

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 42  
Mosiah 29–Alma 1  
Treatise on Power  
Priestcraft

We are in Mosiah 29:34 where he is talking about the king. These chapters are a magnificent treatise on power; that's the thesis here. You won't find a better one anywhere. Let's go back to verse 8: "Now I say unto you let us be wise and consider these things. . . . And if my son should turn again to his pride and vain things [they made him king, and he decided not to—he was going on a mission; but what if he got back from his mission and wanted to be king—after all, he was in line] he would recall the things which he had said, and claim his right to the kingdom, which would cause him and also this people to commit much sin." Then they would really be in "hot water." The classic example of this is [Richard II] when he had to give up the crown.

Give me the crown.—Here, cousin, seize the crown;  
Here, cousin: [he says cynically]  
On this side my hand, on that side yours.  
Now is this golden crown like a deep well  
That owes two buckets, filling one another;

Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, act IV, scene 1

They are all met in the court, and Richard has to resign. Then Bolingbroke says, "Are you contented to resign the crown?" And Richard says:

Ay, no;—no, ay; for I must nothing be;  
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.

[He can't make up his mind; he will resign it, and he will not. In act III, scene 3 he says:]

Down, down I come; like glistening Phaeton  
Wanting the manage of unruly jades.  
In the base court? Base court, where kings grow base . . .

He'll give it up, but he won't give it up. Of course, this is a terrible tragedy. In all these king plays everybody is grabbing for power. Richard gives it up—he's sick of it. But then he wants it back again, and there's real trouble for him.

Verse 10: "And now let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people." He repeats that again; this is very important, you see. This is no longer divine kingship; it is now our government. The constitution though is still the *Torah*; they are going by that. "Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days; nevertheless, let *us* appoint judges." They were now going to act together, not the king by himself. He will remain the king, but he will not appoint the judges anymore—as

the President does in our society. Again, you see, it's the judges that count; it's the *boulē*, the council, the judges that really in the end have the say in the government. They did in Egypt where the priest kings were the judges and took over the kingdom of Thebes. "And we will newly arrange the affairs of this people, for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God." They were going to change and revamp the whole government from top to bottom. That's a sensible thing to do.

If you want to read a perfect description of our time, you should read the Edict of Diocletian from the year 296. He completely revamped the Roman Empire to its maximum extent. He revamped the whole thing and turned it upside down; he was a genius at organization. He listed the reasons why he did that and the condition of the state. It sounds exactly like our society today. I should read that to you someday; that Edict of Diocletian is something worth hearing.

Verse 11: "Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days. . . . We will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God." How can you tell they are wise? Well, just ask them what they would do in a certain situation. If they start weaseling or waffling or something else, you can find out quickly enough whether a person would be wise or not. It's still the *Torah* they are going by entirely. "Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man." If we could have perfect judges, everything would be fine. Remember, the Constitution ultimately rests on the judiciary. The Supreme Court decides what is the law after the legislature has made it, and decides how far the executive can go in executing it. It's all up to the good old court; this is the thing. "For the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just [well, there's the understatement of the year]. Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments."

That was Plato's theory, the philosopher king: Could we find a just man to be king? He thought in Dionysius the Younger of Syracuse he had somebody who was willing to listen to his teachings. He went to Syracuse and tried to discipline Dionysius, whose father had been the very powerful and magnificent tyrant of Syracuse. It didn't work at all. Here Plato, the great man, had one chance to make his great theory of philosopher kings work, and the thing was a complete flop. His conclusion in the laws is that the best thing you can do is "to cultivate your own garden. Find a quiet place under a wall out of the wind, the blowing newspapers, and the dust and try to relax in the sun." That's about the only thing left for you to do. He despairs of it because you are not going to get human beings that are anything else but this way.

Verse 13: "Yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people, . . . if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you." There have been good kings, of course; there have been great kings, like Diocletian himself. Who would think that a son of a sergeant would ever work himself up to rule the empire and put everything on its feet again? For about three years [laughs]. That's the way it happens in the Book of Mormon; it doesn't happen for long. God is king. There's the divine right. You are supposed to be secure in that. The king claims divine right, but it isn't. We won't go into that.

