

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 4, Lecture 104
4 Nephi 1:27–Mormon 2
Church Growth and Decline
Mormon Leads the Nephites

We're following the sad declension by which the earthly paradise in 4 Nephi declined into the type of living hell which we find in many parts of the world today. This is one of the most valuable texts we have in the world—there's nothing like it. It shows us step by step exactly how it happens, so let us pay attention. I hoped to finish it the last time and get on to the even more tragic book of Mormon, perhaps today.

We got to verse 27, and here we see that the new churches retained their traditions, of course. They were not seeking to be original. They claimed to be the old true church. This is the cafeteria theory of the church, you know. Some years ago my son was a bishop in San Francisco. There was a rich man in the ward who delighted in the gospel because he said it is just like a cafeteria. You can take what you please, and you can leave the rest. Well, that's exactly what was happening here, you see. We are in 4 Nephi 1:27: "There were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel." They took some parts. They kept parts of the gospel, but they got rid of others they didn't like. Well, we do that the same way. "They did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness." And they went further than that. They had the gospel. They denied most of it, though, but they still had the forms and the ordinances and they administered them. They "professed to know the Christ." They accommodated their doctrines to the market. They supplied temple recommends on demand. It says here they "did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden," to the wrong people. They knew what was sacred. They claimed to have it and sell it. Verse 27 tells us a lot. Well, every one of these verses is loaded, you'll notice.

It was very popular. The church grew phenomenally as a result of this. Remember, this is the church we're talking about. This is not apostates. Give them what they want and you'll win. This is the Nehor story already. Remember, the Nehors were so permissive and they taught the people exactly what they wanted to hear, so the Nehors grew like crazy. We do that today, of course. You have a survey. You take a poll and decide what people want, and then that's what you give them. Then you'll get elected, of course. Verse 28 also teaches another thing—that the phenomenal growth of the church is no proof that it's true at all, or that it's on the true path. It grew faster than anything because it was very popular. So don't use popularity as a gauge either.

There was a more active group that aggressively attacked the original church. They made fun of their miracles. Well, who would make fun of a miracle? Miracles are at a premium. They are what we want. "They did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them." They could see the miracles. Well, miracles do not convert people—that's another point. The miracles had a very opposite effect here. They despised what they couldn't see. Of course, miracles are going on that you may not recognize as miracles, too. Remember, as Buckminster Fuller tells us, "It's all a miracle in the end." As Morris Klein, the great mathematician says, "It's all mystery." A mystery is a miracle if it happens at all and you can't possibly explain it. What is a miracle? It's a *miraculum*. It means "a little thing that makes you wonder." Notice, it's a diminutive. *Mirara* is to wonder, to admire with open mouth in admired amazement. So that's what a miracle was, and they despised anything like that. They just brushed them aside, and you can do it with everything. But they had the power and the authority. They had the office. You'll

notice here (verse 30): “Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus.” Well, if they belonged to another church, how come they exercised power and authority? Not legal. It’s religious here, because it was a sacral state, “. . . who did tarry with them [the ones that were foolish enough to remain], and they did cast them into prison.” It didn’t do much good, though. They were aggressive and obnoxious; they grew up in the heart of the old church; and they gave a bad time to the old disciples of Jesus. They singled them out as an element which would have to be removed, along with their miracles. But the others having retained their integrity also retained their powers, and they couldn’t be stopped. They kept right on.

Now we’re getting an interesting situation, and all this is going on inside the church. They’re not divided into two others. It was the same way with the persecutions in the Reformation and afterward during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. You find the same sort of thing going on. The best example is with the Jews, as we’ll see.

In verse 31 what do we have happen? The people hardened their hearts and sought to kill them. That’s a strange phenomenon. But no, “. . . even as the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus.” Here you see it. We’re not dealing with opposite religions here at all. The situation in Jerusalem was the same thing. Jesus and the Scribes and the Pharisees and the doctors and the multitude all followed the law of Moses. They were all preaching the law of Moses. Palestine was the scene of all sorts of cults. You wouldn’t be persecuted for not being a Jew. (We see that in the Book of Mormon, too.) The cult of Jezebel, for example, flourished at that time, but that was in Philistia. The Jews would go over and practice that. But the Greeks were very influential and the Egyptians were very influential in [Palestine] at the time of Lehi, and their religions flourished and were not persecuted or anything like that. That isn’t the issue at all here, you see. But if you don’t want to believe, miracles will only offend you. And remember the miracles of Jesus, culminating with the raising of Lazarus, turned the leaders of the Jews against him the most. It was the raising of Lazarus from the dead that made them finally decide that he would have to be put out of the way. They couldn’t let this go on any longer. But it’s all inside the church. The whole thing is going on there [in 4 Nephi].

