

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 21  
2 Nephi 25–28  
Nephi’s Prophecy of Our Times

Now, Nephi is in his prophetic vein, and he is going to take us all the way. We are on 2 Nephi 25. Here we go in verse 18: “Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day.” The purpose of these words is the “convincing them of the true Messiah, . . . for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people.” There were many false Messiahs that came forward. Robert Eisler collected [information about] quite a number of them. The most famous of those was Sabbatai Zevi in 1648. What was the treaty in that year? Of course, it ended the Thirty Years War. At that time [Bohdan] Chmielnicki, a leader of the Cossacks, revolted against the Polish crown and swept over the land, selecting the Jews as his special victims. There were terrible pogroms all over Europe, especially in Poland, and the Jews became very discouraged. “This must be the end of time,” they thought, and they hoped for a Messiah. This fellow, a young Turkish Jew who was born in Saloniki, emerged as the Messiah. All the Jews in Europe and elsewhere got all excited about him. His headquarters were in Cyprus, and everyone decided this was the Messiah. Then all of a sudden he got converted to Islam; he became a Moslem. Well, you can imagine the effect that would have on the Jews. That just cast them down completely. But the day was saved in 1700 by Baal-Shem. He was wandering around among all the communities in Europe, etc., preaching the *Hasidic* doctrine (he was a *Hasidic* Jew; a *Hasid* means “a saint, sacred”), which was one of God’s love and tolerance and that “everything is going to be all right.” It was a very uplifting doctrine—purely spiritual, nothing but peace, etc. Such people as Martin Buber and Arnold Zweig were *Hasidic* in that sense.

Some years ago Abraham Kaplan from Israel—who teaches at Tel Aviv now, I think—was here. He has been here a number of times. He’s the great Jewish authority on the temple; we’ve had some wonderful discussions with him on the temple. He was here, and he was a *Hasidic* Jew, preaching this gentleness, etc. But the last time he was here, he had changed completely. He was a real *Hasidic* Jew then. That means “going back to the old literalism.” All the Jews that ever joined the Church were *Hasidic* Jews, including my great grandfather. They believed these things in a literal sense; they didn’t make them abstract and allegorical the way the rabbis do. It’s very interesting that *Hasidism* reverted again to this doctrine. [Some Jews said,] “Don’t put your faith in anything physical or literal or anything like that. We just have to exercise what love and patience we can.” It was a great doctrine, but Kaplan finds much punch now in *Hasidic* Judaism, apparently.

As I said, there were many false Messiahs, and the Jews got all excited about them because they had missed the real one. Verse 19: “His name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” That, of course, is a translation meaning “Jesus—the Savior” and “Christ—the Messiah, the Anointed One.” It’s a very interesting thing—only the early parts of the Book of Mormon refer to the *Messiah*. It’s here that he starts referring to *Christ*. He calls him *Christ* from here on, but earlier he’s always called the *Messiah*, which means the same thing, of course—the *Anointed One*. Then it tells about coming out of the land of Egypt, etc. “And gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they have been

bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth.” Can someone please explain to us how he could heal them by the serpent if they had been made mortally ill by the bite of a serpent? Remember, we are told in Exodus that the serpents came in great numbers and bit the people. Moses raised a brazen serpent on a staff, and whoever looked at the serpent would be healed. So by the curse the curse is removed. What is the point of that? And what do they mean by “washed white in the blood of the Lamb”? Why would the blood of the Lamb wash you white? It’s the same ambivalent meaning there. It’s explained in the Book of Mormon and nowhere else what these things mean.

The serpent, of course, is the most ambivalent of emblems. You know what the *caduceus* is, the emblem of doctors. Some of your parents are doctors, or you’re going to be doctors. You know the *caduceus* is the two serpents intertwined, which is the sign of the healer. Aesculapius founded it, but it was originally the staff of Hermes. There were two serpents copulating on a staff. He picked it up and made it his symbol. The one stands for life and the other for death. There are always the two serpents. To this day in the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Serbian Church, the staff of the archbishop, head of the church, always consists of a cross with two serpents entwined on it. There are two serpents facing each other on the cross. It’s a strange thing; they go back like this and face each other. All the episcopal staves and patriarchal staves of the Orient and the old eastern churches have the two serpents. One is life and the other is death, and you must have both—this opposition in all things. It’s very clear among the Hopis in the snake dance. They won’t let you go there anymore, will they? This year they shut it to the public. But it’s very clearly explained by them, and this is an Egyptian formula too. You must pass through the serpent. In this earth we must pass through the serpent; we go to the lowest stage. They don’t like those serpents or anything like them but they have to live with them. They have to accept them, and they have to recognize their own weakness.

