

July 15–21: Alma 30–31, “The Virtue of the Word of God”

Overview

I can think of two false teachers in the Book of Mormon that Mormon gave specific labels to. First Nehor whom he referred to as practicing Priestcraft (Sherem from Jacob would fit here).

Priestcraft:

There is a God
But He will save us regardless
The priest is better than the followers
And he should be supported
Hearts are on vain things of the world

The other (in today's lesson) Korihor, whom he labels as an Anti-Christ.

Anti-Christ:

There is no Christ
No sin
No redemption
No after-life
You can not know what you do not see
Prophecies are foolish tradition
Will not believe without a sign
Religion is bondage
Believers have frenzied mind
Priests exploit believers
Prosper by your genius and strength
Whatever a man does is OK
No shame in wickedness

Pres. Benson makes it clear that their deceptive doctrine is prominent in our day and that the Book of Mormon helps us to recognize it.

Ezra Taft Benson

“God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.” (CR, April 1975)

Korihor the Anti-Christ

Mormon tells us what Korihor was teaching the people

Alma 30:6,12-16

6 But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the

people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying:

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

What are some of the arguments Korihor uses to attempt to convince them that they should not believe in Christ?

(For no man can know of anything which is to come
ye cannot know of things which ye do not see)

According to Korihor, what is the damage that comes from believing in Christ?

(yoke with foolish things)

Todd Christofferson

"On the surface such philosophies seem appealing because they give us license to indulge any appetite or desire without concern for consequences. By using the teachings of Nehor and Korihor, we can rationalize and justify anything. When prophets come crying repentance, it 'throws cold water on the party.' But in reality... the gift of repentance is the cause for true celebration." (CR, Oct. 2011)

Alma 30:17-18

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but 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.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

How would you describe the philosophy that Korihor was trying to convince the Nephites to believe in?

(every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength)

Korihor was a secular humanist, as was Nehor, his predecessor. He believed that if success came it was because the individual had earned it. If progress was made it was because of hard work, consistent effort, and fulfillment of one's goals. The humanist focuses upon man: Man is the measure; all things rotate around man; man is the center of the universe; man has the power to solve his own problems, the power to make himself happy, the power to do anything he sets his mind to. Humanism points toward man's genius, toward man's strength, toward man's works and accomplishments. (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 3:204)

What is wrong with believing that “every man [prosper] according to his genius and... strength”?

Humanism points toward man's genius, toward man's strength, toward man's works and accomplishments. It is an anti-Christian philosophy and is thus false, devilish, and destructive. It draws man's attention away from the one source which could bring liberation from this world's woes and give satisfaction and happiness in the world to come. It deflects one's vision away from Christ and away from that grace or enabling power which comes from him. (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 3:204)

Boyd K. Backer

"True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.... That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel." (CR, Oct. 1986)

The fact that the philosophy of secular humanism is prominent in our day was foretold by Nephi.

2 Nephi 28:4-5,31

4 And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

5 And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men;

31 Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost

If we believe that our accomplishments are only a result of our ability then we have no reason to put any hope or faith in Christ.

These points arguments are reinforced when by Korihor is questioned by the High Priest of Gideon

Alma 30:22-23,27-28

22 And it came to pass that the high priest said unto him: Why do ye go about perverting the ways of the Lord? Why do ye teach this people that there shall be no Christ, to interrupt their rejoicings? Why do ye speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?

23 Now the high priest's name was Giddonah. And Korihor said unto him: Because I do not teach the foolish traditions of your fathers, and because I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads, but be brought down according to thy words.

27 And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.

28 Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do according to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God—a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

According to Korihor, how are people “kept down” by believing in Christ?

(they durst not look up with boldness
they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.
they durst not make use of that which is their own)

Todd Christofferson

"As in the days of Nehor and Korihor, we live in a time not long before the advent of Jesus Christ—in our case, the time of preparation for His Second Coming. And similarly, the message of repentance is often not welcomed. Some profess that if there is a God, He makes no real demands upon us.... Others, with Korihor, deny the very existence of Christ and any such thing as sin. Their doctrine is that values, standards, and even truth are all relative. Thus, whatever one feels is right for him or her cannot be judged by others

to be wrong or sinful." (CR, Oct. 2011)

He is brought before Alma and continues to make the same arguments and ask the same questions. Lets read Alma's response

Alma 30:30-36

32 Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people.

