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Deliverance from Bondage

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Clyde J. Williams

Two of the most frequently overlooked portions of the Book of Mormon are found in Mosiah chapters 7–8 and chapters 19–24. These scriptures record the experiences Limhi and Alma had with bondage. For many, the stories of intrigue found in these chapters are perceived as mere side-trips from the main message of Abinadi and his efforts to persuade Noah and his people to come unto Christ. However, I am convinced that each part of the Book of Mormon, including this one, was written for the latter days with one or more purposes in mind.

President Benson, speaking of the ancient Book of Mormon writers, declared:

If they saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, “Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?” (“Book of Mormon” 6)

Because of these questions, I searched for reasons why the prophet Mormon included the story of Limhi in the Book of Mormon. While I do not pretend to know the mind of Mormon, I am certain that one of the main reasons for including Limhi’s story in the Book of Mormon is for the lessons it teaches about bondage—the steps leading to it, its different types, what we

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must do to be delivered from it, and the different degrees of help the Lord gives us in dealing with it.

To appreciate fully the message of Limhi and his people, we must understand how they came to be in bondage to the Lamanites. Mosiah, the father of king Benjamin, had been warned by the Lord to take those among the Nephites who would “hearken unto the voice of the Lord” and leave the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12). They were led by the power of God to the land of Zarahemla where they discovered the descendants of Mulek, whose ancestors had fled Jerusalem at the time of its destruction (see Omni 1:13–15; Mosiah 25:2). The people of Zarahemla accepted the Nephites and made Mosiah their king (Omni 1:19).

Following Mosiah’s death, his son Benjamin was made king (Omni 1:23). During Benjamin’s reign, Zeniff and a considerable number of Nephites returned to the land of Nephi and settled there (Omni 1:27–30; Mosiah 9). Zeniff’s son, Noah, later became king but ruled unrighteously (see Mosiah 11). For deserting his people as they were being attacked by the Lamanites, Noah was later put to death by some of the men when he commanded further desertion (Mosiah 19:8–9, 20). Following king Noah’s death, his son Limhi, who was a “just man” (Mosiah 19:17), became king.

The Steps Leading to Bondage

A careful examination of the narrative of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi reveals at least four major steps that led them into bondage: they were over-zealous; they embraced wickedness; they failed to follow the living prophet; and they lacked spiritual knowledge. Limhi identified the first step as he spoke to his people:

And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being *over-zealous* to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land.

... And all this he [king Laman] did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. (Mosiah 7:21–22; emphasis added)

Zeniff's over-zealousness led him to make an unwise agreement with one whose ultimate purpose was to bring these Nephites into bondage.

While we question the wisdom of Zeniff, we could ask if the same kind of zeal causes people today to make agreements or sign contracts that will ultimately place them in political or financial bondage. Individuals can be over-zealous for material possessions, or they can become so involved in a cause or in their work that they begin to neglect the weightier matters that are most important, such as family, church, and service to others.

Over-zealousness is an exercise of free agency that can have serious consequences. President Marion G. Romney voiced his concern about our use of free agency in these words: "Free agency, however, precious as it is, is not of itself the perfect liberty we seek, nor does it necessarily lead thereto. As a matter of fact, through the exercise of their agency more people have come to political, economic, and personal bondage than to liberty" (43).

The Nephites who exercised their agency by following Zeniff were not immediately placed in physical bondage, but that decision certainly moved them much closer to that possibility. The same could be said of those of us today who risk our homes or savings in speculative financial ventures. It is important to remember that such people, like Zeniff, may be over-zealous, yet they are not necessarily wicked people. They may be a humble God-fearing people who have become trapped in their quest for financial success.

The second step leading Zeniff's group toward bondage was their gradual embracing of wickedness. Zeniff's son Noah was not like his father; rather, he was guilty of three major sins—winebibbing, adultery, and greed (Mosiah 11:3–4, 14–15). Noah's bad example led his people to adopt his sinful ways

(11:2, 15). In later years, Noah's son Limhi would lament: "Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity. For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them" (Mosiah 7:24–25).

Sin of any kind leads one into bondage—some sins more rapidly than others. Until the murder of the prophet Abinadi, the most serious of Noah's sins was adultery. Immorality has a tremendous tendency to lead one into bondage. Concerning this point President Spencer W. Kimball gave the following warning:

In the area of one of Satan's most destructive evils, we strongly warn all our people from childhood to old age to beware of the chains of bondage, suffering, and remorse which come from improper use of the body.

