



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Transcript

The following transcript represents the views of the speaker and not the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



James E. Faulconer

How to Study the Book of Mormon

F
A
R
M
S

Summary:

In this essay James Faulconer, a BYU professor of philosophy and dean of honors, outlines some general suggestions for scripture study. He presents his extensive notes on Mosiah 4 to show the treasures that can be found by careful and thorough scripture study. His study methods include considering context, examining word meaning, and looking for patterns.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Teachings

FARMS
Brigham Young University
P.O. Box 7113
University Station
Provo, UT 84602
1-800-327-6715
(801) 373-5111
www.farmsresearch.com

\$2.00

FAU-T1



7 14861 03180 5

For a complete listing of FARMS publications,
call 1-800-FARMS-15 for a FARMS catalog.

© 1999 by James E. Faulconer

Transcript of a lecture presented as part of the FARMS Book of Mormon Lecture Series.

How to Study the Book of Mormon

James E. Faulconer

I was a graduate student at Penn State University and I worked for a professor named Stephen Goldman. Professor Goldman not only taught the philosophies of science, he also was a part-time Rabbi in a nearby community. It was a small community with a Jewish congregation but it didn't have enough money to hire a Rabbi, so, much as a Mormon bishop would do, Professor Goldman acted as their Rabbi.

I was very intrigued by this. Professor Goldman and I became friends as I worked with him. I went to Professor Goldman at one point and said that I would like to take a readings class with him; that I would like to study the Old Testament with him.

We talked for a while and he proposed that I should come and propose a course of study for a readings course in the next quarter. I came and I brought a suggestion that he and I study Genesis together. He laughed a little bit and said, "Well, how much of Genesis did you want to do?" I suggested that we do all of it. He suggested that we do only the first chapter. I laughed and said, "Why don't we just do as much as we possibly can."

He said we could do that if I would come at lunch time. He would discuss it with me if I would bring my questions. So I made up a list of questions and brought them to Professor Goldman. We had lunch and as we were eating he asked me to read my questions. He was absolutely disgusted with my questions when I read them.

There were things like, How does the Bible correlate with evolution? What can we say about this, that, and the other aspect of some abstruse idea? He asked me why I didn't take my religion seriously and I was embarrassed. It was clear that he was thinking quite differently than I was.

In turn he said, "Instead of your questions, let's ask mine." And he asked his questions, which were always about details of the text. What does this word mean? Why is this event before that event? What are we doing here? What is the Lord saying here? How is he saying what he says? I couldn't answer any of these questions.

I went away very humble. I had thought to come and have some sort of high level discussion with this Rabbi and instead I had been humiliated and shown I really didn't know very much about what I was talking about. I came back the next week, though, with different kinds of questions—questions about the text itself, about words, about the ideas, about how things related to each other; and I began to talk to Professor Goldman. As we talked I was shocked to discover that this man knew a great deal about the gospel that I thought only the Latter-day Saints knew.

He was also shocked because he discovered that we knew many things that he thought only Jews knew. These things came out, however, by careful reading of this book. We made it through the quarter all the way to the end of chapter 3 of Genesis. He felt we had run at a breakneck speed. I thought it had gone very slowly, but I learned a great deal.

Mostly what I learned, however, wasn't about this thing or that matter about Genesis. I learned much more about how to read the scriptures, about reading carefully and closely.

A year or so later I discovered a motto. It was a medieval alchemist motto. Alchemists were people who thought during the medieval period that they would be able to find a method for changing lead into gold, or other elements into gold.

Obviously, if you had such a procedure and you didn't let everyone have it, you could become quite wealthy. And this was the goal of alchemy—finding a way to make something into gold, getting rich, supplying money for the endeavors that you wanted to support. The motto, though, was, “Lege, lege, lege, labore, ora et relegere.” Read, read, read, work, pray, and reread.