Mosiah established peace throughout the land. Notice the list of crimes here [in verse 14]: “that there should be no wars, no contentions, no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity.” It comes right down the ladder here, but at the top is *wars*. That’s the worst crime. War is a crime; it’s not just a mistake or something like that. It’s a terrible crime, and everybody knows it, too. Wars are the result of these other things—the contention, the stealing, the plundering. If nobody is going to play fair, you are going to end up resorting to violence. This is what happened because nobody was playing fair—everybody was grabbing. In a gang war who is breaking the law? Well, all wars are gang wars, as far as that goes. That’s the beginning of Clausewitz or the famous Roman maxim, “All laws are suspended as soon as the fighting begins.” Clausewitz said it’s absolutely cynical to think of the laws of war, because the only reason you are going to war is to take every possible mean advantage you can. You want to agree to some laws so you can break them. If you could settle things by sensible discussion, what are you doing shooting at each other and trying to kill each other? It’s the silliest thing in the world. Clausewitz knew the answers. No war is going to come unless somebody wants it; we’ll see that.

Verse 16: “Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.” Well, what should we do in that case? In verse 26 he tells us what we are to do. He says, remember the case of king Noah—55 years before. Because of his iniquity the people were brought into bondage. In other words, don’t blame the Lamanites. After all, “because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.” But the king led them in their iniquities; he could be responsible. They were in bondage to the Lamanites, yes, but don’t blame the Lamanites. It was their [the Nephites’] iniquities. Verse 19: “And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance [this is what got them out of it], they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now. [And this is not a special case:] But behold, he did deliver them because they did humble themselves before him. . . . And thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men.” It’s not peace through strength, refusing to yield, standing tall, and all that. He delivered them because they humbled themselves. It is all in his hands “and thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men.” This is the only way our quarrels will be solved. These are lessons in power.

I thought it was so ridiculous on May 7, 1945. One minute you were shooting madly at somebody, trying to kill him. The next hour (or minute) because somebody signed a piece of paper, you were the best of friends. It was the funniest thing you ever heard of. That’s what happened. In Rheims they signed the agreement, and the war was over. All of a sudden we said, “Isn’t that great?” Then we all ran out and embraced each other. Of course, I had been chatting with the prisoners all along anyway, but it was so ridiculous. The Book of Mormon has it all figured out here. The theme here is the foolishness and silliness of men and how it all has to do with their moral wickedness, and their greed, and all the rest of it.

And we don’t accept the reality of the gospel. Verse 21: “And . . . ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood [Cromwell succeeded, but then they dethroned him]. For behold, he has his friends in iniquity [this is the way they do it; notice this case], and he keepeth his guards about him; and he tearth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him.” Well, the CIA put Noriega in because they thought he would help us with the drug [problems], and now he is in there’s absolutely nothing they can do about it. This is the condition that

he describes here. Once he is in, he makes his own policy. Once a person is elected, he claims his executive privilege. You can't touch him because this is what he does, and this has happened many times, of course. I guess the worst instance is that of, not Iran, but Iraq, where even a whisper or a suggestion against the government and you disappear just like that. That's ample reason—there are no laws, no trials, nothing. As it says here, “And he enacteth laws [that please himself] . . . after the manner of his own wickedness [he makes his own rules]; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed”—not just punished, but destroyed. This is what happens. Everywhere all over the world when people disagree now, they [the rulers] find that's the easiest solution, which Hitler called “the absolute solution.” You just get rid of them. He tried it on the Jews, you know. This is what happens in your dictatorships in Iraq, etc.

Verse 25: “Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers [that which was handed down, the *Torah*], which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord [so we know where the laws come from in the end]. Now it is not common [and this is the key; it does happen but is not common] that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right [if they understand what they're doing]; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right [there are always some who do]; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.” Why? He says because they are going to be responsible then. And for a good reason they should be responsible. Moroni tells us back here in Moroni 7:15–16 that the people can be held responsible. You say, “What, the ignorant people?” It's for this reason: “For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil [so you can trust that; every man will know; we do have consciences, no matter how we rationalize and get around them in our interest]; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.”

