

The Last Days--Who Will Survive?

by

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"And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). That is an established pattern: hard upon the preaching of the gospel comes its rejection followed by destruction and darkness. Each time it is called the end of the aeon, the age or dispensation. This appears most plainly in Joseph Smith's inspired rendering of the so-called "Little Apocalypse", the 24th Chapter of Matthew in which the end of the world is described three times.

First the Lord prophesies "great tribulations on the Jews, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, such as was not before set upon Israel...no, nor ever shall be set again..." (JS 1:18 = Matthew 24:21) It was a true prophecy; never were the Jews so completely obliterated as in the days of the Apostles (70 AD & 130 AD). And yet this was only "the beginning of the sorrows which shall come upon them" (v.19)--the beginning of two thousand years of persecution. Time and again they were on the verge of extinction and only one thing saved them: "And except those days be shortened, there should none of their flesh be saved..." (20) There is no point to foretelling woes from which there is no deliverance and the Lord does not leave the people helpless, but tells them specifically what they are to do.

In the first place those who live in the Judean area are to do what they had always done in such an emergency, they are to flee to the mountains with their hundreds of caves and gorges a few short miles from the city (v. 13). But unlike the other times, they were under no conditions to go back to the city again; no one was to "return to take anything out of his house; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes" (14-15); it was not to be the usual return to the city after the trouble had passed; there are no arrangements whatsoever for returning. The Lord gives fair warning that pregnant women should be got out of the city before it was too late (16); not to wait for winter, which would be a bad time to flee (17), and of course things should be so arranged as not to flee on the Sabbath (17).

So it was foretold and so it happened. The Lord then describes the next End, the end of the Church, which is to take place "after the tribulation of those days which shall fall on Jerusalem..." (21) At that time people will come claiming to have the Gospel but they are not to be believed (21). The saints, "who are the elect according to the covenant," will be led astray by "false Christs, and false prophets (22). To prepare them for this cruel blow which "must come to pass" the Lord is giving them an explanation ahead of time--"see that ye be not troubled...behold, I have told you before" (23-24). The next verse anticipates the sectaries of the desert and the secret conventicles which flourished in the second century; the saints were to join none of them, "...go not forth...believe it not" (25).

Next comes the restoration of the Gospel and some vivid imagery is used. First, "the morning breaks the shadows flee"; "for as the light of the morning cometh out of the east...and covereth the whole earth" so should it be in the time of "the coming of the Son of Man" (26). Now comes one of the most disturbing parables in the Bible which in the true context as given here is

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perfectly clear. The manner of the gathering we are told will be in the same miraculous and mysterious way as the gathering of eagles to a carcass lying in the desert--they appear suddenly and inexplicably in the four quarters of the sky and come together from vast distances to that single spot (27). Just as the breaking of the light from the East describes the manner of the restoration, with no reference to geography, so this passage describes the manner of the gathering--no other comparison is implied in introducing such an unsavory object as a carcass.

It will be a terrible time with "wars and rumors of wars" (28), with world unrest, "nation against nation...famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes..." (29). "And again...iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold..." (30) Yet at that very time "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come..." (31) A thick pall of dust and smoke covers the earth, "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light...(33). The generation in which these things happen will see the final end (34): unlike all the other great destructions this one involves the entire globe when "all the tribes of the earth mourn" (36) Then the Son of Man shall come, but first "He shall send his angels before him with the sound of a trumpet" for a last gathering--"and they shall gather together the remainder of his elect...from the four winds..." (37) "As it was in the days of Noah," it will be business as usual right up until the end which shall come suddenly and unexpectedly--"they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." (42-43) Again an interesting comparison when the Lord likens himself to a thief in the night which has no criminal connotations but is used purely to describe the manner of his coming--it will be a complete surprise. How does one prepare for it then? One does not. Jesus makes it very clear that the only preparation is to live every day as if the Lord were coming on that day. In striking contrast to the Jerusalem situation he gives no specific instructions but explains that when "that shall be fulfilled which is written, that in the last days, two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left; two shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other not" (44-45). Which means that there is no point to devising ingenious schemes for survival, there being but one real course of escape. What you're supposed to do is to watch yourselves at all times (46); be found doing good all the time (49); do not act as if it were going to be business as usual indefinitely, as if the great event belonged to a vague and indefinite future (51). The one thing you can be sure of is that it will be "in such an hour as ye think not" (48). So the only preparation is to do what? To abstain from taking advantage of others, oppressing the poor, and living in luxury (52).

