

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Alma 57–61

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What we're supposed to do is read the Book of Mormon, isn't it? So we are doing it. Wait a minute. Are we stuck in the mud of an eternal battlefield here? It looks that way, doesn't it? I'm trying to break loose. I jumped the gun last time in my eagerness to bring it to a close, but this is a very important part, how wars close. A thing that keeps recurring to me all the time is how much this is like the Hundred Years War, which began in 1339 and didn't end until well into the middle of the fifteenth century. The battle of Agincourt in 1415 was practically a carbon copy of the battle of Crecy, which was 75 years before. The same war just went on for over a hundred years. We have to stop these things. We may have reference to that later, but let's go on here.

Notice this nice psychological study. We are in Alma 57:28. Everything is winding down now, and they are going to get fooled. This is the interesting thing. Every sign is that the war is ending up. Moroni is going to get it all over with and have a wipe-up operation. It doesn't work at all. The whole thing collapses, and Moroni is fit to be tied because his whole great plan has fallen through. He isn't as great a general as he thinks he is, or something. ". . . we did inquire of Gid concerning the prisoners whom they had started to go down to the land of Zarahemla with. Now Gid was the chief captain over the band who was appointed to guard them [this huge amount of prisoners] down to the land." As they were taking them toward the city of Cumeni (a very good ancient word which belongs to the Mediterranean), they got news that a huge Lamanite army was already attacking Cumeni. The guards were obviously disturbed. The prisoners noticed there was tension among them, so this was their chance to break out. Remember, they were not guarding them with automatic weapons—they just had swords. Verse 32: ". . . our prisoners did hear their cries, which caused them to take courage; and they did rise up in rebellion against us." This was when they realized that the Nephites were in distress. This was a blessing, actually. They ran in a body on [the Nephites'] swords, and the remainder broke loose and escaped. But that's what they wanted; they didn't have to have them anymore. They rushed on to Cumeni, which they couldn't have done otherwise and arrived there just in time to rescue the town. So that was a good thing—you never know.

Then the next object was Manti, which was the big objective. What could they do? None of their tricks worked. Alma 58:1: ". . . they remembered that which we had hitherto done [so we couldn't pull any fast ones like that]; therefore we could not decoy them away from their strongholds." So now they settle down to a long wait. They say the war should be over by now. What's wrong? Now this long and painful wait starts, and it's the biggest trial of all. They waited for provisions from Zarahemla, but they were just a little trickle. They weren't getting any at all. The Lamanites were receiving great strength from day to day on their part. This is beginning to look bad. What about ending this war? The Lamanites began sallying forth against them, taking courage and giving them a bad time. They waited and waited many months. They were just stuck in this particular place for many months. Remember what Clausewitz said? The longer a war drags on, the greater the losses and the greater the uncertainty of what's going to happen. It's a terrible thing,

and wars have that habit of dragging on whether you like them to or not. This inaction became terrible. He said, we received two thousand men [and food], but that's all we got. This is all the assistance we received. The same thing happened just before the Bulge when Patton ran out of gas. His whole charge just ground to a halt. Why? For political reasons. As we learn here, it was politics. Churchill wanted Monty to get the glory of ending the war. They had that dagger thrust north into the heart of Europe. He wanted to give all the gas to Monty, and Monty was bound down. He didn't make any progress at all. That's what happened. Needless to say, Patton didn't like it at all. There were terrible political squabbles about that.

Notice verse 9. Why don't they send more strength to us? We don't know what's going on here. At least we don't want to be in the dark. What kind of information? ". . . therefore we were grieved and also filled with fear, lest by any means the judgments of God should come upon our land." Perhaps we are not going to win after all, [they said]. They resorted to prayer, and they waited. That was a great consolation. ". . . he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith." This is the real test, these long waits you have to go through. Then they had a new plan that I mentioned last time. They went forth against the city of Manti with everything they had. ". . . and we did pitch our tents by the wilderness side, which was near to the city." This was a provocation; it was right near the city. On the morrow [the Lamanites] sent their spies to see what was happening. They were afraid that if we were to settle down there, we would cut them off from their support. They were receiving more support, and [the Nephites] were camped practically under the gates. They had to do something to stop this. So now they were forcing them to come out. It tells us in verse 15 that they thought it would be an easy operation: ". . . they could easily destroy us with their numerous hosts." There would be nothing to it. So that's the way they were able to draw them out. Gid on one side and Teomner on the other, had on either side a path through which they were to go. Naturally, when they come out the army camp there is going to retreat, drawing them out again—the usual thing.

