

**Alma 51: 2-4****1** *Desire laws to be changed*

I pray that we may be true to our covenants, true to each other; that we will cast out of our hearts all that is evil, that we will not speak evil one of another, or be given to backbiting or contention or strife, for the spirit of wickedness destroys faith and tends to divide and separate instead of uniting and strengthening the people.

Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1913, 74

**2**

Satan has control now. No matter where you look, he is in control, even in our own land. He is guiding the governments as far as the Lord will permit him. That is why there is so much strife, turmoil, and confusion all over the earth. One master mind is governing the nations. It is not the President of the United States; it is not Hitler; it is not Mussolini; it is not the king or government of England or any other land; it is Satan himself.

What does the Lord say in the 1<sup>st</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “The hour is not yet [this was over 100 years ago], but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.” [D&C 1:35.]

Well, Satan certainly has dominion over his own, for his is the power of confusion, strife, bitterness, and class distinction. His is the power of delusion and not one of peace and righteousness.

Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:315

**Alma 51:2-4****3** *Looking Beyond the Mark*

The grand question is how such plain and precious truths as the personal nature of God and the sonship of Christ get perverted and lost. It is the prophet Jacob in the Book of Mormon who answers this question:

The Jews were a stiff-necked people [he wrote]; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble (Jacob 4:14).

There are two equally effective ways to pervert the word of truth—add to it or take from it:

This is my doctrine [the Savior told the Nephites], and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. . . And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them (3 Nephi 11:32, 40).

The Jews both added to and took from the law that had been given them. "My people do not know the ordinances of the Lord," said Lehi's contemporary, Jeremiah. "How can you say, 'We are wise, we have the law of the Lord,' when scribes with their lying pens have falsified it?"

(New English Bible, Jer 8:8). The words of Christ sustain Jeremiah's allegation: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge, the fulness of the scriptures; ye enter not in yourselves into the kingdom; and those who were entering in, ye hindered" (JST Luke 11:53). When he inquired about the reliability of the Apocrypha, Joseph Smith was told that "there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hand of men" (D&C 91:2). The 1828 Webster's Dictionary defines interpolation as, "The act of foisting a word or passage into a manuscript or book," or, "a spurious word or passage inserted in the genuine writings of an author."

What we have here is the perfect pattern of apostasy—both taking from and adding to the law of the Lord. The emphasis of Jacob's text is that of looking beyond the mark, of going too far, of being "truer than true," of adding tradition upon tradition, rabbinical ruling upon ruling, and all of this ostensibly to protect the law. The Jewish scholars decked it and bedecked it; they jeweled and bejeweled it; they garnished and trimmed and shaped and reshaped; they preened, bordered, and embroidered; they adorned and ornamented until the law was unrecognizable, and then they worshiped the creation of their own making and forgot the God of their fathers who was the giver of the law. Fanaticism is addictive, and when we become fanatic in one area it is a short step to fanaticism in another. President David O. McKay suggested there were three kinds of sin—sins of commission, sins of omission, and virtues that were overdone. Any virtue overdone, he said, becomes a vice. In their excessive zeal the Jews made of the law a master rather than a servant. It was this obsession with the Holy Day that caused Christ to say, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

We come back to the fact that the gospel is everlastingly the same and that the first great dispensation of the gospel took place long before the foundations of this earth were laid. The principles by which we are saved were taught to us and known by us long before we commenced our journey in this mortal probation, and they are not to be added to nor taken from. "Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name? Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed? And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?" (D&C 132:9-11).

Jacob's warning about going beyond the mark strikes at the issue of theological and scriptural scholarship. It is an appropriate warning for what we vainly call "higher education." The glory of the Book of Mormon is in its simplicity. It is important that we not convey the idea that real understanding of the book rests only with scholars. The best of the world's scholarship, as it has been directed toward the Bible, has not resulted in an increase of faith in that holy book. In fact, one of the primary reasons the Lord gave us the Book of Mormon was to restore faith in the Bible, which has been under scholarly siege for many years (see D&C 20:8-11). It is not without significance that in the revelation given as a preface to the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord warns us against trusting "in the arm of flesh" (1:19).

