

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Alma 19–22

King Lamoni

We're on Alma 19. These chapters that follow have a number of unusual things happening in them. But in other ages these things were not so unusual; they were sort of routine. These things sound quite fantastic in the Book of Mormon. You may have heard Brother Packer during conference. He compared our time with just forty years ago. Well, I had already been teaching twenty years, forty years ago. But it's a different world, he said. Compared with that world, our world today is just a pastiche of crimes and excesses. You wouldn't recognize it. Unfortunately, I don't think its reversible either; it just goes more and more. This is the Book of Mormon; that's where it comes in. It keeps hitting back at us all the time. This was once thought to be utterly fantastic and out of this world—these excessive things, like civilizations destroying each other completely. Such a thing was utterly unheard of. Well, it isn't unheard of anymore. The Book of Mormon is for our time.

In chapter 19 we were talking about these [situations where people pass out]. Well, they are routine, too. And we were talking about the lost *Testament of Hezekiah*, [part of] which has turned up in a writing called *The Ascension of Isaiah*. Isaiah goes to the king's court and passes out on the king's bed. The people say he is dead. He's gone for two days and comes back again. When he comes back he says, I have seen the Messiah, O blessed Jesus, etc. That's the very thing that happens when the king and queen come to, here. The whole family passes out. This passing out is fairly common—it does happen. There's a very famous writing that's four hundred years older than Lehi, *The Journey of Wenamun*. It's a historical account of his journey from Egypt. He was on business for the king, and he was a high priest. He went to the palace in Tyre, and Zakar-Baal was the king there. He [Wenamun] would have lost everything if one of the chief courtiers hadn't passed out in this same way. When he came to he had had a vision. It was his vision that released Wenamun so that he was able to get away and go back to Egypt. There were some pirates waiting—it's quite a story.

The point is that this passing out is almost routine. And for some occasions in religions it's an important thing. It's so important and so basic as a religious experience that it is very commonly faked and imitated. Once you have had it you try to control it. What about all these drugs, all this peyote? The dancing has that effect. In the first volume of Chantepie de la Saussaye there's a great work on this subject. The main point of religion was to be bedizened and half out of your head. You get your nerves all whipped up to the point of breaking and then go into an ecstatic condition. This is produced by dancing, by choral singing, by drugs, by incense, and by dervishes. You know about whirling dervishes; they dance themselves into a drunken state where they pass out. In the Indian sun dance it's the same way (such as the Mandans). You were supposed to exhaust yourself by dancing. Then you passed out and had the visions, and then you came to. [There have been] whole groups of people passing out and then coming back and reporting visions. You couldn't be a member of some of the plains Indians unless you had done that. A young man had to go up into a mountain and fast and pray until he became so weak that

he passed out. Then he would have his private vision, receive his own totem (his own animal), and then come back and report. That would be a test to him. The animal might be a bear or a beaver. There were various customs in various tribes.

Well, this business of passing out that seems so strange in these chapters that follow is the routine. You are supposed to do this when you've had a real inspiration. Writers like Abraham of Santa Clara [have written about this]. And you know what the Tantra is, the Sheva cult of Tantra. The revivalists pass out, and the VooDoo still do it in the West Indies. In Haiti they do this. You may have seen documentaries where they dance themselves into a fit. A woman or a man will pass out; their eyes will go glazed with VooDoo. This is part of it, and this passing out is quite a routine. It's faking the real thing. If you can't have a vision, you can at least fake it. People do this all the time. Well, we don't have to do that sort of thing. Revelation appears on various levels. This is nowhere clearer than in the Book of Mormon, where Lehi starts out saying, "Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Nephi 8:2). Well, at what level can you have it (a dream, a vision)? They are all communication beyond your control.

Let's go on here with chapter 19. The king passed out, and Ammon went to the queen. Verse 5: "I would that ye should go in and see my husband, for . . . some say that he is not dead, [it's the same story as Isaiah and King Hezekiah and the prophecy about Mannaseh] but others say that he is dead and that he stinketh . . . but as for myself, to me he doth not stink. Now, this was what Ammon desired . . . and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God . . ." Notice the imagery that's used here and how often the word *light* is used: ". . . and the *light* which did *light* up his mind, which was the *light* of the glory of God, which was a marvelous *light* of his goodness—yea, this *light* had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the *light* of everlasting life was lit up in his soul." There are six lights in this sentence. Notice that this is imagery, and yet is it imagery? We are still faced with the basic question, what is light? Nobody knows. Protons don't have any weight or any mass. But what are they? "Yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God—" This is *ekstasis*; *ek* means *out*, and *stasis* means *stepping*. So you step out of your body when you are in a state of *ekstasis*. In Revelation John says that on the Lord's day he was in a state of *ekstasis*. He left his body. We are told the same about Abraham. In the Hebrew it's the *tardēmāh* of Old Testament when you pass out. In Genesis 15 the same thing happens. Abraham passes out the same way. His soul is carried aloft and then he comes back and reports.

