

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 39
Mosiah 23–26
Amulon and Alma

Now we come to one of the most satisfying parts of the Book of Mormon. This is what historiography should be. It's full of drama, personality, and all sorts of things. We'll start with Mosiah 23:31. Remember how it happened [background information]: Mosiah had gone out from the Nephite community and ended up in Zarahemla. He became king of Zarahemla, which was a Mulekite settlement. Then out of that came other settlements. Zeniff went out and got himself stuck in the midst of the Lamanites, but he flourished there completely surrounded by Lamanites. His son, Noah, was the corrupt one. Noah was hard pressed and decided that the whole nation should take off and flee, which they did. When the enemy started to overcome them, he said to his army, "We will go on—forget the women and children." That was not a nice thing to do. But they did go on, and a lot of them started to regret it. A lot of them refused to go and stayed back; others started to drift back very soon. King Noah got very unpopular and got himself burned up. Then the priests continued on under the leadership of a man called Amulon. This man, Amulon, was a VIP, a very important and ambitious person, which becomes clear here.

Verse 31: "And behold, they had found those priests of king Noah, in a place which they called Amulon." They named it after their leader—just like *Brigham City*. Amulon was their leader, and he must have been important back there. We learn a little later on that he had been a rival and "old friend" of Alma back in the priests' quorum, and he hated his guts. This tension between them is really something. Verse 32: "Now the name of the leader of those priests was Amulon [look ahead to verse 9 of the next chapter]. . . . For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king's priests." He was a priest too; they had both been in the quorum. Apparently, Amulon was an important guy who was aspiring to be chief priest. He was here. They named the settlement after him, and he became leader of the priests. He still aspired to leadership and achieved it; he got a real break. He got a sponsor and was able to rule, as people do who get sponsors—like Angelo in [Shakespeare's play] *Measure for Measure*. Notice what he [Amulon] did. The reason the priests were being chased now is that they had captured the Lamanite girls. They married them. Notice what "small potatoes" this is; there were only twenty-four of them. Amulon decided that they should go forth and plead with the Lamanites. After all, we're fellow Lamanites (ha, ha, ha); let's let bygones be bygones, etc. The Lamanites were always more compassionate than the Nephites, so this is what happened. Verse 33: "Amulon did plead with the Lamanites; and he also sent forth their wives, who were the daughters of the Lamanites, to plead with their brethren that they should not destroy their husbands." That worked; the Lamanites had compassion.

Verse 35: "And Amulon and his brethren did join the Lamanites, and they were traveling in the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi when they discovered the land of Helam, which was possessed by Alma and his brethren." After Amulon joined their company, a mass of them were moving on and discovered the land of Helam, the happy land which means *prosper*. Helam is like *Phoenix*; it means *reborn, prosperous, flourishing*, and that sort of thing. It was a name of good omen for a colony, and that's where Alma was. They

came to Helam, and what happened? Amulon took over everything and not only pushed Alma into the background, but started persecuting in grand style. “The Lamanites promised unto Alma and his brethren, that if they would show them the way which led to the land of Nephi that they would grant unto them their lives and their liberty.” Amulon was putting them on; you can be sure of that. Alma agreed and showed them the way, and then they said “April fool.” They wouldn’t keep their promise. I see the fine hand of Amulon there, don’t you? He refused to do it.

You notice we have no race problem here. You can’t talk about Nephites and Lamanites [as distinct and separate groups] because look how these things are mixed up now. Here is another mixing of Lamanites, and a group in which the women are Lamanites and the men are Nephites. That’s a common phenomenon, as you know. Certainly as late as the 1940s, the women in the city of Seville [Spain] still spoke Arabic. Since 1492 there haven’t been any Arabs [in power] in Spain, but the women all spoke Arabic. The men didn’t know Arabic, but the women in the city of Seville spoke Arabic and Spanish. This happens—women have their own language. Oh, they do among the Hopis too. They have a special language just for the women. I remember that I got laughed out of court because I once said “thank you” to some people, using the women’s language. Oh boy, that was a real boo-boo! Anyway, notice how these things are all mixed up here. You mustn’t be too simplistic about the Book of Mormon; it’s complicated enough.

Then what happened? They wouldn’t keep their promise, but they went on. They were moving through. Verse 38: “And the remainder of them went to the land of Nephi; and a part of them returned to the land of Helam, and also brought with them the wives and the children of the guards who had been left in the land. And the king of the Lamanites had granted unto Amulon that he should be a king and a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam.” Amulon said he would stay there, and he persuaded the king of the Lamanites to make him the local chief and give him absolute power there. We see now that the king of the Lamanites had a lot of territory, as the Indians always do. The idea is that you have a great chief and chiefs under him. You have tribes and then you have clans within the tribes; every tribe has clans within it. This is what they had. Of course, in the Mabinogion you have the same, especially among the Celts. You’ll find a beautiful example of this in Caesar’s Gallic Wars. Orgetorix was the great king, and Casticus and Dumnorix were under him. Everybody was aspiring to be the great king. There was the high king and the kinglets under him. Anglo-Saxon England was divided up the same way with the Edwardses, etc. Harold was the high king over a lot of others.

So Amulon got himself made king over the Nephites of Alma’s community. They joined up with Alma’s people, and this put Amulon in the driver’s seat. Mosiah 24:1: “And it came to pass that Amulon did gain favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites.” You can be sure he would; the high king was only too glad to turn over to him the responsibility for judging those people. Remember Macbeth was Thane of Glamis, and then the king made him Thane of Cawdor. “All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter!” His wife got more and more excited as he got higher ranks. These were petty kingships. The Thane of Cawdor was a betrayer, so he lost his kingdom. It was given to Macbeth who was planning the big treason. So these things go throughout the tribal histories.

Notice that most tyranny works through patronage. It’s usually a patron, a well-meaning king, who knows what’s going on back home. We find this a little later on in the Book of Mormon. The classic example is what I mentioned from *Measure for Measure*, where the

duke in Vienna is going away and makes Angelo, his secretary, [lord deputy] in his place. Then Angelo really “loads it on.” When he plays his dirty tricks, exercises power, and throws his weight around in the most repulsive way, Isabella says,

But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

Give a man a little authority, and this is what happens. He didn't have any authority himself; it was granted to him by the duke. But the fact is that the duke was prowling around, dressed up as a monk, and seeing just how this man could manage. He was thinking of turning it over to him, but that wouldn't do at all. This guy didn't know how to handle authority. This happens. Remember Doctrine and Covenants 121:39: “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.” That's what happened with Amulon, and he took it out on Alma. And the classic example is in Matthew 24 & 25, where the master of the house goes away and leaves the house in the charge of his servant. The apostles were asking, “How shall we behave until you come again?” He said this is the way: You don't know when the Lord is coming again, but don't act like this man. As soon as he was put in charge of the house, he started lording all over the other servants, oppressing them, giving high commands, and making everybody miserable. What will happen when the lord comes home and discovers him doing that sort of thing? That's why he [Jesus Christ] is going to come by surprise and not announce his coming—we would all be dressed, spit polished, and ready for inspection, like when the general comes around. If we knew ahead of time, it wouldn't be a good test that way. So the Lord comes like a thief in the night and catches everybody by surprise, including the servants. What are these servants doing? Don't be found living riotous and expensive lives while you are oppressing other people. That's what the Lord doesn't want to find when he comes back, but that's what he's going to find.

He [Amulon] was appointed not only this [a ruler], but “the king of the Lamanites granted unto him and his brethren that they should be appointed teachers over his people.” That was natural because they were educated priests, in this case a mixture of Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulekites. Here was Amulon and his college of priests, Noah's council, some of the most learned men in the land. They are the ones to appoint as teachers, so he naturally appointed them teachers. They took the job naturally as a part of the empire, “. . . teachers over his people, yea, even over the people who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the land of Shilom, and in the land of Amulon.” It went right back to the place where they had settled originally; they connected the two lands. They must have been close together. It was all connected and put under the rule of Amulon. The city called Amulon was a village. If you have a big village, that's ten or fifteen thousand; that's a good size. So they had the Amulon lands; and the Shemlon lands, which means the lands to the east on the left side; and the Shilom lands, which means the “higher lands, the high and dry lands.” Here's an ambitious man. We overlook Amulon among the dangerous characters in the Book of Mormon. We just pass by him, but he was as clever as any of them.