Then in verses 32 and 33 they do these various things to them—pretty rough treatment. They wouldn’t treat outsiders this way. As I said, there were many cults in Palestine. You were not blamed if you don’t belong to that particular cult. Only a Jew could be punished, you see, by the Jewish law. They couldn’t lay a finger on anybody else. After all, the Romans were much stronger than the Jews in the time of Christ, when the Lord was there. The predominant religion was that followed by Pilate. Well, the tenth legion was there, and they had their cults. They had the cult of Mithra. It was very strong even at that time, and later it flourished.

These people seemed determined to ruin their own happiness. Notice verse 34. They went on hardening their hearts “for they were led by many priests.” It’s a religious movement, you know. They’re led by many priests. In the early seventeenth century you get the same sort of depravity—the restless, violent, cruel times. Everybody was cynical and heartless. They changed religions all the time. It made no difference. You had to have one or the other. And when you changed from one, you started fighting the other, and the other way around. They started going back and forth the same way. Look at the wars of Wallenstein, Gustavus Adolphus, and the rest of them. They would cynically change sides and go on fighting. This strange, insane cruelty doesn’t make sense. What kind of a history is this? The people harden their hearts, are led by many priests, and set up many churches. “And they did smite upon the people of Jesus; . . . they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness.”

It’s the old bad business they’re back to, and it’s pretty bad. Well, you see it in the world today. Did you see just yesterday that the Christians in Lebanon resumed shooting at each other? I mean really going at each other hot and heavy with artillery, firing mortar, and everything else all day long. This is two Christian sects in the middle of Beirut, which was always considered the most

sophisticated, the most educated city in the East. You know what it's become now. Well, right before our very eyes these silly things are happening. They ruin their own happiness. Why do we do it? Well, of course, there's somebody there making it happen, because these people are normally very friendly. After all, the Jews and the Arabs and the Christians have lived very peaceably together in Beirut for some hundred years. Then all of a sudden, they have to destroy each other, but especially themselves.

Then this is an important thing, too, being led by the many priests. In the second century the church broke up into lots of sects. Epiphanius lists 88 different churches, all these splinter groups. The second century was the century of disbelief. But every single sect regarded itself as the old original church and all the others as offshoots or splinter groups. The same thing happens here. There are various churches here, each one claiming to be the original church, having the same basic doctrines, etc. So this insanity goes on. They were led by many priests and false prophets. Verse 34: "And they did smite upon the people of Jesus." That group is always there, you'll notice. It keeps pointing them out again and again. There's that little nucleus called the people of Jesus that remain faithful. They're always very much a minority. "And thus they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness." And then finally comes a real showdown. The movement ended in this great division of the people. Like the Thirty Years' War, finally the division had to come. You had to be on one side or the other. But people switched easily and often, as I've said before, and each time they heartily hated the other side.

The true believers finally asserted themselves and broke off communion with the others. Notice what happens in verse 36. This is a strange thing happening. See, this is all one big mix; it's time to sort things out. "There arose a people who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ; and among them there were those who were called by the Lamanites—Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites." These are the three tribes among the Nephites. There were the [three] Nephite tribes and the [four] Lamanite tribes. They always kept their tribal identity—we've noticed that all the way through. It's a very mixed ethnic picture, and they probably had their dialects, too. Well, there's indication of that, too.

Here the Nephites dominated the church and gave it to the whole people. Now, when they break off this way—this has happened before. In the case of Joseph Smith, for quite a while all the members of his family were still communicating Christians in various churches. Some were Presbyterians, some favored Methodism, etc. But then there came a point of decision, when it became very clear that what Joseph Smith had given them was something totally different, and then there was a complete break. Then the persecution began in earnest. But for a long time the family was distributed among these [creeds], and then it became perfectly clear when they accepted Joseph's vision what was happening. The same thing happened here. It was the Nephites who broke off here. They called themselves Nephites, and they were a very small minority. You get the impression here because of the three tribes, etc., that it was a rather arrogant thing. They called themselves the true believers, and they broke off and made the true church. No, it tells us down here in verse 40 that they were a very tiny minority, actually. "And the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God." So they weren't pulling any fancy stuff at all. They were just a small minority that decided to keep on by themselves, and this would get them into all the more trouble.

