

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

HUGH NIBLEY

Semester 2, Lecture 51

Alma 17–19

War

Ammon and King Lamoni

With only four sessions to go, we have not yet finished the Book of Mormon. You may ask why we are getting stuck on this trivial episode about the waters of Sebus, but it's a very important part of the Book of Mormon, and a very important part of warfare. You don't get into the big wars until later on, but we must mention Karl von Clausewitz (1783–1831). He wrote a great two-volume work, which for 150 years has been the bible of the military.¹ It wasn't published until 1833, so Joseph Smith is "saved by the bell" there, isn't he? He couldn't have used it, although the Book of Mormon reads exactly as if it had been written by someone who had been a diligent student of Clausewitz. The main thesis is a thesis of the Book of Mormon. It begins this way. His first famous dictum is that "war is a continuation of politics by other means." That's the way he puts it—war is just a continuation of politics. And what is politics after? It's after power and gain. Whether it's the princes, or whether it's the industrial barons, they want power and they want gain. Of course, they get it that way. He goes into various wars. He was very active in the Napoleonic Wars.

The second rule is that "war is absolute." When you have decided to fight, *cedunt leges*. As the Romans say, "Forget about the laws." If you are going to follow a civilized discussion, you discuss. But when you decide to kick and scratch and gouge and shoot each other, it's silly to talk about laws. He says it's absurd to talk about laws of war or anything like that. War is absolute. When you are into it, you are into it all the way. You can't just go partly. If you're going to go partly, why don't you continue discussion in that case? No, you throw the rule book aside. That's important with him. He says, as in the world of mules, there are no rules for battle. There are no rules, he says; throw away the book.

The third point of Clausewitz: What is the object? It is the total destruction of the other side's capacity to do anything at all—their total submission. So it's total destruction. That's what we have in the Book of Mormon. They begin with setting their hearts on riches, and they are already on the high road to destruction. That's what the Book of Mormon tells us again and again. They set their hearts on riches; therefore, one thing was going to happen. We get more of this later. It builds up climactically until you get those terrible, terrible chapters in Mormon that are so modern, so frightening, and so relevant.

But how about this business at the waters of Sebus? It's best to read very quickly a summary,² and then we'll see what it is. This is in Alma 17, as you know: All the Lamanites would drive their flocks to a particular watering place (Alma 17:26). And when

¹ See Hugh W. Nibley, "Warfare and the Book of Mormon," in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 127–45, for a discussion of von Clausewitz.

² Hugh W. Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, CWHN 8 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, and FARMS, 1989), 539–41. Brother Nibley reads from material in this book throughout the lecture.

they got there, “a certain number of Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the . . . [king’s] flocks.” That was a fine thing to do, and this was routine. This had been done many times. After the [flocks] of the king “scattered . . . and fled many ways,” the servants lamented that as a matter of course, “now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren” (Alma 17:28). And they began to weep. Is everybody crazy here? What insanity is this, the king kills his own servants for losing a contest that had been acted out before? In fact, we are told in Alma 18:7 that “it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people,” keeping what they could for themselves, “it being a practice of plunder among them” (Alma 18:7). It looks like it was a regular custom. So it was no secret to anyone; this was not an ambush but something to be expected. But the king’s own flocks? How could they get away with that? Didn’t he have enough men to protect them if this happened regularly? Well, for one thing the Lamanites played the game for sport; it was more than meat that they were after, for “they delighted in the destruction of their brethren; and for this cause they stood to scatter the flocks of the king” (Alma 17:35). They thought it was great sport. The Arabs have a saying, “If we cease *ghāza*, we will cease to live. A *ghāza* is a *raid*; our word *raid* is from the Arabic *ghāza*. They must raid or life isn’t worth living. “Life is raiding.”

The fun of it was their main interest, but Ammon spoiled the fun when he “stood forth and began to cast stones at them with his sling.” They were outraged: “They began to be astonished . . . [and] angry” (Alma 27:36)—he wasn’t playing the game fair. So they came after him with clubs. Why only clubs? He had a sword. There is only one way you can wield a club; you cannot cut or thrust with it but have to raise it up over your head and thus expose your arms. (With both arms the strongest blow is possible.) Ammon took full advantage of the situation, slicing away at the arms raised against him. And yet, with his overwhelming advantage, Ammon “slew none save it were their leader with his sword” (Alma 17:38). He knocked six of them out with his sling and cut off the arms of others as they raised their clubs, but he only contended with the leader to death. After that, the winning party or team brought back the trophies to the king, “bearing the arms which had been smitten off by the sword of Ammon” (Alma 17:39). By now it should be clear that we are dealing with a sort of game; a regular practice, following certain rules. This becomes apparent when a few days later, the very men “who had stood at the waters of Sebus and scattered the flocks” (Alma 19:21) mingled freely and openly with the crowd of people [Lamanites] gathered at the palace. They were the ones that scattered the king’s flocks and got the king’s followers executed by law, according to the game. They gathered at the palace at a report that strange things were going on. Ammon was causing some stir inside the palace.

