

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 43

Alma 1–2

Escapes

Wealth

This is a game. I just wrote this down this morning, and it may expedite things. We will call it “The Escape Game” or “*Fuga Mundi*,” which means “flight from the world.” We will mark it this way: Who does the escaping? and from what? First of all it was Lehi who did the fleeing, the getting out. This game is based on the passage that you find in Revelation 18:4, a passage we all know: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” So all of these people are running away from something, and we will see what it is. Each time we are going to refer to the scripture here. We are not talking about Lehi’s Jerusalem this semester, but it is described by his contemporary and friend Jeremiah. So we will put this reference down: Jeremiah 5:25–31 and Jeremiah 7:4 and following. These are good passages which are typical of what he is running away from. I will read them to you for your delectation.

This is speaking to Jerusalem in the time of Lehi: “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked; they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?”

The other passage I mentioned was Jeremiah 7:4: “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. [This was a famous saying; you trust in the temple and everything will be all right.] For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doing; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. [But Lehi and his family had to move out.] Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations [because we are in the temple]? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? [Remember, that’s what the Lord said when he drove the money changers out: My Father’s house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. He was quoting Jeremiah here.] Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.” You are not getting away with anything. God is not mocked, as we are about to find out.

Who else makes an escape? Then Nephi made his great escapes. What was he escaping from? Well, the perils of the desert, but especially from Laman and Lemuel and from the slough of Jerusalem. This is what Laman and Lemuel represent. We will put it this way [writing on the chalk board]. What did they do? They didn't want to go, and they repeatedly tried to kill him. He was always escaping from them and from the trials and dangers of the journey. In 1 Nephi 17 the brethren [Laman and Lemuel] were reluctant about having been brought along and said, "We've got to go back home." They planned to kill both their father and their brother in order to go back to Jerusalem to this sort of thing, which is what they had been escaping from. 1 Nephi 17:20: "And thou art like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart." This is the objection; the other side had a case, too. They were escaping to something else. Lehi was escaping from a prosperous city, and the sons resented it. They thought, "Everything is going to be all right; we're safe." As they were escaping, Nephi left all their precious things behind. This was a foolish thing [in their opinion]; they wanted to escape from the desert and get back home where they could live comfortably. "... yea he hath led us out of the land of Jerusalem, and we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and our women have toiled, being big with child . . . Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy."

They had given up gracious living for this, but this is the thing that Nephi was fleeing from, through a much more austere type of life. Even if they had stayed in Jerusalem, he wouldn't have lived the way they were living. They [Nephi's family] were getting away from it. The Lord forces us to change. 1 Nephi 17:22: "And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses [just as Jeremiah said, they went to the temple and all that]; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them . . ."

So this is another escape. From what and to what? We know that he escaped to the life in the desert, the rigors, etc. But soon after they got in the New World, Nephi had to make another escape. They started quarreling again—remember the big fight? From the New World settlement he escaped with as many people as wanted to go with him. They lived the law in its strictness and austerity. We find what they were escaping from in 2 Nephi 5:10. They went out to a rigorous and austere life. "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." That was basic. [The others] wouldn't believe the warnings, so he took his family and Zoram and others. "And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God." They went out, and again they were fleeing from the destruction. "... Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

Nephi founded another colony, and then Mosiah escaped from it. That colony went bad. Jerusalem had gone bad, and they went bad after they settled here. Then Nephi went out and settled his own colony, and it went bad. This is a pattern, isn't it? Then Mosiah was commanded in a dream to escape and take his people. What was he escaping from? I think a good example is that eloquent passage in Jacob 2:13–21. There are plenty of examples in Jacob. We know what they were running away from, what was dangerous, and what was going on here. "And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained

more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts [already, and they are still in the wilderness], and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel [this is Lehi's own family—this is his son Jacob; in the first generation, they have already done this after escaping from Jerusalem], and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they. . . . Do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemmeth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you. O that he would show you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye he can smite you to the dust! O that he would rid you from this iniquity and abomination. And, O that ye would listen unto the word of his commands, and let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls! Think of your brethren like unto yourselves [then the appeal for equality] . . . Ye were proud in your hearts, of the things which God hath given you, what say ye of it? [God has given you these things, but you are proud of them] Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other.” He [Jacob] kept rubbing in that equality, but the people wouldn't take it; they liked this better. We have two totally different ways of life—two totally different economies, two totally different disciplines as described here.