Verse 8: "He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God [in other words God is taking care of him]. . . . And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word [but I believe]. And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman [here's another one], there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites." Now this isn't a paraphrase of the New Testament. After all, Ammon had been a missionary to more Nephites than anyone else; he knew the Nephites by heart. He said we don't find such faith among all the Nephites as we find here, and these are Lamanites. An interesting thing is about to happen here. He [the king] arose and said, "I have seen my Redeemer." In the Isaiah text first the king passes out and then Isaiah. Isaiah comes to and says, "I have seen the Messiah." He has been taken aloft. So we have a sort of standard vision here. Then "he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit."

They were all passing out. This is the way you do when you are completely overwhelmed this way. Verse 14: “He fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren [Ammon did this because his message has gotten over]; and he was also overpowered with joy [and he fell down, too]; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth.”

Of course, the hardest thing to contain is joy. Anybody can contain all sorts of pain. It’s amazing what you can put up with when you have to put up with pain. How astonishing it is—there’s just no limit. But joy is a thing that scares the daylights out of you. You can’t contain it and don’t know what to do with it. In the Moscow Art Theatre they say, “Suffer, suffer, suffer; that’s the way you become an artist.” Well, we love to suffer; there’s no limit to how much we can suffer. But joy is so much harder to take. You don’t know what to do with it, do you? And yet that’s the purpose of our existence—we “are that we might have joy.” So we are learning to control joy and control ourselves when we have it. We can’t contain it, you see. It’s a hard thing to contain. What do you do? Do you shout and holler and run around? Do you make a fool of yourself, etc.? How can you contain that in yourself? Well, they are all sinking down here and passing out, and that’s the best thing. After all, when pain becomes too great you black out automatically. So that takes care of that. It’s the same thing with joy if you can’t contain it. When you don’t know how to handle a problem psychologically, what do you do? You black out. This is your defense. It’s a form of Pentecost here and very special. It’s a part of initiation times. They are one-time experiences which people attempt to repeat, as in the Sioux sun dance and the Sufis. The Sufis are the most important branch of mystics among the Moslems; they have to pass out. So you have your various dances and dervishes and things like that.

People wondered what was going on; they didn’t understand. Verse 16: “They did call on the name of the Lord, in their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth.” Then this Abish comes along. That’s a very interesting name because that’s the name on a very famous Egyptian mural from a tomb in the Middle Kingdom. It shows a family coming from Palestine to Egypt. It’s a family of bedouins very vividly portrayed, and the leader is Abish. They [in verse 16] had all fallen to the earth. This was Abish “having been converted to the Lord, and never having made it known” to anyone before. When she saw this opportunity she ran forth from house to house making it known, and they began to assemble themselves. It was a great display, “and they all lay there as though they were dead. . . . And now the people began to murmur among themselves.” Something is wrong here. They say, the king has brought this evil upon himself. The central theme of this particular story goes back to the waters of Sebus. “The king hath brought this evil upon his house, because he slew his servants who had had their flocks scattered at the waters of Sebus.” This king has done wrong in doing this.

Now this is the interesting thing that happens. What about the men at Sebus who had scattered the flocks? They were there. Verse 21: “And they were also rebuked by those men who had stood at the waters of Sebus and scattered the flocks which belonged to the king, for they were angry with Ammon.” They were in the crowd. It was part of the game; they were accepted here. A strange crime against the king. They announced their presence here; they shouted out at him. “They were angry with Ammon because of the number which he had slain of their brethren at the waters of Sebus, while defending the flocks of the king.” One of them was the brother of the one that Ammon had killed in the single combat, the only one killed with the sword. He drew his sword and made at Ammon, and he fell dead. So they did have swords after all. Strange goings on here. But it only occurs to them now that what they had been doing there was wrong. Verse 24: “When the

multitude beheld that the man had fallen dead . . . fear came upon them all, and they durst not put forth their hands to touch him or any of those who had fallen.” Strange goings on here, aren’t they? Verse 25: “There were many among them who said that Ammon was the Great Spirit, and others said he was sent by the Great Spirit.”

I refer to an article of mine here in *The World and the Prophets*. Shamanism is very important. The basic priest throughout the ancient world is the shaman, as you know. The shaman absolutely must pass out, and he must nearly die or he is not a true shaman. Sometimes they really do; they don’t come back. They have to be taken abroad. They have to be taken up to heaven by a bird, and they have to be brought back again after many trials. All the way from the tip of Tierra del Fuego, especially across northern Asia, the shamans existed. And you find the pictures from Altamira in Spain of shamans in action in prehistoric drawings. Throughout the ancient world the shaman was the central religious figure. But in order to gain his calling he had to pass out and he had to be taken to heaven in his mind. It was a real experience. He had to fast until he was unconscious and then he went through this experience. As I said, it not uncommonly happens that he doesn’t come back again. So it’s quite a risky thing this Shamanism. It’s very desirable and, therefore, artificially induced. They must have seen something to be real shamans, and they risk possession by evil spirits in the rite.

