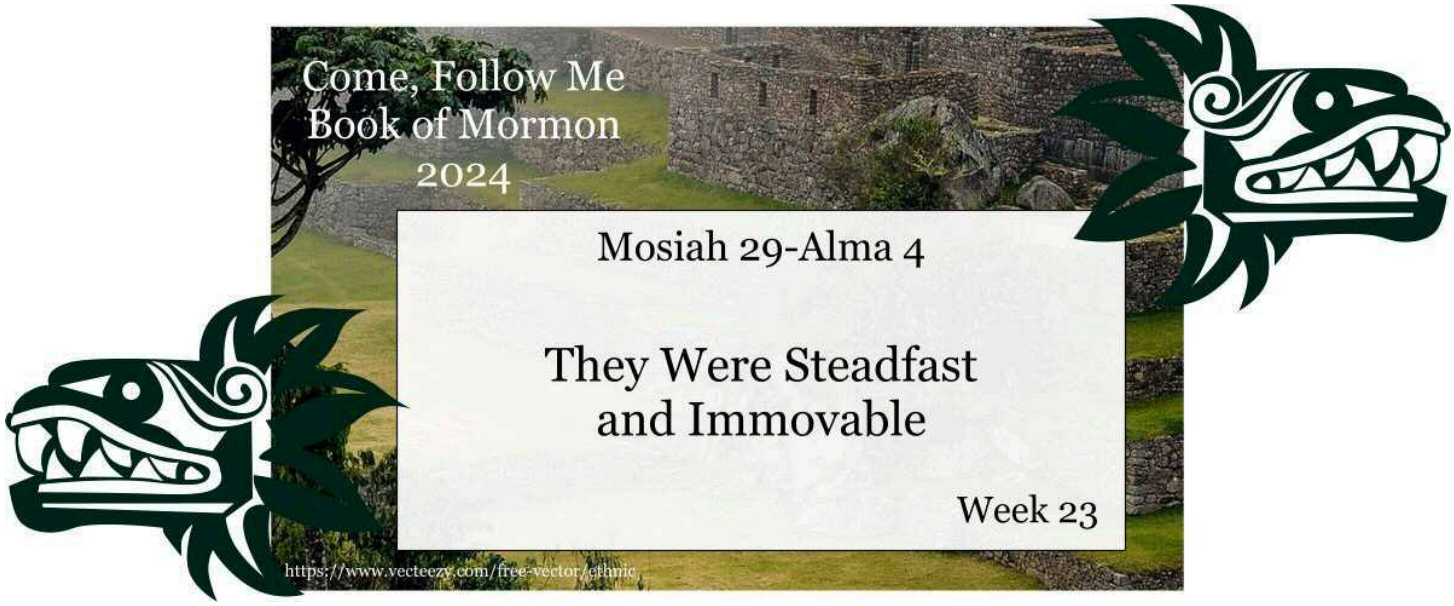

Week 23 is scheduled for study June 3-9, 2024. We are such fickle creatures, faithful today, but wayward tomorrow. Let's be more consistent in our daily attitudes and behaviors.

Day 1

Mosiah 29:26-27; Alma 2:1-7 - I can be a positive influence in my community.

I don't believe it is any accident that this topic is brought up to us in an election year. Here is the U.S.A. we are going to have a general election for the next President of the country. Getting everyone to take voting seriously is a big issue. I don't know how much of an issue it is in other countries, but it is a big one here in the States.

Nehor taught Amlici at least two great lessons. The first lesson is that trying to enforce your opinions by the sword will get you killed. The second lesson is that it doesn't matter what you preach, as long as you pretend it is your true belief. The law has no power over those who profess a belief, only on those who outright lie. Using these lessons Amlici crafted a narrative that was enticing and alluring to many people, all in the hopes of being able to convince them to return to having a king, with himself at the head of the government. A bold move.

Amlici was so persuasive that he managed to gather a huge following. It was perhaps big enough to get him duly elected as king. This is one of those situations where it isn't enough for a segment of the people to just be silent, neither acting for or against a particular proposal. If anyone was silent in this election then his followers would be able to get him elected. That would spell the end of the judges their last King, Mosiah had taught them would protect them from the tyranny of wicked kings.