Remember, Joseph Smith in Zion’s Camp lifting the serpent up and saying, “Unless men can get along with each other, the beasts will be their enemies.” That’s a teaching from the *Talmud* too. But the two serpents are the serpents that oppose each other and they represent both parts of life. We have to have life, and we have to have death. On this earth the two go together. The bite of the serpent ends it, but by the serpent are we saved. Obviously, the reason the Egyptians take it as a symbol of resurrection is that it sheds its skin and becomes really new and shiny every year. It leaves its old skin behind. Everything is left behind and out it comes like a new creature, reborn. It’s one of the most striking symbols of rebirth. The others, like the frog (they used the tadpoles) and the caterpillars, change their nature while maintaining their identity from a cocoon to a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. They change their nature and their appearance; whereas, the snake gets reborn and stays himself, keeping his same appearance. Anyway, the ambivalence of the serpent is very ancient, and it’s a symbol that was understood by the ancients. But a thing like that seems so contradictory to us; it’s not so, though.

Now notice all this emphasis on writing in verse 21. “Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand [why is it necessary to preserve the seed?]. . . . These things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them shall be judged of them according

to the words which are written [the importance of writing all the time; we will be judged by them]. For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ.” The Dead Sea Scrolls show this. When I was at Claremont, I taught Junior Humanities at Scripps College alternately with Edgar Goodspeed who had retired from the University of Chicago. He was the grand old man of New Testament studies. Back in those days, he insisted that the Jews didn’t write a word because they were illiterate. The New Testament was written in Greek because ordinary Jews didn’t write Hebrew or anything like that. Then he died conveniently and the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. I would teach the class on Thursday, and he would take it on Tuesday. Professor Goodspeed said that the Jews didn’t write at that time. Well, they certainly did write; they wrote all over the place. They couldn’t stop writing. They had an obsession with writing, as the Dead Sea Scrolls show. They had a *scribendi cacoethes*, as the Greeks called it—they couldn’t stop writing. But they do write everything. After all, how did the law come down? The Lord wrote it, supposedly, with his own finger on the tablets and handed them to Moses. Just like Moroni had painfully written it with his fingers and handed the plates to Joseph Smith later on. It’s a strange thing, this handing down.

It’s the greatest invention that ever was. As Galileo says, “Compared with writing, any other invention pales in significance.” It goes far beyond television or anything like that because it can preserve over any limit of time and space (so simple, just something to scratch with and something to scratch on) not only what people did, but what they thought—their most subtle emotions and everything. Homer can still make us weep, and you can get all excited about Egyptian texts after all that span of years. It will always be there. But, of course, it wasn’t an invention. We read about that before, didn’t we, in “The Genesis of the Written Word?”<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on writing is so important for the Book of Mormon because it is a book. It goes by that title, “the book.”

Notice verse 24: “We keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.” Professor Frank Cross of Harvard, who has been here quite a number of times, gave the Dead Sea Scrolls people the name “The Church of Anticipation.” As Norman Golb has shown now, the Dead Sea Scrolls people were always looking forward. They sound like Christians, but they are not Christians—they’re Jews. Since they always looked forward, he called it “The Church of Anticipation.” Everything was anticipating the Christian church. That’s exactly what we have here. He says, it points our minds forward. We are anticipating what’s to come. That’s why we keep the law of Moses—in anticipation of other things to be revealed. That’s exactly what happens in the *Serekh Scroll*, for example. “For, for this end was the law given.” But it is really Christ, the Messiah. The whole thing has to do with him. This comes right in the right place here. To what do they look forward? To one thing, to Christ. They are obsessed with that. He says, “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies; . . . we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law.” Why would you teach the law if it was just to teach the deadness? Well, the law is the iron rod; the law is the Liahona. Remember when Mormon showed it to his son when he was ten years old. There was the Liahona. It was kept among the national treasures, but it didn’t work anymore. Once it had performed its function of leading them through the desert, then it became excess baggage. It’s the same thing with the iron rod. When you reach [the end of] the iron rod, you have to let go. The rod is not the goal. It will take you where you are going, but when you are there you let go. It was to be guidance. Remember that verse by Newton:

Praise the Lord, for he has spoken

Worlds [notice plural] his mighty word obeyed.  
Laws that never shall be broken  
For their guidance he has made.