Notice some said that Ammon “was sent by the Great Spirit; But others rebuked them all, saying that he was a monster, who had been sent from the Nephites to torment them. . . . And they said that it was this Great Spirit who had destroyed so many of their brethren, the Lamanites.” The Great Spirit is on the side of the Nephites. It turned into hysteria. Verse 28: “And thus the contention began to be exceedingly sharp among them. And while they were thus contending, the woman servant . . . came” and told them about it. Then they said it was her fault. When she saw the contention that she had caused, she decided she was to blame and “was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto tears [what have I done here?]. . . . She went and took the queen by the hand” and she arose. This is a critical situation here, isn’t it? “And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood.”

This is typical. When the shaman comes out, he talks in riddles and rhymes. Again, the ancient world was governed by the oracles. What was the oracle? The oracle was a woman who was made to pass out. Usually she snuffed bay leaf, which is very powerful. If you live on the bay around the coast, you can go down to Stinson Beach or Half Moon Bay and get the laurel. If you rub it like this and take a good sniff, you’ll pass out. Well, the Delphic Oracle was the woman who governed the ancient world for centuries. Everybody went to Delphi to consult that oracle. She was a woman who sat on a tripod over a pot of bay leaf and passed out. When she was out of her mind, she would utter things. It was uttered in rhyme and sometimes in strange tongues. Sometimes it was in gibberish. So this is a type of institution which we are not familiar with today, but it has ruled the world until very recently. Until very recently we have had these things—these strange gifts and perversions. You’ll find them among the Druzes in Lebanon. For years I went around with an old Druze, and he taught me various things about that, too. Very strange things going on here. So she carried on like this, and then she took King Lamoni’s hand and he arose. “And he, immediately, seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them” for behaving the way they were. “But there were many among them who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way.”

“If they believe not Moses and the prophets, they will believe not the one that rose from the dead,” the Lord said. This was an anti-climax as far as they were concerned. Verse 33: “When Ammon arose he also administered unto them.” But you notice he didn’t convince everyone; many among them didn’t believe it at all. He went among all his servants, and “their hearts had been changed; . . . many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them.” You notice that angels must get things moving because the point is this. Here we reach a critical point in Book of Mormon history. From this time on the Lamanites start going up in virtue, and the Nephites start going down. The Lamanites become the virtuous people now. It’s a very strong trend we see from here on. This critical moment in history is the turning point. It had to be, and the only way such a thing could happen would have to be by another Pentecost, by an eruption of the spirit, a breaking in or intrusion of the other world. Theologians are talking a lot about this today. They never talked about it before, but they say what you have in the New Testament is an intrusion of the other world into this one—a breakthrough, something that people never could have arranged or suspected, a note of surprise. With the restoration of the gospel then as now, the main theme was surprise. Everybody was surprised because things were happening completely beyond their control. Utter amazement seizes them, and the angels have to say, “Don’t be afraid; we are messengers from God.” So this is not a normal occurrence. The big shift begins here in the Book of Mormon where the Lamanites begin to get a break. We talked about mixing races; from now on you’re not going to be able to distinguish them at all. Many said “they had seen angels and had conversed with them . . . and as many as did believe were baptized; and they became a righteous people, and they did establish a church among them. And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites.” That’s why this thing is so sensational, so very striking. The work of the Lord begins among the Lamanites. The moral of that, says Mormon, is “that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.”

We have to move right along now, don’t we? Lamoni desired that Ammon should go with him on a trip to see his father. Lamoni said, won’t you come and see my father? His father was the high king of the whole country. It was just like the Sachem, the five nations of Indians on the eastern coast when the first pilgrims came here. They had a system of nations in which there was a high king and then the lower kings below him. But the Lord said, “Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi, for behold, the king will seek thy life; but thou shalt go to the land of Middoni; for behold, thy brother Aaron, and also Muloki and Ammah are in prison.” The name *Middoni* is a very interesting one. It wasn’t until the end of the nineteenth century that we discovered the Mittani. Who are the Mittani? They are the nation just to the north and east of Manasseh. There is half Manasseh in the desert east of the Jordan. Just to the north and east of them is the next nation, which is *Madani*, or *Midian*, or *Mittani*. It’s usually written *Mittani*. It’s amply testified in the Hittite and especially in the Egyptian records. This is *Mittani* obviously, and it changes with *d*.