Today evil wears many faces. It is peddled by many false fronts, and is often difficult to decipher from the real truth. This is done by proposing an agenda that looks, on the surface, to be good for either most of the people or for an important segment of people. But what we don't see is that by accepting that proposal other proposals, built off of this original one, will lead us into dark places and the loss of freedoms. It is not enough just to look at the face value of current issues. We also need to think about where they might lead in the future. This may require some prayer and pondering on the part of each intelligent voter. The Spirit can lead us to vote for better candidates, even if we don't know them intimately.

I have seen the Church get involved a number of times in the voting process. The issue at hand seemed trustworthy, but those who had studied it out could see that by accepting that current proposal it would lead to the loss of freedom for the church in the future. This is the only time I have seen the Church get involved in politics. This is what is taking place in today's lesson. The leaders would have been encouraging the members of the Church to voice their concerns and to join the public debate to protect their freedoms of religion. Mormon seems very certain that Amlici's intent was to destroy the Church of God.

As members of the Church it is our responsibility to make sure that those pieces of legislation get passed that preserve our freedoms to worship as we see fit. This means that our voice in our country's government is important if we are to safeguard what is important to us. Just showing up blindly on election day and voting for the candidate with the flashiest or most prolific signs and ads isn't enough. We need to know what that person is going to do with the power we grant them as a public servant. Every vote is important.

Day 2

Alma 1 - The word of God can help me recognize false doctrine.

I am assuming here that you have read at least verses 2-6 of today's reading.

Nehor was a real piece of work. You might have asked yourself how he was able to be so successful in leading away the people from the truth. Look who their teachers were, Benjamin, Mosiah, and Alma. All of these men taught plainly and in context so there couldn't be misunderstandings about their meaning. Yet along comes Nehor and convinces many to follow his teachings. What do you think it was about his teachings that was so appealing to the people that they were willing to give up the plain and simple truths they had been taught and follow his ways instead?

I think the answer is that the truth, no matter how simple and direct it is, carries with it consequences. If we break the law we must pay for that sin. If we know better and don't do what we know we are supposed to do, God holds us accountable. People like Nehor taught that God had done all the work, or would do all the work for our salvation, and that we are not responsible for the things we do wrong. Look at what Nehor taught in the verse below. This is pure predestination, and a form of it where no one can fail. Success is guaranteed to all.

> 4 And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

Nehor's teachings are a mixture of truth and outright lie. Truth - "the Lord had created all men." Truth - "and had also redeemed all men." It is true that Christ would come and redeem us from death, eternal separation from God. But it is not true that God had paid for all our sins and that we no longer had any responsibility for how those sins continue to show up in our lives. Nehor was teaching that Christ's payment for our sins put an end to anyone's responsibilities for those sins. He wasn't taking into account the purpose of the atoning sacrifice, which is to enable us to be forgiven for our sins by accepting Christ's payment for them through obedience to his commandments. That is a lot to leave out! It is also False - that "all men should have eternal life." They will all live forever, but will not have eternal life, which is God's life. Eternal life is reserved for those who have lived lives of obedience, service, and humility. None of these attributes are being taught in Nehor's sermons. That would hold everyone accountable for the way

in which they lived their lives, and his whole premise is that it doesn't matter what you do, for you will still be saved in the end. Isn't it interesting that Nehor made claims the scriptures support, but filled in the gaps by making claims never found in the scriptures in any way.

Understanding the gospel and the principles, at least the most basic principles, and how they work and are applied in our lives is so important. If we don't understand the fundamentals of the gospel then it is so easy to fool us into believing falsehoods and to get us to do things that are actually going to hurt us, instead of free us. Evidently the people didn't see through his mixture of lies and truth and couldn't tell that Nehor was paving the road to hell for each and every one of them. If he had been teaching the truth he could have supported everything he taught the people by the words of the prophets and through the scriptures. Those truths never change.

We have Nehor's in our midst today who preach a good game, but if you understand the basics of the gospel it is possible, though not always easy, to determine that what they teach holds falsehoods within them and should be avoided. I believe one of the reasons people followed Nehor was because he advocated for lack of responsibility and answerability in the way the people lived their lives. He basically redefined good and evil into non-existence. By telling the people that is didn't matter what they did, because they would all be redeemed in the end, he taught the people to rejoice in the allure of the natural man and all the sinful things the natural man feels. No wonder they were willing to pay a few coins to support him. He had saved them from a life of spiritual effort. Now they could forget about repenting, duty, service, changing, etc. They could do whatever they wanted and still get saved. It was a win/win for them. Or so they thought.