The impulse will tell you it is of God, just as the impulse will tell you when something tastes nasty or smells nasty. It is given you to know with a perfect knowledge the good from the evil, so why shouldn't the people be held responsible and vote—most of them? But he knows this time will come: Verse 27: “And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.” The Book of Mormon constantly holds up to us this vivid possibility. America is especially vulnerable to self-destruction. Well, look at the Civil War, which was a senseless, terrible thing. We have acquired an insatiable appetite today for violence and destruction. These are keys and indications, etc. Why if they can't judge any better than that is it going to happen? Because the buck stops with them. If they suffer, they will answer for it, not the king. They can't blame Noah; they can't blame anybody but themselves. That's why it is given to them now because it is given to every man.

Verse 28: “And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause they may be judged of a higher judge.” But who is going to judge the higher judges? The first rule of Roman law was, “Who watches over the watchers; who takes care of the custodians?” He says this is the way it is: A small number of lower judges watches over them; and those lower judges are chosen at the local level.

They are popular judges. The people know them, so they are responsible for the judgments that are made. “Your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.” It always comes back to them because they chose the lower judges at grass level. They elected them locally at the grass roots, so they are responsible. Verse 30: “And I command you to do these things . . . that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads.” That’s the whole point. That’s why he was having them make the decisions instead of being able to blame the king or anybody else. The judges are truly representative of what the people want, and they are in this country, too.

Otherwise, in the old system, as described in verse 31: “For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings.” We think of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. What’s that famous speech? He can’t sleep, you know.

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,

[It won’t let me sleep.] . . .

Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose  
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude;  
And in the calmest and most stillest night,  
With all appliances and means to boot,  
Deny it [sleep] to a king? Then, happy low, lie down!  
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, act III, scene 1

Twenty-five years ago, by uttering those words in a bookstore in Amman, I caused a major riot. It’s not just today that these irrational and wild reactions occur. The king had just written an [autobiography], and Nasser’s agents were everywhere in town. I went in to buy a copy of the book, and the title of the book was *Uneasy Lies the Head That Wears a Crown*. Somebody took off, and that night there was a major riot. They had to send two tanks down from the palace to stop it, just because I made that remark, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” Talk about a brittle world! Talk about living right on the edge! What kind of world are we living in here? That was really a night! I thought it was a Moslem celebration—I enjoyed it. I didn’t know it was a mob. There was a Moslem celebration that night, and then I saw all this shooting. I thought they were just celebrating. In the morning I went out with my camera and started to take pictures. I said, “Can I take some pictures?” The same people were there. They were excavating an archeological excavation at the bottom of the hill, across from the old Philadelphia Hotel there. We talked about the fun the night before. They said, “Oh, no, that wasn’t a celebration; we were rioting.” They were perfectly cheerful—no bad feelings or anything like that. Remarkable people, aren’t they? Well, that’s the world we live in, you see.

Verse 32: “And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty.” Notice that *liberty* and *equality* go together. It’s very interesting that today we interpret *liberty* as *inequality*—the right of anyone who wants to pile up as much power and wealth as he can

and take advantage of anybody he can. If they are weaker, that's just too bad. We have free, competitive enterprise now, and you do what you want. So you have the perfect right to be unequal, but you are not going to have liberty with inequality because some people are in bondage to others. There are all sorts of legal tricks you can play. What are lawyers for? "... and every man enjoy his rights and privileges alike ...". But you don't when you can't hire the law. You know how the rights and privileges are bestowed in any society. But *freedom is equality*. I mentioned that [comment] from Philo last time; I just came across that. "Equality is the mother of righteousness." And it's the mother of liberty, too. [Mosiah] wants every man to "enjoy his rights and privileges."

And here's another thing. He has been a king, and he doesn't want anybody to suffer the way he has suffered. Verse 33: "And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king ['uneasy lies the head that wears a crown']. . . . And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part." And what is his part? Does it consist in making money entirely for himself? We say, "No tax, no burden on us; I don't have to bear anything." We absolutely resent any taxation whatever. Well, what is your part? Just to get for yourself. It's the "me generation." This is the philosophy we are living by today. A car today is no burden on anybody. "I won't do anything I don't want to do." That was a very interesting thing on the front page of the paper this morning.