This is done over and over again. The reason the battle of Poitiers was won is that the Black Prince hid his banner so that nobody could see where he was. He hid all his men in some bushes on a hill at Poitiers and gave the impression that he had run away. Then the whole French force decided to take off after him. They were on either side and they did the very thing that was done here. It's an old trick and it works. ". . . I caused that Gid, with a small number of men, should secrete himself in the wilderness [it was a high willow underbrush typical of that part of France, and there were a lot of vineyards nearby. Anything to slow down the attack; it worked very well too], and also that Teomner and a small number of men should secrete themselves also in the wilderness." They were on the other side, so [the Lamanites] would go between them. But that isn't the main point. Verse 17: "Now Gid and his men were on the right and the other on the left . . . I remained with the remainder of my army, in that same place where we had first pitched our tents." They were still taunting them and trying to get them to come out. The others were all in place; now they were ready for their squeeze-play here. ". . . I caused that my men . . . should retreat into the wilderness." Of course, now they follow.

The Lamanites did follow with great speed, and we did pass right between Gid and Teomner and went right on that way. So they closed the way behind them. ". . . Gid and Teomner did rise up from their secret places, and did cut off the spies of the Lamanites that they should not return to the city." They ran to the city and took possession of it. Then what? We took our course towards the land of Zarahemla. When the pursuing army saw they were going toward Zarahemla, which was the big one, they wouldn't dare follow.

They feared a trap then. This must be something—this has been too easy. “. . . they were exceedingly afraid, lest there was a plan laid to lead them on to destruction [what were they going to do?]; therefore they began to retreat into the wilderness again.” It had been a strenuous effort, so they slept that night. While they were sleeping, the Nephite army they had been chasing went around behind them and back to the city which was ready to receive them. So the city of Manti was in their possession when they came back. Verse 26: “. . . I caused that my men should not sleep, but that they should march forward by another way towards the land of Manti. And because of this our march in the night-time . . . we did arrive before them at the city of Manti [we out-marched them]. . . . by this stratagem we did take possession of the city of Manti without the shedding of blood.” When the armies of the Lamanites arrived near the city and saw what had happened, they were filled with great fear. All they had to do was the usual thing—take off to the wilderness and be gone. Now the war seems to be over, this ranging around and wanton destruction. Verse 31: “. . . our fathers and our women and our children are returning to their homes.” Notice, everybody is going back home again now. They know the game is over. Everybody knows who’s going to win, so they are starting to relax. But that’s a very dangerous thing to do.

This is Helaman’s letter reporting in verse 34: “Now we do not know the cause that the government does not grant us more strength; neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength.” What’s going on there? Is it inside political fighting? “We do not desire to murmur,” he says, but “we fear that there is some faction in the government, that they do not send more men to our assistance”— which is exactly what it was. In fact, they had taken over the government. Notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, we believe that the Lord will deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, [he said]. The Lamanites have fled back home to the land of Nephi. Remember, the land of Nephi was a Lamanite land. “But behold, they have received many wounds.” It’s not a happy situation. They have been there a long time, but it’s slowing down.

Verse 41: “. . . that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us.” That’s what the issue is, to get back that which the Lamanites had taken away from them. This was not a war of aggression, but just to take back the territories. That’s the way [fighters in] ancient wars did; they seized territories. The object of ancient wars and the wars of the Middle Ages was not to have battle, but to avoid battle. For example, Edward III would go over to France to reclaim his lands which the French king had just run over. What would happen? He would destroy everything in sight. He’d spend months, and there would be no pitched battle. He and the French king wouldn’t engage each other—they would avoid it. What was he doing? One region, such as Anjou, now belonged to France, so the best thing he could do was to destroy it. That’s the way he got at his enemies, destroying everything they had. So he destroyed all the villages and all the crops and killed everything. They did that for months, ranging around like that with no intention of having a battle. Then he would go back to England with a great fanfare of banners flying and have a great celebration. At that time a large part of southwestern France belonged to England. Then the French king would come back, overrun the land, and do the very same sort of thing. It was wild. And that long war ended up in what? Organized crime—just exactly as we go into the book of Helaman from this. Without a break we go into the organized crime of the book of Helaman. So this is the issue.