The laws are for our guidance; they are to lead us where we are going. They are the head or the guide through the desert—the *hudā*, as the Arabs call it.

Verse 27: “Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given.” It’s guidance—it’s to lead us there. But remember, it becomes the obsession. After the temple was destroyed, what could they do except discuss the law? They went on, and that’s why we have the *Talmud*, the *Mishnah*, and all that. It’s all discussion of the law. That’s what the *Talmud* does, discusses the law, and boy do they split hairs! When is it day and when is it night? The new day begins at a certain time, and it’s important to determine when it happens. It’s when you can distinguish between two strings, a black string and a white string. Well, how black and how white? How long do those strings have to be? At what distance do they have to be? It says “at arm’s length.” At whose arm’s length? At the arm’s length of a man six feet tall. So it goes. You are splitting hairs and trying to find out exactly what is what. This is the “letter of the law,” but it’s the only thing they were left with after they rejected the Messiah. Notice, they hardened their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away. They became hard, like hardening arteries. You get hardened and set in your ways, and you will not be receptive anymore. The thought has to be fluid. That’s the expression we use for that sort of thing. The law is “sufficient to teach any man the right way.” Notice, verse 30 is important: “Ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.” The ordinances and performances aren’t going to save you, but you must keep them because they point your mind forward until the law shall be fulfilled. They will keep you on the path. It’s a discipline, and that discipline is important—the law having no particular effect or virtue in itself.

Old Leopold von Anhalt-Dessau, predecessor of Fredrick the Great, built up the Prussian Army and made it the great machine that it was. And how did he do it? He introduced the *Manual of Arms*, a perfectly useless ornamental display—port arms, present arms, etc. You go through this rigmarole, and then you march stiffly and artificially with a *passo romano*, the goose step. Why do you do it? Well, it made the army. It wasn’t necessary, but it was a discipline. It got men acting together and taking orders. It put some form into things. Before then, when people went to war, such as the Thirty Years War, the armies would drag along dragging guns, like Napoleon’s army coming back from Moscow. Old Leopold, who died of an apoplectic stroke when he heard that his thirteenth child was learning to read (that’s the kind of a guy he was). “Old gun powder face,” as Macaulay calls him, built the army doing these purely artificial things. As I mentioned before, we had to shave every day in the Hundred and First. That had to be done; that was all there was to it. But it had an effect.

We’re going on here; we have to get to the prophecy of our times. After Christ came generations would pass away. Then the proud that do wickedly shall burn and be as stubble. Notice that complete consumption in verse 4. Then one of those emotional outbursts of Nephi in verse 7: “O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! [he sees it all]. For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth

me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just [it's almost more than he can stand]. But behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets . . . shall not perish." It's interesting that every time it mentions this being consumed as stubble, [the righteous are mentioned]. That means by fire and completely—overburn. That's what it is. After the field has been cut, then you burn it over. That's the great overburn of the stubble. But the righteous are told they shall not perish. We are not told how; we have to leave that up to the Lord. The only concern with you is to be righteous; this is the point. Verse 9: "But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away."

This is a paradox again. Why is the gospel there? Why all this trouble? If this is the plan of salvation for the whole human race, why has it had so few takers? I mean it not only hasn't been popular, [almost] everyone has just ignored it. Well, that's what happened in the Old Testament. They didn't keep the law. That's what the prophets storm about. That's what Moses says in his farewell, "You have never kept the law at all." With the Lord it was the same way; even his disciples left him at the end. He stood alone. He must "tred the wine press alone." Of course, nobody else could do that. But he was not well received, as you know. Well, what's the whole idea of giving something like this? John tells us right at the beginning, "the light shines in the dark, and the dark comprehends it not." He came to his own, and his own received him not. But to as many as received him he gave power to become the sons of God. You can receive him if you are willing, and he will give you power to become the sons [and daughters] of God. So that is a big thing, you see, if you could bring that off. So it is not contradicting that eternal life in the presence of God and the angels is not bought so cheaply. Few are going to take it [the gospel], but it's got to be here. Some aren't qualified at all, and this is the way it is. They have been very favored. Then he speaks about himself. They will have peace, but after three generations they will reject him. Verse 10: "And when these things have passed away a speedy destruction cometh unto my people. . . . When the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction, and this grieveth my soul." That's *atē* when the Spirit will no longer strive with them. And he says, "My spirit will not always strive with man."

