like the American Civil War—the North against the South, brother against brother and that sort of thing. There is only one cure for that, as we read here: “They did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi.” So it was that.

Verse 10: “Now king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept the kingdom.” This is an interesting thing that they were not ambitious. They were all in line beginning with Ammon. Why did they turn down the kingship? Well, of course, they had a new sense of values. They knew what had priority now; otherwise, they would have jumped at it, I’m sure. Ammon was the crown prince, so to speak, and he added luster to Alma the Younger and his gang. But they knew what counted now. He wasn’t impressed with it [becoming king] and wouldn’t do it. Then there was this knowledge of the sick world Alma had persecuted and mocked. As soon as they repented and came around, then their old friends, the whole mob, and the general public started making fun of them and giving them a very bad time—started persecuting them. Well, would you want to be king over that crowd? He didn’t want to be king. All they wanted to do was preach the gospel now. That’s it, as far as they are concerned.

It was still the law of the Old Testament they were preaching; they were still preaching the *Torah*. Remember the brass plates they brought from Jerusalem were the basic law on which Benjamin and Mosiah built the organic law of the Nephites—namely, the Law of Moses. Verse 11: “Therefore he [King Mosiah] took the records which were engraven on

the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God, after having translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi.” These were the national treasures, along with the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, etc. Nations have national treasures. The Hopis have the *tiponi*—a special box, like the Ark of the Covenant, that has the precious things of the tribe. They have the *mongkos*, and they have the sacred Hopi stones, and things like that. They are great on these things. But there are certain treasures that must be kept together, and these objects mark the integrity of the tribe. In Japan they have the sacred mirror, the sword, and the other sacred relics of the nation that mark its legitimacy—like the crown jewels of England.

Question: Where did Mosiah get the two stones fastened to the rims of a bow? The reason I asked is that when Ammon’s group found Zeniff’s colony and were captured, they asked Ammon if he could translate the record of the Jaredites they had found. He said that the king had means at that time whereby he could translate. But this appears to be what the brother of Jared hid up with his record.

Answer: Mosiah translated them himself by means of two stones fastened into the two rims of a bow to interpret language. This is a very interesting thing. Notice that it mentions this interpreting language as a very matter of fact sort of thing. Notice that verses 15 and 16 are entirely alien to our world. We don’t have anything like that today, but there are such things. I can assure you of that. We’ll talk about them in a minute. But this is entirely alien to our world, as a computer would be alien to theirs. A few years ago a computer would be absolutely unthinkable, especially a computer that draws diagrams and pictures, makes portraits, and does anything you want it to. That sort of thing is another Urim and Thummim, as far as they are concerned. Did you people really have something like that? Yes, and what did you have? Well, we had this Urim and Thummim, and it worked that way.

Reading itself is a mystery. I was reading an awful text last night, *A Man Weary of Life*, in hieratic [Egyptian]. I won’t go into it now, but the fact that it can be read is rather miraculous. It really isn’t very hard when you come right down to it because all the letters look exactly alike. The *M*, the *R*, the *L*, and the *W* are all exactly alike. That’s all there is. They put a list of these, and yet you know what they mean because you know what they should mean in this particular context. You have to have a title tell you what the subject is, and then you can go all right. But it’s quite a strain. It’s like the flying of a bee; there’s no reason why a bee should fly. It can be shown that aerodynamically it can’t fly. But these things happen. This new book by Gleick on chaos is a very good one. There are things that happen beyond all control of science and everything else, and yet they do happen. This has become a very serious subject for science today. You have such a thing as speed reading, for example. Who ever thought a person could read a whole page in a minute? Yet people have been known to do it. What kind of operation of the mind is that? What’s going on? See, you have to cooperate to use a Urim and Thummim. It takes far more concentration and intelligence to use a Urim and Thummim the way Joseph Smith did than it does to use a grammar and a dictionary and wade your way through something like that. You notice as Joseph got more and more used to it, he didn’t need either the seer stone or the Urim and Thummim. As Emma Smith said, he would just lay it aside. You do the same thing if you are reading something in Coptic, Greek, or anything like that. After a while you don’t need the dictionary or the grammar at all. You just sail on without them. Why is that? At an earlier time you had to have someone tell

you what every word meant. Not anymore. How do you do it? Well, it's like a centipede trying to figure out how he walks, how ice skaters work, and all sorts of things that operate in a rather miraculous way. The seer stone is one of these. Well, crystals do have that strange quality of concentrating light, and they concentrate the attention at least. So there are various techniques. It's a strange thing. It could have the bow or not have the bow. As I said, the oldest title of Pharaoh in Egypt is that of *wr m3:w*, the greatest of seers. It is simply written with two stones, side by side.