After Moroni had read this letter of Helaman’s, he rejoiced greatly that they had been holding their own. And he announced it to the land round about. He immediately sent an

epistle to Pahoran to strengthen Helaman. He said, why don't you give more forces to Helaman? This was the first letter he sent to Pahoran. Then the war is virtually over, so he has a master plan to wind it up. That's what he is going to do. He's going to roll up the whole front and end it all. Various people had great plans like that in the last war, and they didn't work. Notice it tells us that was what it was [verse 4]: ". . . he began again to lay a plan that he might obtain the remainder of those possessions and cities which the Lamanites had taken from them." There were a lot of these cities, so he was going to roll up the front and take them one after another. The key city was Nephihah. He wanted to make a clean sweep. From there he intended to go to the city of Moroni and the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton, which had been attacked by the Lamanites. They had driven a lot of Lamanites out of cities so far. What did [the Lamanites] do? They went over and joined the Lamanite army and made it stronger. They didn't all go home; some of them did. We'll see more of them start going home. They had come over and joined the Lamanites in this part of the land, so they were having a buildup. This is just like the Bulge. It's a long, big buildup, and it catches them completely by surprise. It catches the great Moroni by surprise.

Verse 7: ". . . by the command of Ammoron [there's that rascal again] they came forth against the people of Nephihah, and they did begin to slay them with an exceedingly great slaughter." All of a sudden it was just like the Bulge, a massive breakthrough that caught them completely by surprise and rolled over one city after another. The people would flee from one city to the next, and they'd all gang together and flee from that one. It was a brilliant success for Ammoron. ". . . the people of Nephihah were obliged to flee before them; and they came even and joined the army of Moroni." They were building up on each side.

Moroni was wrong. Verse 9: ". . . he supposed that they would easily maintain that city." He had not left Nephihah sufficiently defended. He thought it would be strong enough to hold its own. The Lamanites were weakened; they had lost their morale. Things were running down. We can relax [they thought]. Remember the 110th Division which was new. It had only been in Europe two weeks. It had never had any combat and knew nothing at all. All very green, it was covering twenty-eight lines of front. Two lines from a dozen German divisions, including three powerful tank divisions, were just two miles away there. They fooled us completely. It didn't fool me, but that didn't do any good. I made out a situation map and told them what was going to happen, and it did. I knew even the day. A special day with Hitler, who followed astrology, was December 17. I said, "The 17th of December is going to be a breakthrough. The sixth paratroop will come through here and the tenth panzer." This is what happened here. Notice that Moroni was fooled. He supposed that he would easily maintain the city, because you want to believe that. We didn't want to go. We went down to Corps that day to find out if they had any maps. They said, "We haven't sent anyone on patrol because we are moving tomorrow. Can't you see we're all packing this stuff? [They were packing everything.] Don't bother us; we are going away. We are going to retire and go into a rest area." That's what happens.

Verse 11: "And now, when Moroni saw that the city of Nephihah was lost he was exceedingly sorrowful [his pet project], and began to doubt, because of the wickedness of the people." You have to blame someone. As Clausewitz says, you always have to blame somebody in a war, and it's always possible to find somebody. He blamed the wickedness of the people, and his chief captains stood around nodding agreement. "They doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people." The staff agreed. But then he took

the next step and blamed the government. “And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government.” He didn’t know who the government was. They had been completely replaced by a lot of rascals. Then he wrote again to the governor who was Pahoran. If you think his letter on the exchange of prisoners to Ammoron was tactless, this one breaks all the rules for lack of tact. But it isn’t. There’s a point to this letter, you’ll see. It makes pretty good sense, after all. He wrote to Pahoran “who [was] the chief judge and the governor over the land, and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war.” He said, you have been chosen to manage the national defense, and you are not doing it. As a matter of fact they weren’t. Verse 2: “For behold, I have somewhat to say unto them by the way of condemnation . . . ye have been appointed to gather together men, and arm them with swords [and protect the country] . . . against the Lamanites, in whatsoever parts they should come into our land.” But you are not giving us any support, he said. Our men have suffered exceedingly. “. . . great has been the slaughter among our people . . . while it might have otherwise been if ye had rendered unto our armies sufficient strength and succor for them [you could have stopped all this]. Yea, great has been your neglect towards us.”

He has a picture of people quite prosperous back home, as he describes them later on. What’s wrong here? Verse 6: “. . . we desire to know the cause of this exceedingly great neglect; yea, we desire to know the cause of your thoughtless state.” Then he says he knows the cause already—because you are sluggish, reluctant, incompetent, and everything else. He jumps to a conclusion. This is a marvelous passage, isn’t it? “Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor [Moroni gets some good digs in; this is humorous], while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren—Yea, even they who have looked up to you for protection [what are you giving them?]. . . . But behold . . . ye have withheld your provisions from them [well, had they withheld them?]. . . . And now, my beloved brethren—for ye ought to be beloved; yea, and ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently for the welfare and the freedom of this people; but behold, ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance . . . could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you?” You could trust in him like they did at Salonika, the last of the great Turkish overthrows. The people at Salonika thought God would bless them and couldn’t possibly lose. Well, they were wrong. They had a secret weapon that could wipe them out, but the enemy had it too. They didn’t know that.

Verse 12: “Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness?” It’s their own fault if they are poor. We say things like that. It’s their own fault if they have bad luck. It’s their own fault if they get beat. No, it is your condemnation. Then he says an interesting thing. This seems to be a settlement that makes everybody unhappy: “For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked.” He lets the wicked go ahead and be wicked so that he can punish them, but the righteous take a beating in the meantime. “What kind of justice is that?” you say, Well, that’s the way the world goes. This is the point he makes: They are not lost because they are slain; you think they are. “. . . but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God”—as we saw from the case of Alma and [Amulek] viewing the burning of the women and children. That looked like such a terrible thing, but Alma said, “Don’t stop it.” It’s not as bad as you think. For the righteous it isn’t bad at all.

Verse 14: “And now behold . . . I fear exceedingly that the judgments of God will come upon this people, because of their exceeding slothfulness.” That’s a crime. Not to do anything can be sinful. As I said, the first rule of the Generalstab to any officer is, “Do something. It’s better to do the worst possible thing than to do nothing.” That’s a very strong thing to say, but that’s the slogan because you must do something. And slothfulness. Are we exceedingly slothful today? Well, in what regard are we exceedingly slothful? What are we supposed to be finding out? “. . . yea, even the slothfulness of our government, and their exceedingly great neglect towards their brethren.” Well, we are certainly neglecting our brethren. This is a self-centered, **me** generation. It’s an interesting thing that this is a tendency in the country. This is the thing that would happen. We were taking off for one operation at Ramsgate at night. The permanent cadre, the staff that were there, were having a big party. They were having a binge, a great old time. They were nearly all drunk. Our boys got out to load onto the C-47s, the Dakotas, these slow, lumbering old things. They were good work horses but not very fast. They would come in at 55 miles an hour. Anyone could blast them out of the air. They [the permanent staff] lined up on either side and shouted as they went down, “Good-bye, suckers. You’ll be sorry.” They were laughing their heads off. But I knew they were secretly envious of these boys. They knew [the boys] were doing what they should be doing. They [the staff] all got drunk that night, and some terrible things happened as a result that I found out later on. Overnight in passing through a place, I was billeted with a gang of that same crew from Ramsgate. They told what happened to them that night; we won’t go into that.

Verse 15: “For were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies.” Again, you notice that civilization always dies at the top. [We have the attitude] I’m doing all right, me first. I was in Athens a few years ago, and the colonel in charge of the base there at Athens had just joined the Church, a very good man. They had just had a psychological test in brainwashing, which was a big thing in those days, because there was so much brainwashing in various parts of the world. They tried it on the Greek soldiers, and they tried it on the American soldiers. They could never brainwash the Greek soldiers; they could never shake a Greek at all. They felt loyalty to each other. They felt a brotherhood that was very strong. With the Americans it was a cinch. They had to show each individual it was to his advantage. Of course, it was an imaginary situation. But they offered them strong inducements in their own interest—a promotion, money, or the best rations (assuming they were prisoners of war). He said the Americans would tumble every time. For their own particular interest, they would be willing to sell out anyone. That was very, very disturbing. But you couldn’t get the Greeks to do it no matter what you did. Can we be true and faithful if it’s the “me first” generation? I’m glad the 80s are coming to a close. I don’t think it’s going to last.

So civilization always dies at the top. You can’t say it dies at the bottom. You can’t say the great unwashed, the rabble, are responsible for the overthrowing of anything. They are always there. The Lord said, the poor you have always with you. If you want to practice your charity, you are free to do it, as he said to Judas. But if there is failing at the top, then a civilization will decline. The bottom is dead level. You don’t have to worry about them; they are always there. You always have the riff-raff, inner cities, and things like that. But when the people at the top lose their integrity [there’s trouble]—“the wickedness which first commenced at our head.” That’s where it begins.

Verse 16: “Yea, had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; Yea, were it not for these king-men [this politics business] who caused so much bloodshed among

ourselves; yea, at the time we were contending among ourselves, if we had united our strength as we hitherto have done [this never would have happened. It's the personal factor again]; yea, had it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us . . ." It's the desire of certain individuals for power, office, and authority. Without that we'd have had no trouble at all. ". . . yea, if we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies, for it would have been done, according to the fulfilling of his word." The word is not always fulfilled? No, he said [God's] word is always conditional. If you had kept the commandments, we would have had no trouble at all. We would have dispersed our enemies without trouble.