So the three tribes of [Nephites] broke off from the rest and renounced the whole thing. Again, this happens in our time. Notice this is another familiar phenomenon sociologically. We talked about Lebanon. You couldn't tell the difference between a Maronite Christian and a Jew or between a Sunnite and a Shiite Moslem in Beirut at all until all of a sudden they broke up into different factions and started fighting each other. It's the same thing in Iran today. After World War I all of a sudden the nations of the Holy Roman Empire emerged as individual nations with individual religions, individual languages, and everything. They'd always had them, but then they asserted themselves and excluded all others—like Serbia. There's a Serbian church with a Serbian

cross and a Serbian service—quite different than the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia. Then you had Slovenia, Slovakia, Bohemia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Each one had its own language and [culture]. It wasn't until after World War I that they all broke up and became absolutely separate, independent, proud nations with their own traditions, etc. So it goes and comes. Then another time they'll be united together. The Soviets brought them together again. They've tried for a United States of Europe, so we break up and we separate. It's the same sort of thing here. The feeling of union is very strong at some times, during world wars, for example. At other times the feeling of sectionalism is very strong, such as when Texas was an independent republic, the South flew its Confederate flag, etc.

A German professor by the name of Joachim in the 1930s wrote a massive work called the *Wandlungen der Weltanschauung*. In every society throughout history, from the beginning, there has been a century of binding and a century of loosening—a century when things come under strict controls and rules, and then a century of liberalizing, of breaking down. And you'll notice these are the two tendencies that go on—the gay and melancholy flux. From time to time we become more severe, more strict, more militant, etc. Then another time we become more liberal and lax. He [the German author] said that happens, and it usually runs by centuries. The eighteenth century was one of relaxation, because it was under people like Joseph II, Catherine the Great, and Frederick that there were these great liberal kingdoms. First you have the enlightened despots who let people do anything they wanted. That was the eighteenth century, and then in the nineteenth century everything tightened up with Napoleon. Anyway you have these alternate periods of binding and loosening. Which period are we in today? We're in a period of binding right now, aren't we? We're helpless, we're almost brain dead today. People do not take independent ways that are free in thinking, and things like that. We don't think about anything anymore. This is quite a contrast to earlier generations of the Church. It was all very different in the last century when I was young [laughter]. I am an Edwardian, you know. I was born during the reign of Edward VII [in 1910]. It's wonderful to be Edwardian; there have been poems about that.

So this is what happens. We see this sort of thing. Well, the Indian tribes are now trying to assert their individuality—just as today the Soviet satellites are asserting theirs. They're breaking loose. This is what's happening. Well, the same thing happens here. We've seen they broke up into tribes before; now this is happening again. Don't be surprised if it happens at certain intervals, because that's the way things go.

We're back to square one now, verse 39: “. . . even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning.” Here's Ireland, here's Lebanon, here are the Philippines, here's Cyprus, here's Armenia, here are the Sikhs, here are the Afrikaaners, etc. All the things that go on go way back. The Azerbaijanians and Armenians [are fighting] today, you know—the Malays, the Sri Lankans, and the Chinese. All throughout the world these splits are going on today, where they're teaching their children to be proud of their own culture and to hate the opposition. And you get some terrible things happening with this utter hatred. Iran is a classic example with the hostages, etc. It's irrational, wild, and extreme. You think the Book of Mormon is exaggerated. As it heats up here it becomes more and more like our world. A few generations ago this didn't make much sense, but it certainly does now. So they taught their children [to hate], even as it was in the beginning. We're told it began in the beginning with the children of Adam—the Cainites and the Sethites or Sethians, those who followed Seth. Cain taught his children to hate them and this went on ever after.

What we have here is a very religious, cult-centered civilization. You see what's emerging here, the well-known Mesoamerican pattern of religion with the familiar imagery of the overdone [art], the great ceremonial centers, and the vast wealth, ceremonial and otherwise, that we have here. Verse 41: “And they did still continue to build up churches unto themselves, and adorn

them with all manner of precious things.” This happened—the building of churches and hundreds of these towers with all their processions and their great display of precious things. So things are moving and we expect a direction here. The same thing happened with adornments during the Counterreformation in the seventeenth century. That produced the Baroque—this lavishly overdone, ornate lavish Baroque style of southern Europe, which was largely victorious. It made such an impression on the people; they got such an appetite for this theatrical, overladen, heavily burdened, gold-plastered Baroque with little putti and plaster figures all over the place. It’s quite impressive, but they said this is what heaven is like. The same thing happens here, this emphasis on adornment as a counterreformation.

