

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #27
“ALL THINGS DENOTE THERE IS A GOD”

Alma 30-31
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

I have a vision of homes alerted, of classes alive, and of pulpits aflame with the spirit of Book of Mormon messages.

I have a vision of home teachers and visiting teachers, ward and branch officers, and stake and mission leaders counseling our people out of the most correct of any book on earth—the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of artists putting into film, drama, literature, music, and paintings great themes and great characters from the Book of Mormon.

I have a vision of thousands of missionaries going into the mission field with hundreds of passages memorized from the Book of Mormon so that they might feed the needs of a spiritually famished world.

I have a vision of the whole Church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon.

Indeed, I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon. (Pres. Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, Nov. 1988, page 6)

INTRODUCTION: When Korihor had his first-hand experience with the power of God he tried to explain to Alma why he had attacked the truth. According to his statement in Alma 30:53, this is the path he followed:

1. “I taught [these things] because they were pleasing to the carnal mind.”

2. "I had much success . . ."
3. Because of my success, "I verily believed that they were true . . ."
4. "For this cause I withstood the truth . . ."

In his earliest statement, Korihor tried to convince his hearers that he had a passionate love for freedom and truth. Most of those who attack the work do so with similar declarations, but when the truth is revealed, I suspect that we will find that Korihor's path is well-used, a sequence followed by a great number of those who attack the gospel and its doctrines.

I. KORIHOR LEADS AWAY THE HEARTS OF MANY IN ZARAHENLA (Alma 30:1-18)

Once we acknowledge the primary motivation for this "mission" of Korihor, we are able to make some judgements about what he is really saying with his sophistry and his intellect. Remember why he is teaching these things? Because they are pleasing to the carnal mind. So, what does he mean when he declares the following?

1. There is no such thing as revelation or prophecy (30:13)
2. Your prophecies are only foolish traditions (30:14)
3. There is no Christ (30:15)
4. There can be no remission of your sins & therefore no atonement (30:16)
5. There will be no judgement (30:17)
6. You should not feel guilty for your sins—you can "lift up [your] heads in [your] wickedness" (30:18)
7. There is no life after death and no resurrection (30:18)

What he is really saying is, *"I do not believe in anything which might curtail the totally free expression of my inclinations and appetites."*

He picked a bad place to preach when he was getting started, for he "went over to the land of Jershon . . ." The probability of converting very many of these Anti-Nephi-Lehies was pretty low. In fact, "They were more wise than many of the Nephites..." (Alma 30:20) What did they do to cause Mormon to tell us of their wisdom? They (1) bound him and took him before Ammon, their High Priest, and (2) Ammon booted him out of the land. (Alma 30:20,21)

We should be so wise. There is no divine injunction requiring us to listen to every apostate who wants our attention. We are not expected to defend ourselves or give our undivided attention to people who want to destroy our way of life. In Deuteronomy 13:6-8 the Lord gave these instructions:

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;

Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him . . .

As I studied the New Testament today, I re-read another verse that reminds me of the way in which the Ammonites treated Korihor:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

On another occasion, Moses said it even more directly:

Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins (Numbers 16:26).

Ammon and his people refused to hearken to Korihor or to pity him or to conceal him. They didn't depart, but he did. They tied him up and tossed him out. He got the same treatment, more or less, in Gideon (Alma 30:21), where he was delivered to the high priest and the chief judge. They asked him why he was teaching this strange new doctrine. His answer came in three parts:

1. Academic freedom—"I can teach what I want" (see Alma 30:23)
2. Your only purpose is to get power over the people (see Alma 30:23,24)
3. Your doctrines are stupid (see Alma 30:27,31)

They listened to him enough to discover his stubbornness and sent him to Alma (Alma 30:29) in Zarahemla.

II. KORIHOR IS TAKEN BEFORE ALMA, WHO TESTIFIES OF CHRIST'S COMING

(Alma 30:19-60)

As he stood before Alma he used a word he had used in Gideon. The word is "glut." The priests, he said, kept the people "down, even as it were in bondage" in order to "glut themselves" with the labors of the people. (Alma 30:27) They instructed the people "after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people." (Alma 30:31) Korihor's arguments fail unless he can explain the incentives of the religious leaders of these people which inspire them in their efforts? Korihor has publicly accused them of dishonesty and so he must explain it somehow. He calls it glutting. But Alma correctly perceives that this is a glaring weakness in his argument:

Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people. And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time. And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren? Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? (Alma

30:32-35)

Watch your bishop this week. Follow him around and make a note of all that he does for the members of the ward. Alma knows what you know, and what Korihor also knows (30:32): Why does he do all that he does. Can anyone with eyes and a heart really believe that he is “glutting” on the labors of ward members?

And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren? (Alma 30:34)

Another weakness worth noting shows up here. Korihor’s early preaching contained this concept: “no man can know of anything which is to come.” (30:13) Later, however, Korihor declared that God was a being “who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.” (30:28) Don’t you want to ask Korihor how he “knows” that? He sounds in this statement very much like someone who knows of things to come.

But the teaching is ridiculous for another reason, and Alma points it out:

. . . what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only. (Alma 30:40)

Think about this. How could you “know” there is no God? No Christ? Only someone who knows everything could tell you, but a person who is omniscient would be, by definition, a god. There is another way to say this. In *Time Magazine*, December 28, 1992, I read this statement: “If you admit we can’t peer behind the curtain, how can you be sure there’s nothing there?”

Evidence? Of course Korihor has none. But Alma has some.

I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true . . . (Alma 30:41)

Alma even declared that Korihor knew the truth: "I know that thou believest . . ." (Alma 30:42) And Korihor himself, after he lost the ability to speak, confessed, "I always knew that there is a God." (Alma 30:52)

What evidence exists of the reality of God?

. . . ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:44)

And even if someone decides that none of these evidences are conclusive, they are certainly more conclusive than the unverifiable word of Korihor that there is no God.

Korihor's insistence on seeing a sign (see 30:43,45) suggests that Korihor's intellectual dishonesty was accompanied by at least one other problem.

When I was preaching in Philadelphia, a Quaker called out for a sign. I told him to be still. After the sermon, he again asked for a sign. I told the congregation the man was an adulterer; that a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and that the Lord had said to me in a revelation, that any man who wanted a sign was an adulterous person. "It is true," cried one, "for I caught him in the very act," which the man afterwards confessed when he was baptized. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Five 1842–43, p.278)

In relation to this subject, notice the content of Alma 30:18.

Korihor teaches us one more important lesson: a man can become so much the prisoner of his passions that it is impossible for him to repent regardless of the motivation. When Korihor begged for a reversal of the curse that had incapacitated him, Alma replied,

If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead

away the hearts of this people; therefore, it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will. (Alma 30:55)

And then Mormon gives us the final lesson of the story as he recounts the end of Korihor. He introduces the lesson, as he so often does when pointing out what we ought to learn, with the words, “And thus we see . . .”

And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell. (Alma 30:60)

President Benson said that “the Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ.” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 56) The ignominious death of Korihor shows a side of sinning that we never see in the movies or on the television, and Mormon’s final observation contains an insight well worth absorbing.

III. ALMA LEADS A MISSION TO RECLAIM THE APOSTATE ZORAMITES (Alma 31)

Alma’s continuing commitment to his people—his determination to preach the truth and proclaim the word of God anywhere it was needed—is a great inspiration to me. Having dealt with Korihor and warned those who believed him to speedily repent (30:57), he turned his attention to another group of apostates: the Zoramites. His motivation was more than a desire to declare the truth.

. . . it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites. (Alma 31:2)

His concern for the iniquitous Zoramites was compounded by the concern of the rest of the Nephites.

Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter

into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites. (Alma 31:4)

Alma's solution is the best solution. We are told of it in a scripture that almost all of us can quote or paraphrase, but that few of us actually believe.

And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just--yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them--therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. (Alma 31:5)

This is the sort of doctrine to which many of us give lip service, but upon which few of us are willing to risk our success. We are sometimes more inclined to trust in logic or a baseball bat than in the saving power of the scriptures and the word of God.

And our retreat from this source of power need not be a wholesale abandonment. There are a number of substitutes for interaction with the scriptures that seem worthwhile, even powerful, but that cannot give us the success that will attend "the virtue of the word of God." For example:

1. Spending too much time on faith promoting stories
2. Giving too great an emphasis to discussion
3. Teaching into the scriptures rather than out of the scriptures; that is, using the scriptures to support our ideas rather than using our ideas to support the scriptures
4. Over-abundance of application--most of the time we ought to let the Holy Ghost make the application.

If you have time, you might wish to review the following scriptures on the power of the word:

- A. D&C 35:18-20
- B. Hel. 6:37
- C. Alma 37:8
- D. 2 Tim. 3:13-17

- E. D&C 6:2
- F. Hel. 3:27-29
- G. Alma 5:6-13
- H. Hel. 15:7,8
- I. D&C 11:21
- J. D&C 18:34-36

Alma assembled what might be the most powerful missionary district of all time to go and deal with this problem.

Therefore he took Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons. (Alma 31:6)

What a group. If they were taking applications to fill vacancies for this missionary effort, I would sign up in a flash: how would you like to go tracting and teaching with Alma, Ammon, Aaron, Omner, Amulek, Zeezrom, Shiblon, and Corianton? Well, maybe not Corianton, but the rest? Sign me up!

The Zoramites seem to have at least five problems.

1. Idol worship (31:1)
2. Pride (31:15,18)
3. Rejection of Christ (31:16,17)
4. Hearts set on riches (31:24,28)
5. Despising the poor (32:2,3)

In addition, “they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld.” (31:12) The whole thing with the Rameumptom and the prayer seems strange beyond comprehension, and I have wondered as I have read this account how these folks got from faithfulness to foolishness (see 31:8). But I remember several years ago when a man calling himself Zev Cosmos appeared in and around BYU as a representative of what he called the Nudist Christian Church, exhorting people to “repent in the raw.” This all reminds me of the dream of Lehi in which he reported seeing people “wandering in strange roads.” (1 Nephi 8:32)

I suspect it is more than coincidence that the prayer of the Zoramites is followed almost at once by the prayer of Alma. In the Zoramite invocation (31:15-18) we see vain repetitions, pride, an absence of real intent, insincerity of heart, and a desire to be seen of men. In Alma's prayer (31:28-35) we see an outpouring of love and pain and sorrow—a great cry for comfort and a plea for success among these people. “O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.” (31:34) The Lord and Mormon must have wanted us to note the contrast between these two prayers and to compare them to our own supplications.

The aftermath and the result of his prayer are wonderful:

Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith. (Alma 31:36-38)

CONCLUSION: Our communities are filled with Zoramites, millions of men and women “who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” by the Korihors and the Zorams, and “who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it . . .” (D&C 123:12) And what Alma said of the Zoramites we might say of them:

Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren . . . (Alma 31:35)

We ought to be as anxious and willing as Alma, in our own stewardships and neighborhoods, to try and reclaim them by “the virtue of the word of God.”

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