Helaman 1

The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's second coming. The Nephite civilization had reached great heights. They were prosperous and industrious. They had built many cities with great highways connecting them. They engaged in shipping and trade. They built temples and palaces. But, as so often happens, the people rejected the Lord. Pride became commonplace. Dishonesty and immorality were widespread. Secret combinations flourished because, as Helaman tells us, the Gadianton robbers "had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils" (Hel. 6:38). "The people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning" (3 Ne. 6:12). And "Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world," even as today (3 Ne. 6:15).Mormon noted that the Nephites "did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them" (3 Ne. 6:18).There were but few righteous among them (see 3 Ne. 6:14). Nephi led the Church with great power and performed many miracles, yet "there were but few who were converted unto the Lord" (3 Ne. 7:21). The people as a whole rejected the Lord. They stoned the prophets and persecuted those who sought to follow Christ. (President Ezra Taft Benson, CR April 1987)

Our nation will continue to degenerate unless we read and heed the words of the God of this land, Jesus Christ, and quit building up and upholding the secret combinations which the Book of Mormon tells us proved the downfall of both previous American civilizations. (President Ezra Taft Benson CR, April 1975)

President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency stated in forthright terms that the Spirit of the Lord cannot abide contention: "When there is contention, the Spirit of the Lord will depart, regardless of who is at fault" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 57; or *Ensign,* May 1996, 41).

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that contention is purposely fostered by Satan to serve his own evil purposes: "The sins of corruption, dishonesty, strife, contention, and other evils in this world are not here by chance. They are evidences of the relentless campaign of Satan and those who follow him. He uses every tool and device available to him to deceive, confuse, and mislead" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 100; or *Ensign,* Nov. 1994, 76).

President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency emphasized "Where people have that Spirit with them, we may expect harmony. The Spirit puts the testimony of truth in our hearts, which unifies those who share that testimony. The Spirit of God never generates contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29). It never generates the feelings of distinctions between people which lead to strife (see Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine,* 5th ed. [1939], 131). It leads to personal peace and a feeling of union with others. It unifies souls. A unified family, a unified Church, and a world at peace depend on unified souls" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 86; or *Ensign,* May 1998, 67).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that the threat of secret combinations still exists in our day: "The Book of Mormon teaches that secret combinations engaged in crime present a serious challenge, not just to individuals and families but to entire civilizations. Among today's secret combinations are gangs, drug cartels, and organized crime families. The secret combinations of our day function much like the Gadianton robbers of the Book of Mormon times. They have secret signs and code words. They participate in secret rites and initiation ceremonies. Among their purposes are to 'murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God' [Helaman 6:23]. "If we are not careful, today's secret combinations can obtain power and influence just as quickly and just as completely as they did in Book of Mormon times. Do you remember the pattern? The secret combinations began among the 'more wicked part' of society, but eventually 'seduced the more part of the righteous' until the whole society was polluted [Helaman 6:38]. …"The Book of Mormon teaches that the devil is the 'author of all sin' and the founder of these secret combinations [Helaman 6:30; see 2 Nephi 26:22]. He uses secret combinations, including gangs, 'from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men' [Helaman 6:30]. His purpose is to destroy individuals, families, communities, and nations [see 2 Nephi 9:9]. To a degree, he was successful during Book of Mormon times. And he is having far too much success today. That's why it is so important for us as priesthood holders to take a firm stand for truth and right by doing what we can to help keep our communities safe" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 51–52; or *Ensign,* Nov. 1997, 38).

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) referred to terrorist organizations determined to foster murder, tyranny, fear, and wicked control:"Terrorist organizations … must be ferreted out and brought down."We of this Church know something of such groups. The Book of Mormon speaks of the Gadianton robbers, a vicious, oath-bound, and secret organization bent on evil and destruction. In their day they did all in their power, by whatever means available, to bring down the Church, to woo the people with sophistry, and to take control of the society. We see the same thing in the present situation. "We are people of peace. We are followers of the Christ, who was and is the Prince of Peace. But there are times when we must stand up for right and decency, for freedom and civilization, just as Moroni rallied his people in his day to the defense of their wives, their children, and the cause of liberty (see Alma 48:10)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 88; or *Ensign,* Nov. 2001, 72).