33 And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time.

34 And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren?

35 Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? And now, believest thou that we deceive this people, that causes such joy in their hearts?

36 And Korihor answered him, Yea.

After discrediting Korihor's assertion that those who serve do it for money -
What does Alma give as the reason he desires to labor in the church?

(save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren)

Alma 30:37-44

37 And then Alma said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

38 And he answered, Nay.

39 Now Alma said unto him: Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come.

40 And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only.

41 But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true?

42 Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God.

43 And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

44 But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God?

Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.

How does Alma address Korihor's assertion that there is no evidence of the existence of Christ?

(I have all things as a testimony that these things are true
the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets
all things denote there is a God)

Korihor insisted on a sign and was given the sign by being struck dumb and apparently deaf. He gives the following reasons for his actions to Alma.

Alma 30:53

53 But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown God. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me.

He was successful because the message was pleasing to the carnal mind. What do you think it is about the message of the anti-Christ that is “pleasing unto the carnal mind”?

Teaching the Zoramites

Next we have Alma and his group preaching to the Zoramites. The Zoramites provides us with another example of false doctrine and teachings

Alma 31:1-2,5

1 Now it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

2 For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

Why do you think the word of God “[has] more powerful effect” than fighting and war?

Lynn G. Robbins

"Alma discovered this same principle.... Why? Because the sword focused only on punishing behavior while preaching the word changed people's very nature—who they were or could become." (CR, April 2011)

Henry B. Eyring

“The word of God is the doctrine taught by Jesus Christ and by His prophets. Alma knew that words of doctrine had great power. They can open the minds of people to see spiritual things not visible to the natural eye. And they can open the heart to feelings of the love of God and a love for truth.” (CR, April 1999)

Alma sees how the Zoramites practiced their religious belief

Alma 31:12-18

12 Now, when they had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld;

13 For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person.

14 Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying:

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

Do you see any similarities between the anti-Christ teachings of Korihor and the religious practices of the Zoramites?

(thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ)

They both believed some people, or group of people, are better than others

Do you see any difference between the teachings of Korihor and the practices of the Zoramites?

Korihor: “every man prospered according to his genius and... strength
Zoramites: “thou hast elected us to be thy holy children”

Richard Lloyd Anderson

"The Son of God came to call all men to repentance—because all mankind has sinned. But some are so virtuous in their own eyes that they will not listen. Jesus told many parables that illustrated the narrow-mindedness of the self-righteous. Before one such story—the parable of the Pharisee and the publican—Luke mentions that Jesus 'spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.' (Luke 18:9)

“Joseph Smith clearly identified why self-righteousness is so dangerous: it prevents repentance and keeps a person from developing the love of God. In an 1842 discourse, he said, 'All the religious world is boasting of its righteousness—it is the doctrine of the devil to retard... our progress by filling us with self-righteousness' (HC 5:24)." ("Parables of Mercy", Ensign, Feb. 1987)

As with Korihor, the object of their doctrine was to allow them to carry out their carnal desires without consequences

Alma 31:24-29

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; 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.

29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

How did the actions of the Zoramites demonstrate what was really in their hearts?

(he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride)

Hugh Nibley

“The wickedest people in the Book of Mormon are the Zoramites, a proud, independent, courageous, industrious, enterprising, patriotic, prosperous people who attended strictly to their weekly religious duties with the proper observance of dress standards.... Well, what is wrong with any of that? There is just one thing that spoils it all, and that is... they are really thinking of something else. ‘Behold, O my God, their costly apparel... all their precious things... 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.’” (Old Testament and Related Studies, pg. 222)

Finally in Alma's prayer we have an example of the opposite of these deceptive doctrines. We see the faith of someone who truly believes in Christ. We see where true happiness comes from.

Alma 31:31-38

31 O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people.

32 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ.

33 Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.

34 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

35 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

36 Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of

afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

How does this prayer contrast the belief of Korihor and the Zoramites with true gospel doctrine as demonstrated by Alma?

(O Lord, their souls are precious... therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee)