

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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3 Nephi 6–7

Byzantine Civilizations and Zion
Secret Combinations

Well, we're in the sixth chapter of 3 Nephi, and everybody says at this point, "Well, this is where I came in. You mean we've got to go through this again?" As it starts out, you notice everything is lovely at the beginning. The Nephites all returned to their own lands, a happy ending. They still had plenty of provisions left. It wasn't seven years—it wasn't even six years—and they returned to their own lands, and everything was lovely, like 1945. And they rehabilitated the robbers. Verse 3: "And they granted unto those robbers who had entered into a covenant . . . land [they even granted them lands to settle] . . . wherewith to subsist upon; and thus they did establish peace in all the land." They not only rehabilitated the robbers, they gave them land. That was their trouble—there was no way to make a living otherwise. "And they began again to prosper and wax great." Now this is a postwar boom that is a beauty. They really flourished because everything had to be built up again. There was a great demand for everything, and everything started to flourish magnificently—a boom, you see. Verse 7: "There were many cities built anew [all this reconstruction to be done] and there were many old cities repaired." The inner structures were restored. What we call the infrastructures had broken down, and they were repaired. Notice the Book of Mormon is right up to times in these things. You not only build new cities, you have to repair the old ones, and that's where the big expense goes.

Verse 8: "And there were many highways cast up, and many roads made"—great road building. See, that's what happened after World War II. We didn't have any freeways. We didn't have any I-15 or anything like that. There were none of those roads in the country at all until after World War II, and then came this, "many highways were cast up, and many roads made, which led from city to city." And this is a very vivid picture of the culture as we actually know it was. But then "there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches." Do we have to go through this again? you say. It had only been three years, and this was beginning to happen.

Notice they have a very efficient Byzantine civilization. Almost all ancient civilizations were formed like this. By byzantine, we mean you have various classes with various uniforms and insignias, various preparations, educations, etc. In Rome if you were a member of the conscript patris you wore a toga. You didn't, if you were not. If you were a member of the plebs, you didn't. And if you were a workman, you had to wear a russet brown garment. If you were a little higher up in business, you added a purple tinge to it. If you were an official, you wore the *toga clavata* with a rim around the border or a red fringe. And so it goes. If you were the "big cheese," then you'd wear a *toga picta*. These things were to distinguish them all. You remember *Julius Caesar* from high school. He says, "What, know you not? Being mechanical, ye ought not walk upon a holiday without the sign of your profession." You had to wear the sign of your profession at all times. And

they're talking about workmen and being mechanical. If you were a workman, you had to have a sign of your profession. It was so here, too, notice.

Verse 12: "And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning [as I said, this is the byzantine—an efficient, over-organized type of civilization, as the yuppie world is]; some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches." Today, for the first time, money is regarded actually as the purpose for which a person wants to be educated—because you make more money that way. They did receive learning, but they had this warped view of things—instead of scholarship as a life of austerity and doing without, so that you can have the real fun. Verse 13: "Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble [and then this happens very rapidly]. . . . There became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up." Broken up how? Well, in verses 12–13, into the rich and the poor, of course. They were redistributing the wealth, all right—the rich get more, and the poor get less. That's redistributing it, as we are doing it today. Many statistics today steadily, for the last ten years, show that drift has been very marked in this country—the separation between the rich and the poor. Well, we don't need to recite them, but some other things I'm going to read to you now anyway.

The church began to be broken up; the church couldn't take that, you see. There were a few among the Lamanites who survived. The church can't survive inequality. You'll notice this is a very interesting thing. In ancient times it was the same way. A few among the Lamanites stuck to the true faith; "they were firm, and steadfast." What can this refer to? It can only refer to the law of consecration as far as I can see—the doctrine. They were "immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord." See, that's what they did; they kept the commandments. It was not doctrine. They gave a different interpretation to doctrine, but they kept the commandments and the others didn't. Now here it sums it all up. Here's the whole thing, and these are the four things we've talked about before. Notice verse 15 if you want to know what caused all this. "Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this [it lays it right down on the line here]—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world." Again, this is your prime time. Power is what they all want. That's the big game today, but they go with riches. Of course, you have to have the means, and the two go together.

The only virtue to the stuff I write is that I quote some good things. I've got some good quotes, and that makes them rather useful reference books for some things or other. They're interlarded with the tripe I put in. There's some very good stuff here, I just happened to notice, in this book that's just out [Nibley's *Approaching Zion*]. It's not available yet, and it will stir a lot of people up when it does come out. We were talking about how this happened so fast. Remember, the commentator keeps telling us here all the time—it's amazing that this happened so soon, that it happened so quickly. In the space, it tells us right here, of not more than six years—all this change came about. It's amazing!

Daniel Yergin, a famous economist, writes: "There is increasing doubt [among economists] that anything at all can be done about anything. . . . If that wisdom is correct, then any 'solutions' to poverty become far more difficult and painful; they cannot be financed out of a growth dividend, but only by redistributing what others

already have—in turn creating massive social unrest [most utopians did that very thing]. Before the 1974–75 mini-depression [as recently as that], all financial poverty could have been eliminated at a modest shift of \$10–15 billion to the poor from the rest of the community; \$15 billion is less than 1.5% of the GNP, about the size of one of the cheaper weapons systems.” But we didn’t do it. Our society has gone out of the way *not* to do what could be done to solve the problem. Why? A community which can at tolerable expense eliminate human distress but refrains from doing so either must believe that it benefits from unemployment or poverty, or that the poor and unemployed are bad people, or that other more important values will be impaired by attempts to help the lower orders—or all of these statements.

Now, Robert Heilbroner says this, and he’s considered the most eminent economic historian today. Many people consider him that. He says, “No other civilization has permitted the calculus of self-interest so to dominate its culture. It has transmogrified greed and philistinism into social virtues and subordinated all values to commercial values.” He’s going to tell us the very same thing here in the Book of Mormon; they did the same reversal of values here, the *Umwertung der Wertung*, as Nietzsche calls it.

Thomas More wrote his famous *Utopia* in 1516, and he was one of the most eminent men of the time, one of the great merchants in Holland and England, a very important figure. You know the movie about Thomas More [*A Man for All Seasons*]. Thomas More wrote in his *Utopia*: “What was heretofore passed as unjust, . . . they have turned upside down, and in fact proclaimed it publicly and by law to be nothing less than justice itself.” And that is exactly what Ivan Boesky proclaimed when he recently commended “healthy greed” as a high virtue to college audiences (of course, he’s in jail now). The complete inversion of the utopian ideal is reached when success itself becomes synonymous with money, which of course it does. That’s exactly what we’re reading about here, and it’s a very precise, concise, and to-the-point discussion in the Book of Mormon. It hits it right on the head. This doesn’t describe Joseph Smith’s world at all. This isn’t the kind of community he lived in. This goes back to ancient times and other times, but it certainly is coming awfully close to home now.

What is the end result? The old familiar pictures. A citizen of New York writes, “You have to be on the alert constantly to sense when somebody nearby is out of place—waiting, looking, ready to pounce. You have to clutch your handbag up close, ready to fight for it should that become necessary. You have to put three locks on your door plus a burglarproof chain. You have to avoid the subways, night or day, and don’t smile at strangers on the bus.” What a way to live. Still the writer is determined to hang on. She says, “I can’t accept a life-style that makes us weary of community or civility, where human beings have to take on the attributes of jungle animals in order to protect themselves, in order to live.” Foreigners coming to this city from Eastern Europe hail it as an earthly paradise—that’s New York—a utopia; which only goes to show that anyone can adjust to anything. But, our writer objects: “Something inside of me says that I will die if I accommodate to this way of living.”

The Lord has to put an end to it, and this is what we’re going to have very soon in the Book of Mormon with a big bang. Is this an exaggeration? Every day coming to school I walk from Seventh North, where I live, up to here. Every day I pass these signs along by the canal—“Do Not Walk in This Area After Dark for Your Own Safety.” And this is Zion? You can’t even take a stroll in the dark. Great guns! In Athens a few years ago we

lived in a fleabag. It was cheap but not bad, down just two blocks from the Acropolis at the base. There was this little Byzantine church and a place where the buses turned around there. It's the end of the line, the end of Athena Street, and very busy. And you could go out any time of day or night. Phyllis had to go out to the drugstore at 3:00 in the morning, and it was perfectly safe. This is a tough part of town, by the flea market. I left a suitcase on the curb there where you get off the bus and went and forgot all about it. The next morning at 10:00 I had to go up to the university, and I said, "Well, it's gone, it's gone." I went by there at 10:00, and there was the suitcase standing on the curb. Nobody had touched it, and this was the toughest part of town. It seemed like it was, but it was perfectly safe. The last day we were there that time, I got some yogurt at a place in the open market there. I bought it from a farm woman. Goat's cheese is what it was. I walked over a mile getting back to town, and here came this little old lady. She chased me all the way. I had overpaid her about ten cents, and she had to pay it back to me. She followed me all over town so she could pay back this ten cents that I'd overpaid. We don't do like that here at all. You can see why those ancient civilizations have survived. Suffer they have, but they will survive.

[Back to Brother Nibley's book]: So this is Zion to which we have become accustomed for the sake of the economy. It's the same fantastic situation as that confronting all the utopians. Well, here we might quote from [Shakespeare's] *Timon of Athens*. When he left Athens, Timon was the richest man in Athens and extremely generous. He gave his money to everybody and helped everybody. And by doing so he lost his wealth. He didn't keep good track of it. He was too generous and went broke, and all his friends just cut him. They wouldn't recognize him in the street or anything else. First he went around trying to get loans, [but he got] nothing. They'd all never heard of him, etc. Oh, they all had good excuses. Well I'd like to help you, but this, that, and the other. He got no help from them, so he became a misanthrope. As a misanthrope he left the town and went out to live on roots outside the city. He was not going to have any more of that. And he pronounced a curse on the city as he left, "Let me look back on thee. O thou wall, that girdest in those wolves! . . . Bankrupts, hold fast; rather than render back, out with your knives, and cut your trusters' throats! Bound servants, steal! Large-handed robbers your grave masters are, and pill [steal] by law."

See, a servant should filch around the house and steal as he can. He has a perfect right because his grave master steals in the grand manner. He's the real thief because he steals by law; that's all arranged. So he talks about that, and then he uses that wonderful soliloquy on money, which I won't recite at this time. But money can do anything, is the idea. Timon's whole argument is that money creates values that do not exist, "confounded contraries," he says, and thus gives us a completely phony world. We have mentioned this before.

So here we have it in the Book of Mormon which really pours it on here and makes it very clear what these things were. Because of their riches, what's going to happen? Verse 16: "And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years." Notice he keeps commenting on how this could this happen so fast, the pace of it. In verse 8 of the next chapter, it says, "And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire." How can it happen? Well, it does. These things hit us fast. And it says it became the "me first" philosophy—I want it now, and I want it all. 3 Nephi 6:17: "the people having been

delivered up for the space of a long time to be carried about by the temptations of the devil whithersoever he desired to carry them, and to do whatsoever iniquity he desired they should—and thus in the commencement of this, the thirtieth year, they were in a state of awful wickedness”—after just those few years.

It began by telling us at the beginning of chapter 5: “There was not a living soul among all the Nephites [five years before that] who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken. . . . And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come [already]; . . . therefore they did forsake all their sins, and their abominations, and their whoredoms.” And now they’re already back in a state of awful wickedness. Now that is a real flip-flop. But you can do those things. It’s amazing how fast they can take place.

And then what happens? Of course something has to happen now. Verse 18: “Now they did not sin ignorantly. . . . They did wilfully rebel against God.” But we’ve seen that. They had just been righteous people; they knew what they were doing. How can that happen? You may have read Butler’s novel *The Way of All Flesh*. It’s not read much in schools now, but it’s a great novel on that sort of thing. The man was very strict and upright. In just in one event, by one experience, he completely lost everything, because of his misadventure. These things happen after sinning once. One good sin and you say, what the hell. As Macbeth says, I might as well go all the way now. “I am in blood stepped so far, that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.” So I might as well go on, and people do that. They did not sin ignorantly.

This is exactly what [Robert] Heilbroner and Thomas More were talking about here. They [people] make a virtue of what they are doing. Ayn Rand for years was the most popular author by far here in the bookstore. They would sell more of her books than any other [author’s], and her books have such titles as *The Virtue of Selfishness*. But selfishness was a virtuous thing, and to be too generous is a fault, because if you take care of yourself, then you’re taking care of everything else. Then the economy will take care of itself. Well, this is the basic philosophy today, you see—the virtue of selfishness.

Lachoneus filled the seat of his father at that time [verse 19]. So there had to be a reaction here, not just objection, but something had to cut in. God couldn’t just leave things [as they were] here, and so “there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, . . . preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people.” When it goes too far, this happens. These men got in real trouble, you see. They couldn’t just laugh at them. Notice verse 21: “Now there were many of the people who were exceedingly angry because of those who testified of these things [the important ones, the chief judges and others in high places] . . . the chief judges and they who had been high priests and lawyers; yea, all those who were lawyers were angry with those who testified of these things.” Notice he keeps hammering away at the lawyers. They’re the ones who take over when a society reaches this stage of depravity—it becomes a world of lawyers. They were the lawyers, and they didn’t like this kind of talk at all.

Then, what’s going to happen? Now, there was a law—it was part of the constitution here—that nobody could be put to death unless there was a warrant signed by the governor. Of course if there’s a death warrant, you have to go to the top. He had the power to reprieve and he had to sign the death warrant. But the judges and the lawyers didn’t like these people who were preaching, so they put them out of the way anyway. They had ways of getting around that; this was their business. Verse 23: “Now there were

many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ . . . were taken and put to death secretly by the judges”—legally but secretly, you see, because they were the judges and made it legal. And then no knowledge [of this] was known until after their death. It was a *fait accompli*—too bad, there’s nothing we can do about it now. In other words, it’s sometimes necessary to go beyond the law, as Faun Hall [secretary to Oliver North] says. And so they did, to get rid of these people. Well now, this was very serious, and people started noting this and started declaring that this was unconstitutional. A complaint came to the governor against these judges. They were going to be indicted. The complaint was made officially to the governor, so these judges and lawyers were going to be indicted for what they’d been up to. They weren’t going to put up with that, you see. Notice in verse 26, they were not only indicted; they were tried and [almost] convicted. They were “brought up before the judge, to be judged of the crime which they were done.” But they weren’t going to be convicted, because they had a position of strength.

Verse 27: “Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests did gather themselves together.” And remember we’re told this is a byzantine society, where you belong in a particular class. It says they were divided into classes, and they wore a particular garment and had a particular rank. They were members of the same order, so they stuck together. That’s what they were doing here, showing great solidarity. “Almost all the lawyers [it says here] and the high priests, did gather themselves together and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law.” [They were] these rich, influential people of the establishment—we read about them [today]. There was such an establishment. You see here in verse 12, “And the people began to be distinguished by ranks according to their riches and their chances for learning.” They formed definite groups in the society. But it went much beyond that.

We forget that far more important than the national state, anciently and today too, are the subgroups, the groups it’s divided into—our classes, interest groups where they’re in business, academics—and, of course, the tribes. All the cities were divided into demes and frateries, into smaller groups. They were the ones you belonged to. That’s so with any tribes of Indians or anything else. If you’re a Hopi, what are you? Are you of the Snake Clan, the Turtle Clan, or the Bear clan? That makes all the difference. That’s where all the ordinances and all the secrets go, in this particular group. And these people were divided the same way, as our society is. Our real business is done in little groups, in confidential groups and bodies. We come to agreement about things, and we have certain things in common, like political parties. Political extremists, for example, will form bodies that are closely knit and extremist and set themselves apart from the whole rest of the society. They’re distinct from the rest of them. That could be a healthy thing sometimes or otherwise, but the fact is we do divide up like that because we don’t see eye to eye. And this is what happened here, a very natural thing. This is tribal structure, and it remains. The word tribe, from the Latin *tribus*, means “for the three,” because there were always three. Everything that was done depended on a tribune. A tribune was only the governor in charge of one part of the people. He was the tribune, and he spoke from the tribunal. But that didn’t affect the Senate at all; they didn’t care. And the conscript fathers didn’t bother about that. The tribunes had their own things. They worked with the plebs, but there were the other tribes, the three tribes. The *tribus* means for the three. There were the three main tribes. But this structure goes on.

In Israel the first thing you ask is, “What are you? Are you of Ephraim? Are you of Manasseh? Are you of Judah?” That’s where the wars went on. That’s where the politics went on between the Twelve Tribes all through the Old Testament right until they leave. Then it still goes on. So we’re dealing with smaller groups within [the society], and this is a perfectly normal procedure we’re having here. You have the fratrics, you have parties, societies, and demes. A person who is devoted to his lodge places that before everything else, you see, and that to him is sacred, etc. So we don’t have the single nation we think we do—never have and never will have, because we have our various interests, and our loyalties conflict.

This is the essence of tragedy, conflicting loyalties. It’s not the good guys against the bad guys. The Book of Mormon keeps telling us that, and we won’t believe it. We say, yes, it’s good guys vs. bad guys. But the essence of tragedy is the incompatibility of two good things. The two great tragedies are the *Oresteia* and *Oedipus*. We have the one trilogy, but we don’t have the other. What happens? In the one case, Orestes has a choice. His mother has killed his father, and he’s required by the ancient law to avenge his father’s death. But you’re not supposed to kill your mother, so that’s the tragic situation. How does he solve it? He goes mad—that’s the only solution. You can’t do it. And it’s the same thing with [Oedipus.] He innocently married his mother, and also killed his father. He took an oath that he would take vengeance on the man who killed his father, who happened to be himself. When he found out, he wouldn’t face the facts—another case of madness. So he blinded himself. He didn’t go crazy like Orestes. His solution was to blind himself, cut himself off completely from society, and go off as a wanderer and a beggar. He had been the great king and goes off as a wanderer and beggar in the land because he can’t reconcile the two conflicting principles and can’t observe them both. So what are we going to do with these things? They’re facing us constantly. This is the essence of tragedy, two good things.

Here [in 3 Nephi 6:28] they enter into a covenant. These people are quite solid among themselves. They had the secret government. We have secret government today with parties and interest groups; we have underground things going on. We have covert operations, and we even accept them as legitimate now, though by very nature they’re vicious and extremely dangerous and very common in the Book of Mormon, you’ll notice. “They did enter into a covenant one with another [they made it very secret; they were making a society] . . . which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil to combine against all righteousness.” [They formed their own independent operation to get their release; the only way they could get out of it was to] . . . enter into a covenant to destroy them, and to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice.”

They were planning assassinations. That’s what they were going to do. After all, this isn’t the first time we’ve heard of judges being assassinated in the Book of Mormon. It had become routine practice, except at certain hours—you’re not supposed to assassinate a judge from 10:00 to 12:00. “. . . to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law [according to the constitution; they wanted their own law; remember, these were judges and lawyers]. And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country.” But there were other laws, and those were the laws they were going to follow, as it says here [in verse 30], “. . . they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor and to establish a king over the

land.” They’re going all the way to get rid of their executive checks and limitations. And they succeed.

It’s not surprising that they succeed, and the government that follows works pretty well. This is interesting. This shows us that all the time they have been divided up this way—that the infrastructure was already there for the tribes. They moved right into it. It didn’t shatter the country or anything like that. Just as if we would give up the federal government, we would still have states. That’s what the Confederacy wanted; that’s what we had the Civil War about. So here [3 Nephi 7:1]: “They did destroy upon the judgment-seat, yea, did murder the chief judge of the land.” They destroyed him upon the judgment-seat; that’s the standard solution, neat and easy. “And the people were divided one against another, and they did separate one from another into tribes.” They went off by themselves, because the infrastructure was already set up. In a crisis that’s what you do; you gather around your family. We had reduced it to the family shelter during the 1950s, which was an absurdity, of course—that every family is just for itself, and you get all the supplies you need, and above all, you supply yourself with weapons and make sure that nobody else shares what you have. That way you will survive a nuclear war [laughter]. Everybody was nuts about that in the 1950s, believe it or not.

Verse 2: “They did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family [that’s the nearest association, the safest, the one to take] and his kindred and friends [that’s the little larger circle, the relatives, the cousins, and the in-laws—and friends come into the circle]; and thus they did destroy the government of the land.” Everything was out of control, so they privatized everything and went back to the tribal system. Notice it says in the next verse, “And every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes.” They went back to the old tribal government. They were ready for that all along. We have this, and we could do this today. There are plenty of people here in Utah [who have done it]. I’ve known people like [M. L.] Glendenning and others up in Idaho who wanted to go off and live by themselves, and they do it. Things get pretty rough because they want to live absolutely independent, and you can’t do that anymore.

And “their tribes became exceedingly great [see this infrastructure was already in place]. . . . And there were no wars as yet among them [these tribes didn’t fight with each other as yet—that will come later]; and all this iniquity had come upon the people because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan.” They just gave up and stopped trying. They started out being a righteous people, but you have to make an effort. You have to keep at it. Being righteous isn’t just the absence [of wickedness]—what you don’t do; but what you do do. That’s what makes you righteous. As I said, there’s no such thing as being an idle righteous person—an idle person isn’t righteous. You’re not necessarily wicked or anything like that, but if you’re going to be righteous, it’s something you have to work at. That’s what we’re here for—being tested, being tried and tempted—and it doesn’t just stop when we’ve made one hurdle. There are more to follow. So they yielded themselves unto the power of Satan. They had given up trying. Notice the word is *yield*. They gave up. It wasn’t that they were pushed into it or anything like that. They yielded to it.

Verse 6: “And the regulations of the government were destroyed [well, that’s exactly what they wanted, this privatization; they didn’t like government regulations, so they did away with them], because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets [they were behind this; there’s unrestrained competition now].

And they did cause great contention in the land [as you might well expect], insomuch that the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked [nearly all the righteous people, not just the wicked, and they had plenty of wicked to begin with—that's pretty bad]; yea, there were but few righteous men among them [everyone accepted the system and went along]. And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness [and it quotes the prophets here] like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire." That's the Old Testament pattern here.

Now this secret combination. Well, at the head of it, this powerful, right-wing coalition had existed all along. They were the hard-core king people, it tells us there, the secret combination. They placed at their head a man called Jacob to make him a king. But he wasn't accepted; people hated him. He didn't go over at all. They went too far, you see. These king people kept a nucleus, but "they were not so strong in number as the tribes of the people, who were united together save it were their leaders did establish their laws, every one according to his tribe." They were united together. Notice, they were the united tribes, but the leaders of each tribe established their own tribal laws, and they were the laws by which they lived, "every one according to his tribe; nevertheless they were enemies."