"Beginning in the days of Cain and continuing through all generations, whenever there have been unrighteous and apostate peoples on earth, Satan has revealed unto them his oaths, vows, and secret combinations. . . . Murder, plunder, robbery, power, the destruction of freedom, and the persecution of the saints have been the objectives of these societies ever since (Moses 5:16–59; 6:15; Hela. 6:17–41). "These secret societies flourished before the flood; they gained great strength among the Jaredites on this continent; the Gadianton robbers and the Lamanites reveled in them in Nephite days; and they are had in all parts of the earth today" (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 698).

Daniel C. Peterson explained why the wicked would swear an oath to the living God (see Moses 5:29) and then keep that oath when they have no intention of obeying His commandments: "The Book of Mormon declares that the origin of such murderous conspiracies can be traced back to

Lucifer through Cain, 'who was a murderer from the beginning' (Ether 8:15; cf. Hel. 6:26–30). Following their strange, quasi-religious meeting, the successful conspirators dispersed to their various ordinary pursuits, blending into Nephite society in such a way that the government could find only some of them. So religiously—if we may use that word—did they keep their oaths, that many of the group, including Kishkumen himself, remained at large"… "The conspirators then swore an oath of silence. Intriguingly, the Nephite record tells us that it was a religious oath, 'swearing by their everlasting Maker' (Hel. 1:11). This seems odd to those of us unaccustomed to thinking of murder as a religious act. But the very word assassin was given to us by a religious sect of the medieval Near East who bore it as a name. The 'Assassins' carried out daring murders for many years from mixed religious and political motives. And it would seem, from the story of Cain and Abel as recorded in the book of Moses, that such 'religious' oaths go back to the very beginning of human history" (Peterson, "Their Own Worst Enemies," 94).

Who was Coriantumr? (1:15) "Coriantumr was a descendant of Zarahemla, and consequently was most likely of Judah. Originally he was a Nephite, but like many others during the days of the Judges, he dissented and went over to the Lamanites. He was a man of commanding presence, of more than ordinary stature and brilliant parts, with a reputation for wisdom which his later course scarcely appears to warrant. Tubaloth, . . . king of the Lamanites, gave him high office, and when (51 b.c.) the invasion of Zarahemla was determined upon, Coriantumr was placed in command of a vast host which was well armed and was raised particularly for that purpose. "At this time through internal dissensions the Nephites were weak and distracted" (Reynolds and Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 5:194).

Who was Tubaloth and why did he appoint Coriantumr? (1:16) "It may be remembered that this king, named Tubaloth, was not really a Lamanite. Rather, he was the son of Ammoron, the brother and successor of the notoriously unscrupulous Nephite adventurer, Amalickiah. Tubaloth had chosen yet another dissenter from the Nephites, by the name of Coriantumr, to lead his warriors. It was certainly a common practice of those who would lead the Lamanites into battle against the Nephites to choose apostates as their assistants. . . . These apostates could be counted upon to feel a powerful hatred for the Nephites, which made them very useful to the great manipulators who appear with such appalling frequency in the pages of the Book of Mormon" (Peterson, "Their Own Worst Enemies," 94–95).

What is the significance of the names Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni? (1:3) "There were three sons of Pahoran named Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni. Paanchi is the one indisputable Egyptian name in the Book of Mormon. Nobody can ever dispute that, either that Joseph Smith could have invented it or that it could not be pure, 100% Egyptian, because Paanchi [Piankhi] was a very important person in Egyptian history, just before Lehi's day. It means 'Amon is my life.' And Pacumeni and Pahoran mean the person is a Syrian. That's what an Egyptian would call a person from northern Palestine. These are familiar Egyptian names" (Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, 3:197–98).

"This name [Paanchi] has been called 'the one indisputable Egyptian name in the Book of Mormon.' It was unknown at the time Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and has been established as the name of 'a very important person in Egyptian history, just before Lehi's day.' The name is Egyptian and means 'Amon [or God] is my life.' The name is far from fitting, in

light of the fact that Paanchi led a ferocious rebellion against the people and his own brother Pahoran II, drawing away many followers in the process (see Helaman 1:7–9). Once again, this may be an example of a name bestowed at birth in the hope that the child would live up to it. If this be the case, Paanchi failed miserably" (Gaskill, Lost Language of Symbolism, 235–36).