

HOW Disciples of Christ LIVE IN TIMES OF War and Violence

Principles from the Book of Mormon help us live with faith and hope during troubled times.



Above: *Nephi endured being bound for four days until Laman and Lemuel repented and loosed him (see 1 Nephi 18:9–21). Right:* *None of the 2,000 young men in Helaman's army were killed in battle (see Alma 56:44–57).*

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We live in a time of widespread war and violence. News sources report incidents of these awful events every day. The Lord's prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, said, "We have come to the earth in troubled times."¹ He affirms what President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said: "We live in a season when fierce men do terrible and despicable things. We live in a season of war."²

While sobering, this should not be surprising. The scriptures teach that in the last days Satan will "make war" (Revelation 12:17) with the faithful and that "peace shall be taken from the earth" (D&C 1:35).

God foresaw our day and called the Prophet Joseph Smith to bring forth the Book of Mormon to help us (see D&C 1:17, 29; 45:26). Of the 239 chapters in the Book of Mormon, 174 (73 percent) deal with war, terrorism, murder, political conspiracies, secret combinations, threats, family collusions, and other hostilities.

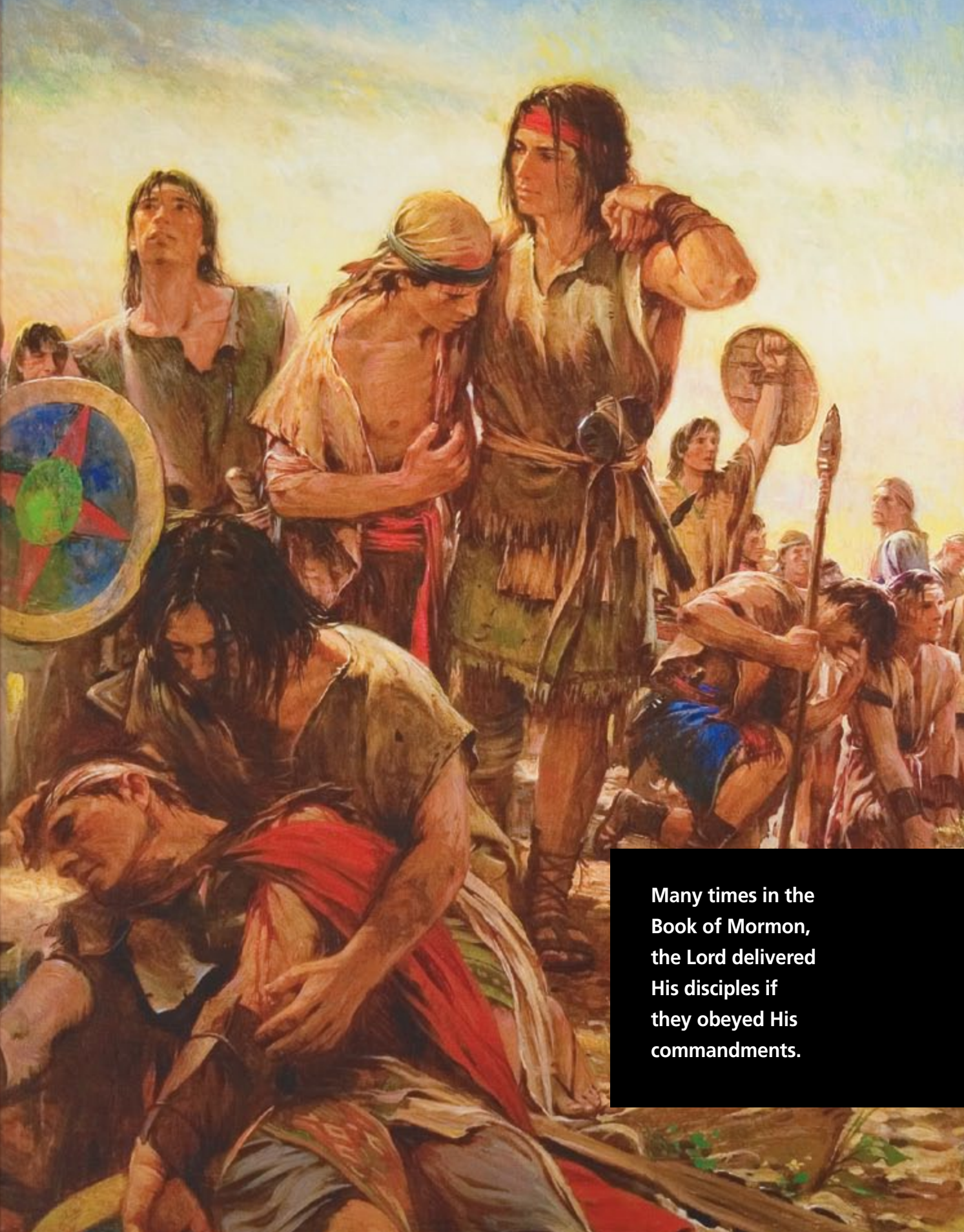
Why did the Book of Mormon record keepers preserve so many incidents of war?

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) answered, "From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war."³ Following are insights that can guide us as we live in troubled times.

Obedience Invites Deliverance

Many times in the Book of Mormon, the Lord delivered His disciples if they obeyed His commandments.⁴ Nephi taught, "The tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). Nephi then recorded how the Lord delivered his father from people who attempted to kill him, delivered his family from the destruction of Jerusalem, delivered him and his brothers from Laban's murderous attempt, and delivered him when Laman and Lemuel resorted to violence (see 1 Nephi 2:1–3; 3:28–30; 4; 7:16–19; 18:9–23).