Some of the people said these things were happening because the king “slew his servants.” The king began to regret it now. That’s an interesting thing. The king saw nothing wrong whatever with killing his servants who lost flocks. He’s stunned later on when it suddenly occurs to him that this might have been a sin. Already people began to say that these things were happening because the king “slew his servants who had had their flocks scattered at the waters of Sebus” (Alma 19:20); and the very men who had scattered the king’s flocks loudly announced their presence by shouting abuses at Ammon when he came out for what he had done “to their brethren at the waters of Sebus” (Alma 19:21).

They were there to get revenge on Ammon right at the king’s palace. The brother of the head man (whom Ammon had killed with his sword) drew his own sword on the spot (he had a sword, too, you see) and made at Ammon (Alma 19:22). He attacked Ammon and

was going to finish him off on the spot. So the men had swords but only used clubs. Isn't that odd, and isn't it odd that those same wicked Lamanites [not only] walked around right in front of the king's palace where everybody recognized them, but nobody did anything about it? They were perfectly free to come and go. And no one held it against the winning team that they had stolen their flocks back (nothing wrong with that), but the losers were only angry with Ammon because he had thrown rocks at them and used his sword against men bearing only ceremonial clubs.

Why ceremonial? All this reminds us of those many ritual, ceremonial games in which the loser also lost his life, beginning with an Aztec duel in which one of the contestants was tethered by the ankle and bore only a wooden mace, while his heavily armored opponent wielded a weapon with sharp obsidian edges. Then there were the age-old chariot races of the princes in which one was to be killed by the *Taraxippus*. In the chariot races the purpose was sacrifice. The *Taraxippus* was the place where the ghost of the prince in whose honor this was held was buried. He demanded a human sacrifice, and a chariot had to wreck there. Somebody had to be killed; it was planned that way. Maybe two or three, but there had to be slaughter at the *Taraxippus*, the sharp curve. Then there were the equally ancient games at Olympia. It was the spirit of . . . I can't remember his name.

Add to these such vicious doings as the Platanista, the Krypteia, the old Norse brain-ball, the hanging games of the Celts, and so on. And the Glima. The Glima was still celebrated down here at Spanish Fork recently. That's an ancient game that has to be played. You see the same game being played in Egypt; it's very well drawn in Egypt. Two people are bound together by a rather loose belt, and each person has a short dagger. One grabs the other person's hand, and one of them has to get killed. What kind of fun is that? That's the Glima, and it's the national sport of Iceland.

Then there were the Philistine games, the Homeric duels, David and Goliath, etc. The point is that this is not to increase slaughter but to place a limit on it. When the hero is killed, then the war is over. Everybody else doesn't have to die. It sacrifices a few for the whole nation—kings that must die for the people. Mary Renault wrote a very good novel on that particular subject, the kings that die. That's the idea of the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat. He goes out and perishes; one person dies for all of them. Then at Easter time it's *Barabbas* and one person is released. The kings must die for the people. It's one who dies for the others, but that saves all the rest of them. They have these rules. A certain number are slain. Sometimes it is equal numbers on each side. But when a certain number had fallen that was it; they would call it off. As I said, wild animals and savages do fight, but they know when to stop. They don't want to exterminate each other. This is one thing on which Clausewitz goes wrong: He says it's unthinkable that there would ever be a war in which you could find complete extermination. But there the Book of Mormon takes us right through—Nephites and Lamanites, Shiz and Coriantumr—both sides complete. Now with both having “nukes” there is no doubt at all about it.

The Minotaur required the sacrifice of seven youths and maidens once a year in the bull rings. Those who escaped [were free], but there had to be a certain number and that was it. But that was all; you stopped at that number. And there are bullfights today. Blood has to be shed in a bullfight or it's not an official bullfight. It's a sacral or ceremonial thing with all the tooting of the trumpets, all the bowing, and all the formalities, etc. But this obligatory bloodshed is to limit it, so that everybody won't have to go through with it.