The next [development] is inevitable. Our good old pals the Gadiantons must emerge now. This we’ll have to expect. Verse 42: “The wicked part of the people began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton.” That was irresistible. This is added to verse 41, where they get the forms, the ornamentation, the adornment, the splendor, etc. Now we get the Aztec aspect of it, the Mongol, the Mahdi, *deus vult*, the fanatical, the savage. Bloodthirsty human sacrifice and things like that follow later, but this comes in here now. In Christianity and Islam alike, they were the most cynical, the most greedy, the most cruel, and the most sadistic when they were most pious. It was a great thing—because only God could authorize the bloody things they were doing, so everything was in the name of God. The name of God is perpetually on their lips. A single syllable in English, all you have to do is use it and that justifies anything you want to do. God wills it. It’s God’s idea. The slogan of the Crusades: “It is the will of God.” [This is used to justify] anything we do. When King Solomon heard that the Queen of Sheba was approaching him through the desert with her army, her hordes, he said to his jinns, you go make a tunnel underground. You get to her at her camp as soon as you can and bring her throne back to me. He was going to surprise her with her throne when she came. But be sure you do it quick because we must rob her before she becomes a Moslem. It won’t be legal to rob her after she’s a Moslem—that would be wicked. But as long as she’s not a Moslem, we can do anything we want. So go and steal her throne, he said. That’s a story about Solomon. Well, that’s the principle of the thing. Like with us, of course, the Ten Commandments protect only our friends. They apply only to people we like. Thou shalt not lie; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal. Well, you’re not going to lie, kill, and steal from your friends, are you? It’s all right with your enemies; you get medals for that. The Ten Commandments only apply about 50 percent, just to the people we want to apply them to. There’s nothing wrong with killing and robbing from enemies, destabilizing their economies and things like that [spoken in irony].

Now, what do we have here? Verse 43: “The people of Nephi began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites.” I was thinking of something that St. Augustine wrote. “Oh wo to thee, thou tide of human custom. Who can resist you?” When all the people are doing one thing, no one can resist it, even though the Lord told the Jews, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” Just because everybody’s doing it, that’s no excuse. Well, here, this is what happens. Everybody gets swept along in this evil tide now, even these good people who were holding out. It’s an amazing picture here. The people who were called the people of Nephi, these righteous people, “began to be proud in their hearts.” Ten guesses why—of course, “because of their exceeding riches.” Here we go again. There is where I came in, you might say.

The greatly outnumbered Nephites began to go along with the others, of course. It was the custom. They were completely surrounded by these people, so everybody went that way. If riches were the name of the game, they could show them a thing or two, and that’s true. As you remember, people like the Quakers and certain abstemious sects, like the Dutch Reformed, quickly got very rich because of their thrifty, hard-working, sober habits. Then they became just like anybody else [because of] their riches.

So here it is now. There is the stroke of doom again. Verse 43–44: “The people of Nephi began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites. And from this time the disciples begin to sorrow for the sins of the world.” This is the turning point. Here again, we see throughout history the disciples of Jesus remain a distinct group, you notice. The disciples begin to sorrow. They must be a very small group now, really oppressed. The disciples were something special. But it’s the fatal response to the call of riches that seals the doom of the people.

The semester’s running short now. I was going to read you something from the Roman Satirist. The only great thing Rome produced was this marvelous literature of satire. It describes their civilization right down to the ground. It’s so much like ours you wouldn’t believe it.

“Please take time.”

Not today. I didn’t bring it with me; we’re not going to talk about it. It’s very funny; you’d die laughing because you’d recognize everything there. I mean it’s devastating. There was never such a commentary on wealth as Petronius [gave]. He just burns their ears, but it all comes home to us, very much so. But this is the one that seals it, you see.

Verse 45: “And . . . when three hundred years had passed away, both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another.” Well, so much for race and everything else—the good guys and the bad guys. This is not two different kinds of wickedness, you know. They’re all playing the same game. When you talk about power, gain, popularity or authority, and the lusts of the flesh (the four things that Nephi talks about), they all play that. It’s a leveling out process, a one-party system in which everything is approved or covered up. They’re all good guys now [in their eyes].

