

ZARAHEMLA RECORD

Issue 62
July/August 1992



The Power of the Word

by Shirley R. Heater

While I was working on textual research for *First Nephi* Study Book of Mormon, one particular instance initiated a personal quest for understanding that is still continuing. The wording on both the Original and Printer's manuscripts for First Nephi 3:179 reads:

Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall for ever remain in that *state of awful woundedness*, Which thou beholdest that they are in because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb Which hath been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen [emphasized words are restored].

The phrase "state of awful of woundedness" was changed to "awful state of blindness" in all editions since the 1837 when the original wording was marked out on the Printer's manuscript and the change written boldly above it.

My method for analyzing such changes is to compare the original wording with the altered wording, pondering over if and how the meaning may have altered. About that time I was listening to audio tapes of the book of Jacob in my daily scripture time. When I heard the words of Jacob 2:8, I immediately

connected them with the original wording of First Nephi 3:179:

And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God,
Yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul [emphasis added].

This scripture describes the solution for the condition of the Gentiles in the passage of First Nephi. Their state of awful woundedness was brought about "because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which hath been" taken away (v. 168). Verses 184-186 contain the prophecy that these truths will come forth in the Book of Mormon. I saw in Jacob 2:8 that healing of "the wounded soul" was accomplished by receiving the word of God.

These thoughts reminded me of two verses in Alma 16.

The first one is verse 82. Leading up to this point, Alma's heart was sickened because of the spiritual condition of the Zoramites who had separated themselves from the Nephites. They were not only perverting the ways of the Lord, but there was also concern that they would join with the Lamanites. Alma determined that the greatest power to produce change was to preach the word of God among the Zoramites rather than to use the sword:

And now, as the preaching of the word had had a greater 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.

Three phrases in this verse—"greater tendency to lead," "more powerful effect" and "the virtue of the word"—seemed to convey the same idea, i.e., it was the *power of the word* itself which would bring about the change. (Saying something three times is a Hebraism which expresses the highest degree of importance.) This became even clearer to me when I checked the definition of "virtue": "authority, goodness, efficacy, or power to produce effect" (*World Book Dictionary*), as well as "miraculous power, ability, strength" etc. according to Strong's concordance. *Dunamis*, the Greek word for virtue, is the origin of our word "dynamite," and carries the same meaning as the Hebrew word *chayil*. This is the same virtue or power which went out of Jesus when people were healed (Mark 5:21-23; Luke 6:19; 8:44-47).

With this understanding in mind, I was reminded of a second verse in

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Satan's Tactics

by Mary Lee Treat

Since all scripture is given for our reproof and learning (2 Timothy 3:16) the accounts of the three antichrists in the Book of Mormon—Sherem, Nehor and Korihor—give us valuable insights for living in today's world. According to the purpose principle (everything written in the Book of Mormon is there for a purpose), these accounts are included in the Book of Mormon by design, for our benefit, and not as "filler."

Sherem (Jacob 5)

The purpose principle is obvious in Jacob's account of the antichrist, Sherem. Jacob gives a final farewell at the end of chapter 4, then adds the account of Sherem in chapter 5 with a second farewell. The purpose principle indicates that Jacob added the account of Sherem for a purpose.

Sherem taught:

- no Christ to come
- no Holy Spirit
- Jacob was "perverting" the law of Moses

Jacob tells us that Sherem had a way with words (v. 6). It is significant that he gives us the exact words of Sherem in their encounter (vv. 9-37). Sherem begins by flattering Jacob, calling him "Brother Jacob" and then proceeds to accuse him of perverting the law of Moses and leading the people astray. He accuses Jacob of blasphemy.

Jacob's response is sure. He has a first-hand testimony, because he has heard the voice of the Lord on more than one occasion. Sherem cannot sway him.

When Jacob asks him bluntly if he denies Christ, who will come, Sherem equivocates by saying "If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him . . ." and then goes on to say that there never has been nor will there ever be a Christ.

This evasive response is typical of one who "bends" the word of God. Jacob goes on to challenge Sherem's supposed belief in the scriptures:

. . . none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ.

Wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made, all mankind must be lost. Jacob 5:19, 21

Sherem counters by asking for a sign "by the power of the Holy Ghost in the which ye know so much."

