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Nephi—An Impressive Lesson

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Abstract: Giving many examples from the life of Nephi, the author states his impression to follow the example of Nephi.

NEPHI—AN IMPRESSIVE LESSON

BY ANDREW JENSON, ASSISTANT CHURCH HISTORIAN

It has been my privilege twice to assist in revising the Danish translation of the Book of Mormon; the first time, together with the late President Niels Wilhelmsen, in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1881, and the second time, together with the late President Anthon H. Lund, in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1901; and in revising and reading proofs, and otherwise preparing the manuscript for the printer. I have had a splendid opportunity to study the contents of the sacred volume in detail. When, therefore, the question is asked me which particular part of the Book of Mormon appeals to me the most, I would unhesitatingly say that the very first verse of the first chapter of the First Book of Nephi has impressed me, and influenced my life, as much as any other passage in the book. It reads as follows:

"I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father, and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days."

In addressing the young people of Zion, I have often had occasion to refer to that passage, and then enter into some details pertaining to the life of Nephi, showing that he was an obedient boy, who from his early youth listened to the counsel of his parents, and sought for the blessings of his father continuously, and I have advised our young people to follow the example of Nephi in this regard. For Nephi's devotion to his God and to his parents certainly paved the way for him to become even a greater prophet and a greater leader than his father. The Lord blessed him ahead of his brethren, and his kindred generally, and granted him marvelous manifestations and a glorious insight into the future, for no one of whom we have any record saw the coming of the Savior in the flesh and other great future events more clearly and more vividly than did Nephi. Such confidence had he in the Lord, and in the teachings of his father, that, on a certain occasion, when his brothers faltered in the discharge of the work that the Lord had commanded them to do, he took a positive stand by saying:

"I will go and do the things which the Lord has commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." (1 Nephi 3:7.)

Nephi's subsequent career proved that he was a man of great faith, and he had no hesitancy in undertaking to do anything which the Lord commanded him to do, even to the building of a ship which brought the family of Lehi safely to the promised land.

When, some 54 years ago, I was called on my first mission to Europe I had no more experience in preaching the gospel than the average young man of my day, but remembering the words of Nephi, I sought diligently unto the God of my fathers, and by the blessing of the Lord, and my confidence in what I call a fundamental principle—that spoken of by Nephi—I was successful on my mission, and ever since have endeavored to exercise faith in God and confidence in myself, in order to make a success of life.

As the beautiful passage quoted from Nephi in the commencement of his book foreshadows the great blessings which follow those who honor their fathers and mothers, I feel impressed to ask: "Why should not the youth of Zion of our day, or the young men and women of modern Israel, follow the example of the Prophet Nephi? Nearly everyone born within the pale of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can consistently quote the saying of Nephi and apply it to themselves: "I ————— was born of goodly parents." Why then should not our children and grandchildren take advantage of their birth-right, exercise faith in God, keep his commandments, like Nephi did, and receive the blessings and rewards which, according to Divine promise, comes to those who honor their parents, who are true to God and true to those principles which, from the beginning, have been the real foundation and guiding force of nearly every man and woman in the Church (and out of the Church, too, as far as that is concerned) who have made life a success. Such almost invariably become shining lights in the midst of their fellows. By continually doing what is right, they get confidence in themselves and feel that, by the help of God, they will be able to accomplish anything within human power—anything that an allwise Providence shall mark out for them to do as they journey the pathway of life.

To keep the commandments of God and to honor father and mother, in the sense in which that commandment originally was given through Moses on Mount Sinai, means success and happiness in this world and salvation and exaltation in the world to come. The history of the world is full of examples illustrating the success of men and women who have been true to God and have honored their parents, like Nephi did. Then, in the language of our modern poet, Elder Evan Stephens, let the youth of Zion, in the spirit of faith and devotion, join together in a mighty chorus and sing:

"True to the faith that our parents have cherished,
True to the truth for which martyrs have perished,
To God's command, soul, heart and hand,
Faithful and true we will ever stand."