

August 12–18: Alma 43–52, "Stand Fast in the Faith of Christ"

Overview

President Ezra Taft Benson said, "From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war" (CR, Oct. 1986)

Important lessons from the "war chapters" include:

- When and why we are justified to go to war
- Freedom and liberty are essential for those who follow Christ
- Methods used by evil people to gain power and destroy our liberty

Liberty

Alma tells us about the wickedness of former Nephites - the Zoramites and Amalekites

A few weeks ago we studied about Alma's work among the Zoramites and how hard-hearted and murderous they were. Now we learn that they joined the Lamanites along with other Nephite deserters

Alma 43:3-6

3 And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges.

4 For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon.

5 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader.

6 And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites.

Why do you think Amalekites and Zoramites had "a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites"?

Neal A. Maxwell

"Willful dissent ages ago [among the Nephites] produced yet other symptoms that are worthy of our pondering today as life confronts us with determined dissenters who leave the Church - but who then cannot leave the Church alone." (Plain and Precious Things, pg. 72)

Alma explains that the purpose of the Zoramites, Amalekites, and Lamanites was to destroy the freedom of the Nephites and bring them into bondage

Alma 43:7-10,14

7 Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs.

8 For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

9 And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires.

10 For they knew that if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites, that whosoever should worship God in spirit and in truth, the true and the living God, the Lamanites would destroy.

14 Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites; and thus the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren, even unto bloodshed.

What did the Nephite dissenters and Lamanites hope to accomplish by attacking the Nephites?

(usurp great power over them
he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage)

Why were the Nephites justified in going to war?

(preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires)

Ezra Taft Benson

“Our stand for freedom is a most basic part of our religion; this stand helped get us to this earth, and our reaction to freedom in this life will have eternal consequences. Man has many duties, but he has no excuse that can compensate for his loss of liberty.” (CR, Oct. 1966)

The importance of preserving the right to worship is of upmost importance. The need to do so is mentioned seven times in this weeks reading assignment. We will see that preserving the right to worship is something captain Moroni writes on the Title of Liberty

Mormon points out that these Nephite deserters are more numerous than the Lamanites. Clearly the Nephites are outnumbered and their enemies would do anything to destroy them

Moroni was appointed captain over the Nephite army when he was just 24. Verses 18 thru 22 describe how Moroni prepared his army for war (specifically by using body armor), and how, upon seeing this, the Lamanites retreated and would not

fight.

Alma 43:23

23 But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness Moroni sent spies into the wilderness to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

What measures did Moroni go to “to defend [the Nephites] against the Lamanites”?

He sent spies AND asked the prophet Alma

Ulisses Soares

"Captain Moroni... had the courage to defend the truth at a time when there were many dissensions and wars which put at risk the very survival of the entire Nephite nation. Although he was brilliant in exercising his responsibilities, Moroni remained humble. This and other attributes made him an extraordinary instrument in the hands of God at that time... All of Moroni's attributes stemmed from his great faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ and his firm determination to follow the voice of God and His prophets." (CR, April 2015)

From the revelation received by Alma, Moroni intercepts the Lamanites. Verses 24-54 describe the first part of the battle.

Lets read Moroni's words to Zerahemnah after he knows the Nephites had gained a decisive advantage

Alma 44:1-6

1 And it came to pass that they did stop and withdrew a pace from them. And Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you.

2 Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage. But this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion.

3 But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith.

4 Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.

5 And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who

has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, and by the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children, by that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country; yea, and also by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness; and by all that is most dear unto us—
6 Yea, and this is not all; I command you by all the desires which ye have for life, that ye deliver up your weapons of war unto us, and we will seek not your blood, but we will spare your lives, if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us.

What prompted Moroni to tell Zerahemnah “now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith”?

(ye behold that the Lord is with us
ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands
ye see that this is the true faith of God
ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us)

What do you think Moroni means by "that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country"?

Why is Moroni so anxious to stop the fighting and have the Lamanites return peacefully to their lands?