Who was the next person to escape then? It was Benjamin. He was the son of Mosiah, and he undertook a great reform. He gave a great reformist speech. People needed to get back on the track again. We can find this in Mosiah 4:2 and Mosiah 5:7. You know what he was escaping from—the inequality. “I would that this inequality should be no more. Think of your brethren like unto yourselves.” They had acquired riches. He said the Lord would bless them, but they didn't need to go bad because of it. You all know Benjamin's great speech, so we don't need to go into that. “Always remember your own nothingness and the greatness and goodness of God.”

Mosiah 4:2 “And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified.” He really cut them down to earth. They practically worshipped Benjamin, and they were celebrating after years of victory, prosperity, and success. This was a great national assembly to let the “eagle scream.” They were going to stand tall, and in everything he said, Benjamin just cut them down to nothing. “You are less than the dust,” he said. Don't get the idea that you are anything at all. Then you will be equal, and “then you will feel to rejoice . . . Are your hearts changed? Are you born of him this day?” In chapter 5 he gave them a new name and a new title. They took the covenant of Moses. “This day has he begotten you.” It's a new birth. He said he was going to give them a new name, and they were going to have an entirely new way of life. Well, how long did it last? Not very long.

Then Zeniff had a reason for escaping. What was he escaping from? This everlasting tension and unpleasantness with the Lamanites. It can't go on like this, he thought. When he found out the Lamanites weren't such bad people after all, he wanted to make concessions. He went out from the settlement [of Zarahemla] and became a king within them because he was deceived by the Lamanite king. In Mosiah 9:1 we find what he was escaping from: “I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers' first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces . . . but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.” He wanted to save them, which happens. Then verses 6–8: “And

I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom. And he also commanded that his people should depart out of the land.” Zeniff went out to relieve the tension and started an entirely new community in the midst of the Lamanites. It was quite a project. Mosiah 9:1 and 6–8 are just a few examples; you can find lots of them.

Then who went out from this colony? His son was the wicked King Noah. Alma had to run away from Noah, so we have another escape. Alma went out by himself and founded his own church in the wilderness by the waters of Mormon. He was escaping from Noah (Mosiah 11:2, 7, 15, 18, 27). You know what the situation was when he went out there. [His community] was founded just like that of the Dead Sea Scrolls people—very disciplined. They all worked; the priests visited them and also did their work; they baptized and lived holy lives out there. That’s much too strict for most people. Notice that they settled in the land of Helam, and they were driven out of that. They were able to make an escape to the land of Helam; then they escaped from Helam because they were running away from Amulon. Amulon wouldn’t let them even breathe. He came down so hard because he was jealous of Alma. The Lamanite king made Amulon an underking. We get this in Mosiah 24:7. This time they ran away and they ended up in [Zarahemla]. Mosiah was just waiting for him with open arms because he brought the priesthood and the knowledge of the church and its organization, which he had gotten from Abinadi and from the scriptures. He was a direct descendant of Nephi, and he was able to help Mosiah out.

Mosiah hesitated and felt he couldn’t launch the church in a big way. Then Alma came and they started working together. Then what happened? Immediately, in the first year there was general defection. Mosiah and Alma put their heads together and said, What should we do? We don’t know what to do with these people. The only thing to do is excommunicate them [paraphrased]. They started to do that on a huge scale. It says [the people] were so scattered out that they couldn’t keep control of all the branches of the church. They became more and more independent, although the priests were sent out to them. There were all sorts of local troubles, and they couldn’t hold the church together. Soon [the apostates] far outnumbered the others. So what Alma and Mosiah had to fight against was a general defection—everybody falling away, getting disinterested and going their own way. People aren’t willing to live that strictly—that’s the whole point. We do not like the Law of Consecration, whether we covenant to keep it or not. Mosiah 27:7–10 is pretty good for this last example.

Then what happened? Alma’s son was among the defectors and trouble-makers. You know how he was converted. Alma II made an escape from the bonds of hell actually. He talks about it in Mosiah 27:23 and following. He describes what he has been through. He has escaped, and he doesn’t want anybody else to have to go through that. It is a matter of escaping. He said, “I’ve been delivered; I’ve been snatched; I’ve been saved.” This was a spectacular escape. So what did he do?