One of our boys has gone to Berkeley to study Egyptian. They are telling him now that they have completely changed the sound of *r*, which used to be so dominant in Egyptian. It has suddenly changed to *l*. They used to say there was no *l* in Egyptian. Well, within the last two years you have to say *l* where you used to say *r*. That’s the way they change things. It’s the same with *Mittani* and *Middoni*. You find these changes. This is *Middoni* it’s talking about, the land next to Lehi country, half Manasseh there in the desert east. Remember Lehi was of Manasseh and Egyptian and all this sort of thing. And, of course, it’s Arabic because they had the Ishmaelites here. They brought Ishmael along with them. The Ishmaelites kept their separate identity. The Moslems still preach that Ishmael was a

descendant of Abraham. He was the elder son of Abraham, and he became the father of the Arabs. You have people going by the name of Ishmaelite because there was this feud between Ishmael and Isaac. They fight each other. You remember the Ishmaelites had separated themselves here. They came along, too. It's a complicated picture. *Middoni* was only discovered in the 1880s, and Petrie decided it must be related to the Midian of Moses.

Ammon said, "Behold, my brother and brethren are in prison at Middoni, and I go that I may deliver them." The king said, I have some clout; I'll go with you and help you get them out. So they made ready his chariots and horses. As I've said before, with the exhausting treks of the brethren from land to land that we've been reading about in this part of the Book of Mormon, why didn't they ride horses like cowboys and Indians do? The horse appears in the Book of Mormon as a rare and exotic animal, exactly as the Arab steed appears in ancient, medieval, and modern times. In 1964 I went with somebody, and one of his purposes was to buy Arab horses. Real Arabs are very hard to get. You find them popping up, but they are only for kings. They're rare and royal animals. They say they aren't like other horses at all. They are special beasts. They are highly sensitive—too sensitive as a matter of fact. They are nervous, but they are extremely intelligent. There is something strange and eerie about them, the Arabs will tell you. People say so. They raise lots of [Arabian horses] here in the valley up toward Pleasant Grove, but they are mixed. They are a rare, exotic, imported animal, and only for kings. Maybe a great duke might have one. The riding horse was very limited throughout the Middle Ages. In England by the forest laws of the Normans no Saxon was allowed to ride a horse. Only a noble could ride a horse. Well, what is the common word for *knight* on the continent? It's Ritter, a rider. Only someone of noble blood could ride a horse, the noble knights. That's from the Equestrian Order of Rome. The Equestrian Order were only those of noble blood. They were equestrians. They could ride a horse, and nobody else was permitted to ride a horse. You had to have a particular blood line. They were very special animals, usually limited just to kings until they became useful in war, etc. But we find the same thing [with other animals]. Throughout Europe you will find, where you never expect to find them, peacocks and elephants and camels. Frederick II, king of Sicily, had those, but they were rare and exotic things that always caused excitement. You would find them clear up in England sometimes. It's the idea of these strange beasts appearing and being taken care of. This is the picture you get in the Book of Mormon. Only kings have them, and he is taking care of the king's horses for his chariots. Nobody rides horses in the Book of Mormon. As we said before, nobody rides horses in the Near East, just as nobody rides bicycles—just as we don't ride water buffaloes here. We would be scared to death to do it, but they do it in southeastern Asia.

Lamoni said to Ammon, "I will go with thee to the land of Middoni." There Ammon is making ready the king's horses and chariots. That's a thing for only a noble person to do. The equestrian, the one who takes care of the king's stables, is the constable. Who is the constable of France? He is the one next to the king. The constable is the one who takes care of the king's stables, and that's as high as you can get. Remember the great speech the constable of France gives in *Henry V*? He was the one that settled the peace between England and France; he was the king's highest representative. So horses are a strange, exotic thing. You can't generalize about horses too much, as I'm doing here. But in the Book of Mormon they were imported from the plains to the north. As my friend Woodrow Bora found out, all the trade in horses between the continental United States and Mexico was not in taking Spanish horses up to the continent. They brought them down from the plains through Santa Fe to Mexico. They were brought to Mexico, not

from Mexico. He finds that significant, along with other things. Well, we won't bother with horses too much.

Now here is a very dramatic situation right out of *Oedipus*. Verse 8: "They met the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land." He was the *sachem*, the high king. He gave a real speech, and this shows you that the Lamanites had a case. They really believed this, and this is the point at which the Lamanites turn. They now start to become the righteous people. They were justified in their own eyes in what they did because here was the king, and he couldn't stand Nephites. He said they have betrayed us, tricked us, and outsmarted us all the time. This was the point because the Nephites did outsmart them. They would have a great resentment against that.

Verse 9: "Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people?" Well, the feast of the king is compulsory wherever you go. In the last chapter of Zachariah it's the same thing. From year to year everyone shall come up to Jerusalem to the feast—the feast of the Passover, the feast of the booths this was, the feast of the *sukkot*. You must come to the feast, and you must bring something with you. No one shall come empty handed. You had to bring your offerings of lamb or doves, etc. You had to bring food with you, and they had the great feast. Well, it's like the coronation in the book of Mosiah, where Benjamin gave his great speech. That's the strict and correct description of the rite that took place at the feast. It was feasting that they engaged in. If you didn't come, you were an *ūtlage*, outlaw. You were outlawed from the kingdom for three years. You had no citizenship and no rights. You had to come and report and have your name put in the Book of Life, the list of the *incisi*. I wrote a long article years ago for the centennial lecture up at the University of Utah when they were celebrating. It was on this very thing. It was published in the *Western Political Quarterly* back in 1951.¹ They haven't reprinted it yet.