Verse 2: “For the Lamanites had taken possession of all these lands; therefore, the king of the Lamanites had appointed kings over all these lands [that’s the idea, to appoint chiefs; he was the high king, and he appointed kings to take the load off his shoulders]. And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman [that’s natural; just as you have a long string of *Caesars*, you’re going to have a long string of *Lamans* here]; . . . therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people. And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon [as I said, they were the educated, priestly class here] in every land which was possessed by his people [so he sent them around not just in Amulon territory, but throughout the whole Lamanite territory, which was an extensive and populous one; they were circulating and being the teachers] and thus the language of Nephi [notice this racial mixture again] began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites.” They broke up very soon into dialects and languages.

As I said, you have twelve Hopi villages on three mesas, and each village has a different dialect. They are only a few miles apart, but you can recognize which village a person comes from. It’s like the islands of Friesland. They speak a language very close to Old English. They are all connected, but any native can immediately spot what island you come from by the words and dialect you use. They are different languages, and very soon they become so that people can’t understand each other. Two years ago we were visited by some cousins from the Hebrides, the islands off the west coast of Scotland. They spoke perfectly good English; they could use the same words we did. We took them around the valley and showed them all the sights, and we couldn’t understand a word they said, although they were speaking English. So this can happen very soon. They had been on those islands since 1621, about 300 years. These people [in the Book of Mormon] had been there 500 years. Dialects are certainly formed everywhere. Kramer found twenty-seven different Indian languages still surviving in California. That doesn’t mean there were twenty-seven different migrations, or anything like that—they just develop. It makes a problem for American Indians, unless you want to take the trouble to learn them. Like the man on the First Mesa. When I asked him how many people spoke Tiwa, he said, “Lots of people speak Tiwa; a hundred people speak Tiwa.” So there you are, and that’s what we have here. They learned the common language, like learning the *lingua franca*.

England was [covered] with Anglo-Saxon dialects. For Old English you study with Northumbrian because Northumbrian has the oldest surviving documents. Then *Beowulf* is something quite different. Then you have standard Saxon or West Saxon, used by King Alfred, in which there is a lot of literature surviving. But then the Normans came over and imposed Norman French on the whole thing. The Saxons drank it up like milk and adopted all the usages and grammar of the Normans that they needed, but they kept their own language. They mixed them together, so we have the most flexible language in the world today and also the biggest vocabulary. There are over 470,000 words in the Webster Dictionary; a tremendous [language] mixed together. The Book of Mormon uses only 3,000 words—that’s great. Shakespeare uses 34,000 words, and for one writer that’s something. A lot of the words he has given have stuck with the language. So with the language problem in the Book of Mormon, I’m afraid you need a Urim and Thummim if you are going to translate those plates. People say, “Oh well, they’re Reformed Egyptian, they’re Hebrew, etc.” Sure, they’re all that mixed together, just like our English. *English* is not from Anglia; that’s from the north coast of Holland. And the Saxons are more central. We have both languages now and call it Anglo-Saxon (we hyphenate it). So it goes.

They began to have the people learn the language of Nephi. It “began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites. They were going to have the *lingua franca*. They used it for business, and, of course, they became very prosperous. This is a great tool, you see. We want to make English the one [language] of the country because that will expedite business. That’s why in the Middle Ages they used Latin until the great banking houses of Italy were established. Then Italian became the official language everywhere. But here it was Nephite, and it tells exactly what you would expect. They did this to keep the records that they might write to one another. What kind of writing did they have? I think they used something like drawings. The sand drawings of the Hopis are combinations of symbols you recognize. There’s no such thing as a picture language that you can read—look and tell what it is by pictures. There are some that look like it, like Egyptian hieroglyphics. It’s made up of pictures, but when two men start to read it, they won’t come to the same conclusion at all. You have to be trained to recognize the symbols. Well, that means you have a written language then. It doesn’t have to be alphabetic; it can be syllabic. But it is not picture language. For “he went into the house,” you don’t show a word for *he*. You put an *f*, a snake, instead of that. You do put walking legs following the word. But for *ee* you put the two feathers first; that’s phonetic, you see. Then the two legs. Then you do draw a picture of a house, but only after you have put the letters *pr* meaning *house*. “He went into the house.”