Alma told his son Shiblon, "I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions" (Alma 38:5). Mormon



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GOD WILL PROTECT US

“God will be with us. He will watch over us. He will protect us . . . if we will be true and faithful and obedient and hearken to His word.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “God Will Protect Us in These Perilous Times,” *Church News*, Feb. 22, 2003, 3.

also observed that “those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times” (Alma 50:22). Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reaffirmed this principle when he said: “Obedience allows God’s blessings to flow without constraint. He will bless His obedient children with freedom from bondage and misery.”⁵

The Book of Mormon also shows that even a few righteous people can secure peace and safety for a whole city (see Helaman 13:12–14).

War Can Be a Call to Repent

When we forget God, He calls after us. At first He uses merciful means such as personal promptings and prophets. But if we do not respond, He escalates His efforts. At times, He allows wars and violence as part of His last resort to help us return to Him.⁶

Mormon said, “And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3). War can be a reminder to repent and return to God.

God Provides Relief during War

When God’s disciples are required to suffer the effects of war, God provides relief for them. When Alma and his followers were taken captive, they immediately turned to the Lord (see Mosiah 23:27–28), and He promptly answered: “I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; . . . that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions” (Mosiah 24:13–14).

Jacob told the pure in heart of his day, “Look



Some disciples, like Abinadi (depicted above and below), are called to suffer or die in order to stand as a witness against the wicked.



unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction” (Jacob 3:1).

Modern-day prophets confirm this truth. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “While [God] does not always intervene in the course of events, He has promised the faithful peace even in their trials and tribulations.”⁷

President Benson said, “Even though times become perilous, . . . if we only trust in God and keep his commandments we need have no fear.”⁸

Some Are Called to Stand as a Witness against Wickedness

While disciples of Christ can be delivered from war, some disciples are called upon to suffer or die to stand as a witness against the wicked. This is a harsh reality not easily accepted or understood. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded us that “the faithful will not be totally immune from the events on this planet.”⁹ President Hinckley acknowledged that some of us “may even be called on to suffer.”¹⁰

The Book of Mormon preserves a few episodes of inhumane abuse and savagery to help us understand why the Lord’s disciples, including prophets as well as innocent women and children, sometimes suffer and die in war. For example, the wicked priests of King Noah bound the prophet Abinadi “and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death.” Before dying, Abinadi testified, “If ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Mosiah 17:10, 13).

In another occurrence of torturous murder in the Book of Mormon, the wicked lawyers and judges of Ammonihah burned the wives and children of religious converts. Alma and Amulek were brought to the place of martyrdom and forced to witness this merciless massacre.

“When Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.”

Alma responded, “The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (Alma 14:10–11).

The Righteous Who Die in War Enter into the Rest of the Lord

As we mourn the loss of faithful loved ones, the Book of Mormon assures us that they have entered into the rest of the Lord and are happy. Moroni makes this pointed remark, “For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 60:13).

After a battle which left the “bodies of many thousands . . . moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth,” including some faithful



Ether (above) and Moroni (page 34) saw the destruction of their civilizations because of war (see Ether 13:13–14; Moroni 1:1–4).

disciples of Christ, the Book of Mormon records that the survivors “truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness” (Alma 28:11–12).

The Prince of Peace

The Book of Mormon was brought forth to bless those who live in times of war and violence. The events and teachings recorded therein highlight hope, convey comfort, and provide divine perspective. We learn that obedience to God delivers many, that war can be a call to return to God, and that God provides relief for His disciples who are required to suffer. We also learn that the righteous who are called upon to die during war or violence will stand as a witness against the wicked and that these disciples will enter into the rest of the Lord.

Ultimately, the Book of Mormon teaches us how disciples of Christ can receive peace in their hearts, homes, and nations. It is the eminent instrument to bring us to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 66.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Living in the Fulness of Times,” *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 6; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 6.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 7.
4. There are at least 56 scriptures in the Book of Mormon that teach how the Lord delivered people from war and other dangerous circumstances.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Face the Future with Faith,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 34–35.
6. There are at least 35 scriptures, including 11 in the Book of Mormon, that teach how the Lord allows war and natural disasters to help us remember Him.
7. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Finding a Safe Harbor,” *Liahona*, July 2000, 71; *Ensign*, May 2000, 59.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 146.
9. Neal A. Maxwell, “Encircled in the Arms of His Love,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 17.
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Times in Which We Live,” *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 86; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 74.

WHY DO WARS AND VIOLENCE OCCUR?

The Book of Mormon testifies with distinct clarity that iniquity invites war. Whether unrighteous individuals seek power over others or a citizenry allows iniquity to thrive unrestrained, the result is war, conflict, and violence.



WHEN UNRIGHTEOUS INDIVIDUALS SEEK POWER

Amlici lost a contentious but legitimate election yet refused to relinquish his desire to reign over others. He convinced his constituents to consecrate him king anyway. He then commanded his new subjects to engage in war to destroy the Church of God and subject the people to him. Thousands suffered unnecessary violence because one man wanted power over others. (See Alma 2.)

Zerahemnah, a Lamanite commander, stirred up his people against the Nephites to bring them into bondage. War broke out, and their dead could not be counted because of the greatness of the number. (See Alma 43:6–8, 37; 44:21.)

Amalickiah, a Nephite dissenter, employed deception, violence, and war in his personal pursuit for power. He brought the Nephites into bondage, and they suffered war and violence for the next five years. (See Alma 46–48.)

WHEN CITIZENS ALLOW INIQUITY TO THRIVE

Nephi taught that various groups of people were “destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities” (2 Nephi 25:9). Captain Moroni assured his people that they would not be destroyed until they brought it upon themselves by their own transgressions (see Alma 46:18). Mormon noted, “It has been [the Nephite] quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (Alma 50:21).