

Know of the Doctrine

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." -John 7:17

[Saturday, September 22, 2018 – Link to original](#)

A More Excellent Way

The Lord said,

"And I will show unto this people that I had other sheep...And I will bring to light their marvelous works which they did in my name, yea and I will also bring to light my gospel which was ministered unto them. And behold, they shall not deny that which you have received, but they shall build it up and shall bring to light **the true points of my doctrine**, yea and the only doctrine which is in me. And **this I do that I may establish my gospel, that there may not be so much contention**. Yea, Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention concerning the points of my doctrine, and in these things they do err, for they do wrest the scriptures and do not understand them. Therefore I will unfold unto them **this great mystery**: for behold, **I will gather them** as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if they will not harden their hearts." (D&C 10:60-65) (T&C 10:20)

God has stuff He is revealing and wants to reveal to us in order to show us the points of His doctrine. What is the point of His doctrine? What is He aiming for? Well, the first one He mentions in this scripture is less contention. Jesus confirmed this when He told the Nephites,

"He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the Devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger one against another, but **this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away**." (3 Nephi 11:29-30) (RE 3 Nephi 5:8)

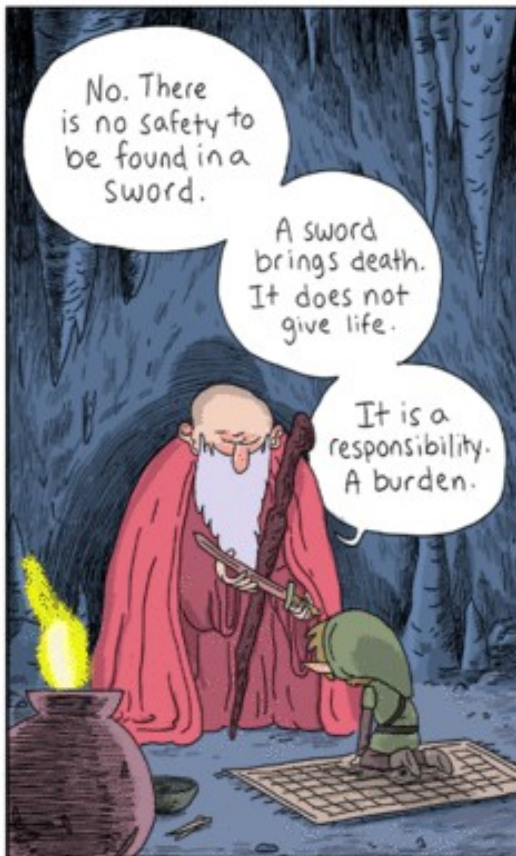
That's the point of His doctrine, or at least the first point. The first thing He is aiming for is less contention or, even better, no contention at all. But then, in the earlier scripture I quoted, God goes on to reveal the "great mystery". What comes next after no contention? What's the point of it all? "**I will gather them** as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if they will not harden their hearts." People can be gathered. Zion can come. That comes after contention is gone. That's the point of His doctrine.

To the Nephites and Lamanites who survived the great storm and destruction, the Lord said,

“O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, **how oft have I gathered you** as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and have nourished you. And again, **how oft would I have gathered you** as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel who have fallen. Yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem as ye that have fallen, yea, **how oft would I have gathered you** as a hen gathereth her chickens and ye would not. O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, **how oft will I gather you** as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings **if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.**” (3 Nephi 10:4-6) (RE 3 Nephi 4:9)

God is not kidding around with this gathering thing. If we can repent (as evidenced by a lack of contention) we can be gathered. He has offered it so many times, He would have offered it so many times, and He will offer it every time we're willing to listen. If God lamented those missed opportunities to the Nephites, then that means they must not have been listening the many times God offered them the opportunity to repent and gather. That means that a search of the Book of Mormon should reveal many missed opportunities. And we'll be able to find those missed opportunities by seeing if the people truly understood the point of His doctrine, which, as we saw above, is to do away with contention. So let's take a look and see what we can find - not to criticize or condemn those who went before, but to learn and see how we can do better. And we may find many bright spots where people put away all contention in order to do the Lord's will.

Built Upon the Sword



-ZAC GORMAN

Nephi wrote,

“And when I came to him, I found that it was Laban, and beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof, and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

“And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban, but I said in my heart, Never at any time have I shed the blood of man, and I shrunk and would that I might not slay him. And the Spirit said unto me again, Behold, **the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands**. Yea, and I also knew that **he had sought to take away mine own life**; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord and he also had taken away our property. And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again, Slay him, for **the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands**. Behold, **the Lord slayeth the wicked** to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief. And now when I, Nephi, had heard these words I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise. Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses save they should have the law. And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. And again, I knew that **the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands** for this cause, that I might obtain the records according to his commandments; therefore I did obey the voice of the spirit and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.” (1 Nephi 4:8-18) (RE 1 Nephi 1:16-17)

Those verses describe the moment that Nephite society became built upon the sword. The sword of Laban was later used as a model to make more swords for their armies once Nephi was the king in the promised land. Not only that, but the sword of Laban became an important relic and was used for centuries by Nephite leaders to slay the wicked in battle. Such behavior is certainly “justified” by the Lord. But is it “righteousness”? Is there a difference? Did Nephi act to increase or decrease contention? Did Nephi have a choice if he wanted to follow God?

The Lord told us some important things regarding violence in a revelation to Joseph Smith - a revelation containing a law that the Lord had specifically given to His “servant Nephi”.

“If men will smite you or your families once, and you bear it patiently and revile not against them neither seek revenge, you shall be rewarded. But if you bear it not patiently, it shall be accounted unto

you as being meted out a just measure unto you. And again, if your enemies shall smite you a second time, and you revile not against your enemies and bear it patiently, your reward shall be a hundredfold. And again, if he shall smite you a third time and you bear it patiently, your reward shall be doubled unto you fourfold. And these three testimonies shall stand against your enemy if he repent not, and shall not be blotted out." (D&C 98:23-27) (T&C 98:5)

This certainly happened to Nephi and his brethren. Laban had tried to kill them multiple times and he had stolen their property. And that only includes the parts we know about. They bore those offenses patiently, not seeking revenge on Laban. The Lord continues in the revelation to Joseph Smith:

"And then, if he shall come upon you or your children or your children's children, unto the third and fourth generation, **I have delivered your enemy into your hands**...your enemy is in your hands, and then if you reward him according to his works, **you are justified**. If **he has sought your life** and your life is endangered by him, **your enemy is in your hands, and you are justified**. Behold, **this is the law I gave unto my servant Nephi**..." (D&C 98:29-32) (RE T&C 98:5-6)

So we see that Nephi was "justified" according the law that the Lord had either already taught him or would teach him at some future point. But the Lord put something in the middle of that law that I purposely skipped over but should not by any means be overlooked. After four offenses, after your enemy has been delivered into your hands, and when you would be justified in killing him, "if you will spare him, you shall be rewarded for your **righteousness**, and also your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generation."