Verse 17: "But behold, now the Lamanites are coming upon us, taking possession of our lands [all of a sudden] . . . and this because of the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men. . . . For we know not but what ye yourselves are seeking for authority." This is written to Pahoran and the government. Well, he doesn't know. He admits he doesn't know, but now he assumes he does and talks to him like a Dutch uncle. This is just a suggestion though. He knows something is very wrong, and this is what it naturally is. Remember, he'd had a lot of experience already with these king-men. He knew how they operated. He knew what the situation was, and he knew their strength and their appeal. "We know not but what ye are also traitors to your country . . . ye are surrounded by security, that ye do not cause food to be sent unto us, and also men to strengthen our armies. Have ye forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? [he starts lecturing them like this] . . . Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?" He changed the person there [to we]. You notice, the Lord is not going to come and rescue you while you sit on your throne. He has provided you with the means. I'm reminding you that you have the means, and what we want is that.

Verse 22: "Yea, will ye sit in idleness while ye are surrounded with thousands of those, yea, and tens of thousands who do also sit in idleness . . ." Everybody wasn't out at war at all. It wasn't the Nephites versus the Lamanites. This was a relatively small army going out and doing this thing. Four thousand men was as much as they got—two thousand was quite a host, when they could get them. Tens of thousands stayed at home. ". . . while there are thousands round about in the borders of the land who are falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding?" He makes it as dramatic as possible. It's a rhetorical question, of course. "Do ye suppose that God will look upon you as guiltless while ye sit still and behold these things? [inactivity can be a crime here] . . . the inward vessel shall be cleansed first." I'm talking about you, he says. This was a well-known proverb of the time. What we call cosmetic improvements should wait—the dress standards, the campus. Mormon tells us that it's the inner part of the vessel that comes first. We don't care much about that, but we are great on the outer part of the vessel here. The covenants that we have made come first. We like to say, "It's the little things that count."

Here's an interesting item that came from the newspaper on Saturday. This is Lebanon today. You know what's going on—everybody is shooting up. The two factions never stop shooting. "While shells slammed into Beirut Saturday night, the moneyed elite of the Fara Club, an hour's drive from the burning city, dined and danced the night away to the strains of 'Whatever Will Be Will Be.'

"'They are like people from another planet' [this is just the way our friend Moroni is writing now], said one West Beirut resident, who had suffered months of artillery

bombardments in a city without power and short of food and water. [Well, that's exactly Moroni's situation, isn't it? What do the others do?] At the mountain resort the conflict seemed a long way off, even though the Syrian front lines were only two miles away. In the swimming pools, on the tennis courts, in the expensive French restaurants Lebanon's smart set is displaying its traditional zest for life as if nothing had happened." They go on living it up while all these people are dying around them—exactly the situation in the Book of Mormon. Strange coincidence, isn't it? Strange people and strange land. Remember, these are the same stock as Laman's people. "Can you imagine [it sounds like Moroni talking, doesn't it?] that with this sort of madness we are still building ski resorts?" said the hotel manager, Nicholas Katan. Katan feels the club proves a point—that Lebanon must prevail however bad the situation on the streets of the battered capital. 'If we did not have this, we would have disappeared a long time ago,' he said. It's the psychology of keeping up the morale. At least 760 civilians have been killed and 3,000 wounded in the past five months of madness—as Syria, backed by the leftist and Moslem militia allies and Christian army commander Michael Alloun [who is the worst] forces sought to destroy each other. The Fara Club, a chalet development northeast of Beirut, boasts three restaurants, two bars, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a squash club. For those able to afford \$300,000 a lot to buy land and build a chalet, it's not a bad place to sit out the war. It has its own roads, garage, wells and generators, and enough supplies to last a thousand people for six months." So within a few miles, within easy hearing distance, there you are. It's the same thing going on that we have here. It happens in our world. How selfish people can be. How selfish we all are, aren't we? They sit in idleness while thousands die. These people have no food; they have nothing. There's no power or anything in the city. Yet these people don't give it the slightest concern. They are living the "life of Riley" up there. They're rich. They're buying property and building chalets up there. It's absurd. As the manager of the hotel said, "Can you imagine it?"