Jacob's response is to say that if God should smite him it would be a sign that he has power in heaven and earth and a testimony that Christ would come. Immediately Sherem is struck down by the power of God. Before he dies several days later, he denies the things he has taught and confesses the reality of Christ and the Holy Ghost.

We observe several things:

- Jacob's accuser is a brother in the faith
- the accuser uses scripture
- Jacob's defense is a first-hand testimony: he has heard the voice of the Lord
- by faith Jacob has power to "smite" Sherem

There is yet another "purpose" for Jacob's added account. The book of Jacob is from the unabridged small plates of Nephi. Unabridged means they are the exact words of the original writers—in this case, Jacob.

Mormon added the small plates to his abridgment "for a wise purpose" (WM 1:10) and Nephi tells us that he made this second set of plates for wise "purposes" (1 N 5:223-224). It seems logical that another purpose for Nephi's small plates (besides replacing the 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris) is to be a first-hand witness to Jews today. His record is the most "Jewish" in all the Book of Mormon because he had lived among Jews in the Old World.

With that in mind, Jacob's account of Sherem who did not believe in Christ, who said it was a perversion of the law of Moses, that no atonement was needed, that there was no Holy Ghost power, etc., speaks directly to Jews today. Jacob is giving a powerful message to all who do not believe in Christ but especially to Jews who believe in the law of Moses. His message and testimony are that all the prophets testified of Christ to come.

The fact that Jacob added this account after he had "finished" his record in chapter 4 gives added emphasis to his message.

Nehor (Alma 1:3-24)

In the first chapter of the book of Alma we learn of an antichrist named Nehor. Alma's brief account tells us that Nehor taught:

- because God created all men, all would be redeemed to eternal life
- priests and teachers should be supported by the people

His teachings became so popular that he established a church. However, a man named Gideon contended for the word of God against Nehor; Nehor became angry and killed Gideon. When Nehor was brought before Alma II, the chief judge of the land, he was sentenced to die by the laws established by Mosiah II. Alma said to him in sentencing him:

Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people . . . [and if it were] enforced among this people, it would prove their entire destruction. Alma 1:17-18

The record then tells us that Nehor suffered an “ignominious death” after acknowledging that what he had taught was contrary to the word of God.

Mormon, the abridger, comments that Nehor’s death did not put an end to priestcraft in the land. Nephi defines “priestcraft” in Second Nephi 11:106-107:

... priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world,
That they may get gain and praise of the world,
But they seek not the welfare of Zion. 2 Nephi 11:106

What can we learn from this incident?

- Nehor’s insidious philosophy that all will be saved is very much alive today. This comfortable philosophy allows one to do anything without being accountable. The concept of sin and judgment is eliminated.
- Alma rebukes the concept of a “priest class.” The priests and teachers were not to become a separate class of people, supported by the people. The priest class depicted in the murals and art of Mesoamerica bear mute testimony that his prediction of destruction came true.
- As a people we must be vigilant in guarding against both of these philosophies.

Korihor (Alma 16:7-77)

The account of the antichrist Korihor is more in-depth than the other two accounts.

We would call Korihor an atheist. He taught:

- no God; the coming of Christ was not prophecy, but a foolish tradition imposed upon the people by the priests and teachers
- no atonement; everyone was responsible for their own destiny in this life
- no life after death, therefore, they could “lift up their heads” now in their wickedness

After futile attempts to preach in the lands of Jershon and Gideon, Korihor was delivered to Alma, the chief judge and governor of all the land of Zarahemla.

Korihor accused Alma and the priests and teachers of keeping the people in bondage and living off their labors. Alma reminded him that he had not received even “one senine” for his ministry. His only salary was for time in the judgment seat, which was prescribed by law.

Alma asked him if he believed there was a God, and he answered, “no.” Alma asked him if he would deny again that there was a God and also Christ.

As with the previous antichrists, Korihor asked for a sign that there was a God. Alma told him he had enough signs. He had the testimony of his brethren and the holy prophets as found in the scriptures. Alma reminded him that the earth and the planets all testified to a Creator.

Korihor again denied the existence of God.

Alma said it grieved him, but it was better for one soul to be lost than many. So he said a third time that if

Korihor denied God, he would be struck dumb.

Like Sherem, Korihor equivocated, “I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe there is a God . . . and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.”