But the closest are those known to many of us here, namely the bloody fun of the famous basketball games played in the great ballcourts of the ceremonial complexes of Mesoamerica. Anyone who has been there (and a lot of you have, I'm sure) has visited the big basketball courts there. In these games either the captain of the losing team or the whole team lost their heads. Everybody didn't get killed. One or two people did—sometimes the team and sometimes just the captain. But somebody got bumped off. You might say, "Why did they do those things?" Well, it's better than the way we do it when we go out and clean out everybody—civilians and everybody else. Surviving into the present century among the Pueblos was the race between the Coyote and the Swallow. They would have the race across the plain toward the mesa, and the one who arrived first killed the other as he crossed the finishing line. Equally horrendous was the Wa-Wa rite of the Hopis and some of the other pueblos. It is still celebrated in Guatemala at the spring equinox. There is a tall pole, and they swing [people] around it head down. When the Hopis did it, up until 1900, the pole protruded over the edge of the mesa and the drop was 300–400 feet. The pole was cut half-way through and was supposed to break. Human sacrifice was expected, and that satisfied the necessary killing for the year.

The purpose of such games was to make a human sacrifice, but as at Olympia or in the Roman arena, the religious nature of the thing could be lost in the fun and excitement of the brutal contests. Granted that the Lamanites at Sebus were depraved barbarians and real Yahoos, what is the logical or ritual explanation, the aesthetic appeal, or sporting spirit of [the way we do it] the tag-team wrestling, demolition- or roller-derbies, or laser-tag of our own enlightened age? Nothing could be closer psychologically than that. That has something to do with the bloodshed, etc.

What's this getting at? It's a very important side of psychological warfare, and the Book of Mormon treats all sides of it. This is one that applies to our side, too, for reasons that will be presently explained. The games of chivalry were just as rough and deadly as the Sebus sport, and far more ancient. Sinuhe is a thousand years older than Achilles or David, and monuments from prehistoric Egypt show the first "pharaohs" bashing the heads of rival rulers with the ceremonial mace. The famous scenes of the battles of Megiddo and Carchemish display the piles of severed hands and arms brought as trophies to the king. That's how you would prove that you had slain them; you would bring the right arms to the king and pile them up. This is Bible stuff, too, as well as Babylonian, and the Egyptians were in it, too. At Carchemish and Megiddo the king sat there with big piles of arms in front of him. Well, Ammon brought piles of arms to show his prowess to King Lamoni.

From the days of the Jaredites to the final battle at Cumorah, we find our Book of Mormon warriors observing the correct chivalric rules of battle—enemies agreeing to the time and place of the slaughter, chiefs challenging each other to single combat for the kingdom, and so on. I have written elsewhere of the martial formalities of the *Battle Scroll* observed in the Book of Mormon.

Clausewitz said you only go through those formalities just to fool a guy. You pretend to stop so you can catch him off guard, as Zerahemnah tried to catch Moroni off guard. We say it is human nature to fight and enjoy violence. As I said, animals and savages fight regularly, especially at mating seasons. But as we have learned from nature documentaries, they know how to stop. There's no point in killing everybody. We still do this in maneuvers today. One round in ten or one round in fifty will have live ammunition in it. That will pay the price if anybody is too careless. Or decimation still happens in armies. In

the Roman army when a unit had misbehaved and deserved court martial and execution, they couldn't execute the unit. They would be weakening the forces. They would use decimation—take out every tenth person. That would pay the price that the whole unit was supposed to pay. Duels stopped with the drawing of blood. The Indians had a better way. They would go around in a battle and say, "I touch you with a stick and you're dead." Or they had maneuvers where they spattered them with paint to say "you have been hit."

It's common for warriors to rest during the noonday heat. The Crusaders had the European idea. At the battle of Morocco, they wanted to go in and slaughter the Moslems. But the Moslems wisely took off for lunch and rested. In that particular battle, the one that St. Louis was in, they all died of the heat. They all had heavy armor and underclothes on. They sat on their horses waiting for the charge of the Moslems. The Moslems sat inside the walls and said, "What are those crazy people doing? It's lunch time." Then the heat started to take its toll and they started dropping one by one. It was a very hot day, and Morocco isn't a cool place. It was about 120 degrees, and they were sitting there in armor with heavy wool under it to pad the armor. They were sweating and sat very stiff, rigidly awaiting the oncoming enemy. The whole army was wiped out by the heat. It's quite a story.

And opponents still make it up after a lusty brawl. The first week in Normandy our object was to take the town of Carentan, and the commander put up a very good defense of it. General Max Taylor wanted to invite the colonel from Carentan over to tea. I was supposed to dress up in my "bib and tucker" and go invite him to tea because I spoke German. Then he changed his mind and thought it would be better if an officer invited him to tea. So an officer went, but the colonel refused. After that Max Taylor was known to all the German generals as "the last gentleman." While the battle was going on, he wanted to have tea with the colonel over on the other side.

