

Book of Mormon 31
Firm in the Faith of Christ
(Alma 43-52)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background and **physical evidence supporting Book of Mormon account**)

I. The overall message of the Book of Mormon is the same as the Bible's.

A. A promised land is prepared and given, but its possession can only be maintained by righteousness. Otherwise, the inheritors will be swept off. **The key to inheritance is to remain firm in the faith of Christ.**

B. Alma prophesied the land would be lost, and told when and why the loss would occur.

1. "Behold I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, **in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ** shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief" (Alma 35:10).

2. "... **the people of Nephi shall become extinct** ---" (45:11).

3. "Yea, and because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, **that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge...** that from that day even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

"And whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled (Alma 45:12-14).

II. By rending his garment, Captain Moroni created "The Title of Liberty," and made similar prophecies with additional details.

A. "Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions" (Alma 46:18).

B. Taking the rent part of his garment, he called upon the people to covenant that they would "maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them" (Alma 46:20).

C. Many accepted the covenant by rending their own garments and acknowledging that "if they should transgress the commandments of God; or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them [away] even as they had rent their garments" (Alma 46:21).

D. They acknowledged they would be destroyed, as the Jaredites had previously been destroyed, if they fell into transgression" (Alma 46:22).

III. Captain Moroni testifies that the Brass Plates [Biblical record] also taught of these things.

A. He reminds them that as a people they are the seed of Joseph of Egypt and that **Joseph's coat was rent as a witness that part of the seed of Joseph would be preserved and part rent away.**

B. According to Moroni, Jacob himself had explained this prophecy.

[The patriarch Jacob said] "Even as this remnant of my son [Joseph's coat] hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment" (Alma 46:24).

C. The Bible does not include this prophecy. However, **Dr. Hugh Nibley found evidences that this story was indeed in the original traditions.** He found verification in the writings of an ancient Arab scholar, Thalabi, who gathered stories about the patriarchs from Jews who had fled into Egypt not long after the destruction of Jerusalem. Other scholars from The Neal A. Maxwell Institute found additional sources of the story, one of them being the Book of Jasher. None of this material was available to Joseph Smith while translating the Book of Mormon.

D. These same scholars also show that the way of making covenants as described in the Book of Mormon has parallels in Middle Eastern traditions. That is --- writing their names on garments and then tearing them or otherwise abusing them as a witness of the dangers/shame of breaking the covenant. (For Nibley's information on both of the above points see "TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON," Semester 3, Lecture 62: Alma 46, which can be obtained online; Stephen Ricks also has an article on these points available online through the Maxwell Institute).

IV. These warnings about the Promised Land apply not just to the Nephites but to all who later inherit the land, **including our generation.**

A. "Thus saith the Lord God --- **Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe:** and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16).

B. Remember that it was not the wickedness of the Lamanites which triggered the removal, but the eventual wickedness of the Nephites, the favored people, that did it. This should be of concern to us as we live in a time of great wickedness and can easily be caught up in it. Some lament, for example, that even the Saints are letting themselves become desensitized to a culture of violence through the movies and video games that are watched or played. Certainly pornography, so easily available and so highly addictive, serves as a great trap for even active Saints. Similarly, the great riches available to the Saints today are a trap, as **riches were a great source of the downfall of the Nephites.**

V. Important principles to help us remain among the righteous.

A. Never be the first to offend.

"And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God: for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: **Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense,** neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" (Alma 43:46).

B. Wars or conflicts often begin with one or more persons who use flattery to sway some people and then stir them up into contention against others (See Alma 43:8; Alma 46:5, 7, 9-10; Alma 48:3). Hitler flattered the German people by convincing them they were meant to be a "super human race," and stirred them up to hatred against the Jews and others.

C. In time of war, those who are fighting for the right reason will be blessed. "...the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45).

VI. **While disturbing, the war chapters in the Book of Mormon are important.**

A. I used to only "quick-read" the war chapters in the Book of Mormon, puzzled why so many were included since the record keepers generally said their writing space was so limited.

B. But military members at the Presidio in San Francisco showed me that the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon were clearly consistent with military procedures and strategy, something that Joseph Smith as a young man, untutored in the ways of war, would not have known.

VII. Furthermore, the **War Chapters in the Book of Mormon do reflect the true nature of War of the people living in North America at that same time. The North American Moundbuilders used the following defensive measures which are exactly like those described in the Book of Mormon.**

A. Their ancient fortifications were made of **extremely high banks of earth surrounded by extremely deep ditches** (See Alma 48:8; 49:2). They also used walls of stone.

B. The fortifications were built with **one maze-like entrance to create a bottleneck for any invaders**, trapped and vulnerable to those shooting weapons on them from above (Alma 49:4-5; 49:18, 20). (The fort at Meggido in Israel is built with one similar maze-like "place of entrance").

C. The attacking Lamanites were thwarted by the **high earth banks because they could not "throw their arrows"** (Alma 49:4). The atlatl, a weapon now on display in at least one Midwestern museum, was a weapon which was used to throw arrows. They were designed in such a way, with weights on the shaft, to actually carry heavier arrow points, to travel further, and to sink deeper into the chest. But the Nephites' high walls prevented their usage.

D. The Nephites added **wooden barricades to the top of their high earth banks, and pickets**; and they built many **watchtowers** (Alma 50:2-4). Archaeological evidence supports these descriptions through the discovery and dating of post molds. Some wooden barricades were also covered with a light cement, which was used by Book of Mormon people (Helaman 3:7, 9, 11).

E. The **Nephites protected themselves with copper head plates and copper breast plates** (Alma 49: 6). Examples of such protective copper gear are on display in Midwestern museums.

F. The Nephites **wore garments of skin, or protective "thick garments"** (Alma 49:6). The Lamanites wore little clothing to cover their nakedness (Alma 3:5; 43:20) and remained more vulnerable to wounds.

G. The Nephites **built many fortifications.**

"Moroni did prepare strongholds against the coming of their enemies, roundabout every city in all the land" (Alma 50:6). Such fortifications would have required the cutting of a great number of trees, and most likely burning their stumps, as is usually done. This is supported by physical evidence. A stalagmite dated to around 100 B.C. has been discovered which is covered heavily with carbon, showing a huge increase in the emission of carbon at that time, a great surprise to scientists. (Wayne May, ed. "*Ancient American: Archaeology of the Americas Before Columbus, LDS Special Edition IV*" p. 14).

H. The archaeological record verifies there were times of Great War and one time of Great Peace. These periods fit the time-line of the Book of Mormon. The greatest **times of war was the century just before Christ, and after 400 A.D.** Archaeologists noted that in between these times of war was one of significant **Peace, beginning at an early time after Christ and lasting a few hundred years.** They noted an absence of wounds from fighting in burials in the time between early A.D. and about 400 A.D., called the Middle Woodland time period). (George R. Milner, *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004, pp. 9, 85).

Note then that Alma's prophecy that the Nephites would be destroyed by war 400 years after the coming of Christ has support from archaeological discoveries, but only recently obtained.