

MORONI, MOSES, AND PRESIDENT NELSON: VITAL CORRELATIONS WITH THE COVID-19 VACCINE

Robin Litster Johnson

I listen to the Book of Mormon almost every day and often find what I consider to be interesting correlations with other goings-on in life. Most recently, I am struck by the similarities between the Nephites' attitudes regarding defending themselves against the Lamanites, Moroni's preparations for war, Moses and the brazen serpent, and the development of the COVID-19 vaccines and President Nelson's emphatic encouragement to be vaccinated.

In Alma 48:15–16, it says, “this was their faith . . . that he [God] would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies.” This was not a static set of actions the Nephites were to take in every circumstance in order defend themselves but rather a belief that in each varying circumstance they would be inspired and led to do what was appropriate for the situation.

Then, in Alma 49:8–9, when the Lamanites, led by apostate Nephites, came against them in battle, it reads,

But behold, to their [the Lamanites' and apostate Nephites'] uttermost astonishment, they [the righteous Nephites] were prepared for them, in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi. Now they were prepared for the Lamanites, to battle after the manner

of the instructions of Moroni. And it came to pass that the Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites, were exceedingly astonished at their manner of preparation for war.

It is clear in these verses that entirely new technologies, new tactics, and new strategies had been innovated and developed by the Nephites because of the inspiration and guidance of their leaders—and because of the people’s cooperation and collaboration with their leaders.

Now flash back a few thousand years to Moses in the desert with the children of Israel. In Numbers 21:6–9 we read:

And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

The people asked Moses to pray to have the fiery serpents removed. The scriptures here do not say that that is what Moses asked the Lord to do. It simply says, “Moses prayed for the people.” The Lord did not remove the fiery serpents, which had been the people’s request. Instead, they were given an antidote to quell the effects of having been bitten.

This entire “Moses and the fiery serpent” scenario is expounded various times in the Book of Mormon. Consider these verses:

After they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished. (1 Nephi 17:41)

But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them. (Alma 33:20)

Now flash forward to March 29, 2020. President Nelson asked the Church, and the world, to join in a worldwide fast for relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. He included, “As a physician and surgeon, I have great admiration for medical professionals, scientists, and all who are working around the clock to curb the spread of COVID-19.”¹

Less than two weeks later, President Nelson called for a second worldwide fast on April 10, 2020 for relief from the pandemic, including “that the present *pandemic may be controlled*,” and for “our Heavenly Father and His Son—the Master Healer—to show forth Their marvelous power to bless the people of the earth.”²

Nine months later, on January 19, 2021, President Nelson was vaccinated and shared these comments:

We are thankful for the countless doctors, scientists, researchers, manufacturers, government leaders, and others who have performed the grueling work required to make this vaccine available. *We have prayed often for this literal godsend.*

As a former surgeon and medical researcher, I know something of the effort needed to accomplish such a remarkable feat. *Producing a safe, effective vaccine in less than a year is nothing short of miraculous.* I was a young surgeon when, in 1953, Dr. Jonas Salk announced that he had developed a vaccine against the cruel and crippling disease of polio. I then watched the dramatic impact that vaccine had on eradicating polio as most people around the world were vaccinated. . . .

My professional and ecclesiastical experiences convince me that vaccinations administered by competent medical professionals protect health and preserve life.

1. Tad Walch, “Video: President Nelson invites all to participate in worldwide fast Sunday and to pray for relief from coronavirus pandemic,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 26, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/3/26/21196285/coronavirus-covid-19-russell-m-nelson-pandemic-faith-mormon-lds-church-prayer-fasting>.

2. Jason Swensen, “President Nelson calls for a second worldwide fast in response to COVID-19,” *Church News*, Apr. 4, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-04-04/general-conference-april-2020-worldwide-fast-president-nelson-180010> (italics added).

Receiving the vaccine today was part of our personal efforts to *be good global citizens in helping to eliminate COVID-19 from the world.*³

It is interesting to note President Nelson specifically mentioning that the polio vaccine eliminated polio *because* most people around the world were vaccinated, implying, if not directly stating, that COVID-19 could be eliminated thusly as well, if most people around the world were to become vaccinated.

On January 19, 2021, the First Presidency released the following statement:

Vaccinations have helped curb or eliminate devastating communicable diseases. . . . COVID-19 vaccines that many have worked, prayed, and fasted for are being developed, and some are being provided. . . . As appropriate opportunities become available, *the Church urges its members, employees and missionaries to be good global citizens and help quell the pandemic by safeguarding themselves and others through immunization.*⁴

These efforts continued. In February 2021, per President Nelson's direction, the Church, through LDS Charities, gave \$20 million to support global efforts to provide two billion COVID-19 vaccines to people in low- and middle-income countries.⁵ In March 2021, the First Presidency upgraded the Church's general handbook to encourage

3. Russell M. Nelson, "With approval from our physician, my wife Wendy and I were vaccinated today . . ." Facebook, Jan. 19, 2021, <https://m.facebook.com/russell.m.nelson/photos/a.607086232692150/3650726764994733/?type=3&source=48> (italics added).