We have this aspect now. There is one phrase that's used repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, a very disturbing one. They talk about people "who delighted in the shedding of blood." We are repeatedly told, for example, that Moroni did not "delight in the shedding of blood." We delight in the shedding of blood today, and that's a very bad sign, the Book of Mormon tells us. To say that I enjoy the ballet or football doesn't necessarily mean that I enjoy dancing or playing football. I enjoy them as a spectator. The ancient Romans greatly enjoyed the bloody games of the arena. They delighted in the shedding of blood. It was one of their big things. So do we. If you flip through the TV channels any evening between ten and fifteen minutes [before the beginning of] the hour, you are bound to come up with two or three murders in progress to get the evening going. It's the one sure selling item on prime time. The murder has to be there. Do the same thing in the last quarter hour, and then you see the vengeance catching up—with the mandatory explosion as the car, boat, or house disintegrates in a glorious burst of boiling flame and flying debris so that everything has been settled. These people seem to have an insatiable appetite for violence. We forgot the car chase. You've got to get that in before the blowing up. This happens over and over and over again. We can't get enough. It's the standard plot. It doesn't have to have any plot anymore, just the finishing off, the shootout at the end. Of course, it's purely accidental who gets hit and who doesn't, but the hero is not going to get hit. It's so silly and it goes on and on. This insatiable desire expresses itself in many ways. Of all things, everybody wants to own an automatic military assault rifle now, which you need for all sorts of things, of course—a very necessary item [laughter].

“It’s not sufficient to have murder,” the man notes here. “We must see the slashes, the gashes, the gaping mouths, the spurting blood. For the gentler side of life there’s the obligatory couple in bed.” Now this is routine everywhere. I saw it three months ago, but if you turn it on tonight this is what you will see. “And all this, sitting safe and cozy with our popcorn and drinks—it’s fun to watch others suffer.” This has become a main obsession with the youth of the land. They feel sort of immune to this as if it wouldn’t hurt you—these things weren’t really hurting these people. “They have brought forth this new kind of entertainment—the totally explicit display of unlimited cruelty and pain, careful dismemberment of the human anatomy, and howling agony. There’s real big fun and money in that sort of thing.” Now when the civilization has gone this far, and quite recently, there’s something to worry about. Well, we won’t go on to the horrid details here. But what is the alternative? We are immediately taken to the alternative—what Ammon did. He led those known as the people of Ammon, who were complete pacifists.

Chapter 17 is the one about the waters of Sebus. Notice that they delighted in playing the game. Then the king is impressed. He said, “Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit [the words *Great Spirit* are going to be repeated many times, and that will turn out to be very significant for us] who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders” (Alma 18:2). The people were beginning to think that what they had done was murder. The people of Ammon later on always described their killing in battle as murder. Why did he [the king] go on murdering? It could have been ritual murders, etc.

Verse 3: “He cannot be slain by the enemies of the king.” He was a superman. Was the king so weak? And what about his expertness? “And now, when the king heard these words, he said unto them: Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren.” See, he was about to slay them; he had every intention of putting them to death. It occurs to him for the first time with rather a shock that it must be wrong to kill the way he had been doing. In other words it was an established custom; it was the thing to do. Nobody thought of it as particularly wrong. “Now this is the Great Spirit of whom our fathers have spoken [there’s something required and deliberate about it]. Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit; . . . they supposed that whatsoever they did was right.” The Lamanites were following their customs and their rites. So King Lamoni says he “supposed that whatsoever they did was right [so do we; we suppose that whatsoever we do is right]; nevertheless, Lamoni began to fear exceedingly [now he had doubts], with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants.” It is perfectly clear that he was doing it as a custom, as a required gesture, and now it suddenly occurs to him that it might be wrong to slay his servants. You would think anybody was crazy who didn’t know that was wrong. But he didn’t. It was customary, and people do these things.

Verse 6: “For he had slain many of them [it had been the custom all along] because their brethren had scattered their flocks at the place of water.” That was the established pattern. He didn’t send an army out to defend the flocks; he just let this go on. It was the custom; the next verse makes this clear. “Now it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being a practice of plunder among them.” We have these practices carried out. That’s what a raid is, and it was perfectly legitimate. It was carried right down to the Middle Ages. If you read Jean Froissart, you will see it all through there. The right thing for a great lord to do was to raid his rival’s

camp at night and cut the tent poles. When the tent fell down, they cried, “A Douglas, a Douglas,” and made a splendid exit. That was considered a thing to boast about; that was an accomplishment. Read Froissart, the great fourteenth-century writer. He was secretary to King Richard II and lived for years in Ireland also. He wrote a marvelous story about everything that went on then. It was this sort of thing. Not only the Arabs do that; a gentleman must raid. There’s that famous letter to the Pope Stephen III. When he suggested that the Frankish nobles stop plundering each others’ land, they wrote back in amazement. “What else is a gentleman to do? Isn’t that what we are made to do? Isn’t that God’s purpose that we raid each others’ land and prove ourselves heroes in defense.” It was routine, so we can get used to all sorts of practices. It says this was their practice. See how many times the word *practice* is repeated there.