It was Nehor's bold affrontery to all that was taught by the prophets that encouraged people like Amlici to come and preach openly against the teachings of the prophets. Nehor proved that the people would listen to false teachings and embrace them. So why shouldn't other opportunists take advantage of such an easy opening? Remember that it is only when we understand the basics of the gospel that we can discern truth from error when it is openly preached or insinuated. Staying close to the Spirit is our biggest protection. Sometimes a false teaching sounds good on the surface, but we still feel uncomfortable about it. That is the Spirit helping us recognize that there is error hidden in there somewhere. It is up to us to find out why we don't feel good about what

is seemingly a hopeful doctrine. Rely on the Spirit, the scriptures, and the living prophets. They will never lead you astray.

Day 3

Alma 1:19-31; 4:6-15 - True disciples of Jesus Christ are "humble followers of God."

This question may seem off topic, but trust me, it is dead on topic. What does it mean to set our hearts upon the things of this world? The manual gives us two sets of verses to compare. One is in Alma 1 and the other is in Alma 4. In the first set of verses the members of the church, identified as the humble followers of Christ are described this way.

> 27 And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.

In Alma 4 those who were described earlier as the humble followers of Christ are now described this way.

> 6 And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.

Apparently the members of the church were able to hold out and not get caught up in the things of the world, their possessions, for a while. But even many of those who had held out for years finally succumbed to the temptations to own the best, to wear the best, to think better of themselves than they did of their neighbors who had less. Is that answer to my question more apparent now than when I asked it?

The lesson today is about being a humble follower of God. The scriptures cited in this lesson point us to those members of the church who gave to the poor, fed the hungry, clothed those who needed clothing, and who dressed in neat and comely clothing, but weren't caught up in the fine silks, jewelry, and haughtiness of their neighbors. Fast

forward a couple of years, and even these good people had gotten caught up in the rhetoric of their society. The people had become proud, selfish, uncaring toward others, and felt that the world revolved around them, that the world owed them. They no longer gave God the credit for their successes, but took all the credit to themselves as being better than others around them. They looked down on those not as blessed as they were, and even came to blows in their contentions with others over things like who was right or who was wrong about something.

Funny thing about prosperity. When you begin to experience it, even though you remember your poverty days, you now begin to be possessive of your things, your status, your abilities that come with more money and riches, even though you still consider yourself "poor." We slowly forget how grateful we were when someone helped us when we truly had nothing. Our focus rests upon our need to hold onto what we have been able to acquire lately. We become selfish and aren't as free with our substance as we were when we had nothing of value. Then we gave all that we were and had to help anyone in the same situation. Now that we have some of that pain and suffering relieved, we will do anything in our power never to have to live that old life again. We hold onto our possessions. Things take on a level of importance that wasn't there when we were very poor. We don't believe we are as free to share what we have with others again. It is almost like having PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). We become so afraid of being poor again and having to suffer like that again that we jump at anything that hints that we don't have enough of something.

Having money changes us almost as much as wanting money changes us. Too often when we have just a little money we become foolish and act like we have more money than we actually do, spending it foolishly and frivolously. I speak from experience. This doesn't happen to everyone, but it happens to many of us.

When we get caught up in the things of this world we lose our perspective. We stop looking at eternity, what President Russell M. Nelson refers to as thinking Celestial, and we look at only the here and now. Eternity ceases to exist in our way of thinking. Don't get me wrong. You don't have to be rich to think this way. Just being in America and some other countries brings opportunities and blessings that many others can't even imagine having. Most of us aren't rich by our country's standards, but are very rich by the standards of many other countries. The Lord isn't measuring us by a dollar and cent ruler. He is measuring us by our attitude toward others. Do we see them as so

important in God's eyes, or in our own, that we are willing and wanting to sacrifice for their comfort and care? That is the Celestial mind set.

I'm not talking about making the poor rich. I'm talking about alleviating the poor's suffering and helping them to find a measure of comfort in their lives. Do the humble followers of God spend their energies on obtaining that latest gadget, vehicle, vacation, that bit of cosmetics that will make them look "fabulous", or trying to get into that club or school that has more prestige than the others do? No, the humble followers of God are more concerned that others around them aren't suffering from want or neglect. They are helping to support others so they can go on missions, taking a meal to someone who has just had surgery, mowing someone's lawn just to help them out. The humble followers of God care about the happiness and welfare of all they know and meet. Their focus is on others, not themselves.