There was no love between them, but they were united in one thing, you see. Once the federal government had disappeared, they all regretted it. They missed it. They wished it was back, and they united only in hatred of the people that abolished it. One thing they had in common—they wanted to get it back again. "They were united in the hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government." They thought that was what they wanted, but they didn't. The plan backfired, in other words, and this is what happened here. Too late they regretted the loss of the central government, which has its virtue and its necessity too. What are they going to do? Well, the king people were very unpopular, and Jacob skipped out. He got out as fast as he could. Verse 12: "Therefore he commanded his people that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land [the north is the frontier] and build up unto themselves a kingdom." They were going up there where they'd be left alone to build a kingdom, and he would be king. The dissenters would go and join them. That's the old pattern, you see. We've seen that in the Book of Mormon; the Nehors started it out.

Question: What was the church doing at this point in time?

Answer: It says there were a few who had gathered around Nephi. It was still there, but it was almost underground. We'll see what happens to it.

They got away. Notice, "And so speedy was their march that it could not be impeded," and they went out and settled. And here's another of these racial problems. See, here's another stock moving out, and they're a mixed stock. They're going out by themselves to become independent. You have another tribe here. Before long they would be speaking [another language]; they must have been speaking a different dialect already. And here's the idea of splinter groups in verse 14: "They were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred, and friends." It emphasizes this because it's very important. This chapter actually tells us about the end of the Nephite state. It's the end. This is where the book should end, if something wasn't about to happen. Big things are about to happen now. When it reaches this stage, you can expect something to pop.

“Nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another [that was sensible; that’s more sensible than we have been; now we’re finally agreeing that you’re not going to gain anything by that]; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another.” Territorial bounds were respected as is always the case, even with animals—wolves and foxes have their territories. The most lawless people in the world are the Arab Bedouins of the desert. They live by the *ghazw*, by raiding what they can get. But, nevertheless, even in the desert, there are certain tribal boundaries, certain limitations, and you can’t go over the boundaries. This is what they [the Nephites] had, these tribal boundaries. Of course, the main cause of war between tribes is infringing on the other’s boundary—and the European wars for that matter, such as France and Germany. All their arguments have been about boundaries—Alsace-Lorraine, the Netherlands, and Austria. Who owns what? It’s the same thing here. They’re not going to last very long, but it’s the proper arrangement. It’s the way things were done.

Verse 14: “ But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, insomuch that in some degree they had peace in the land.” Well, they were not absolute fools, but they did stone the prophets. So the church was there and having a rough time. “And it came to pass that Nephi—having been visited by angels . . .” Now we have to have the *deus ex machina*. Something has to intervene at this moment, because they’ve reached rock bottom now. What’s going to move them off dead center here? This is the end. As I said, it would be the end of the book if it hadn’t been for the intervention of something else. “. . . visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord, therefore having seen angels, and being eye-witness, and having had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ, and also being eye-witness to their quick return from righteousness [notice how quick it was, always emphasizing the speed] unto their wickedness and abominations.” These lightning switches. They impress you; they impress the writer no less. He thinks it’s quite strange.

They were grieved and they went forth among the people and tried to do something, but it didn’t pay off. Nephi had power and great authority, but “they were angry with him [in verse 18] . . . for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words [they knew he was right, and that made them furious] for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily [these extreme conditions require extreme measures; we have them here]. And in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and even his brother did he raise from the dead. . . . And the people saw it . . . and were angry with him because of his power.”

What was the mortal offense of Jesus? When the elders of the Jews, the high priests, and the Levites came together, they decided there was only one solution to the problem, and that was to put Jesus to death, get him out of the way. That was when he raised Lazarus. That was the thing that decided it. You go back and look there. They put up with everything, but when he raised Lazarus from the dead, that was too much. They decided that he would have to be put to death. The doctors came together then. And it’s the same thing here. When the people saw it they “were angry with him because of his power.”

And notice verse 21. You asked, where was the church? Here it is. “There were but few who were converted unto the Lord; but as many as were converted did truly signify unto

the people that they had been visited by the power and Spirit of God, which was in Jesus Christ, in whom they believed.” So the church was active, small, persecuted, etc. And here’s an account of what went on in the church. They had their miracles, their casting out of devils, and their testimonies. Verse 24: “Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water [anyone who repented got baptized, so the church was growing]. Therefore, there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry.” Nephi had ordained others. The church was growing, and they were baptizing people with water for the remission of sins. “And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized.” So just before the big disaster many were baptized. Well, the church was growing. Things were going all right—then. Not too all right.