Lamoni asked, “Where is this man that has such great power? . . . He is feeding thy horses.” Now this is very important—feeding the king’s horses. You never find in the Book of Mormon anybody riding a horse. You never find any horse but the king’s horses. In Egypt after the eighteenth dynasty you find lots of pictures with horses in them. You know the [movie] *Ten Commandments* and that sort of thing. The kings of the eighteenth dynasty, because they were Asiatics, adopted the light chariot. And, of course, we have the chariot of King Tut. But you never find anybody riding a horse. No, this riding custom is very set in the world. For example, would you or I go ride a giant water buffalo in Southeast Asia? No, it might cost your life, but little eight- and ten-year-old boys do. These little naked kids sit around all day long on these buffaloes, push them around, and lead them everywhere. Isn’t that a strange thing? We don’t ride bovines; we don’t ride horned creatures. Other people wouldn’t dream of riding [a horse]. I had a very good Arabic friend; I traveled with him a lot. Well, he wasn’t Arabic; he was a Druze—a very learned, mystic Druze. But he would not ride in a wheeled vehicle. He said when bicycles were introduced into Lebanon, Duma, Zahle, and places like that, nobody would ride them. They said, “You make the back wheel go, but the devil makes the *dūlāb* go. The *dūlāb* is the front wheel. “Satan makes the front wheel go, but you make the back wheel go—that’s all right.” Isn’t it an interesting thing that these people who live in flat lands on the plains and deserts of the Near East never rode wheeled vehicles? You may think they might help them a great deal.

On the other hand, these brethren in the Book of Mormon who make their long missionary journeys that go for years all over the country. Wouldn’t you think that they would be riding horses too if the king had horses? Why aren’t they riding horses the way the Indians do later? Well, this is an interesting thing. Where do we first find horses being used? They were being used in Mesopotamia. In 4000 B.C. horses and mules were pulling these heavy old wagons, but never is any of them ridden. They were not ridden; they were to pull wagons. These customs are a funny thing, and so we find it here. It’s just the king’s horses that are mentioned.

My friend Woodrow Bora is a specialist in Latin American history at Berkeley. We shared an office together and were very good friends. He made a study of the horse and pointed out some very interesting things about the horse in Central America. When the horse first appears in America, it appears all of a sudden on the plains. And the Indians who ride horses are absolute accomplished experts; they ride better than any people on earth. As I said, these customs are extremely conservative. For thousands of years you ride or you don’t ride; it’s a tradition or it isn’t. When white men first saw horses on the plains, they saw Indians riding them with consummate skill. The big place for trading horses, as you

notice, was Santa Fe. The horse trading between Mexico and the continental United States was there, but the horses were not traded from Mexico up to the plains. They were all traded from the plains down to Mexico, through Santa Fe to the south. The horses didn't come from the Spaniards up this way; they came from the Indians down south. There were plainsmen up there who rode and were awfully good and accomplished riders. He [Bora] said some other things: The big horse market at Santa Fe was all for getting the horses there from the Midwest and selling them south into Mexico to the Spanish.

In Homer they have the chariots and are great charioteers, as you know. But nobody ever rides a horse in Homer. In [the story of] David and Goliath nobody rides a horse. And you find the same thing in the Battle of Marathon, for example. The fellow ran himself to death to go to Athens to announce the victory at Marathon. Why did he do that? Why didn't he ride a horse? It's a funny thing. People use horses or they don't, and they use animals in very specialized ways—just as we don't ride cows. Yet we used oxen. They were much more valuable than horses in crossing the plains.

So Ammon was making the king's horses and chariots ready. As in Egypt just the king used them only for special ceremonial occasions. Only the king, nobody else used them. Well, the custom still applies. Only the British royalty can have a coach and eight white horses. Only an emperor could have a *quadriga*, four horses, in Rome. These horse and riding rules are very strict. The Germans eat horses, and I ate horses all the time when I was on a mission. Other people wouldn't think of eating horses. And so it goes. Notice that Ammon is feeding the king's horses and getting his horses and chariots ready for a ceremony because he is going to a big affair, a big "general conference."