Then the sons of Mosiah made an escape. They were nailed for political jobs, but none of them would take them. They all ran away on missions, which was the sensible thing to do. So what they were escaping from was the double burden of royalty. Remember, they were warned about it by their father. The double burden of royalty is the burden on the king himself, which can make an honest king suffer terribly, and the burden on the people if they get an unjust king. It’s one way or the other. There’s an unfair burden either way, and you can’t escape it. The speech on that particular subject is Mosiah 29:16 and

following, especially 33 and 34. This is that a just king has to suffer, and this is with an unjust king everybody suffers.

Then Mosiah put Alma in charge of everything. Now we come to this happy time. Everybody was crazy about the charismatic Alma. But now he had been thoroughly converted, and he was in charge not only of the church, but he was the chief judge in a sacral society. He was head of the church and the state. Anybody writing this would say, “We are in for a golden age—at last a new age dawns with Alma.” And what happens? Before the year is out, the whole thing starts coming apart. Well, well! In Alma 1:26 is what he escaped to. The general corruption—or collapse was what it amounted to—is in Alma 1:16–20. See what was happening? So we come up to this point now. We will find plenty more escapes and collapses as we go on here.

We mentioned Alma 1:29 last time. They did not wear costly apparel or anything like that. “And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need [but in that they were still righteous; this is the interesting point—they were righteous for a whole year]—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and [even] abundance of silk [that’s an interesting thing, but we won’t go into silk now] and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth. And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry.” The question is how long could they resist the corroding effects of riches? Four years at the outside, as we learn—the last two years being years of war anyway. In Alma 4:6 it tells us what happened. But what is the problem here? We see this a great deal. Notice that the reason they were able to get along was that “they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all . . . whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.” There was no such thing as deserving poor. If you are in need, that’s that, and all there is to it.

These very popular verses with Latter-day Saints must be taken in full context with verses 26 and 30 and the rest. So why does God enrich the righteous then, as we see in Alma 1:29–31 here? Brigham Young gave the answer to that many times. One whose talent, initiative, dedication, and industry have been demonstrated is now in line for the next test, the next step. That’s why. So naturally he is given these riches to test him to see what he will do with them. That’s a totally different test of a different kind of character. Work itself doesn’t sanctify. We are told it is possible to work like the devil, or to work like demons. He works hard. Alma 4:6 and 10:4 say what you gain by your industry is not holy gain. As James said, because of your work you have received these riches. That’s fine; you should receive them. But it’s neutral; it’s not holy. It’s not one way or the other. The qualities for success in business are required in a much higher degree in any other line. We have a hundred millionaires here. But how many first-class scientists or authors or painters or composers or poets—or even generals—has the country produced? Very, very few first-class people [in those professions], but almost anybody and his dog can become a millionaire, said Brigham Young. But it’s what you do with it. If a man has been good and conscientious, we’ll load the stuff on him and see what he does. This is the real test. There are far more important qualities than this. What is missing in our candidates and our big men today, for example? They seem to be a very shallow lot. Greatness is very rare. We clamor for it and slaver over it when we have it, even if we are not so sure if this person really is great or not. But there are very few.

Now comes the next test. God gives a capable man wealth and power, as Brigham says, to see what he will do with it. Nimrod was the first person to establish kingship, fortifications, armies, and things like that. Nimrod was a very righteous king when he was young. He had great intelligence and great strength, and the Lord rewarded him for his service to the human race by giving him the bow. This [story] is universal—you find this everywhere. Men at that time were threatened by the beasts; they couldn't defend themselves against the wild animals that were large and ferocious. Cave bears, saber-tooth tigers, and creatures like that can be rather dangerous. Men weren't up to it, so God gave Nimrod the bow to protect the human race. But Nimrod very soon discovered that by using the bow he could put the human race at his disposal. So he turned it against them and made himself the first king who ruled everything. He was given this tool to help people, and he found out, "Boy, what a profit this will give me! How great I can become now that I have the bow." And he did. He used it and organized the first armies, the first empire, the first tyranny, and all that sort of thing. He misused the great gift God had given him.