And it tells us in the next verse that they are a business civilization based on commerce and finance. “The robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. [You still have that nucleus there; I’d like to know who they were.] And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.” Notice they laid up gold and silver. It was based on finance and commerce and all manner of traffic—exchange, commerce, business, banking, and all the rest of it. These things were far more sophisticated in the ancient world than we’ve been willing to think before. They had common stock companies and everything else. We’re not sophisticated today. And this was rich soil also for the spread of the Gadianton group.

Then in verse 48, the stroke of doom again—it had come time now to hide up the records and get ready to close up shop. It’s all over when it reaches this point. Notice the finality of that word. “Ammaron, being constrained by the Holy Ghost, did hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation. [See, they’re going to close up shop now. We’ve reached the end of the story. We might as well go home here.] . . . even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ.” He hid them up for the same purpose that they’ve been hid up since the days of Adam. Enoch tells us that he hid up the books of Adam so they wouldn’t be destroyed in the flood. That’s the way the *Pistis Sophia* begins, with Enoch burying the books of Adam. He hid them up in solid and cemented them in, very much like the plates Moroni had. There was a stony shrine, a piece of solid rock with a hollow in it that was cut out and squared. He plastered it up, put in another rock, and cemented it in. That would weather the flood. That’s just a story, but it is tradition that the record has been hid to come forth in a later time. But it was always hid after the last entry had been made. It had to be pretty near the end so that you wouldn’t miss any of it, and then it was hidden up to come forth at a later time, after the earth had passed through some great trial, some great change. We know now about the ages of extermination— that these great trials and changes do take place. There have been periods of extermination when whole

civilizations have been wiped out. We'll get that when we get to the Jaredites. I thought we'd finish this chapter today.

If you have tears, prepare to shed them because we come to the book of Mormon now. It starts out with a colophon which tells us it was an autograph. It was written by his own hand. The colophon should tell you what the book is about, who wrote it, and under what circumstances. Mormon 1:1: "And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard [eyewitness account, you see], and call it the Book of Mormon." This is after Cumorah, after the whole thing is finished. This is the last conclusion that he's putting in here, and it's before the other stories. Don't think that this is following in chronological order. It isn't. This is when the whole thing is over. It is, as Tennyson would say, "the last echo of a great cry." This is the Book of Mormon proper, just this little book here. But it tells the whole story again. Here we go.

Verse 2: "And about the time that Ammaron hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me (I being about ten years of age)." Now obviously, Mormon was in all modesty a phenomenal person. He was chosen to lead the armies at sixteen (there have been generals that young before); he was recognized as a person of amazing gifts and talents. He's the one man about whom the whole thing centers here. He supports the people, then he withdraws himself. Then it breaks his heart; he has to go back to them again, etc. He's perhaps the most outsized figure in the Book of Mormon, and there are some gigantic figures in the Book of Mormon, like the brother of Jared and Nephi. But Mormon is the most tragic figure, and he is the most epic figure, actually, even more than the brother of Jared.

Ammaron came to him when he was ten years old and said, I see that you're a pretty smart brat. No, he said "I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe." You know what's going on, so I have advice. In about fifteen years from now—see, he knows the time's about fifteen years—when you're twenty-four, you go to "a hill which shall be called Shim." Incidentally, it's an interesting thing here. The Lord does not hold any special grief for stupid people. We should not cultivate that in the Religion Department or anywhere else. The hill of Shim is very interesting. What's the Arabic word for shim? It means *north*, north country. *Shim* is *north* in any Semitic language. Of course, you get *shimal* from that—the same sort of thing, the left hand when you're facing east. It's the left. And sure enough we learn a little later on that when they go further north, they get to the hill Shim. So here's another one of those places where the Book of Mormon just casually tosses off just a bit of evidence at no extra charge. But people don't notice these things.

Therefore, go to the hill Shim "and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people." He knew that the movement would be northward. It wouldn't be safe for them to remain south when they start into this long tragic retreat here.

Then he says to Mormon [verse 4], "And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are." Just take the plates of Nephi. Those are the ones we have. When will the others be found? Where's the hill Shim? "And ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people." So you add to them, bring them up to date as of fifteen years from now, he says.