After his father asked why he didn't come to the feast, "he also said: Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar?" Now this is the case the Lamanites make out for themselves. This is a skillful history, too. It's like the telling of a saga. The language is, too. "Lamoni rehearsed unto him whither he was going" and what he was going to do because he had to tell him. "And he also told him all the cause of his tarrying in his own kingdom [why he didn't go to the feast, etc.]. And now when Lamoni had rehearsed unto him all these things, behold, to his astonishment, his father was" not impressed but he was furious. He said, "Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar [get them out of jail; this is the Lamanite party line]. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us." Here we have these Nephites circulating and spreading missionary news, and Lamoni had given them a free hand. He had given them a *carte blanche* to do anything they wanted. He goes too far; in fact it causes a revolution a little later on. They robbed our fathers, and you are letting them do anything they want among us—infiltrate us "that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property." We haven't been the robbers; they have been the robbers [the king claimed]. The Nephites (men like Alma and Amulek) had consistently outsmarted the Lamanites. The Lamanites had a real grievance. They were not bad as Lamanites anymore than the Russians are bad as Russians. This is an important insight

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

into Lamanite mentality. And we still treat the Indians this way. After all, they still get the dirty end of the stick, you might say. He [the king] ordered him to “slay Ammon with the sword.” He wouldn’t put up with it at all. He was very serious and “mad as a hatter.”

Verse 15: “But Lamoni said unto him: I will not slay Ammon, neither will I return to the land of Ishmael.” He defied his father openly, and to defy the king openly is treason. Verse 16: “Now when his father had heard these words, he was angry with him, and he drew his sword that he might smite him to the earth.” After all, he had openly defied the high king, his father. This was treason, and he should be smitten. But Ammon stood forth against him, to his surprise. He said, “If thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved.” No one dies well who dies in a battle. Remember those great speeches of the soldier from *Henry V* where he says, because we die in our anger, because we die in wrath, that’s no way to die. It’s a terrible thing [paraphrased]. It’s the same thing here, “If thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved.” Moreover, “he being an innocent man, his blood would cry from the ground.”

What is the rationale of this saying we have again and again in the Pearl of Great Price especially—“his blood shall cry from the ground” or “from the earth.” There’s a rationale for this very ancient formula. The earth is the mother of life and is the womb of the resurrection also. From the earth we are resurrected and out from the earth we are born. She is Mother Earth. She is the mother of life and the womb of the resurrection. The destruction of life in any form is the reversal and perversion of existence itself, as we learn in Ether 8:19 in the Book of Mormon. “For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man.” It’s an unspeakably horrendous calamity deliberately to reverse the process for which the earth was created. If the earth accepts their blood, it will cry from the ground and demand vengeance, as it does in the book of Moses.

Verse 19: “I know that if I should slay my son, that I should shed innocent blood; for it is thou that hast sought to destroy him. And he stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon. But Ammon withstood his blows, and also smote his arm . . . [good old Ammon; he knew how to hit people’s arms, didn’t he?]. Now when the king saw that Ammon could slay him, he began to plead with Ammon that he would spare his life.” The “gun” is in the other guy’s hand now. Remember how quickly they change around in our endless police shows, etc. The person who has the gun has all power. One moment he is insufferably arrogant and the next he is cringing. This happens with the king here because Ammon has the “gun” now and is holding it on him. The king said, I will give you anything, even half the kingdom [paraphrased]. Again, why this old formula “half the kingdom.” Well, you know the game of chess. In English we call it *chess*, but that’s just the first word *shāh* which means “the king.” The game is *shāh māt*, as they call it in other languages everywhere, whether it’s Russian, German, French, or anything else. *Shāh māt* means “the king is dead,” and the whole thing in chess is to checkmate the king. *Checkmate* means “the king is dead.” *Māt* in all Semitic languages means “dead.” When he is checkmated, he may have a whole board full of pieces, but he is beaten if he is checkmated. It doesn’t make any difference how many kings, queens, and bishops he has, he has lost. And it’s the same thing here; it’s to beat the king. If the king has lost then he must lose all. Then his kingdom and his whole army (another article I wrote)² go over to the other side, and they belong to the other king. But to save his life he may compromise. He may not give away

² Hugh W. Nibley, “Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” in *The Ancient State*, 33–98.

his kingdom because he has been anointed and appointed to it as a sacred office. He must keep it. But he must save his life, so he'll have to give you the kingdom. How does he do it? He splits it exactly in half—the halving of the kingdom. He gives you half, and he keeps half. He spares his life, he keeps his office, and he gives you legitimate claim to your half. This settles everything. This is the idea of the half. How can the king possibly share it? Well, he can share it only if he halves it. There is a lot of Egyptian lore connected with this—the halving of the kingdom, the red and the white kingdom, and all this sort of thing.