The human body is the sacred home of the spirit child of God, and unwarranted tampering with or defilement of this sacred tabernacle can bring only remorse and regret. We urge: stay clean, uncontaminated, undefiled. (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball 7*; hereafter *TSWK*)

The third step on the road to bondage was the failure of Noah and his people to heed the warnings of the prophet Abinadi. In his first visit to Noah's people, Abinadi warned that "except they repent[ed] and turn[ed] to the Lord their God, . . . they [would] be brought into bondage" (Mosiah 11:21). After his warning was rejected and his life threatened, Abinadi fled. Two years later the Lord sent him to warn Noah and his people once more, but the nature of his warning had changed; he now told the people that they would be put into bondage because of their iniquities (Mosiah 12:2). At this point there was no way to avoid bondage. What now remained in question was their final fate, for Abinadi solemnly warned that unless they repented they would be "utterly destroy[ed] from off the face of the earth" (Mosiah 12:8).

Their rejection of Abinadi's testimony culminated in his martyrdom. In this dispensation modern prophets have been and are still being rejected by many. The Prophet Joseph Smith was slain because he taught the truth about God, and there are those today who "trample [the Lord's prophets] under their feet" (1 Nephi 19:7) by failing to hearken to their counsel.

The fourth step that allowed Noah to lead his people toward bondage was their lack of spiritual knowledge. While speaking to the priests of king Noah, Abinadi said, "Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise" (Mosiah 12:27). These people were in a condition of mental slavery because they had not read and understood the scriptures. Their condition resembles President Kimball's description of the condition of those who lived before the Protestant Reformation: "For hundreds of years before [Martin] Luther, there had been mental slavery. People did not read their Bibles, they listened only to the priest. They were in spiritual bondage. But beginning with this break of Martin Luther from the church of which he had been a member, freedom of thought and freedom of religion began to be a nearer reality" (*TSWK* 426-27).

Likewise, when Alma the Elder's heart was penetrated by Abinadi's message, he was led by the power of God to bring spiritual knowledge to the people and to establish the Church anew among those who would believe. His efforts led 450 souls out of the bondage of sin and ignorance (Mosiah 18:35).

Types of Bondage

The Nephites in the land of Nephi experienced several different kinds of bondage, which may be categorized into four types: intellectual, financial, spiritual, and physical. Intellectual or mental bondage results from ignorance of spiritual things. When people do not understand the purpose of life or their ultimate potential, they are in bondage to ignorance and cannot be saved (D&C 131:6). President Benson's declaration

that the Church is still under condemnation for neglecting the Book of Mormon (“A Sacred Responsibility” 78) would seem to indicate that many of the Saints today are suffering the effects of some degree of mental bondage. To the extent that we allow ourselves to accept false political, social, and educational ideas we move toward a bondage that would deprive us of our God-given freedoms.

Financial bondage occurs when selfishness, greed, and materialism take over. Such was the case when king Noah laid a 20 percent tax on his people to support his riotous life (Mosiah 11:3–15). This materialism and greed ultimately led Noah’s people into financial bondage, paying 50 percent of all they possessed to the Lamanites (Mosiah 7:22; 19:15). Financial bondage in modern times may differ from that of king Noah’s people; nevertheless, the negative effects are still the same. Unfortunately, in our society there is a trend toward increased debt to support a more opulent lifestyle. The desire to possess material things is a plague of wide proportions. In 1987, 21.2 percent of Americans’ disposable income went to pay debts (U.S. Bureau of the Census, table 829). By August 1989 the consumer installment debt had risen to nearly 704 billion dollars (U.S. Department of Commerce, S–14). Certainly financial bondage is a serious problem today.

Spiritual bondage, or the bondage of sin, is referred to by President Romney as “the most awful bondage” (45). Although physical bondage is the most recognizable form of bondage—the Lord often uses it to persuade people to repent—the eternal effects of spiritual bondage are of greater consequence. It was the bondage of sin that ultimately led king Noah’s people into physical bondage. Their neglect of the scriptures and their refusal to heed the warning voice of the prophets made it easier for them to rationalize and commit sin. They used their finances to support their lifestyle of leisure and licentiousness. This addiction to sin became so powerful that in the face of possible death many fathers deserted their wives and children to save

their own lives (Mosiah 19:11). Who could imagine accepting such distorted values?