Verse 5: "And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi . . ." There is another interesting comment on racism. We think the Nephites were the descendants of Nephi. Well, then what's he boasting about being a descendant of Nephi. It's a rare thing by now. A pure-blooded Nephite is going to be hard to find around there. Plainly all the Nephites were not descendants of Nephi, as we see in verse 8 here. He says they call them "the Nephites"—the Jacobites, the Josephites, and the Zoramites. This war was between the Nephites and the Lamanites, and they called them that. They're all divided this way into parties.

He was eleven years old, and he was taken by his father to a land southward to Zarahemla—the big city, the big capital. He was impressed as a little kid, he says. The land was covered with buildings, and he never seen anything like that. “The people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea.” Now this is important for the Book of Mormon, you see. We talk about such vast numbers—well, we’ll see what vast numbers are. When they gather all their forces for a big war down here, how many do they have in the army? Thirty thousand—that’s just one division. In our army 27,000 would make a division. He calls that as numerous as the sands of the sea. Well, as an eleven-year-old, he’s impressed. You’d be impressed with these things. So we have to be very careful and not be simplistic when we read the Book of Mormon. When this kid tells us that people in Zarahemla were as numerous as the sands of the sea, how many hundred trillion people are there? It doesn’t mean that at all. It’s a metaphor here, as it were the sands of the sea.

There began to be a war between the Lamanites and the Nephites while he happened to be there. Happy event. It’s like a visit to Beirut, isn’t it? “And this war was between the Nephites and the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites.” They’re operating on a tribal basis now. Verse 9: “Now the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites were called Lamanites [it was just a political title, that’s all], and the two parties were Nephites and Lamanites.” They were parties. They were not nations. They were not families. They were parties who were called Nephites and Lamanites.

Verses 10–11: “And it came to pass that the war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon, [as it usually was, the waters of Sidon was a classic battleground]. And it came to pass that the Nephites had gathered together a great number of men, even to exceed the number of thirty thousand.” Wow! Almost an army division, you see. Well, when you consider that the Russians had 150 divisions on the line at one time, that’s an army that is an army, you see. Do you know that during World War II the British never committed more than three divisions at a time? You got from the BBC that they were fighting the whole war, but they never committed more than three divisions. They couldn’t afford to; they had lost too many [in World War I].

Well, anyway, the Nephites beat the Lamanites. Three cheers. Then the Lamanites withdrew and there was peace for four years. Verse 13: “But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land.” It didn’t do them any good. (Let’s see if I have anything very wise to say here.) These four years of peace brought no improvement. The Lamanites were still the bad guys, but that’s not the problem, you’ll notice here. The Lamanites withdrew and there was peace, “but wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land.”

As Shevardnadze and others say, we hear quite often the saying that America must have an enemy. The enemy right now we’re picking in desperation is poor old Castro. The enemy must be the embodiment of evil; he can’t just be an enemy politically. He’s is now being compared to Ceausescu, although he’s a good friend of Mandella and Gorbachev and people like that. This is so we can go on. We have to have this evil enemy, so we can go on being the good guys without having to repent. This is a great convenience.

Well, anyway, removing the danger left the Nephites free to do their thing, and they just got worse. The brethren depart in verse 13, and things get very bad. There are no gifts from the Lord anymore. The Holy Ghost doesn’t come upon them anymore because of their wickedness. They’ve gone all the way, and yet they don’t worry. They’re not going to think about repentance because they know who the wicked people are—they’re the Lamanites, of course.

Verse 15: “And I, being fifteen years of age . . .” and he’s still sober. Well, after what he’s seen, I think he would be. Therefore he’s the one who says I’ve seen nothing pleasant in all of this since the days of my birth. What a time to live! And so this happened. There were no gifts. They had

cut the wires and then complained that there's no revelation, no messages. They cut themselves off, and God cuts himself off. Everything *can* shut down. There is a horror plot when God removes his spirit entirely, when there's nothing left but evil. There are such pictures, and we have them. Read the writings of Lucan or Salvian or the Lamentation Literature which is very great, both the Babylonian and Egyptian. Read the border ballads from Scotland. Talk about bleak, horrible situations. Or if you want a document of absolute personal despair, read Scott's journal when he went to the South Pole. Remember, none of them survived. The journal that comes to us came from the tent where they were all found dead. There are times when the Lord turns off the power completely. This is very dangerous if we go on thinking we don't have to repent because other people are wicked. That's what we've got the Book of Mormon for. We're going to see a lot of that. We're just beginning to warm up here.