How then do we distinguish between genuine gospel scholarship, which is seriously needed in the Church today, and the pedantic intellectual games played by those who have gone far beyond the mark or fallen quite short of it? Perhaps we simply need to ask, "Where does this lead us?" "What is its purpose?" For instance, do the compilations of quotations from selected

brethren, which are used to build fortresses to protect otherwise vulnerable theories, represent an honest search for truth? Are our files of quotations used to hide mental atrophy? Does the fact that so and so said it stop all thinking or searching? And what of our preoccupation with internal and external evidences? Is it possible to develop an expertise in scriptural geography and yet be unable to find the straight and narrow path? Are there those of us who know the stories of the Book of Mormon, but not its doctrines?

Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *Jacob through Words of Mormon: To Learn with Joy* [Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990], 173

### **Alma 51:13-20**

#### 4 *Answering call to Military Service*

Certainly a true American cannot have too much patriotism. Surely Americans who have respect for our traditions, who support our freedoms and are willing to fight to preserve them have been called patriots.

. . . I love America's traditions and its freedoms and I believe they are well worth fighting for.

Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings*, 591

#### 5 *To Maintain the Cause of Freedom:* It is to you, our brethren in the armed forces, that I speak. Nor is the man who serves the only one concerned. There are wives and there are parents who never, never cease to love their children or fear for them.

A man answering the call now is not left in total comfort that all will sustain him. There have emerged in our society groups composed mostly of rest-less, unchallenged, young people. In the name of peace and love and brotherhood, they criticize those who, obedient to the laws of the land, have answered the call to military duty. It is puzzling to see them renouncing their obligation, repudiating their citizenship responsibilities. They declare on moral grounds, as an act of virtue, that they will not serve. One can be sensitive, even sympathetic, to their feelings, for war is an ugly thing—a heinous, hideous, ugly thing! Strangely, it is a pursuit to which mankind has turned again and again and again. The wicked have generated it, and the innocent have ultimately been provoked by it.

The Lord said: “Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace...” (D&C 98:16). I would that all men would remain at peace.

Boyd K. Packer, CR, April 1968, 33.

#### 6 Do you have this problem, young men? This is a problem stated by a young man who contemplates military call-up. This is what he says: “Didn't the Savior teach peace? To me, peace means no fighting. I am not sure about our present military involvements.” I say to this young man, the following facts helped me and they may be helpful to you:

Where the Book of Mormon talks about a land choice above all others, I believe it.

When we are taught that our founding forefathers prayed for and received inspiration as they framed our Constitution, I believe it.

When a prophet suggests that the gospel could best be restored in a land of freedom and democracy, I believe it.

When the standard works of the Church instruct me about obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law, I want to do it. I even believe our elected national leaders are basically honest men and base their decision upon what they believe to be for the good of the people as they see it.

Last but not least, I also believe that a prophet of God will let me know about any change of policy in the foregoing line of reasoning. Young men, to whatever country your citizenship commitment might be, you honor it, you obey it, you sustain it. To do otherwise would be contrary to the law and order; and law and order is the basis of the priesthood, wherever it is established.

Robert L. Simpson, "Sustaining the Laws," in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 101.

7 We have been asked today [1942] to be patriotic. This Church, as has been read by President McKay, has a record of accomplishment that is a ... testimony to the world of the patriotism of this people. We have been sending our boys into the army, and will continue to do so. We will buy war bonds and stamps. We will pay inordinate taxes, for the carrying on of the work for the buying of planes and munitions of war. We will produce and conserve foodstuffs, that there may be sufficient of the necessities to carry on, as we have been requested by our government. But beyond all that, the Latter-day Saints have a responsibility, that may be better understood when we recall the prophecy of Joseph Smith who declared that "the time would come when (the destiny and) the Constitution of these United States would hang as it were by a thread, and that this people, the sons of Zion, would rise up and save it from threatened destruction" (*Journal of Discourses* 7:15). I want to ask you to consider the meaning of that prophecy, in the light of the declaration of the prophets of the Book of Mormon times, who declared that this land was a choice land above all other lands, and would be free from bondage and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of this land, even our Savior Jesus Christ (Ether 2:12). This is a people whom the Lord has chosen to preach the gospel of righteousness. We talk of security in this day, and yet we fail to understand that here on this Temple Block we have standing the holy temple wherein we may find the symbols by which power might be generated that will save this nation from destruction. Therein may be found the fulness of the blessings of the Priesthood.

Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Apr 1942 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1942], 87

8 A Latter-day Saint must give allegiance to (his) sovereign and render it loyal service when called thereto. This includes military service. The attitude of a Latter-day Saint should be fully to render loyalty to (his) country and to free institutions which the loftiest patriotism calls for... The Church is and must be against war... It cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these should and could be settled—the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment. But the Church membership are citizens or subjects of sovereignties over which the Church has no control... When, therefore, constitutional law, obedient to these

principles, calls the manhood of the Church into the armed service of any country to which they owe allegiance, their highest civic duty requires that they meet that call.

Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1942], 92-95.

- 9 The Church is opposed to war because it causes the blood of brothers and sisters to be shed. It opposes war because wars destroy spirituality.... But notwithstanding the horrors and evils of war and the beauty of peace, there is a greater purpose in life than merely remaining peaceful. Life calls for growth of the soul. The opportunities for growth requires that man shall retain his freedom, his free agency, his right to live and work and worship according to the dictates of his own conscience... The right to a world where the individual is recognized, the right to protect our loved ones, our liberties and our religion is more important than the keeping of peace.  
William E. Berrett, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952], 177-178.

- 10 Someone asked me once how I felt about amnesty for the draft card burner and the deserter. I told him that I thought every one of them should be taken before General Moroni to be judged.  
Vaughn J Featherstone, *Ensign*, Nov. 1975 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975], 7-10.

*Is it murder when a soldier kills in battle?*

- 11 There are many persons who are engaged in wars who are devout Christians. They are innocent instrumentalities—war instrumentalities, for the most part—of their warring sovereignties. On each side, people believe that they are fighting for a just cause, for defense of home and country and freedom. On each side they pray... for victory. Both sides cannot be wholly right; perhaps neither is without wrong. God will work out in his own due time and in his own sovereign way, the justice and right of the conflict. But he will not hold the innocent instrumentalities of the war—our brethren in arms—responsible for the conflict.  
Harold B. Lee, *From the Valley of Despair to the Mountain Peaks of Hope* Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1971], 3.

- 12 The only real peace—the one most of us think about when we use the term—is a peace with freedom. A nation that is not willing, if necessary, to face the rigors of war to defend its real peace-in-freedom is doomed to lose both its freedom and its peace! These are the hard facts of life. We may not like them, but until we live in a far better world than exists today, we must face up to them squarely and courageously.  
Ezra Taft Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, comp. by Jerreld L. Newquist [Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1969], 161-162.

- 13 Men really are brothers because God really is our Father. Nevertheless, scriptures are studded with stories of contention and combat. They strongly condemn wars of aggression but sustain obligations of citizens to defend their families and their freedoms [see Alma 43:45-47; 46:11-12, 19-20; 48:11-16]... Members of this Church will be called into military service of many nations. “We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and

that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society” [D&C 134:1]

During the Second World War, when members of the Church were forced to fight on opposing sides, the First Presidency affirmed that “the state is responsible for the civil control of its citizens or subjects, for their political welfare, and for the carrying forward of political policies, domestic and foreign... But the Church itself, as such, has no responsibility for these policies, [other] than urging its members fully to render... loyalty to their country” .

M, Russell Nelson, in James R. Clark comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965-75), 6:155-56. (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 42; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 40.

14 The time was World War II. Fierce battles raged in various parts of the world.

Tragically, the Borgstroms [family in northern Utah] lost four of their five sons who were serving in the armed forces. Within a six-month period, all four sons gave their lives—each in a different part of the world.

