

# Book of Mormon: Message of Shalom

## Megan Bartel

How do you know what is truth? Growing up, I was taught that I can know truth based off of whom the message was coming from. If it came from certain, trusted people, you knew it was truth, and didn't question that. This was my world view, my paradigm. Well, a few years ago, that world view was shaken, and my whole paradigm got flipped upside down. In essence, I had a faith crisis. I began to question everything I had ever been taught. So I began asking myself, "How do I know what is truth?" It was then that I was introduced to a different way of thinking, as Bryce discussed. It was suggested to me that I start looking at the message given, and testing the message vs. just looking at the source. For some odd reason, this was a novel concept, and it took a lot of rewiring in my brain. But through this process, I began rebuilding my faith. The book of Mormon was something I had to re-look at. Instead of looking at where it came from, or at the people who professed to believe and follow it, I looked at the message contained within it. Funny enough, the concept of looking at, and testing a message was actually in the Book of Mormon all along, so apparently I had never read it very carefully.

In the Book of Alma, Alma the younger teaches about testing the word, or message. He compares it to planting a seed. You plant the seed, or word, in your heart, and you experiment with the word. If the seed/word grows and produces fruit, that it is good. If it does not grow, it's not good. Well, then the question is, what is fruit?

In 1 Nephi, Lehi has a dream, where after following a man and becoming lost, after much hardship, after much prayer, and after trying the word, he comes to the tree of life. When he tastes the fruit on the tree, he describes it as "desirable above all other fruit." Nephi is later given to see the meaning of his father's dream, and he is shown that the tree and its fruit represent the love of God.

Over the past two years, my family and I have attended worship service at Community of Christ in Salt Lake City, Utah. Over that time I have been introduced to the meaning of Shalom. Over the past few days, we have been staying at a local Bed and Breakfast, and we have been in the Shalom room. On the wall is a picture that says: "Shalom – completeness and wholeness. Peace. Harmony. Salvation. Tranquility. Friendship. Trust. The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call Shalom. We call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs that in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in which he delights. Shalom, in other words is the way things ought to be."

I was talking to the owner of the B&B over breakfast about Shalom. She expressed that the concept of Shalom goes beyond religion, culture, race or ethnicity – it is something everyone can comprehend given their individual background and world view. It's not just about peace and love but a wholeness within a community.

As I pondered more on Shalom, I began to think of, individually, who exemplifies Shalom. They don't just talk about how to love others, they don't just do loving acts; these people have become the very essence of love. As I thought this, words of Alma, from the Book of Mormon came into my head: "And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experience this mighty change in your hearts?" [Have you found the tree? Have you tasted the fruit? Have you achieved Shalom? Have you become love?] How do we experience this mighty change of heart? How do we become love or achieve Shalom?

After testing the words of the Book of Mormon I have found that every prophet within the book is trying to teach us how to obtain the fruit, or achieve Shalom.

In 2 Nephi we are taught about the Doctrine of Christ. "For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this straight and narrow path which leads to Eternal life." Nephi explains that this is the Doctrine of Christ, because it is what Christ himself did. In order to follow Christ, we must follow the doctrine He himself not only gave to us, but showed to us by His example. "And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved...And now my beloved brethren, this is the way, and there is none other way nor name given under Heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God." Nephi continues with "And now my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this straight and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of Him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men."

In Mosiah, King Benjamin reiterates to his people the doctrine of Christ, although in different wording. He then picks up where Nephi left off and expands on what it means to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men". He says "And behold I say unto you that if ye do this, ye shall always rejoice and be filled with the love of God and always retain a remission of your sins. And ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. And ye will not have a mind to injure one another but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry or naked, neither will you suffer that they transgress the laws of God...But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another and to serve one another. And also, ye yourselves will succor those that standeth in need of your succor. Ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish...For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same being, even God, for all the substance which we have...? And now for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you – that is for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God – I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally according to their wants. And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order."

In 3 Nephi, Christ speaks to the people of Nephi. He reiterates the doctrine of Christ as well as the words given by Mosiah. He then gives to the people the same words he himself spoke at the Sermon on the

Mount. This sermon is the higher principles that underlie the commandments. We are given the commandments in order to help us discover the principles they are based upon. Our goal is to begin living the higher principles, as Christ did. These higher principles bring about godliness and holiness, because they are His words. Words that allow us to achieve Shalom.

I could go on further with how the Book of Mormon teaches us how to achieve Shalom, but I won't. Basically, once I finally opened my eyes to the true message of the Book of Mormon my heart was forever changed. I began to see what God really wants me to be. A person full of love, not anger or hatred; a person full of compassion not judgment; a person full of goodwill, not jealousy or envy; a person full of humility, not pride. A person who doesn't just talk about love, or act kindly, but a person who has become love.

Again, "And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your own countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" Have you found the tree? Have you tasted the fruit? Have you achieved Shalom?

Christ lived the word so perfectly He became the word. He lived the doctrine so perfectly, it became His. And to be like Him, we must follow the word and His doctrine and become it. I believe the Book of Mormon contains His words and His doctrine and is full of love and light. It is the message of Shalom.