Hugh Nibley
“[Moroni's] 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.... In battle Moroni always calls an end to the fighting and proposes a settlement the moment the enemy shows signs of weakening.... With never a thought of punishing a beaten foe, Moroni sought no reprisals even after the gravest provocations. 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, even granting them Nephite lands for their rehabilitation.” (The Prophetic Book of Mormon, pg. 353)

Zerahemnah refuses the peace terms and so the fighting continues. But when the Lamanites are about to be destroyed Zerahemnah makes the vow for peace and the Lamanites return to their land (44:7-24)

In chapter 45 Alma prophesies to Helaman about the fate of the Nephites. He departs the land of Zarahemla and is “never heard of more.” Some speculate that Alma was taken up in the same manner as Moses.

A short time later the Nephite dissenter Amalickiah wars against Moroni. Lets read what precedes the destruction caused by Amalickiah.

Alma 45:22-24

22 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth to establish the church again in

all the land, yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches.

23 And now it came to pass that after Helaman and his brethren had appointed priests and teachers over the churches that there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman and his brethren;

24 But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words, to walk uprightly before God.

Recall that Moroni told Zerahemnah that “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him.” But -
What was beginning to take root in the church once the Nephites began to prosper?

(they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts)

And, in the pride cycle, what does pride lead to?

Destruction

Now lets read about Amalickiah

Alma 46:4-10

4 And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power.

5 And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people.

6 Thus they were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions, notwithstanding the preaching of Helaman and his brethren, yea, notwithstanding their exceedingly great care over the church, for they were high priests over the church.

7 And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites, and their great rejoicings which they had had because of their deliverance by the hand of the Lord.

8 Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one.

9 Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men.

10 Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.

What did Amalickiah do to accomplish his desire to be king and to “destroy the foundation of liberty”?

(he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly)

Why do you think that he was so successful in causing so much destruction among the Nephites?

(he would make them rulers over the people
many in the church who believed in the flattering words
Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God,
yea, how quick to do iniquity)

Note the “thus we see” in verses 8 & 9. Mormon often uses this phrase in the Book of Mormon when he has a specific lesson for us

Ezra Taft Benson

"The children of Israel, willing to sacrifice liberty, wanted Moses to be their king. Generations later their descendants begged Samuel the prophet to give them a king. He pointed out the fallacy of their reasoning. Samuel, like other great spiritual leaders, ancient and modern, saw the results that would follow the surrender of liberty.

“In that sacred volume of scripture, the Book of Mormon, we note the great and prolonged struggle for liberty. We also note the complacency of the people and their frequent willingness to give up their liberty for the promises of a would-be provider.

“The record reveals that a man 'of cunning device... and... many flattering words... sought... to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them'" (CR, Oct. 1962)

Lets contrast Amalickiah with Moroni, and read Moroni's response

Alma 46:11-13

11 And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he 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—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

13 And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren,

so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

What did Moroni do to try to make sure that “the blessings of liberty [would] rest upon his brethren”?

(the title of liberty
and he prayed mightily unto his God)

Ezra Taft Benson

"Moroni raised a title of liberty and wrote upon it these words: 'In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.'... All these things were a part of his religion, as they are of our religion today.'

"Should we counsel people, 'Just live your religion. There's no need to get involved in the fight for freedom'? No, we should not, because our stand for *freedom is a most basic part of our religion*; this stand helped get us to this earth, and our reaction to freedom in this life will have eternal consequences. Man has many duties, but he has no excuse that can compensate for his loss of liberty." (CR, Oct. 1966)

Moroni ask the Nephites to enter into a covenant to maintain liberty, rights, and religion

Alma 46:18-21

18 And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions.

19 And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:

20 Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.

21 And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, 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, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.

What does Moroni's actions teach us about the importance of liberty when it comes to religious freedom?

(maintain their rights, and their religion
they would not forsake the Lord their God)

Moroni gathers an army to stop the Nephite dissenters from making Amalickiah king. Amalickiah escapes to the Lamanites (46:28-35). Chapter 47 tells us how Amalickiah becomes king of the Lamanites thru deceit and murder.

