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FRE-BM

Freemen and Kingmen in
the Book of Mormon

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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in the Book of Mormon

Of recent years Mesoamerican archaeologists have directed their attention with increasing concern to evidence that might explain the strange and sudden demise of the great Ancient American centers of civilization, leaving behind those imposing ruins "abandoned by unknown builders at an unknown time for unknown reasons." (P. Tompkins).

In attempting to get at the root of the matter the experts have, it would seem at present come to some sort of consensus or convergence of ideas favoring one explanation over all the others. While not excluding the roles played by the upheavals of nature, disease, change of climate, depletion of resources, etc., the specialists now conclude that the primary reason for rapid decline and fall of those civilizations, far outweighing the rest, was the pressure brought to bear by one segment of the population, which they designate as "the elite", on another, which they call "the commoners." This matches the tales told in the pre-Columbian literary accounts transmitted and translated by the European Conquistadores of the 16th century, with their repeated reference to the tragic confrontations between "los seniores" and "la gente comun."*The theme is not confined to one area of Middle America nor to any one period of time; it is in fact one of the constants of history. And so it is not going out of bounds to recall the long and exciting account in the Book of Mormon of the rivalry between the "king-men" and the "freemen" and what it led to.*(See the quotations appended to this study.)

As a completely self-consistent and convincing story, the epic tale of the "freemen" stands on its own feet; but the new double-check of ancient evidence plus modern relevance now invites us to examine it more closely and take it to heart seriously than ever before. We cannot do better than to let the Book of Mormon tell the story in its own powerful and moving prose, leading off with the basic question:

Q. Who were the freemen?

A. The term is first used in the Book of Mormon to designate the people who supported the government of the Nephites, c.67 B.C., during a political crisis: And those who were desirous that [the newly-elected] Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen. (Al.51:6).

Q. Shouldn't the name be capitalized?

A. It does not designate a political party, organization, or society, but simply denotes the body of common citizens supporting Moroni in his opposition to a group known as the "king-men". When their candidate lost and the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen (Al.51:7), they refused to accept defeat; it was their continued hostility which gave rise to the popular countermovement led by Moroni and designated by the name of freemen.

Q. Did Moroni organize them into a party?

A. No, he did not need to. He was acting in his official capacity, having been appointed to be chief captain over the Nephites (Al.46:3), with emergency powers granted by the chief judges and the voice of the people (Al.46:34). He was simply fulfilling the duties of his office in alerting the public to the dangerous nature of the opposition.

Q. What was the nature of that danger?

A. The king-men at the time represented the resurgence of an element which had plagued the Nephites from the beginning. Just six years before the affair in question Moroni had overcome a coalition formed to overthrow the government and establish a monarchy. The name of freemen was not mentioned at that time, but the king-men ye have always with you: Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people. (Al.51:8).

Q. Wouldn't it have been within their rights to change the form of government if they got enough votes?

A. That is what they were aiming at; but it was their methods that brought Moroni into action against them. They were secretly preparing a coup to take over the government by force, and were in communication with the king of the Lamanites, with whom Moroni

had just concluded a dangerous war brought on by Nephite dissenters (Al.43:44); with peace barely achieved the new threat made the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous (Al.46:7).

Q. Who comprised the powerful coalition?

A. The original nucleus was composed of people who were making a lot of money in the post-war boom. When Helaman and other leaders of the church reprimanded their practices: calling upon them to walk uprightly before God...there arose a dissension among them and they would not heed the words of Helaman and his brethren: But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceeding great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words... (Al.45:23-24).

Q. Were they organized from the first?

A. No. The new trouble began with many little dissensions and disturbances...among the people (Al.45:21). But as was usual in these periodic slips back into the old materialism, the discontent crystallized around the person of a dynamic leader who was able to bring jarring and dissident elements together.

Q. Why did he oppose the government?

A. The old story--he wanted to run things himself. He was desirous to be king (Al.46:4), and took skillful advantage of the ground-swell favoring a monarchy in an atmosphere of sudden prosperity in which many grew proud...lifted up in their hearts (Al.45:23). The man who led them on was Amalickiah, who is, in Moroni's opinion, another example of the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men (Al.46:9).

Q. Ambition is hardly a rare human quality--what made him so very wicked?

A. It depends on how you define wickedness. This man was really quite a charmer, a man of many flattering words, who won a great personal following and led away the hearts of many people (Al.46:10). A large and strong man of imposing presence (46:3), to a powerful and persuasive rhetoric he added the fierce resolve of one who swore to drink the blood of Moroni, his chief opponent (Al.51:9). Shrewd and calculating, a man of cunning device (Al.46:10), he knew how to preserve himself (...he did not come down himself to battle, Al.49:11), and was willing to pay any price in blood to gain his objective, for he did not care for the blood of his people (Al.49:10). His plan of action was skillfully conceived and executed.

Q. What did he do?

A. He not only brought together the conflicting factions of selfish and greedy Nephites, but united them for war, at the same time arranging a coordination of activities with an invasion by the Lamanites as he stirred up the hearts of the people of the Lamanites against the people of the Nephites, among whom he was gathering together soldiers from all parts of his land, and arming them, and preparing for war (Al.51:9). For him the answer to his problems and the realization of his ambitions lay in military action. That was his last campaign, and it was brilliantly successful until he was assassinated in his tent. Unpopular with most of the Nephites, he had to use Lamanite man-power in his various operations.

Q. How was he able to do that?

A. Once by a discrete assassination he gained complete control of a renegade Lamanite army of war-protesters (Al.47:8ff); then he got command of the main Lamanite force by winning the confidence of the King and quietly poisoning him. Putting himself forward as the champion of law and order he then married the mourning queen and mounted the Lamanite throne (Al.47:32ff). Then he stirred up the war-weary Lamanites to a pitch of war-fever entirely contrary to all their interests and inclinations but beneficial to his own. He accomplished that feat by masterful use of the media. As in later Meso-america, it seems that towers were a conspicuous part of public architecture, used among other things for public presentations and announcements. When Amalickiah became king he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers against the Nephites; (Al.48:1). He saturated the airwaves, so to speak, and his propaganda worked. Finally this consummate dissembler and master liar was able to march at the head of a mighty army which he thought would make him king in Zarahemla.

Q. Did he think the Nephites would support him after Moroni had thrown him out the

first time?

A. He could always count on strong backing by the king-men among them. Let us go back to his first enterprise when he found a field ripe for his talents among those who were made fighting mad--exceeding wrath--by the words of Helaman and his brethren; they had decided to take action and were gathered together against their brethren, not merely to oppose them at the polls, but determined to slay them (Al.46:1-2). Playing upon their disaffection and anger, he became the man of the hour: and these people who were wrath were also desirous that he should be their king...(Al.46:5). By working on a common hostility to the government, Amalickiah was able to weld half-a-dozen divergen interests into a single military force of kingmen.

Q. I believe we started out asking what those divergent elements were.

A. First, as we have noted, was the original core of those who refused all instruction because of their exceeding riches (Al.45:24), gathered together as a hate-group--exceeding wrath--to plan the extremest measures against those who stood in their way (Al.46:1). Then there were passionate monarchists, who not only were in favor of kings, but, being of high birth...sought to BE kings (Al.51:8)--every one in line for the throne. After them were those who may not have claimed royal blood, but nevertheless professed the blood of nobility--whether they could prove it or not (AL.51:21). Then, as in the Late Roman Empire, intermarriage put aspiring judges and high clergy into the picture as aristocratic families intermarried and intrigued together:...those judges ha many friends and kindreds; and...almost all the lawyers and high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges...(3 Ne.6:27). All those who aspire to be in the upper crust, "the elite", "los seniores", gravitate towards the king-men in every period of Book of Moromon history. Though they are lower in the scale, the lower judges of the land were Amalickiah's strongest supporters, and he knew how to make use of them:...the greater part of them (were) the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power. And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they [the local magistrates] would support him and establish him to be their king, he would make them rulers over the people (Al.46:4). Finally he used his cunning arguments and gratifying rhetoric on the people of the church with considerable success as many in the church believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah (al.46:7). This was six years before the name of freemen marked the opposition. It was by the tried and true method of hard, persistent work, constantly stirring up and playing upon the discontent, aspirations, and fears of various groups with a ceaseless flow of clever and impassioned rhetoric, that Amalickiah was able to lay the solid foundation for his armed takeover of the country. It seems to have been kept very secret, or else nobody took it very seriously, for Moroni exploded when he heard about it.

