

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #31

"FIRM IN THE FAITH OF CHRIST"

ALMA 43-52

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "It is not sufficient that the Book of Mormon be [just physically] in our homes; its principles must be captured in our minds and hearts. Through consistent reading, prayerful pondering, and conscientious application, its teachings will be-come an essential part of the fabric of our lives.

"What does the Book of Mormon mean to you? Has it been a source of inspiration and power in your life? Will it continue to be?

"If you have not yet drunk deeply from this fountain of pure truth, with all of my soul I encourage you to do so now. Don't let the consistent study of the Book of Mormon be one of the things that you intend to do but never quite accomplish. Begin today.

"I bear witness that it can become a personal 'Urim and Thummim' in your life" (Elder Richard G. Scott: "The Power of the Book of Mormon in My Life," *Ensign*, Oct. 1984, 11).

INTRODUCTION: People more numerically inclined than I am have suggested that about 1/3 of the Book of Mormon deals with war and related issues. Whether that is an accurate fraction or not is not terribly significant. What matters is that in these chapters and those that follow in Alma and in later books, we will read a great deal about war. There must be a reason for this emphasis---a reason which we ought to understand. Six times in the Book of Mormon we are reminded that the writers could not give us the "hundredth part" of the available material. (see Jacob 3:13; WofM 1:5; Hel. 3:14; 3N5:8; 3N26:6; Ether 15:33) Why then do we have so much emphasis on the Nephite experience with war? Look for answers to that and related questions as you study Alma 43-52 this week.

I. THE NEPHITES FIGHT TO DEFEND THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR LIBERTY (Alma 43-44)

Alma 43 and the first part of Alma 44 teach some critical lessons about war; about how to prepare and how to fight and how to win. I think as we review these chapters we must recognize that wars come in different shapes.

When I was in the mission field in the mid 1960's

I thought quite a bit about war. Viet Nam was waiting. Only my missionary service had kept me from an earlier induction, but I knew as did many of the missionaries, that my release might precipitate an unwelcome invitation from Uncle Sam to visit Southeast Asia.

Israel's 6-day war occurred during the final months of my mission and again I wondered what the future might

hold. The fact that I was not the only one concerned by these things became clear when my mission president made the following comment at a Zone Conference.

Are you afraid of a scratch? A little mud? A little ? That war in Southeast Asia is a pipsqueak war! It will not affect the eternal destiny of one single man, except as it brings men closer to Christ and the realities of the restored gospel. This war—the one you are fighting here and now against evil and corruption and and misery—this war with lucifer for the souls of men—this is the war that counts! (Wayne M. Beck, from the journals of Ted Gibbons)

Every principal and lesson on war discussed in these chapters can be applied equally well to both physical and spiritual warfare.

Consider the following lessons from Alma 43.

Prepare! (Alma 43:4,19,20) When the Nephites

learned that the Zoramites had become Lamanites, they knew at once that the result would be war. They did not wait for the attack to commence. When the Nephites saw

. . . that the Lamanites were coming upon them . . . they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon. (Alma 43:4)

They prepared in part by putting on their armor: "breast-plates and . . . arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing— (Alma 43:19)

We also are at war and have been counseled in D&C 27 and Ephesians 6 to put on the whole armor of God. We must therefore visit the *armory*. We must arm and prepare ourselves for battle. But where is the Armory? During Viet Nam and the Gulf War, soldiers who might encounter an enemy force were expected to carry a "basic load" of ammunition and supplies. My drill sergeant in the Infantry Officer Basic Course in 1968 told us that during his Viet Nam experiences, he never went into a combat zone without a "double basic load" of ammunition and supplies. Such an attitude required him to carry a few more pounds of weight, but when the battles began, he was as prepared as he could possible be. Where do we get our "basic load" ? Such activities as Family Home Evening, Prayer, Scripture Study, Seminary and Institute, Sacrament, Sunday School, and Priesthood Meetings are certainly part of the process of being adequately armed for this battle with Lucifer.