The degree of spiritual bondage among the people in the land of Nephi differed from person to person, much as it does in today's society. The vast majority of people today (72%) are unconditionally opposed to the idea of extramarital sex ("Morality" 53). However, if statistics were available showing how many people are entertained annually by videos and movies which condone extramarital affairs, the picture would be much less encouraging. Spiritual bondage begins not while physically committing sin, but intellectually when we begin to accept sin. These oft-repeated words of Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man" summarize well the process that leads to spiritual bondage:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.
(Epistle 2, ll. 217-20)

One of the most dramatic examples of our society's movement from enduring and pitying immorality to embracing it was revealed in a survey reported in the 9 December 1985 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* ("Morality" 52-53). In 1969 a Gallup poll indicated that 68 percent of all adults and 49 percent of young adults thought that premarital sex was wrong ("Morality" 52). The 1985 *U.S. News* poll indicated that a tremendous shift in attitude had occurred: 61 percent of all adults and 78 percent of all young adults now felt that premarital sex was not wrong ("Morality" 52). This change represents a 30 percent shift in moral values in a 16-year period. It would appear that with the sin of premarital sex we have arrived at the stage which Pope called "embrace." This pattern of increasing acceptance of sin was also the pattern of king Noah and his people.

The final type of bondage which the Nephites in the land of Nephi experienced was physical bondage, or slavery. While

physical bondage could refer to those who are subject to bad habits or appetites, in this paper the term physical bondage is applied only to those who are prisoners or slaves to another person or nation. It is difficult to find a time in history when there were not at least some of our Heavenly Father's children in physical bondage. In the Book of Mormon, this bondage often comes as a result of people's failure to follow the principles of the gospel or to give heed to the warnings of the prophets. Intellectual and spiritual bondage are generally precursors to physical bondage, which was the case with the Nephites in the land of Nephi.

One additional point applies to both physical and intellectual bondage: everyone is born with the Light of Christ, and that Light eventually causes all who are in bondage to seek their God-given freedoms. Concerning this principle President Ezra Taft Benson affirmed:

There is a God in heaven who is the sovereign power of the universe, and we are His literal offspring. He has endowed us with inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This He has implanted in the human breast. This is why men cannot be driven indefinitely or led by despotic rulers to intellectual or physical slavery and bondage. Fear and despotism may rule for a generation or two, or three, but in time the human spirit rebels, the spirit of liberty manifests itself, and its tyrannous hand is overthrown. (*This Nation Shall Endure* 69)

Perhaps never in known history has a more dramatic example of this principle occurred than in the events which have recently taken place in eastern Europe. People who have been long deprived of personal freedoms have finally stepped forward and said, in essence, "I want to have freedom to vote, to speak, and to worship according to the dictates of my own conscience." These events are a great evidence of the Light of Christ that influences all humankind to desire freedom.

What Delivers a People from Bondage?

Having examined the different types of bondage and the steps that lead people into bondage, we need to examine the process that leads people out of bondage. On the subject of deliverance from bondage, the stories of Limhi and his people and that of Alma the Elder and his people present some unique insights.

In fulfillment of Abinadi's prophecy (Mosiah 11:21–23), Limhi and the Nephites in the city of Nephi were placed in bondage by the Lamanites after being led astray by the poor example of king Noah. Upon experiencing the hardships associated with bondage, these Nephites determined to go to battle against the Lamanites (21:6). They were soundly defeated three times (21:12). Only after being defeated for the third time did they begin the process that would enable them to escape from bondage.

The first step outlined in the Book of Mormon for removing the chains of bondage is to be humble before the Lord. Because of heartache and the heavy yoke of bondage, Limhi and his people humbled themselves before the Lord (Mosiah 21:13), “turn[ing] to the Lord with full purpose of heart” as Limhi had instructed (7:33). Notice that the command to turn to the Lord is not to be half-hearted, but rather requires one's “*full* purpose of heart.” This process of being humbled requires a changing or “turning” that must occur in individual lives if they are to be spared or delivered from bondage. President N. Eldon Tanner declared: “A person who is guilty of a serious transgression cannot progress, and he is not happy while the guilt is upon him. Until he has confessed and repented he is in bondage” (78). Limhi's people acknowledged their guilt and turned to the Lord for his help.

The second step that leads away from bondage is for people to engage in mighty prayer. Prayer should automatically accompany being humbled before the Lord. In Mosiah 21 we read that the people of Limhi “did humble themselves even in

the depths of humility; and they did cry mightily to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions” (v 14). These Nephites learned to put their trust in the Lord as Limhi had encouraged them to do (Mosiah 7:33). Even though they sincerely and humbly relied on the Lord, “the Lord was slow to hear their cry” (Mosiah 21:15) because they had been slow to hear and respond to his word.

