

The Parable of Korihor

Of course, there is an immediate problem with the title – Korihor was a real person, and the events recorded in Alma 30 really happened. However, the things that Korihor said and did serve as such good general instructions for recognizing how Satan works that it might just as well be a parable.

I find it very interesting that Korihor is first introduced as a disturbance to the peace¹. One of the lessons of the Book of Mormon is that true peace and happiness comes only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, hence someone preaching against Christ poses as great a threat to peace as does an invading army.

Verses 7 through 11 teach a concept which makes perfect sense to me, but which leads to some confusion in the story of Korihor. These verses explain that a man is not judged before the law based on his beliefs or thoughts, but only on his actions. Verse 12 specifically says that the law “could have no hold” on Korihor. Yet in this chapter we three times see Korihor taken and bound and brought before the high priest and chief judge. The basis for binding him, except that it was wisdom on the part of the people of Ammon², is never explained. However, as Alma points out to Korihor, he certainly was lying, and perhaps this was considered sufficient grounds to bind him.

Korihor started preaching in Zarahemlah, which was the principle city of the Nephites and the seat of their government. It seems like a logical enough place to start to corrupt Nephite society, and we are told that he had considerable success there. However, his next two venues leave one to wonder about his wisdom. First, he goes to the land of Jershon, where the people of Ammon lived. They immediately reject his teachings, and in fact he is cast out of the land by Ammon's order. Next Korihor tries Gideon. If we look at Alma Chapter 7 we see that these people had a history of being relatively righteous, yet Korihor decided to try to corrupt them next. The response at Gideon was similar to that of Jershon – he is again cast out of the land, but this time he is sent with an escort back to Zarahemlah where he can appear before Alma, the high priest over all the church, and before the chief judge over all the land, who was Nephiah.

1 See Verses 6 and 22 in Alma 30.

2 Verse 20

What was it that Korihor taught that was so offensive to the people, and so instructive for us? His principle teaching was that there was no Christ and no God, that the laws of God are foolishness, and that there could be no remission of sins. In fact, a part of his message was that there is no sin, nor indeed any crime. These teachings are pleasing to the natural man, and gained him many followers.

Verses 27 and 28 summarize the heart of Korihor's teaching:

And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges. Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do according to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God—a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

The world tells us today, as Korihor told the Nephites then, that the commandments of God are really foolish restrictions designed to keep us from experiencing the fullness of life; that there are so many fun things we could do if we would just ignore the stuffy old men and allow ourselves to be free. We know this teaching is incorrect, but unless we are prepared it can be difficult to counter. I like to use the following analogy:

In essence, the world tells us that the commandments are like a fence which restricts horses to one particular pasture without allowing them to roam free. I say that the commandments are a fence, but this fencing is placed to protect us and warn us. Just as some people feel nervous about driving on a mountain road without a guard rail, so the commandments are set up to keep us away from dangerous cliffs and canyons, and to help us to avoid falling into perilous swamps or raging rivers. In other words, the commands protect our freedom because we avoid injury and death, and they restrict us not at all.

One of the interesting paradoxes of Korihor's teaching, and one which is continued today (if couched in somewhat vaguer terms) is his definite declaration that “no man can know of anything which is to

come”, “ye cannot know of things which ye do not see”, and that God is “a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.” As any student of law knows, proving non-existence of anything is a difficult task. The only way Korihor could possibly know these things would be through revelation – which directly counters all of his arguments.

Alma seizes on this point as he reasons with Korihor in verses 40-44. He states that Korihor has no proof except for his own word that God does not exist, but that all things testify that there is a God. However, Satan is very astute, and if he had not prepared Korihor he has certainly prepared men in our day to counter this argument. We are taught that there is a natural explanation for the evolution of the universe to the form we see today; and that if there is a God he must have stopped operating as soon as the Big Bang occurred. Because nature is now considered simply a work of natural processes, and not of God, we cannot rely on the same arguments Alma used. We must begin and end where he began: “For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come.” The power of our personal testimony is what will allow us to resist those who preach that there is no God. Therefore we must do all in our power to keep our testimonies strong and vibrant.

Although Korihor went among the Zoramites and “was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead”, his spirit (or better stated, the spirit that motivated him) lives on in the blandishments of TV advertisements and programs, in movies and on the internet, in books and in magazines. We are repeatedly told that we should be more reasonable, that we should be willing to experiment with everything, that what a man or woman does is no sin, and we should be tolerant of alternate life-styles. However I would say that we must remember that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”³ There truly is a divine creator, and he is all powerful and all knowing. If we are to be reasonable, let us be reasonable before God and not before men. The purpose of the gospel is that we might have joy, and joy will be ours if we follow faithfully the commandments of God and avoid the dangers and pitfalls of mortality.

3 1 Corinthians 3:19