Notice in verses 15–17, the boy Mormon is in the position of Abraham—remember, when he was young. He said he tried to persuade his family, but they “did utterly refuse to listen to my voice.” In fact, his father even volunteered him for sacrifice. It got that bad. “I did endeavor to preach unto this people,” but this was not going to do any good, so [the Lord] shut him right up. “I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold they had willfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land, because of their iniquity.” As we read in the Jaredite case, the prophets mourned and withdrew. There's nothing else you can do. God forbids him to preach; more preaching would be damnation.

So who takes over? Well, naturally the Gadianton element—about as low as you can get. Verse 18: “And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land [notice, that they mingle with Lamanites here and add their forces to them] insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them.” Remember, that's exactly what Samuel the Lamanite had said—you place all your love in your riches. Behold your riches will become slippery that you cannot hold them [Helaman 13]. Of course, they do. I mean the stock market can be wiped out in an hour. That did happen. I'm not just talking about the October 19, 1989, but I'm talking about October 1929, which I remember very well, when everybody got wiped out. I mean completely wiped out. So these things can happen. They became slippery that they could not hold them.

The very same thing happened at the end [of the Roman Empire]. I mentioned Salvian. He described what happened in the fourth century. The Roman Empire collapsed suddenly, as you know, and everything became slippery. That's why you find such interesting treasures all over Europe, because they were hidden on that occasion. Everybody hid up their treasures on the chance that they might come back and get them. Very tragic cases. Hundreds of these treasures are found. The most tragic, I suppose, is in the Cave of Letters of the Jews from when the Romans occupied Palestine. Not at Masada—we find some of them there, but in the Cave of Letters, which is nearby, we find where the people hid out for the last time. There they all died because they couldn't escape. They were in these huge caves there in the Wadi Hēver. They give us their letters and their parting words, etc.

In Europe at the end of the Roman Empire, the Bagoudi took over. They were just wandering bands that would get together and go over and start looting and raiding. They became the terror of the whole country. They continued among the free companies way down in the fourteenth century—just bands that go everywhere. And there were robber barons who set up their own castles on the passes and taxed any merchant who went through, or wouldn't let them go through. But everybody was fighting everybody else.

Well, these hells have been achieved. In fact, for long periods of time, they have been the normal condition. Life on earth has been utterly insecure. How can we be completely insecure? Well,

hang around—you'll see how it can be completely insecure. Remember at the time of the Crusades how they broke up. In 1348 there was the Danse Macabre, the plague, and all these things.

It's like the end of the ancient world here now. This is what happened at the end of the ancient world. What did they do? They went to sorcery. Everybody took to magic at that time. Everybody that was haunted. Remember, another expression from the Book of Mormon—"we are surrounded by demons," they said. How do we account for it? It reaches the point of sheer desperation. Verse 19: "There were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics [you put your only trust in these sorts of things—in astrology, in chance, in luck in the market, etc.]; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land." A spiritual vacuum, you see.

I saw the pocket contents of hundreds of German soldiers during the war—well, thousands, as a matter of fact. I had to go through them. It was different from World War I. They said just about every soldier [in World War I] was carrying a Bible. We didn't find any Bibles [during World War II], but we found rabbit's feet, lucky charms, and *crux ansata*—you found all sorts of superstition. They were superstitious, but they had no faith. It was a very sad thing. Everybody feels helpless. Everybody feels haunted. Magic and witchcraft take over [in this situation] because what else can you do? Charms and talismans abound here at this time.

Then, lucky Mormon—he launches his career. At this time they choose him to command the army, and he's fifteen or sixteen years old. Mormon 2:1: "There began to be a war again between the Nephites and the Lamanites. And notwithstanding I being young, was large in stature; therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader," at sixteen. Well, Prince Eugene was that age. Napoleon wasn't much older when he won the Battle of Marengo. He had been chosen the same way. Palnatoki, the terror of the North, who ruled from Jomsburg at the mouth of the Vistula, was the great commander of the pirates of the North. He was twelve years old. So there are prodigies in the military business, like Prince Eugene, extremely young. Alexander, you know, wasn't exactly aged. Remember, he was thirty-two when he died, and his conquests were all made in his twenties. Mormon must have impressed people, because he impressed Ammaron as being phenomenally smart, sober, and observant. He'd given that impression all along, so the people knew that they had a person of real stature here, and also large physically in stature. Mormon is a heroic figure.