Alma said he would have his sign:

I say that in the name of God that ye shall be struck dumb,
that ye shall no more have utterance. Alma 16:61

When Alma finished those words, Korihor could not speak. Alma wrote a note to him asking if he was convinced of the power of God.

Korihor responded that he knew it was the power of God; he knew there was a God, but Satan appeared to him as an angel of light and persuaded him to deceive people. He asked Alma to pray for the curse to be removed, but Alma refused because he said that he would return to deceiving the people.

Korihor turned into a beggar and ended up being trampled to death by the Zoramites.

In summary:

- Korihor repeats a common accusation still used by atheists today: religion is bondage by clerics for the purpose of control and financial gain.
- Satan literally converted Korihor to be his disciple for the purpose of destroying belief in God.
- Alma was merciful (as God is with us) and gave Korihor three opportunities to repent. Korihor’s willful rejection of mercy shows there will be some who will ultimately reject God no matter how many opportunities for repentance they are given.

Application

What can be gained from studying these three antichrists? Satan is using the same arguments and methods today. Therefore it must be profitable to our understanding to study the arguments these antichrists used, even though they were hundreds of years apart.

It is important to realize that all three of these antichrists were former believers. They not only held these beliefs personally, they actively proselyted others. Their arguments can be grouped in two ways:

Satan’s deception within the church:

- no literal fulfillment of scripture; foolish tradition to look for coming of Christ
- God made all people and will save all people

Satan’s deception outside the church:

- no God; religion puts people in bondage

For the clearest description in all scripture of how Satan operates, see Nephi’s summary of these three philosophies in Second Nephi 12:24-28.

Satan is not creative. He deceives by employing the same methods throughout all ages. These clear and direct examples in the Book of Mormon of how Satan

which Alma makes a profound statement in the course of preaching to the Zoramites:

And now, behold, I say unto you,
And I would that ye should remember that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name;
Therefore, he desireth in the first place that ye should believe, yea, even on his word. Alma 16:144

God's *first-place* desire is given in this verse! I had read it many times before, but this time I saw these words as the key to understanding the parable of the seed which Alma was about to relate. The parable is the blueprint for planting the seed or the word of God. The underlying principle—the reason why God places such extreme emphasis on his word—is that resident within the word itself is the power to produce change.

Other scriptures ran through my mind, one after another. Each rang with the power of God's word, his "first-place" desire for us and the results he promises when we put believing his word above everything else. A sampling follows:

—tells us all things we should do, 2 N 11:59; 14:4

- brings great knowledge and understanding, 2 N 14:9
- heals, Jac 2:8; Prov 16:24; Ps 107:20; Matt 8:7 [8]; Luke 7:7
- created man, worlds, heaven, earth, Jac 3:12; Mn 4:78; Heb 11:3
- establishes peace, WM 1:26-27
- brings answered prayer, John 15:7
- produces faith, Alma 16:151-157; Rom 10:16
- cleanses and sanctifies, John 15:3; 17:17; Eph 5:25-27
- pulls down pride, craftiness, contentions, Alma 2:26-27
- converts, Alma 12:173; 14:11; 24:63
- delivers, Alma 3:6; 13:20; 3 N 13:32; 4 N 1:33
- brings mighty change, humility, Alma 3:25
- brings many before altar to confess sins, Alma 12:6-7
- brings repentance, Alma 13:45-53; 21:142
- brings redemption, Alma 14:93
- enlightens our understanding, Alma 16:161, Eph 1:17-19
- renews our mind, Alma 16:161; Rom 12:2
- brings happiness, Alma 20:70
- divides, Hel 2:26; Heb 4:12
- keeps us from sinning, Ps 119:9-16
- prisons tumbled to the earth, Mn 4:30
- protects, Mn 4:31

—stands as a testimony to the world, Eth 2:3

After considering these marvelous promises, I was brought full circle, back to the original wording of First Nephi 3:179. It seemed clear to me that we are all in a "state of awful woundedness" in any area of our lives in which we are not living in the fullness of the power of God's word. I have determined to put the word of God first-place in my life. ZRF

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deceives and operates give us much to ponder. Truly, clinging to the rod of iron—the word of God—will take us through the mist of darkness and deception to Jesus, the tree of life.

Alma's counsel to his son Helaman is profitable for us today:

For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, Shall the word of Christ, if we follow its course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. Alma 17:80

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