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## The Book of Mormon—The Last of the Nephites

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# Lesson Department

## Theology and Testimony

(First Week in May)

BOOK OF MORMON—THE LAST OF THE NEPHITES

### *Assignment*

Read carefully the section called "The Book of Mormon" from beginning to end, till you reach the section known as "The Book of Ether." Then, skipping the "Book of Ether," which we shall take in the lesson following this, read all of the "Book of Moroni."

It will be helpful also if you can read what is said about Mormon and Moroni in the *Dictionary of the Book of Mormon* and in chapter 31 of the *Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon*.

### *Story of the Lesson*

Here is where the Nephites come to the precipice and jump off. They have continued to go from bad to worse in the period after Christ, till they reach a point where they cannot see where their own higher interest lies, as has been the case so many times in the history of individuals and of peoples.

Ammoron, who has the plates and the other sacred things, charges the ten-year-old Mormon with the duty of keeping the record of his people, because he is an observant youth. Meantime, he hides the records in a hill, where Mormon is to look for them when the time comes for him to begin setting down the historical facts of his own day. Mormon began this work fourteen years afterwards, when he was twenty-five years old.

In 322 A. D. the last war broke out between the Lamanites and the

Nephites. It continued, with occasional recesses, till after the year 400. At first the Nephites won. This was due partly to the fact that they were not yet "ripe in iniquity," as the historian picturesquely puts it, and partly to the fact that they were led by Mormon, who was made their leader at fifteen. But, as time went on, they lost out in the numerous battles. Meantime if the Lamanites were victorious, they drove the Nephites from their homes into the north countries; if the Nephites won in the battle, they returned to their homes. Occasionally Mormon, who was also a prophet, induced his people to turn to the Lord. Whereupon they would win victories, but presently they would lapse again into forgetfulness of God. Then they would lose. Finally Mormon became disgusted and refused to lead them into battle, till, as he saw their disasters, his heart would soften and he gave in. This is the way things went between the years 326 and 385, with a ten years' respite, during which both peoples were nursing their hatred of the enemy.

Hundreds of thousands of troops were engaged in these battles. Toward the last days we read of horrors unspeakable. Whenever the Lamanites took any prisoners, they proceeded to kill the men, ravish the women, and maltreat the little children. Mormon writes to his son that the women and children were fed the very flesh of their slain husbands and fathers. Truly, as Mormon

says, they were without civilization. In the end—that is, after the year 400—the Nephites disappear or are absorbed into the Lamanite population.

Meanwhile, however, Mormon performed the task assigned him by Ammoron. He got the plates from the hill, set down on them the events of his own time, made an abridgment of the entire history of the Lehites, from the beginning to the end, and turned the records over to his son Moroni, with a set of small plates of Nephi, to be finished and then hidden away in the earth.

Moroni also had been a Nephite military leader. He is not the same Moroni that we read of some lessons ago, who was a contemporary of Amalickiah. This Moroni is the one who delivered the plates of the *Book of Mormon* to the prophet Joseph Smith. After being given the record by his father, he adds some of the happenings of his own day, translates and abridges the record of the Jaredites, and then hides away the precious things in the hill Cumorah, where they remain undisturbed for about fourteen hundred years.

### Outline

- I. The record of Mormon.
  1. His war record.
  2. His struggles with the Nephites for righteousness.
  3. His leadership of the army against the Lamanites.
  4. His work on the history of his people.
    - (1) As historian of his times.
    - (2) As abridger of past records.
  5. His character.
- II. The work of Moroni.
  1. Who Moroni was.
  2. His work on the plates.
  3. His task of translator.
  4. His own additions to the record.
  5. His appearance to Joseph Smith.

### Notes

1. *The Fall of Nations*: The Nephite nation came to an end after it had lived for a thousand years. It was not the first nation, however, to do that, nor the last. Babylon, Chaldea, Ninevah, Israel, Greece, Rome—these, too, have gone, leaving only their names and the lesson of their downfall. Why does a nation die?

A nation does not come to an end for the same reason that an individual does. An individual dies because his body gives out—the respiratory system fails, or the food channels refuse to function, or the circulatory ducts cease to work. The trouble is generally physical. Sometimes, however, he leads too fast a life, as we say of one who dissipates; and that also reacts on the body. Often we find people dying from sheer old age.

But there is no such reason why a nation's life cannot go on forever. A nation is merely an association of individuals, a group of people bound together by invisible ties. Kingdoms are snuffed out at times when the ruler becomes oppressive and tyrannical, or just merely weak. Democracies die because the majority of the people want the wrong things. That is what the good King Mosiah tells us in the *Book of Mormon*. There are certain laws of perpetuity for governments of every sort, and if they do not adhere to these laws they go down.