Now he stirs them in verse 24: ". . . begin to be up and doing . . . it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great head of our government." Now he brings accusations. I noted in Alma 49:11 that Moroni himself, before he launched out on these great enterprises, had altered the management of affairs among the Nephites. It was a big political shakeup to put things in order before he started out for his big defense project. Now he wants to do it again. We have to clean house again, he said, "the inward vessel, even the great head of government." He had been authorized to do it before. He had been given plenary powers, and he did it. Now he is going to use those powers and reorganize the government if he has to. It's not as crazy as you think. ". . . I will leave the strength and the blessings of God upon them, that none other power can operate against them." So he's going to leave his men under the strength and blessings of God, and he's going to go to town.

Verse 27: "And I will come unto you, and if there be any among you that has a desire for freedom . . . even a spark of freedom remaining [he gets caustic here], behold I will stir up insurrections among you [that's a fine way for the general to talk, isn't it?], even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct." Notice he doesn't specify. Whoever it is is what he's saying here. They are the ones he is after. He says, I'm going to put them out of operation. "Yea, behold I do not fear your power nor your authority [he has a lot of certainty here] . . . and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss." Whose iniquity? He is not charging anyone in particular here, but whoever it is who has caused this—you who have desires to usurp authority. ". . . the time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defense of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon

you and visit you even to your utter destruction. . . . except ye do administer unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword [this is open rebellion he is promising], insomuch that ye can have no more power to impede the progress of this people in the cause of our freedom. For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people,” He is hotter than a firecracker here. “Behold, can you suppose that the Lord will spare you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites [now he makes a case for the Lamanites; they are not the bad ones, after all], when it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred, yea, and it has been redoubled by those who have dissented from us [they have gone over and joined the Lamanites], while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world?” [The Lamanites] thought they were fighting for a cause of some sort. They are less reprehensible, but you are just ambitious. You want to be big shots [he said]. That will do it.

Verse 33: “Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. Behold, the Lord saith unto me: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them [the guilty parties]. . . . And behold, if ye will not do this I come unto you speedily; for behold, God will not suffer that we should perish with hunger [this is a desperate situation; they are perishing with hunger]; therefore he will give unto us of your food, even if it must be by the sword [we’ll come and take the food if we have to have it]. Now see that ye fulfil the word of God. . . . I seek not for power, but to pull it down.” We find out a little later that he retires at the age of 39. He could have become the dictator of the country. He was the national hero. He never raised a sword again. He died at the early age of 47, apparently from wounds because he went through a lot of things. He just lived eight years after he retired. Soon after Moroni had sent this epistle to the chief governor, he received the answer from Pahoran.

Now I’m going to talk about the Bar Kochba Letters, a very interesting thing. In [1961] they found the Bar Kochba Letters. Bar Kochba was the great hero who was going to deliver the Jews from the Romans in 130 A.D. That’s where these letters come from. (It is sometimes spelled with ch and sometimes with k.) This is the way Yadin spells it in his book on the Bar Kochba Letters. In the Cave of Letters in [1961] they found documents from farms. In the extreme end of the Cave of Letters on the north side of the Nahal H̄ever [that’s the very deep gorge, very much like Rock Canyon; I’ve been up it] between 3:00 and 4:00 o’clock in the afternoon of 15 March 1961, Professor Yadin put his hand into a crevice in the floor of the cave and lifted out a goatskin bag containing a woman’s materials for mending her family’s clothes on their sad and forced vacation [they were hiding out there not too far from Jerusalem].¹ Stuffed away under the stuff at the very bottom of the bag was a bundle of papyrus rolls in a cloth. Among those was the deed to a farm at En-gedi, etc. Bar Kochba is the great hero of the Jews. Is he a real historical figure? Yes, he’s real because we have letters actually signed by his hand, that were found in that cave.

This is what he tells us. This is the situation. They weren’t getting any help from the Jews at headquarters up north at En-gedi. Why weren’t they getting any help? Bar Kochba’s war, like Moroni’s, was a holy war. A “Messianic war” it is called, with fanatical concern for the temple. In the struggle for liberation the hero found his hands full, dealing with all kinds of people and problems [these are the letters of Bar Kochba]. For one thing he found that “some of the wealthier citizens” of the city were “evaders of national duties” [we’re

right back in Moroni's position] in his day, as their ancestors had been in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:5). Specifically, they were "disregarding the mobilization orders of Bar Kochba" [they weren't joining up at all], who became exceedingly angry and issued dire threats against them, including the death penalty." (Compare this with Moroni in a like situation; I quote some of these things we've just been talking about here. Bar Kochba had to deal with just such characters, and he did it in the same way Moroni did.) To the "brothers" (he calls them his brethren, just as Moroni does all to whom he writes) in the city of En-gedi he personally wrote a letter in Hebrew that survives to this day: "To Masabala and to Yehonathan; *bar Be'ayan*, peace. In comfort you sit eating and drinking [doesn't that have a familiar ring?] from the property of the House of Israel and care nothing for your brothers." You don't give any care at all.