Verse 9: "For there had been a great feast appointed at the land of Nephi, by the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land." Of course, that's the great assembly. That's the great feast which has to be held once a year. The king and everybody must come. If you don't come, you will be cut off from the kingdom for three years. You receive another touch stick, the king's arrow. If the *heror* touches you, then you must come to the presence of the king as quickly as possible, and you must bring something with you for the feast. No one comes up to the presence of the king empty handed. This is universal. I wrote two very long studies about that years ago.³ I wrote another one on this war stuff, that was published in the *Western Political Quarterly*. It was called "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing"⁴ and was about the chivalric rites of waging duels and wars for the land, etc. You had to do this. A *tent* is a *toll*. You had to pay toll on another person's land. If you didn't pay toll you had to fight him. If you won you didn't have to pay toll; he had to pay toll to you, etc. But *tent*, *toll*, and *tax* are all the same word. Taxing is the privilege you pay to live on the king's land. It's not the land you are paying for, but it's in recognition and submission. If you refuse the coin, which could be just a mere token, then you are in a state of defiance. Then you don't recognize his ownership of the land. That's what the tax is. *Tax* means *touch*. When you come into another person's land, you put up your tent and then you put your shield in front of it. If he comes up and taps the shield, then you have to come out and fight him, or get off his land, or pay a tax. If you don't want to fight him, you pay the *touch* or *tax*, and then you don't have to fight him. It was quite a system they had. They have it in the Book of Mormon, too.

³ Hugh W. Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," and "The Hierocentric State," in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 1–32; 99–147.

⁴ Hugh W. Nibley, "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," in *The Ancient State*, 33–98.

These horses are an interesting thing. The point is that they made a great thing about horses being an anachronism and this, that, and the other. That's not necessarily so; the horses come and go. They do in Europe, too. Various types of horses appear, like the little Polish horse that appeared and then disappeared entirely. Then there are the great horses, like these enormous Belgian horses with hooves like kegs that were used by the Crusaders. There are all sorts of horses. Then the Arab horses are something very special, and the Arabs never ride their horses when they migrate, only for races and displays. I had a special engraved invitation (I think I still have it) from King Hussein's secretary to attend the horse and camel races by the Dead Sea way back in 1964. The place is completely destroyed now; there is nothing left of it. They lead their horses and carry their horses, but they never would ride them across the desert. They ride the camels and lead the horses. The horse is a family pet, and the races are to show off. They are short races that only last a little while. They must be very violent because the horses usually bleed [profusely] from the nose in these races. I don't know why that is. They are hypersensitive, very intelligent, lovable beasts. Considering this treatment of animals, we don't know what they may have had in the way of horses [in the New World]. The Egyptians had horses in the royal establishment, and King Solomon had a huge stable, as you know. But they haven't found any horse bones, so don't expect to find very many horse bones here. Anyway, Ammon got the king's horses ready. (I mustn't slow down too much here.)

Verse 12: "And it came to pass that when Ammon had made ready the horses and the chariots for the king . . . he saw that the countenance of the king was changed; therefore he was about to return out of his presence. And one of the king's servants said unto him, Rabbanah, which is . . . powerful or great king . . ." Do you think that is Hebrew? It is not Hebrew. Remember where these people came from? (I have the note I took from the big Aramaic lexicon.)

Question: When the Nephites and the Lamanites went to battle against each other, did they go on foot?

Answer: Yes, they were usually on their feet. Well, that usually happens when you go to battle anyway. It was the Assyrians and the Romans who introduced the cavalry. The cavalry is Asiatic, as you can see from people like Genghis Khan and the Persians. As Xenophon said, the three things required of every Persian youth were "to shoot the bow, ride the horse, and speak the truth." They used to say that a man was considered less than a man—he had come down and was not human as soon as he got off a horse. You could spend your whole life on them. There are people in Central Asia who do—like the Kingiz who spend all their days on horses and never get off. They sleep and eat on them and everything else. In other words you either do or you don't [use horses]. These people [in the Book of Mormon] had them, but only for rare occasions; they were just ceremonial beasts. Lions are used the same way.

Verse 13: They called him "Rabbanah . . . or great king . . ." Isn't this absolutely perfect? I took a very interesting note on that [from Jastrow], and I can remember what it says. *Rabannah* is not Hebrew, as I said; it's Aramaic. It means "a great one, a great king, a great person, a great wise man." But it means "a person of utter preeminence" with the *nah* ending. With the *nah*, it means "our lord." *Rab* is *great*, and *Rabannah* would be "our great one." Notice that these people were Ishmaelites, which is important. That's why they didn't use the Hebrew term for "great king," which would be *Melek*. You get *Meleks* (kings) all through the Book of the Mormon—Amalickiah, Mulek, etc. But here it's *Rabannah*, which is what the Ishmaelites would say. We are told that these people are

descendants of Ishmael in this particular community, so they would say *Rabannah*, “great king.” They are rather removed here.