Verse 24: “If thou wilt grant that my brethren may be cast out of prison . . . [so they spare him]. . . . And when he saw that Ammon had no desire to destroy him, and when he also saw the great love he had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly [by his behavior] and said: Because this is all that thou hast desired, that I would release thy brethren, and suffer that my son Lamoni should retain his kingdom [so that was all right], behold, I will grant unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more [he gave him a free hand.] And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee.” Come and see me as soon as you can, he says.

Then there's another minor king. Notice that they went to the land of Middoni, and the king of Middoni was another one of those minor kings. Lamoni was a fellow king, so they got along very nicely. It says, “And Lamoni found favor in the eyes of the king of the land; therefore the brethren of Ammon were brought forth out of prison.” If he and Lamoni hadn't got along they never would have got out; he had influence. But they were really in a terrible condition when they came out because they had had a rough time. Then in chapter 21 it gives a flashback and shows how they happened to get into the prison and what they went through first. They separated themselves, and “Aaron took his journey towards the land which was called by the Lamanites Jerusalem, calling it after the land of their fathers' nativity [which is a common practice, of course]. . . . Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem.” There were three different elements in it. We can't call them races, but there were three different cultures joined together in it. It tells us here that the “Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder.” Of the three the Lamanites were the nicest, but it was the Amalekites and the Amulonites [who were the hardest]. One was Nephite and the other was Mulekite. It tells us that apostates are the worst enemies of the church; they always are. They are much worse than any outsiders. They “were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts.” And the Amalekites “had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors.” The good old Nehor church; you are going to find it everywhere. It was the popular church, the popular religion. And it was a religion. Most of these wicked people in the Book of Mormon are very religious, and they were here. And there “arose an Amalekite,” who challenged them and started preaching to them. “Why do not angels appear unto us?” We are as good as you are. That's a good question actually. “How knowest thou that we have cause to repent?” That's not such a good question—everybody does. President Benson's opening talk at the conference was refreshing, wasn't it? It was the nearest to a talk on repentance I've heard for ages. As you know, it was on pride. And whose pride? The wickedness of the Book of Mormon. Whose wickedness? Ours. That's what he was talking about; it was a call to repentance. He wasn't accusing other people [non-LDS] at all when he gave that wonderful talk about pride.

So “there arose an Amalekite” who said, how do you know we have cause to repent. As soon as people say they are a righteous people, of course, you know they are not. That’s automatic; it’s self-righteousness. “Behold, we have built sanctuaries [we’ve built churches; aren’t we good people? We’ve done that], and we do assemble ourselves together to worship God [we go to meeting]. We do believe that God will save all men.” This is the routine. Incidentally, it’s an interesting thing that repentance is missing from all the ancient religions except the Old Testament. The word *repentance* doesn’t exist for the Egyptians and the others. I have been reading a lot of Egyptian wisdom literature, and the idea that you should repent [doesn’t exist there]. What you want is luck. They never connect what you have done in the past with your moral behavior. You’ve done what you’ve done, and that’s that. It’s an interesting thing that there is no word in Egyptian for *sin*. And in America today sin is having the wrong ideology. It’s being on the wrong side. The Ten Commandments are only fifty percent binding. They bind us but they don’t control our behavior toward bad people. We shall not kill, we shall not lie, we shall not steal from good people. But you can do it with bad people all you want [according to this philosophy]. And they do it everywhere else. We call that *revenge* because they have been bad. Well, notice that we are having a shift at this point. The good and bad are shifting between the Nephites and the Lamanites. We get it here.

Verse 7: “Now Aaron said unto him: Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?” How do you know that? “We do not believe in these foolish traditions.” We don’t need them at all—this idea of the Atonement. “Now Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them concerning the coming of Christ,” and the resurrection and the redemption. This summarizes the main points of the gospel. The coming of the Christ brings about the resurrection, which brings about the redemption “through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood.” He gave them the whole package, and this made them madder than ever. He gave them the straight gospel. Then “they were angry with him, and began to mock him.” They wouldn’t hear it. It sounded utterly ridiculous. So he just left them—that was all he could do—and went over to Ani-Anti. The people there were hard in their hearts just as bad, so he left there and came over to the land of Middoni. The Lord said, if they don’t receive you in one city go to another. This is how they got to the land of Middoni, and this is where they were put into jail. This has been a flashback telling us how they got into jail. Aaron and his brethren were cast into prison, and the remainder of them fled. Verse 14: “And those who were cast into prison suffered many things, and they were delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon.” So this is where we were in the story.