Q. Do you think he was surprised?

A. His behavior was that of a man caught off guard by acts of such vicious and deceitful nature that his own guileless spirit was slow to anticipate what it was loathe to attribute to any fellow creature:

...when Moroni, who was chief commander of the armies...had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah (Al.46:11), and reacted in a quick and spectacular manner; the drastic measures he took to alert the people show that they needed waking up in a great hurry:...he rent his coat...took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it--'In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children.' (46:12). This vividly recalls the ancient inscriptions that the ancient Jews would put on their banners and trumpets before going out to war, as reported in the Battle Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls, where, moreover, the priests go forth before the ranks of warriors just before the battle stirring their spirits with just such words as Moroni used when, having put the cloak on a pole and calling it the title of liberty (Al.46:13), he went forth among the people, calling upon them with a loud voice, hearing which, and seeing the banner, the people came running together (Al.46:19-21). It was all according to ancient custom, as is clear from the sermons he gave on the occasion, recalling their ancient traditions to mind and giving us the official statement of just what it was the freemen stood for.

The people who answered his summons came girding on their armor and rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God...the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments (Al.46:21)...and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying...we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northwards (the Jaredites) if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies...to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression (Al.46:22). Recent studies have called attention to the forgotten but peculiar old Jewish rite of treading on one's garments while making a covenant; Moroni, in addressing the people on the occasion sheds more light on the subject: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised...shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions (Al.46:18). Then he reminds them of a tradition carrying the origin of the rent garment symbolism back to their ancestor Joseph, the suffering outcast, with whom they are to identify themselves: Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph; yea, let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death...For Jacob, noting that part of the torn garment of Joseph was bloody and decayed and part of it perfectly preserved, saw in that a token of the future of his descendants (Al.24-26). The story, exactly as Moroni recalls it, was also preserved among Jews living in Persia in the Middle Ages—a powerful confirmation of the reality of all this. Moroni asks the people: Which is the remnant of the garment that shall perish—could it perhaps be the people who have dissented from us, the king-men? Don't be smug about it! Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ (Al.46:27). In this episode we see just how the freemen think of themselves; two ideas are of primary importance.

Q. What two ideas?

A. First, as the descendants of Joseph they march under his banner, not the banner of the Grand Vizier of Egypt, but the torn and tattered garment of Joseph the outcast child, beaten, stripped, sold into bondage, his cloak taken from him, then torn and bloodied to prove that he was finished forever, while he went on to be a suffering servant and a prisoner in Egypt. Moroni calls upon his people to recognize their position as the meek and humble of the world, we who are despised; it is the perennial call of the prophets of Israel, with Isaiah at the head. This in vivid contrast to the rich and well-born whose pride and nobility Moroni denounces as loudly as he proclaims the humility of the freemen (Al.51:17,18,21). The second point is more important. You will notice that every time the dedication of the people to the cause of God is mentioned, it is followed immediately by a qualifying clause, proclaiming that the people who enter the covenant are not to be considered righteous simply by virtue of party affiliation, or that they represent the Good People as opposed to the Bad People: their own transgression can spoil everything at any time; they are quite as capable of sinning and incurring destruction as their enemies; they can bring down upon themselves the same calamities as the dissenters; their garments can be rent along with the wickedest, and they can be as completely destroyed as the Jaredites of old, for there is no guarantee that they are the good people. This is an extremely important lesson driven home repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, that righteousness does not consist in being identified with this or that nation, party, church or group. When you find a particularly wicked society in the story (e.g. Hel.5:2), look back a few pages and you will probably find that not many years before those same people were counted righteous. Or, when you find a particularly godless and ferocious lot of Lamanites, if you look a few pages ahead you may find them among the most blessed and favored of God's people (Hel.6:37; Al.26:11ff).

Q. But at any given time, surely, or in any particular conflict you have right against wrong.

A. On the contrary, whenever the Nephites and Lamanites come to blows there is little to choose between them. If the "bad people" more often provoke war, the "good people" have equal responsibility, since they have the greater light. Take what must be the most clear-cut case of a good guy fighting a bad guy in the Book of Mormon: And it came to pass that Alma fought with Amlici with the sword, face to face; and they did contend mightily, one with another... (Al.2:29). The righteous leader Alma versus the wicked arch-king-man Amlici.

Q. Right out of "Star Wars".

A. That is exactly how the average reader would see it, knowing that Alma, being a man of God...was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword (Al.2:30f) And yet how did the Nephites, under Alma's instruction, view this particular showdown? ...they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of the duty (Al.4:3). It was not a case of right against wrong at all, but of two wrongs teaching a grim lesson of mutual destruction; for what kind of a victory was it for the Nephites? The people were...greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren...their flocks and herds...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...(Al.4:2-3).

Q. Admittedly war is hell. But they had to repel those Lamanite attacks!

A. Yes, Lamanite attacks which they knew perfectly well never would have taken place if they had not brought it on themselves. While Lehi's fleeing family were still within range of Jerusalem the Lord told Nephi that it was his intention henceforward to keep the descendants of Laman and Lemuel (who were already making trouble) in a position to threaten Nephi's people with destruction at all times, as a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance. (1 Ne.2:24). *→ as the original king-men!*

Q. IN that case, can you blame the Nephites for being trigger-happy?

A. Yes, because the Lord also made it perfectly clear to Nephi that the Lamanites no matter how formidable and threatening, shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also (1 Ne.2:23f). Accordingly, if there was any war at all the Nephites shared the guilt for it.

Q. But can't we distinguish the Nephites and Lamanites as the right and wrong in a general sense?

A. Hardly. Moroni opposed and denounced his own head-of-state when he thought, quite wrongly as it turned out (and let that too be a lesson to us!) that he was guilty the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea even those king-men (Al.60:17). It is the individual, not the society, that sins. At the time, the king-men were actually the official Nephite nation, in control of the city and the government. Yet not long after we find some of the most brutal and bloodthirsty of those king-men enjoying pentecostal manifestations. (Hel.5:26ff). Repeatedly the Book of Mormon admonishes us not to judge people by labels. While Lehi's family was still in Arabia he gave his sons a lesson in that important principle. Laman and Lemuel had insisted that they were doing right because they were identified with the dominant traditionalist party in Jerusalem (who happened to be Zedekiah's king-men), who were righteous because they were the Chosen People and because they went to church. Non-sense! said Lehi, Do ye suppose that the children of this land...who were driven out by our fathers, do ye suppose that they were righteous?...Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice if they had been righteous? I say unto you nay. Behold the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favoured of God (1 Ne.17:33-35).