Now the great retreat begins—fifty-five years of falling back now. It's very, very sad. Verses 2–3: "Therefore it came to pass that in my sixteenth year I did go forth at the head of an army of the Nephites, . . . and the Lamanites . . . did frighten my armies; therefore they would not fight, and they began to retreat towards the north countries." It doesn't become a rout yet, but the big retreat now begins. They're not going to do it. This retreat is a rear-guard action. Remember Chief Joseph who retreated for three years with the U.S. Army after him, to get over the border out of Montana. And there were the retreats of Darius and Alexander. We can think of all sorts of retreats. The retreat from Moscow [by Napoleon's forces] was over 2,000 miles—that's some retreat, you know, falling back all the time. It wasn't necessarily a rear-guard action because they weren't being hotly pursued. But there are other retreats. Zukav built up this enormous reserve, almost 150 divisions waiting for him, and from then on it was just one long retreat for the Nazis all the way from Stalingrad right back to Berlin—a tremendously long retreat. This is the sort of thing that's going to happen here. As a matter of fact, it's not as long as some of those retreats. Well, there's Xenophon's classic work on the march of the ten thousand—you might say they'd lost their shirt and were trying to get home.

Anyway, they fall back on a place called Angola (things move fast here), take possession of it, and make preparations to defend themselves. They dig in to hold out there. They fortify the city. This is the system they're going to use. They fall back on strong points, fortify them, and try to hold

them. But they drove them out and out of the land of David. Then they came to the land of Joshua, which was on the shores west by the seashore.

Why would they have these names of biblical lands here? Well, that's what we do all the time when we name our own lands. All the names we give to our lands and cities are those we had in the old country. As far as naming them after heroes of the Old Testament, this is exactly what people would do. In upstate New York, Joseph Smith's country, you have a Rome, an Athens, and a Syracuse. You have all the old classical names of towns up there. We carry our old names over, and we keep our traditions. We don't invent names cold, unless they describe either the founder of the city or some peculiar thing about it—Battle Mountain or something like that.

Verse 6: "And we marched forth and came to the land of Joshua, which was in the borders west by the seashore." We could follow these on the map—sad story. There they gathered again together in one body. That's a bad sign, when you gather together in one body. You should keep two bodies so you can counterattack and all sorts of things. As Clausewitz says, beaten armies tend to bunch together for a feeling of security in each other's presence and feeling that in mass and in number there is strength. It's a dangerous thing when this happens, and it happens here. What a picture!

What a marvelous verse this is [verse 8], describing the complete breakdown of government. This is exactly as things were in 1917–18 in Russia and in Eastern Germany. In Berlin I actually heard descriptions of it from people who went through it. "But behold, the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites; and notwithstanding the great destruction which hung over my people, they did not repent of their evil doings; therefore there was blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land, both on the part of the Nephites and also on the part of the Lamanites; and it was one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land." Let's hope we never live to see that. There have been science fiction [stories about that]. Ray Bradbury has written a story inspired by this verse. It's possible, you see.

Verse 9: "And now, the Lamanites had a king, and his name was Aaron," and here we have a super army of 44,000. Now we're getting big armies, almost two divisions. "And it came to pass that I beat him with my army that he fled." Ah hah. Now, this is a very nice thing happening here. Mormon finally checks their advance. There's a complete breakdown of public order.

If you wanted to have real fun and were very rich, the thing you used to do in the forties and fifties was fly down to Rio. That was the place to go. Don't go to Rio today. If you're found in the inner city of Rio, you're as good as dead today—or in some countries like the Sierra Leone. A marvelous Persian girl, who joined the Church, married the ambassador to Sierra Leone who is a black man, a very fine man. They lived there, and she had a great influence in Sierra Leone, but at the time there was no law or order at all. Nothing was safe, and nobody was safe. So we have these conditions in the world today, and [if you go there] you'd better stay in your hotel and keep your blinds down. These are the instructions they give you wherever you go today. If you go to the American Embassy, they'll tell you, sorry, we can't protect you. You'll just have to do the best you can. Get out of the country if you can; maybe we can get you out. This is the way they talk everywhere now. What a world we live in! Saved by the bell. It could get worse and worse.

He was twenty-three years old, this kid from the farm who wrote all this stuff, and don't try to tell me he made it up.