And they went forth led by the Spirit after they were out of jail “preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted. . . . The Lord began to bless them, insomuch that they brought many to the knowledge of the truth.” King Lamoni has a rather extreme program. He hasn’t converted his people yet, but he really pushes the church. You might say he overdoes it because it is very soon going to bring about a revolution against him. They are going to get rid of him. He had “synagogues built in the land of Ishmael; and he caused that his people should assemble themselves together. . . . And he did teach them many things.” And any that fled from oppression by the king, his father, went to them. “And he also declared unto them that they might have the liberty of worshiping the Lord. . . . Ammon was thus teaching the people of Lamoni continually.” Then Aaron “was led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi, even to the house of the king which was over all the land save it were the land of Ishmael [these Ishmaelites are a different stock, too]; and he was the father of Lamoni.” The king of the land of [Nephi] was the father of Ishmael, and

Lamoni was an Ishmaelite. He “bowed himself before the king, and said, . . . we are the brethren of Ammon; . . . we will be thy servants.”

The king said, “I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon; and I desire to know the cause why he has not come up out of Middoni with thee.” Aaron said he had gone to the land of Ishmael. Then he asked Aaron questions about the Spirit of the Lord, is there a God, etc. Remember, they are trying to establish a bridge with the Lamanites, who for hundreds of years had been going their own way and had their own version of the gospel. They had kept the Great Spirit, and they still have. They still believe all these things. It’s a complex picture we have here. Verse 7: “And the king said: I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries [this is the high king]. . . . Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king [said Aaron], there is a God. And the king said: Is God that Great Spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem?”

If an Indian says, “We believe in the Great Spirit. Do you believe in the Great Spirit?” That’s a legitimate title. Verse 10: “And Aaron said unto him: Yea, he is that Great Spirit, and he created all things both in heaven and in earth.” So we both worship the same Great Spirit after all. Verse 12: “When Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam.” That’s the starting point, and it’s an on-going history through verse 18—the creation of Adam and the plan of redemption. “And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself.” How could that happen? What does that mean? Why do you disqualify yourself once you fall? If you just fall once why do you disqualify yourself? Because you will never again be as pure and as strong as you were before you fell just that once—unless you undergo a complete renovation again. So we have to have the atonement and baptism and all that. But it’s true that if you have yielded once you will never be as strong and as certain as you were before. You may think, “Well, I found out now; I had to learn about sin.” But it doesn’t work that way. Nevertheless, we do have to learn about it, so here we go. That’s what the gospel is. It brings this very powerful medicine in after we’ve got ourselves good and sick here.

Verse 15: “What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken?” He being a king, this is a very interesting thing. I’ve been reading accounts of Nectanebus and Alexander, and a brand new, just discovered papyrus of Sesebek, a king. They are all about the same thing. It’s called the Vandier papyrus, and there are others. It’s the story of the king who has one great worry. Alexander the Great ruled the world, as you know. In the story that we read in the Pseudo Callisthenes he had just one obsession. Everywhere he went, every oracle he visited, every land he conquered, he had just one purpose. “Why do I have to have such a short life?” he said. “Why do I have to give it up? Can’t I last longer? How long will I live?” In this story of Sesebek the king is told that he can only live seven days. Oh boy, that really gets things going when Merere, the wise scribe, is the only one that can prolong his days. There’s a terrific thing where the wisemen all fail, etc. It’s quite a papyrus, and just in the last year it has already come in for some very important commentaries, etc. But the point is that these great kings, whether it’s Sesebek or whoever it is, have everything. But what’s the good of having everything if you can’t keep it—if you can only keep it for a very little while? This worries kings more than it worries other people. What does he say here? If I can only be king for a little while it’s nothing. (I’ll think of the quotation in a minute; let’s not slow down for it though.)

What shall I do that I may have this eternal life? . . . Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast [the guilty king, you see; the king can do anything he wants, so he has done some pretty awful things] . . . that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold . . . I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy” (Alma 22:15).

At the end of the Pseudo Callisthenes, Alexander climbed a Himalayan peak that nobody had climbed before. Trust Alexander to do that! Using pitons he got up and then he consulted with Brahmans, with the wise sages of India. This was the one question. He said he would give up his kingdom or anything else if they would assure him of eternal joy. They said, “Well, you’re the king; you can do what you want.” He said, “No, that’s one thing I can’t do. What can you promise me?” Well, they can’t promise him anything. So the king is desperate here, and he starts out like St. Augustine begins the *Confessions*. “O God . . . if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me” (Alma 22:18). Is this a fair prayer to say, “O God, if there is a God?” How can you pray to him if you are not sure? And if you pray to him, you are assuming that he assists. Aren’t you cheating that way? You ask him to reveal himself. This puzzled St. Augustine. He said, I pray to God to reveal himself, but in praying to him I’m assuming that he has already revealed himself. That’s not right. I’m supposed to be completely rational and completely logical here. I can’t cheat by assuming that God exists before I prove that he exists. How can I do it? He gets all tied up in that. *Fides quaerens intellectum* he calls it—“faith looking for an intellectual justification for it.”