This is more than being "justified". This is "righteousness". This is doing what is in the Lord's doctrine. This is living the principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount in order to get rid of contention (so that a gathering can occur). The Lord goes on to restate the law regarding violence in the context of nations warring against nations:

"...they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, **save I the Lord commanded them**. And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue, and if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second, nor third time, they should bring their testimonies before the Lord. Then **I the Lord would give unto them a commandment**, and **justify them** in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people..." (D&C 98:33-36) (T&C 98:6)

We can see that the "justified" route includes not only the option to kill, but a commandment to kill. So if that's what you really want to do, the Lord will command you to do it. But if there is another route that isn't "justification" but is "righteousness", if there is a higher way, the commandment to go out to battle and kill the wicked would simply not apply. A more excellent way would prevent the need for such a commandment. After all, who does the Lord use to slay the wicked? Does He ever use the righteous to slay the wicked? If you are slaying the wicked, what does that make you?

How does this apply to Nephi? We know that Nephi was admiring the sword of Laban. We know that a "Spirit" told Nephi to kill Laban (which "Spirit" that was exactly, we are not told, but it might be important to note that that "Spirit" referred to the Lord in the third person). Nephi was told that Laban had been **delivered into his hands** because he had **sought his life** (didn't we see those exact terms in the other revelation?). Did Nephi have a choice, even after a commandment to kill had been given? Could Nephi have chosen the path of "righteousness" instead of the path of justification? Would Nephi have gotten counsel more along the lines of the Sermon on the Mount from the Lord had he not listened to that particular "Spirit" that spoke when he picked up and admired the sword? Would Nephite society have been quite different had its founder not taken up the sword in his youth? How did Nephi treat his brethren when they weren't doing the right things? Was he patient with them? How would you have reacted to Nephi if you were in the place of Laman or Lemuel? How did Nephi treat his brethren after they had split up into Nephites and Lamanites? If things had been different, could the children of Lehi have qualified themselves to be gathered? Questions to ponder.

Close but No Cigar

If I had to choose one group of people in the Book of Mormon who got close to being gathered by the Lord but didn't, I would choose the people of King Benjamin. It was a huge opportunity. King Benjamin called all the people together and the entire group received a covenant all at the same time! A truly miraculous event, indeed. And presumably none of them ever left the faith. So what happened? Weren't they righteous enough to be gathered into a Zion community with Gd dwelling among them?

Aside from the problem of having a king (I don't know if you can have true Zion-like equality with a political king - even a very meek and humble king - in your community), there may have been an even bigger problem. The people of King Benjamin had learned that problems can be solved through violence and death. Before the covenant was offered, the record tells us a little of the history of this people.

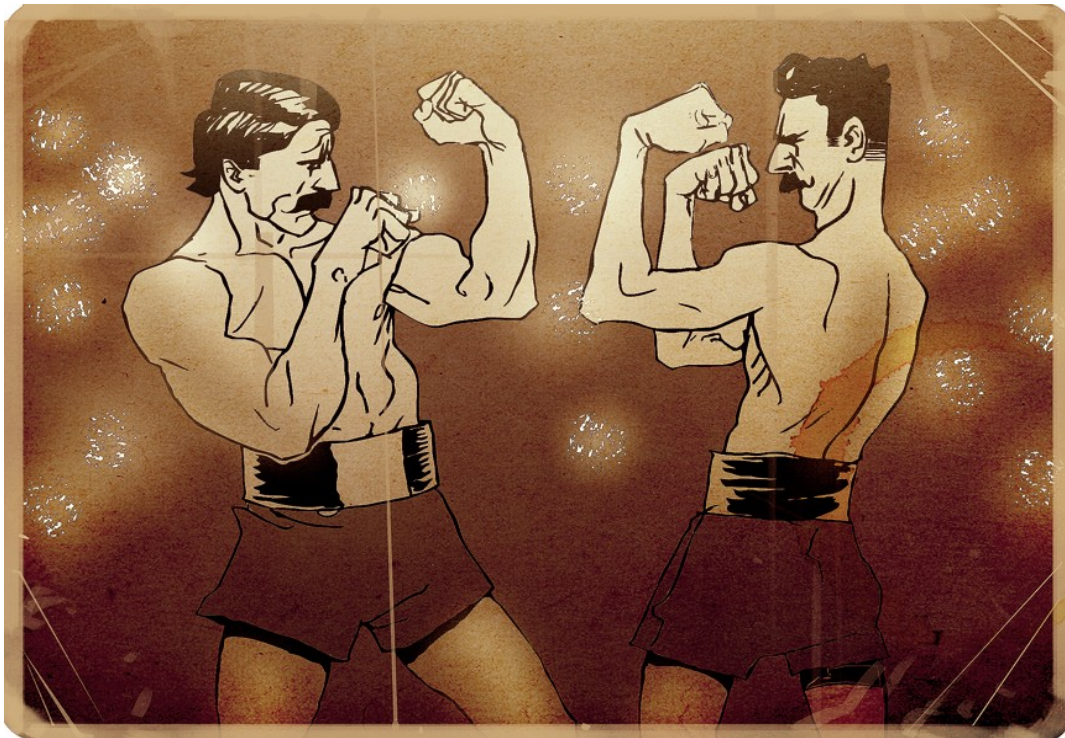
“And now, concerning this king Benjamin, he had somewhat **contentions** among his own people. And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi to battle against his people. But behold, **king Benjamin gathered together his armies**, and he did stand against them. And **he did fight** with the strength of his own arm, **with the sword of Laban**, and in the strength of the Lord **they did contend against their enemies** until **they had slain many** thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that **they did contend against the Lamanites**, until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.” (Words of Mormon 1:12-14) (RE Words of Mormon 1:5)

Again, I have no reason to believe this contention wasn't "justified" as we saw with Nephi. And I have no reason to believe those people who entered into a covenant under King Benjamin didn't inherit their rest in the kingdom of God. But did King Benjamin and his people pass up an opportunity due to their violent behavior towards their enemies? Did they miss the point of the Lord's doctrine, which is to eliminate contention? Remember that the Lord's law concerning violence promises blessings to "your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generation" if you choose to always forgive and never slay your enemies. Well, the Book of Mormon is clear that the people of King Benjamin did not secure such blessings for their children.

“Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers. They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ. And now because of their unbelief, they could not understand the word of God, and their hearts were hardened. And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state, for they would not call upon the Lord their God.” (Mosiah 26:1-4) (RE Mosiah 11:18)

If not even King Benjamin's people could be gathered, what can we do? It appears that being fit for a gathering in a Zion society and having God dwell with you actually requires what Jesus said: Do away with contentions. Even if your enemies are thoroughly and consistently horrible and violent, and they "deserve" to be driven out or slain, do away with contentions.

The Contenders



At the very beginning of the great Nephite experiment of having a more democratic form of government after centuries of kings, Nehor came around, preaching the doctrine of priestcraft (i.e. being rewarded with money and honor for preaching). This was a problem for the believing Nephites, as they apparently hadn't experienced priestcraft before. Of course, the law couldn't punish anyone for preaching their beliefs, but Nehor ended up getting in trouble for something else.