4. "The First Presidency and Apostles Over Age 70 Receive the COVID-19 Vaccine," Newsroom, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jan. 19, 2021, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-leaders-covid-19-vaccine> (italics added).

5. Tad Walch, "President Russell M. Nelson and the COVID-19 vaccine: What the church leader has said and done," *Deseret News*, Apr. 29, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/4/29/22407953/president-nelson-on-covid-19-vaccine-comments-speeches-actions-prayers-shot-church-news>.

vaccinations.⁶ In April 2021, it was announced that missionaries should be vaccinated, and if not, they would only be assigned to missions within their home country.⁷ In August 2021, another statement was released by the First Presidency, including this plea: “We find ourselves *fighting a war* against the ravages of COVID-19 and its variants. . . . We know that protection from the diseases they cause can only be achieved by immunizing a very high percentage of the population. . . . *We urge individuals to be vaccinated.*”⁸

In the event that my argument and the vital correlations between Moroni, Moses, and President Nelson are not apparent, I will attempt to lay them bare here. We are at war like the Nephites, though our battle is metaphorical. Like the Nephites, new technologies have been developed to fight and win this war. The prophet, highly knowledgeable and experienced in this battleground, has himself used these new technologies and has repeatedly urged Church members to use them as well in order to win this war. Yet, like the children of Israel ignoring Moses as he lifted the brazen serpent for all to see, and like those whom Moronihah attempted to lead (see Helaman 4), there continue to be Church members who refuse to be vaccinated, many due to belief in a false narrative.

It is true that individual choice in this matter has always been affirmed in each of the statements by President Nelson and the First

6. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 38.7.13, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng#title_number238.

7. “Church Encourages Missionaries to Receive a COVID-19 Vaccine,” Newsroom, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 23, 2021, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/missionaries-covid-19-vaccine>.

8. “The First Presidency Urges Latter-day Saints to Wear Face-Masks When Needed and Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19,” Newsroom, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Aug. 12, 2021, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-message-covid-19-august-2021> (italics added).

Presidency, as personal agency is a prime directive. It is also true that there are genuine medical conditions that preclude some from getting a COVID-19 vaccination. For example, the daughter of a friend is expecting her first child, and because of her and her husband's blood types, she had to receive a RhoGAM shot.⁹ Her doctors were uncertain how the COVID-19 vaccine would interact with that and recommended waiting until after the baby's birth to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. There are other medical conditions that prohibit small numbers of others from getting the vaccine.

However, in my opinion, complacency, obstinacy, or an affiliation with conspiracy theories do not constitute medical conditions that warrant the refusal to be vaccinated. Stories are proliferating about unvaccinated people in the hospital who sorely regret their refusal to be vaccinated, along with those mourning the unnecessary deaths of the unvaccinated.¹⁰ "In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me" (D&C 101:8).

I have several family members who are currently choosing to not be vaccinated. Their research for making this decision comes from what some consider to be "alternative" doctors. Some of their evidence can appear quite compelling. However, more compelling than their research, more compelling than the research presented by traditional doctors, and more compelling than any opinions proffered by political

9. "Rh Disease," Stanford Children's Health, accessed Aug. 20, 2021, <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=rh-disease-90-P02498>.

10. Erika Edwards, "Unvaccinated hospitalized patients say they regret not getting the shot," NBC News, July 8, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/unvaccinated-hospitalized-patients-say-they-regret-not-getting-shot-n1273342>; Stephen Collinson, "The tragedy of Covid victims who said no to the vaccine," CNN, Aug. 3, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/03/politics/covid-victims-who-said-no-to-the-vaccine/index.html>.

pundits on either side of the aisle is my testimony in the concept of a living prophet. I believe in the concept of a living prophet. Right now, the living prophet happens to be Russell M. Nelson. On this topic of being vaccinated against COVID-19, he has given clear, consistent, and continual counsel: Get vaccinated.

ROBIN LITSTER JOHNSON {RLLJ@yahoo.com} is a resilience and well-being advisor, fraud prevention expert, and Suzuki violin teacher. She LOVES the Book of Mormon and its relevance to our lives. Her favorite church callings have been stake music chair and Primary chorister. She received an MBA, emphasis in organizational behavior, from Brigham Young University and a Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) from the University of Pennsylvania—“COVID Class of 2020.” She can be contacted through RobinLearningSystems.com and MusicMadeEasier.com.