Question: So is it possible that Mosiah had a seer stone or something before they found the stones with the bow?

Answer: Yes, you'll notice in the case of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon that if we didn't have the Book of Mormon, we would say he was faking the whole thing. But we have the Book of Mormon, and he wasn't faking anything. Sometimes it was a seer stone, sometimes it was the Urim and Thummim, and sometimes it was neither. Sometimes it was inspiration. Section 7 of the Doctrine and Covenants is a translation of a particular document written by John on parchment and hidden up by him. We know since the *Dead Sea Scrolls* that in John's day everybody was writing on parchment and hiding them up in the desert. That's exactly what happened. It was probably one of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, but we don't have the scroll. Joseph Smith translated it. He didn't have the scroll, but he said it was translated from a scroll. Sometimes the words would appear, or the letters would appear. Emma Smith said, "Joseph never read a proper name; he always spelled it out." He could see it spelled out for him. If Joseph, being what he was, had given phonetically what he read, and Oliver Cowdery, being the clerk he was, had written down phonetically what he said to him, you wouldn't recognize a single name in the Book of Mormon. They had to be spelled out, so they can be reliably used as philological evidence, etc. This is a *disciplina arcani*; this is hermetic. Notice verse 16: "And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times." That's what I mean; it belongs to another culture and to another world.

I've been doing a lot of stuff in this hermetic writing now. It has been emerging recently that they were doing and saying things and had knowledge that we don't have. We've sort of joked about it in the past, but they really did. The classic example is the pyramids. As Santillana, the scientist at MIT said, they weren't idiots who built those. You'd have to be consummate engineers and mathematicians to achieve what they did there. And yet we have nothing of what they did it with; we don't know. And there's all this stuff about all the stone cutting they did—tremendous, gigantic, cyclopiian masonry without metals. How did they cut the stone? With other stones? There was something going on there. We are not going on to Arthur Clarke's program on unsolved mysteries. But "whosoever has these things is called seer." *M3:w* means *a seer*. It's written with an *eye*, and with the two stones under it.

Now this is an interesting thing. What did it [the record] give? Verse 17: "Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed back to the building of the great tower," which was destroyed. Well, can't we have anything less negative than that? Why must it always be the grim message? Why is that necessary? Well, Mormon and Moroni, who give us the book, are physicians. They are meant to heal. The Book of Mormon is a prescription for people who are very sick. It's for us, so it's going to talk about the diseases that we have. "... building of the great tower ... and even from that time back until the creation of Adam. Now this

account did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly.” They didn’t like it; they mourned exceedingly when they read it. It was very sad. Again, why would that be? It’s our story. It’s like American history, a ghost town sort of story. This is what I was talking about, that this does apply to us. It is expedient that all people should know the things that are written in that account about Ether. Everybody should know that because this is the classic story of what happens. Were they expecting something great? They got something very sad. These were solemn admonitions that they received. Yet, what happened next? “Nevertheless it gave them much knowledge, in the which they did rejoice.” They rejoiced in the knowledge, in the ultimate assurance that there is someone who knows and someone who cares—that we are not, as William James said, “an atom on a speck of dust spinning around a bubble of gas.” There’s more to it than that. So this gave them great knowledge and reassurance, and they did rejoice because the story was being told to them for a purpose—not just to gloat over their fate and say, “This is what’s going to happen to you.” No, it doesn’t have to, and it’s all good news. Verse 19: “And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.”