"And it came to pass as he was going to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers. And he began to **contend with him** sharply that he might lead away the people of the church; but **the man withstood him, admonishing him** with the words of God. Now the name of the man was Gideon, and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage. Now because **Gideon withstood him** with the words of God, he was wroth with Gideon and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore, he was not able to withstand his blows; therefore, he was slain by the sword." (Alma 1:7-9) (RE Alma 1:2)

So Gideon, a highly respected member of the church, was not about to let Nehor get away with his false preaching. Gideon, as we know, was a man of passion who, years before, "swore in his wrath that he would slay" King

Noah during a "division" and "a great contention" among the people at that time. Apparently Gideon was ready and willing to use contention to stop wicked men from achieving their goals. How much are we like Gideon when we encounter wicked men preaching falsely? And is that a good thing or a bad thing when we consider the point of the Lord's doctrine? Do we need to shout down our enemies or critics? What price do we pay when we contend, even if we are not the ones who initiated the contention? In this case, Gideon paid the ultimate price when Nehor took the contention a step further and used the sword to kill him. In our day, we may not pay with our lives for engaging in contention, but we lose track of the point of the Lord's doctrine and potentially forfeit any chance of being gathered.

The Sentence is Death

For his crime, Nehor was brought before Alma, the chief judge. Alma explained to Nehor that he was "condemned to die according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king. And they have been acknowledged by this people; therefore, this people must abide by the law." So Alma sentenced Nehor to death. Alma may have been stuck between a rock and a hard place. After all, he was "obliged to abide by the laws which [King Mosiah] had made". Regardless, how does Nehor's death sentence look when the points of the Lord's doctrine are considered? Did the execution reduce contention or increase it? Is there a place for executing criminals in the Sermon on the Mount? If not, then what are we supposed to do with murderers?

Interestingly enough, Nehor's execution did nothing to stop the spread of priestcraft. If anything, it increased priestcraft as Nehor had some kind of a cult following for years or maybe even decades afterwards. And that makes sense as we can see in our own lives that responding with contention very often entrenches our opponents in their beliefs and leads to even worse contentions in the future. Another effect of how things were handled with Nehor is that "there were many among [the church] who began to be proud and began to contend warmly with their adversaries, even unto blows. Yea, they would smite one another with their fists." In other words, things got worse, not better. Were the people of the church taking cues from Gideon and the strictness of the law that King Mosiah had established and Alma was obliged to obey? I suspect Alma started learning something from that experience and we can, too.

The Kinslaying at Amnihu

Just a few years later, a guy named Amlici wanted to be king. He got so popular that it eventually forced a vote. He lost that vote but that didn't stop his followers from anointing him their king. Right after that, Amlici stirred up

enough of his followers to anger that they went to war with the rest of the Nephites so that Amlici would be king over everyone. That didn't sit well with Alma and the more liberty-minded Nephites, so they went to meet their brethren in battle.

"Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies against the Amlicites to battle. And they began to slay the Amlicites upon the hill east of Sidon..." (Alma 1:16-17) (RE Alma 1:11)

The Nephites beat the Amlicites in the first battle, but then the Amlicites joined with an army of Lamanites and they met in battle again.

"And it came to pass that **Alma fought with Amlici** with the sword face to face, and **they did contend mightily** one with another. And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried saying, O Lord, have mercy and spare my life that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and protect this people. Now when Alma had said these words, **he contended again** with Amlici, and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword. And **he also contended with the king** of the Lamanites, but the king of the Lamanites fled back from before Alma and sent his guards to contend with Alma. But Alma with his guards **contended** with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drave them back." (Alma 2:29-33) (RE Alma 1:14-15)

That's a lot of contention. And, unless I'm mistaken, it's the first time in the record that the "good guy" Nephites killed other Nephites. I wonder why Alma had to pause in the middle of his battle with Amlici to pray for his life to be spared. Is it possible that Alma was losing to Amlici? Did Alma recognize the shaky (i.e. sandy) ground of taking the "justified" route, as he led his people in the slaughter of thousands of their own brethren? They ended up winning, yes, but could they really say that God was protecting them when several thousand of their own people were killed by the sword? It doesn't seem like the Nephites had much of anything to celebrate after their "victory" against the Amlicites.

"After they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands and their houses and their wives and their children. Now many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds, and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men." (Alma 3:1-2) (RE Alma 1:17)

After yet another battle with the Lamanites not many days later (which Alma did not fight in due to a wound he had received),

“the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted, for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites. And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn, and they believed that **it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations.**”

They recognized that all the death and destruction was the result of their own wickedness. The Lord was not able to protect them and so they protected themselves with disastrous results. I don't blame them or condemn them for what they did. But I do believe that the Lord provides a different way - a more excellent way - for His people so that they can be gathered. It could be quite a trial of faith to refuse to use deadly force to defend yourself against enemies that intend to enslave you. Could you do it?

Choosing One of Two Masters

Just a few years later, things were getting really bad in the church, as the church members had become very hardened.

“The people of the church... began to be **scornful** one towards another. And they began to **persecute** those that did not believe according to their own wills and pleasure. And thus in this eighth year of the reign of the judges there began to be **great contentions** among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings and **strifes** and **malice** and **persecutions** and, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God... And now it came to pass that Alma having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God and the **persecutions** which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful...” (Alma 4:8-9, 15) (RE Alma 2:3, 5)

The church was descending into darkness due to the severe contentions caused by believers. Alma was wearing two hats at the time. He was the high priest but he was also the chief judge. He essentially had two masters. One required him to succor to those who were afflicted and persecuted and to correct those who were contending. The other required him to execute criminals and to slay his hostile brethren in battle. So here's a question that Alma may have faced in this dilemma: Can you go to work and kill your enemies during the week and then preach forgiveness and meekness to a

congregation of believers on the Sabbath? These are two different spirits that were pulling Alma two different ways. What did he do?

“Nevertheless the spirit of the Lord did not fail him; and he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church and gave him power according to the voice of the people...Now this man’s name was Nephihah, and he was appointed chief judge, and he sat in the judgment seat to judge and to govern the people. Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself, but he delivered the judgment seat unto Nephihah. And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down by the word of God all the pride and craftiness and all the **contentions** which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them...Alma delivered up the judgment seat to Nephihah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.” (Alma 4:15-20) (RE Alma 2:5)



Hopefully we can all get off our "judgment seats", too.

Born Again, Again

Alma was a different man after that. He had reformed himself yet again and he never again took up the sword or harmed his enemies. He got right to preaching to the church. Apparently he was so excited about his new outlook on life that he gave multiple sermons to the people of the church, telling them to get baptized. Of course, these were people who would have already been baptized. But that didn't stop Alma from telling them - even commanding them - to be baptized again.

"I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church. And unto those who do not belong to the church, I speak by way of invitation, saying, Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life." (Alma 5:62) (RE Alma 3:12)

This was a veritable reformation among the church. Alma was trying to get the people to see what he, through much tribulation, had finally seen. It turned out that there was one final way that Alma could personally show people the true point of the Lord's doctrine. It would give the Nephites (and now us) a great example of what doing away with contention actually looks like. You might say that a series of events were ordained or ordered by God so that the people would know in what manner to look forward to the Son.