If we fail to arm adequately, we may find ourselves in a battle for our very souls clothed like the Lamanites: ". . . they were , save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were . . ." (Alma 43:20)

Insure that you are inspired by proper motives.

(Alma 43:9,12,30,45,47) The Nephites, forced into a war they did not seek and did not want, were inspired by righteous motives.

And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires. (Alma 43:9)

The Nephites had one other purpose in fighting. They wanted to protect the Ammonites.

And the Nephites would not suffer that [the Anti-Nephi-Lehies] should be destroyed . . . (Alma 43:12)

It is one thing (and sometimes perhaps an appropriate thing) to fight in the jungles of Asia or the desert

sands of Iraq to defend someone else, but it is another thing to defend your own homes and families.

And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto shed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion. (Alma 43:47)

We send our young warriors and our older warriors to the deserts and jungles of the world armed with the sword of the Spirit and the word of God. But we must also realize that the safety and security of those we live with and love is at stake, and may depend on our ability and willingness to fight the battle with encroaching evil in our own homes and neighborhoods.

Keep your covenants. (Alma 43:11) Even in these

desperate extremities, with Nephites forced to lay their lives on the line in defense of the people of Ammon, the Ammonites were firm. They would not take up weapons against their enemies:

they would not take up arms, yea, *they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it--*therefore, if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites they would be destroyed. (Alma 43:11, *emphasis added*)

For some, unusual and frightening circumstances are an excuse to reevaluate commitment to covenants. All of us have encountered people who excuse iniquity by saying, "I said I would, but . . ." followed by a description of a circumstance never imagined when the covenant was made. The Lord's feelings about this are described in D&C 98:14,15:

Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto , that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me.

When our enemies open the lions' den or the fiery furnace; when the minions of King Noah drag in the faggots; when Herod sends a charger for our head; When we lose a job or face an untimely or wreck a car or burn down a house, we may be inclined to reconsider our covenants. At such a time we should remember the Anti-Nephi-Lehies waiting without weapons for enemies determined to bring about their destruction. "For they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it." No one in the kingdom of God has ever been invited to make a conditional covenant. The Lord does not work that way. We make promises with our eyes wide open, but still unable to see what will come in a day or a week or a month. But they are never conditional covenants. We cannot say, "I will keep my covenants so long as things go well and I have no problems." In fact, the only way for the Lord and for us to know how we really feel about our covenants is to see how we respond in a situation when covenants are hard or dangerous or inconvenient to keep.

In this matter, the example of Job is a shining light:

God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach [me] so long as I live. (Job 27:5,6)

Do your part and do your best. (Alma 43:13) The

Ammonites could not fight, but that did not mean they could not help.

And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had

dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah. (Alma 43:13)

The Anti-Nephi Lehi's would not fight, but they could give sustenance to those who did. Thus, in these most difficult circumstances, the Nephites were not required to devote great effort to locating and transporting food for those in the forefront of battle.

I am not the Stake President. He has things to do that I cannot do. But I can fulfill my calling so well that he does not have to worry much about the 9th ward. If anything comes up that needs his attention, I will let him know, but in the meantime, I will do my part in a way that allows him to devote his energies to other parts of his stewardship.

Other Church leaders have battles to fight of which I am not a significant part, but I can insure that the requirements of my stewardship do not lessen their ability to fulfill theirs.

Seek and heed inspiration on the places that need

defending. (Alma 43:23; see also Alma 48:15) When the Lamanites saw the preparation of the Nephites at Jershon, they reconsidered their plans and departed into the wilderness on a roundabout journey to the land of Manti. Moroni sent men to watch them, but he also,

. . . knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites. (Alma 43:23)

I am certain that you have seen this happen in your own lives. As you have gathered your family around the TV in April and October and listened to the prophets, seers, and revelators, have you not noted how clearly and precisely they point out the places that need defending in this culture and generation. How many warnings have we heard about the dangers threatening the home? How much as been spoken about movies and media?