If this had been discovered before Joseph Smith's day, you would say, "What obvious plagiarism. That's so gross—it's just too apparent for words." But wars are very much alike, I'm afraid. They use the same expressions here. "You care nothing for your brothers" is Yadin's translation of the Hebrew letter. It's clear Hebrew to read. Moroni says, "Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor . . . while they are murdering thousands of your brethren."

If this sounds shockingly severe, the provocation was terrible. Moroni, like Bar Kochba, was holding on by the skin of his teeth. "Whatever we may think of Bar Kochba's harsh tone [this is Yadin commenting on Bar Kochba's letter] it is quite clear that Yehonathan (an important leader) was not the most loyal of subordinates." He hadn't been able to trust him, and there were others like him in high office, especially as things grew worse.

This is the difference between them. The secret of Moroni's success was his essential gentleness. He brought the Lamanites around actually as soon as the king was dead. Remember *shakh* is the shah and *māt* is the word for dead in all Semetic languages. The Germans call it *Schach*; we call it chess. The Russians call it *shakh mat*. They give it the whole name: "The king is dead." Once the king or the shah is gone, you have all his men. So your object is not to wipe out as many pieces as you can on the board but to save as many pieces as you can. That's where your skill is, because that army is going to be yours when you win. This is the Asiatic policy of *shakh mat* which becomes the great game. The secret of Moroni's success was his essential gentleness. He always called a halt to the fighting the instant the enemy, whom he called his "brethren," showed the least inclination to parley. But Bar Kochba carried through with his threats, and that was his undoing. He could have won if he hadn't done that. He didn't follow the policy that Moroni did, who became immediately softened when he read the letter of Pahoran. He immediately understood what was going on then. But here we have this on Bar Kochba: It has often been said that Bar Kochba's undoing was lack of such a redeeming quality. [Quoting Yadin:] "His brutality, according to some sources, was manifested in the way he killed the revered Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'in . . . who Bar Kochba suspected of betraying the secrets of Bethar (a city under attack) to the Romans." Remember, they were attacking cities and besieging cities. He suspected that a certain rabbi had betrayed him in a city, so he put the rabbi to death. The rabbi hadn't betrayed him. It's a Book of Mormon situation very much here, isn't it? "This cruel act, according to the same sources, caused Bar Kochba's death and the fall of Bethar." He lost his case because he was cruel.

This is a part that's very interesting. When another leader, Galgoula, was called to task for holding out supplies, including a cow, he wrote to his superiors to explain: "Were it not

for the Gentiles [the Romans] who are near us, I would have gone up and satisfied you concerning this lest you say that it is out of contempt that I didn't go to you [with the food]." We've been held up. The Gentiles have blocked our way. They've taken over, and we couldn't get to you. I want you to know this lest you get the wrong idea and say that it is out of contempt that I did not go to you.

Moroni said the same thing of them, and Pahoran replied just as Galgoula did, "And it is those who have sought to take away the judgment-seat from me that have been the cause of this great iniquity . . . they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen that they have not come unto you. . . . in your epistle you have censored me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry . . ." So this is exactly the same situation again. The food couldn't get through. I want you to know why so that you won't get mad and censor me for it [he said]. These parallels are not only striking—sometimes they are positively stunning. You wonder, where has Joseph been to pick up all this information about how things were done in those days?

Then we have the letter here in Alma 61: 1: "Behold, now it came to pass that soon after Moroni had sent his epistle unto the chief governor, he received an epistle from Pahoran." This is interesting. Why hadn't he heard from them long before? He immediately explains why. There's a state of complete crisis—not only complete insecurity, but everything was totally disrupted, the communications and everything else. He tells the situation. I, Pahoran am not mad at you. ". . . I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul. But behold, there are those [plenty of people] who do joy in your afflictions [you are right when you feel that something is wrong], yea, insomuch that they have risen up in rebellion against me [very serious], and also those of my people who are freemen." They are extremely numerous. They have taken over the government. "And it is those who have sought to take away the judgment-seat from me that have been the cause of this great iniquity [they had a complete takeover]; for they have used great flattery [What is flattery? Remember: promises, hyperbole, good guys, standing tall, greatest civilization. That's flattery], and they have led away the hearts of many people [by that sort of talk], which will be the cause of sore affliction among us; they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen [they couldn't get through] that they have not come unto you." They have blocked the way so that they couldn't come to you. It's not only intimidation, but they have taken over everything.