Now, in the Church most of us are acquainted with some of the elements of this procedure. Most of us know how to read. Those of us who follow the admonition of the prophet, read, read, read. We also pray and presumably those who study pray over what they study. But I don't think that many of us, as many as should, do the work that is required. So I have written that alchemist motto in the front of my Bible to remind me of the things that I should do to turn the leaden things in my life into gold through the scriptures, and I'd like to focus today for a few minutes on this issue of work—how to work at studying the scriptures.

I'd like to do two things to do that. First of all I'd like to give some general suggestions for scripture study, and then I'd like to take a particular look at Mosiah 4 and show you the kinds of things that a careful and slow reading of Mosiah 4 can do for us.

The first thing to consider when doing a careful reading is, perhaps, context. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I inquire, what was the question which drew out the answer or caused Jesus to utter the parable?” To ascertain its meaning we must dig up the root and ascertain what it was that drew the saying from Jesus. We take a look, then, at what context this is being said in. We take a look at what we are doing. We say, what's going on?

Take a look, for example, at Alma 32. When we talk about Alma 32 in our Sunday School classes, in our sacrament meeting talks, we often talk as if Alma 32 dropped out of the sky, as if it doesn't matter to whom Alma was speaking, or why he said the things that he did. But I believe very strongly that if we go back and re-

read Alma 32 in the context of Alma 31, Alma 34, and Alma 33 we see that the sermon that Alma is delivering is delivered to a certain group of people who have a particular question. And, we see his preaching in the context of that question.

We see, for example, that it doesn't answer the question they initially asked and so at the beginning of Chapter 33 they re-ask. They say, what can we do. And then he answers their question and he talks about the scriptures. When we see these things Alma 32 takes on a very different character and becomes more meaningful to us.

In addition to context, we need to know the meaning of the words we read. Now, that sounds quite obvious. We need to know the alternative meanings, which is, perhaps, less obvious. I think, however, in both cases we often think we know what we are reading and we don't. I think the best example of this is in Doctrine and Covenants 121. We are told that we should reprove betimes with sharpness. If you stop and ask people, what does the word "betimes" mean, more often than not they will say something like, once in a while. However, there are ways of finding out that that is not the case. What it really means is "early." One way to do that is to use a dictionary.

If we were to look up "betimes" in an historical dictionary, like the Oxford English Dictionary (you may not find it in a standard desk dictionary), you will find it means "early." If you don't have an historical dictionary handy, read and use a concordance and look up the number of times the word "betimes" occurs in the scriptures; you will see it used in context and it means "early."

For example, in Genesis 26:31 it says, "they rose up betimes in the morning." There are other uses in the Old Testament that suggest that this must mean "early." This is another key, I think, to understanding what it means to study the scripture and how to do it. When we read scripture it is often very important to ask

ourselves what kinds of scriptural text were available to the prophet who is writing or speaking at the time that we're reading.

We're going to be looking at Mosiah 4. We might wonder, where does King Benjamin's language come from? Does it come from nowhere? It presumably comes from the brass plates, most of which we have in the Old Testament. We have this record than we can refer to, to see the kind of scriptural language, the kind of scriptural ideas, that King Benjamin is using to help us understand better his ideas, his thoughts. So we might very well look up the words as they were used in the Old Testament passages to which he had access.

We also need to understand how various words in the scriptures connect to each other—words like "and" and "therefore." We often overlook these, but those words will help us see the ways in which the ideas, the scriptures, hook up to one another. For example in Romans 12:1, in the Greek text, the very first of the words used is "therefore." It's not quite the first word in the English, but it's the word that connects chapter 12 to all the rest of those chapters, the first eleven chapters.

Many who are not Latter-day Saints find a number of beliefs in Romans. It may be difficult for us. We may have difficulty understanding, and we are fairly convinced that they have some difficulty understanding. Namely, they find a belief in salvation by grace alone. We, too, believe in salvation by grace alone, but we also believe that this is connected to the necessity of works. And this word "therefore" at the beginning of chapter 12 helps us understand that. Paul, having explained in great detail the necessity of relying upon grace for our salvation, then turns in chapter 12 to say, therefore you must present your bodies in acceptable sacrifice. You must obey the commandments. Your obedience is required of you because the Lord has sacrificed himself for you, so you must sacrifice yourself for him. And the sacrifice required is obedience. If we see that word, then we begin to understand

much more clearly that grace and works are not opposed to each other the way we often think.