So everyone must pass the wealth test, and it's the hardest of all. Remember, Satan tries men and tempts them. How does he do it? You can have anything in this world for money. That's the way he is going to tempt you, of course. We are to be tested to see if we will be faithful and true in all things whatsoever the Lord commands. He is very experienced in this, and he knows what the number one temptation is. In 1 Nephi 22:23 he tells us the four things, and repeats them again in 3 Nephi 6:15. The things we can't resist are, in this order: power, gain, popularity, and lusts of the flesh. And they are all interrelated; they are all built around ego, pride, etc.

Here's an interesting speech by Brother Warner Woodworth,<sup>1</sup> who is on our faculty here. Incidentally, this is from a book that I have, too. I could have read it from that book, but I would have gotten started and never let up. He has some discreet quotations to show us what the problem is. "A top executive described his work experience in several different companies this way: 'We always saw signs of physical affliction because of stress and strain. Ulcers, violent headaches. In one of the large corporations, the chief executive officer ate Gelusil by the minute. That's for ulcers. [He] had a private dining room with his private chef. All he ever ate was well-done steak.' He went on, 'You're always on guard. Did you ever see a jungle animal that wasn't on guard? You're always looking over your shoulder. You don't know who's following you.'"

Now this doesn't seem to be the order of Zion or sacred things, where they had all things in common and no poor among them. The four things that Nephi talks about are first *power*, then *gain*, then *popularity* and *fame*, and then *sex* and all *the lusts of the flesh*. They all go together, you'll notice, if you watch your prime-time TV—as I do very faithfully, of course [laughter]. I did Friday night for once because my son was on a soap opera. In fact, had quite a big part. It was the most sordid, silly, disgusting, and sickening thing. He said, "They have to come up with a new story every day." They have to keep ten stories ahead, so the writers get together and just cook up any combination of sordid relations—some married person is two-timing his spouse; they divorce. Someone has an abortion. It goes on and on and on. It's utterly nasty, and here my son is cashing in on it! I never could correct that kid, but he's the most faithful member of the Church I've ever known. Oh boy, is he dedicated; he makes me look like an atheist.

[Quoting from Brother Woodworth's article]: " 'A man wants to get to the top of the corporation not for the money involved. After a certain point, how much more money

can you make? In my climb, I'll be honest, money was secondary [but it was there]. Unless you have tremendous demands, yachts, private airplanes—you get to a certain point [and] money isn't that important. It's the power, the status, the prestige. Frankly, it's delightful to be on top and have everyone call you Mr. Ross and have a plane at your disposal and a car and a driver at your disposal. [This is like King Noah]. When you come into town, there's people to take care of you. When you walk into a board meeting, everybody gets up and says hello. I don't think there's any human being who doesn't love that. It's a nice feeling.' ”

Then here's an interview with a [presidential campaign manager]: “ ‘*Running* for President feels exactly like *being* President. The ordinary experiences of life melt away, are replaced by a constant swirl of limousines and money, jet planes and prepared statements, secret service men and gorgeous political groupies. There is almost an infinite sense of power and prestige. It feels wonderful, which is why it's so terrible. [The Book of Mormon always zeros in on *pride* as head of the list; it's the first of the deadly sins in the classic list.] Yes, I particularly remember the feeling of riding alone in the limousine with a motorcycle escort. Everybody was peering in at me. To them I was a blur: power in motion. To me they were a frozen milieu of still, dumb, gawking faces—as if captured by a strobe light. During those moments I knew the glory the President himself knows and it was an impressive experience. Had it continued, I have no doubt that I would have succumbed to it absolutely.’ ”

Unless you have a general like MacArthur, who had immense ability, of course, it's the uniform you salute. It's an interesting thing that the military who live for rank never have any illusions about it because they know how people get promoted. We were always told it's the uniform you salute, not the person. He doesn't think he has made a great achievement; maybe they needed him, he had a friend in the right place, or something. But this sort of thing gets to us.

“The interviewer asked, ‘Succumbed to what?’ [The campaign manager replied], ‘To the atrocious assumption that I was more important than other people. [Think of your neighbors like yourself, that you are all alike. I would have this inequality done away with, said King Benjamin.] And I would not have been evil to have done so—just human. If your repeated experience is that you're in motion and everyone else is frozen on the side of the road, it is only reasonable to conclude that you are a more important person than they, that they expect you to run the universe for them. You don't feel as though you are being corrupted by power. You feel as though you are intelligently responding to empirical evidence. And *that* is power's greatest corruption: the tragic and universal misconception by the wielder of power that it *isn't* corrupting *him*.’ ”

Of course, it's the same thing with money. That's the famous dictum of Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” So look out for power! So we have these things [to look out for]. 1 Nephi 22:23 calls them “gain, power, popularity, and the lusts of the flesh.” And 3 Nephi 6:15 calls them “power, authority, riches, and the vain things of the world.” Who can handle these things? If you are going into the eternities to rule and reign in the house of Israel forever, you can't go on with a defect like this. As a mortal, you are here to be tested. “This life is a time of probation.” This is the hardest test of all—can you be trusted for infinity? This means, can you be left completely alone for endless ages without doing infinite damage? Well, who can? You make the average person president of a committee of three and he starts acting like Genghis Khan. I've seen that happen again and again. That's the world we live in.

In Alma 1:29–31 the people had the wealth and still were righteous, so the question arises: Are wealth and virtue compatible? We all like to think they are. Today we are actually preaching that sexual promiscuity and virtue are compatible; people are actually trying to believe that. They want that, too. Actually, this vice is less absorbing, less persistent, less demanding, less predatory, and less hypocritical than the pursuit of gain. Sex is way down the list compared with the other one, certainly in the Book of Mormon. But this problem here is treated by no one as well as Brigham Young, so here we go. I'm going to read you some passages from Brother Brigham, who was our greatest businessman and the greatest leader in American history. Nobody performed anything like what he did as a leader. George Washington is the only one within shouting distance of that. I just noticed this passage. I hadn't intended to read it, but this is thrown in at no extra charge. We often hear the strange perversion of that saying, "The idler shall not eat the bread of the laborer," which means that the idle rich shall not eat the bread of the laboring poor. That's the way it has been throughout history; the poor have been ground down supporting the rich. Brigham said,<sup>2</sup> "Man has become so perverted as to debar his fellows as much as possible from these blessings, and constrain them by physical force or circumstances to contribute the proceeds of their labor to sustain the favored few." He discovered the conflict at an early age. Can you have them both? He said he "sought for riches [when he was nineteen], but in vain; there was always something that kept telling me that happiness originated in higher pursuits."

This was the Sunday School lesson for last Sunday, as a matter of fact: Doctrine and Covenants 6:7. This was the first specific commandment once the conditions were agreed on with the Lord and had been clearly explained and accepted by the brethren to carry on the work. He said they must have faith and all the other things. Then he gave the first specific rule, the first explicit order in clear and ringing words: "Seek not for riches, but for wisdom . . ." They are clearly marked alternatives—not seek for wisdom more than riches, but seek for the one and not for the other. They are mutually exclusive. "You cannot serve God and mammon," the Lord says. You must necessarily hate the one and love the other, and you must "serve God with an eye which is single to his glory." This is a common rationalization, and Brigham has a lot to say about it. At the very beginning of the Church, Joseph Smith said, "God has often sealed up the heavens because of covetousness in the Church." You are not going to have covetousness and revelation.

This is more or less chronologically arranged. "In 1855 Brigham pointed out the way in which love of knowledge and love of wealth, like antipathetical sets of glands, render each other ineffective: 'It is possible for a man who loves the world [riches] to overcome that love, to get knowledge, to understand until he sees things as they really are; then he will not love the world, but will see it as it is. . . .' In 1859 [he said], 'I desire to see everybody on the track of improvement. . . . But when you so love your property . . . as though your affections were placed upon the changing, fading things of earth, it is impossible to increase in knowledge of the truth.'"