[In connection with this idea of] the king being burdened, just before the battle, Henry V gives his famous speech that the king has to bear the whole thing. He doesn't like to bear it. What advantage does the king have, except ceremony? He gets all the pomp; he's waited on, etc. But he is responsible for everything.

Upon the king!—let our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives,  
Our children, and our sins lay upon the king!  
We must bear all. O hard condition,  
Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath  
Of every fool whose sense no more can feel  
But his own wringing!

[Every fool is thinking just of his own interests, but the poor king has to think of everybody.]

What infinite heart's-ease must kings neglect,  
That private men enjoy!

[Private men just do their own thing, but the king has to be responsible. Lay it upon the king.]

Shakespeare *Henry V*, act IV, scene 1

Incidentally, you'll notice this remarkable thing. I love to pass from Shakespeare's poetry to the Book of Mormon prose because you can do that without any declination in loftiness of style. The one is just as exalted as the other. You realize what a masterpiece the Book of Mormon is when you start doing this. Compare Shakespeare's language with this:

“And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king [notice that there’s rhythm and poetry in that line; it’s a very nice iambic pentameter], yea, all the travails of soul for their people, and also all the murmurings of the people to their king; and he explained it all unto them.” That’s marvelous poetry. The Book of Mormon is right up there with Shakespeare, and people call that “chloroform in print.” Just yesterday, a writer in the newspaper quoted Mark Twain’s famous remark about the Book of Mormon as “chloroform in print.” Well, of course, he didn’t read it.

Verse 34: “And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part.” Then what do you have when you have an unrighteous king? Here is another eloquent passage; listen to verse 36: “Yea, all his iniquities and abominations, and all the war, and contentions, and bloodshed, and the stealing, and the plundering, and the committing of whoredoms, and all manner of iniquities which cannot be enumerated.” This is what a king will bring you. Can a king steal? Well, he owns everything anyway. The people were “convinced of the truth of his words.” Mosiah got through to them. (A professor of economics here at BYU quotes a remarkable thing on what follows here. Remember, we were talking about the subject of power.)

They assembled in bodies to cast their votes and elect the judges. Since the judges were going to run the country, why not elect them directly and hold them responsible instead of having them appointed by a legislature or executive? Verse 39: “And they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them. And they did wax strong in love towards Mosiah . . . for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain [this is what tyrants are after], yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul [money corrupts]; for he had not exacted riches of them, neither had he delighted in the shedding of blood; but he had established peace in the land.” This is the usual military complex—gain, corruption, riches, the shedding of blood, etc. “With the treasures of the earth I will buy up armies and navies and rule with blood and horror on the earth,” [Satan said]. The two go together, as they do here. And when the treasury is empty, whether it’s the king or his empire, they’re finished.

Of the sixty Roman emperors, at least two-thirds of them were bumped off by the military, [often] by their successor. Look at Diocletian. He rose to a high rank in the army. Then he revolted, got rid of [Numerianus], and established himself. This happened in almost every case, time and time again. Because of the corruption, they were bought off. After Nero was dead, there were Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Each one offered more to the army than the other offered. Galba was bumped off, Otho was bumped off, and Vitellius was bumped off. Each successor offered more than his predecessor offered. Then things got in such bad condition that the senate took over. We won’t go into that now.

Verse 42: “Alma was appointed to be the first chief judge, he being also the high priest, his father having conferred the office upon him, and having given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church.” So he was the head of the state now. It was a sacral state; there was no king anymore. Alma was first judge. He was going to be head of the state, head of the army, and head of the church. He held all three offices at once, and pretty soon he is going to lay them all down. He said you can’t do any good with that—even being the top man and having all that authority. Remember, he laid them down and felt that he could do more good by bearing down in pure testimony. He went out on a mission. Then they spit on him and kicked him around, because he had lost his

clout—nobody cared anymore. He was a “has-been” then and went through that. What a remarkable essay on power, and where you get with power, the Book of Mormon presents to us! As we read in Alma 2:16, he could have been absolute dictator. He was in a perfect position to take over and run everything. Well, he was absolute dictator, wasn’t he? No, he refused to do it. The man makes the difference.