Q. But if the Law is a moral code, to observe the Law implies upright behavior.

A. That was the position of the Pharisees; but when the Lord was asked how one could be sure one was fulfilling the Law, he replied by holding up to his apostles as the perfect example of a righteous person ("Go ye therefore and do likewise!") a man who was a member of the wrong nation, the wrong party, and the wrong church, who did a very unpleasant, messy, and inconvenient thing in helping a total stranger who for all he knew and to all appearances was a dirty, drunken, no-good tramp. At least two members of the right party and the right nation and the right religion, respected authorities and priests in Israel, discreetly and quietly declined the awkward involvement (which could certainly lead to complications) by passing down on the other side of the road (Luke 10:27-37). Now the title of liberty like the Good Samaritan proclaimed the cause of the outcast and downtrodden against the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea even those king-men (Al.60:17)

Q. How do you distinguish the righteous from the wicked then?

A. You don't; that is not your prerogative: "...as you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous," the Lord told the Prophet Joseph, "therefore I say unto you hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known..." (D.C.10:37). In

In which connection another parable of Jesus bids us consider a very important principle, namely that we are never to take people's own estimate of their virtue at face value. When "two men went into the Temple to pray," one of them proclaimed his righteousness and the other his sinful condition; as it turned out the true labels were reversed (Lk.18:10-14). This is important, because throughout the Book of Mormon the king-men routinely describe themselves as the champions of freedom. Right at the outset Laman falsely accused Nephi of being a king-man: ...he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir their hearts to anger (1 Ne.16:38). Of course it was Laman himself who was aspiring to be top dog (1 Ne.17:44; 3:28f), while he puts himself forward as the champion of freedom. One of the most rabid of king-men, the leader and governor of a band of robbers aspiring to take over the government (3 Ne.3:1) wrote a most high-flown and idealistic letter to the real governor, praising his dedication to that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty, and insisting that his own followers are the real freedom-fighters with their unconquerable spirit and determination to right the many wrongs which ye have done unto them... (3 Ne.3:2-4). But magnanimous feeling for your welfare (3:5) he urges them to become our brethren...not our slaves, but our brethren and partners in all our substance (3 Ne.3:7)--a blow for freedom. He invites them to join his dignified and venerable society--the work thereof I know to be good and they are of ancient date...handed down...to us (3:9). He pleads for avoidance of bloodshed by returning to his people their rights and governments which they had lost through the Nephites' wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government (3:

Lachoneus the governor was exceedingly astonished at the sheer effrontery of the thing (3 Ne.3:11), in which the modern reader cannot but detect familiar echoes of "liberationist" terror groups throughout the world: the king-men have always made a big thing of sounding like freemen. One of the cleverest such twisters was Korihor.

Q. Who was he?

A. Korihor was another ambitious man who rallied people of property to free themselves from the oppressive restraints of sacral government, foolish ordinances, and performances, he said, by which this people bind themselves...that they may not lift up their heads (Al.30:23). He said that thanks to the government people durst not enjoy their rights and privileges; in particular, they durst not make use of that which was their own lest they should offend their priests (Al.30:27f). His appeal was for freedom from restraints; laid down by ancient priests (v.23), freedom to do business without interference from church or state, freedom to follow the natural order in which every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime (Al.30:17).

Q. What was Alma's answer to that?

A. He showed that Korihor was deliberately misinterpreting everything, being possessed with a lying spirit (Al.30:42). He answered him patiently point by point, but it was his exemplary restraint that gave Korihor the lie.

Q. How so?

A. He showed him real freedom was, putting him under no restraint whatever, though he openly defied the highest authorities; Korihor was perfectly free to teach the people anything he chose, for there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the Law of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds (Al.30:7)...Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege...but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him (Al.30:9), or to put him at a disadvantage, for the idea was that all men were on equal grounds (Al.30:11).

Q. Do you mean that Alma, the high priest and chief judge of the land actually permitted people to preach atheism?

A. When his own son went around the country with the King's sons preaching publicly against every thing their fathers stood for, those two powerful men took no action against them (Mos.27:8ff)--it took an angel to stop the young smart-Alecs, and even he made it perfectly clear that God would not revoke the agency even of those who oppose

his purposes: This is my church...and nothing shall overthrow it save it is the transgression of my people (Mos.27:13). God guarantees the integrity of his church against all external enemies, but he will not deny the members the right to transgress and destroy it. SO with Korihor: Alma the chief judge, as determined as Moroni later w to pull down the pride and the nobility of the king-men (Al.4:19), passed no sentence against him.

Q. What happened to him?

A. Poetic justice caught up with him. Uncomfortable among the Nephites, he sought out the community of certain dissenters as proud and independent as himself, people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites after their leader. There Korihor was killed by a mob (Al.30:59). These Zoramites are a perfect example of a phenomenon to which American archaeologists are calling attention, since they seem to represent one of those "incursions by small expansionist 'elite' groups" into areas where they imposed "political control and their own religious cults" on the less militant inhabitants (J.A. Graham, 1973), who perforce thereafter "maintained the elite and constructed the great ceremonial centers under their direction" (G.R. Willey & D.B. Shimkin, 1973). So we find the common people complaining to Alma the missionary, ...they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands (Al.32:5). We cannot pursue this striking piece of evidence here, but cannot ignore the principle message of the Zoramites to us.

Q. What is that?

A. The deceitfulness of the self-image--perfectly understandable, since people have to live with themselves; but also quite dangerous, since it easily covers a multitude of sins. Thus the people of Zarahemla angrily rebuffed calls to repentance by Samuel the Lamanite by insisting on being told not what was wrong with Zarahemla--for that ye... cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him...say that he is a false prophet...of the devil, etc. (Hel.13:26)--but rather what is right with Zarahemla, for which ye will lift him up...give unto him of your substance...your gold and silver...clothe him with costly apparel... (Hel.13:28). Which is, incidentally, exactly how prophets were treated in Ancient America where the chilans (prophets) "were held in such high esteem that they were carried on men's shoulders when they went abroad"--lifted up (R.L. Roys, Chilam Balam, p.182). Another bull's-eye for the Book of Mormon.

Now these Zoramites had their virtues as well as their vices, as every society does if it is to survive for a month or more. They were strong-minded, independent people, who went off to found their own nation and in so doing showed themselves exceedingly enterprising and industrious; a disciplined people, they turned out the ablest military officers that Moroni ever had to contend with (Al.43:6,44; 48:5). Enjoying great prosperity, they were strict in their religious observances, giving fulsome thanks to God for his goodness in fervid personal testimonies every week, and preserving an atmosphere of high respectability with unswerving adherence to proper dress standards (Al.32:2).

Q. They seem the right kind of people to me.

A. They certainly thought they were, giving themselves a five-star rating in everything. And yet to Alma, who had seen as much as any man of the depravity of which men are capable, these were beyond a doubt the wickedest people he had ever come up against: O Lord, he cried, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men? (Al.31:26)

Q. What was so wicked about them?

A. The peculiarly deadly combination of total selfishness with the assiduous cultivation of an air of saintliness was what stunned Alma, astonished beyond all measure at their performance (Al.31:19) Behold, O God, they cry unto thee..

Q. What is wrong with that?

A. "And yet" is what is wrong with it, as Alma continues...and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride...they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are lifted up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world. Behold, O my God, their costly apparel...and all their precious things...and behold their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say--we thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people...(Al.31:27-28). It was that combination of covetousness and self-righteousness to which the Prophet Joseph found the people of his day also highly susceptible, that condemned them. Who can doubt that Mormon, who saw our day in detail, had a very good reason for including the strange case of the Zoramites in his message to us? The story is equally impressive for its manifestly authentic ancient setting and its prophetic relevance to the modern situation. The Zoramites were the very type and model of the king-men.

Q. It seems to me that a little more discipline would not have harmed the sons of King Mosiah and Alma. Why didn't the King simply forbid his sons from making all that mischief?

A. Because he was Mosiah, who had given the Nephites their ideal constitution based on the old Israelite rule of judges. Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king, he told his people in his farewell address, for thus saith the Lord: ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, nor one man think himself above another; therefore I say unto you that it is not expedient for you to have a king (Mos.23:7). Here you have in a nutshell the difference between the king-men and the freemen, and the issue is purely that of equality. Where persuasion would not work with the young men, an angel had to take over.

Q. Exactly what did Moroni want in dealing with the king-men?

A. Before all else, peace. ^{→ "breaking down the axes & contentions among his own people for"} The nation desperately needed peace--that is why he fairly exploded when he learned that Amalickiah was stirring up war-fever at home and abroad (Al.46:11ff); personally his grand passion was for equality--a positive mania with him--without which, according to the Book of Mormon, there can be no freedom.