Verse 12: "It must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; and that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith." He will be received according to the faith to receive him. It will be done according to your faith. "But behold, I prophesy unto you concerning the last days [now this should interest us from here on] when the Lord God shall bring these things forth unto the children of men [this is our time]. After my seed and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles; yea, after the Lord God shall have camped against them round about [The Indians were pretty strong at this time in the 1820s. They occupied most of the country, and they had received the horse and become very warlike and effective. There were whole great nations, but this shows us the Indians completely ground down, just reduced to where there is almost nothing left before the tide is going to turn here.] . . . and after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written [he's talking about the record], and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten. For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust [we

mentioned the Naḥal Ḥever caves, etc.]. . . . They shall write the things which shall be done among them [there are the Dead Sea Scrolls, among other things]. . . . And it shall come to pass, that those who have dwindled in unbelief shall be smitten by the hand of the Gentiles [now it's the Gentiles' turn]. And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled [notice, he is using the present tense], because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches.”

It's an interesting thing that in Greek historical accounts you only use the present tense for future or past because as you talk about it, it is happening. You only use the present tense in historical narrative. They just stick to the present, and he is doing the same thing here. Of course, this is 2500 years ahead of him. He says, “And the Gentiles *are* lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches [the ‘great and abominable’ is a composite]; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning [notice the two things], that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor [positivism and materialism become the main trends in Christian studies]. And there are many churches [he told us before that there was one church—that's the big composite that covers everything] built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice.” Of course, they are always competitive, but that happens within every church. All churches are full of envyings, strife and malice—including ours (you know that), in some wards, not everywhere. But that happens because it's human nature.

“And there are also secret combinations [this gets more serious, you see], even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.” We immediately think of the Mafia here and things like this—secret combinations and works of darkness. The foundation is murder. That's what the Mafia sells. The product that brings the Mafia its biggest income is murder. Amazing business, isn't it? Of course, it's the same with the military, with arms makers and things like that. You can make quite a list of the Mahan principle, “I am master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain.” You can convert life into property. They do it all over the place; it's always done. We won't go into that now.

Verse 23: “I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness.” This is interesting because of the militant orders that rose after the time of the Crusades. They were very secret. I'm talking about the Templars and the others. They degenerated into the schlerafian and fraternities and things like that. They have been all over the place, and some of them have been quite militant and full of mischief. “For he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation [of course, the Church is not exclusive]. Behold, doth he cry unto any saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. . . . Behold hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? [Notice, he recognizes them. Corruption and cynicism should not turn us away from religion itself. We start out with that. That's what we have to have, and then which direction you take is up to you to decide.] Behold, I say unto you, Nay. Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade [so we have to work on it] all men to

repentance.” That is the first thing. That is the message of the missionary, “Speak nothing but repentance to this generation,” because that’s what we have to have. That’s what we need to do from day to day and always, all the days of our lives, as the ninth chapter of Nephi says. He has lengthened our days just to give us a better chance to repent. And no one has less need to repent than another because the greater your virtues the greater the responsibility you have for the things you haven’t done, etc. I mean if you know more than someone else, you have a greater responsibility than someone who knows less, so you have to repent just as much if not more than he does that you are not studying enough, that you are not doing enough.

Verse 28: “All men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.” Notice right across the page there, if you have this edition, in the end of the last verse of this chapter he says, “And he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.” Did any of you see that remarkable thing on [Escalante] and Dominguez yesterday? They were the first to visit this valley here in 1776. It showed photographs of Indians like the Paiutes. The Paiutes are very interesting. They were bearded Indians; they weren’t like the other Indians. Indians don’t have heavy beards, but these had beards and very European features. There are strange things that turn up among these Indians, like the blonds among the Hopis, etc. But that’s getting off the track here, a little bit.