Verse 43: “And there was continual peace through the land. And thus commenced the reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called Nephites [notice, they were called Nephites, although they were mostly Mulekites]; and Alma was the first and chief judge. Verse 47: “And thus ended the reign of the kings over the people of Nephi; and thus ended the days of Alma, who was the founder of their church.” The older Alma died, being 82 years old, and also Mosiah died. So we begin the book of Alma with a new reign and new troubles. It starts out with Alma “in the first year of the reign of the judges . . . king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, having warred a good warfare . . . [notice these ancient figures of speech—the path of righteousness, slept with his ancestors, etc.] nevertheless he had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people [notice this]; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made”—because the people acknowledged and accepted them. He didn’t just impose them and say, “This is the law; therefore, you will keep it.” They were obliged to keep the laws which they had acknowledged. They were based on the *Torah* which was their constitution.

Now they’re already going to have trouble. This Nehor went about among the people. He’s an interesting person. The trouble was that they were living under the law that Alma had given them. Alma and his community went back to the law and a very strict order of things. Men like Abinadi, who were great scriptorians, were living according to the law of Moses the way it should be kept. It was strict and austere, and the people didn’t like it. They are going to go for this man Nehor “hook, line, and sinker.” From this time on, the Nehors rule the roost, and they claim to be the church. Theirs was a much more genial and easy religion to take. People didn’t like the rigorous religion, so they went over to the Nehors here. This will tell us how it happened. Verse 2: “In the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.”

Nehor becomes the perennial opposition, which represents the majority throughout here. He was a great orator, a powerful personality, a very persuasive speaker. He was a real evangelist, and he preached what he termed to be the word of God. He was not preaching atheism or anything like that. Verse 3: “And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people . . .” This [what follows] was his doctrine, a more relaxed religion; people immediately opted for this more agreeable philosophy. As Brigham Young said about the Law of Consecration, “But would they consecrate? They would not.” The Saints absolutely refused the Law of Consecration. It is too hard to take, though they promise and covenant to keep it every day. This is an astonishing thing; we are going to have some backfire on that, “. . . declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.”

Remember back in Mosiah 27:5 it told us that in the church of Alma there were not professional clergy—the priests all worked with everybody else. It was an agrarian society. Everybody, including King Benjamin, worked in the fields. Well, that wasn’t going to go;

that would go over like a lead balloon in our society, too. Nehor was a sophist, and he was an evangelist. He was very clever and told them what they wanted to hear. Now here's a nice soft gospel: "And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice [now this is an easy-going, happy teaching—the Bakkers teach this; it's highly permissive, you notice]; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should [be saved and] have eternal life [period]."

What is wrong with this upbeat, cheerful religion—this popular message? Well, it's the period that is wrong. It says, "In the end, all men shall have eternal life"—and that's the whole story. Everyone is saved, and that is that. This short circuits and bypasses the whole plan of salvation, which is that this is a time of probation here, accepting salvation the hard way. When you accept the gift, you prepare yourself to enjoy it here. We do the same thing. We don't feel bound by all the covenants and commandments very strictly. We are very strict on the Word of Wisdom. Some we make a big thing about, but others we don't take seriously. Should we lower our standards to gain converts? Well, that's the great thing. The great Catholic Church historian—not only of our time, but I think the greatest of them all—was Duchesne. He said that's exactly what happened. The church was able to expand and conquer after the fourth century because it just kept lowering its standards, lower and lower. Every time it lowered them, it could get more people in. Finally, everybody was willing to join because they didn't have any standards at all as far as morals were concerned. This is the thing that happened here with Nehor; he made himself very popular. He was like a popular evangelist, and this is what people want to hear. They are not too bound by anything; they don't worry about things like that.