Q. But if ever there was an un-average man it was Moroni!

A. Yes, Mormon comments on that--for him Moroni was a sort of super-man (Al.48:16-17). BUT he was wholly dedicated to defending that constitution which Mosiah had given the nation when he laid down the kingship, in which the sum of wisdom was equality, as set forth in the great speech of his father King Benjamin at a former abdication: And I, am not better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust (Mos.2:26). Mosiah reiterated the theme in his own farewell address: ...for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man think himself above another... (Mos.23:5). I desire that the inequality should be no more in this land...but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike... (Mos.29:32). He tells us what kind of equality is indispensable if a people are to enjoy liberty, namely...that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land... to answer for his own sins." (Mos.29:38).

Q. What's to prevent any man from answering for his own sins?

A. Being in bondage to another, so that he is not free to arrange his own actions. We might get into all sorts of fine distinctions here, but fortunately the Book of Mormon is full and explicit on the subject, allowing a generous sampling of relevant and enlightening passages. Right at the beginning, Nephi, following Isaiah, singles out the greatest enemy of equality: For because they are rich they despise the poor...their hearts are upon their treasure; wherefore, their treasure is their God... (2 Ne.9:30). "The economy" is the culprit...and they that are rich...puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches--yea, they are they whom he despiseth (2 Ne.9:24). The only time we ever read of God despising anything--not his creatures but their base self-imposed condition. Next Jacob, the brother of Nephi, puts his finger on the spot: ...you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren...ye suppose that ye are better than they...God.. condemneth you; and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you...O that you would rid you of this iniquity and abomination... (Jac.2:13-16). The danger does not lie in riches as such, as Jacob points out; nothing would please him better than to have everybody rich: Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free in your substance, that they may be rich like unto you (Jac.2:17), but in the unequal distribution, which is an abomination to God: Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable to him who created all flesh? And one being is as precious in his sight as the other (Jac.2:20). Mosiah recognizes the same perennial threat to freedom in the processes of acquisition: I...have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; neither have I suffered...that ye should make slaves of one another...And I myself have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you (Mos.2:12-14). For, behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same being...for all riches which we have of every kind? (Mos.4:19). When Alma organized his model church, they were all equal, and they did all labor...and they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had... (Al.1:2 ...

and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength (Al.1:26). As a result, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceeding rich, having abundance in all things...(Al.1:29).

Q. That sounds good to me.

A. So mark well what happened soon. These same good people, because of their exceeding riches...which they had obtained by their industry [note that--they worked for it!] ...were lifted up in the pride of their eyes...(Al.4:6)...the people of the church began...to set their hearts upon riches...that they began to be scornful, one towards another...(Al.4:8). The result was great inequality among the people (Al.4:112), and Alma...seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful (Al.4:15). Will ye persist, he said to the people, in the wearing of costly apparel, and in setting your hearts upon...your riches? Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another? (Al.5:53f). This state of things inevitably led to social and economic collapse.

Q. How?

A. Through the operation of what we may call Samuel's Law. The prophet Samuel the Lamanite sets forth the interesting rule, that when "the Economy" becomes the main and engrossing concern of a society--or in the routine Book of Mormon phrase, when "they begin to set their hearts upon their riches"--the economy will self-destruct. This is how he puts it: ...ye do always remember your riches...your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride...envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions and murders, and all manner of iniquity (Hel.13:22). Note well that sequence of folly: first we are well pleased with ourselves because of our wealth, then comes the game of relative status and prestige, leading to competitive manoeuvres, hatred, dirty tricks and finally the ultimate solution. Where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away as the criminal element rises to the top: For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land, and also upon your riches (Hel.13:23). And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them (Hel.13:31)...and then shall ye lament and say...our riches ...have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold our riches are gone from us. Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone...(32-34). Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land...for behold the land is cursed, and all things have become slippery and we cannot hold them. Behold, we are surrounded by demons...(Hel.13:35f). It ends in utter frustration and total insecurity as morals and the market collapse together and the baffled experts surrender. It happened also in Alma's day, when he attributed the wars and contentions among the Nephites...an awful scene of bloodshed (Al.29:9f) to the same human weakness: And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression (AL.28:13). That was at the very time that Korihor emerged with fervid dialectic giving philosophical sanction to that inequality as every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature, etc. (Al.30:17).

Q. How long does the problem persist in the Book of Mormon?

A. Right to the end. Many years after Alma a righteous people were again lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceeding great riches (3 Ne.6:5); careerism became the order of the day in a business-society of many merchants...and also many lawyers, and many officers. And the people began to be distinguished by ranks according to their riches, and their chances for learning...(3Ne.6:10-12) And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up...(3 Ne.6:14). Then came great natural calamities, after which the church was established again by the Lord himself, and the people were all converted unto the Lord...and they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free... (4 Ne.2-3). And there we see what it means to be true freemen. But as long as Satan is permitted to try men and to tempt them by the gold and silver and treasures of the earth we can expect a counter-attack; in time the ideal society established by the Lord was broken up as there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel...and from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more

common among them (4 Ne.24-25).

Q. Shouldn't we change the subject and get back to Moroni?

A. Moroni is still the subject--he was the greatest champion of equality of them all. He had been elected to defend his people, and thus he was preparing to support their liberty...and their peace. Moroni...did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and freedom of his country (Al.48:10-11). For him peace and freedom were as inseparable from each other as both were from equality. So Moron commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride an their nobility and level them to the earth...And...the armies did march forth against them; and they did pull down their pride and their nobility...(Al.51:17f). And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men, and there were not any known by the appellation of king-men; and thus he put an end to their stubbornness and the pride of those peop who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren.(Al.51:21).

Q. There seems to be a note of gloating there.

A. There is no doubt that the king-men had made a horrible nuisance of themselves But the final settlement left them no worse off than anybody else--no hint of punishment or reprisal. Moroni is quite impartial; when he suspects his own superiors of arrogance in governemnt he writes to them: I shall stir up insurrection among you, even until those who have desire to usurp power and authority shall become extinct. Ye behold I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear (Al. 60:27f). Behold, I am Mroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for the honor of the world but for the glory of my God (Al.60:36

Q. Doesn't all that pulling down sound rather drastic?

A. Moroni explains: Had it not been for these king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves...yea, had it not been for the desire for power and authority w those king-men had over us...we should have dispersed our enemies...(Al.60:16). He notes that ambitious Nephites are more guilty than Lamanite invaders even, for it is tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred...while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world...(Al.60:32).

Q. Moroni was a great warrior, a great general, and you say all that he wanted was peace?

A. His first move against Amalickiah was to gather all the people together and make a covenant to keep the peace (Al.46:31), and the immediate result of the lightning campaign that followed was that the Nephites began to have peace; and thus did they maintain peace--for four years. They did have much peace, thanks to Moroni (AL.46:36-38). And as soon as the long war was over, what did he do? As the savior of his country and a national hero he could have been elected to any position he chose, including that of king or dictator--he had achieved the very thing for which Amalickiah had plotted and struggled so long; but instead of going on to a brilliant career Moroni, though still a young man (Al.43:17), yielded up the command of his armies...and retired to his own house that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace --all his words about peace and equality had not been just talk (Al.62:43).

Q. But he was a fierce fighter.

A. High-spirited and short-tempered he certainly was, as his ill-advised letters to Pahoran (Al.60:1ff) and Ammoron (Al.54:11-13) amply attest. But his magnanimous nature as a lover of peace and fair play always prevailed. He always calls the enemy his brothers, with whom he is loathe to contend. Could you ask for a less warlike spirit than that of an army who were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren the Lamanites, who waged war for the space of many years, notwithstanding their much reluctance, who were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea...they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world...(AL.48:21-23)? In battle Moroni always calls an end to the fighting and proposes a settlement the moment the enemy shows signs of weakening (Al.43:54, 44:1,20, etc.), and though surprise and deception are the essence of strategy, he refused to take advantage of an enemy who was too drunk to fight--that would be "unjust", he said (Al.55:18). He even made special excuses for sending spies behind enemy lines (Al.43:23f). With never a thought of punishing a beaten foe, he sought no reprisals even after the gravest

provocations; and he was satisfied to take his defeated adversaries at their word and trust them to return to their homes or settle among the Nephites as they chose (Al.44:6,20; 44:11,19f), even granting them Nephite lands for their rehabilitation (Al.62:16). His attitude is well expressed in an exchange of letters with his friend Pahoran, who writes: We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land. We would not shed the blood of our [Nephite] brethren if they would not rise up against us in rebellion and take the sword against us. We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God--which, indeed, in the Book of Mormon story it sometimes was (Al.62:10-13). We do not desire to be men of blood, says Alma on the battle field, ...ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you. We have not come...that we might shed your blood for power...(Al.44:1-2).

His wars were all defensive: The Nephites were taught to defend themselves, but never to raise the sword except if were against an enemy...to preserve their lives (Al.48:14). While he prepared fortifications for defense...to support their liberty and their peace, he did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and freedom of his country (Al.48:8-10). Above all, this great general renounced the standard military solution to problems of defense.

Q. What is that?

A. The strategic approach. Strategy is by definition deception—its purpose is to fool the opposition. Moroni's "unrealistic" approach to the problem of power is vividly contrasted with the methods of Amalickiah: ...while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful to the Lord their God (Al.48:7). For him, in the end, that was the only guarantee of true security. Moramon tells us that Moroni was a man like Ammon...and also Alma...(Al.48:18). Alma, it will be recalled, after ably functioning as commander of the armies, high priest of the church, and chief judge of the land, laid down all his high offices to go out and try to save things by bearing down in pure testimony among a stiff-necked people (Al.4:19). They gave him a bad time when he came before them without any official clout, but he knew that that was the only solution. Ammon, the mightiest fighting man in the Book of Mormon, laid aside his invincible sword to go tracting from door to door among a bloody-minded enemy nation; his friends and fellow church members laughed at the idea: Do you suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth... as stiff-necked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in bloodshed; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning? That is how they made fun of Ammon's insane proposal. There is only one way to deal with these people, they said--only one language they understand: Let us take up arms against them, that we destroy them and their iniquity out of our land, lest THEY overrun and destroy US (Al.26:25). Kill or be killed--the basic creed of the military to this day. Now my brethren, ye remember that this was their language, says Ammon recalling it (Al.26:24). But what did Ammon do, the most terrible fighter of them all? With his companions, patient in our sufferings... we have traveled from house to house, teaching anyone who would listen...and we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks...(Al.26:28f

Q. You say this man was the greatest of all Book of Mormon warriors?

A. In single combat no one could hold a candle to him.

Q. And he let people laugh at him, and slap his face, and spit on him?

A. He tells us why: And we have suffered...all this, that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul; and we supposed that our joy would be full if perhaps we could be the means of saving some (Al.26:30). He knew that the harder way of winning over an enemy was the better way and all his converts underwent a most marvelous change of heart: Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren; nay they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not (Al.24:6). No less than eight times do they refer to their former deeds of arms as acts of murder for which they are deeply contrite (Al.24:9ff, 25:6, 8,23). They were complete pacifists, and Moroni gave them his unqualified support along with Helaman, another great commander, who labored successfully to dissuade the

Ammonites from taking up arms even to come to the aid of his own sorely-pressed troops in a desperate military crisis (Al.53:11). As a result of that, many Lamanites surrendered and were sent by Moroni and Helaman to dwell with the people of Ammon... (Al.62:17), such as were desirous to join the people of Ammon and become a free people (Al.62:27).

Q. Strange that those pacifists should be singled out as a free people.

A. Who is free to do as he will in a state of war? Once the shooting starts the options vanish. That is why people rush into war--because they think it will put an end to their problems.

Q. But hold on! What about all those men who were put to death for not joining Moroni's army?

A. They have been represented as conscientious objectors and pacifists, but they were the exact opposite. Note that Moroni specifies that he sheds the blood of his Nephite brethren only when they take the sword against us (Al.62:10f). He explains the situation: ...were it not for those king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves...had they been true to the cause of freedom, and united with us, and gone forth against our enemies, instead of TAKING UP THEIR SWORDS AGAINST US, which was the cause of so much bloodshed among ourselves...we should have dispersed our enemies... (Al.60:16). These were no pacifists or foot-dragging Nephites, but a para-military combine out to use force to gain political ends; they were Amalickiahites, both stirring up war with the Lamanites and planning to shed the blood of the opposition at home: ...and whomsoever OF THE AMALICKIAHITES that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom...he caused to be put to death...and there were few (Al.46:35). They had welcomed the approaching Lamanites, glad in their hearts that the government was in trouble, and though Moroni reasoned with them and appealed to their sense of gratitude and fair play, they would not budge from their hostile position: ...when Moroni saw...that the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land, he was exceedingly wroth with them because of the stubbornness of those people whom he had labored with so much diligence to preserve (Al.51:14). Even so, they were not taken from their homes or cut down in the streets, but all met their fate on the battle-field in the very act of laying about them with their swords--they were fairly beaten in an open fight which they invited: ...the armies did march forth against them; and did pull down their pride and nobility, insomuch that AS THEY DID LIFT UP THEIR WEAPONS OF WAR TO FIGHT AGAINST THE MEN OF MORONI they were new down and leveled to the earth (Al.51:18). The victims were not helpless prisoners but armed warrior on the field of battle.

Q. But were not those cut down who refused to take up arms in defense of their country?

A. Cut down, but only on the battle field during the battle: ...all of their leaders who were not SLAIN IN BATTLE, were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period (Al.51:19). Those not slain in battle had also refused to take up arms in defense of their country, yet they were not put to death even when taken with arms in their hands, but were remanded for trial.

Q. How did the trial go?

A. They were all released when they surrendered rather than be smitten down by the sword; they were not even executed for treason, but only were required henceforth to fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage (Al.51:21)--which I think they willingly did in the face of what followed.

Q. What was that?

A. The sight of Amalickiah, the king-men's idea of a Nephite patriot, leading a Lamanite army against the Nephites--when they saw him in his true colors after have won them over "by fraud and deceit" they would willingly enough switch to the faithful Moroni. Four years later under a new leader of the king-men the problem of disaffected Nephites came up again, with the solution: ...those men of Pachus [the new leader] and those king-men who would not take up arms in defense of their country, BUT WOULD FIGHT AGAINST IT, were put to death, this time after being captured and tried (Al.62:9). They had actually joined the Lamanites in the attack, which indeed they had arranged; yet even so they were given a chance to change their minds,

and only those were put to death who stubbornly insisted on denying their freedom (Al.62:10). But they are all warriors--anything but pacifists or conscientious objectors. There are indeed some very conspicuous pacifists and war-objectors in the Book of Mormon besides Ammon and his people, and interestingly enough they include some of the most valiant warriors and seasoned fighters, but we cannot go into their stories here. We are concerned only with king-men and freemen.

Q. Did the Pachus episode put an end to the king-men?

A. Far from it. Though we never hear of the freemen by that name again, the king-men persevere right to the end. They were able to become so numerous in Zarahemla during the war that the governor Pahoran had to flee for his life (Al.61:3); but the people flocked to him in exile as they had flocked to Moroni's banner, and the two leaders were able to join forces and bring the war to a successful conclusion (62:43). Then Moroni went into permanent retirement--free of ambition to the end. But the king-men were not finished.

Q. What next?

A. They went underground--standard procedure when they are beaten--and made themselves indistinguishable from the general public as they bided their time and carried the secret plans and programs that such people love (Hel.1:12). Their leader, Kishku, sought out the services of a professional hit-man by the name of Gadianton, a talented killer, exceeding expert in his craft (Hel.2:3-4), who could be trusted to carry out secret work of murder and robbing in a businesslike and professional manner. He worked out a plan which he guaranteed would put Kishkumen and his gang in complete control of the government. All they had to do was to murder the chief judge Helaman, as they had already murdered his predecessor Pahoran, and get Gadianton himself made judge--he would take care of the rest (Hel.2:4-5). The plan miscarried and the villains had to skip town, and yet before many years this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction, of the people of Nephi (Hel.11:13).

Q. How was that possible?

A. By broadening his operation. The cloak-and-dagger stuff was all very well, but big money has to be respectable money from a visible source, and his new plan was to bring the public into his operation in a big way, allowing anyone to buy in, so that they seduced the more part of the righteous, who seeing how the business prospered had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils (Hel.6:38). Public opinion was so much on their side that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, but then growing ever more respectable until they had overspread all the land... (Hel.6:38).

Q. But how could they be so crude or so naive as to invest in a corporation whose business was robbery?

A. That was the clever part of the plan. As the Nephites did turn into their own way, and did build up unto themselves idols of gold and silver (Hel.6:31), it was easy for the society to swing elections in its favor and so put its people in complete control of the law-courts: from then on they could make whatever they chose to do perfectly legal. Speaking of the days of Moroni, Moron observes that it was the lawyers and judges who started laying the foundation of the destruction of this people (Al.10:27). So with the public in a state of awful wickedness and the combine in control of the nation's wealth in the space of not many years (Hel.6:32), there was little opposition when those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment seats established their kind of justice, doing whatever they pleased under color of legality, condemning the righteous because of their righteousness ~~and the wicked because of their wickedness~~; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money ~~and the righteous because of their righteousness~~; ...held in office at the head of the government to rule and do according to their wills (after all, they were the government), that they might get gain and the glory of the world... (Hel.7:5). This was no undercover operation, but government heavy with the symbols of power and majesty. Ironically, at this very time the Gadianton robbers were hunted down and utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites (Hel.6:37).

Q. Good police work?

A. Of the right kind. They borrowed a page from Ammon and sent out missionaries everywhere to preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, and that did it--they gave up the whole evil business (Hel.6:37).

Q. That sounds unrealistic.

A. As indeed it is, to those who do not know the power of the Gospel. But Alma had used the same method to pull down...the pride and craftiness...which were among his people years before (Al.4:19). That is, instead of marching forth with an army or a posse, though he was up to then the commander-in-chief (Al.4:16), he armed himself with no other weapon than the word of God...seeing no way that he might really claim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them (Al.4:20). But it worked--we make a tragic mistake in underestimating the power of the Gospel to change men's lives if only it is brought to them. Also we are prone to look to force for solutions, though the final word and summing-up of the last great commander in the Book of Mormon is, therefore, he that smiteth shall be smitten again, of the Lord. Behold what the scripture says--man shall not smite, neither shall he judge (Mor.8:19f). The Lamanites got rid of the Gadiantons, but not the Nephites.

Q. Who was left for them to loot if everybody belonged?

A. There were levels of control and profit-taking, as in a modern franchise set-up; at the heart of everything was the original band of charter members, a sort of central committee, whose meetings and manipulations were top-secret (Hel.6:22ff). But there is no love lost among criminals--the devil will not support his children at the last day, says Mormon, but doth speedily drag them down to hell (Al.30:60). Inevitably interests and ambitions conflict, and so with criminal interests fighting each other there were wars throughout all the land among the people of Nephi. And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness...(Hel.11:1).

Q. Why weren't the Nephites destroyed at that time?

A. The intervention of the prophet Nephi saved them when he deliberately asked God to wipe out the economy completely--he prayed for a super-depression: 0 Lord, do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword: but 0 Lord, rather let there be a famine to stir them up in remembrance (Hel.11:4). The famine was horrendous, and put a stop to everything, so that finally the people were willing to give up their stocks and bonds and settle for just their lives: ...when the people saw that they were about to perish by famine (Hel.11:7), they appealed to Nephi who prayed: ...0 Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, and try again if they will serve thee? (Hel.11:16). So they were given another chance and the robbers went, literally, underground: ...the band of Gadiantons...have become extinct, and they have concealed their secret plans in the earth (Hel.11:10). That concealing in the earth is a very important part of the story. The mischief is not finished off--it only sleeps. Since it is Satan's prerogative to try men and to tempt them with the treasures of the earth, the means of doing so will always be within his reach. Accordingly, only four years after the great famine we find a certain number of dissenters from the people of Nephi who had permanently joined the Lamanites some years before, bent on stirring up another war (Hel.11:24). Their motive was robbery.

A. Hadn't they learned their lesson?

Q. They thought they had, for this time they were resorting to a wholly new strategy--terrorism:...they would commit murder and plunder; and then they would retreat back into the mountains, and into...secret places, hiding themselves that they could not be discovered, receiving daily an addition to their numbers...(Hel.11: Becoming strong, they revived the name and the program of the Gadianton society, and their appeal was mostly to the young, who found it exciting (3Ne.12:29f). Their unrelenting campaign of terrorism did make great havoc...among the people of Nephi (Hel.11:27). Armies were sent against them, but to no avail--it was not that kind of a war; the terrorists were winning (Hel.11:28-33). But this had one good result--it kept the rest of the people from slipping back into their old ways: Now this great evil, which came unto the people because of their iniquity, did stir them up to remembrance of the Lord their God (Hel.11:34). But here we have another demonstration of the folly of labelling good guys and bad guys, for only three years later they began to wax strong in iniquity (Hel.11:36) and this time they did not mend their ways (11:36), so that for another two years they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction (Hel.11:37). Nephi the prophet did his best,

but got little support. As usual, it was the king-men who ended up in the saddle under a man called Jacob. Under this renewed pressure the central government finally collapsed and the people followed their local tribal leaders and traditions, and thus they did destroy the government of the land (3 Ne.7:2-3). The "secret combination" had engineered the whole thing (3 Ne.7:9) by stirring up contention everywhere (3 Ne. 7:7), and taking advantage of a climate in which the people did yield themselves unto the power of Satan (3 Ne.7:5), since even the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked (7:7). The secret organization put their man Jacob on the throne (8-9). But then the rest of the populace, notwithstanding they were not a righteous people, yet they were united in hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government (3 Ne.7:11). Having finally gotten rid of their favorite target, the central government, the people immediately regretted its loss and turned with fury on those whom they held responsible for terminating it.

Q. By now the story is getting a bit monotonous.

A. Yes, and it is the same monotonous scenario that tells us of decline and fall in other times and places, including the days that lie ahead for us--for the story has been preserved and published for our benefit.

Q. But don't the recurrent transitions from Good People to Bad People and back again take place awfully fast?

A. The Book of Mormon writers themselves often marvel at the speed with which the picture changes. In the instance last cited the writer notes, And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness... (3 Ne.7:8). And yet if we examine our own experience and history people do pass with such dexterity from one extreme to the other--where wealth is concerned, that is; and in the Book of Mormon, money is the key to the situation. Now the cause of this iniquity was this, Mormon observes, Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world (3 Ne.6:15). Need we remind you that "power, authority, and riches" are what the king-men are always after, and what Moroni and his freemen were determined to "pull down"? Mormon's remark was by way of explaining why the nation had declined so quickly, why they had enjoyed peace but a few years (3 Ne.6:16). Money gets quick results, and the effects of newly-acquired riches are almost instantaneous. At once the happy recipient of a big promotion is expected to change his life-style, move to a better part of town, join different clubs, send his children to different schools, even change his church affiliation for a more fashionable one, or drop an intended bride for one more acceptable to the President's wife and her exalted circle. The instant pride of the foolish milkmaid in the prospects of a new affluence was the same ambition that made a monster of the noble and generous Macbeth overnight. History, literature, and folklore are full of the Fatal Gold--the deadly Rings, the Dragon's Treasure, the Golden Fleece, etc.--that brings quick and inevitable destruction on those that seek and find it. No, my friends, the Book of Mormon does not exaggerate either the relentless efficiency or the speed with which wealth corrupts all those who "set their hearts upon riches and the things of the world."

