

Book of Mormon Lesson #32
THEY DID OBEY . . . EVERY WORD OF COMMAND
WITH EXACTNESS

Alma 53-63
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

There comes to us from the voice of the Book, echoes as from some word that we have heard long since and have well understood; they are the whisperings to us of familiar truths. We recognize them, for they are attested by the reasoning of the mind and the sanction of the spirit within us. They tell us that the end of life is that we shall be born again (Mos. 27:25), redeemed and become the sons and daughters of God; that there is no happiness in sin, and that obedience is the way to joy (Alma 41:10; 2 Nephi 2:25). It teaches that an element of faith is a recognition of God's superior knowledge (Mos. 4:6-12), and how that faith is nurtured and grows in the heart of man (Alma 26:22); and how it may become so powerful that nothing can be held from it (3 Nephi 7:18; Ether 12:19). That spiritual gifts to man cease only because of his wickedness (Mormon 1:14), and that God to be unchangeable must be a God of miracles (Mormon 9:19). It gives full light on the comprehensiveness of the plans of the Almighty (2 Nephi 27:7-10), and shows that all men have been alike to him from the beginning of creation, and that his atonement applied as well before as subsequent to his coming in the flesh (Mos. 3:13). That baptism, necessary now, was always necessary (2 Nephi 31:9; Mos. 2:22; 3 Nephi 11:38-39). That the mission of all prophets has been to testify of the Christ (Jacob 7:11). It teaches that purity of heart alone gives access to God (Jacob 3:1). And with unanswerable authority is given again, by the Lord himself, the essence of his Gospel (3 Nephi 27:13-16). (John A. Widtsoe and Franklin S. Harris, Jr., *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon*, pp.167,168)

INTRODUCTION: Sometimes stories that speak of physical or temporal

salvation can be applied to spiritual salvation. For example, what is the most astonishing event from the story of the 2060 stripling warriors? Probably it is that while all of them were wounded, not one of them was killed. (Alma 57:25) We might summarize their experience in this way: ***Two thousand and sixty Lamanite youths fought battles against deadly enemies with the result that all of these youths were wounded, but not one of them died.***

Now, if we apply this remarkable event to our own time and our own youth, we might write something like this: ***Many modern youth and Church Members fight battles against deadly enemies with the result that all of them are wounded, . . .***

What are the unfortunate results that we sometimes see in the church today as youth and others battle against the forces of evil and temptation? The reality is that many seem to die spiritually. We would expect that all of us would be wounded. “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Some might be *severely* wounded. Among the Lamanite youth there were 200 that had fainted from the loss of blood. (see Alma 57:25) ***But none of them died!***

As we examine the story of the stripling warriors, we will look for the actions and characteristics exhibited by the Stripling Warriors in their battles with the Lamanites that will assist us to triumph as the Stripling Warriors in our own spiritual battles.

The following outline does not coincide directly with the sections of the lesson in the manual, but the principles can be easily applied to those sections.

They entered into a covenant: (Alma 53:10-17)

These verses present an interesting insight into both the meaning and the power of covenants. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies had entered into a covenant to avoid the shedding of blood regardless of the danger or sacrifice that covenant might require. The Nephites had agreed to protect them (53:10,12) and had done so through various battles. But

now, as these Lamanite converts watched the “many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them,” (53:13), they were about to abandon their covenants and take up weapons again.

In our own lives, we are sometimes encouraged by afflictions and tribulations to rethink our covenants. *I did not know when I agreed to pay 10% of my income as tithing that I would lose my job and wreck both family cars in the same month.*” Who persuaded the Ammonites to keep their covenants even in this time of great difficulty and suffering? This is a significant part of the duty of a prophet and his brethren—to help people keep their covenants.

But these marvelous converts had sons who had not entered into the same covenant made by their parents (53:16). But they made a covenant now. Like their parents, they made a covenant of their own will. No one encouraged, much less compelled, them to gather together and make this covenant. “They did assemble themselves together.” Moved, apparently, by the longing of their parents to help and the great need of the Nephites for help, they gathered themselves together,

And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from ~~_____~~. (Alma 53:17)

Why are commitments we choose to make of our own will more enduring than those we are encouraged or induced to make by other people? How might this apply to a decision to serve a mission? To search for the dead? To study the scriptures?

What phrase in Alma 53:17 indicates that they meant to keep this covenant no matter what happened? (“in all cases”)

You will recall that once these young men had made this covenant,

they never had to be reminded of it. No verse in these chapters implies that any leader *ever* had to remind them that they had promised to fight. Sometimes we need to be reminded. Constant encouragement comes from the pulpit and from other sources to us pay our tithing and serve missions and complete our home teaching and give a generous fast offering. Why do we who have entered into a covenant need to be reminded?

I remember reading somewhere the story of a bishop who arose every morning at 6:00 AM to go to the train station to watch the 6:05 leave for the big city. When a friend realized that this was a daily activity, he asked the bishop to explain the reason for this unusual behavior.

The bishop replied, "I watch the train pull out because it makes me feel so good to see something move without me having to push it. *The stripling warriors did not need to be pushed.*"

- ***They chose a prophet for a leader*** (Alma 53:19)

One of the most critical decisions the stripling warriors made was in their choice of a leader. Whom did they choose to lead them? (Alma 53:19; 56:5) Helaman was the leader of the Church--the Prophet. Why would this decision increase their effectiveness in the battles they would fight? What kind of behavior would you expect from a person in our day who has chosen the prophet as his/her leader? What other kinds of leaders might Latter-day Saints choose to follow that would weaken them in the spiritual battles they fight?

There are so many causes clamoring for our attention and our resources. My wife and I receive mail every day from those who need our contributions or our time or both. Many of them are involved in causes that seem most worthy, and from time to time we offer what help we can. But before we enter into battle in any cause, I think we ought to know what, if anything, the prophets have said about it. Like these young Ammonites, we ought to choose the Prophet as our leader. Brigham Young was one who made such a choice:

The story is told in the early days of the

Church—particularly, I think, at Kirtland—where some of the leading brethren in the presiding councils of the Church met secretly and tried to scheme as to how they could get rid of the Prophet Joseph's leadership. They made the mistake of inviting Brigham Young to one of these secret meetings. He rebuked them, after he had heard the purpose of their meeting. This is part of what he said: "You cannot destroy the appointment of a prophet of God, but you can cut the thread that binds you to the prophet of God and sink yourselves to hell." (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.334; CR April 1963, p. 81.)

How did these young warriors address Helaman? (Alma 56:46) How did Helaman address them in return? (Alma 56:44) What does this indicate about how they felt toward one another? Why was Helaman willing to call them "sons?" (Alma 56:10) How can we develop this same feeling for our prophet today?

- ***They were valiant for courage, strength, and activity.*** (Alma 53:20)

D&C 76:79 tells us that one quality of those who inherit the Terrestrial Kingdom is that they were not valiant in the testimony of Jesus. What does it mean to be valiant? What people come to mind as examples of that quality? The stripling warriors were valiant in at least three ways. *Courage* probably does not mean the absence of fear, but the willingness to proceed in spite of it. The strength mentioned here probably has more to do with endurance than muscles, and the word *activity* suggests that they were "anxiously engaged" in the cause of the freedom of the Nephites. When things needed to be done, they did them, without waiting for commands or directions.

I spent time in the Army during the conflict in Viet Nam, I gave two years to Uncle Sam and had the opportunity to watch many soldiers at work. I observed that one of their major activities was to see how much they could *avoid* doing. The ideal was to be invisible. I remember the delight a close friend of mine, a lieutenant, expressed when his commanding officer passed us one day and called him by the wrong name.

In your ward, men and women like these youths are the ones asking for opportunities to help. When sealing assignments and cleaning assignments and service assignments come, they are the first ones to raise their hands and give their names.

- ***They were true at all times*** (Alma 53:20)

I had the opportunity to command others while I was in the Army. I learned what every military leader has known from the beginning—that the most attractive quality in any soldier is perfect reliability.

Can we think of a body of men living this way, a hundred men and women, fifteen hundred men and women? If one can do it all can do it. I shall never forget, as long as I live, the impression my mother gave me when she told the story of those two thousand sons who went to battle under the leadership of Helaman. Think of those boys, Hold them as a pattern, you priests, teachers and deacons, yes, and high priests, seventies and elders. If two thousand men in that ancient time could live such lives, two thousand, nay ten thousand and a hundred thousand men can live it today. These were their principles, founded upon the principle of faith, inculcated into their hearts by their mothers, who taught them in their youth that if they prayed to God nothing doubting, their prayers should be answered. Such is their testimony; such was the result of their mothers' teachings, showing the influence of home on the boys' lives.

They were all young men and they were exceeding valiant for courage, for strength and activity, and behold this was not all. They were men who were true at all times and in whatsoever thing they were entrusted. (Elder George F. Richards, Conference Report, October 1911, pp. 60,61)

Job was such a man. In the midst of trials such as few men have ever known, he declared:

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)

Most of us know that someone saying “I will go and do”: is not the same thing as their having “gone and done.” What a delight it must be to work with people who are “true at all times.” I had an assistant in the group leadership of my High Priest group. He was utterly reliable. When he said, “I’ll take care of it,” whatever *‘it’* was, I knew I could forget it. In his case it was the same as if it were already done. He “was true at all times in whatsoever thing [he] was entrusted.”

- ***They were men of truth and soberness*** (Alma 53:21)

What are you serious about? What feelings in your life occupy a place beyond the reach of levity or dishonesty?

It is not difficult to imagine these boys going about their duties resolutely and tenaciously. The covenant they had made—to fight, and if necessary, to die for the Nephite cause—was never far from their thoughts. It was a thing that they were likely to “always remember.” That covenant, therefore, would affect nearly all of their actions and words. Keeping it would transform them into men of “truth and soberness.”

We, too, have been commanded to *always remember* the Lord and our baptismal and sacramental covenants with him. That

remembering ought to infuse us with a measure of soberness that others outside the kingdom would not comprehend. The Lord spoke of this when he said, "Treasure these things up in your hearts, and let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds." (D&C 43:34)

- ***They walked uprightly before the Lord*** (Alma 53:21)

In lesson #15 we talked about the warning of King Benjamin against *listing* (see Mosiah 2:32,33,37) We also mentioned the image of the plumbline from Amos 7:7,8. The Lord expects us to walk uprightly before him. Another way to think of this is mentioned in D&C 121 wherein we are told that if we abide by certain requirements, our confidence will wax strong in the presence of God. We will not cower in fear before him. Because we have kept the commandments and followed the prophets, we will be confident enough to stand *upright* in his presence.

Nephi described walking uprightly to his brothers in this way:

And now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might walk uprightly before God, then ye would not murmur because of the truth, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us. (1 Nephi 16:3)

- ***They did not fear death*** (Alma 56:46,47)

Look at Alma 53:47. What did these young men fear? What were they most concerned about? In this matter they are much like Abinadi and John the Baptist and Stephen and many others, including the converted Lamanites who became the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who knew that some things are worse than death.

I have been terrified by spiders and minefields and machine guns and thunder and loud noises in the dark and movies about sharks and the man who caught me riding his horses. But I have not been frightened enough of those things that might draw me from my covenants and

the commandments. We must discipline ourselves to be afraid of the right things.

- ***They loved and trusted and believed their mothers*** (Alma 56:47,48; 57:21)

Three or four years ago a T-shirt/sweatshirt pattern circulated in the church. The shirt had a drawing of young Book of Mormon warriors and this caption: “STRIPLING WARRIORS WERE MOMMAS’ BOYS.” They certainly were! The fathers are not mentioned in these verses. One wonders why. All the verses that speak of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies praise them as a people of stunning righteousness without distinction of father and mother. But no fathers are mentioned here. Perhaps the fathers were among the casualties of that first Lamanite aggression before the converts moved to Jershon.

My father died when I was 17. I was the baby of the family and the last child at home. Most of what I learned about the gospel in those late teen years I learned from my mother. My faith and my love and my trust were nurtured by her faith and love and trust. I knew that she knew the Lord. I knew that she got answers to her prayers. I knew that she worked miracles by her faith. I knew of her absolute trust in the Lord and the prophet and in the priesthood. My mother bore her testimony of the doctrine and the truth and the power of the gospel, and I did not doubt my mother knew it..

To be a righteous woman during the winding-up scenes on this earth, before the Second Coming of our Savior, is an especially noble calling. The righteous woman’s strength and influence today can be tenfold what it might be in more tranquil times. She has been placed here to help, to enrich, to protect, and to guard the home—which is society’s basic and most noble institution. Other institutions in society may falter and even fail, but the righteous woman can help to save the home, which may be the last and only sanctuary some mortals know in the midst of storm and strife. (*Teaching of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 327)

- ***They did obey and perform every word of command with exactness*** (Alma 57:21)

The word *exactness* is a wonderful expression. The Stripling Warriors performed every word of command with *exactness!* I worked for Del Monte stacking boxes of canned vegetables and driving a forklift. I bagged groceries for Valley Discount and ran a supply room in the 14th Military Intelligence Battalion of the U.S. Army. I suspect that I used the phrases “close enough” and “good enough” hundreds of times in those jobs. I knew what I had been assigned to do, and I knew when I had done it well enough to avoid censure. “Close enough,” I would say, or “good enough,” and go on to other things. But these Ammonite youths performed every word of command with exactness. For them, good enough was never good enough. They did it right every time.