It’s the same thing here. The Indians do have a written language. Again, back to the Hopis. They have left their glyphs all over the Southwest, showing the various places they’ve been. They’re the same characteristic things. These drawings are familiar signs used by various clans, etc. Up into central Utah and down into New Mexico, all the way down to Mexico, you can recognize the blazons of the Beaver Clan or of the Reed Clan, or the Bear Clan especially. That’s the great wandering one and one of the more powerful ones. The Parrot Clan is the second most important, but in some cases they are the ruling clan. Why would they be parrots if they came from the deserts of southern Utah? Well, they didn’t, of course; they migrated to there, but you get the characteristic. Then you have the flute man; everywhere you go you find an insect that looks if he were playing a double flute. He has antennas and walks along as if he had a big hump on his back. It’s like he’s carrying a load as he walks along. You will find that all over the place. That represents, “We were wanderers here; we camped here.” That’s the wandering sign. They have wandered all over the place, and you find these things everywhere.

So they did have a conventional use of symbols, which is writing. That’s all our writing is. Our capital *A* is just *aleph*, a picture of an ox with his horns upside down. In the *alphabet* that’s the beginning of all. *Beta* was a picture of a *house* that was written square like that. Now we write it this way to speed it up. You don’t want to draw an angular house each time; you just go [like this] and that’s your house. We are writing ideograms in English when we write. *Delta* is an upside down bush. You don’t want to draw a triangle every time, so you just go like that, and you have your three sides. It’s the old, conventional Semitic alphabet—Phoenician, but probably taken from the Egyptian, as we find in the Sinai Peninsula, where you find a transfer from Egyptian hieroglyphs to the Phoenicians. That was the theory of Petrie and others.

This is all perfectly credible and perfectly in order that they had them learn the Nephite language and had them adopt writing as a means of expediting business. Clear down in Peru they use grass and tie the grass knots. They are very efficient at communicating a message in knots. There are various ways you can use. Our ancestors used the tally stick. But there are these various ways of communicating, and they had them. Just like the touch

sticks and a certain wand passed around. You know the herald always passes a wand. You always see Hermes with his caduceus, his staff. That's the staff the herald makes, which has his markings and message on it. So it goes. With these exchanges they [Amulon and his brethren] were able to increase their riches. They began to trade with one another. How would Joseph Smith figure out this? It's a marvelous thing the way this is constructed, with such tremendous economy. While he is telling this story of Amulon and Alma, he just throws this in without any extra charge.

“And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people [if you start trading, you do], as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness [that means exchanges and tricks] and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.” (Mosiah 24:7). No white-collar crime—that's very interesting that they wouldn't rob their own people. It's the same thing in Israel. You can't charge interest, and you can't enslave a person. That's wrong if he's an Israelite. They have two rules, one for dealing with Israel and one for dealing with the world. We learn this in the case of Shylock [in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*].

If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

So they were doing that, but they didn't cheat their own. White-collar crime is by far the worst because you are fooling and robbing people that trust you. And we are living in the capital of that. Many people have been taken in; don't invest in anything in Utah. “. . . delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren [they had that honor among thieves]. And now it came to pass that Amulon began to exercise authority [you can believe that] over Alma and his brethren, and began to persecute him.” He had it in for Alma. Now, would he think that Alma was a traitor because he walked out on the priestly group? He fled with the priests, but he took the families with him and set out. He could have an argument that Alma was a traitor, but he was the worst traitor. He was with the ones who walked out on their wives and children. He not only deserted the king, but he deserted everybody. He went out and took over himself, and then he stole the Lamanite girls, etc. But who was guilty of doing the wrong thing? Alma kept the people together and took them out. We know the reasons, etc. But you can imagine what the rivalry would be between the two men—how he would hate Alma. Alma was the great man who was doing the right thing. This represents the famous maxim, “We can pardon those who injure us, but we can never pardon those whom we injure.” He had wronged Alma, so he could never pardon Alma. That's true. We can easily forgive those who have wronged us, but never those we have wronged. That rankles. You have to have a reason for it, so you will never forgive that guy if you have wronged him. But he began to persecute him; Alma got on his nerves, etc. Notice this pecking order of the corporate ladder. He [Amulon] is middle management. The king put him in, and he could do what he darn pleased. Alma had been chosen as king of his people, and now Amulon just pushed him out. He was going to take over now.

Verse 9: “For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king's priests, and that it was he that believed the words of Abinadi.” He knew about that, you see. You've started all this, he said. You can imagine that Shakespeare at this point would have marvelous dialogue between them, like in the king plays where he has these long accusations back and forth. In Greek that is called a *stichomythia*, where I say a verse and then you say a verse. One person recites a line, and the other tops it with another line. This goes on for

half an hour, as the two heroes or villains shout at each other in a *stichomythia*. We have a situation here that could be very well dramatized. This is what happened. “For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king’s priests, and that it was he that believed the words of Abinadi and was driven out before the king, and therefore he was wroth with him [he was mad at him for that reason]; for he was subject to king Laman, yet he exercised authority over them, and put tasks upon them, and put taskmasters over them.”