The question arises here: What is the measure of a successful evangelist? There's Norman Vincent Peale. My cousin Donald Sloan was his business manager for years. Donald is dead now, but he told all sorts of stories about Norman Vincent Peale. We won't go into that. There was Henry Ward Beecher in the early days and Cardinal John Spellman in our own time—and Jerry Falwell and Dale Carnegie. What is the measure of their success? Well, it's popularity alone. How to win friends and influence people is the whole secret. Well, what is wrong with winning souls for Jesus? The answer is that it requires rhetoric. This type of missionary must be a crowd pleaser. Truth tellers are something else, as we learn from Samuel the Lamanite, Abinadi, and people like that. We wouldn't need prophets at all if they told us only what we wanted to hear. We wouldn't need the scriptures if they told us only what we wanted. Yet we avoid the unpleasant parts very cleverly. "Narrow is the way, and few there be that find it," but everybody wants to go in the broad path. What's wrong with that? It frustrates the whole purpose of our being here, which is to test us and see if we are good for the long run ahead. To be good for the long run of eternity, you can't be very questionable about certain things. You can be let in at lower levels and train—we don't know what happens later on. But here you are given a great chance to show how much stamina you have for the long stretch ahead in terms of trillions of years, although we don't think in terms of that at all.

So this was a nice, pleasant, permissive, easy-going religion, and [many] went for it. Verse 5: "And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money." Now all religions are supported by money, but the immorality of it (as Plato shows in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*) is when you start giving it to individuals. When you have a line veto that it be used for this or that, then you are not giving it at all. If I give money to the church specifying that it can only be used for this, I'm not giving it to the Lord or

trusting him at all. I don't specify what it's for; I just pay my tithing and that's that. If it's misused that's none of my affair; I've done what the Lord requires of me.

So they began to support him and give him costly apparel, "and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching." This crowd-pleasing evangelist established his church. We have some very interesting Old World documents about this sort of thing, too. The *Chilam Balam*, the oldest record from Central America, talks about this sort of thing—how the priests would be lifted up on people's shoulders dressed in elaborate apparel and carried around town. It talks about this later on when Samuel the Lamanite says, "And if a man shall come among you and say this [what you want to hear], ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel" (Helaman 13:27–28). We have pictures of these overdressed priests being carried in on poles.

And rhetoric is aggressive. He used a rhetorical message to be a crowd pleaser. Then old Gideon came along, and there was sharp talk. He was the old war horse, you know. He took an aggressive approach and began to argue with Nehor, who was a large and powerful man. They began to dispute sharply. Verse 8: "And it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage. Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him." Now, what's going on here? What would he be doing with a sword? This is an interesting commentary on the frontier. There was this great contention going on. When Alma and the sons of Mosiah changed their opinion, then they started being knocked around. People started throwing rocks at them and all sorts of rough stuff. Gideon would probably have a sword for defense because he traveled around a lot; moreover, the peace was very new here. They had barely settled down. Gideon traveled throughout various territories in the wilderness, and it was like the Old West. What's more, Gideon, in spite of his age, had a truculent temperament, so I guess he would carry a weapon anyway.

Verse 9: "Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword." It was Nehor traveling around with a sword here. That was allowed, I suppose. And he was brought before Alma for his crimes—not for his doctrine, but for his crimes. Then Alma says a very interesting thing in verse 12. Remember this priestcraft? He knows about it and that in the time of Lehi, in the twenty-sixth dynasty, it ruled the world.

Palestine had a cultural dependency on Egypt at that time. There were Greek and Egyptian soldiers all over the place—mostly Greeks. The fleet belonged to Psammeticus II, and his son, Necho II, organized the fleet. They had ships and arms all over the Mediterranean. But priestcraft was the thing. At that time the priests took over the government of Egypt. To be a king in the twenty-sixth dynasty (in Lehi's time), you had to be high priest, too. Every king claimed to be high priest or to be intermarried with a priestly family. But even the king couldn't do anything without asking the priests of Thebes, who were tyrannical, crooked, and all sorts of things. There were all sorts of troubles; it's a big story. The Nephites remembered this; it made a big impression. Remember, they kept records of everything as they went.

Verse 12: "But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people [they had never had it before, but they had a memory of it].