What assignments in the church need to be performed with exactness? What duties of parents? Do you have family home evening every week with exactness? Do you fulfill your home teaching or visiting teaching assignment with exactness? Do you involve your family in family prayer and family gospel study with exactness? When the prophets speak and give counsel and direction, do you “observe” that counsel and plan to comply with exactness?

In D&C 118:4,5, the Lord called the Twelve Apostles on a mission to England. That call gave them an opportunity to show their willingness to perform every word of command exactly as the Lord had revealed.

[On July 8, 1838] the Lord called the Twelve Apostles, while in this state of prosperity, on the 26th day of April, 1838, to go to Far West to lay the corner stone of the Temple; and from there to take their departure to England to preach the Gospel. Previous to the arrival of that period the whole Church was driven out of the State of Missouri, and it was as much as a man's life was worth to be found in the State if it was known that he was a Latter-day Saint; and especially was this the case with the

Twelve. When the time came for the corner stone of the Temple to be laid, as directed in the revelation, the Church was in Illinois, having been expelled from Missouri by an edict from the Governor. Joseph and Hyrum Smith and Parley P. Pratt were in chains in Missouri for the testimony of Jesus. As the time drew nigh for the accomplishment of this work, the question arose, "What is to be done?" Here is a revelation commanding the Twelve to be in Far West on the 26th day of April, to lay the corner stone of the Temple there; it had to be fulfilled. The Missourians had sworn by all the gods of eternity that if every other revelation given through Joseph Smith were fulfilled, that should not be, for the day and date being given they declared that it should fail. The general feeling in the Church, so far as I know, was that, under the circumstances, it was impossible to accomplish the work; and the Lord would accept the will for the deed. This was the feeling of Father Smith, the father of the Prophet. Joseph was not with us, he was in chains in Missouri, for his religion. When President Young asked the question of the Twelve, "Brethren, what will you do about this?" the reply was, "The Lord has spoken and it is for us to obey." We felt that the Lord God had given the commandment and we had faith to go forward and accomplish it, feeling that it was His business whether we lived or died in its accomplishment. We started for Missouri. There were two wagons. I had one and took brother Pratt and President Young in mine; brother Cutler, one of the building committee, had the other. We reached Far West and laid the corner stone according to the revelation that had been given to us. We cut off apostates and those who had sworn away the lives of the brethren. We ordained Darwin Chase and Norman Shearer into the Seventies. Brother George A. Smith and myself were ordained into the quorum of the Twelve on the

corner stone of the Temple; we had been called before, but not ordained. We then returned, nobody having molested or made us afraid. We performed that work by faith, and the Lord blessed us in doing it. (Wilford Woodruff, December 12, 1869, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.13, p.159 - p.160,)

- ***They were firm*** (Alma 57:19,20,27)

When the remainder of the army “were about to give way” what was the response of the stripling warriors? Helaman referred to the firmness of the stripling warriors in three different verses. What does this word teach us about them?

Why is it so important to us to remain “firm and undaunted” in our spiritual battles, even when friends, associates, and others are “about to give way”? What was the result of this firmness on the army of the Nephites? What similar result might we expect from those around us if we remain firm? Can you think of a time when someone’s firmness gave you increased courage to stand fast?

My friend Eli Herring, whom I have mentioned before in these lessons, was firm and undaunted. I have watched him teach math and coach football at a high school in Utah. Professional football teams waved millions of dollars in front of him, trying to entice him away from a “never on Sunday” job. But he would not move. He knew what was right and he refused to give way. And no team in professional sports had enough money to get him to change his mind. And I believe that others in this church will know of him and will be inspired by him and by his example to stand firm in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Conclusion: We, like the stripling warriors, must “contend with an enemy that is innumerable” (Alma 58:9; see 1 Nephi 14:12,13). If we acquire the qualities possessed by the stripling warriors, perhaps what was said of them will one day be said of us:

Nevertheless, according to the goodness of God,
and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of

our whole army, there was not one soul of them who
did perish . . . (Alma 57:25)

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