He was really rubbing it in; he was the unjust steward. This again is a Nephite characteristic. It’s their meanness when they have the upper hand. It’s like the insolence of apartheid, etc. “And Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries [if they complained]; and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.” Well, how low can you go? See, he was a priest himself, but anyone calling upon God he would put to death because these were the people he didn’t like—and all this because of his personal enmity with Alma. So they prayed in their hearts. How can you pray in your thoughts? The standard prayer is, “Lord, hear the words of my mouth.” We are required to pray vocally, although Joseph Smith didn’t until he went to the Grove. He was raised in a religious family, but nobody ever prayed out loud at that time. That was a new thing. “And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.”

Well, the most powerful force in the world is thought, and the most powerful form of thought is faith. They could count on this; suddenly they were feeling reassured. This is a perfect setup for revenge, but they have no thought of revenge at all here. Then they began to be comforted [in verse 13]: “for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me [the Lord tells them through Alma]; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage.” We are going to be disappointed that we don’t find the revenge scenario here. After all this villainy of [Amulon] we are not going to have the mandatory, final super explosion at the end of the film, when everything has to be blown up. No, the vengeance never takes place. I’m afraid we’ll be disappointed because the theme of all our John Wayne epics, etc., is the guy shown as being very bad at the beginning so you’ll really see that what he gets is what he deserves. And we all wait to see him get it, but we wait here in vain. Verse 15: “And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.”

Now that was the pioneers. A less aggressive people could not be imagined in every case when there was a showdown, when they had a great possibility of [taking revenge]. There were some hotheads, but it was remarkable how they avoided [violence]. After they left, then the mobs broke loose and started destroying each other—the Bushwhackers and the Jayhawkers, etc. There was “bloody Kansas,” the burning of Lawrence and the like. These terrible mobs would circulate and destroy. The thing became a riot of mobs after they left. It wasn’t just the Mormons that took it [the persecution]. They took it and left, and then with the others terrible things began to happen.

So what were they going to do about it? They were going to get out. Verse 16: “so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.” Remember,

we've had Rechabites before; this is the way they do. I think you could list at least twenty examples in which large factions or tribes or clans [have done this]. Anyway, they had a tug of war [among the Hopis]. They had decided that the clan that lost the tug of war would have to move, so the whole clan moved out and went to Moenkopi and joined another village, another society. This is the way they do; they've done it time and again. If there was too much tension between two groups, sometimes they would cast lots and decide which should go. That's out of ancient history; that's a common theme too—to decide to migrate as the Phoenicians did under Dido and her sister Anna. They left and founded Carthage.

So the Lord said to Alma, "Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage. Now it came to pass that Alma and his people in the night-time gathered their flocks together, and also of their grain." We notice that the same thing happened back here in Mosiah 22:2, where it is talking about Ammon and Limhi. "And it came to pass that they could find no way to deliver themselves out of bondage, except it were to take their women and children, and their flocks, and their herds, and their tents, and depart into the wilderness." These two migrations are very close together, but this is the way things were being done. That's what they were getting to in a time of tension like this. We talk of the Swarming Time—the great migrations, during the fourth and fifth centuries, of the barbarians, when our ancestors overran Europe. That is called the Swarming Time. The Germans call it the Völkerwanderung, when the people were wandering, mixing up, and settling down. The most amazing thing is how people from the Far East, way up there almost to Alaska in Asia, ended up in Portugal of all places—the Goths who settled there.

Well, anyway the same thing happens here [as happened in Mosiah 22:2], all night long they were gathering their flocks together and getting ready. (Oh darn, I was going to bring Marion's book along. He gave a very interesting report. He got all the British reports on the Battle of the Bulge and how completely fooled we were—how they could organize and set in motion just a few miles from our front an army of 200,000 men.) With the enormous intelligence operation we had, our generals were completely fooled. Little me, I wasn't fooled, but it didn't do any good—nobody listened to me. I was keeping in closest contact with the situation. We'd send out scouts on patrol, and they would say, "Well, they are gathering up; they are building up here and there." This went back, but they didn't like to hear it in Brussels. So nothing came of it, until Rundstedt overran everything. They just came all of a sudden, and then it was wild.

This is what happened here; in the night-time they built up. Remember, we mentioned before that these people had been watching. They used the wine trick the other time, but they didn't this time. They didn't need the wine because it was the Lord that "caused a deep sleep to come upon Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep." So they sneaked out, and they came to a valley which they called "the valley of Alma [just as we have Brigham City, and Smithfield, and the little, infinitesimal town of Nibley up in Cache Valley; they name them after the people that settle them], because he led their way in the wilderness. Yea, and in the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God" with a sigh of relief and settled down. Don't fool yourself; you're still in danger. Get moving. You're not safe yet just because I have performed one miracle. Go on [paraphrased]. Verse 23: "And now the Lord said unto Alma: Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land, for the Lamanites have awakened and do pursue thee; therefore get thee out of this land, and I will stop the Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people." Don't worry!

We think of Nephi's prayer when he said, Lord, block up the way of my enemies pursuing me. Don't block up my way. Make the level way open for me. He was talking about fleeing through the desert and said, block up the way of my enemies; place stumbling blocks before them so they won't pursue me. It's the same thing here. The Lord does that. He stopped the Lamanites. I think we've all heard the story about Colonia Juarez, down in north Mexico. The Romneys lived down there in those days. When Pancho Villa came through with a big crowd burning, looting, and all that sort of thing, they were held up when they saw very clearly a lighted train coming along. There was no train there, but they all saw the lighted train. They thought troops were coming or something, so they took out and left the town alone. I've heard that story many times. See, the Lord blocks people in various ways. He did it here [for Alma's people].

Verse 25: "And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days [that gives us a geographical tip since there was such a gang of them moving, and they stopped a while, in fact too long; the Lamanites nearly caught up with them, but they got away], they arrived in the land of Zarahemla [these places were fairly close together, but they were safe home now in Zarahemla]; and king Mosiah did also receive them with joy." They celebrated that, of course.

When people come together, there are these great gatherings. We have descriptions and marvelous paintings by Bierstadt and others of Indian life in the West. They used to meet up at Jackson Hole, for example. You may have been to Kelly's Grove in Springville. That was a place where Indians would come by the thousands and meet in the fall. Kelly's Grove is a beautiful place. There were places where the Indians met in great numbers and came from great distances. The trappers would do the same thing because they would come there to trade the furs, etc. There were these places where they would have congregations once a year, sometimes once every four years, and they were huge affairs—like giant camp meetings, powwows, etc. This is what it was. "And now king Mosiah caused that all the people should be gathered together" (Mosiah 25:1). Well, this is ancient too. I wrote an article on that, too, a long time ago called "The Hierocentric State" about when they did that same thing in the ancient world.¹ They didn't have the Book of Mormon at all in those days, but it's all down here. Here they all come together, so this gives us a survey and a census. It doesn't give us numbers, but it says there were the descendants of Nephi and the people of Zarahemla, the descendants of Mulek. And the Mulekites were far more numerous than the Nephites. But the Nephites and Mulekites together weren't even half as numerous as the Lamanites, so they had increased much more rapidly. It breaks them down into tribes.

Let me show you something in the Doctrine and Covenants 3:16. On the 116 pages that were lost there was information that we don't have today. This is a broad hint of the sort of things that was in them. Section 3 discusses the loss of the 116 pages, which were not going to be replaced at that time. It's a very interesting thing here. "Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—And [this message will go] to the Nephites [there are still Nephites around], and the Jacobites [it breaks them down into seven tribes], and the Josephites [they are still distinct], and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers." Now they are the four tribes that are classed as Nephite; as it tells us later, that is just purely a cultural, political classification to call them *Nephites* because they include these four tribes: Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. The other three are the Lamanites,

Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. That makes the seven tribes. You usually have to have seven tribes. Seven or twelve you have to have. But it's more complicated than you think. And even though the Lamanites had only three tribes, they were far more numerous—an interesting development. Well, it's because they had a healthier family life. It tells us that they loved their children, and they didn't play around, like Amulon and people like that.