They had the Law of Moses on the bronze plates. Remember, in Joseph Smith’s day the word *bronze* wasn’t used at all—not until the 1880s. That’s a French word that was adopted by the artists in Paris, but it means the same thing. Verse 20: “After king Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma.” These were the state treasures. For example, the British proudly preserve the Magna Charta. We preserve the original Constitution; it’s a token or a talisman really. We have these things to attract our concentration, rally our attention, bring us together, etc. The Bible is a classic example of that. It’s the cultural core of things, like the *Torah*, the Magna Charta, and the Constitution. That’s what this was, and all this stuff was conferred upon Alma, who was the son of Alma—all the records that had been handed down “from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.”

The Old Testament is unique in that. It does hand down the records, and they are unadorned. That’s the interesting thing. Other records we have are ritualized and glamorized. The king always wins and is all powerful, whether it [the record is from] the East or the West. In the Old Testament, even if it’s Solomon or David, they are mortal and they sin. They can be very wicked men. They have their faults, and they lose battles as well as win them. They are chased around, etc. Whether it’s a great priest like Elijah or Samuel, they have their sufferings. Nothing is prettied up in the Old Testament at all. It “tells it like it is,” as we say. That’s the only ancient chronicle that does. The rest of them lean very strongly toward the administration.

Then chapter 29 is on government; it’s the last one in Mosiah. We’ve got to get to Alma sometime, don’t we? This has been a very sobering lesson. It’s a lesson on kingship, and this chapter now is a lesson on government. “Now when Mosiah had done this he sent out throughout all the land, among all the people, desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king.” This is the great assembly which happened in all ancient societies. They had to come together for the *panegyrics*, the gathering of the tribes, the festival, the pow-wow. This was when everybody in a particular tribe was required to come. They were always at the spring equinox or at the solstice. They were desirous that Aaron, his second son, should be king. This episode might be one right out of the ancient Near East. We have interesting accounts like the Papyrus of Contendings of Horus and Seth, an Egyptian papyrus from the eighteenth dynasty. “Now Aaron had gone up to the land of

Nephi, therefore the king could not confer the kingdom upon him [he went on a mission, so he couldn't take it and didn't want it]; neither were any of the sons of Mosiah willing to take upon them the kingdom. Therefore king Mosiah sent again among the people; yea, even a written word sent he among the people." Remember, that's the way King Benjamin did when he couldn't reach them. Xenophon wrote messages, too; Darius, and especially Alexander, sent messages throughout the kingdom if he couldn't reach them himself. The written record was the big thing at this time. That was the advantage of writing, which makes empire possible. You have control at a distance, but without writing you have no control at a distance. There's nothing you can do but be there personally or send somebody to report back and forth. But with the written order, you keep a copy of it and send it out. It's only writing that makes empire possible. That's why the Babylonians and Egyptians used it for that purpose. So the king sent again among the people a written word.

Verse 5: "Behold, O ye my people, or my brethren, for I esteem you as such. . . . Now I declare unto you that he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong has declined, and will not take upon him the kingdom. And now if there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. [He doesn't want them to have a king, and this is what would happen, he says] And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood."

What's the classic tragedy on that? The play *Seven against Thebes*. Remember the two brothers, Oteocles and Polynices. They were twins, and each one was to have the kingdom for a certain length of time. But when Oteocles' time came to give it up, he wouldn't give it up. They killed each other, and this is what happens. There are many examples of this. When the time comes up, the temporary king or the exchange king refuses to leave. The ancient world always had two sacral kings, like the Spartans. It's the same way here. I had a long footnote in a classical journal many years ago on this particular subject—the instances in which kings in ancient times, having fulfilled their office during a season for which they had been appointed, [wouldn't give up the throne]. Usually it was the festival king, the Lord of Misrule, or whatever you want to call him. They would set up a king, and then when the time came up, he refused to give up the throne. This is what happened with the first [king] of the Neo-Babylonian Empire—he refused to give it up. He was the son of a gardener, and they elected him king for the period of the festival. When it was over, he had collected gifts from the people as king. He used that money, gave them promises, became king, and founded a dynasty. This sort of thing happened. King Mosiah knew a thing or two about that.