Verse 14: “What wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king? And the king answered him not for the space of an hour.” The king just sat there and stared at him. He was stunned at the sight of him. Could he be the Great Spirit? It is true that the Indians all expect this Great Spirit that came down to visit them. The Hopis do, the Navajos do, they all do. They ask, “Is this the the Great Spirit? Verse 17: “I say unto you, what is it, that thy marvelings are so great? Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant.” He still stares at him and says, “Who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things?”

Now here’s Ammon’s big chance to take advantage, as Cortez did. The king is going to believe anything he tells him now. How easily he could have done what we have done with the Indians and tricked him. What are some of the stories we know about? Mark Twain wrote one, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*. In Kipling’s story *The Man Who Would Be King* they were expecting a Great Spirit to come in India, and these rascals [took advantage of them]. Jules Verne wrote another one. There are a number of stories of men who have come among the savages. Because of their supernatural power, the savages are ready to worship them. They take advantage of that and are waited on hand and foot until their fatal flaw is discovered. It’s the same [opportunity] here, but “Ammon answered and said unto him: I am not.” Here was Ammon’s chance to tell a big, fat lie and convert the king. But [he wouldn’t do it].

Verse 20: “Tell me by what power ye slew and smote off the arms of my brethren that scattered my flocks. . . . Now, Ammon being wise, yet harmless . . .” He’s not going to lie, but now he plays a trick [by saying], will you believe everything I tell you? The king said, I will believe everything you tell me because he was ready to take it. “And thus he was caught with guile.” Ammon said, now I can preach to him and he will believe me. So he began, “Believest thou that there is a God?” God is an epithet, you see. [Ammon] would have used Eloah or Eli. He said, “I do not know what that meaneth.” It was an unfamiliar word. “And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?” Now, that’s the epithet they all used, the Great Spirit. “And he said, Yea. And Ammon said: “This is God,” [like saying], “This is Allah.” Do I believe in the Great Spirit? Yes. We are going to have this repeated a number of times in the rest of the book here, where the Great Spirit which they believed in is made absolutely identical with the God we believe in. So if an Indian asked me, “do you believe in the Great Spirit?” I would say, “yes, I do believe in the Great Spirit.” It’s the same thing. If an Arab asked me, “Do you believe in Allah?” there’s no other word [he could use] for God. So I would say, “Of course, I believe in Allah. I think I know more about him than you do.” “I know more about the Great Spirit than you do. Do you want to hear more?” That’s the approach that Ammon is using here. He gets him to say, yes, I believe in the Great Spirit. Then he says, well, so do I; now I’ll tell you who he is. He said, “This is God.”

I wonder whether I should read you something here. It’s rather distasteful, but it will illustrate what I have in mind. This is a news item from January 1986. The president of the Customs Clearing House, a Denver-based firm, wrote a letter to the Navajo Tribal Council protesting favored treatment in hiring practices of Navajos on the reservation. Well, shouldn’t Navajos have a favored position when they are being hired to work in the oil fields on the Navajo Reservation? He didn’t like that at all, and this is the letter he wrote. “Given the historical facts, we consider ourselves to be members of the conquering and superior race and you to be members of the vanquished and inferior race. We hold

your land and property to be spoils of war, ours by right of conquest. Through the generosity of our people, you have been given a reservation where you may prance and dance as you please, obeying your kings and worshipping your false gods.” Now, I’m wondering if this man is a Latter-day Saint because I’ve heard them talk just like that. His name is Ronald Ventriss and he is president of the company that supplies the oil fields with their equipment. “Contacted Monday, Ventriss said he had no regrets about the sending of the letter,” and there was no outrage or anything else. This is the position we have taken—this idea that they worship false gods and they have no rights at all because we worship the only true God. That’s not so. The Book of Mormon tells us a very different story.

Verse 26: “And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit? And he said, Yea. And Ammon said: This is God. And Ammon said unto him again: Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth?” Well, the Indian believed that already. These are all the basic questions. “And he said: Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens.” Well, who does? This is the cosmological aspect of it. Then Ammon explains to him more; he is going to teach him more about it. “The heavens is a place where God dwells and all his holy angels.” And King Lamoni, speaking with the innocence of a child, said, “Is it above the earth? And Ammon said: Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.” Most people think this is a primitive superstition—that heaven is a place where God dwells with all his angels. We smile at the expression.