In a related verse, we learn that sometimes the Lord will warn us of the necessity to flee rather than fight.

And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger . . . (Alma 48:15).

The epidemic of ography was mentioned 372 times in the Ensign between 1970 and 2000. From 1899 to 1969, this plague was only mentioned 9 times in General Conference, and never before 1959 when Elder Benson mentioned it in an October sermon. The prophets have indicated clearly where the danger lies. Like Joseph bolting from Potiphar's house, this is a temptation from which we must flee.

know your enemy's intentions. (43:8,28,29)

Zerahemna led the Lamanites and Zoramites and Amalakites into battle against the Nephites "that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into ." (Alma 43:8)

Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land . . . (Alma 43:29)

Do you know what Lucifer is up to? Joseph Smith said that

Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.255)

And Lehi said of Lucifer that "he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself." (2 Nephi 2:27) An understanding of what lies behind the bright lights and the glossy photos and the seductive smiles will prevent many episodes of misery. Solomon's warning, referred to previously in a lesson from Jacob, fits here as well, offering us a glimpse behind the and the glow of iniquity.

He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. (Prov. 7:22,23)

On another occasion he described the invitation of iniquity:

Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell. (Prov. 9:17-19)

Lucifer is a magician. No one can hide things like he can. Talk about sleight of hand and misdirection! How grateful I am that the Lord has shown us the nature and cunning and bitterness of our enemy. Satan's window displays are replete with stolen waters and secret bread, with sweet and pleasant things. But behind the false front, hidden in the darkest corners of his evil emporium, misery waits patiently and with great hunger.

Cry unto God for strength. (Alma 43:48-50)

And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts--yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from . And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from . And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon (Alma 43:48-50)

The phrase "pray always" appears sixteen times in the standard works. Nine times this requirement is related to overcoming Satan and/or temptation. When we feel the power of the enemy of our souls increasing in the battle fields of our lives, we must seek for more strength to overcome. Some, like Corianton, boast in their own strength and wisdom. (Alma 39:4) Others are inclined to trust in the arm of flesh. (2 Nephi 4:34) But this is a battle we can never win by ourselves. We must cry unto God for strength.

I was acquainted a lovely couple, and had the sacred privilege of watching them make their way back from decades of inactivity and indifference. It was such a delight to see the light come on in their lives and to feel the increase in joy that radiated from them. But they both had tobacco habits of many years duration, and they finally admitted that overcoming this enemy was going to take more strength than they could generate on their own.

They called their bishop and their home teacher and asked for blessings. Neither has touched a cigarette in the years since those blessings were given.

Hearken and hear, O ye my people, saith the Lord and your God, ye whom I delight to bless with the

greatest of all blessings, ye that hear me . . . (Alma 41:1)

The Lord has promised so many times to hear us and to help us. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:13, JST) the angel asked when Sarah laughed at the prospect of a baby in her old age. And Christ testified that "with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)

Don't be men of ; seek your enemies' best

interests as well as your own. (Alma 44:1,6,20) When Moroni recognized that the Lamanites were in his power, he immediately "commanded his men that they should stop shedding their ." (Alma 43:54) He said to the Lamanite commander, "we do not desire to be men of . Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you." (Alma 44:1)

The inclination of the natural man is to say, "I'll do worse to you than you did to me," especially if he is in a position of power. When those who have injured us and offended us and belittled us are subject to our will, we must be like Captain Moroni.

Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of . (Alma 44:2)

When Johnston's Army marched to Utah,

A body of men under the command of Daniel H. Wells and Lot Smith [were] sent to the front to stop the progress of the army. This they did by stampeding the cattle and horses. They were enjoined by President Young to *avoid the shedding of* except in self-defense. (Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff—His Life and Labors, p.387, *emphasis added*)

2. CAPTAIN MORONI RAISES THE 'TITLE OF LIBERTY' TO INSPIRE THE PEOPLE (Alma 45,46)

The contrast between Amalickiah and Captain Moroni offers a comparison that can teach us important principles about good men and bad men.

Amalickiah conspired to be king and did not care whom he buried on his way to the throne. He was devious, thirsty, cold-hearted, and satanic.

Thus we see . . . the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men. Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake. (Alma 46:8-10)

But on the other hand we are told that

if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. (Alma 48:17)

Moroni and Amalickiah both made oaths. Moroni swore "to defend his people, and his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his ." (Alma 48:13)

Amalickiah, on the other hand,

did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his ; and this because

Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people. (49:27)

After you have reviewed the manner by which Amalickiah became king of the Lamanites, consider the implications of the Title of Liberty. Captain Moroni, that great patriot and lover of freedom and of God, would not suffer that a despot like Amalickiah should usurp power over the people of the Church. He ripped his garment and wrote upon it the things for which he was willing to lay down his life.

If you were to take a white shirt, rend it, and inscribe upon it those things for which you would be willing to fight and die, what would you write? This might be an interesting activity for class members if you are teaching a gospel doctrine class of youth or s, or for a family home evening.

What do wicked men write on their 'titles?' What would Amalickiah have written, had he made a 'title?'

I believe that what we would write on our own 'titles' determines in large measure how valuable we are to the Kingdom of God.

3. AMALICKIAH BECOMES KING OF THE LAMANITES AND INCITES THEM TO BATTLE. (Alma 47,48)

One day I sat listening to a marvelous sermon delivered by a teacher of youth to a congregation of two or three hundred teenagers. He talked about the desire of Lucifer to deprive them of their happiness and to destroy them. As he spoke I wondered about his successes. I looked around at this gathering of the elect of God and recognized that what the speaker was saying was true. There were some among them who would turn away from the truth, from the commandments, from the Savior, from the faith of their fathers.

"Why?" I wondered. How is it that people who know what they know and have felt what they have felt can be turned away from the truth?

As I pondered that question, three words from a verse of scripture in alma made their way into my heart, bringing with them an answer to my question. The words were "poison by degrees."

After Amalickiah had become leader of the Lamanite army, he was sent by the king of the Lamanites to compel the rebellious part of the army to join in a new campaign against the Nephites. The Lamanites had been badly defeated by the Nephites just two years before, and survivors had entered into a covenant never to come to battle again against the Nephites. And so, in their fear, a part of the Lamanite soldiers refused to fight. They chose a leader and made plans to defend themselves against Amalickiah and his troops at the top of the mount Antipas.

However, Amalickiah had no desire to serve the King. He wanted to be the King, and so he made plans to destroy Lehonti, the commander of the fearful soldiers.

[Amalickiah] sent a secret embassy into the mount Antipas, desiring that the leader of those who were upon the mount, whose name was Lehonti, that he should *come down* to the foot of the mount, for he desired to speak with him. (Alma 47:10, *emphasis added*)

In this situation, Amalickiah becomes a marvelous metaphor for Satan, who desires that we too should "come down."

But Lehonti knew his danger, and refused this first invitation to go down, as well as the second and the third. Finally Amalickiah "went up into the mount, nearly to Lehonti's camp; and he sent again the fourth time his message unto Lehonti, desiring that he would come down, and that he would bring his guards with him." (Alma 47:12)

Lehonti must have assumed that he would now be in control. He would be close to his men. He would have his

guard with him. Amalickiah would evidently be alone. And so he went down, *just a little bit*, of course. But he went down! And of course, the moment he descended, he was no longer in control.

Amalickiah offered him the command of all the soldiers if he, Amalickiah, could be second in command. Lehonti agreed to the plan proposed by the treacherous Amalickiah, and became the leader of all the army.

And then it happened. "Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer *poison by degrees* to Lehonti, that he died." (Alma 47:18, *emphasis added*)

Generally speaking, Lucifer does not attack in full frontal assault with flashing bayonets and booming bazookas. He entices us to lower our standards ever so slightly, and then, once we have begun to *come down*, he poisons us by degrees.

The solution is to attend to the work at hand and not be enticed away from it to less important things.

A similar thing happened when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He tells us that his enemies, intent on stopping or disrupting the work,

. . . sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. (Nehemiah 6:2-4)

This is reminiscent of an event mentioned by Elder Boyd K. Packer in a talk to CES personnel several years ago.

I recall not too many years ago riding to the office one morning and turning on the radio as they were excitedly announcing that someone had placed a bomb at the temple. The front doors of the temple had been blown off. Remember that? Most of you don't because it is just not that important—it isn't worth remembering. We were then using the parking lot north of the Relief Society building; and as I went to the office, I glanced across the street. There was a lot of action around the temple—people, police cars, fire trucks, and everything. But I was late to a meeting, so I had to resist the temptation to go over and see what was going on. I was in meetings with combinations of the Brethren all day. As I went back that night about 6:30 or 7:00, there were some big sheets of plywood over the place where the doors had been. Then it struck me. All day long in meeting with the Brethren, not once, for one second, was that thing ever mentioned. And why? Because there was work to do, you know. Why be concerned about that? ("To Those Who Teach in Troubled Times," in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd Edition (1982), pp. 72-76)

There is great power in staying high and doing what has to be done. "Why should the work cease?" Nehemiah asked, while we tend to things that do not matter and that may in fact give Lucifer an opportunity to begin to poison us by degrees. "Why should the work cease?" Elder Packer asked, "while someone repairs the doors to the temple?"

There is an additional point in Alma 48 worth noticing. After Mormon testified of the greatness of Captain Moroni in Alma 48:17, he made this comment:

Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni . . . (Alma 48:19)

Of this matter of being equally serviceable even though less noticeable, President Howard W. Hunter taught:

Not all of us are going to be like Moroni, catching the acclaim of our colleagues all day every day. Most of us will be quiet, relatively unknown folks who come an go and do our work without fanfare. To those of you who may find that lonely or frightening or just unspectacular, I say, you are "no less serviceable" than the most spectacular of your associates. You, too, are a part of God's army. (Ensign, April 1992, pp. 64-67)

The engine and the paint job get all the attention when people notice a new Corvette Convertible, but I assure you that the distributor and the fuel injection system are "no less serviceable."

4. WAR CONTINUES BETWEEN THE NEPHITES AND THE LAMANITES (Alma 49-52)

The true cause of these Nephite/Lamanite wars is explained in Alma 50:21.

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their ings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their doms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

The point is reiterated (and recorded by Mormon so that we might learn the lesson) in Alma 51:16. When the *kingmen* rebelled against the chief judge and sought to overthrow the constitutional form of government (see Alma 51), Moroni immediately turned his attention to them.

For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction. And it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people. (Alma 51:16)

His first care was to cleanse the inner vessel, for he knew that the iniquity of the Lamanites was not the cause of the destruction among the Nephites. Rather, it was the iniquity of the Nephites.

The lesson should be crystal clear. If Lucifer is successful in making our lives miserable, it is not because he is corrupt and evil, but because we are.

CONCLUSION

President Joseph F. Smith taught this about war:

God is the greatest man of war of all, and His Son is next unto Him, and their warfare is for the salvation of the souls of men. It would not be necessary for them to use or force, nor to permit their children to use nor force in order to conquer if they would but humble themselves, and obey the truth. For, after all, nothing will conquer nothing will win but the truth; and so far as the wars that are going on in the world are concerned, we not only want to see peace established among the children of men, but also justice, but above all things, truth, that justice, peace and righteousness may be built upon this foundation and not depend upon the covetousness, pride, vanity, evil desire, and for power in men. (Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report, October 1914, p.129)