Verse 18: “. . . that I may be raised from the dead.” See, that’s what he wants; he wants to be raised from the dead. His kingdom doesn’t count for anything if it’s just going to go down the drain. Well, there are so many stories, like the great story of Hisham, the king whose end draws near. It’s a tragic story. It’s the very essence of tragedy—the king who has it all. “And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.” Here it happened again—he was struck as if he were dead. Here we go again. This is just a short one. The queen was angry. The servants didn’t lay their hands on Aaron and his brethren. When the queen saw that the servants were scared stiff, she began to be frightened. She called the people in so they could slay Aaron and his brethren. Aaron saw that things were getting bad, so he put forth his hand and raised the king. This is a much shorter episode than the other one, and the “whole household were converted unto the Lord.”

“Now there was a multitude gathered” and because of the great murmurings “the king stood forth among them and administered unto them.” It parallels the other missionary occurrence; it follows a formula almost. Then “the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land.” Then in verse 28 we have a nice summary of Lamanite culture. The Lamanites are changing their ways now, and these had been their customs for centuries. “Now, the more idle part of the Lamanites lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents [or tepees]; and they were spread throughout the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla [they are always on the west along the Pacific coast there] in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers’ first inheritance [because they landed from the Pacific] and thus bordering along by the seashore.”

They could complain about Nephite aggression because the Nephites had practically bottled them up here. “And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them.” They wouldn’t allow the east and the west to

make contact. As the Generalstab says, “The one thing to avoid is a war on two fronts.” So they kept them separated; they kept the Lamanites off balance because they were greatly outnumbered by the Lamanites. You can see why the Lamanites would resent that—being always kept off balance, and things always being stirred up. In the far north it was called Desolation. You would get up into the desert country in the far north. I suppose it was Sonora or something like that, the desert up there. “. . . it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed.” There had been other people in the land, and not too far away. These weren’t the first people. When you find bones, it doesn’t mean they are Nephite, Lamanite, or Jaredite necessarily. I think the Jaredites were much farther up at this time.

Verse 31: “And they came from there up into the south wilderness.” From the north there they came up. It’s just like the Nile when you go upstream to the south wilderness. Of course, it’s much higher elevation than the coastlands. The land northward was Desolation, and the land southward was Bountiful. Now we are told in the *Millhāmāh Scroll*, the *Battle Scroll* of the Dead Sea Scrolls that before the battle the priest would go out before the Lord of Hosts and formally dedicate all the land of the enemy as *Hormāh*, as *Desolation*. And then he would dedicate all the land of Israel as *Blessed*, as the land *Bountiful*, as “blessed of the Lord and fruitful.” So there were the two lands, and they were supposed to expand the land. It’s like expanding into the *Dār al-Ḥarb* and the *Dār al-Islām* in Islam. The *Dār al-Islām* is all the pacified land, and the *Dār al-Ḥarb* is the other. *Dār al-Ḥarb* is the same thing as *Hormāh*. It means “war, desolation, destruction.” So everything that hasn’t been conquered by Islam is *Dār al-Ḥarb*. That’s the desolate part. And the other is *Dār al-Islām*, the “land that was submitted to God.” It was the same thing with the Romans, the *ager pacatus* and the *ager hosticus*, the *pacified* land and the *hostile* land. Anything you haven’t conquered is refusing you submission and, therefore, is in a state of rebellion and must be conquered. So the Romans had to conquer the world or they didn’t feel safe. They always felt unsafe if there were enemies on their borders. By enemies, they meant any unconquered people. They misused everybody, so they expected people wouldn’t like them too much. So we get this crazy imperialism that goes on. Well, they [the Lamanites] sort of have a case against the Nephites here, don’t they?

Verse 32: “And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea.” We are told in Deuteronomy that the king Arad tried to conquer some of the Israelite tribes, and they counterattacked and laid the land waste. In Numbers 21:1–3 it tells us that all the land was called *Desolation* after because it was destroyed and they wouldn’t allow anything to grow in it again. So they called the kingdom of Arad the *land desolation*, as against the *land of Israel*.

Verse 32: “And thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water.” That certainly places them in Central America, doesn’t it? Notice that the Nephites “had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south.” They wouldn’t like that, you see. The wisdom of the Nephite was “that they might have a country whither they might flee.” They were outnumbered and they looked forward to a time when they might have to withdraw. To have something to fall back on they kept the land up in the North. This was their military policy through the years, and you can see it would always bring pressure on the Lamanites. The Lamanites were always making their slave raids, etc.

Wow, the time is up now. This is just what you might call historical stuff, etc. But the Book of Mormon simply shines through this. It's so much like the stuff I've been reading now that it's just right in the same library. People don't recognize this because they don't read the other stuff. We certainly should finish Alma this semester. Sixty-two chapters to Alma! We are now on chapter 23 and we have been four or five weeks on it. We are really going to have to speed things up.

It's in chapter 23 when the king goes too far. I mean he practically turns the kingdom over to the missionaries and lets them do what they want. A lot of people resent it, and they stage a revolution. There's a big war as a result of it. You shouldn't go too far in your piety.