

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 4, Lecture 97  
3 Nephi 11  
The Sermon at the Temple  
Law and Covenant

Okay, Brothers and Sisters—I think it is about time for us to get started. I'd like to first let you know that Brother Nibley left at 5:00 o'clock this morning. Apparently, he didn't tell many of you what was going on, but that's all right. He's on a plane right now somewhere over Chicago on his way to Egypt where he will be present at the opening of some tombs that have never been opened before and the unwrapping of some early Christian burials. He is working with Brother Griggs here on campus. I'll be taking his position, not filling his shoes in any way but directing our discussion for the next couple of weeks while he is gone. We'll have five sessions together before he is back. I'm John Welch, past president of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, general editor of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, professor over in the Law School, and one of the directors of the Religious Studies Center.

Let me make a couple of general comments about what we hope to accomplish in the next five lectures. First of all, if I were in your position I would view myself somewhat as trying to catch up to a freight train that has been moving about ninety miles an hour for about forty years. Brother Nibley has been working in the Book of Mormon area that long. He has covered an awful lot of territory. I remember when I first had a class from him as a freshman here at BYU, in fact the first lecture I attended. I'd had a lot of ancient history, four years of Latin, and things like that in high school, so I was prepared enough to at least understand and appreciate the incredible things he was talking about. But it still, even that long ago, was a mammoth chore trying to catch up with where he already was. It's staggering to me to imagine your position as a student trying to pick up everything that has happened in the interim.

So I would suggest, especially for this particular class and for the final that I know you're going to have to take, that you look at things like the *Approaching Zion* volume that has recently come out and volumes 6, 7, and 8 of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, especially chapters 27–30 in volume 6, his concluding chapters in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, where he talks about the ways of the intellectuals, the ways of the wicked, the nature of society, and the strategy for survival. I'd also recommend chapters 12 and 13 in *Since Cumorah* and chapters 19, 21, and 22 in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*. That's volume 8 in the *Collected Works*. I think that would help you to catch up a little bit with what he has been up to in the last forty years and put you in tune with a lot of the scriptures that he focuses in on, the phraseology, the mentality, and the gospel orientations. They are all in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* in the library and the Bookstore, and volume 9 is *Approaching Zion*. We have about twenty on the drawing boards in one place or another. It's mostly the latter chapters in each of those volumes where he finally gets to telling you what's really eating at him—what is really driving and impelling what he is telling you.

You will have a final exam, and Brother Nibley told me to instruct you that this is significant. I know I'm a substitute, and I know what the Utah teachers association have told the press: If they go on strike—nothing that happens when the substitute is present will count for anything. That's not your fortune. He has asked me to prepare one portion of your final exam which will cover what we will do here in the next five lectures. That's what I understand is going on. [There were some questions from students about the course.] I understand that there will be one final exam at the end of the semester. I've never known Hugh Nibley to teach any other way. I think my final

exam for Book of Mormon 121, if I remember the question right, was “Write a book review of the Book of Mormon.” That was the exam.

Question: What was your grade?

Answer: Well, I got the highest grade in the class, but it wasn’t a straight A. I think he has gotten lenient in his old age though, so there’s hope. Brother Nibley will be back on Friday, March 9, in time for his eightieth birthday on March 27, which you should all know a little bit about.

I’d like to point out that there will be a lecture next Tuesday night, sponsored by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, by Richard Rust, professor of English at the University of North Carolina. He has recently completed a book on the Book of Mormon as literature. He will be delivering the third annual Book of Mormon lecture. I encourage all of you to attend and will also allow you to indicate to Brother Nibley if you have attended [the lecture] so he will know what you have been up to while he has been away. I think that’s enough by way of introduction. We have some important material to cover, so let’s get down to work.

I’d like to talk primarily about what I call the Sermon at the Temple and spend the next five lectures working on this material. We all know the Sermon on the Mount by that label—that’s Matthew 5–7. The Sermon at the Temple is in 3 Nephi 11–18. It is a monumental text. It is one of those texts that acts as a “Grand Central Station,” a switchboard through which almost everything else in the Book of Mormon sooner or later will pass. There are a couple of other seminal texts like it: King Benjamin’s speech, in Mosiah 1–6, acts in a similar way as sort of the constitution of the covenant that Benjamin placed his people and the Mulekites under, bringing together the Nephite nation and creating the basis for what became a hundred and fifty years of the Nephite republic. These documents are important in the life of a civilization.