Each of these ends is expressly called the end of the world with the explicit statement of what is meant by the expression "...the end of the world, or the destruction of the wicked, which is the end of the world." (4;31;55) This is followed by the most important explanation of all, namely, that the end of these dispensations is not the destruction of the globe, for "the end of the earth is not yet but by and by," i.e. at some unspecified future date. Just as we do not believe that the creation of the world was the instantaneous beginning of everything, neither do we suppose a Star Wars ending. What we are

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plainly told is that the expression End of the World refers expressly to the destruction of the wicked. So who are the "wicked", and how "destroyed"? The Book of Mormon is the complete handbook on the subject. Twenty times it tells us of the great overburn and each time assures us that while the wicked shall burn as stubble the righteous need not fear. The question that concerns us then, is not how such a miracle can be arranged--that is quite beyond our imagination at present--but who are the righteous and who are the wicked? We may think we have an easy answer to that one, but it is not the answer that the scriptures give us.

The righteous are whoever are repenting, and the wicked whoever are not repenting. "Two men went into the temple to pray," the one a Pharisee who gave thanks to God that he was not a crook or a lecher; he fasted twice a week and paid a full tithe and was very strict in his religious observances. All this was perfectly true. (Luke 18:10ff) The other man was a tax collector and rather ashamed of some of the things he had done, and instead of thanking God by way of boasting, only asked him to be merciful to him a sinner(13). The surprise is that the sinner was the righteous one because he was repenting; the other one who "exalteth himself shall be abased"--because he was not repenting (14). "None but the truly penitent are saved", and that is who the righteous are (Alma 42:22-24).

What do you repent of and how do you repent? It is all a matter of seeking: when you repent you turn from seeking some things to seeking others. What you seek are "the desires of your heart" as Alma says and by them alone you will be judged. "Now the cause of the wickedness of the people was this: Satan had great power unto the stirring up of the people tempting them to seek for power and authority and riches and the vain things of this world" (3rd Ne. 6:15) The condition is first laid out by Nephi and often repeated throughout the Book of Mormon as he sums up his experience: all who seek "to get gain, and...to get power and...to become to popular...and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world...they are those who must be brought low in the dust...who must be consumed as stubble and this according to the words of the prophets." (1 Ne. 22:23) The first commandment given to the Church was "seek not for riches but for wisdom" (DC 6:7, 11:7), the Lord well knowing what most people are prone to seek. We need not expand on how those four things are inseparably joined "in one specious and glittering mass" as Gibbon says of the Romans; the appeal of the prime-time TV show would be defective and our joy would not be full if any of the four were lacking in Dallas, Dynasty or Falconcrest.

The Nephites of old had their own idea of who are righteous and who are wicked, as we do, which conveniently avoided the necessity of repentance until they were forced to it by violent events. And we are warned to "...beware of pride lest ye become as the Nephites of old," who, the same verse tells us, sought the wrong kind of riches--that was their wickedness (DC 38:39).

Very well, what do the righteous seek, isn't "wisdom" rather vague? The righteous in the Book of Mormon seek "to live after the manner of happiness" (2nd Ne. 5:27), and in at least five instances succeeded. It is their example we should follow, but I don't think we will until we get rid of our own definition of who are the good guys and who are the bad guys.

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All the writers in the Book of Mormon are worried men. Nephi ended his days disappointed, discouraged and saddened. He had once led a society that lived "after the manner of happiness," but all that had changed. "...Now after I have spoken these words if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not...wherefore ye are not brought to the light but must perish in the dark... (2Ne. 32:4) And now I Nephi cannot say more; the spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the wickedness and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be....it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing," etc. (7-8). His last words show us the old Nephi, upright, passionate, obedient til the last: "...these words shall condemn you at the last day...for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey." (2Ne. 33:14-15)

If Nephi's last words are neither happy nor hopeful, the first words of Jacob, to whom he turns over the record, are positively alarming as he begins on a note of "great anxiety," because he has been shown what is going to happen (Jacob 1:5). Jacob and his descendants are religious leaders, not kings, working their heads off to forestall a growing trend, trying "to persuade the people not to rebel against God" (7,8). Already under Nephi the Second, they "began to grow hard in their hearts," indulging "somewhat" in Solomon's luxurious vices and "lifted up somewhat in pride"--that "somewhat" still leaves the door open to repentance (Jacob 1:15). But they do all this in the odor of sanctity, justifying themselves by the scriptures (Jacob 2:23). Jacob is very reluctant to speak about this sort of thing (2:2), he "shrinks with shame" at it (2:6); but things are definitely getting worse: "This day [I] am weighed down with much more anxiety...than I have hitherto been" (2:3). "I can tell your thoughts...ye are beginning to labor in sin..." (2:5) At the launching of a new civilization which is to last for a thousand years things must not get out of hand and Jacob is desperate to control the situation. He is plainly embarrassed (2:11) to bring up their sins (5), wickedness (6) crimes (9) and abominations (10) under which the people are beginning to labor--just what are these vices? we begin to wonder, and the answer is loud and clear: "...now this is the word...that many of you have begun to search for gold" (12) They have not been opposed in this, he tells them, for God means the riches of the Promised Land to be enjoyed (12), but what he does not like is the invidious comparison of a competitive economy: "...because some of you have obtained more abundantly than...your brethren ye are lifted up in pride...ye suppose that ye are better than they" (2:13). It is inequality that the prophets deplore throughout the Book of Mormon; pride stands at the head of every one of those many lists of crimes that beset the society. Above all this reverence for wealth will not do, Jacob tells the people (14); do they have any idea how contemptible this thing is in God's sight? If you value his opinion you will not set up your own artificial scale of values (16). There is nothing wrong with having plenty, but let's all be rich! "...be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." (17) Then comes a classic statement on equality: "Ye were proud...of the things which God hath given unto you, what say ye of it? Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in the sight as another" (21).