Following the war, the bodies of the four Borgstrom brothers were brought home to Tremonton, and an appropriate service was conducted, filling the Garland Utah Tabernacle. General Mark Clark attended the service. He later spoke with tenderness these words: “I flew to Garland the morning of June 26. Met with the family, including among others the mother, father, and two remaining sons.... one a lad in his teens. I had never met a more stoic family group.

“As the four flag-draped coffins were lined up in front of us in the church, and as I sat by these brave parents, I was deeply impressed by their understanding, by their faith, and their pride in these magnificent sons who had made the supreme sacrifice for principles which had been instilled in them by noble parents since childhood.

“During the luncheon period, Mrs. Borgstrom turned to me and said in a low voice, ‘Are you going to take my young one?’ I answered in a whisper that as long as I remained in command of the army on the West Coast, if her boy were called I would do my best to have him assigned to duty at home.

“In the middle of this whispered conversation with the mother, the father suddenly leaned forward and said to Mrs. Borgstrom: ‘Mother, I have overheard your conversation with the general about our youngest. We know that if and when his country needs him, he will go.’

“I could hardly contain my emotions. Here were parents with four sons lying dead from wounds received in battle and yet were ready to make the last sacrifice if their country required it.”

Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1999 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999], 20.

15 I want to call on everyone... to be men and women of loyalty to the nation of which you are a part. Love of country is a great thing. It is a good thing. If we want to change the world, we begin with ourselves, and then we move out to include our fellow citizens and build goodness among the people.

*Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley, 1995-99* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 1:511

**Alma 51:22**

16 Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites, in proportion as their love to justice is above their rapacity, in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption, in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.  
Edmund Burke

**Conclusion to Alma 51**

17 The Book of Mormon was designed to prepare its readers to survive the problems of the latter days. Book of Mormon prophets stated that this book would be brought forth when there would be wars and other social problems. Elder Marion G. Romney made this observation: "Latter-day Saints know that this earth will never again, during its telestial existence, be free from civil disturbance and war."<sup>1</sup> This being true, if people of these latter days have any hope, it will be founded in righteousness. We must be careful that we do not follow the pattern of the Book of Mormon people who had more faith in their own armaments than they had in God. A modern-day general, Omar N. Bradley, once warned: "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living."<sup>2</sup>

In our society today, we find that we are well prepared for war. In our preparation, however, we have lost the spiritual strength to prevent it.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower observed: "Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, *the hopes of its children*. . . . This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."<sup>3</sup>

The cry in these days is for righteousness. If there is to be hope for a peaceful future, it will be because people repent and serve the Lord. The First Presidency, in a Christmas message to the world, made this plea:

*We are dismayed by the growing tensions among the nations, and the unrestricted building of arsenals of war, including huge and threatening nuclear weaponry. Nuclear war, when unleashed on a scale for which the nations are preparing, spares no living thing within the perimeter of its initial destructive force, and sears and maims and kills wherever its pervasive cloud reaches.*

<sup>1</sup> "Peace in This World," Improvement Era, June 1967, p. 77

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 349

<sup>3</sup> Peace with Justice, Selected Addresses of Dwight D. Eisenhower (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) pp. 37-38

*While recognizing the need for strength to repel any aggressor, we are enjoined by the word of God to "renounce war and proclaim peace." We call upon the heads of nations to sit down and reason together in good faith to resolve their differences. If men of good will can bring themselves to do so, they may save the world from a holocaust, the depth and breadth of which can scarcely be imagined. We are confident that when there is enough of a desire for peace and a will to bring it about, it is not beyond the possibility of attainment.<sup>4</sup>*

It is the duty of every Latter-day Saint to live righteously enough to be an influence for peace. However, if the time comes that they have to fight "for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45), then they must be prepared to respond in righteousness and with purity of heart. Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 8: Alma 30 to Moroni [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988], 78

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<sup>4</sup> "From the First Presidency," Church News, 20 Dec. 1980, p. 3