Similarly, the Sermon at the Temple replaced everything else that the Nephites had lived under. In 4 Nephi they tell us that they had from this point forward lived only according to the commandments which Jesus had given them while he was there. There was a radical change in life in Zarahemla and Bountiful and in other cities that the Nephites occupied as a result of this Sermon at the Temple. It’s a masterful sermon. It is coherent and specifically organized. It addresses themes that were of interest and would have been a pressing concern to the people in Bountiful and in the Nephite world in that day. Moreover, it becomes an anchor for everything else in the gospel.

Jesus only had a short time to spend with these people at the temple at Bountiful. He didn’t waste a word. What he says is of crucial importance. It’s the kind of thing that you and I can look to as an anchor in our lives to put our bearings straight, to see what is going on in the world, and to see what really matters most in our covenant relationship with our Father in Heaven. I believe, and I wish to submit for the next five lectures for our testing, the proposition that there is unsurpassed power and strength in the Sermon at the Temple—that it is coherent, insightful, and profound—notwithstanding the fact that this section of the Book of Mormon has probably been subject to more ridicule and criticism than any other part of the book. Why? Because it has the obvious inclusion of Matthew 5–7, which to a naive or simple-minded view appear to have simply been spliced in crudely into the middle of a text.

Thus, you have Mark Twain quipping that the Book of Mormon contains passages which he said “were smooched from the New Testament and no credit given.” Or you have the Reverend Lamb, who in the 1880s published a lengthy volume criticizing the Book of Mormon. His conclusion: The book is verbose, blundering, and stupid. He especially viewed this material that I call the Sermon at the Temple as a mere duplication, which you will see it is not, of the Sermon on the Mount “word for word,” to quote him. He saw no excuse for this lack of originality and constant repetition of the Bible. He said, We have such passages already in the Bible, and God never does

unnecessary things; why then give us these chapters again? His conclusion: Careful examination proves it to be unprincipled plagiarism. I wish to take issue with those conclusions and hope that as we proceed you will share with me and we'll be able to develop ideas to help us reach a different conclusion.

Today I'd like to do two main things. First is to establish a general religious setting for the Sermon at the Temple, and then to establish a more specific religious context for this great discourse—and it's more than a discourse. We will begin in earnest our look at the material next time, and I would like you to read very carefully 3 Nephi 11–14. I don't care if you have read it recently; I want you to read it again. I would like you to memorize your choice of any segment of those chapters. Let me just say in general, I don't know how much memorizing you do. Some of you are returned missionaries and you know the value of memorization, of studying and of having things in your mind so that the Spirit can bring to your thoughts those things that you need to be moved to remember. My experience is that if I don't pack a lot of things into my mind and into my heart there is a vacuum there, and it's pretty hard for the Spirit to move a vacuum. If you give the Spirit a few building blocks to push around at the right time, some very significant things can happen in your lives. We don't use our minds for memorizing nearly as much as we ought to. Thinking of Brother Nibley over in Egypt, [I recall] that not long ago it was a requirement to enter the Moslem universities in Egypt that you have the entire Koran committed to memory. That can be done; the human mind is capable of such things. Yet we're so lazy. We have computer disks and books at our disposal, and we feel little need to internalize these materials. You hear stories about the early brethren in the Church riding from Kirtland to Missouri. What do you think they did on horseback all the time? Much of it was spent reciting scripture. They had large portions of the Bible memorized, so I challenge you to do the same.

One of the best things I ever did in my life before entering the South German Mission was memorizing the Sermon on the Mount in German. I was a smart aleck kid at the LTM [Language Training Mission]; that was before the MTC [Missionary Training Center] days. I had all the discussions memorized, and they said, "All right, if you're so smart why don't you pass off the Sermon on the Mount next week for us in German?" I went off and memorized those three chapters and passed them off. I've never done anything better in my life. It's up to you. You do what you want there, but that's your assignment for next time.