Verse 5: ". . . I have fled to the land of Gideon. So they had to flee out. He wasn't even in Zarahemla when the letters came. ". . . I have sent a proclamation throughout this part of the land . . . they are flocking to us daily, to their arms [there was a backlash; it had gone too far] . . . insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us . . . do fear us." They've gotten so numerous now. The backlash is beginning to be noticed. "They have got possession of the land, or the city, of Zarahemla; they have appointed a king over them, and he hath written unto the king of the Lamanites, in the which he hath joined an alliance with him." They are in cahoots with the Lamanites now. Things are going to look very bad. This war isn't going to end the way we thought, unless something is done in a hurry. Just when you think everything is going right, this is the sort of thing that can happen. You never can be sure. They are in an alliance with the Lamanites, and their idea is to partition authority later on. But you know perfectly well that [Ammoron] is going to take over the whole thing when he can. That was Amalickiah's idea. ". . . and he shall be placed king over this people when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites."

See, the Lamanites were not politically minded, but they were looked to as a power base

for ambitious individuals of either side to keep things stirring up and supply them with forces. “I, Pahoran, do not seek for power [you think I do, but I don’t any more than you do, he says], save only to retain my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. . . . We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land.” It is all fought on their [Nephite] territory; they do not have troops abroad or foreign bases or things like that. “We would not shed the blood of our brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us.” They didn’t do it for being on the wrong side because they just meet them in battle when they take up the sword.

Verse 9 is very strong. Pahoran says, I don’t ask for power. He talks about liberty and being free. It isn’t rhetoric, because he says in verse 12: “We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God.” It isn’t just rhetoric to say, “Freedom, freedom” and all this sort of thing. All people use that line. But he says, we would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage to the Lamanites if it were the will of God, “requisite with the justice of God.” If he should command us to, after all this talk of liberty.

It’s very interesting. Thebes was one of the great free cities of Greece, as you know. It had been under a dictator, and they finally threw the dictator off. Everybody went around saying, “Thebes is free—puke where you want to.” It’s a vile thing to say, but that’s the idea. That’s all it meant to them. They used a stronger word than that. Liberty always begets boredom if there is nothing that goes with it. This is a phenomenon you will commonly find in the military. Spoiled, rich young men like to be drafted. I’ve seen them enjoying themselves for the first time in their lives when they weren’t just bored stiff. They liked to be told what to do. They liked to have to get up at a certain time and be smart and do certain things. They enjoyed it thoroughly. I know the son of one of the richest men in San Francisco. He thought it was great. The first real fun he had ever had in his life was this discipline, because he had never had that. He was just bored sick. This is a very interesting thing. What is your freedom? What is your liberty? To enjoy discipline and the imperatives of necessity.

He continues here. He has a plan. “Therefore, come unto me speedily with a few of your men,” whatever you have and we will join up. I have a few provisions for them. I can help you out with that. Verse 17: “Gather together whatsoever force ye can upon your march hither, and we will go speedily against those dissenters.” We’ve got to get rid of them first, he says, because they own Zarahemla. We’d have nothing to win in the war. They had to spread the war. This was no longer politics. They had spread it abroad.

Notice this: It’s their own city of Zarahemla that is completely controlled by [the rebels], but he says, would that be the right thing to do? After all, they have taken it over. “. . . for I was somewhat worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren.” They still have conscience. As Moroni does, so does Pahoran here. They have taken up arms and been very aggressive, but he doesn’t know whether it’s right to go against them or not. But you said, “the Lord hath commanded you,” so I think it is clear. He has given us the signal. We will go then in that case. But he hesitated, just as Moroni often hesitated whether it be the right thing to do. “. . . that liberty wherewith God hath made them free.” Is this a special kind of liberty? What kind is it?

I see we’ve come to the next one. I thought I would be through with wars today, but we go to another kind now. We’ll get to Helaman next time, and then the great crime story.

We love crime today. We batten on it, so we are going to get plenty of crime. As Joseph Smith said of the mobs, they want mobs, and they'll have plenty of mobs. After the Saints were driven out, then the real bad mobs came—the Bushwhackers, the Jayhawkers, “Bloody Kansas,” and all the rest of it.

1. Brother Nibley is reading from his book review of *Bar Kochba* by Yigael Yadin (New York: Random House, 1971). Only the information he quotes from Yadin is in quotation marks. This book review appeared in *BYU Studies* (Autumn 1973): 115–26.