Finally, I think the important thing for us to do as we read is to ask questions. But we shouldn't start our questions by asking about broad doctrinal issues. Our first question should be about the book, about what the words of the book say, not questions about what is this doctrine, but questions about what does this word mean? What is the context? Where has this prophet spoken before? What kinds of things has this prophet said? How did the people who heard the prophet respond? What kind of speech am I reading? Is this a story? Is it a sermon? Is it an historical narrative? Is it a Psalm?

These kinds of questions will help me begin to understand. With that brief background let's take a look at Mosiah 4, and I would like us to especially take a look at Mosiah 4:6-10.

When we take a look at this chapter, at Mosiah 4, verses 6 through 10, we will discover that there are problematic ideas in here, things that may bother us. Let me read you one or two. Mosiah says:

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—

I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all

power, both in heaven and in earth, believe that man doth not comprehend all things which the Lord can comprehend.

And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble ourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

There are people who are bothered by this when they read these scriptures because they are bothered by the fact that Mosiah seems to be so negative about the people he is speaking to, about human potential. He seems to be putting them down.

What I'd like to do is to take a look at these verses in context, taking a look at particular words. Try to understand what Mosiah is saying, and by doing that begin to realize that it isn't quite what it sounds like at first glance. To do that, let's just start with the context of the first chapter. Let's look at Mosiah 4:1.

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

Benjamin has said several times before in this sermon that the words that were given to him were given to him by an angel. He is saying directly what the angel has said. And whatever that was, and we will look at it in a minute, whatever the angel said gave them the fear of the Lord. My first question then was: what does that mean to have fear of the Lord?

I looked up the phrase in a number of places and what I discovered was, as we often will say in our classes, it does mean reverence and awe. But as I looked at it, it also became clear that in many instances it means genuine fear. These people were afraid of something. With that in mind I turned back to the previous chapter, chapter 3, trying again to establish a context. And I gave myself a brief outline of that chapter.

In verses 3 through 5 of chapter 3, King Benjamin is telling us the words of the angel, telling us that Christ is coming. That's not particularly frightening; in fact it's probably joyful. In verses 6 through 7 he tells them—he's predicting the first coming of the Savior—that Christ will live and suffer in the flesh. Again, it's not necessarily a happy message to know that Christ will suffer but it doesn't seem to be something that should make them fear. In verses 8 through 9 Benjamin says that he will bring salvation. Here we not only have nothing frightening, we have a very joyful message.

In verse 10, however, we begin to shift in the direction of something that may very well be frightening. In verse 10, the angel's words are that Jesus will arise from the dead and because of that there will be a righteous judgment. In verse 11 we are told that Christ will atone for Adam's transgression and for the sins of those who have sinned ignorantly. Then in verses 12 through 18 we begin to get very clearly the idea that there is something to be afraid of. In those verses we hear that the Lord has sent prophets to preach woe to those who have rebelled, because without their repentance they can not be saved. If we are among those to whom the prophets are supposed to preach, those who need to repent, then we may have something to fear. In verse 19, the angel's words follow up by saying the natural man is an enemy to God. We must put off the natural man and yield to the Holy Spirit. We must become saints.

Now reading through that I began to get an idea of what it is that the people of King Benjamin understood that made them fear, but I then also wondered what it meant to become a saint. How do I become a saint? It says in verse 19 that it happens through the atonement; it happens because we will become submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love.

We are told in verses 20 through 21 that the knowledge of the Lord will spread through the world and when it does only little children will be blameless. Again we

have another issue. Perhaps I'm not really a saint because I can think of times when I'm not submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love.