And behold thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.” Alma knew what happens when that starts. Incidentally, the first high priest [of the twenty-first dynasty in Egypt] was called Korihor, and his son was called Piankhi—two Book of Mormon names. They have the same relationship in the Book of Mormon. Paanchi is one of the high judges. Those Egyptian names come in just right here. They knew those names and had those names. Piankhi was a very famous name at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. It was a priestly name and a royal name. Some say it was Piankhi who founded the twenty-fifth dynasty; some say it was Shabako.

Verse 13: “And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man. . . . Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.” There it is again. It is the law; they accepted it; therefore, they must abide by it. Then they carried out the old ritual of Hārūt and Mārūt. In the days of Enoch the Watchers came to the earth and started corrupting men. They started taking the sacred ordinances and claiming them, but perverting them. They claimed that they had the right gospel. They gave a false slant and a false teaching to it, and justified all sorts of immorality. Therefore, Hārūt and Mārūt were hanged on a high hill because the earth would not accept them. They were the first to betray the law of God to men. There was plenty of wickedness and murder, etc., but they were doing it in the name of the gospel and the priesthood. They introduced the temple ordinances but falsified them. There is quite a story about the Watchers here. One was Hārūt and one was Mārūt; there are various names given to them. They were hanged between heaven and earth because the earth wouldn’t receive them, just as it wouldn’t receive Cain. Remember, the earth refused her strength to Cain. And heaven wouldn’t receive them. So what can you do? You can just leave them hanging there because neither would receive them. And they hang there until the Day of Judgment—that’s the point. That’s very widespread; everybody knows about the story of Hārūt and Mārūt suspended between heaven and earth because they were the first corrupters of the human race in the name of preaching religion.

It says here in verse 15: “And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti [the hill Months], and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth [the one won’t take him and the other won’t take him] that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.” He had first corrupted the gospel. Alma said, you’re the first one [among us] to do a trick like this in the name of religion—to take the teachings of the gospel and pervert them in this manner. The penalty is always hanging between heaven and earth. That’s why they put a person on a gibbet; they hang him up on a high tree that way. That is to witness his crimes against heaven and earth and mankind.

Verse 16: “Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land.” This was a winner! This religion is going to last right until the end; everybody goes for it. It’s much more popular than the church is. “For there were many who loved the vain things of the world [they wanted that easy-going religion], and they went forth preaching false doctrines [giving it out as the gospel; they had their missionaries]; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor. [Well, and why do the TV preachers preach? For fame and fortune, of course.] Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of

the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.” They pretended this was a sincere religion. With separation of church and state, they couldn’t be persecuted if they really believed it. And who was to judge whether they were sincere or not? Therefore, they were allowed to preach. Remember, Nehor was hanged for his murder, not for his preaching.

They tried to crack down on Jehovah’s Witnesses for their beliefs about saluting the flag, etc. It’s hard thing not to crack down on someone for their beliefs, if you dislike their beliefs. Of course, that was what caused the war against the Mormons; they were a state within a state. Their beliefs made them defiant of the Union. There was the great trial back in 1903 when many of the General Authorities went back and had to testify that the Church was not a state within a state. We were not defying all the laws and the Constitution.

In this early stage, they [the Nehors] “durst not steal, for fear of the law, for such were punished.” The legal system was new, but they soon found ways of getting around it. We will see that. Then they had the Ten Commandments. They couldn’t lie and steal and that sort of thing because they were being judged by the Ten Commandments. “But it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church of God.” The church was being persecuted by this other church, which was a big church now. They were able to do it. They persecuted at first with words—slander and all sorts of things like that. Well, is that bad? If you call a person a “communist” or something like that, you can persecute with words. You can make things very bad for him. “Bred of an idle word”—you can put a person into real trouble with words.

Verse 20: “Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes [now here’s the contrast; here’s what the issue was between these churches: The new system was nice and easy going, and the other was much too rigorous], and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price.” Well, that hit them hard. [The Nehors] thought there should be some pay here and some structure. [The true believers] went out and worked like anybody else, and this made them very unpopular. It was a standing rebuke to them, like Socrates and the Sophists. That’s exactly why the Sophists got Socrates put to death, because he didn’t take money for his teaching. Here it is uncontrolled and very suspicious. Religion should be uncontrolled, sincere, etc.