Verse 4: "And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla [it was a great assembly and must have been an impressive gathering], and they were gathered together in two bodies." That's natural, of course. If I had a Bible, I would read Deuteronomy 31 and Exodus 24, where the same thing happened in Israel. They united in separate bodies and kept a certain identity, as it says there. These tribes were still aware of their identity because genealogy is important. What they did is have the law read to them; that was what they must do. If you go up north to Iceland, you will still find the *thingstað r*, the place where they used to hold the ancient *allthing*. As you may know, Spanish Fork is the oldest Icelandic settlement in the Western Hemisphere. When I first came to Provo, there were five wards in Spanish Fork where they still spoke Icelandic. I gathered a good Icelandic library there. You will find throughout Iceland in certain places the *sites*, the places where the nation met. The *allthing* was the "great meeting of the people." They met in a circle. And you will find the circles of rocks, the rocks and boulders around where they set up their booths of branches, green trees, rocks, blankets, anything they could throw together. It was exactly like the booths of Israel or the *seh* of Egypt. They always met at the mount of the law. The *god i*, which is our word *god*, was the high priest who would stand on the *logberg* and read the law to the people. Remember, those people had writing very early. The only people in the world with a complete history are the Icelanders; they have a complete history of every family that was ever with them because everything was recorded.

The point is that he [Mosiah] read them the law. The same thing happened in Israel, in Rome, in Greece, etc. When the law was pronounced, it was sent down from the mountain and read to the people, as Moses read it to them. He brought it down and read it, and the people were camped at the foot of the mountain living in booths. It is called "the festival of the booths—the gathering." These are customs you will find throughout the world. It's a very surprising thing. This is not the sort of thing you would invent spontaneously; it went back to a single source. They [Mosiah's people] met here in the two bodies, and it was very impressive. He read them the records of Zeniff and the account of Alma, and this gave them a new perspective entirely. The reading filled them in on both the history and the important events. We must be informed, and this was something new to them. Notice that it says in verse 8: "For they knew not what to think." They never knew such things were going on.

Question: Why do you suppose they were so struck with amazement when they read these records?

Answer: This is back in Zarahemla and is telling us what has been going on with these people who had been going out everywhere. He is talking about three or four different colonies of people—where they originated, their tribulations, etc. They didn't know any of this had been going on with their relatives or anyone. Is this what has happened since we left Jerusalem? Well, they were struck with amazement. It says, "For they knew not what to think; for when they beheld those that had been delivered out of bondage they were filled with exceedingly great joy" (Mosiah 25:8). They were glad to hear this. You

have to have the book of the law read and by acclamation you have to approve it. The classic example here is King Benjamin. With the new coronation and the new year, the people came, brought their first fruits, and camped in booths. The king gave them a speech from the tower, exactly as happens in “Nathan the Babylonian,” who recorded that thing happening with the Jews in ancient times. There’s nothing in the Bible about that, but it’s in the Book of Mormon and in Jewish records. That’s the way they used to do when they gathered all together.

Notice that they were filled with both joy and sorrow. These people are easily moved; they sit around and weep their heads off at conferences, etc. It’s a very cheerful event when you go to a conference with the Indians, and they “even shed many tears of sorrow.” This is the warp and the woof—this in our life. There are many accounts of the old man at the gate in heaven. There are two gates, one where the righteous go through, and one where the wicked go through. An old man sits there. It’s Enoch with a book, and he records. He weeps and he smiles. He smiles and is happy every time a righteous person comes, and he weeps every time a wicked one does. We find the same thing in the Book of Mormon a little later on in Alma, when he talks about the Title of Liberty. That’s another story, and we’ll never get to it if we don’t get along here. But this is all relevant, you see—it’s all here. How did this ever get in the Book of Mormon? By some kid trying to fool the family, as Mrs. Brodie said?

Verse 11: “And again, when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, they were filled with pain and anguish for the welfare of their souls.” Can we suffer that they go in ignorance? The thought of the pagans in ignorance breaks the hearts of Christians, supposedly, so they send missionaries out. Then this is a very interesting note. Amulon and the priests had children with these Lamanite girls. The Lamanite girls were still Lamanites, and they raised their children. The children always stay with their mothers until they have regular initiations into puberty. These kids were all raised by Lamanite mothers, so they “were displeased with the conduct of their fathers.” Their mothers were much more moral than their fathers were, and probably their fathers didn’t treat their mothers very well. So they wanted to be Nephites, and “they took upon themselves the name of Nephi [no desire to dominate here at all], that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.” Here’s more racial complication; this is not a simple ethnic story at all. These kids wanted to be called Nephites and join the Nephites. This is a thing that happens.