Verse 29: “He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.” That’s very interesting when he says, “They seek not the welfare of Zion.” He’s talking about somebody who is in Zion in that case who sets himself up for a light and wants to get gain and praise. Well, I know lots of businessmen and others who have had a free ride on the Church. It’s sad. But you’ll find that in every church, too. We might as well be frank about these things. How do we deal with these people? The next verse makes it clear. You should have charity; you don’t judge them at all. Of course not. “The Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing [so this is how we deal with these things: we have charity and love, and without that you are nothing]. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish.” Notice, he is talking about Zion here. If they had charity, they wouldn’t suffer the laborer in Zion to perish. Then he really hits it hard: “But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish [laboring in Zion; wow, we’d better watch it here]. And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal.” Notice the list of things. Here we have the real prime-time TV show. This is the best hours of the evening when you see murder, stealing, envy, malice, contention, and whoredoms. They make the program. That is the rich mix that makes the big selling TV program today that will go over everything. Then he invites all “to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white.” Notice, he moves between these things. He sees the evil and gets right to the heart of it and then says, but you must forgive; you must tolerate these things; we are all being tested together; the Lord wants everybody to have a chance, etc.

Then he really warms up in the next chapter: “But, behold, in the last days, or in the days of the Gentiles [notice, the last days are called ‘the days of the Gentiles’; they certainly haven’t been the days of the Jews]—yea, behold all the nations of the Gentiles and also

the Jews, both those who shall come upon this land and those who shall be upon other lands [that's all of us], yea, even upon all the lands of the earth, behold, they will be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations [this is the way they are]. . . . And all the nations that fight against Zion . . ." We'll see who Zion is if you turn to 2 Nephi 28:21. You don't identify yourself with that to establish your virtue. "All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell [if they do that]." There's too much of that, you see. But notice it's the *theatromania*. This third verse is marvelous, and of course, it's quoted from the prophet. "And all the nations that fight against Zion, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision; yea, it shall be unto them, even as unto a hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or like unto a thirsty man which dreameth, and behold he drinketh but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite; yea, even so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion."

Notice the state of mind you are in: You think you have it made. This is the delusion of drugs, or the delusion of wealth and plenty, or whatever it is. But you notice we are in a sort of dream state now. The wildest things happen. People feel no outrage at the most terrible crimes that are committed in our midst, etc. But the whole thing is like a dream. It's what the ancients called *theatromania*. I still have an article I've got to write on *theatromania*. As you can see, it means *theatre mania*. The appearance or the show is everything—a mania for the theatre, for spectacles and sights. Everybody becomes a spectator, a watcher. So the heroes of our time are people like DeNiro, etc., whom we regard as giants of the arts. They can't play anything, they can't dance, they can't perform really. Everybody can act, more or less, as far as that goes. I have a couple of kids in the business. But he's talking about the unreal world we live in. It's quite unreal; you know that. Of course, this was recognized already in the nineteenth century. In Grillparzer's famous play *Der Traum: Ein Leben* [*A Dream Is Life*] things aren't really real. The same thing was so in Rome. That's why the ancients called it *theatromania*. People spent all their time at the games and shows. Athletics became everything with them. They had these enormous colosseums and stadiums. We still use their words for that. We still have the same sort of games, and they get rougher and rougher and more violent, just for violence's sake—like tag wrestling, roller derbies, demolition derbies, and such cultural events as those. What a society! Well, that's it—it's not real. We think we've got it, you see. We dream of a night vision; we dream like a hungry man. How often you are hearing today that the American dream has gone down the drain. It was too much of a dream—all this prosperity, etc. It could be. And what has happened? As I said, to top it all off is the final thing where you can take a pill or a shot and it will really put you into nirvana or some happy state. But it is all unreal, and when you awaken it's a coming around and killing yourself that's a terrible thing.

In this example of prophetic language that follows here, I think Brother Sperry was right. It moves freely "as the spirit listeth" and is addressed to spiritually receptive audiences at various times and places and parties. Time and space swim together, sort of, in this prophetic language. As it says, you have to have the same spirit to follow it. But notice here in verse 4: "Ye shall be drunken but not with wine, ye shall stagger but not with strong drink [well, they have plenty of strong drink, too]. For behold, the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep." Everybody has slowed down; nobody seemed to know anything today of what's going on. All you had to do is listen to these political debates to see them missing one ball after another. Somebody would throw a fast

one, and the other guy would miss it entirely. Nobody is sharp on the uptake anymore. Everybody wanders around and generalizes and avoids issues, etc. It's wild.

Verse 5: "For behold, the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep. For behold, ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets; and your rulers, and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity." It uses the very interesting old Hebrew word *kāfar*. He has taken them from you; he has covered them. We are out of touch with reality; we definitely are. On TV we have Disneyland. If you want my idea of hell, it would be Disneyland. That is hell as far as I'm concerned. Everything is artificial in it; nothing is real. You begin to have illusions and begin to feel sick. Well, we don't go into that. It would be poor advertising for Orange County.

Verse 6: "The Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book [now this isn't the Book of Mormon he is talking about; this is another book apparently], and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered. And behold the book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof." The Book of Mormon doesn't go from the beginning of the world to the end, but the sealed part does. This is just a small part. The big part was sealed (the big plates), and this is what he is talking about. "Wherefore, because of the things which are sealed up, the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people. Wherefore the book shall be kept from them." They do get the Book of Mormon, but not the sealed words. Notice verse 10 talking about the man to whom the book is delivered: "But the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book. For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof." The book of Moses comes nearest to that, but the book of Moses is a very small book. That's not the one that is sealed. It's another thing, and it's every bit as remarkable as the Book of Mormon. Well, the book "shall be read upon the house tops" when it comes, and "all things shall be revealed" then. "The book shall be hid from the eyes of the world."

Then it talks about three witnesses because there are always three witnesses. It doesn't have to be the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. The scripture says, "In the mouths of three witnesses shall all things be established." This one has three witnesses too. This in verse 15 could refer to the case of Charles Anthon when Martin Harris took the plates [the translation] to him. Why did he take it to Charles Anthon? In 1830 [1828] Charles Anthon couldn't read Egyptian; nobody could. He claimed he recognized the signs, etc. and could read them, but he said, "How can I read a sealed book?" Well, Martin Harris had to take them to the most learned man, and he was. Charles Anthon was without any doubt the best classical scholar—the best antiquarian in the country, one of the very best in the world. He produced a magnificent and masterful dictionary of antiquities. It was so they could never say to Joseph Smith after that, "Oh yes, you gave a translation of it. You had the characters and the plates, but you never took them to a real scholar. You never got a top opinion on it, did you?" He did have Harris take it to the best scholar in the world, and he got his opinion on it. He said that he couldn't read a sealed book. Then he said, "Bring them back and I will read them to you." He got huffy about it. Of course, he couldn't read them. He was bluffing; that's why he got so huffy. But we couldn't say that the world wasn't given a chance [to give an opinion] in that case because, as it says in the verse 20 here: "The learned shall not read them. . . . Touch not the things which are sealed

[that's very particular here]. . . . Then shalt thou seal up the book again, and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men." This is the way it happens, and this is why in verse 25: "Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men." Is this the situation today? We certainly draw near to him with our lips, but have we removed our hearts far from him? Not everybody. No, there are people in the world whose hearts are set because of their sufferings. And if they fear God because of the precepts of men, that's better than nothing. But he says he's got to bring forth "a marvelous work and a wonder."

Notice here in verse 27: "And their works are in the dark; and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?" Did you ever hear about insider trading? There's big money in that, but this is the whole thing. I mean all these takeovers, favorable or unfavorable. Anyway, they have to be done secretly. All of a sudden you find your company taken over, and you didn't know about it. You may have a billion-dollar company. There's a hostile takeover, and what can you do about it? These things are all done in the dark; they are arranged by officers in certain places. "Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?"

Here's prophecy again in verse 28: "And Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field; and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest." It's interesting that they pick Lebanon for the big ecological change because Lebanon is the great paradox. Lebanon is the richest; that's the old Phoenician country, and they still call themselves Phoenician. We had a Lebanese girl here not long ago. She became furious if you said she spoke Arabic, which, of course, it was. She said, "No, we speak Phoenician." And they do have a lot of words that are different in Beirut, etc., but look what a mess! Was there ever such complete jumble? It's a stew that's stirring all the time—all sorts of them fighting each other. Lebanon is in a state of complete chaos, and it has been that way for some years now, hasn't it? [laughs] When there's nobody there, it will become a fruitful field. They are replanting those. I mean that area is becoming reforested again. It's a fruitful field, but when they build in Lebanon they build on terraces—terrific terraces that go up thousands of feet. They are very good at cultivating them. But that Lebanon should be the center of violent change, both natural and social, is an interesting thing because it still is. The Israelis are daily bombing over in Lebanon, in Sidon and across the border in the Bekaa Valley or somewhere like that.

Verse 31: "For assuredly as the Lord liveth they shall see that the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off." So let's not watch for iniquity. There are four things you must never do. Joseph Smith separately discusses four things. The first, of course, is "to aspire." Satan aspired, and that was his undoing. Never aspire and never be ambitious. You don't aspire in this world if you're going to get anything you want in the next. Never accuse. Of course, Satan is "the accuser." The word *diabolus* from which the name *devil* comes means *accuser*. He is called "the accuser of his brethren" in the scriptures. Adam said to Satan, "I will not bring a railing accusation against thee. Let God judge between me and thee." Adam would not accuse Satan after what Satan had done to him, you see. So we don't accuse anybody, no matter how guilty they are. Then you do not contend. The first thing the Lord says to the Nephites is there shall be no more contentions among you as there have been. This is my gospel that there shall be no contentions. All contention shall cease, for contention is not of me, but all contention is of the devil who stirreth up the children of men to anger to bloodshed and things like that [paraphrased]. So we never contend and never coerce, if

that's the case. And those are the four things that everybody wants to do today. Everybody is aspiring to high office, and everybody accuses in order to get it. Everybody contends; it's a very contentious world we live in, a competitive world. And we back it all up in the end; the bottom line is force. We have to have the force, coercion. We have all four things.

We'll move along here. The prophecies are continuing in chapter 28. The churches which are built up contend one with another. I like verse 4: "And they shall contend one with another, . . . and they teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance." Learning will always be inadequate. To do that the usual thing is to deny the Holy Ghost. It's vanity. In denying that they deny the power of God. "Behold, hearken ye unto my precept; if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work. Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God [they want it both ways in other words]—he will justify in committing a little sin [because it's human nature; we do it, of course]; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor." Notice, these are legal and business stratagems that are taught here at BYU as commendable, and practiced. I know people who practice them and think it's great to pull off a fast one. We had a big wheel from the East last year giving talks on sales strategies, which are defined by the dictionary as "deception practiced on an enemy." That's what it is. It's supposed to be legal if you practice it on an enemy. But when you use strategy against a customer, you are trying to deceive. The guy is your enemy because he is resisting you. You are trying to overcome him. He is trying to give you as little as he can, and you are trying to get as much as you can. You have to look at him as one who has to be approached with strategy, with all sorts of tricks and devices. It's not necessary really, but it's the world we live in. This is a better commentary than you could ask for. "Dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die [it's very interesting; a little later on this is the teaching of Korihor]; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God."

"Tomorrow we die" means "live it up like there was no tomorrow." But if there is, well, "God will beat us with a few stripes. . . . Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner [in this sort of manner. This isn't an article of faith or anything; this is the type of doctrine that will be taught], false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark [they have Swiss accounts, you see—that's works in the dark; then someone pays for it] And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted." Then we read in verse 14: "They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men." Because of the pride, the false teachers, the false doctrines of the churches, they rob the poor for their fine sanctuaries and their fine clothing. In Mormon 8:39 it takes this right home to us today. This is quite explicit there, "Why do you adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?" We studiously notice them not.

Notice in verse 15 that these are the three vanities: the wise, the learned, and the rich—those who are clever, those who know so much, and those who have it. They "are

puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms.” We think this means nothing anymore. All you have to do is look at the Sunday paper and you see [these things. You read that people] have been living together for the last three years. These are well known, popular, beloved figures of screen and television. The whoredoms have become part of our way of life today. It’s very common, and I’m not fooling you, am I? They live that way. “Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught [ah, the technicalities of the law] and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth! For the day shall come that the Lord God will speedily visit the inhabitants of the earth; and in that day that they are fully ripe in iniquity they shall perish.” He’s giving us a lot of rope; you notice that. When they are fully ripe, they will take care of themselves. That’s *atē* again—when you reach the point of no return, when you are fully ripe. “But behold, that great and abominable church, the whore of all the earth, must tumble to the earth, and great must be the fall thereof.” Then we go back to 2 Nephi 10:16 where he says that all those who fight against Zion are the “great and abominable.” Who is Zion? Well, don’t flatter yourself on that because we come right to that now. Verse 20: “For behold, at that day shall he [Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.” All you have to do is name a few buzz words, and people get absolutely furious. Now here is Zion: “And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion [who claims to be Zion?]; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.” Notice that this trick has been carefully arranged, this equation here—“he leadeth them carefully down to hell.”