Q. But just how far can we go in applying the story to ourselves?

A. Why do you think the book was given to us? Angels do not come on trivial errands, to deliver books for occasional light reading to people whom they do not really concern. The matter in the Book of Mormon was selected, as we are often reminded, with scrupulous care and with particular readers in mind. For some reason there has been chosen for our attention a story of how two previous

civilizations on this continent were utterly destroyed and why. Lest the modern reader of this sad and disturbing tale from the dust choose to pass lightly over those fearful passages that come too close to home, the main theme is repeated again and again, so that almost any Latter-day Saint child can tell you what it is: The people were good so God made them prosperous, and then they were bad and got wiped out. What few can tell you is the steps by which the fatal declension took place, without which the story is jejeune and naive.

Q. Can you sum up the steps? I take it they are more or less what you have been talking about.

A. In their prosperity the people "begin to set their hearts on riches", an oft-repeated formula which rings like the stroke of doom. It reminds one of the four steps in Greek tragedy, each leading inexorably to the next--olbia, koros, hybris, and Ate--there, too, power and gain is the theme. With wealth the measure of all things a class-conscious and covetous society ends up under the domination of powerful combinations, leading to internal rivalries and international intrigue that inevitably lead to war, a war of extermination resulting from the willful polarization between equally guilty nations, each justifiably feeling threatened by the other, and each determined to see the sole source of its troubles in the wickedness of the other. The wars solve nothing, even for the winners.

Q. I can see endless debate growing out of those propositions.

A. Fortunately we are not obliged to speculate on the purpose of the Book of Mormon in telling us all this, for its authors and editors have addressed themselves specifically to our generation on the point. Hear the moving appeal of Mormon: And now, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways?(Mor.5:20)...he hath made manifest unto you OUR imperfections, that YE may learn to be more wise than WE have been (Mor. 9:31)...there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth [the expression definitely implies ecology], and there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms...many who will say, do this, or do that, and it mattereth not...Wo be unto such! (Mor.8:30). I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not...but Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing, And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts...unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envyings and strifes, and malice and persecutions...For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor...needy...sick and afflicted. O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God?...Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life and yet suffer the hungry and the needy, and the naked...sick...and afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not? Yea, why do ye build up your secret combinations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans...and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry to the Lord from the ground for vengeance upon your heads? Behold the sword of vengeance hangeth over you and the time soon cometh...(Mor.8:35-41). I used to think that those words about blood crying from the ground were possibly a bit overdrawn--but not after seeing what is going on throughout the world today!

Q. How do you know that these things apply to our particular generation?

A. Mormon's son, Moroni, tells us that the teachings of the book will apply to that generation that recognizes the symptoms; the shoe will belong to the one it fits. Up until now the Book of Mormon has been for the Mormons themselves a romantic tale of the far-away and long-ago, as strange as the Arabian Nights--such things just did not happen in the real world! But now: O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain--and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea even the sword of justice of the eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye suffer these things to be...Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of

this secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain (Ether 8:23-24).

Q. But what can any one do about combinations as secret and as powerful as those mentioned? Who can oppose them?

A. First of all, we are told, we can cease to build them up, for...whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands...and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people (Eth.8:25).

Q. How can you build up a combination if you don't know where it is or even what it is?

A. You can do that by playing the game its way. Once you have been warned, as we have here, that things are being run by such elements, then you know very well that if you aspire to power and gain, influence, status, prestige, in a word success by present-day standards, you can only achieve them by doing everything their way. One ceases to uphold them only by rejecting a whole way of life, regardless of the risk or inconvenience involved.

Q. So you don't uphold them; but they are still there. How can you get at them?

A. As Alma and Ammon did in their day. They went forth bearing down in pure testimony to whoever would hear them, suffering the worst the opposition had to offer, not with the intent to destroy our brethren [who were very wicked and depraved, you ou will recall], but with the intent that PERHAPS we MIGHT save SOME FEW of their souls (Al.26:26). Admittedly it was a risky and dangerous business, but it was all they could do. We are not called upon to seize and occupy enemy territory, for the evil we are combatting is everywhere (D.C.1:1ff), and the only place we can confront it and overcome it is in our own hearts. I cannot make a bad person good by pulling a trigger; yet conversion of sinners to saints is exactly what the Lord requires, to persuade the children of men to do good continually, so that Satan may have no more power over their hearts (Eth.8:26). If men are to overcome Satan in this world they must be alive to do it—shooting them solves nothing.

Q. But we must overcome the hosts of evil.

A. Where are they? This is my doctrine...that the Father commandeth all men, every where, to repent...(3 Ne.11:30). Will you ask God which people you are to love and which you are to hate? Which to deal fairly with and which to cheat? Which to speak the truth to and which to lie to? Which to be kind to and which to be cruel to? The word of God answers all such questions: with the greatest clarity; we have only one game-plan, and that is the call to faith, repentance and charity with which Moroni sums up the Book of Mormon.

Q. You mean we should treat freemen and king-men alike?

A. Of course. In our society who is going to call himself a king-man or not call himself a freeman? To lay official claim to the title is as fatuous as forming a club called "the Great Men" in the expectation of being accepted as such. It is the title in its Book of Mormon context that has concerned us here, and though the definition has taken us on a longer journey than we expected, we have not been wandering, for the ways of the king-men must also be understood if we are to understand the freemen.

Q. How, then, would you define the freemen in the Book of Mormon?

A. As the Nephites who supported Moroni in his opposition to a dangerous coalition led by Amalickiah. That combination consisted of rich Nephites who were outraged by what they considered the interference by "Helaman and his brethren" in their private affairs, monarchists, influential and intriguing families, a self-styled aristocracy, social climbers lifted up in their hearts by their new wealth (Al.45:24), haughty and aspiring judges, power-hungry local officials including almost all the lawyers and the high priests, taking advantage of church positions (3 Ne.6:27), along with many ordinary church members beguiled by the powerful and impressive rhetoric of Amalickiah. Only one comprehensive label fits that combination--

Q. And you would call the freemen left Wing?

A. Not at all. For them there were no wings—equality was their watchword, and their torn and trampled garments and tattered "title of liberty" announced to all that they considered themselves nothing more than God's typically weak and fallible children, whom he loves all alike.

Q. Would you say that the freemen as such had no distinctive characteristics?

A. On the contrary, from our point of view they would be a great oddity. For the Book of Mormon they are just ordinary people, but their character stands out in bold relief as they are pointedly contrasted to the king-men. To wit, they were not militant; it took a great deal to stir them to action, and they made war with heavy reluctance and without rancor, always keeping the fighting to a minimum. They were peace-loving, non-competitive, and friendly, appealing to the power of the word above that of the sword. "Taught never to give offense;" and never aggressive, they were terrible indeed when the king-men pushed them too far, but quick to spare and forgive. They were not class-conscious, but prized equality among the greatest of blessings. In their personal lives they placed no great value on the accumulation of wealth and abhorred displays of status and prestige, e.g. in the wearing of fashionable and expensive clothes. Eschewing ambition, they were not desirous or envious of power and authority; they recognized that they were "despised" by the more success-oriented king-men, and thought of themselves as outcasts from the ways of the world. They shunned the climate of secrecy and conspiracy in which the king-men delighted as they did their aristocratic pretenses and aspirations. They sought the solution to all their problems in fervid prayer and repentance.

Q. It sounds rather boring to me--too idealistic and unrealistic.

A. Yes, that is the way it seems to us. We have disqualified ourselves for that kind of life; nothing short of a fix moves our jaded and over-stimulated appetites any more. But may I point out to you that there are still a few societies left on earth, or were until recently, in which the freemen's way of life survived. I am thinking of certain societies of American Indians and Pacific Islanders.