Let's go then to the establishing of a general religious setting for the book of 3 Nephi. What is going on in this world? Well, you know a little bit about the Gadianton robbers and problems that were encountered there. First, the obvious thing is that these people were living in the imminent expectation of the coming of a Messiah. They had prophecies that went back to the days of Lehi, Nephi, Benjamin, and more recently Samuel the Lamanite, who had specifically talked about the coming of Christ. I don't know exactly how specific their expectation was. It seems that they still were a bit in the dark about exactly what was going to happen. What Jesus would do when he would come, etc., were questions that they didn't have completely answered, but they knew that he would come, that he would fulfill the law, that he would bring about a redemption, and there would be some major changes. Second, notwithstanding that, they all lived the law of Moses. How do we know that the Nephites lived the law of Moses? How far back did their living of the law of Moses extend?

Student: "Jacob says so."

When does Jacob say that?

"He says, we follow the law of Moses and adhere to those principles. I think he hinted that they lived some other principles, also."

Okay, and they did; they had a broader understanding. It was a preexilic version of the law of Moses, and they also had, coupled with that, the prophetic traditions, knowing of the coming of Christ. But the specific passages I'm thinking of . . .

“Are you thinking about where he says, the law has become dead?”

There is 2 Nephi 25 where Nephi says, notwithstanding the fact that we know that salvation does not come by the law, we live the law of Moses. Were they strict in their living of the law of Moses? Well, look at some of the passages like 2 Nephi 5:10. When Nephi establishes the monarchy in the city of Nephi, he does all the things that kings basically do in getting a society going. He builds a temple—you have to have a temple. He establishes the law. He says, we will live the law. What law is it that he says they must live? It's the law of Moses. He says, we will live it according to its statutes, judgments, ordinances, etc. The nomenclature here becomes important, as we will see in a minute. He says, “And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things according to the law of Moses.”

How long does that continue? Well, in Jarom 5 he says that they were strict to live the law of Moses, and the law was “exceedingly strict.” Then look at Alma 30:3 in introducing the materials on Korihor. Again it says they were strict to observe the law of Moses in all of its ordinances, laws, statutes, etc. [which went on] right down to the time of the birth of Christ. What happens in 3 Nephi 1? [Some people argued that they could stop living the law of Moses.] Why do you think they would have said, we don't need to live the law of Moses any longer? They said, when Christ comes then the law will be done away. The sign of his birth had been given. Isn't it logical then to conclude that we are now absolved from the requirements of living the law of Moses? There were people who made that argument. What did they do about that toward the end of 3 Nephi 1? They had to correct this general misunderstanding; the law hadn't yet been fulfilled, even though Christ had come. There were various things that needed to be accomplished during his ministry and had not yet taken place. It's a logical kind of mistake for them to have made, and the need for them to have corrected it can be seen if you go back and look at 2 Nephi 25. When Nephi is talking about Jesus coming to fulfill the law he is not very specific about when or to what extent. He doesn't say he will fulfill all the law, by the way, which is something that is not taught until 3 Nephi 15. They correct their errors.

One of the things that remains, and also may have led to some confusion on their part is the concept of covenant. It's interesting that Jesus spells that out and says, the *covenant* is not fulfilled in me (3 Nephi 15). Within the covenant is the law—the law is a part of the covenant. By the way, in Hebrew and Greek the word for *covenant* is translated as our word as *testament*. The word *testament* or *covenant* describes the entire relationship between God and his people. That, of course, had not been fulfilled completely, and the Nephites could well have argued that there were certain things in the covenant relationship promised by God that had not yet been fulfilled. One of them would have been the fact that the Nephites had not yet been brought back into Israel. There were still these promises unfulfilled and outstanding. Well, that certainly can't have been fulfilled yet because the Nephites are still living over in Bountiful and Zarahemla, expecting that they will someday be brought back together with these others. Now the law is a part of this covenant relationship. You can fulfill the law and, as Jesus says, still not yet fulfill all of the covenants and all of the promises that have been made to all of Israel.