You notice that prosperity, like life itself, is a blessing. But it’s not a sign of blessedness, as Wilford Woodruff and John Taylor said. When the Church started being prosperous in their days, they started warning the Saints, “Don’t mistake prosperity for virtue.” You seem to think because the Lord blesses the Nephites when they are good for just three generations that if you’re rich that means you’re good. At least you’re smart. If you’re so smart, why aren’t you rich? Last year there were about 2800 new millionaires made every month. There are well over a million now. Do you have to be a genius to be in that group? How many great composers do we have? How many great poets do we have? Have many great painters do we have? People count them on the fingers of one hand, and yet we have literally millions of millionaires. This is a sign of the greatness of achievement. “Yea, Zion prospereth [notice the emphasis on *prospereth*], all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none.” This is a very common belief that there is no devil, he’s not personal, etc. You make people feel good and you’ll win in our society. You’ll sell your product. There’s this terrible competition.

This is an example of the depth of our civilization: The battle of the century this week is between McDonalds and Burger King. Burger King spent 200 million dollars on an advertising campaign that went right into the hole because the words in a five-word sentence weren’t arranged just quite right. So they lost 200 million dollars. They have a huge plant on Madison Avenue to turn out five or six words as a slogan. Whereas McDonalds spent 900 million, nearly a billion dollars, and came up with a family formula. They’re in it big now, but they spent nearly a billion dollars just to get an image. Well, aren’t you supposed to be your own image? To flatter them and make them feel good is what McDonalds did. The whole purpose of the thrust of Burger King (you see, I

study these things very carefully) was that McDonalds is for kids, but we are for grown-up people. But everybody wants to be kids in our society, so McDonalds won hands down on that. We've never grown up. It always shows them as the adolescent—eternal youth.

Verse 23: “Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment [notice, that is a metaphor]. Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion! [I try to make myself as uncomfortable as possible]. Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!” But he is going to win. He is going to win if he says all is well. He'll win every time, you'll notice. Don't criticize. “Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!” How many returned missionaries say they've now done their work? They've received their testimony; now they can settle down to business? You hear this sort of thing. My son that I mentioned, who was in the ballet in San Francisco, was first counselor in the bishopric in a ward there. They had a very rich man in the ward, and he said what he liked about the Church was that it was just like a cafeteria. With the gospel you could go through and take just the things you wanted and leave the rest. This is what you like; it's the same thing. He was at ease in Zion; he liked it. They say they have received and need no more. See, I'll accept the Word of Wisdom, but this I won't take. Tithing is a bit too steep; I'll interpret that. And so you say, “Well, I've received and I don't need anymore. I've got the gospel, and it's wonderful.”

Well, with this faith-promoting talk let's finish the chapter here. Verse 29: “Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God [he says I'm going to continue to give it]: I will give unto the children of men line upon line [the scriptures], precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.” Of course, he goes on; God doesn't cease at all. It's funny that we have thousands of volumes adding to the gospel's teachings. That's what the councils of the churches do. They reinterpret. That just means they are adding elements that are missing, and they have to be supplied by their wit and wisdom. As the late Cardinal “what's his name” said, “Men can add to the gospel, but God may not.” He has spoken his final word, he can't, but we can add to it all we want by reinterpreting, etc. “For unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.” That's so in any art or science, any study you are doing. If you say you have enough, “I've got my terminal degree and that's it,” you're not going anywhere then.

Verse 31: “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men [the experts in other words. Notice this government military business; they put their trust in man and maketh flesh their arm]. . . . Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! . . . They will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them . . . if they will repent and come unto me.” If they will repent, it will be all right with them. So that's that happy chapter.

It's a prophetic book, and it's full of all sorts of things. I've been finding many things about the early practices of the Hebrew atonement rites, which were the whole purpose of the temple anciently. That's what it was for, the sacrifice of the atonement. I find more in the Book of Mormon than in the Old Testament. It's just amazing the customs that emerge. You bring them up with the *Talmud* and the *Mishnah*, and you see that the Book

of Mormon knows what it's talking about. Whether I do or not, the Book of Mormon does. That's why I stick to the text. You'll notice that.

1. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Genesis of the Written Word," in *Temple and Cosmos*, CWHN 12 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 450–90.