Prisoner of Jesus Christ

Alma went to Ammonihah to preach. He was initially unsuccessful and he left but he was told by an angel to return. He did and that's when he met Amulek. The two of them tag-teamed one of the best missionary lessons ever recorded. And a lot of people believed their words, repented, and started searching the scriptures. The rest of the people in Ammonihah couldn't stand for this. They tied up Alma and Amulek, cast out the believing men, and threw the believing wives and children into the fire. Even during that awful scene Alma had the faith to know that it wasn't his job to stop or punish the wicked. He knew that God would work it all out.

"And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he was also 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. But Alma said unto him, 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." (Alma 14:10-11) (RE Alma 10:7)

After that, Alma and Amulek were smitten, thrown in jail, and were subjected to all manner of abuse. Through everything they suffered, they absolutely refused to contend.

"The chief judge of the land came and stood before Alma and Amulek as they were bound, and he smote them with his hand upon their cheeks and said unto them, After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone? Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire, neither has God saved them because they were of thy faith. And the judge smote them again upon their cheeks and asked, What say ye for yourselves? Now this judge was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon. And it came to pass that

Alma and Amulek answered him nothing, and he smote them again and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison. And when they had been cast into prison three days, there came many lawyers and judges and priests and teachers who were of the profession of Nehor, and they came in unto the prison to see them. And they questioned them about many words, but they answered them nothing. And it came to pass that the judge stood before them and said, Why do ye not answer the words of this people? Know ye not that I have power to deliver ye up unto the flames? And he commanded them to speak, but they answered nothing.

“And it came to pass that they departed and went their ways, but came again on the morrow. And the judge also smote them again on their cheeks. And many came forth also and smote them saying, Will ye stand again and judge this people and condemn our law? If ye have such great power, why do ye not deliver yourselves? And many such things did they say unto them, gnashing their teeth upon them and spitting upon them and saying, How shall we look when we are damned? And many such things, yea, all manner of such things did they say unto them. And thus they did mock them for many days. And they did withhold food from them that they might hunger, and water that they might thirst, and they also did take from them their clothes that they were naked, and thus they were bound with strong cords and confined in prison.

“And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for many days (and it was on the twelfth day in the tenth month in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) that the chief judge over the land of Ammonihah and many of their teachers and their lawyers went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords. And the chief judge stood before them and smote them again and said unto them, If ye have the power of God, deliver yourselves from these bands, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words. And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them saying the same words, even until the last.” (Alma 14:14-25) (RE Alma 10:8-10)

Alma and Amulek understood the point of the Lord’s doctrine. They completely did away with contention during the most difficult of circumstances. Could we do the same? After this amazing example of meekness, the Lord miraculously delivered Alma and Amulek. Their enemies were killed when the prison fell, yes, but they did not ask God to punish their tormentors. They only asked for deliverance, utterly refusing to curse those who hated and persecuted them.

Preparing the Way of the Lord



After Alma and Amulek and other chosen vessels preached the word throughout all the land, things were actually looking up!

“And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land in all the region round about among all the people of the Nephites. And there was no inequality among them, for the Lord did pour out his spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming, that they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God...And now after the church having been established throughout all the land, having got the victory over the Devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord pouring out his blessings upon the people, thus ended the fourteenth year...” (Alma 16:15-21) (RE Alma 11:6-8)

The people were being prepared to hear the word of the Lord, straight from the Lord Himself, as He was going to visit them after His resurrection. And to top it all off, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (the former Lamanites who Ammon and his brethren converted) moved in with the Nephites, having demonstrated the most astonishing example of charity and forgiveness when they allowed themselves to be slaughtered because they refused to hurt their enemies. Such examples of mercy and love! Their example was right at the heart of what Alma was trying to teach the people. Would the Nephites take a cue from the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and refuse to take up arms?

Missing the Mark



Apparently the Nephites as a whole did not learn much. A huge army of Lamanites invaded and the greatest battle ever fought among the children of Lehi took place. Tens of thousands of Lamanites were killed. And the losses among the Nephites were “tremendous”. Unfortunately, it was the same old story and the Nephites missed out on a chance to show their faith by blessing their enemies instead of cursing them. They missed the point of the Lord’s doctrine and failed to do away with contention, despite the preaching of Alma, Amulek, and others; despite the blessings that had been poured out and the “victory over the Devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity”; and despite the witness of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the power of God that had been manifested through them. The record takes a sober look at the tragic events.

“And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the Devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men. And thus we see the great call of the diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord. And thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing; sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life.” (Alma 28:13-14)
(RE Alma 15:11)

If there are times of crisis and war in our lifetimes, may we choose the more excellent way of forgiveness and love, even when our enemies are upon us.

Faith of Our Fathers

We can see a little bit of the frustration and anguish that Alma must have felt. Directly after all this war and death, he wrote:

“O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people. Yea, I would declare unto every soul as with the voice of thunder, repentance, and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might be no more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.” (Alma 29:1-2) (RE Alma 15:12)

He had been preaching the gospel diligently for years and yet he still felt like he needed to declare these things with even more power. Interestingly enough, years before, Alma himself was the beneficiary of a visit from an angel who spoke with the trump of God and shook the earth with his voice, crying repentance. That was the initial step in Alma’s first transformation into a new creature in Christ. Many have wondered why Alma had the “advantage” of an angel appearing unto him to help him change his ways. His father had been praying for him, yes, but how many wayward children have loving parents praying for them that don’t receive angels to help them out? Here is a clue to help us discover why it happened the way it did.

Remember that the revelation about the Lord’s law of violence that was given to Joseph Smith promised blessings to the posterity of those that consistently choose to forgive their enemies. In other words, such people of “righteousness” can secure heavenly rewards for their children. Did not Alma’s father, Alma, abide this law of righteousness? Let’s briefly review everything Alma (the elder) endured. King Noah threw Alma out of his court and sent guards to kill him. The king’s soldiers continually hunted for Alma and his flock of believers. King Noah falsely accused Alma of inciting rebellion and sent an army after him and his flock when they were discovered. After they settled a new home, they were invaded by Lamanites, but did not try to defend themselves. And they were inflicted with difficult tasks, brutal masters, and a highly oppressive tax. Throughout all of this, Alma endured patiently and never sought to harm his enemies. Alma knew how to bless his enemies. He knew the point of the Lord’s doctrine: to do away with contention.

So maybe we shouldn’t be too surprised that Alma’s prayers on behalf of his son were answered. He was simply redeeming the reward he had secured through his righteousness. In another part of the Book of Mormon, the sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were given a huge blessing in that they could not be killed in battle. Similar to Alma, is it possible that they received such amazing blessings, not through their own faithfulness, but because of the righteousness of their parents when they chose to die rather than contend

with their brethren? That's worth pondering.