With seeking for wealth goes a "grosser" attendant vice of licentious living (22ff). God does not bring people to the Promised Land for a repeat of the Old World Follies; here he is determined "to raise up unto me a righteous branch of the fruit of the loins of Joseph. Wherefore, I...will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old" (25-26). God's people may never enjoy the luxury of living "after the manner of the world" (DC 105:3-5). The promised land is a testing ground offering both great opportunity and corresponding risk: "wherefore this people shall keep my commandments...or cursed be the land for their sakes" (29). In the Old World are civilizations which were ancient at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, and they still survive, but of those in the land of promise we are told that when they are ripe in iniquity, when the cup is full, they shall be swept off from the land. Compared with other continents this one has no history, no surviving cultures, though far and wide civilizations whose identity remains a complete mystery have left their ruins and their scattered descendants.

The Nephites always fancied themselves to be good people because the Lord had brought them to the Land of Promise and accordingly styled their enemies as the wicked. And indeed the enemy was a real and constant element in all their operations. The dangerous illusion that the populace may be classified simply as the good guys (our side) and the bad guys (their side) becomes the main theme of the Book of Jacob as of the Book of Mormon itself. While Jacob spares no words in describing the wickedness and depravity of the Lamanites he can declare of his own people at that early date. "Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites" (Jac. 2:35). Where does that leave us? With a polarized world that emerges in Jacob Chapter 3. "...except ye repent the land is cursed for your sakes; and the Lamanites...nevertheless they are cursed with a sore curse, shall scourge you even unto destruction. And the time speedily cometh that except ye repent they shall possess the land of your inheritance...the Lamanites, your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness, are more righteous than you...the Lord will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them" (Jac. 3:3-6). So later: "I will not utterly destroy them but...concerning the people of the Nephites: If they will not repent...I will utterly destroy them" (He1. 15:16f). Bad guys? "...how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great creator" (7). As Isaiah told the Jews at Jerusalem, it is not for them to decide who are God's people--that is for God to decide (Is 1:12).

Throughout the Book of Mormon the wicked have a perfectly beautiful self-image, to which Jacob now refers, "...a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins...because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and...that their filthiness came because of their fathers" (Jac. 3:9), while "your filthiness (may) bring your children unto destruction" (10). Even Nephi in his youth recognized and combatted the natural tendency to put one's self on the right side: "Yea, why should I give away to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, oh my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, oh my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again because of mine enemies" (2 Ne 4:27-29). He recognizes that no matter how vicious his enemies were they were not responsible for his condition. We cannot repent for our enemies--what do we

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know about their personal lives? "Repent" is a reflexive verb, "I do repent me..." I can sorrow for the wickedness of another but I cannot repent of it unless I have caused it. For Nephi the perennial tension was laid down as a condition of life for his people, "inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper and shall be led to a land of promise, choice above all other lands, and inasmuch as thy brethren (the Lamanites) shall rebel against thee they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord (1 Ne. 2:20)...and in that day (fulfilled in Jacob 3:3)...I will curse them even with a sore cursing and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also (23). And if it so be that they rebel against me they shall be a scourge unto thy seed to stir them up in the ways of remembrance" (24). Thus it was God's intention to keep the "Bad Guys" in place permanently and it would be no use for the Nephites to try to get rid of them, since they could be rendered harmless by their own righteousness.

The same message came to Jacob's son Enos: "I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land; and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity" (En. 10). With this goes a vivid description of just how thoroughly bad the Lamanites were; every effort of approach or conciliation by the Nephites was rebuffed, "...our labors were in vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and blood thirsty people...and they were continually seeking to destroy us" (20)--perfect type-casting for the Bad Guys. And yet Enos declares that this dangerous confrontation was exactly what the Nephites needed! They would not behave themselves without being thoroughly scared and admonished: "...nothing save it were exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars...and continually reminding them of death" could have the desired effect of "stirring them up continually to keep them in fear of the Lord" (23). The prophecy of Nephi was being fulfilled, "they shall be a scourge unto thy seed to stir them up unto remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them, even unto destruction" (2 Ne. 5:25). Isn't that all a bit severe? Not with "a stiffnecked people hard to understand" (En. 22). Jarom, the son of Enos, tells how "the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments...they should be destroyed off the face of the land" (Jarom 10); and Jarom explains that it was "by so doing they kept them from being destroyed from off the face of the earth; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance" (Jarom 12)--Nephi's formula again.

Strictly speaking, there are no good guys, "...all men are in a state of nature...a carnal state...in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world..." (Alma 41:11). Hence, "this is my doctrine...that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me" (3 Ne. 11:32). It is as pointless, then, to ask, Who are the Good Guys and who are the Bad Guys? as it is to ask who should repent. The answer is always the same: I am the sinner, and I must repent. How much? Until, like the Son of Man, I am "full of grace and truth." When will that be? Not in this life! Here, all one can hope for is a passing grade.

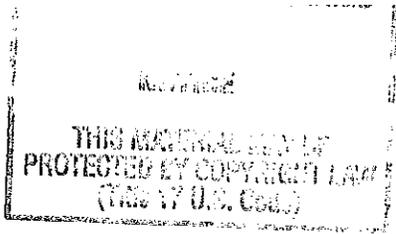
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Jacob's warnings of destruction take on an ominous note when his son Enos prays the Lord that "if it should so be that my people, the Nephites, should...by any means be destroyed" he would preserve their record for the Lamanites (Enos 13, 16). This nervous future-less-vivid condition is supplanted by an alarming future indicative when Enos's son Jarom flatly states, "...these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites" (Jarom 2). The most hopeful thing that he can say for his own people is that "God is exceedingly merciful unto them and has not yet swept them off from the face of the land," in spite of "the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks..." (3). Were the Lamanites, then, so deserving? At that time, Jarom tells us, they "loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts..." (6). The best Jarom could hope for was to postpone the tragic end, and there were many righteous people among the Nephites who set themselves to the task: "...the prophets did threaten the people of Nephi...if they should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the lands" (10).

Why this constant insistence on destruction--can't the people simply be punished or corrected? The ceaseless labors of prophets, priests and teachers was all that "kept them from being destroyed...for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up to repentance" (12). Apparently the severe penalty clause for those who fail to meet conditions of survival in the Promised Land comes with the territory.

And who are the righteous in this land of backsliding Nephites and depraved Lamanites? The answer is written all over the Book of Mormon, the righteous are whoever are repenting. "...I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent..." (2 Ne. 30:2). Nephi is here repeating a lesson earlier given to his brethren Laman and Lemuel who assumed that they were the Good Guys and that the traditional enemies of Israel, the Amorites who formerly inhabited the land, were the Bad Guys. "Not at all!" says Nephi, "...do ye suppose that the children of this land who are in the land of promise, who were driven out by our fathers, do ye suppose that they were righteous? ...Do you suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you nay. Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. ...They were ripe in iniquity...and the Lord did curse the land ...against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers..." (1 Ne. 17:34-35). The same land is blessed and cursed depending entirely on how the people behave, "And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes" (17:38). And now Nephi tells them it was the Jews' turn to come under the curse: "And now...the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and...the day must surely come that they must be destroyed" (17:43).

Laman and Lemuel being patriots weren't having any of that; for them the Jews were ipso facto the Good Guys: "We know that the people...in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord...according to the Law of Moses; wherefore we know that they are a



righteous people and our father hath judged them..." (17:22). It is this very argument to which Isaiah gave such a stinging rebuke. Jarom's son Omni admits that he is a wicked man and has spent his time fighting Lamanites rather than keeping "the statutes and commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 2). Omni's son, Amaron, announces the fulfillment of the prophecy in his own day when "the more wicked parts of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 5): "For the Lord would not suffer, after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from...their enemies...that the words should not be verified which ye spake unto our fathers....Wherefore the Lord did visit them in great judgement; nevertheless he did spare the righteous that they should not perish..." (Omni 6-7). How was it possible to be so selective in times of war and confusion? It was done by the process of leading the righteous away. When the lights went out and the grandson of Amaron could report that there was "no revelation...neither prophecy" in his day (Omni 11), then the righteous man Mosiah was "warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi," taking any who would go with him--it was Lehi all over again, another society of saints in the wilderness.

Mosiah became a king in the land of Zarahemla where his son the righteous King Benjamin was able to establish the semblance of a decent society by using "much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people," speaking "the words of God with power and authority" (Words of Mormon 17). At the time he handed over the crown to his son King Mosiah the conventional great assembly of the nation, a "panegyris" was held after the manner of the ancients everywhere "I have not commanded you to come up here to trifle with words which I shall speak," he tells them (Mosiah 2:9). Benjamin was the idol of his people to whom his courage and skill had brought victory and prosperity. The meeting was in an ecstasy of patriotic fervor. But what did the king do? He studiously threw cold water over every spark of national pride. When he saw that in response to his words "they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them" (Mos. 4:1), he congratulated them on being "awakened to a sense of your nothingness, and you worthless and fallen state... (4:5), believe that you must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God...I would that ye should always retain in remembrance the greatness of God, and your own nothingness...you unworthy creatures...humble yourselves even in the depths of humility" (10-11).

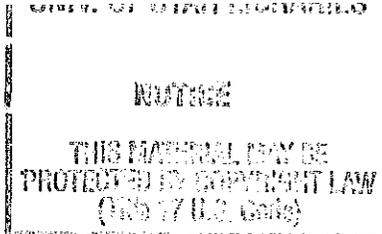
Why this relentless suppression of every impulse to self congratulation? It was to prepare the people's minds to receive the doctrine of the Atonement and the Redemption which otherwise appear strange and alien to prosperous people, and to prepare them to receive the Covenant. Only those who are aware of their lost and fallen state can take the mission of the Savior seriously, and before one can embrace it in terms of the eternities it must be grasped on the level of common everyday reality--Benjamin's people knew that they were in real danger a good deal of the time and thanks to his teachings knew that there was only way they could get through. And now he wishes to bring home to them the need for a Savior and Redeemer as something even more real and urgent than holding off the Lamanites. Their righteousness must be put to a very practical test: "...ye will administer your substance unto him that standeth in need...perhaps thou wilt say the man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay mine hand and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart to him of my substance..." (Mosiah 4:16-17). This equating of busy

acquisition with righteousness is a great sin according to Benjamin (Cf. Al. 4:6), and unless one who commits it "repenteth of that which he hath done he perishes forever," for he has denied our common dependence on God, "and hath no interest in the Kingdom of God. For behold are we not all beggars?" (Mosiah 4:18-19). He wants them to realize that this dependence applies at every level: "...if God...doeth grant unto you whatsoever you ask that is right...O then, how ye ought to impart of your substance to one another" (4:21). The essence of Benjamin's preaching is to purge the people if possible of their flattering self-image as Good Guys.

It was in the time of Mosiah that Zeniff was sent on patrol to spy out the weak points of the Lamanite defenses, "that our army might come upon them and destroy them--but when I saw that which was good among them, I was desirous that they should not be destroyed" (Mosiah 9:1). For this treason the leader of the patrol, "being an austere and bloodthirsty man (a real commando) commanded that I should be slain"--musn't be soft on the Bad Guys! After all Zeniff tells us the Lamanites really "were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage" (Mosiah 9:12), what is more they "taught their children to have an eternal hatred toward the children of Nephi" (10:17). How can you deal with such people? That problem was solved in the proper way at a later time by the mightiest warrior of the Nephites, the great Ammon.

One might expect Ammon the super-swordsman of the Book of Mormon to whom no man or platoon of men could stand up, to wade in and teach the Lamanites a lesson; so when he proposed to go with a few companions among the Lamanites as a missionary everybody "laughed us to scorn," as he reports it (Alma 26:23) "for they said to us: do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of truth?...convince them of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood...transgressors from the beginning, etc., etc. This was their language" (Al. 26:24). Of course everybody was for the standard solution: "let us take up arms against them that we destroy them and their iniquity out of the land lest they over run us and destroy us"--the only realistic solution (Alma 26:25). But not for the mighty Ammon! "We came into the wilderness not with the intent to destroy our brethren, but with the intent that perhaps we might save some few of their souls" (Alma 26:26). And so the terrible warrior "traveled from house to house," patiently suffering every privation, "relying...alone upon the mercies of God" (26:28), teaching the people in their houses and in their streets, being "cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks...and stoned, and bound...cast into prison...suffering all manner of afflictions, and all this that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul" (26:29-30). And that is the way you deal with the Bad Guys.

The result of that effort was a body of converts who accepted Ammon's own philosophy, who "buried their weapons of war, and they feared to take them up lest by any means they should sin..." (Hel. 15:9), the righteous People of Ammon who spent their days repenting of the murders they had committed as acts of war and refusing to fight the Bad Guys under any circumstances (Alma 24:5-30).



When Abinadi came with the usual message: "...except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth" (Mosiah 12:8), the people of King Noah said he was crazy because they were the Good People: "and now O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man?...behold we are guiltless, and thou O king hast not sinned...and behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage...and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper"--peace and prosperity, standing tall all the way (Mosiah 12:13-15). In reply Abinadi pointed out that while being actively religious they were doing the two things so fervidly condemned by Jacob, "If ye teach the Law of Moses why do ye not keep it: Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms...and cause this people to commit sin?" (Mosiah 3:13).

We must not forget those Book of Mormon super-good guys, the Zoramites: hard working, independent, fiercely patriotic, brave, smart, prosperous Zoramites, strictly attending their meetings and observing proper dress standards. What a perfectly wonderful self-image! "Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren...we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children...and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, while all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee...and again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people" (Alma 31:17-18). To Alma these quintessentially Good Guys were the wickedest people he had ever known; "O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and iniquity shall be among this people?...give me strength...for I am infirm and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul" (Alma (31:30). And yet instead of condemning them he prays God to give him "strength to bear his afflictions among them" (31:33), because "their souls are precious" (35). And in what did the "gross wickedness" of these people consist? In this, that "while they cry unto thee O God, their hearts are swallowed up in their pride...puffed 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 unto thee, while others shall perish" (Alma 31:27-28).

The prophet Nephi made the same charge against the people of Zarahemla: "...ye have set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor" (Hel. 7:21). But God is not going to put up with it; he is withdrawing his protection: "The Lord will not grant unto you strength...to withstand against your enemies. For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to the one more than the other, save it be unto those who repent...it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent. For behold they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received: therefore the Lord will...lengthen out their days...even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent" (Hel. 7:22-24). How often does this have to be repeated, why do you think such great pains and sufferings have been experienced to get the message of the Book of Mormon through to us? Nephi goes on, "Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride...which has lifted you up because of your exceeding riches!" (v. 26).

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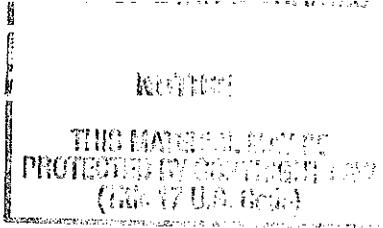
11

In the 12th Chapter of Helaman the demoralizing effect of riches on society is stated as a general rule: "...at the very time when he doth prosper his people...then is the time that they do harden their hearts" (Hel. 12:2). Why do they do it, "O how great is the nothingness of the children of men"--thus is their beautiful self-image rebuffed (Hel. 12:7).

Jesus Christ visiting the Nephites personally saw to it that the preaching of Samuel the Lamanite be included in the record, from which it had been omitted, perhaps because he was an alien or spoke too frankly. "For this cause," said Samuel to the people of Zarahemla, "hath the Lord caused that a curse should come upon the land and also upon your riches...ye do cast out the prophets and do mock them (Hel. 13:23), and now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the day of our father of old, we would have not slain the prophets, we would not have stoned them and cast them out" (Hel. 13:24-25). Behold ye are worse than they...if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord which testifies of your sins and iniquities you are angry with him...you will say that he is a false prophet...of the devil..." (26) They want to be told that they are the good people and so when a man comes and tells them not what is wrong with Zarahemla but what is right with Zarahemla they will "say that he is a prophet..." and reward him with large sums of money, "because he speaketh flattering words anew and he saith that all is well then you will not find fault with him" (28).

Giddianhi, the robber leader, insists that his followers are the good guys who are only trying to protect their sacred rights and property against the bad guys, "behold the many wrongs which ye have done unto them..." (3 Ne. 3:4). He is the chief of the large and powerful "secret society of Gadianton; which society and the works thereof I know to be good;" (3 Ne. 3:9-10) and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down to us. The chief is merely trying to "recover their rights and government," lost to them "because of your wickedness in retaining from their rights, etc" (3 Ne. 3:10). It is the rigid tribal morality of the Mafia.

The shining hero of the Book of Mormon is Moroni, "...if all men had been...like unto Moroni...the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men...the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever" (Alma 48:17). You do not expel evil from "the hearts of the children of men" by shooting them or blowing them up or torturing them--the Inquisition operated on that theory. Nor can "the powers of hell be shaken" by heavy artillery or nuclear warheads. The devil does not care who is fighting or why, as long as there is fighting; "he is the father of contention, and he stirrith up the hearts of men to contend in anger one with another" (3 Ne. 11:29). "Behold this is not my doctrine to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine that such things should be done away...I will declare unto you my doctrine...that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me" (3 Ne. 11:30-32). There is no possibility of confrontation here between Good and Bad. This is best shown in Alma's duel with Amlici. The Amlicites are described as coming on in all the hideous and hellish trappings of one of our more colorful rock groups, glorying in the fiendish horror of their appearance (Alma 3:4-6). Alma on the other hand was "the man of God" who met the monster Amlici "with the sword face to face" (Alma 2:29), and of course won. Yet the Nephites considered that debacle to be "the

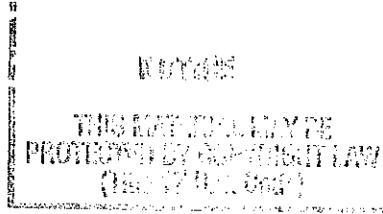


judgements of God sent upon them because of their wickedness, and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty" (Alma 4:3). The moral is that whenever there is a battle both sides are guilty.

Nobody knew that better than Moroni whose efforts to avoid conflict far exceeded his labors in battle. When he saw trouble ahead he got ready for it by "preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God" (Alma 58:7). His military preparations were strictly defensive and he was careful to do nothing that would seem to threaten the Lamanites; "we would never fight them," he said, "if they did not come up against us" (Cf. Moses 7:13); all of his battles were fought on Nephite soil (Alma 48:8-10). We are repeatedly reminded that Moroni was, "a man that did not delight in bloodshed". By him "the Nephites were taught to defend themselves...and they were also taught never to give an offense, and never to raise the sword except it were to preserve their lives" (Alma 48:14). Any thought of preemptive strike was out of the question; Moroni even apologizes for espionage, for if they only had sufficient faith "God would warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger and...make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves" etc. This was a great load off their minds "and Moroni's heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood" but "in keeping the commandments of God, yea and resisting iniquity" (Alma 48:15-16). Resisting iniquity where? In the only place it can be resisted, in their own hearts. Not only was a preventive strike out of the question but Moroni's people had to let the enemy attack at least twice before responding, to guarantee that their own action was purely defensive (Alma 43:46). The highest compliment that Alma can pay Moroni was, "Behold he was a man like unto Ammon" (Alma 48:18), who, as we have seen, renounced all military solutions to the Lamanite problem.

Later it was the decision of the Nephites after a series of brilliant victories to take the initiative against the Lamanites, and "cut them off from the face of the land" that made a conscientious objector of Mormon, their great leader, who "did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader" (Mormon 3:10-11). "When they had sworn by all that was forbidden them...that they would go up unto to their enemies to battle and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren [a perfect John Wayne situation], behold the voice of the Lord came (to Mormon) saying: vengeance is mine and I will repay" (Mormon 3:14-15). So Mormon from being top brass becomes a detached observer and reporter for our express benefit, "I did stand as an idle witness....therefore I write unto you Gentiles, and also unto you House of Israel" (Mormon 3:16-17). He explains that the fatal mistake of the Nephites was to take the offensive: "And it was because the armies of the Nephites went up unto the Lamanites that they began to be smitten; for were it not for that the Lamanites could have no power over them" (Mormon 4:4). Then comes the bottom line: "But behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed" (Mormon 4:5). The battle is not between good and bad--"the wicked shall destroy the wicked".

Mormon places the Nephites and the Lamanites side by side for our benefit. As the war between them continued each sunk deeper and deeper into



depravity. First, after a Nephite victory there were four years of peace devoted not to repentance but to warlike preparations as the Lord removed "his beloved disciples from among them...because of their wickedness and unbelief" (Moroni 1:11). The Lord even forbade Mormon to preach repentance, which preaching would now do no good, "because of the hardness of their hearts...the land was cursed for their sakes" (Moroni 1:17). They had passed the point of no return. The people had begun to worry and seek safe investments, to "hide up their treasures in the earth." But the Dow Jones kept going down as "their riches became slippery...that they could not hold them, nor retain them again" (Moroni 1:18). It is interesting that amid all this military fury riches still held the number one position in their minds. Then, as at the end of the Antique World, total lack of security forced people to turn in desperation to "sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics"--they felt haunted, helpless, "surrounded by demons!" (1:19). "The land was filled with robbers," insecurity was total but "notwithstanding the great destruction which hung over my people they did not repent...and it was one complete revolution throughout the land" (Mormon 2:8). Then come those awful words, "and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them" (Mormon 2:15). Though Mormon relented under extreme pressure and led the army to more victories (Mormon 2:22ff), "Nevertheless the strength of the Lord was not with us; yea, we were left to ourselves" (Mormon 2:26). The poor fools after all the Lord had done for them "they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them and granted unto them a chance for repentance"--his arm was still stretched out (Mormon 3:3).