Interestingly, within the law there are also subdivisions. The law in Hebrew is the word *Torah*. Our English word *law* does not begin to capture the meaning of the word *Torah*, which means more *teaching*. The *Torah* is identified with the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Bible. You know there is a lot in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy that we wouldn't consider as law. I am a law professor, but I look at some of those stories and I think this isn't statutory legislation. This isn't what I would call positive law. But to the ancient Jews the *Torah* embraced all of those teachings in a broader sense. Did Jesus come to fulfill the *Torah*? Well, not in a very specific

sense. Within the law, you have things like the commandments. We already read that pleonastic list that Nephi gives you—we did keep the statutes, and ordinances, and commandments. These are all different Hebrew words. The statutes and judgments are the *mishpāṭîm*. The ordinances and the performances are the *ḥuqqôṭ*, etc. But if you go to something like 1 Kings 2:3 when the kingdom is passed on from David to his son Solomon, he exhorts Solomon to keep the statutes, the *ḥuqqôṭ*; the commandments, the *mitzvôt*; the judgments, the *mishpāṭîm*; the testimonies, the *ʿēdûṭ*; and keep all that is written in the *Torah*, the law of Moses.

Now the question again is, when Jesus comes to fulfill the law, which of these does he fulfill? It's interesting to me that when you go to 4 Nephi 1:12, they say we no longer observe the ordinances and the outward performances, which may be identified with these portions of the law, but we do keep the commandments—especially the commandments as they have now been explained and fulfilled by Christ. By the way the Book of Mormon is very interestingly consistent in its use of this legal terminology. I present this to give you a perspective on what it might possibly have meant to these people to talk about living the law of Moses. To them the law of Moses is not what we think of when we usually think of just the law of sacrifice at their temple. The law of Moses was a very broad concept. It embraced their entire constitutional law, public law, civil law, and private law on commercial transactions. It told you what happened when somebody's ox wandered into someone else's field and trampled on the corn. It prescribed things like oppressing the orphans and the widows. A lot of things were covered in the law of Moses. Well, the Nephites lived the law of Moses. I'd like to give you just a couple of examples to show you right here in 3 Nephi what we mean. I passed out to you a little handout about the execution of Zemnarihah. We have actually in the Book of Mormon quite a lot of legal material. When you stop and think about it, there is the trial of Sherem; the trial of Abinadi; the trial of Korihor; the trial of Nehor; the trial, detection, and execution of Seantum and other people like that. All of these legal proceedings are transacted in accordance with the ancient Israelite jurisprudence and according to principles in the law of Moses.

One of those principles was that a person couldn't be executed except in certain prescribed ways. The punishments had to be meted out very carefully. You had to be sure that the crime matched the nature of the punishment, and so the law is usually explained—when punishment should be exacted in the form of stoning, or execution by the sword, for example, for an apostate city, etc. Jewish law as it develops later becomes much more specific and rigid about the designation of modes of execution and punishment. One of those modes of punishment pertained, in Deuteronomy 22, to the displaying of the executed corpse after a body had been stoned. Deuteronomy says that it was important after the person was killed that the body would be hung on a tree. It's not until the Talmud and the medieval writers that we learn something about why they probably did this in ancient Israel. The main reason was so that people would walk by and this would be notoriously heralded so that everyone would see the kind of thing that happens to a person who has been so infamous as to deserve this kind of punishment.

Not contained in the Bible but found in the Talmudic literature is a little more explanation of how they would go about doing this, and what they would do at the end of the day. For example, just as with the crucifixion of Christ, it was not permissible to leave the body hanging overnight. The body, after all, is created in the image of God; therefore, it would be an offense to God to mutilate or desecrate the body. The Talmud and Maimonides explain that it is important as you take the body down off the tree to chop the tree down. Why? They want to completely eradicate from the face of the earth all memory that this person had ever lived—he is so wicked. In hanging him up on the tree, you are hanging him between heaven and earth. As Brother Nibley has pointed out, neither will receive this wicked person. Then you chop down the tree, because you don't even want people ever walking by and saying, that's the tree that good old so-and-so was hanged on.

There are only two places that I know of in world legal literature that talk about the need to chop a tree down after you have hung a person on it. One is in the Jewish literature that I have just talked about, and the other is in 3 Nephi 4:28–33, with the execution of the notorious leader of the Gadianton robbers, Zemnarihah. They take him and hang him on the top of the tree. When he is dead they chop the tree down. They all stand around and in a ceremonious way chant, May God cause to be felled to the earth all people who try to bring down our country—bring down righteousness—just as we are chopping down this person and this tree. The whole thing becomes a symbolic felling. That’s an interesting little detail—interesting for a lot of reasons, but the relevant one for this lecture is to show the extent to which aspects of the law of Moses and of the ancient traditions and legal requirements were being observed by the Nephites clear into this period. We could talk about a number of others like that, but let that suffice as an example.

Let me then suggest that if you were a Nephite and you were standing around in Bountiful after the signs of Jesus’ death had been given, there would still be a bit of a question in your mind what you should do next. You know that the law of Moses is now in some way superseded. It’s kind of like being in Romania today. You don’t have a government; you don’t have law. What do we do? Do we go about reconstructing the law ourselves? Do we look to the prophet to give us the law? Do we wait for Christ himself to come? This would have been a question that they wouldn’t have had an immediate answer to. They knew that something incredibly important had happened—the destructions made that perfectly obvious. They knew that something was no longer applicable. But the voice from heaven in 3 Nephi 9 hadn’t really clarified this issue very much either. For example, in 3 Nephi 9:17 the voice simply says, “In me is the law of Moses fulfilled.” All right, we know that, but what comes next? In 3 Nephi 9:19–20 the voice says, I no longer want sacrifice by the shedding of blood. The Nephites would have then known that that aspect of the law of Moses was done away. But what is to take its place? The phrase that is used is simply, what I now want is the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. That phrase, by the way, comes right out of Psalms 51:17, and as such was always thought in pious Judaism as the necessary precondition for making a valid sacrifice of any kind. Did that mean to the Nephites that they were simply to go on as things had been? In other words, the broken heart and contrite spirit was still a part of what they were to do, only they weren’t to offer sacrifice of blood.

That is, I think, among many factors a general religious setting for why the people might have gathered around the temple and have been discussing in 3 Nephi 11:1, with great amazement, the mighty changes that had taken place. I think those were not just physical changes, but the mighty changes in their society. Many people were dead, and there were mighty changes in their legal and religious system as well. They were amazed, and they stood and wondered. I think as they pondered on those questions, then the manifestation of the resurrected Christ was precipitated and occurred. I don’t think that just came “out of the blue.” Very few revelations come without someone asking a question. “Have you asked?” Nephi pushes his brothers Laman and Lemuel [to consider]. Joseph Smith received so many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants as a result of asking specific questions about the meaning of things. I imagine that as the Nephites stood around the temple at Bountiful they, too, were asking questions—what next? Why were they at the temple in Bountiful? Let’s now turn our attention to a more specific religious context for the Sermon at the Temple. One of the requirements for the law of Moses [was a gathering three times a year]. You will find this in Exodus 23, throughout Leviticus, and toward the end of Deuteronomy. Three times every year all men—and for the Feast of Tabernacles, all men, women, and children—[gathered together]. I suppose women and children came for a number of them. We don’t know exactly, but we do know for sure that all of the families had to be present for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, when they sat in tents or booths around the temple while the king delivered a speech—reminiscent, of course, of King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 1–6. Three times a year all Israel had to present itself before God at the temple. What for? Primarily for covenant renewal. When Joshua says (in Joshua 24), “Choose you this day whom ye will serve,” this isn’t the first time Israel has chosen to follow Jehovah. This is a covenant renewal,

very much like you renew your covenants of baptism every Sunday when you partake of the sacrament. At the temple they read the statutes, they read the law, they were instructed by the priests, and they performed certain rituals and ordinances. They had a liturgy that they followed very specifically on each of these high, holy festival days, these feasts. The three that were convocation festivals were Passover, Pentecost, and the Year-rite Festivals, which brought together in the ancient world all of the elements of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; the Feast of Tabernacles; and Rosh ha-Shanah, the new year, which appears to have been a single ritual complex in the pre-exilic period. They have those three main festivals.

The logical conclusion is that if they are living the law of Moses and still strictly doing so, the observance of the festival requirements would not yet have been abrogated; therefore, it would have been logical for all of this Nephite city to have presented itself before the Lord at their temple—all the men, women, and children. Notice that they are there. That, in my mind, rules out the possibility that this is some kind of a city council pulled together to deal with the emergency at hand. You would only have the men, the elders, attending such an affair as that. But the men, women, and children are there from the first thing in the morning. [The leaders] don't have to run off and get everybody. That's the next day when Jesus says, go get the people in the neighboring villages, or wherever. The multitude is there; they are waiting, I think, to say, as they logically would have, all right we are now here for our festival, but what do we do? We know we're not supposed to offer sacrifice, but what next?

