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THE BOOK OF ALMA: LESSONS FOR TODAY

The Nephites faithfully endured the trials of their day and are a witness that the Lord will provide the blessings and protection we need to successfully meet the challenges of our day.

At the conclusion of his reign, King Mosiah proposed that the monarchy be replaced with a system of judges chosen by the people. The proposed system was to be based on God-given laws administered by judges who were to be selected by the people.

The principle of agency was the foundation of the proposed system—individuals, rather than a king, would accept responsibility and accountability to act in accordance with the law. Because “it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right” (Mosiah 29:26), this system would provide greater protection for the rights of individuals and the collective righteousness of the society.

In response to Mosiah’s proposal, the people “became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed

a willingness to answer for his own sins” (Mosiah 29:38).

The book of Alma contains the history of the people during the 40-year period after the proposed system was adopted by the people. The last chapters of Alma’s record, chapters 43 to 62, recount a period of intense challenges and testing. During this short 19-year period, the people faced internal political challenges, external threats, and almost constant armed conflict.

Twice the governmental system was threatened internally by men who sought to establish themselves as kings and deprive the people of the right to select their leaders and to worship freely. Simultaneously, the people had to defend themselves from multiple external attacks by Lamanites who were determined to destroy the Nephite government and subject the Nephites to bondage.



Through all of their challenges, righteous Nephites were able to take strength from the fact that they were acting with proper motives. Their sole intent was “to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.”

The economic disruption of these multiple challenges, though not specifically mentioned, was likely a significant challenge for the people. Mormon, in compiling the sacred record, felt impressed to provide a detailed account of this period. In fact, had he provided similar detail for the rest of the 1,000-year history of the Nephites, the Book of Mormon would contain more than 2,500 pages!

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught:

“The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

“We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’”¹

Today Latter-day Saints throughout the world find themselves facing many of the same challenges the Nephites faced during this period of their history, including efforts to deprive members of the right to worship and speak out on issues important to the societies in which we live. Some Latter-day Saints have felt the threat of external attack and conflict with forces committed to the destruction of their nations and freedoms.

Fortunately, the Nephites were able to overcome their challenges by supreme effort, sacrifice, and help from the Lord. A few lessons about how they successfully responded to their challenges may give us guidance and courage to face our challenges today.

1. Maintain proper desires and motives.

Through all of their challenges, righteous Nephites were able to take strength from the fact that they were acting with proper motives. Their sole intent was “to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion” (Alma 43:47). Their desire was to preserve their agency—the right to act in righteousness and to answer for their own

conduct—rather than have a king prescribe their conduct. Their motive was to preserve equality under the law, specifically their liberty to worship God and maintain their church (see Alma 43:9, 45).

There are and always will be in societies forces seeking to manipulate public opinion to obtain power for personal gain. There is a temptation to adopt their motives and turn the conflict into a power struggle. The Lord’s way is to always act based only on pure desires and motives, as did the Nephites. Doing so allowed them to draw upon the powers of heaven to overcome their challenges “in the strength of the Lord” (Alma 46:20; see also Alma 60:16; 61:18).

Similarly, in our responses to the challenges we face today, we must constantly check our hearts to be sure that our desires and motives are pure and based on the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we act (or manipulate others to act) out of selfishness, for personal gain, or to demean others, we will not have the needed heavenly help to withstand our challenges.

2. Be kind and generous to the less fortunate.

When their former enemies, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were threatened with destruction, the Nephites voted to give them a place to live and build new lives and provided them with protection (see Alma 27:21–22; 43:11–12). Because the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had taken an oath never to take up their weapons of war again, they provided instead “a large portion of their substance to support” (Alma 43:13) the Nephite armies during these critical times. Nevertheless, there is no record that the Nephites treated these immigrants with anything other than respect and love, even though they must have been an easy political target for those who wanted to stir up dissension.

The kind treatment the Nephites gave to the people of Ammon, as they came to be called, was reciprocated and eventually contributed to the formation of one of the most inspiring military brigades in recorded history—the 2,000 stripling warriors. Ironically, the service of these young men may have been the key to



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In times of internal dissension, external attack, and economic challenges, there is a tendency to become negative toward those who are “not like us.” It becomes easy to become critical of them and make judgments. One might question their loyalty to and value in society and their impact on our economic well-being. These negative responses are inconsistent with the Savior’s charge to love our neighbors as ourselves, and they create polarization, contention, and isolation. Had the people of Ammon not been welcomed into Nephite society, it could have perhaps created resentment rather than gratitude in the rising generation. Instead of producing 2,000 faithful warriors, the new generation could have become alienated and rejoined the Lamanites.

A willingness to be kind and generous to the needy was an important factor in the preservation of the Nephite nation and entitled the Nephites to the blessings of heaven in their time of extremity. God’s people need such blessings today.

3. Listen to and follow inspired leaders.

The Lord knew the challenges the Nephites would face, and He raised up inspired leaders to help them meet those challenges. Captain Moroni was a warrior but was inspired to prepare breastplates, arm shields, head plates, and thick clothing to protect his people (see Alma 43:19). As a result, the Nephites fared much better in battle than did the Lamanites (see Alma 43:37–38). Later, Moroni directed the people to dig up heaps of dirt around their cities and to top those heaps of dirt with works of timbers and frames of pickets (see Alma 50:1–3). These inspired preparations helped preserve the Nephites from destruction.

While Moroni was preparing for war, Helaman and his brethren were preaching the word of God and urging the people to righteousness so that the Lord’s Spirit could guide and preserve them. By listening to the temporal and spiritual direction of inspired leaders, the Nephites were preserved. Only when internal dissensions arose and the

people refused to heed inspired warnings did setbacks and suffering result.

We are blessed to live in a day when the Lord has called living prophets, seers, and revelators to warn us and guide us to prepare for today’s challenges. In 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) gave inspired instruction and warning to Church members:

“The time has come to get our houses in order.

“So many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings. . . .

“The economy is a fragile thing. . . . There is a portent of stormy weather ahead to which we had better give heed.”²

Recently I spoke with a man who heard the words of President Hinckley and the promptings of the Spirit. He and his wife decided to liquidate their investments, pay off their home, and get out of debt.

Today that man is self-reliant. The economic downturn that followed had minimum impact on his family. In fact, his self-reliance made it possible for him and his wife to serve a mission.

President Thomas S. Monson has been raised up for our time. His life and teachings are the message God has sent to protect and bless us today. At a time when many worry about what they don’t have, President Monson teaches us to be grateful for the many blessings the Lord has given us. And at a time when many focus on their own problems, President Monson urges us to reach out and rescue, forgetting ourselves in blessing others. Heeding the direction of President Monson will provide our families with the spiritual protection and blessings needed in our day.

I am grateful to live in a day when the gospel has been restored. I am grateful the Lord prepared the Book of Mormon for our day. The Nephites faithfully endured the trials of their day and are a witness that the Lord will provide the blessings and protection we need to successfully meet the challenges of our day. ■

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 6.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “To the Boys and to the Men,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 53.



By listening to the temporal and spiritual direction of inspired leaders like Moroni, the Nephites were preserved. Only when internal dissensions arose and the people refused to heed inspired warnings did setbacks and suffering result.