

LESSON 25

Living Righteously in a Day of Wickedness

Introduction

The Book of Mormon records the destruction of individuals and societies that embraced wickedness and allowed secret combinations to exist. At the same time, the Book of

Mormon also teaches that we can live righteously despite living in a wicked environment. In this lesson, students will learn what they can do to remain righteous in today's world.

Background Reading

- Quentin L. Cook, "Reaping the Rewards of Righteousness," *Ensign*, July 2015, 33–39.
- Dennis B. Neuenschwander, "One among the Crowd," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 101–3.

Suggestions for Teaching

Alma 37:21–22, 25–27; Helaman 6:20–26, 37–40; Ether 8:18–26

Secret combinations can destroy freedoms and societies

Write the phrase *enemy territory* on the board and ask students what it means.

Display the following statement by President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and invite a student to read it aloud:



"You young people are being raised in enemy territory. We know from the scriptures that there was a war in heaven and that Lucifer rebelled and, with his followers, 'was cast out into the earth' [Revelation 12:9]. He is determined to disrupt our Heavenly Father's plan and seeks to control the minds and actions of all" ("Counsel to Youth," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 16).

- In what ways is living at this time like being in enemy territory?

Explain that this lesson will examine the Book of Mormon's description of the wicked environment in which some righteous individuals lived. Invite students to look for principles and doctrines that they can apply as they study the examples of individuals who remained faithful despite being surrounded by wickedness.

Remind students that Moroni witnessed the destruction of the entire Nephite civilization. He described the wickedness that led to both the Nephites' and the Jaredites' destruction. Invite a student to read Ether 8:18 and 21 aloud while the class identifies the cause of this destruction. Invite students to share what they discover.

Write the following scripture references and questions on the board:

Alma 37:21–22, 25–27

Helaman 6:20–26

Ether 8:18–26

What are secret combinations?

What are their goals and purposes?

How do they ensure their continued existence?

Ask students to read one of the passages on the board and look for answers to the questions listed. Tell students that the passage they choose might not answer all three of these questions, but they should find what they can. After sufficient time, discuss the questions on the board as a class. Then discuss the following:

- From what you read, what are the consequences of allowing secret combinations to exist and flourish? (Students should identify the following principle: **Secret combinations can destroy freedoms, governments, and societies.**)
- What do you think are some examples of secret combinations in our day?

To help address this question, display the following statements by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994). Ask a student to read them aloud.



"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. . . . Among their purposes are to 'murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness' [Helaman 6:23]" (M. Russell Ballard, "Standing for Truth and Right," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 38).



"I testify that wickedness is rapidly expanding in every segment of our society. (See D&C 1:14–16; 84:49–53.) It is more highly organized, more cleverly disguised, and more powerfully promoted than ever before. Secret combinations lusting for power, gain, and glory are flourishing. . . . (See Ether 8:18–25.)" (Ezra Taft Benson, "I Testify," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 87).

- Why do you think Book of Mormon prophets included information about secret combinations in their record?

Invite a student to read Helaman 6:20, 37–40 aloud. Have the class follow along, looking for contrasts between the Lamanites and the Nephites. (*Note:* Comparing and contrasting is a scripture study skill that you might emphasize in this lesson [see *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* (2012), 22].)

- What can we learn from these verses about how to eliminate wickedness and secret combinations?

Alma 62:41; 4 Nephi 1:42; Mormon 1:13–17, 19; 2:8, 14–15, 18–19; 3:2–3, 12, 22; Moroni 9:6, 22, 25–26

Remaining righteous while surrounded by wickedness

Tell students that the prophet Mormon was born into the environment of increasing wickedness brought on by these secret combinations. Ask students to study the following passages and look for and mark descriptions of Mormon’s environment: Mormon 1:13–14, 16–17, 19; 2:8, 14–15, 18. Invite students to report on what they found, and then ask:

- What concerns would you have about living in such an environment?