Verse 13: “And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites [so we don’t call them *Mulekites* anymore; they’re *Nephites* too; they are numbered with them and that’s the name], and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi.” See, it’s a political designation beginning with Mosiah, because only Nephites could rule. Then [Mosiah] desired that Alma should take charge of the church. Now we come to the most interesting parts of what happens—how to manage the church is very important. (This information comes very soon now.) They are back in Zarahemla now, not out with that other crowd, and the king said, I’ll put you in charge of the whole thing; you can go around and establish the church [paraphrased]. Alma went from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord. And he did exhort the people of Limhi and his brethren, all those that had been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them. And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them [this is still at the meeting], that king Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized [Alma is the one who brought the authority; Ammon

refused to do it until Alma showed up]; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also.”

It's the same thing that happened in the case of Benjamin, when they all accepted the covenant and cried out in a single voice that they accepted it when the king asked them. [Limhi and his people] accepted the covenant also and were baptized to show that they accepted the covenant. Verse 18: “Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon [using the same method]; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma [it's very much like the Dead Sea Scrolls here]. . . . King Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla [remember, this is a large expanse here with many cities]; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers [wherever he wanted to] over every church [it was going to become a sacral state, in other words; the priesthood is approved by the king]. Now this was done because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher; neither could they all hear the word of God in one assembly [so they had different assemblies in different churches everywhere; they couldn't all have to come together in one group because they had to come too far]. Therefore, they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches,” and they were ruled by Alma. And they were to preach nothing in the churches “except it were repentance and faith in God.” Verse 23: “And now there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla.” We just said there were the seven tribes there. When John wrote in Revelation, he wrote to the seven churches in Asia. That's probably a coincidence. But seven churches would certainly suggest seven tribes or seven groups. “And they were called the people of God [they were given a name; remember, Benjamin said, I'm going to give you a name today when he talked to the people in the general assembly]. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land.”

The next chapter is devoted to the church. This is another very important thing. What about the church? What authority does the church have over people? What authority does the church have over individuals if they don't want to belong to it, if they want to leave in a group, or if they want to join a group? What do we do in that case? These are the rules that are to be laid down here. Both the king and Alma are completely stumped. They don't know what to do, so they call upon the Lord and get instructions. This is the reason this becomes troublesome. Can the church force people to stay in it? “Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin [and it tells us why they didn't understand them], being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.” So they weren't there for Benjamin at all, and Benjamin is basic. Well, do we understand Benjamin's teaching? Do we follow it? It is addressed to us actually. They didn't follow it. They gave it up, and they didn't understand it because they didn't believe on the two main points.

There are two standards tests of whether a person is a real believer or not in ancient records, like the recently discovered *Bodmer Papyrus*. There were various sects that broke off from the church in the first and second centuries, especially the second century which was the great age of heresy. Eighty different gnostic and other sects were listed by Epiphanius, and he told what they believed. All of these sects broke off from the church. What are the tests of whether they are real Christians or not? Well, this is a letter discovered about 1950 in which Paul was writing his third letter to the Corinthians. He

said, how can you tell [a person who does not believe]? The first thing is that they will deny the literal resurrection. The second thing is that they will deny the literal returning of the Lord, the coming of Christ. Notice that these are the two things these people can't believe. They will believe in the morals. They will believe in the Word of Wisdom and all the rest if you want it. But they won't believe in the literal resurrection (when people die, they die dead), and neither will they believe concerning the coming of Christ (he won't come again). This is why they didn't believe; it's a vicious circle. Because of their unbelief, they couldn't understand it. And because they couldn't understand it, they wouldn't believe it.

Verse 3: "And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened." They started to campaign against it. This always happens when people turn away from the church—that's the way. Verse 3 is the process, the anatomy of apostasy, and verse 4 goes on with it. "And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state [they wanted it that way]; for they would not call upon the Lord their God." This is going to lead very soon to the establishment of the religion of the Nehors, which dominates throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon. The religion in which they call themselves "Christians" is not the dominant religion among the Nephites and Lamanites; it's the Nehors. They far outnumber them, persecute them, and everything else. We haven't gotten to Nehor yet, but they dominate throughout the Book of Mormon.

We'll see now what happens. How do you deal with these people? If you are the king or the high priest, and you have a state religion here, and the king has recognized and authorized the priesthood, what are you going to do with these people who don't want to cooperate and won't believe any of that stuff? That's what he talks about, and it's a very interesting chapter.

1. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," *Western Political Quarterly* 4/2(1951): 226–53; reprinted in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 99–147.