The third step of Limhi’s people toward deliverance from bondage was their willingness to covenant with the Lord to keep his commandments (Mosiah 21:32). Their obedience not only moved them toward freedom from physical bondage, it also enabled them to begin to enjoy a release from spiritual bondage before they had actually escaped from the hands of the Lamanites. In the words of President Marion G. Romney:

Freedom thus obtained—that is, by obedience to the law of Christ—is freedom of the soul, the highest form of liberty. And the most glorious thing about it is that it is within the reach of every one of us, regardless of what people about us, or even nations, do. All we have to do is learn the law of Christ and obey it. To learn it and obey it is the primary purpose of every soul’s mortal life. (45)

The fourth and final step in escaping bondage is to serve the Lord with all diligence (see Mosiah 7:33; 21:32). To both the Nephites and the Jaredites the Lord declared that freedom from bondage would continue for those who inhabit this choice land as long as they “serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12; compare 2 Nephi 1:7). Once Limhi and his people had covenanted with God to serve him and keep his commandments, they were able to devise a plan of escape from their Lamanite captors (Mosiah 22). That Limhi and his people began to witness the hand of the Lord helping them in their time of bondage confirms the promise of the Lord “that he [would] pour out his Spirit more abundantly” upon those who would serve him and keep his commandments (Mosiah 18:10).

Different Degrees of Help from the Lord

A subtle yet important lesson to be learned from Mosiah 21–24 pertains to the differing degrees of bondage which Limhi's and Alma's people experienced and the reasons for those differences. The following chart contrasts the bondage of Limhi's and Alma's people.

TABLE 1 *Degrees of Bondage*

Limhi's Group	Alma's Group
Limhi's group was placed in bondage with much bloodshed (21:5–12).	Alma's group was placed in bondage with no bloodshed (23:35–38; 24:9).
The Lord was slow to hear their cries because they had been slow to hear Him (21:15).	The Lord was not slow to hear their cries (24:10–13).
The Lord softened the Lamanites' hearts so they eased the burdens of Limhi's group (21:15).	The Lord physically eased the burdens of Alma's group (24:14–15).
They prospered by degrees as their faith increased (21:16).	The Lord visited them in their afflictions (24:14).
Gideon devised a plan of escape (22:9).	The Lord said, "I will deliver you" (24:16).
They got the guards drunk (22:7, 10).	The Lord put the guards to sleep (24:19).
They needed to have Ammon lead them to Zarahemla (22:11).	The Lord led them to Zarahemla (24:23–25).

As this chart shows, because Alma and his people had been humbled by the word of God rather than being compelled to be humble by their bondage as Limhi's group had been, the Lord made the bondage of Alma and his people much easier to endure. The message for us is that it is better to repent sooner than later. The slower we are to hearken to the Lord, the slower he must be in responding to our needs. How reassuring it must have been to Alma's people to experience the miracle of not feeling the burdens which were placed upon their backs. They could have no question in their minds about whose power it

was that delivered them and led them back to the land of Zarahemla.

The question may be asked why Alma's group was put into bondage since they had repented, had made covenants, and had served the Lord for some time. The answer seems to go back to Abinadi's prophecy. When he first came to the Nephites in the land of Nephi, he warned that they would be brought into bondage if they did not repent (see Mosiah 11:21). This warning went unheeded until Abinadi returned two years later. His warning then proclaimed that they *would* be brought into bondage, and if they still refused to repent they would be destroyed (see Mosiah 12:2, 8). It was at this time that Alma was converted and began to teach the words of Abinadi secretly to those Nephites who would listen. Thus, even though Alma and his people had repented, it was still necessary that Abinadi's first prophecy be fulfilled.

A great principle we can learn from this portion of the book of Mosiah (chapters 19–24) is that the longer we wait to repent and forsake our sins, the more serious the consequences will be. Elder Melvin J. Ballard reiterated this principle: "Every man and woman who is putting off until the next life the task of correcting and overcoming the weakness of the flesh are sentencing themselves to years of bondage, for no man or woman will come forth in the resurrection until he has completed his work, until he has overcome, until he has done as much as he can do" (242).

Sadly, for many this bondage has already begun in this life. As with Limhi and his people, if we are slow to hearken to the counsel of the Lord, we only make our transformation to freedom more difficult and increase the degree of our bondage.

Conclusion

I have explained the steps that lead people along the road to bondage and examined the types of bondage we can en-

counter, the most serious and far-reaching of which is spiritual bondage. Furthermore, I have outlined the process by which one can escape from the hold of bondage. Significantly, the degree of bondage we experience is directly related to the timing of our repentance. The best time to repent is now.

Finally, we should understand that the Lord never intended or desired that his children should be in bondage. In the words of Elder Mark E. Petersen, "Let us remember that it is against the will of God that any one of us should be in bondage—in any way—neither to sin nor to addiction nor to debt" (63).

Lehi taught his son Jacob that we have all been created by God to experience joy and to be free (2 Nephi 2:25, 27). However, when we experience bondage of any kind and therefore seek relief through applying divine principles, we must remember that deliverance will finally come "according to [the Lord's] own will and pleasure" (Mosiah 7:33). May we thus be blessed with the patience and wisdom to understand, avoid, and overcome bondage in our lives.

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