Invite a student to read Mormon 1:15 and 2:19 aloud.

- What can we learn from Mormon’s example during this wicked time? (As students respond, write this truth on the board: **We can live righteously even when we are surrounded by wickedness.**)

Give students time to read Mormon 3:2–3, 12, 22 to see what else they can learn about how Mormon was able to live righteously in a time of wickedness. After students share what they learned about Mormon, ask the following questions:

- Who else in the Book of Mormon is an example of living righteously while surrounded by wickedness? (Answers might include Ether, Moroni, Abish, and the people who believed that Christ would be born, as recorded in 3 Nephi 1.)
- What challenges do we face as we strive to live righteously in a wicked world?

Remind students that Mormon’s son, Moroni, lived during this same time of widespread wickedness. Before his death, Mormon wrote a letter to Moroni that is recorded in Moroni 9. Ask a student to read Moroni 9:6, 22, 25–26. Invite the class to consider how Mormon’s counsel in these verses could help us to live righteously in a wicked world.

- What can we learn from these verses that will help us live righteously in today’s world? (Help students to understand the following principle: **If we have faith in Christ and in His Atonement, then we will have the strength to live righteously despite being surrounded by wickedness.**)
- What examples have you seen of someone living righteously in the midst of today’s wickedness?
- How has focusing on Jesus Christ and His Atonement helped you to rise above wicked or difficult conditions?

Share the following statement by Sister Virginia U. Jensen, former counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, to help students consider what else they might do to stand firm in faith and righteousness:



“To maintain a firm stance for ourselves and help others stand firm, the message of the restored gospel must be firmly planted in our hearts and taught in our homes. ... Teach your loved ones how to draw upon the powers of heaven through fasting and prayer. Teach them that keeping the Sabbath day holy will insulate them from the world. Teach them to be obedient. Teach them to seek God’s approval, not man’s. Teach them that the only route back to our heavenly home is by loving and following the Savior and by making and keeping sacred covenants and commandments. The truths of the gospel and knowledge of the plan of salvation are weapons your family members can use for victory over Satan’s evil forces” (“Stand Firm,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 94).

- What has given you determination and strength to be obedient to the Lord in an increasingly wicked world?

Explain that during the long war between the Nephites and Lamanites recorded in the book of Alma, individuals had to stand against forces of evil in order to preserve their lives. Invite students to study Alma 62:41 and look for the contrasting ways in which individuals responded to adversity and wickedness. Invite students to share what they discovered that could help them live righteously in a wicked world.

Ask a student to read aloud the following statement by President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency concerning this passage:



“In an increasingly unjust world, to survive and even to find happiness and joy, no matter what comes, we must make our stand unequivocally with the Lord. We need to try to be faithful every hour of every day so that our foundation of trust in the Lord will never be shaken. ...

“It’s not so much what happens to us but how we deal with what happens to us. That reminds me of a passage from Alma. After a long war ‘many had become hardened,’ while ‘many were softened because of their afflictions’ [Alma 62:41]. The same circumstances produced opposite responses. ... Each of us needs to have our own storehouse of faith to help us rise above the troubles that are part of this mortal probation” (“Where Do I Make My Stand?” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 18, 20).

Ask students to take a few minutes to write responses to the following question:

- What commitments have you made to stand “unequivocally with the Lord”?

Then encourage students to ponder the following questions:

- What promptings have you received from the Spirit concerning how you can be more committed to the Lord?
- What can you do to help your family members be more committed to the Lord?

Testify that as we persevere in faith, the Lord will bless us and help us live righteously in the midst of wickedness.

Student Readings

- Alma 37:21–22, 25–27; 62:41; Helaman 6:20–26, 37–40; 4 Nephi 1:42; Mormon 1:13–17, 19; 2:8, 14–15, 18–19; 3:2–3, 12, 22; Ether 8:18–26; Moroni 9:6, 22, 25–26.
- Quentin L. Cook, “Reaping the Rewards of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, July 2015, 33–39.