"In 1860 [he said], 'There are hundreds in this community [he is talking about the little community in the valley; it was getting quite big then] who are more eager to become rich in the perishable things of this world than to adorn their minds . . . with a knowledge of things as they were, as they are, and as they are to come.' In 1862: 'No man who possesses the wealth of wisdom would worship the wealth of mammon.' In 1863: 'If we go on 'lusting after the groveling things of this life which perish with the handling,' we shall surely 'remain fixed with a very limited amount of knowledge, and like a door upon its

hinges, move to and fro one year after another without any visible advancement or improvement [until retirement comes, and then you die of ulcers]. . . . Man is made in the image of God, but what do we know of him or ourselves when we suffer ourselves to love and worship the god of this world—riches?”

Then twelve years later he said, “When you see the Latter-day Saints greedy and covetous for the things of this world, do you think their minds are in a fit condition to be written on by the pen of revelation? . . . We frequently hear our merchants say they cannot do business and then go into the pulpit to preach.” It doesn’t seem to bother them anymore. Some feel that you can have a balance of the one and the other. He says, no balance. “A man or a woman who places the wealth of this world and the things of time in the scales against the things of God and the wisdom of eternity has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to understand. . . . The covetous, those who are striving continually to build themselves up in the things of this life [which we call success] will be poor indeed; they will be poor in spirit and poor in heavenly things.”

This is a thing Joseph Smith talked about. He said, “You must not be contracted; but you must be liberal in your feelings.”

Brigham Young said, “ ‘Let us not narrow ourselves up. . . . This same lack of comprehensiveness of mind is also very noticeable at times with some men who happen to accumulate property, and it leads them to forsake the spirit of the gospel. Does it not prove that there is a contractedness of mind in those who do so, which should not be? Business is by its very nature narrowing. [We are seeing this today with the insider trading and the takeovers; it all depends on secrecy and limited information]: Take for instance the financial circles, the commerce of the world, those business men, where they have their opponents they . . . with all the secrecy of the grave I might say, will seek to carry out their schemes unknown to their opponents in order that they may win. Like a man at the table with cards in his hands, unseen by any but himself, he will take advantage as far as he can [that’s exactly the game they are playing—that’s the stock market]. So says the politician. So says the world of Christendom, so says the world of the heathens, and it is party upon party, sect after sect, division upon division, and we are all for ourselves.’ ” Well, we are told that’s the right thing. It’s a privatized world.

Finally, “Brigham told the well-heeled Saints [and there are lots more of these to the same effect] to ‘keep their riches, and with them I promise you leanness of soul, darkness of mind, narrow and contracted hearts, and the bowels of your compassion will be shut up. . . .’ Even so, Joseph Smith had warned against “those contracted feelings that influence the children of men’ who judge each other ‘according to the narrow, contracted notions of men’ while ‘the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard.’ ” That reads like a paraphrase of King Benjamin, doesn’t it? This is the theme we have here then. It goes on in the [Doctrine and Covenants] and says, “Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich.” We mentioned the people who had everything and had nothing.

In their prosperous circumstances, they behaved themselves. There were no deserving poor, and they were equal. But this next thing is very important: Those who didn’t belong to the church took another business—they were taking to sorceries. This is what you do—games of chance and luck, the stock market sort of thing. Verse 32: “For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife [gossip about this and that]; wearing

costly apparel [dressing for success; it's all one picture—all centered around personal gain, all the prime-time mix]; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness [this is really competitive stuff that was going on]; nevertheless, the law was put in force [they had laws] upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible.”

That's an important qualification. They were doing all these wicked things, but you can't put a person in jail just for being mean, or being cruel, or for oppressing on a debt. You can't do that. We have to let people do what they want to, so this goes on. So they had two definite societies. In one they did not set their hearts on riches and were liberal to all. In the other they were in for all they could get. Were they grabbing—striving for success and all the rest!

Verse 33: They “durst not commit any wickedness if it were known; therefore, there was much peace among the people of Nephi until the fifth year of the reign of the judges.” Then everything broke loose, so this lasted for only four years. Alma got them off to a good start, but right away they were acting like this. You see that these two societies were very different from each other. There was not much chance of compromise between them; they wouldn't allow it. In the fifth year there was contention among the people. Then this Amlici took advantage of it. He was a shrewd person. He was able, effective, a born winner, and a member of the Nehor church, which will be the church from now on. Notice in Alma 2:1: “. . . He being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man [he was sharp] as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon . . .” He was a member of the Nehor church, and he drew away many people after him. When Alma got in [as chief judge] lots of people had to be excommunicated, and even more of them just left of their own free will. They just apostatized and joined the Nehors. This is what was happening, and it picked up speed with this man Amlici, who took advantage of the motion.

Verse 3: “Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.” He had put it on a different level. It was not just religion, or not just a big shot like Nehor, the evangelist. He wanted to be king. Well, this was something else; they had just abolished a kingship. What was going to happen now? Naturally, it got them worried. He got a big party following him and went for the big one. Kingship was out of fashion for only five years here because he got followers. So it alarmed the people of the church and everybody else “for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.” Not by the voice of the church, but the voice of the people. They knew they would be shut out if that's what happened. If Amlici won his victory, it would be legal because the church as such had no voice in the civil government. They had said they would do all things by the voice of the people, and if the people choose the wrong thing, that's just too bad for them. They will be responsible. So he could legitimately be elected king by their constitution—doing things by the voice of the people. He had a real power base, and “it was his intent to destroy the church of God.” That was the immediate obstacle that he had to get rid of.

Notice that he polarized public opinion. “And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land . . . in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.” Like everything going on at a political convention, splitting up etc. Verse 7: “The voice of the people came against Amlici, that

he was not made king over the people.” So he didn’t win, but he was like Satan in heaven. Satan wasn’t cast out of heaven for voting the wrong way; most of the people did the first time. The second time Satan refused to accept the verdict. He was going to resort to violence with a third of the hosts of heaven; therefore, he was cast out in a twinkling. There was no war in heaven; the word that is used is *polemos*. Joseph Smith explains that very well. Satan was cast out for refusing to accept the popular vote.

They went right ahead and wouldn’t accept the [outcome], like Pinochet wouldn’t accept it. We’ve had this happen. It happens again and again. Iraq is another classic example. Dictators just don’t accept defeat. They will hold a free election, but it goes the wrong way. Then they scream “fraud,” etc. Today this is increasingly common, of course. Nobody admits any wrongdoing today, any need to repent, any feeling of guilt. After incriminating events and circumstances, people say, “There is nothing wrong with us. It was bad advice I got. I don’t remember. We don’t agree with those laws; they are bad laws, so we won’t keep them. We don’t like the rulings, which were made by another administration.” This goes on in the world we live in.

Alma 2:8: “Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor,” and they wouldn’t accept the verdict. So they went ahead with their own program in contempt for the constitution, which they had adopted just five years before. Already they were in deep trouble. Verse 10: “Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.” The church is an obstacle now; you can see that. Like a society of social freaks, they had to get rid of them because they never would accept [the Amlicites]. So what would happen? They would have to. That was Amlici’s obstacle. They were called “Amlicites,” and the remainder were called “Nephites.” This was just what they called them; it was the matter of a name. The whole next chapter is on the subject of race. But this was just a political designation.

Verse 12: “Therefore the people of the Nephites were aware of the intent of the Amlicites, and therefore they did prepare to meet them.” Now we see what had happened; the whole thing had been planned out by Amlici beforehand. He had already made a secret arrangement to join forces with the Lamanites. He chose his strong point, not in the center or anywhere near the center of the kingdom, but right on the borders, right at the crossing of Sidon. The Lamanites were on the other side, so they immediately came to his aid. He took a strong point on a hill there, which was a classic point of defense on the border. If he was sore pressed, that’s where he expected the Lamanites would join, and that’s what happened. They [the Nephites] were going to have a rough time when this happened. This is what Amlici did; he was a very shrewd man.

Verse 15: “And it came to pass that the Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla [that was on the border; it was the boundary line], and there they began to make war with the Nephites.” That was their rallying point. They wanted to choose the time and place of meeting the enemy. That gives you a great advantage, so that’s what they did here. They took that position and waited for Alma to attack them—to draw them on as the aggressors. Then Alma, being the chief judge, went up with his captains at the head of the army. Now Alma had three jobs: He was head of the church, he was head of the government as chief judge, and he was also the head of the army. He was a man with a full-time job, and he attacked the base. We will have to stop there and leave things in a state of suspension.

1. Warner P. Woodworth, "Brave New Bureaucracy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Fall 1987): 25–36.
2. The quotations from Brigham Young and Joseph Smith can be found in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 246–48.