Meanwhile, what were the bad guys up to? The Lamanites had been sacrificing Nephite women and children (Mormon 4:15), yet "notwithstanding the great abomination of the Lamanites, it did not exceed that of our people," who were practicing cannibalism "for a token of bravery" (Moroni 9:9). When things reached this state Mormon says "I pray to God to witness the return of his people...or their utter destruction; for I know that they must perish except they repent" (Moroni 9:22). "O the depravity of my people...without order and without mercy" (Mormon 9:18). Mormon actually prays for the destruction of the people he had loved and led (Mormon 3:12f). "And if they perish it will be like unto the Jaredites because of the willfulness of their hearts seeking for blood and revenge" (Moroni 9:23).

And all this is meant for us: "...these things must surely be made known....a knowledge of these things must come unto a remnant of these people and also unto the Gentiles" (Mormon 5:8), by being "hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time." As to Mormon's own people, the Lord hath reserved their blessings, which they might have received in the land, for the Gentiles who shall possess the land (Mormon 5:19). But they will have another chance, for "after they have been driven and scattered by the Gentiles, then the Lord will remember the covenant" (Mormon 5:20). Then it will be our turn to be concerned: "and then, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from evil ways?" (Mormon 5:22) That hardly describes us as good guys; there is only one hope for them: "I prayed...that he would give unto the Gentiles grace," says Moroni, "that they might have charity"--that was the only thing that could save them, unilateral generosity; if I expect anything in return for charity except the happiness of the recipient, then it is not charity. The Lord's answer to Moroni is chilling: "And the Lord said unto me: if they have not charity it mattereth

not unto thee..." (Ether 12:36-37). Mormon was shown our generation, which he describes with photographic accuracy: "Behold I speak unto ye as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ has shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:35). He then proceeds to describe a people immensely pleased with themselves where "there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying and strifes, and malice and persecution, and all manner of iniquities," the high living fiercely competitive crime-ridden world of the 1980's (Mormon 8:36). And then to the heart of the matter: "For behold ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches [communists do not adorn churches], more than ye do love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted" (Mormon 8:37). Why, he asks, do we allow the underprivileged to "pass by you and notice them not", while placing high value on "that which hath no life" (8:39). All the meanness and smugness of our day speaks in that phrase; and these very self-satisfied, church-conscious, and wicked people are about to be destroyed by war: "Behold the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer" (8:41).

We have not mentioned the case of the Jaredites; it should hardly be necessary to tell the story of Shiz and Coriantumr, each obsessed with the necessity of ridding the world of his evil adversary. Both sides were exterminated. Not many years ago all of this Book of Mormon extravaganza belonged even for Latter-day Saints to the world of pure fantasy, of things that could never happen in the modern civilized world--total extermination of a nation was utterly unthinkable in those days. But suddenly even within the past year or two a very ancient order of things has emerged at the forefront of world affairs; whoever would have thought it--the Holy War! The ultimate showdown of the Good Guys with God on their side versus the Godless Enemy. It is the creed of the Ayatollah, the Jihad, Dar-al-Islam versus Dar-al-Harb, the Roman ager pacatus versus the ager hosticus. On the one side Deus vult, on the other Bi'smi-llah; it is a replay of the 12th century, the only way the Good People can be free i.e. safe, is to exterminate the Bad People or as Mr. Lee counsels, to lock them up before they do any mischief--that alone will preserve the freedom of Us Good People.

And now there is even talk of Armageddon with Gog and Magog the two giants of the North ending in extermination. There are those who insist that we are the Good Guys fighting the Bad Guys at Armageddon, but there is no such affair in the scriptures, where the only actual fighting mentioned is when "every man's sword is against his brother"--the wicked against the wicked (Ezek. 38:21). Then God intervenes with pestilence, hailstones, fire, and brimstone (Ezek. 38:22), with much slaughter, but no mortal army has a hand in it (Ezek. 39:11). In the New Testament version it all happens after the Millenium, when fire comes out of heaven and destroys the army beseiging the saints, but there is no mention of a battle anywhere (Rev. 28:ff). We have seen that for us there is only one way to prepare for the great events ahead (Matt. 24:41=JS 1:40-41), and that is to be found doing good whenever the Lord comes with no one taking advantage of temporary prosperity "to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken" (Matt 48:50=JS 2:51-53).

Mormon's message to us is not without a word of hope and advice: "Behold I speak unto you as though I spoke from the dead; for I know that ye shall hear my words....give thanks unto God that he hath manifest unto ye our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been" (Mormon 9:30). His address is expressly to the inhabitants of "this land" into whose hands "this book" shall come; specifically, it is meant for us.