Verses 20 through 21 tells us that only little children will be blameless. The Lord will come and cause us the need to repent. In verse 22 it specifically says that the people of King Benjamin are not blameless. At that point I'd pretty well understand what it is that at the beginning of chapter 4 King Benjamin and his people fear. They fear that they are not what they ought to be. The fear that they have not been obedient. They fear that they have not lived as they ought. They fear that they have not repented.

Because they have those fears then when King Benjamin speaks, they have fallen to the earth. They are so afraid of the possibility of being judged by the Savior that they have fallen to the earth. Lest we begin to think that King Benjamin is dealing here with an unusual group, let's turn further back to Mosiah 1.

Mosiah 1:11 shows us something where Benjamin begins to talk to them, and there Benjamin says:

And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I do because they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.

We have an odd thing here. King Benjamin has said to his people; you are diligent, you keep the commandments. He's praised them for that, but the message of the angel is that these are people who are not blameless, and they are so afraid of the angel's message that they fall to the earth in fear. We have this contradiction. Their diligence and obedience to the commandments is not enough.

Turn back to chapter 4, then, and let's look at verse 2. Let's see the thinking of the people and how they respond.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we

may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

So in chapter 4 they see themselves as less than the dust of the earth. I think a comparable situation would be one in a stake conference where, perhaps, the visiting General Authority or the stake president praises the people of that congregation for their diligence in keeping the commandments and nevertheless they fall down in fear for their salvation and they say, "We are less than the dust of the earth. Have mercy; may the atoning blood of Jesus Christ apply."

These people, then have been diligent but have not yet received remission of their sins. In verse 3, however, we see that happen.

And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

Once they recognized their carnal state, in spite of their diligence, then they were able to receive that remission of their sins. What King Benjamin says in the rest of this chapter has to be understood in this context—in the context of a prophet of the Lord, speaking to a people who are diligent and obedient and who do the things they should, but who have, until this point, not recognized the necessity of relying upon the atonement, have not really asked for that reliance in their lives, and who have just now received a remission of their sins, even though, perhaps, many of them had been baptized many years ago.

So, it's in that context that King Benjamin begins to speak. Let's look at verses 4 and 5.

And king Benjamin again opened his mouth and began to speak unto them, saying: My friends and my brethren, my kindred and my

people, I would again call your attention, that ye may hear and understand the remainder of my words which I shall speak unto you.

For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state—

And King Benjamin interrupts himself. Remember what has happened. These are diligent people, obedient people who have discovered that, in spite of their obedience, they are less than the dust of the earth, and they have then received the remission of their sins. Benjamin, after they have received the remission, says to them: I need to remind you of what you have just learned. I want to repeat that; I want to go back to it. And then he says in verse 5, assuming that this knowledge of the goodness of God has brought this understanding of nothingness to you—then he stops. He stops because he wants to say more about the first part: if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you. What knowledge is he talking about?

We see that knowledge in verses 6 through 10. Those verses then, explain the first half of verse 5. That's where he says:

I say unto you, if you have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—

Notice, again, we still don't have the end of a sentence. This is still a very long "if this," but nothing else. In verse 7 he repeats. He's told us in verse 6 what knowledge he is talking about. In verse 7 he begins to speak more about what this knowledge is.

I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for

all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

Having mentioned who will receive salvation, he talks more about salvation. And this is still in an aside. He is still stopping in the middle of another sentence to explain the various ideas. Verse 8:

And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

And then he repeats the conditions he has told them before. The conditions for salvation are given in Verse 9.

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

He continues in verse 10.

And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

Now in verses 6 through 10 he has expanded on this notion of coming to the knowledge of the goodness of God, explaining what that is—that that knowledge is a knowledge of the atonement, and that those who are obedient, who accept the atonement, are those who will be saved. He has explained what the conditions of atonement are, that they are belief, repentance and humility. Having done that, he comes back again to the second half of verse 5. He says in verse 11:

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love [another way of saying this: if you have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or in other words, if you have tasted of his love], and have received a remission of your sins [which is something that, in fact, they have done; we see that in verses

2 and 3], which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

So verse 11 takes us back to verse 5. It says: if you have come to an understanding of your relative worthlessness, of the fact that you depend upon God (that means an understanding of the atonement, the necessity of repentance, the conditions for salvation), if you have those things and you have received a remission of your sins, don't forget them. You are unworthy; that's why you need the atonement. And so verse 11 is really just picking up on verse 5.

Now, once he has done that, then he begins to give them the blessing that comes. In verse 12: "And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this. . . ." Now what is the "this"? The "this" goes back to verse 11: "If ye remember and retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness." If you remember what it is that our Father in Heaven through his Son Jesus Christ can do for us, and the necessity we have of receiving that atonement and being diligent, that's his greatness and our nothingness.

I say unto to you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

Very frequently we end our understanding of what happens in this sermon at that point. But notice something very interesting about verse 13. Verse 13 begins with the word "and." Verse 13 says you will not have a mind to injure one another. But to say that is to say that that is one of the blessings that is received. If you do this you will rejoice, you will be filled with the love of God, you will retain a remission

of your sins, you will grow in knowledge, and you will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably.

That “and” becomes a key, then, to us understanding that the blessing that follows from receiving a remission of our sins does not end just with having peace in our hearts. It continues in verse 13 with the peace with one another. It continues even in verses 14 and 15:

“And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry.”

So the connective word here is one that forces us to see, if we look carefully at it, that these are not commandments to obey but blessings that follow upon the reception of the remission of our sins. If we remember the greatness of God and are diligent, if we are humble and remember our own nothingness so that we rely on the atonement, then these things will follow from doing that. Now whether these are blessings or commandments, is, I suppose, a moot point. It would be a strange thing, I think, to believe that commandments are not blessings, or that the reception of a blessing is not in a very real sense a fulfillment of a commandment. It’s an artificial distinction that we make between these. But the Lord here, speaking through his prophets, speaks of these things—living peaceably and having good family relations—as blessings that follow on our repentance, on our life with Christ in humility.

Verses 14 and 15 tell us that you will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked, but that you will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness. These, then, are blessings. What follows after that continues to be these blessings or commandments, whichever way you prefer to take them—the things that follow upon having received our remission of sins, having remembered the greatness of God, and having remembered our own nothingness. It is part of our diligence, I think, that we are being shown here.

We will, for example in verse 16, be diligent in service:

And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

Not only will we take care of those who are members of our family, not only will we receive remission of our sins, we will also give to those who stand in need of giving. We are told that there are all sorts of excuses that we could give, in verse 17:

Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

In verse 18, however, King Benjamin responds to this argument:

But, I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent.

If we do that, we are no longer in the position in which we began. We are no longer those who have received remission of our sins and remember the Lord's greatness and our own nothingness. We are no longer those who are diligent. Why? Verse 19:

Behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God.

We depend upon God. That is what it means that we are nothing. Therefore, we are obligated by that dependence and by the blessings that he has given us to assist those who depend upon us, whether those people are our children or whether those people are someone else. He tells us in verse 19 that we depend on him for everything, and in verse 20 he reminds the people he is speaking to of the situation which they are in right now. He says:

And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins.

He not only reminds them of the parallel between them and the beggars, who they, perhaps, have been refusing. By doing this he reminds them of the conditions he has spoken of, that they must remember. They must remember God's greatness and their nothingness. But remembering their nothingness is not a matter of some kind of breast beating or bad self-image. It is a matter of remembering the things they must do. It's receiving a remission of their sins and remembering to care for those who need care, children or others.

He continues discussing this problem for several verses, up through verse 26. Given that he speaks of family relations for only two verses and caring for the poor for about ten or eleven verses, I suspect that this is a problem to which the people of King Benjamin had not been sufficiently diligent. They had not been caring for the poor as they ought. But notice that his reminder here is a reminder by reminding them of *their* necessity, and it's only a reminder that *follows* their remission of sins. And he speaks of it there as a blessing. If they have received this—the remission of their sins—they will be blessed to be able to do these things, to share with those who are poor.

In verse 27, then, King Benjamin says something to perhaps keep them from going too far with the pendulum one way or the other; he says:

And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.

Here, too, is commonly a place where we stop the sermon when we read this. We have, first of all, the remission of sins that's received, then we have King Benjamin's reminder of those conditions for receiving that remissions of sins—remembering God's goodness, remembering our own nothingness. Then we have a list of the blessings that follow from that remembrance: namely we are blessed with the remission of sins and we are blessed to be able to care for those who are in need.

And then comes the proviso at the end, or what seems to be the end, in verse 27, that all these things be done in order.

Oddly enough, however, the sermon does not end there. The last three or four verses are strange to us. After this powerful sermon, notice in verse 28 what Benjamin says:

And I would that ye should remember, that whosoever among you borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth, according as he doth agree, or else thou shalt commit sin; and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also.

Now, King Benjamin brings up a very ordinary case. Having talked of all these wonderful things, he turns at the very end of his sermon to a fairly straightforward thing. I borrowed a rake from my neighbor and I forgot to return it, or I didn't bother to return it. When I was first struck by the oddness of this, I really couldn't understand. Why was it there? Why wasn't it earlier? Why was it there at all? I went through a number of possibilities.

I don't have a definitive answer, but it strikes me that it was an interesting way for him to end partly because it is so ordinary. There is a temptation when we are in church, listening to someone speak, especially if it is a powerful speaker, especially if the spirit is there. There is a temptation for us to believe we are talking about things that are so out of the ordinary. But then it's easy for us to go back to our daily existence and not to worry too much about what this has to do with borrowing a rake from a neighbor.

King Benjamin delivers this powerful sermon where he talks about the atonement, where he talks about the conditions for repentance, where he talks about receiving remission of our sins, where he talks about the necessity of supporting our families and of contributing to the welfare projects of the Church. And then he ends, not with some stirring call, as we might be tempted to, to all go

out and do the right thing, but with a call to go out and return the things that we borrowed.

Finally he says in verses 29 and 30:

And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

King Benjamin ends, having given this wonderful sermon, with two pieces of homely advice. One of them is return what you have borrowed. The other is don't expect me to give you a list of the kinds of things you could have done wrong. I've mentioned things here. You could have not taken care of your children, you could have not helped out in the welfare of those not in your families. But that's just a short list. What you must do, he says, is remember. You have to watch yourselves. You have to be obedient. But memory has been a part of this from the beginning. We are to remember the Lord's greatness and our nothingness. We are to remember that we have received a remission of our sins. We are to remember the commandments. This verse 30, then, is another way of saying what King Benjamin has been saying all along. If we remember what the Lord has offered and why we are dependent upon him, we will have the Holy Ghost, we will be diligent to the end. We will do the things we are required to do.

There is much to be gained from Mosiah; there is much to be gained from King Benjamin's address. There is much to be gained from verses 6 through 10 in Mosiah 4. But what's to be gained is to be gained by careful and diligent study. I hope you have been able to see is the importance of considering the context, of knowing what the words mean, and of using the scriptures to find out what the scriptures mean—cross-referencing, looking at what the prophets are referring to.

I hope you see the importance of understanding how particular words like "and" and "therefore" tie pieces of scriptures together and give us an understanding of what's going on, and the importance of asking questions about what we read and looking to the scriptures for answers to those questions.

My experience has been that by doing this, I get much more out of scripture study. I don't always study this way. There are times when I read through the Book of Mormon from cover to cover. There are other times when I may spend an hour on only a few verses. Part of that is dictated by the needs of the moment. Part of that is dictated by the necessity of reading through the scriptures as a whole occasionally, so that I have the big picture. But I try to spend a good deal of my time reading carefully, in small amounts, to understand carefully what the Lord has told me.

The result has been that the scriptures have become a very important part of my life. They answer many questions. They give me guidance and direction. I discovered that the Lord has told me many things he would have me know without my having to get some other revelation. The revelation has already been given.

My testimony is that carefully study of the scriptures will increase the spirit in our lives and will increase our ability to remember the things that the Lord has told us. And I say that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.