But now we come to the exciting thing. Now we come to the wham-bang part of it. You’ll notice how cleverly [the writer] introduces it, I mean with what tension. He’s about to report something that may test our credulity here, so he begins with an ominously subdued modesty about the whole thing, a very matter-of-fact tone. 3 Nephi 8:1: “And now it came to pass that according to our record [he wants to make sure we get it right], and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record [so he wouldn’t make anything crooked—that’s very important, you see]—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus. . . . And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake [we must get this absolutely right, what we’re talking about here] made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away; and the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign [the thirty-third year, and this is building up the tension, you see]. . . . And there began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people,” a feeling of uncertainty. Will it happen, or won’t it? Well, this had happened before at the birth of Christ in the same way, when they pronounced a “Bartholomew’s Eve” for all those who believed.

Verse 4: “In the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm.” It starts out; now things are beginning to happen. It always hits suddenly, and it begins on low key here. And then POW! it “did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.” Again I’ll refer to something here. It will save us time. If you go into books on earthquakes and check this out, you’ll see that the order of the events is all very correct and accurate. Now this is rather important because [of what] we used to think. In my childhood, as proof of the Book of Mormon the missionaries used to refer to the Rocky Mountains or the Sierras, because the Book of Mormon says mountains were cast up. There are mountains all right, so that proves the Book of Mormon. Well, that’s absurd. That’s not what the Book of Mormon tells us at all. The Book of Mormon just describes a No. 12 earthquake—No. 8 on the Richter Scale might do it. But the Assam earthquake in August 1950 was 12 on the scale. Remember, every time you go up a number, you double the strength of the earthquake, so you can imagine what a 12 would be if the last San Francisco earthquake was a 7.5 at the extreme. So this is some earthquake, and the order in which the events are described is very good here—all the things that should take place. So we’ve summed them up here in this very factual account.¹

Well, it was a terror, about 11 or 12 on the Wood-Neuman scale. It is probably not the worst earthquake on record, because Assam was total destruction, and in this one we’re told there were some cities which remained. It was not total. It describes what happened at

¹ Brother Nibley is referring to “Some Fairly Foolproof Tests,” in *Since Cumorah*, vol. 7 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 231–38.

the epicenter. There were cities that remained; whereas, in the great Assam earthquake of 1950 the damage was total over a large area. I'm going to read you an account of that Assam earthquake. My friend George Allen, who owns the oldest bookstore in America, in Philadelphia, married a princess of Assam at this time. The news came through, and we heard a lot about Assam, which is in the northeast corner of the Himalayas there. On August 15, 1950, there was an earthquake that was total over 10,000 square miles and [killed] 500,000 people. Only 14 people survived. Imagine an earthquake [that killed] 500,000 people over that area. Well here's a description of it.

"On the morning of August 15, 1950, the day of the biggest and strangest earthquake in our times, it gave no inkling of what was to come." All of a sudden just this terrible storm and then the earthquake. All the seismographs in the world went mad. This was terrific. The instruments had gone completely crazy. Nobody was able to locate it. It took a couple of days just to discover where it was because the shocks went round and round and round the earth, it was so great. "In hundreds of seismological stations throughout the world astonished scientists were reading that message from the greatest earthquake since the birth of modern seismology fifty years ago. The energy unleashed was the equivalent of three million atom bombs of the Bikini model. Stranger things were to follow. By all the rules the scene of the cataclysm should have been invaded by reporters, scientists, and relief workers." Nothing—it was just wiped out completely. Instead, they didn't even have to bother. They were afraid of the Chinese going [in there]; that's the Chinese border with Tibet. No worry after that—the map had completely changed. "Where there had been rivers before, there were mountains now. Rivers that ran in one direction now ran in the opposite direction." These things happen. We saw something a few years ago happening like that. Just a couple of years ago down in Sanpete County mountains were moving backwards. But this is sudden, you see.

"Instead, the tortured mountains, the homeless rivers, the vanished villages have remained undisturbed since that awful thing happened." The quake lasted just eight minutes, but took three years for it to subside. It was three hours here [in the Book of Mormon], but then for three days it continued to shake. So the aftershocks went on for three days and the big one was three hours. "It took over three years for the forces of destruction to run their course here. Its intensity was 12, or in the terse language of the Wood-Neuman scale, damage total. Beyond stretched a vast area of lesser destruction. . . . Some 10,000 square miles, home to an estimated 500,000 people, were turned into a wilderness of desolation. [This scientist was sent in to investigate, and he said], I have traced only 14 eyewitnesses"—who survived from that. He had to run them down.