Q. Come now! They are nature-people, savages.

A. By us they are "despised", to use Moroni's expression. But what stable societies from the New England village to the ancient dwellers on the Nile have not been "nature people", gladly accepting the world that God has given us. It is only in our own day that the bull-dozers, free-ways, high-rises, parking prairies, shopping palaces and industrial "parks" have claimed the land in the name of great combinations dedicated to power and gain. And in that denatured and dehumanized setting modern man finds satisfaction in watching, reading, and living out those stories of contention, violence, intrigue, duels for power, grand theft, murder, high fashion and high sex which have become the daily fare of the millions as they once were for the king-men of old. And ever and always, MONEY is the name of the game.

But there is a ray of hope in the circumstance that the freemen and king-men belong to the same race and culture; it is quite possible for people to move from one category to the other, as they often do in the Book of Mormon, where "one very wicked man" can get a huge following in short order, and just as quickly lose it. We are all both king-men and freemen at heart, just as we are all potential devils or gods.

At the center of Ancient American studies today lies the sovereign question, Why did everything collapse so suddenly, so completely, and so mysteriously?

To this question "no solution acceptable to the majority of students has yet appeared." (Culbert 263). J. Eric Thompson's theory is that people "in an increasingly complex society had largely lost the ability to act for themselves." But the valuable collection of studies edited by T. P. Culbert, The Classic Maya Collapse (U. of New Mex, 1973) reaches an overall consensus which is worth setting forth in the words of the various contributors. It may help to put the Book of Mormon statement in a roughly parallel column.

Culbert, p.91. "Oversuccessful, overstrained, and probably overbearing, Tikal would have been at the mercy of...ecological, social and political catastrophes..."

Jac.2:13-21...you have obtained many riches... ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts... God...condemneth you, and if ye persist...his judgments must speedily come upon you.

E.W.Andrews, p.263 "As civilization becomes more complex, it becomes more vulnerable-- as we are discovering to our increasing horror in recent years...the problems of maintenance and unity increase geometrically."

W.T.Sanders, p.359 "...rise of population density, decline of per capita income, increasing local specialization in crops, heavier reliance upon...the periphery for basic materials and more highly organized trade...closely correlated with militarism (and)...a shift from egalitarian to ranked and stratified society." 363. "Recent studies favor political and economic causes... military incursions...disrupted the trade network...farmland gobbled up the forests... 364 "...an increasing distance between peasant and noble, an economic deterioration in the average peasant's lifestyle, and an increase of nutritionally based diseases." "The only reasonable explanation (for sudden and catastrophic population decline) for the loss (of population) is migration, stimulated by peasant dissatisfaction and permitted by the breakdown of the political system."

M.C.Webb, p.402f "...rivalry over trade was a major cause of war...Probably in many cases allegiance was simply transferred to the intruders." 403. "... the proximate cause (of the great collapse) was the spread of the Post-classic pattern of secular trade and commercial war into the Maya area."

General Summary (G.R.Willey & D.B.Shimkin) p.458. "...Late Classic society was more sharply differentiated into elite and commoner strata than...Early Classic times. As this process of an elite consolidation went on (there was)...a related development of a class of bureaucrats and craft specialists ...461. in the 7th and 8th Centuries "Maya civilization...was integrated at the elite level in a more impressive fashion than ever before," as "signs of regionalism" appear. 470. "Intensified fighting among cities, intercity fighting, crop loss and destruction, malnutrition, and disease...reduced the population" (e.g. 90% at Tikal--Culbert)

p.484. "The most vital aspects" of the collapse are, "1) the role of the elite class, 2) the widening social gulf between the elite and the commoners, 3) the competition between centers, 4) agricultural problems, 5) demographic pressures and disease burdens, and 6) the changing effects on...external trade." 484. "The expansion of the hereditary elite population was clearly a major

3 Ne.6:5...many merchants...and also many lawyers, and many officers. 10-12..and people began to be distinguished by ranks...And thus there began to be great inequality...insomuch that the church began to be broken up.

Mor.1:7. The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, & the people were as numerous almost...as the sand of the sea...8 And...there began to be a war between the Nephites...& the Amalites & the Lemuelites & the Ishmaelites (until)...12...the Lamanites withdrew their design (conquest). Al.28:10-13...the destruction of many thousand lives...an awful scene of bloodshed...And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression.

Al.5:54...will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another...in the persecuting of your brethren who humble themselves ..? "

Al.46:23f...we who are despised...shall not be trodden down...let us preserve our liberty... 27f I shall stir up insurrection...I do not fear you power nor your authority.

Hel.6:5ff. 8...whether it were among the Lamanites or...the Nephites...they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and sell, and to get gain, according to their desire...and 9 they became exceeding rich. 17 (Within a few years)...to get gain...they began to commit secret murders, & to rob and to plunder...(leading to a series of wars, v.20ff).

3 Ne.6:12. and the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning, yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, & others did receive great learning because of their riches.

Hel.13:22...ye do always remember your riches... unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions & murders...31...the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery that ye cannot hold them...

Hel,11:1...contentions did increase...that there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi.

Al.45:21...many little dissensions and disturbances among the people...24...they grew proud...because of their exceeding riches.

Al.51:8...those of high birth...were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people

Al.32:4...upon the hill Onidah (Zoramite expansion) 5...they are despised because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have

force in the geographic expansion of the Late Classical...485...the role of the elite must have become increasingly exploitative as resource margins declined...widening social distance (was) an inevitable accompaniment of the evolution of ranked, and probably kin-based, society into a class structured one...In some areas...the numbers of commoners were being maintained only by recruitment and capture from other centers. Yet the upper class continued to grow, to expand its demands for luxury...and to strive to compete with rival centers and aristocracies...The priestly leaders of these great centers, in their efforts to outdo each other, to draw more wealth and prestige to themselves...must have diverted all possible labor and capital to their aggrandizement. 486. Add to this the competition for trade...and we can see the situation brought to a fighting pitch." All leading to a "rapid down-spiraling to extinction."

487. "Population growth increased demand on resources, 2) growing manpower allows economic expansion, 3) differential growth and longevity divided social classes (the poor were short-lived), 4) efforts to compensate for manpower shortage...were increasingly important causes of war."

The economy forced everything in the direction of war. 490. "...the Maya elite...shared like training...prestige, beliefs, interregional cooperation...which acted to control warfare and promote geographical expansion," while it "increasingly separated them from the commoners."

491. The elite "made no technological or social adaptive innovations which might have mitigated these difficulties. In fact, the Maya managerial elite persisted in traditional directions up to the point of collapse." With Religion and Law on their side, the Elite needed to make no concessions.

Sejourné, p.183. "The spiritual anemia was followed by a state of permanent struggles for power...the whole country (Cent.Mex.) broke up into little communities, each claiming its own history and origin." The battle scenes show the fulfillment of the message of the American Prophet..."Mesoamerican fell little by little into a ruinous materialism...It is as if the message of Quetzalcoatl, the American Prophet, had been consumed by the organic inertia which it was his mission to denounce."

labored abundantly to build with out own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship...what shall we do?

3 Ne.6:27...those judges had many friends and kindreds; and...almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather...together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges...28. And they did enter into a covenant one with another...

3 Ne.30:2 Turn...from...your idolatries, & your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings and your strifes...

Hel.6:31...the Nephites...turned out of the way of righteousness...did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and silver.

3 Ne.6:15...Satan had great power...stirring up of the people...themping them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world...17. And thus...they were in a state of awful wickedness.

Al.26:25...Let us take up arms against them, that we may destroy them...out of the land, lest they overrun and destroy us.

Hel.11:1...there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi. 2. And it was this secret and of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction.

3 Ne.2:17 (It was economic warfare) between the robbers and the people of Nephi...18...the Gadiaton robbers did gain many advantages over them 19...insomuch that they were about to be smitten down, and this because of their iniquity.

Hel.6:38...the Nephites (instead of reform) did build up and support them (the robber societies)...they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils...

AL.10:27...the foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by...your lawyers and your judges.

3 Ne.7:2 The people...did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and his friends; and thus they did destroy the government of the land. 3. And every tribe did appoint a chief...6. And the regulations of the government were destroyed (by the king-men) 7...the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked...11...the tribes of the people...were united (only) in the hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government.