In the early church in the first century there was the three-day test. We read this in both the *Clementine Recognitions* and in the *Pastor of Hermas*. Many people went about preaching and becoming professional clergy. The three-day test was that you could entertain them and keep them in your house for three days. But after three days, they had to leave. If they stayed longer than that, they were *christemporoi*—people who were selling Christ for a price. They were making an *emporium*, making a business of religion. A *christemporoi* was one who makes a business or a profit from religion. If they stayed more than three days, that’s what they were. That’s what these people were doing. They didn’t want that rigorous old system. There was plenty of ground for persecution here.

Verse 21: “Now there was a strict law among the people of the church, that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and that there should be no persecution among themselves.” No persecution

at all! Two things: Don't persecute outsiders, and don't persecute each other. But they started doing both. This is a sad thing that happened, especially persecuting each other. Notice that religion is the most socially sensitive subject there is, the one in which offence is most easily given and taken. It touches one's innermost feelings, and quickly the sparks begin to fly. This is a very sensitive issue here. They were not supposed to persecute anyone. "Nevertheless, there were many among them [now we're back to the true church; notice what's happening there] who began to be proud, and began to contend warmly with their adversaries [in the church], even unto blows; yea, they would smite one another with their fists." That's an interesting thing that the outsiders couldn't smite them; it was against the law. During this period they persecuted them only with words. But now the members of the church started fighting unto blows. This was the second year of the reign of the judges. It only took one year, and things were already starting to fall apart—inside and outside. In the second year of the reign of Alma, they had just established their new model government, and the whole thing was "going to pot," with Nehor and the church itself. Verse 23: "And it was a cause of much affliction to the church, yea, it was the cause of much trial with the church." Well, you can believe that; it was a terrible time!

Incidentally, the second century of Christianity was not the century of faith; it was always called the "Age of Heresy," because that's when everything broke apart. Epiphanius mentioned eighty-eight heresies within the church. Nobody knew which was the real church; it just dissolved. That all happened just after the year 100 A.D.

Verse 24: "For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out." Remember the rule the Lord taught was that if the people separate themselves, argue, and go out and found their own churches, the only penalty is to cut them off from the church. So many were excommunicated at this time—just when the persecution was going on. "And also many withdrew themselves from among them." Many voluntarily apostatized, and many were struck from the records and excommunicated. This began already. Did they need a king to make them corrupt?

Verse 25: "Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith [you can believe that! What were they to do? This is what they were to do]; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them." This was from both sides—inside the church and outside the church. The real church was just a nucleus remaining here now, and this is a standard situation in Church history. It has always been the same, so don't be upset by things like this. It's what you can expect.

This is what the motive was. This is why there was a great division between them and the rest of the society—why the other people went on and joined the Nehors, and why they didn't like the way the church was being run. "And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength." Well, we [Americans] don't like that at all; that's not the way we do things today. They were equal and every man labored according to his strength and wasn't required to labor more. If he was stronger, that didn't give him the advantage to accumulate vastly more and take advantage of the weaker person, which is the standard situation. It occurs hundreds of times in the Egyptian record—the strong begin to

dominate the weak. Well, they always will, but they're not supposed to. Every man is to labor according to his strength.

Verse 27: "And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted." They followed the Law of Consecration. Every man gave according to that which he had, to the limit of his capacity as much as he could give, "and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely." How long could they resist the corroding effects of riches? Four years is the outside limit here. Two of the years were during war. The next year after this war broke out again as a result of this. This is not a happy history, but a very instructive one, and it's meant for somebody. President Benson really hit it on the head when he said, "The Book of Mormon wasn't written for people long past; it was written for us here and now!" So here it is.

I see some of you are greatly relieved to find out that the time is up now. It's too late to talk about this favorite passage that comes next. It says they got very rich, but they still weren't bad. You'll see what happened and how they were able to do that. We're going very slowly, you notice, but this was written for a purpose. We should read it. I recommend the Book of Mormon to your serious attention.