It was fantastic, the quantities of rock, etc. Here's the Assam Rifles. They were in position on one of the mountains, and the commander at the start gave the order for his men to secure their mules but not one man was able to stand up or walk. "They could not even crawl. Several vomited as if violently sick. A gaping fissure opened up before their eyes 10 feet wide, 20 feet deep, and unknown length. When the worst shocks were over after nearly 10 minutes, four soldiers and a mule could be seen at the bottom of the chasm. The men cried for help, but before anything could be done, the fissure filled up with yellow-brown sulphurous-smelling mud, and the men and mules disappeared." In this part of the basin, especially over the Mammoth, on the other side of the basin, these things are happening now. And places that they had made subdivisions and were going to develop have been completely abandoned now because of the fissures that are breaking and the hot springs that are suddenly bursting out—fumeroles and things like that. It's like Sodom and Gomorrah; the south end of the Dead Sea did the same thing.

Well, this is one thing that is stressed in the Book of Mormon too. “One thing is stressed in all reports, the awful rumble that heralded the outbreak of the quake, the noise muffled at first seemed to come out of the very bowels of the earth. Birds rose on the wing with a rustle and a flutter. People stood or crouched motionless as the noise grew in volume until it reached a deafening roar, louder than anything any of the witnesses had ever heard before [the Book of Mormon talks about that.] At this point the ground began to move. In the earthquake center it moved with a rapidly increasing vertical vibration. People, cattle, rocks, and small buildings were tossed into the air like peas on an enormous kettle drum [a phenomenon rare in most earthquakes]. It ground the solid mountain like grain between two giant millstones [this is your Book of Mormon description too]. Strong winds raised the dust till visibility was reduced to a few feet [of course this terrible darkness is described here], and breathing became a nightmare.”

There was a monastery of Lamaist monks up there, and when the monks tried to resume contact with the outer world, they found that the earthquake had seemingly transported them to a faraway place. The same thing happened after the earthquake [in 3 Nephi]; remember they all met at the temple marveling that the whole land had changed. They didn't recognize anything. Well, here it is again. “. . . that for their sins they had been reincarnated together with their immediate surroundings on some desolate planet devoid of all other human life. As they probed the howling wilderness around them, there was not one landmark even faintly reminiscent of the country they had known so well. Where there had been a mountain summit with sheer cliff-like rocks rising for hundreds of feet, there was now a scooped-out bowl of dust of a curious pink color. Rivers had disappeared. Others had sprung up and were running in the opposite directions, where the old surface of the land would have been uphill.”

And so it goes on here with other things, and of course the fires. It changed the whole map of things. “Halfway through the earthquake countless craterlets one to three feet in diameter opened up in a low-lying land and spouted great quantities of sand and water.” Remember in 1812, the great earthquake in the central United States was bad as this, when a whole area of more than 10,000 square miles sunk 30 feet—the whole central United States from Tennessee west. “The phenomenon was natural enough, for the alternate tensions and compressions of the ground opened fissures, thus sucking down the groundwater. As on them the fissures closed, sand and water were forced violently out of the miniature volcanoes.”

The Book of Mormon description is one of the best. “In the report by the Assam superintending engineer, it was stated that the . . . river, usually 150 feet wide and five feet deep, is now totally silted up. There's not the slightest trace of a channel. Water covers the surrounding countryside for miles. The Cecey River, usually 250 feet wide and 20 feet deep [there's a real river] has vanished totally without a trace.” A great river [disappeared], and so it goes. These things happen. And then the animals come, and this is in the book of Moses. There was an earthquake that shook, and “the roar of lions was heard out of the wilderness” [Moses 7:13]. And this is what happened too. They said the snakes came out of the jungle. They thought they were going mad. “The snakes soon drifted away, but the elephants and tigers continued for weeks to terrorize the distraught natives. Again the Assam Rifles came to the rescue.”

The treasurer of a tea factory in Upper Langipur had taken refuge in a deserted Siva temple when the snakes arrived. “The jungle lion was about 300 yards away,” he said. “As

I sat on the ruins I suddenly thought I had gone mad. Out of the jungle there came one great slithering mass of snakes—thousands of them. As they came closer, I recognized them as hemidriads, crites, bamboo snakes, and common cobras—all of them venomous and deadly.” What a pretty picture, eh?

But the point is these things happen and on such a scale. But the description in the Book of Mormon is remarkable not for its spectacular and tremendous nature but for its restraint. It says nothing that isn't characteristic of a big earthquake. It wasn't the worst. I'd put it at about 8 because lots of places survived and lots of people survived, etc. But the description of the various phenomena that accompanied it [is accurate, such as] the tsunamis, because this was on the coast. This [the Assam earthquake] wasn't. This [the 3 Nephi account] was on the coast so you have the tsunamis, the cities buried in the sea, and the commonest cause of destruction being fire—which is the commonest cause, and so forth and so on.