Verse 33: “And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God?” It’s very interesting that he doesn’t give him a direct answer. He’s still careful not to give a false impression or to take advantage of Lamoni’s gullibility. He could have exploited that a lot. Lamoni is willing to believe anything he will tell him, but he wants to tell him only the truth. He could have made great capital out of his gullibility and trustworthiness. “And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God? Ammon said unto him: I am a man [so don’t get any ideas that I am superhuman or an angel or anything like that]; and man in the beginning was created after the image of God, and I am called by his Holy Spirit [he hasn’t talked to God face to face] to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true; [Then he meets him halfway here:] And a portion of that Spirit dwelleth in me, which giveth me knowledge, and also power according to my faith and desires which are in God.” As we said before, faith is not the power; it plugs into the power. It gives you access to the power. My faith gets me the power, but it is not the power. It amounts to it, if it comes to that. He began with the story of the [creation] and the fall “and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures [the project to follow this through would have been impossible without the scriptures] of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem, . . . the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness . . . and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time [verse 38]. . . . For he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world [see, he takes the gospel back to the preexistence, and he calls it the *plan*, you notice]; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ.”

Verse 41: “And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy. . . . And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead. And it came to pass that

his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed; and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights; and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss.”

A work called *The Ascension of Isaiah* was discovered in 1832 in Ethiopia, but not translated. It wasn't published until 1877. In *The Ascension of Isaiah* the same thing happened. Two events like this happened in the Book of Mormon, but this one from *The Ascension of Isaiah* is very interesting. The work is called *The Testament of Hezekiah*, which is still lost and being looked for. But this part of it came forth. “When Somnas the scribe [he is the scribe of King Hezekiah] and Assur the record-keeper [like Zoram in the Book of Mormon; they are in the court] heard that the great prophet Isaiah was coming up from Gilgal [near Jericho and about ten miles from Qumran] to Jerusalem, and with him 40 sons of the prophets [because they were collegiate] and his own son Jasum, they announced his approach to King Hezekiah. When he heard this King Hezekiah rejoiced exceedingly and went forth to meet the blessed Isaiah, taking him by the hand and conducting him into his royal dwelling, and ordered that a chair be brought for him.”⁵

This reminds us very much of Ammon visiting King Lamoni. Then the king brought in his son Manasseh and besought the prophet to give him a blessing. Isaiah said he didn't have a blessing because he foresaw the great sin that Manasseh would commit. It was Manasseh who martyred Isaiah. Isaiah, however, told the king that such behavior would profit him nothing, since Satan would have his way with Manasseh. (This is Isaiah in this case; later it's the king.) Later while he was sitting on the king's bed conversing, the prophet was overcome by the Spirit, “and his consciousness was carried away from this world, so that Somnas the record-keeper began to say that Isaiah was dead. But when Hezekiah the King came in and took him by the hand, he knew that he was not dead; but they thought he had died. . . . And thus he lay upon the bed of the King in his transported state [of *ekstasis*, which means your spirit having left your body; *ek/ex* is *out*, and *stasia* means standing up. So *ecstasy* is when your spirit leaves your body.] for three days and three nights. Then his spirit returned to his body, [and Isaiah] summoned Jasum his son and Somnas the scribe [the whole court, you see] and Hezekiah the King and all those who stood about such as were worthy to hear those things he had seen.” To them he delivered an ecstatic discourse on the “surpassing, indescribable, and marvelous works of God who is merciful to men, and of the glory of the Father and of his Beloved Son and of the Spirit, and of the ranks of the holy angels standing in their places.”

Now this is the same sort of thing that happens here. He saw the gospel plan. He was transported to heaven and saw God and his mercy, etc. In the same way when Isaiah comes to, he is going to say the same thing. Later on with the king and the queen this happens again. This is a very interesting passage here because it says, “And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead. And it came to pass that his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed [well, Isaiah is laid upon the king's bed here] and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights [with Isaiah it was three days and three nights]; and his wife, and his sons.” All the family were there mourning for him when he rose up again, which he did. It carried on a long time, and then he finally came to in verse 13: “He stretched forth his hand unto the woman, and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou. For as sure as thou

⁵ Hugh W. Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 181–82.

livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. . . . He sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit.”

Here when Isaiah comes to he says the same thing, “surpassing, indescribably, and marvelous works of God,” because he has seen the Father and his Beloved Son and the Spirit and the ranks of the holy angels in their places. So we get these interesting parallels in the Book of Mormon, with Joseph Smith always getting in just under the wire. This was discovered in 1832, just too late. Of course, he wouldn’t have read Ethiopian anyway. It wasn’t translated until 1877. So we have these stunning parallels all strung along in the Book of Mormon, which oblige me to take some things seriously and make me uncomfortable in some regards. I mean, what position is this putting us in anyway? This is getting awfully close to home if you ask me.