Question: If they were meeting at the temple for that town, does that mean the other towns had their temples? If so, why did Christ pick this temple?

Answer: It's possible that they had other temples, but not likely. It seems in the Nephite history that there was always one main temple. The center of population moved. There was the temple at [the city of] Nephi, but when they left they went to Zarahemla and they built a new temple there. There were some people who were reactionary enough not to accept the new temple in Zarahemla. That, of course, was the Zeniff colony who said, we want to go back and at any cost redeem the land, because that has the real temple in it. Now, why are they up in Bountiful? Well, because in the face of the Gadianon war there was that seven-year period when they had to gather all of their property together in one place where they were a little closer to the narrow neck, which they could defend. They then moved their population center. I would think that this is the main temple of the Nephites.

Question: Why wouldn't everybody have already been there?

Answer: That's a good question. I guess there are some possible answers; we could speculate about that. One is that maybe it's not a feast that they are gathering for. I can't say for sure that it is, but it seems likely to me that it is. Another reason might be that they were gathering for the first day of something and other people were on their way from a distance. That's a possibility; I don't know. You can speculate. Things were chaotic. Maybe they didn't know what to do, a lot of people had stayed home, and it was only the very diligent who had gone to the temple to try to find out what to do next. You're welcome with me, I guess, to wonder why that was the case. [inaudible question] The timing is an interesting question, and we simply don't have an answer to the question of how long after Jesus' resurrection this occurred. The problem is that you have conflicting statements right within the last couple of verses in 3 Nephi 10. The question is how do you read the phrase, "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year"? If that phrase describes the time when Christ appeared, then it was a year-end festival of some kind. On the other hand, if that is simply some kind of an editorial marker that says, I am now going to tell you what happened in the thirty and fourth year, then we have no idea when it occurred. You also have the reference that says "soon after his ascension into heaven." It doesn't say which ascension. Is it the first ascension,—“touch me not for I have not yet ascended”—on the morning of resurrection? Is it the ascension just before the day of Pentecost in Acts 1? We don't know, so that becomes

again an interesting question, a puzzle. We're not quite sure. I think we can get a feel though for the type of general religious meeting this would have been, although not specifically which festival. I have my own preference. I think it was a meeting on the day of Pentecost. The reason is that in ancient Israel the day on which the giving of the law on Mount Sinai was celebrated was the Feast of Shavuoth or the Feast of Pentecost. That was the day that God came down on Mount Sinai to give the law. I guess the poetic beauty and symmetry of having God come down to give the new law on a similar day is almost irresistible to me, but it could have been one of the other festivals as well.

Question: [[inaudible] The question is could I digress and give you a lecture on other aspects of Nephite law that are similar to ancient Israelite law. I'll give you one right off the bat. Take, for example, the exemption from military duty that is given to the Ammonites. This is an extraordinary thing. In the ancient world every able-bodied man had to bear arms. Go back to the book of Mosiah and remember the desperate wars which that little colony in the city of Nephi fought against the Lamanites and how these old kings armed all the men, even down to the young men. Then you have this pocket of Ammonites who have sworn an oath that they won't go again to war, and they are given a military exemption. Why? Well, if you go to the book of Deuteronomy you will find that there were four classifications of people who were entitled to a military exemption. One of them is the group of people who are faint hearted or fearful. You say to yourself, now wait a minute—every soldier is faint hearted or fearful in the face of battle. Wouldn't that, therefore, exempt everyone? If you were a good conscientious objector, that would be the place you would go to to raise that objection. The explanation given in the Talmud is that this doesn't mean anybody who is afraid of anything, but only the people who fear that if they should die in battle things would not be well with them with God. They fear because of their sins and transgressions. You don't want a person standing next to you in the ranks who is afraid that if he dies in the battle his soul will be lost. We can stand mortal fear, but you can't stand divine fear. That's exactly the problem that the Ammonites were in. Anyway there are a lot of other nuances in that particular discussion. It's that sort of thing that you will find all over.