The world teaches us to focus on our self, to promote our self, to advance our self. Yes, it is important to take care of our own needs, but not to the exclusion of the needs of others. Often people say that they just need to focus on their own needs for now. Unfortunately, now has a terrible way of becoming forever. We should never excuse ourselves from our need to be there for the welfare of others.

When we stop looking and focusing our efforts outward, and turn inward, that is when we become proud and haughty, lifted up in our own pride, and stop being humble. The process can, and usually is gradual - not dramatic. But it happens naturally, because that is what is appealing to the natural man. This is what the scriptures are telling us to avoid and to shun. We must keep reminding ourselves that the Celestial mindset is one of thinking of other's needs before our own. It doesn't matter if we are inconvenienced in the process. Service is rarely convenient. What matters is that God's love and caring for all His children is demonstrated through our efforts on His behalf to care for them and help them, no matter how small or great the deed.

Day 4

Alma 4:6-20 - My example and testimony can change hearts.

It is difficult to give credit for things to an unseen source. Too often - in fact, almost exclusively, we give credit to ourselves for all that happens around us. Why? Because

we can't see how God is involved in our lives and in the lives of others. We take both the blame for failures and the credit for successes. This is not what God wants.

For example, we are supposed to share our testimonies of what has happened between God and us in our private lives by living His commandments and being good to those around us. We share our testimony with others, but what others do with that testimony is not up to us, but up to them. We don't convert anyone. Conversion is something that happens between God and that person. He uses our example, our words, our attitudes toward others to help others feel His Spirit and to find a desire to come to Him. We are only responsible for our attitude toward others, not how others behave or what they do because of our attitudes.

When we accept that conversion is between God and a person's inner life, and not our fault, nor solely because of our personal goodness, we can feel free to be as generous as we want in being good in the lives of others. Our personal goodness is only between us and God. He will bless us for the help we give Him in changing the hearts of others, because our example helped them to accept His goodness. And our lack of goodness is something we will have to answer for, because of what could have been achieved had we done what we knew we should have done.

The point of this lesson, in my mind, is that we can and should feel free to be as good as we have always wanted to be. There should be no fear associated with being good, because it is God who takes that good and does the work of change, not us. We share our testimony in word and deed. God uses what we do to influence the lives of others for their own best good. So being good need ever feel loaded with obligation or responsibility for how others end up being. That is between them and God, just as how we live our life is between us and God. We can't blame someone else for how we choose to live our life, and neither can they blame us.

What we can do is rejoice in the spread of goodness wherever we go and in whatever we do. Our desire to freely share good behavior, attitudes, and words with others opens doors for the Lord to bless their lives with change for the better. We are living and walking catalysts of goodness for goodness. Take joy in that.

Personal Study

Liken the scriptures to yourself.

It is so easy for us to look at scripture stories and sermons as something "other." Those belong to another time, another place, and they happened to another people. Not us. As long as we feel disconnected from what happens in the scriptures, we will never learn the lessons the scriptures exist to teach us. We need to learn that people are people. It doesn't matter when they live or where they live, or how they live. We are all people, with the same motivations, basic desires, and the same relationships with others. Those scriptures could just as easily have been written about us as about them.

Another point about scriptures is that we too often read them as though they are just stories. Nope, not true. The story part of the scriptures is an effort to help us find a common footing and common ground so we understand how their experience is relatable to our own. The scriptures are written with the point and purpose of teaching us the ways of Godliness. After all, isn't the whole point of being on earth to prepare ourselves to return home to God to live with Him for the rest of eternity? Isn't that God's whole reason for the plan of salvation He has given us, to lead to our exaltation and our eternal life with Him? (The answer is yes, of course)

When we read the scriptures we need to be looking for ways that they apply to our own life. How would I have behaved in that situation? Can I find a way to understand why those people did what they did? Do I do what they did in my own way as well? What is the prophet trying to teach me by telling me that story? When it comes to the war chapters in the Book of Mormon this can be particularly challenging. I'm afraid that the day will come when we find those chapters to be ever so helpful in our own ability to cope with what is happening in the world in that day. Then we will look at them and wonder how we didn't see their usefulness before. This is the power of scriptures, they stay the same, but their message adapts to our day and time and our own situations so they are always relevant to us and how we live our life.

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