From Bad to Worse



A few years later there was another war (the wars never really let up for the Nephites). The Lamanites and Nephite dissenters were attacking. They nearly met Moroni's army in battle but they opted instead to go another way in secret to attack a defenseless part of the land. Moroni sent spies after them to try to find out where they were going, but Moroni had another idea that might help him defeat the enemy army.

"And Moroni, 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. And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the more weak part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni." (Alma 43:23-24) (RE Alma 20:6)

I used to read this part without a second glance. But recently the terrible significance of this event dawned on me. Moroni decided to use one of the Lord's precious spiritual gifts - gifts that are meant to bless and benefit His children - to help him shed the blood of his enemies. God gives good gifts to His children. There are many spiritual gifts and they are for the benefit of His children and not meant for cursing. At the very end of the Book of Mormon, the other Moroni tells us:

"[The gifts of God] are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men **to profit them**. For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God that he may teach the word of wisdom, and to another that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, and to another exceeding great faith, and to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, and again, to another that he may work mighty miracles, and again, to another that he may prophesy concerning all things, and again, to another the beholding of angels and ministering spirits, and

again, to another all kinds of tongues, and again, to another the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues. And **all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ...**" (Moroni 10:8-17) (RE Moroni 10:3)

If such gifts come by the Spirit of Christ, what exactly is that Spirit? Is it not to love one another as He has loved us? Is it not everything He taught us in the Sermon on the Mount? Personally, I would not dare to use the miraculous gift of prophecy - or any other spiritual gift for that matter - as a weapon to gain advantage over my enemy. I believe such gifts are only meant to help disciples better humble themselves and serve to a greater degree.

Now it's true that Alma had been asked in a previous war about enemy positions. But in that case the only desire expressed by those military commanders was to rescue their brethren who had been taken captive by the Lamanites. There is actually no record of killing in that particular "battle" and, in fact, they rescued every single one of the prisoners and none of them had died. Now that's a way to use a spiritual gift!

Does this business with Moroni and his army make Alma complicit in abusing God's gifts for an unrighteous cause? To answer that, we turn to Ezekiel:

"And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, The Lord God declares: Every man of the house of Israel that sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that comes according to the multitude of his idols, that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols."(Ezek. 14:2-5) (RE Ezek. 5:8)

As God explains through Ezekiel, God will give His people enough rope to hang themselves with. When the people come to inquire God's prophet about something, He will allow His prophet to answer the people according to their idols. In the case of Alma and the warring Nephites, God gave the people what they wanted, which was to improve their ability to fight and contend. So I don't blame Alma at all for speaking the word of the Lord. God was simply giving the people what they desired so they could reap the reward of continuing their warfare. That reward, as it turns out, was a lot of death and destruction.

Alma, We Hardly Knew Ye

Apparently the Lord was highly displeased with how the people abused His gifts because that was the last thing Alma ever did among the people. Alma must have already had an idea of where things were going because when that war was just getting started,

“Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea, for the **wars**, and the **bloodsheds**, and the **contentions** which were among them, and having been to declare the word, or sent to declare the word, among all the people in every city, and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceeding sorrowful. Therefore, he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness.” (Alma 35:15-16) (RE Alma 16:45)

Alma knew he would be gone soon so he gave his last words of counsel to his sons. Directly after that war was over, Alma gave his final commandments to his son, Helaman. In that last meeting, Alma gave the absolute saddest prophecy in the entire Book of Mormon:

“Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief. Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famine and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct. Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities. Yea, I say unto you that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge. Yea, I say unto you that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come. And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi. But whosoever remaineth and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day shall be numbered among the Lamanites and shall become like unto them, all save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now **because of iniquity this prophecy shall be fulfilled.**” (Alma 45:10-14) (RE Alma 16:45)

There is nothing more tragic or lamentable than that prophecy and its

fulfillment in the entire record of the Nephites. And did you catch that last part? The prophecy will be fulfilled because of iniquity. I don't take that to simply mean that it will happen because the Nephites will work iniquity at that future point after Christ comes. That much is already obvious. Alma means that it will be fulfilled because of the iniquity that has been happening among the Nephites during Alma's ministry. Apparently the Nephites had irreversibly established themselves on a path towards ultimate destruction due to their inability to cease their warlike behavior and put down the sword. And all that iniquity had been done in the face of so many witnesses of a more excellent way - the Lord's way to avoid contention and accept His invitation to be gathered. That is the point of His doctrine, but the Nephites could not see it and thus their culture was doomed to extinction and not even the presence of the resurrected Christ Himself would be able to alter their course.

Alma's final quote in the Book of Mormon is this:

"Thus saith the Lord God, Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said, so shall it be. For this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance." (Alma 45:16) (RE Alma 21:3)

That applies directly to us. What will we do? What will we reap? All we need to do to get the right idea is to look at the Nephites. I hope we can make different choices.

After Alma left Zarahemla,

"he was never heard of more; as to his death or his burial we know not of. Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man, and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scripture saith the Lord took Moses unto himself, and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit unto himself." (Alma 45:18-19) (RE Alma 21:3)

When Moses was taken out of the midst of the children of Israel, it was not a good thing for Israel. It was a curse. So it was with Alma. Where did Alma go? He understood the point of the Lord's doctrine. He knew the point was to do away with contention and bless others. He lived the Lord's doctrine. And so it would seem that he was gathered by God. It's no wonder that the most protracted and deadly war in the entire history of the Nephites began right after Alma's departure.

Love Your Enemies

Let's fast forward about 32 years to look at something quite remarkable. It was a (short) time of peace and the church was prospering. But then, as it seems to always happen, things started going south. Pride "began to enter into the church, not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God; and they were lifted up in pride, even to **the persecution of many of their brethren.**" We don't know exactly what the persecution looked like but it certainly started with arguments, divisions, and people generally getting very angry about perceived or real offenses.

"Now this was a great evil, which did cause the **more humble** part of the people to **suffer great persecutions** and to wade through **much afflictions**. Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their **humility**, and firmer and **firmer in the faith of Christ**, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, **even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts**, which sanctification cometh because of their **yielding their hearts unto God.**" (Helaman 3:34-35) (RE Helaman 2:8)

These humble people endured their trials exactly as Christ would end up commanding the Nephites during His visit. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you that ye may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

The humble people of the church did exactly that and it led to the purification and sanctification of their hearts! All they had to do was yield their hearts to God by demonstrating His doctrine - the doctrine of no contention and blessing your enemies.

A "Rocky" Relationship

After the longest war mentioned in the Book of Mormon was over, the Lamanites were driven out and the Nephites got all their land back. Unfortunately, just a generation later, the Lamanites took over all the "land southward". That included Zarahemla and every other place that was fought over in the previous war. All that bloody work done by Moroni and his armies were undone. And the Nephites were powerless to take it all back. It couldn't be done. But then the brothers Nephi and Lehi decided to try preaching the word first among the Nephites and then among the Lamanites.

Nephi had given up the judgment seat (just like his great-grandfather Alma) and dedicated himself to preaching the word for the rest of his life. His father, Helaman, had taught him and Lehi:

“And now my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the Rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation, that when the Devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless woe because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build, they cannot fall.” (Helaman 5:12) (RE Helaman 2:17)

All of that represents what we’ve been discussing. When you work towards blessing your enemies and not contending with them, you are doing exactly what Christ did and you are becoming like Him. If you do that, you can never fall because you share the same goals that God does. That’s being on His Rock.

It’s important to note that when Jesus explained the process of believing in Him, repenting, and being baptized, He says that “whoso **buildeth** upon this buildeth upon my rock” (3 Ne 11:39) (RE 3 Nephi 5:9). It describes an ongoing process. Later, Jesus gave the same Sermon as He did on the Mount and He explained that “whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who **built** his house upon a rock”(3 Nephi 14:24)(RE 3 Nephi 6:6). See the difference? One is present tense and one is past tense. While baptism is meant to show us the journey, doing what the Lord laid out in the Sermon on the Mount is what the journey leads to. Or rather, it is the objective of His doctrine. The practices described in His Sermon are the “very points of His doctrine”.

Nephi and Lehi knew this and they practiced it to great effect. Nephi and Lehi were eventually captured and put in a Lamanite jail. When their captors came into the jail to kill them, a most miraculous thing occurred. They were preached to by God Himself, they repented, they were baptized by fire, and angels ministered to them. That eventually led to the conversion of most of the Lamanites in all the land. The Lamanites then willingly gave back the Nephites all of their land. Nephi and Lehi did the impossible because they were willing to bless their enemies instead of curse them. They understood the Lord’s doctrine. They were built on the Rock.

Sealing the Deal vs. Asking Politely

A decade or so later, God gave Nephi the sealing power.

“Behold, I give unto you power that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven, and thus shall ye have power among this people.” (Helaman 10:7) (RE Helaman 3:19)

Very soon after that, there were wars throughout all the land. Obviously Nephi did not want to see such things continue. He hoped to get rid of such violent contentions. And what he did about it was amazing, considering what God had given him. He specifically did not simply command a famine to happen, which he definitely could have done since he had the sealing power. No, instead he prayed to God and asked for a famine. Nephi wanted to bless the people, that much was clear. He did not want them to be destroyed. And he was humble enough to ask God to bring a famine to the land, allowing God to make the final call since it would affect life and death for thousands of people. And then, when the people had repented, Nephi didn't command the rain to fall. Again, he humbly petitioned God to make it rain so that the people could live. Nephi was very meek and there's a reason God could trust him. He shared a goal with God - the goal of getting rid of contention.

Jesus or Bust

About 15 years later, in the year leading up to Christ's birth, the prophecy of the night without darkness had already been given by Samuel and the believers were waiting for the fulfillment of that great sign. Nephi (the one discussed above) had departed the land, never to be seen again (just like his great-grandfather Alma). He left his son, also named Nephi, to take care of the sacred records. It was in those days that the believers had a big problem. “Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass which had been given by Samuel the prophet.” (3 Nephi 1:9) (RE 3 Nephi 1:3)

The non-believers were actually preparing to kill the believers on a certain day if the night without darkness didn't come. Put yourself in the shoes of those believers. What would you do? How would you respond to your enemies and their wicked plans? Could you do what those believers did? As far as we can tell from what's in the record, the only thing they did was pray. We are specifically given Nephi's prayer on behalf of the people.

“Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people his heart was exceeding sorrowful. And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers. And it came

to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day.” (3 Nephi 1:10-12)
(RE 3 Nephi 1:3)

There were no preparations for war. Nephi wasn't busy helping his people plan a proper defense strategy. There were only prayers. Those believers who were hoping for the coming of Christ understood the One whom they hoped for. They understood the need to get rid of contention. I rejoice that they were not destroyed as their faith was not in vain. The sign came as was prophesied and the wicked plans of their enemies were frustrated.

To top it all off, “it came to pass also that a new star did appear according to the word.” What a marvelous thing to have a bright and enduring sign in the heavens of the coming of Jesus into the world! As with the Nephite believers at the time, such a sign would confirm someone's dedication to living like Christ, putting away contentions and disputations, and trusting in His guiding light.

Forget Waldo. Where's Nephi?

As the years went by, the Gadianton Robbers became a major threat to the people. It got so bad that the Nephites all gathered into one area with all their food, flocks, and provisions so they could withstand seven years of siege while the robbers were starved of any opportunity to steal and plunder. Eventually the robbers realized they couldn't survive and they all went to battle against the Nephites. It wasn't pretty. “And the battle commenced in this the sixth month, and great and terrible was the battle thereof, yea, great and terrible was the slaughter thereof, insomuch that there never was known so great a slaughter among all the people of Lehi since he left Jerusalem.”

The Nephites “won” the battle (most likely while suffering terrible losses) and they killed the leader of the robbers. As time went on, the new leader of the remaining robbers had them try to lay siege but the Nephites were able to continually slay tens of thousands of robbers seemingly at will. When the robbers tried to relocate to another part of the land, they ended up getting surrounded and they were all either killed or captured. The leader was hanged on a tree, which was cut down. Then the people all shouted something interesting. “May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart **that they may cause to be fell to the earth all who shall seek to slay them** because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been fell to the earth.” (3 Nephi 4:29) (RE 3 Nephi 2:14)

I believe these Nephites were honestly trying their best to repent and be humble. I don't know if we would do any better in their place. And I have no

reason to doubt that many of them obtained forgiveness of their sins and were saved. But what they did was not doing away with contention. And I personally think it's very dangerous to pray that God will allow you to kill your enemies. That doesn't seem like the rock we're supposed to build on. That sounds more like sand to me. They listened to the "great and marvelous" words of prophets like Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni, that is true. But I noticed something rather odd. During this chapter of Nephite history that I've just described, there isn't one mention of Nephi. He was completely absent. He was not ministering to this enormous group of people all gathered into one body. Where in the world was Nephi? Did God lead him and maybe others to some safe place, far away from all the death and destruction? Is it possible that Nephi and any others who were with him knew the true point of the Lord's doctrine, didn't want to contend, and thus qualified for at least some level of gathering by God? The idea is certainly worth pondering.

When You Believe

Aside from the Savior Himself and everything He accomplished, what's the most miraculous thing that ever happened in the Book of Mormon? Certainly there are a lot of candidates. The Liahona randomly appearing, Nephi building a boat, the covenant offered through King Benjamin, the miraculous escape of Alma's people from the land of Helam, the baptism of fire and angelic ministrations to 300 people...the list could go on and on. I want you to consider one miracle in particular for the top spot: the gift Jesus gave to the three disciples. Just think about it! After that gift was given, there were essentially three immortal wizards travelling among the people for 300 years, helping those in need, and working mighty miracles in the land! For me, it doesn't get much more miraculous than that.

How did the three get that gift? It started with desire. The nine disciples wanted to go to Jesus' kingdom at the end of their ministry. Jesus said that was a good desire. Boom! Done. But the three, when asked what they wanted, were kind of embarrassed to share their desires.

"What will ye that I should do unto you when I am gone unto the Father? And they sorrowed in their hearts for they durst not speak unto him the thing which they desired. And he said unto them, Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me. Therefore, **more blessed** are ye for ye shall never taste of death, but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father when I shall come in my glory with the Powers of Heaven. And ye shall never endure the pains of death, but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling

of an eye from mortality to immortality, and then shall ye be blessed **in the kingdom of my Father**. And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow, save it be for the sins of the world. And all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, for **ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me** while the world shall stand. And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father. Yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy, and **ye shall be even as I am**, and I am even as the Father, and the Father and I are one. And the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me, and the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men because of me." (3 Nephi 28:4-11) (RE 3 Nephi 13:3)

Their desire was a greater desire because they simply wanted to bring souls to Christ as long as the world stood, or in other words, as long as possible. For that they were "more blessed" and would end up, not in Jesus' kingdom, but in the kingdom of the Father. All of that is simply amazing and it's worth study and pondering.

The Penalty for Attempted Murder is...More Love

Knowing the desires of the three, it should be no surprise that they were experts at blessing their enemies. When Jesus was meeting with the disciples, right before He asked them what they desired, He told them:

"And now behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you and also this generation, yea, and even the Father rejoiceth and also all the holy angels because of you and this generation, for **none of them are lost**. Behold, I would that ye should understand, for **I mean them who are now alive of this generation, and none of them are lost** and in them I have fullness of joy."(3 Nephi 27:30-31) (RE 3 Nephi 13:1)

So, Jesus is very clear that everyone who was alive at that time was going to be saved. No doubt about it. After that, the three went around to minister. This is what happened:

'They did go forth upon the face of the land and did minister unto all the people, uniting as many to the church as would believe in their preaching, baptizing them, and as many as were baptized did receive the Holy Ghost. And they were cast into prison by them who did not belong to the church, and the prisons could not hold them for they were rent in twain, and they were cast down into the earth. But they did smite the earth with the word of God insomuch that by his power they were delivered out of the depths of the earth, and therefore they

could not dig pits sufficient to hold them. And thrice they were cast into a furnace and received no harm. And twice were they cast into a den of wild beasts, and behold, they did play with the beasts as a child with a suckling lamb and received no harm. And it came to pass that thus they did go forth among all the people of Nephi, and did preach the gospel of Christ unto all people upon the face of the land. And they were converted unto the Lord and were united unto the church of Christ. And thus the people of that generation were blessed according to the word of Jesus." (3 Nephi 28:18-23) (RE 3 Nephi 13:4)

The ministry of the three included several attempts on their life. And we know that everyone alive at that time was going to be saved. So those would-be murderers ended up being converted! Just imagine what that might have looked like:

The three try to teach some people and then get thrown into a fiery furnace. They then come out of the furnace with apologetic looks on their faces. They say, "Perhaps we got off on the wrong foot. We apologize if we've done something to offend you. What's bothering you? Do you need help with anything?"

I don't know if it looked like that, but whatever they did, they used perfect love to overcome all the objections and hatred of people who were literally trying to kill them. They did away with contentions more than anyone I've ever heard of. They were built on the Lord's Rock because they knew exactly what the point of the Lord's doctrine was. As a testament to the commitment the three had towards blessing their enemies, the record shows that when the people started becoming wicked and abusive again, the three never stopped helping them.

"And they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them, therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them. And they did cast them into prison, but by the power of the word of God which was in them the prisons were rent in twain **and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them.**" (4 Nephi 1:29-30) (RE 4 Nephi 1:

The three never stopped doing miracles, even among a hardened people. It was only the Lord who prevented further abuse by removing the three disciples out of the midst of the people. If only we could be like those three disciples (spoiler alert: We can).

The Return of the King



The Nephites were given an amazing gift which acted as a type for the things they would experience as a society. The gift was the record of the Jaredites. All the Nephites had to do was look at the example of the Jaredites to figure out what not to do. And what should they have learned to not do? Contend. Fight. Wage War. These things led to the complete extinction of Jaredite civilization. I want to focus on one particular thing at the very end of the Jaredite record.

The record painstakingly tracks the line of kings from the very beginning to the very end. When you realize this, it becomes clear that Ether was the rightful heir to the throne. But when Ether shows up in the record, he was not the king. Coriantumr was. There were plenty of people who wanted to take the kingdom for themselves, but Ether was never one of those people. Ether could have made his claim to the throne, but he never did. He simply wanted to teach. He obviously didn't support all the warfare and wickedness around him, but it seemed he didn't really care who was king. If politics was at all the same back then as it is now, I'm certain Ether (who wasn't taking sides) was accused of sympathizing with Shiz by Coriantumr's people and also accused of sympathizing with Coriantumr by Shiz's people. He found himself in the middle of a conflict of epic proportions and when his message was completely rejected by the people, he stayed on the sidelines and simply watched. There was no desire to contend in his heart.

Interestingly enough, we learn more about the last days Zion from Ether than from anyone else in the Book of Mormon. I find that meaningful. Is it possible that Ether himself was a type for Zion? He was the only one that had a legal right to the land. But he knew he didn't have to fight for it. He simply allowed the Lord to take care of everything, regarding who would stay on the land and who wouldn't. Ether's responsibility was to obey the Lord, do away with contention, and do whatever he could to bless people. After everyone else was dead (or in Coriantumr's case, going to be dead soon), Ether was told to "go forth". My guess is that Ether was "gathered" by God because he qualified for it. Will we similarly qualify?

Right after writing this part of the Jaredite record, Moroni told the Lord that he was worried we gentiles would mock at the things he was writing because he and other prophets apparently had trouble getting across in writing the things they wanted to tell us. The Lord told him, "Behold, **I will shew unto**

the gentiles their weakness. And I will shew unto them that faith, hope, **and charity** bringeth unto me, the fountain of all righteousness." So we clearly have a weakness. What is it? Well, Moroni asked the Lord to give us gentiles grace so we could have charity. But the Lord could not promise such a thing. For me, that's a big clue that our weakness is a lack of charity (the pure love of Christ which includes everything we've been talking about). It's prophesied that some gentiles will bring the house of Israel to the Lord and a key ingredient to be able to do that is charity, which is a gift that the Lord couldn't even promise us because that is our weakness that we need to recognize, which should make us humble ourselves before the Lord and have faith in Him (and everything He taught), so that He can turn that weakness into a strength.

How do we do that? It all starts with living the things we've been discussing as fully as we can. We need to eliminate all the contention from our lives. No more arguing or bickering about who is right or who is wrong. Share your thoughts kindly and meekly, accepting corrections or refutations humbly. No more allowing today's political climate to hijack our sense of how we should be treating others. Become a living sacrifice. Have a broken heart and contrite spirit. Allow your heart to be broken by the abuse thrown your way but don't think that it's your job to fix your broken heart by throwing everything back at your enemies. Instead, return good for evil and help heal the ones who hate you, hurt you, or even want to kill you. The Lord will fix your heart when it is broken. He will take care of everything. He will gather us as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings when we believe Him and the things He taught.

A Suggestion

A good friend of mine - a friend who believes in the principles behind everything discussed in this blog post - wrote a statement expounding and clarifying those principles in modern language. You might consider it something you can use to guide your actions when you're wondering what the Lord's standard of behavior is in a given situation. The language of it works for my friend and I find it sufficient for my own life as well. If it's not exactly how you would say it, feel free to modify it and adopt it as your own. This is for anyone and everyone. I also think that anyone is free to disagree and I will always choose to not contend or dispute with anyone if they think differently than I do. No matter what, we can always agree to disagree. A peaceful relationship among those who disagree will always prove to be mutually beneficial. So, without further ado:

Principles which guide my interaction with others:

I

I will ALWAYS act kindly towards others, no matter what the situation. This includes friends, family, business associates or those deemed annoying or hostile towards me.

II

I will ALWAYS assume that the other person is sincere and telling the truth. It is not my job to make people accountable for deception unless I have stewardship over them (like being a parent, boss, mentor, and so forth).

III

I will remember that sending love in turn creates love. (Love begets love).

IV

I will respond not only with kindness, but acknowledgment, interest and support for what others share with me, trying to see things from their perspective.

V

I will pay attention to feedback, even if given in a hostile manner; I will be contrite when a person is willing to help me see a different perspective; and I will recognize others' efforts, responding with thanks and gratitude or apologizing for offenses if necessary.

VI

I will pray in my heart for each person with whom I interact and remind myself of the love and gratitude I have for them, (expressing that love or forgiving if the occasion warrants it).

VII

I will turn complaints into compliments, anger into agreement and exclusion into acceptance.

VIII

I will learn to discern and speak the love language of others, whether that is serving, sacrificing, offering encouraging and affirming words, giving gifts, spending time together, minding to small details, not judging them because of their choices, or anything else I recognize as their native 'tongue.'

IX

I will remember that opportunities to live and love authentically cannot be contrived; they are organic and will come at the most unexpected times and sundry of ways. God can see my heart, and if I have any other intent than to love, it will be known to Him.

X

When I follow the doctrine of Christ (in other words, please God through "faith" in His word), I will expect to see a "sign" afterwards, which is to not only confirm my hope, but to be followed up by "mighty works" and tasting the "fruit" of my labors.

The Points and Purposes of His Doctrine

Q: Why is it important that I always act kindly towards others?

A: If another person perceives me as an enemy, he can ultimately deliver me to the judge and cast me into prison. And while I am in prison, can I pay even a single quarter to be released?

Q: Why should I assume sincerity in every other person?

A: To the extent that I believe their sincerity, God will believe mine.

Q: Why is it so important to “beget” love?

A: When love is created, wickedness is destroyed.

Q: Why should I acknowledge and support the perspective of others?

A: Supporting another brings me closer to that person and creates an appreciation for something unique, which I may never have considered before.

Q: Why should I pay attention to the feedback I have been given?

A: By seeing my weaknesses, I can overcome them (by trying something different) and turn them into strengths.

Q: Why should I pray for all people and remind myself of their value, even if they are hostile towards me?

A: Christ is in the very “least of these,” so if we have acted this way towards them, we have done so towards Him.

Q: Why should I accept or agree with those who are clearly in defiance to God’s law?

A: Judging another person of sin in turn judges ourselves. EVERY individual has good in them, and that is where I should put my focus. Their other issues are between them and God, and they are none of my business, except to the extent that I can succor them and mourn with them.

Q: Why is it important to hone in on the “love language” spoken by another?

A: God speaks to everyone’s unique language and understanding. If I make an effort to speak in the tongue of another person, they can more fully express themselves, connect with me and trust my intentions towards them.

Q: How can I have opportunities to connect with others if they cannot be formed purposely?

A: Ask for them. They will come. Be ready to act on a moment’s notice.

Q: Why is it important to know that God will send a sign of His pleasure when I live the Lord’s doctrine?

A: This is how I come to see the face of God, and have faith that the manifestations He is sending are really communications from Him. If I am continually watching for these signs, I show that I love Him and am His child.

How will I know if I am living the principles? How can I recognize them in others?

We have heard that it is given us to know “good” from “evil,” and that we can discern the good because it entices, invites and persuades others to do good as well. And Who is good but the Father? What is good but His merciful approach to loving others?

But where we can persuade with our Christ-like actions, we can also provoke others to go against the Lord’s doctrine if we are not careful. Here, then, are some things we can watch for in our words, thoughts and deeds to see if we are on track. It is also a way to identify (but not publicly accuse) those who may want to deceive others. It is a list of actions and the underlying message potentially received, resulting in what it might provoke (instead of persuade) others to do (which is not “good”):

If I am perceived as condescending, it sends a message that others are not as important as I am; it provokes them to be defensive, to prove that they are better than I am, or to try to knock me off my pedestal.

If I send mixed messages by saying I am or want to be righteous, then doing something provocative or mean-spirited (even if it is “unintentional”), it makes me look like a hypocrite and provokes others not to trust me or believe anything I have to say.

If I reject another’s point of view or am perceived as unwilling to consider their perspective, it sends a message that I consider myself superior and already have all the answers; it provokes them to never ask for my view since I am apparently not interested in theirs.

If I judge others (even if their actions are “sinful,”) then it sends a message that I do not understand them nor do I want to understand them and that I’m more interested in following the rules than loving people; it provokes them to avoid me and never attempt to explain the reasons behind their actions, thus fomenting perpetual misunderstanding and disconnection.

If I cast others out of my group (even if they leave voluntarily) then it sends a message that I seek a better way through the exclusion of others; it provokes them to also exclude others, thus creating even more division, contention and hostility.

If I walk away from or give up on others, then it sends a message that I consider them unworthy of my association; it provokes them to celebrate my departure and ignore my previous contributions and feel that it is better without me as part of their group.

If I am perceived as accusing/blaming, then it sends a message that I do not value their friendship since I am unwilling to give them the benefit of the doubt; it provokes others to accuse me in return.

If I do not patch up misunderstandings with others (especially if they let me know that they are hurt or angry), then it sends a message that I am callous to their feelings; it provokes others to avoid me and continue a broken relationship, because they feel that they are not important to me.

If I call another person “wrong, ” then it sends a message that I do not seek understanding; it provokes them to search for reasons to justify themselves, further entrenching them in their position.

If I am perceived as inflexible or that my way is set in stone, then it sends a message that I do not

want to increase my understanding; it provokes others to never want to compromise and refrain from trying to seek common ground with me.

Of course, all the possible ways to "sin" cannot be listed, but one thing is sure: God knows (and I know) the words I put out there, the thoughts I have, and the actions I take. If I am not careful about how I present myself to others, they might perceive me as an "adversary." Then, someday, when I stand in the presence of the Lord, pleading my case and claiming to know Him, I will compare myself to His everlasting mercy and I will shrink in shame; because my actions and their results, with all the people I hurt, will speak for themselves.

Perhaps if we all agreed to live like this we could easily get rid of contention, the Lord could gather us, we could live in peace, and we could learn everything that has been hid up from the foundation of the world. That sounds more excellent than anything else I can imagine and that is my prayer.

Posted by Dan at [4:21 PM](#)