Let's carry on then with some specifics. One of the specifics of the religious context of the Sermon at the Temple may then well be that it was a part of some kind of religious observance, or one of the regular festivals that these people had been observing. Number two: A very important clue is given to us; that is that this sermon is given at the temple. Jesus could have picked a lot of places to appear, as one of you has suggested. He could have appeared at the town gate, out on a mountain, or in a synagogue. No, he chose to appear at the temple. This is a profound temple-related text. We will see in the next lecture that if we are sensitive to temple connections, the coherence and meaning of the Sermon on the Mount all of a sudden snaps into sharp focus. By the way, some New Testament scholars, W. D. Davies in particular, have toyed with the idea that when the New Testament refers to the Sermon on the Mount, no normal mountain is meant. In ancient Israel there was one mount, and that, of course, was the Temple Mount. "Let us go up unto the mountain of the Lord" refers to the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, some New Testament scholars who have sought Jewish backgrounds for the Sermon on the Mount have toyed with the idea that what Jesus is delivering is a new temple-related sermon in the Sermon on the Mount. We will see, and the Book of Mormon corroborates this, that those scholars are onto far more than they suspect.

Number three, in the way of just contextual background information. By the way, let me digress for just a minute to remind you how important it is in interpreting or understanding any written work to think something about the context in which the work arose. If you know something about the audience to whom a speech is addressed, you know a great deal interpretively about why things are being said and what they mean. Exactly the same words given to different audiences can take on different meanings. Knowing something about the context, the whys, and what Jesus is expecting [is helpful]. Who is the audience that he is addressing in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew? We know very little about what that was to mean and how it was to be used. You

can read literally hundreds of biblical journal articles speculating about the context, the *Sitz im Leben*, the audience response, and the reader response analysis of trying to unpack what's going on in the Sermon on the Mount. The Book of Mormon does not leave us with that kind of a problem. It gives us contextualizing information; one example is this temple point.

We are now on point three, if you are numbering them. Point three is that this speech is clearly delivered in the context of covenant making. What actually happens as a result of what Jesus gives in the Sermon at the Temple? It all leads to 3 Nephi 18, where the people enter into a personal covenant and promise that they will keep the commandments “which he has given us this day.” Where are those commandments found? In the Sermon at the Temple. This is clearly a covenant-making text. Thus, for example, in 3 Nephi 11 we'll see that Jesus invites these people to become the children of their Father in Heaven. That's covenant language. How was it that the people of Benjamin became the children of God, “spiritually begotten this day.” In Mosiah 5 it was by entering into a covenant with God and with the king.

Point number four in terms of contextual interpretation is very clear: On multiple occasions in this text Jesus refers to his words as commandments. We will see that biblical scholars have struggled to try to understand what Jesus really meant in the Sermon on the Mount. Are these abstract, ethical principles that are impossible for any human being to really live in this life, or did he really mean for people to try to live these laws? Who did he want to live these laws? Is he talking to all human beings, or is he only talking to a certain group of converted, committed people? Is he talking about rules and principles that are to apply in this world in this day, here and now, or is he talking about rules that will only be effectuated in the Messianic Age in the Millennium or in the age to come? These are questions that the rest of the world stands boggled over.

For example, when Martin Luther ran into the Sermon on the Mount, he found that it was inconsistent with his own views about salvation by grace. After all, it demands that people do things, and indeed do more than just say, “Lord, Lord.” Luther couldn't reconcile that with the rest of his theology and ended up calling the Sermon on the Mount “a masterpiece of the devil.” Why? Because it had twisted what he thought was the real message of Jesus around to something completely different. I just give you that to indicate how difficult it is for people who don't have something like the Book of Mormon to even understand what kind of statements Jesus is making here. The Book of Mormon clearly tells us that he is giving commandments.

There are some other contextualizing points [which we will cover] very quickly. We know that this is a part of the forty-day literature. We know that certain esoteric, secret, and important things happened to the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem as a part of the forty-day ministry. It was here, we believe, that they received an endowment. Luke 24 talks about them being told to stay in Jerusalem until they are endowed with power from on high. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others commented that Jesus himself gave the disciples during this period basically the equivalent of our temple endowment. The purpose of the Sermon at the Temple is clearly stated in 3 Nephi 15:1, and that is that it is of eschatological importance. If a disciple wishes to be lifted up at the last day and withstand the final day of judgment, he must hear and do and remember these things that Jesus has instructed them this day. If they do they will survive and pass into the presence of God at the final day of judgment. That again, is an important clue about what Jesus is talking about, which we will carry on with on Monday.

With these ideas in mind, take a really good look back at the materials in 3 Nephi 11–14 in particular.