In the last analysis, however, the decision as to whether a nation shall live or die, rests with the individual members of that nation. One historian attributes the fall of the Roman empire to the fact that every-

body wanted to live in a city; another, to the general immorality that prevailed at its downfall. Individual sins brought on the final scenes in the Jewish nation. And that is probably why the Nephite people came to their end. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. Whenever the individual members of any nation become so corrupt as to give a general tone to the thinking and the deeds of the nation, then the end is in sight. That is why the more intelligent men and women in our own nation are becoming alarmed at the corruption of the courts in New York City, the gangster's power in Chicago, and the almost universal disrespect for law in the United States.

2. *Mormon*: The last of the prophet-generals among the Nephites is one of the most interesting characters in the *Book of Mormon*.

In his long life of perhaps seventy-eight years he was an active leader among his people. Born in the year 311 A. D., he seems to have attained his maturity, both physically and mentally, at a very early age. At ten his qualities attracted the attention of the historian Ammoran, who placed in his keeping the Nephite records. At fifteen he was asked to take command of the entire Nephite army—a heavy responsibility in times like this. There must, therefore, have been some extraordinary qualities about this man.

One of these was his physical stature. As already stated, he matured in body very early. And then he was a man of strong, decided convictions as to the religious life. For, say what you will, to believe with all your heart in anything as fundamental as religion at once sets you apart in any society or age. Mormon was a firm believer in Jesus Christ and his power to save. Since this sort of thing appears to

have been rare in his time, he therefore stood out.

Also he was full of courage. Not the courage merely that enables one to face the enemy in battle, but the rarer courage that inspires one to reprimand a whole people, including the army, when they leave the path of duty and righteousness. And Mormon did that time and again. "Behold," he says to his son concerning the people, "I am laboring with them continually; and when I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against me; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it. Wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased to strive with them."

But Mormon was more than a prophet and military man. He was also an historian. And he carried on his literary tasks alongside his other duties. To make an abridgment of the record of a people for a thousand years is no easy job, even when you have nothing else to do, especially, one would imagine, as all the writing had to be engraved on gold plates. It may well be that Mormon had to make even the plates on which he wrote the history.

3. *Moroni*: A worthy son of a worthy sire, is what one thinks on approaching the life of Moroni.

In all three respects Moroni was the son of his father. He was a military man, a prophet, and an historian. During the life-time of his father, Moroni had command of a division of the army, and appears to have been very efficient in that capacity. That he was a prophet, not in the lesser sense of one who predicts but of one who is a seer, is evident from the fact that he translated the *Book of Ether*, a Jaredite record in a foreign lan-

guage. Most probably the means he used in its translation was the urim and thummim, or interpreters. And then he finished the record on the plates which his father had given him, adding some letters from his father and some of the forms practiced by the church of his times.

Moroni, furthermore, is the connecting link between his time and Joseph Smith's. He buried the plates and the other precious things in Cumorah, and then, after the lapse of fourteen hundred years, uncovered them to the gaze of the prophet of the nineteenth century. In the meantime, however, he had died—just how we are not, of course, informed—and was raised from the dead, so that he appeared

to Joseph Smith in his resurrected form.

It was a great mission that Moroni performed.

### Questions

1. Tell in brief the story of the years during which the Nephite nation was disappearing.

2. Compare the character and personality of Mormon with those of the first Nephi in as many respects as you can.

3. Do you see any evidences of decay in the nations of the earth today? If so, what are they? Is there any cause for alarm respecting our own nation? If so, point them out. What must the people of our country do in order to preserve our principles of government?

## Work and Business

(Second Week in May.)

### TEACHER'S TOPIC FOR APRIL

(This topic is to be given at the special teachers' meeting the first week in May.)

#### OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FAMILY AND NEIGHBORS

- I. There is a duty in every Latter-day Saint home that rests almost entirely upon the mother and that duty is teaching the children to love and cherish every ordinance of the Gospel.
  - a. Blessing the baby should be made a real event to all members of the household. Tell of Hannah and other mothers in Ancient Israel, looking upon this ordinance as very important.
  - b. Children should be told of the importance of Baptism years before they are candidates for baptism; and also of confirmation.
  - c. Training in the Priesthood

quorums and especially the privilege of passing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be held high in the estimation of boys participating.

Many others could be named but space will not permit.

- II. Our duty to our friends. There are a number of obligations we owe to our neighbors that we must not overlook.
  - a. Where there are parents in any given neighborhood striving to send their children to Sunday School regularly and on time, every parent in that locality