Lets read what Amalickiah does to bring war upon the Nephites

Alma 48:1-4

1 And now it came to pass that, as soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom 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.

2 And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished his designs thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.

3 Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites.

4 For he was determined, because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage.

Amalickiah was able to bring the Lamanites to war against the Nephites by “had hardened [their] hearts, blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger”

How do you think it is possible for an individual to harden someone else’s heart to that extent?

(he did appoint men to speak... against the Nephites.

And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites)

Lets read how Moroni prepared the Nephites for war

Alma 48:7-10

7 Now it came to pass that 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 unto the Lord their God.

8 Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land.

9 And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

10 And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians.

As opposed to Amalickiah hardening the hearts of the Lamanites by “fraud and

deceit”-

What actions did Moroni take to prepare the Nephites for war?

(preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God)

Alma 48:11-13,17

11 And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery;

12 Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

13 Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.

17 Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.

Why do you think Mormon concluded that “if all men... were... like unto Moroni... the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men”?

(a man of a perfect understanding
a man whose soul did joy in the liberty
a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God
a man who did labor exceedingly for... his people
a man who was firm in the faith of Christ)

Hugh Nibley

“By all means, let us take Captain Moroni for our model and never forget what he fought for - the poor, outcast and despised; and what he fought against - pride, power, wealth and ambition; or how he fought - as the generous, considerate and magnanimous foe, a leader in every sense.”
(Heroes From the Book of Mormon, pg. 130)

Alma 48:14-16

14 Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.

15 And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war,

according to their danger;

16 And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity.

When should members of the Church feel justified in supporting war?

(defend themselves against their enemies
except it were to preserve their lives)

What were the Nephites promised that they would receive if they only went to war when their lives and liberty were threatened?

(God would... warn them to flee, or to prepare for war
the Lord would deliver them)

Ezra Taft Benson

“The only real peace - the one most of us think about when we use the term - is a peace with freedom. A nation that is not willing, if necessary, to face the rigors of war to defend its real peace-in-freedom is doomed to lose both its freedom and its peace! These are the hard facts of life. We may not like them, but until we live in a far better world than exists today, we must face up to them squarely and courageously.” (An Enemy Hath Done This, pg. 161-2)

Chapter 49 describes that, because of Moroni's preparation, the Lamanites are pushed back at their first attempt. Lets read the different reactions to the end of this first battle

Alma 49:25-28

25 And it came to pass, that when the Lamanites saw that their chief captains were all slain they fled into the wilderness. And it came to pass that they returned to the land of Nephi, to inform their king, Amalickiah, who was a Nephite by birth, concerning their great loss.

26 And it came to pass that he was exceedingly angry with his people, because he had not obtained his desire over the Nephites; he had not subjected them to the yoke of bondage.

27 Yea, he was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood; and this because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people.

28 And it came to pass, that on the other hand, the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies.

Amalickiah was exceedingly angry because the Nephites were still free and not

subjected to him.

The Nephites recognized that they were delivered from captivity because God's blessings and power

Mormon states that this exemplifies how the Lord blesses the Nephites when they keep their covenants but if they don't then they are left to their own strength and brought down to bondage

Alma 50:18-22

18 And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land.

19 And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

20 Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

21 And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

22 And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

There is another "thus we see" from Mormon in in verse 19-

What do you think Mormon wants us to learn from the miraculous victory of the Nephites?

(these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi)

Another group formed among the Nephites who desired more power by changing the laws establishing a king over the Nephites.

When Amalickiah came again against the Nephites these king-men refused to oppose the Lamanites in hopes that the Nephites would be brought under bondage and they would be given more power and authority

Alma 51:13,17-21

13 And it came to pass that when the men who were called king-men had heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against them, they were glad in their hearts; and they refused to take up arms, for they were so wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty, that they would not take up arms to defend their country.

17 And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against

those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty.

21 And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men, that there were not any known by the appellation of king-men; and thus he put an end to the stubbornness and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren, and to fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.

Again we see that the real problem for the Nephites came because of wickedness within.

Amalickiah was killed by Teancum but his brother, Ammoron, took his place and continued the war against the Nephites.