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Lesson I. What is the Book of Mormon?

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

An Appreciation of the Book of Mormon

Senior Course of Study

INTRODUCTION.

In these days of political unrest and religious unconcern it is particularly significant that we give our attention to the Holy Scriptures. There is no source to which we can turn for guidance in solving the problems which confront us today like the word of the Lord.

The lessons for this year's work are to be studies in appreciation of the Book of Mormon. We shall not turn through the book chapter by chapter in its historical sequence; nor shall we concern ourselves with the evidence which proves the authenticity of the Book. We shall rather introduce the

book from the point of view of its literary gems and its prophecies in the hope that we may come to love to read it—that hereafter it may take its place among our most choice volumes to which we turn regularly for enjoyment and inspiration.

We shall, therefore, turn first through a general survey of the Book of Mormon Narrative and follow with an analysis of specific passages and incidents which will typify the beauties that justify us in our claim for this book—that it is one of the choicest books ever given to the world.

LESSON I.

WHAT IS THE BOOK OF MORMON?

(For Tuesday, Oct. 19, or Sunday, Oct. 10.)

One of the questions most frequently asked by the educators who visit Utah is: What is the Book of Mormon? It is one of the questions put most frequently to Latter-day Saints as they travel outside the borders of Utah and other Mormon communities; it is a question full of significance to all of us, whether we know but little of the book or whether we are fully acquainted with its contents.

The fact that records were engraved on plates through a period of thousands of years—that these records should be preserved in Cumorah through practically fourteen hundred years—that they

should be delivered by an Angel of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph, to be translated by him for our edification—all of these things add a fascination to the question, "What is the Book of Mormon?"

The Book of Mormon is the record of three peoples, the Jaredites, the Nephites, and the Mulekites, through a period of 2667 years. It gives an account of the Jaredites from their leaving the Tower of Babel 2,247 B. C. to their destruction as the result of civil war about 590 B. C. It tells how they left Babel, traveled across Asia to the east to the Pacific Ocean, how

after four years of preparation they crossed that ocean in eight barges—a voyage of 344 days—how they landed on the western coast of North America at some point south of the Gulf of California, how they spread over a good portion of North America, particularly in the region of the Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes, how they grew to be a great people numbering, according to the estimate of Orson Pratt, from ten to fifteen millions of people, and finally how they fell to strife and civil war to their ultimate extinction at about the time the colony of Lehi reached America.

This account is the record contained on the twenty-four gold plates found by the Nephites sent out from Lehi-Nephi by King Limhi to find the land of Zarahemla. It constitutes the Book of Ether, the last book save one of the Book of Mormon.

The Nephites, the second of the three colonies to migrate to America, left Jerusalem 600 years B. C. Their history covers a period of a little more than a thousand years and constitutes the story proper of the Book of Mormon.

The Mulekites left Jerusalem at the time of its fall before Babylon 588 B. C. and reached America some twelve years later than the Nephites. The history of the Mulekites in their city Zarahemla is so interwoven with the experiences of the Nephites that no further separate account need here be carried forward.

The Book of Mormon, then, is the history of these three peoples and their civilizations. When we recall that this year (1920) we celebrate the tercentenary of the landing of the Pilgrims in America—when we contemplate the growth of America during these three hundred years—we speculate

with interest as to just what was achieved by these earlier inhabitants of this continent through a period of more than 2500 years.

In this first lesson by way of preliminary survey, may we not well summarize the Book of Mormon story in outline form so that from the beginning we shall have the whole account in mind as we proceed to the more detailed particulars. In outline the Book of Mormon relates how:—

Lehi and his family, followed later by Ishmael and his family, left Jerusalem and, having obtained possession of the record of their fathers, journeyed to the western coast of South America—their promised land.

Nephi, upon the death of his father Lehi, became the leader of his people.

Laman and Lemuel with very many followers rebelled against Nephi, became a separate people and suffered the curse of their unrighteousness—a dark skin and an aloofness from God and His Spirit.

The Nephites and Lamanites began their series of wars which were to continue throughout their history to the extermination of the Nephites and the very great reduction in numbers of the Lamanites.

The Nephites, under Mosiah, left the land of Lehi-Nephi and journeyed northward into Zarahemla where they found and joined with the Mulekites.

A band of Nephites returned to Lehi-Nephi and entered into agreement with the Lamanites for the repossession of their former home.

The Prophet Abinadi preached to these returned Nephites in Lehi-Nephi only to be put to death; not, however, until he had converted Alma, who led his little band of followers out to the waters of Mormon and eventually to Zarahemla.

The treachery of the Lamanites

reduced the Nephites of Lehi-Nephi to slavery from which they escaped under the leadership of Gideon to return to Zarahemla.

Alma became High Priest over the Church and his son, after a miraculous conversion, did wonderful missionary work among the Nephites. The sons of Mosiah became missionaries among the Lamanites, to the conversion of many of them.

Pride developed among the Nephites, and their wickedness, together with the continued attacks by the Lamanites, made for dissension and unhappiness.

The years following the appointment of a chief judge to preside over the people were full of strife—the Nephites during the years when they were righteous enjoyed the full blessing of the Lord, but proud as a result of prosperity they were regularly chastised by the Lord through the Lamanites.

Cycle followed cycle—faithfulness to God's commandments—prosperity—pride—strife—punishment—war—death.

Korihor, the anti-Christ, led many Nephites astray as did Zoram, the worshiper of idols. Cities were founded and built up but frequently destroyed because of the wars that persisted.

Hagoth, in order to go north by water, built a number of ships, some of which no doubt carried on the coast trade, but others of which because of storm, very likely carried the Nephites to the Pacific Islands. Reynolds says, "In this manner it is more than probable the Sandwich Islands were peopled with the ancestors of the present inhabitants."

Shortly before the advent of Jesus Christ on this continent many of the Lamanites were converted

and led righteous lives. In fact they were often more devoted than were the Nephites. One of their number, Samuel, the Lamanite, was sent as a prophet to warn and preach repentance to the Nephites of Zarahemla.

Six hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem, the whole face of the land occupied by the Nephites was changed and deformed by terrible tempests. All of the signs that had been predicted were made manifest and the Master appeared. He declared Himself, taught His gospel, and organized His Church. Both He and His Disciples performed wonderful miracles. Three of His Apostles enjoyed the distinction of never tasting death.

For some two hundred years subsequent to the appearance of Christ, both the Nephites and the Lamanites lived together and enjoyed all things in common. After that period, however, dissension arose and the old hostilities between the two peoples were renewed. The Gadianton robbers organized and spread over all the land, being a constant annoyance to Nephites and Lamanites alike.

Wickedness continued to increase until finally the whole Nephite race was destroyed, Moroni, only being spared to hide away in Cumorah the plates which contained this remarkable history of his people. The year 420 A. D. marks the close of the record.

OUTLINE. LESSON 1.

- I. The Book of Mormon a record of three peoples—the Jaredites, the Nephites, and the Mulekites.
- II. Who these people were.
- III. The Book of Mormon Story

QUESTIONS.

1. Who were the Jaredites, the Mulekites, and the Nephites?

2. What was the territory in America originally occupied by each people?

3. How do you explain the fact that both the Jaredites and the Nephites preserved their civilization better than the Mulekites?

4. Outline briefly the history of

each of these groups. (Special assignment may well be made of the Book of Ether for a report.)

5. How do you justify the destruction of the Nephites rather than of the Lamanites?

6. Why is it important that we should have the Book of Mormon?

LESSON II.

THE PLACE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON AMONG THE GREAT BOOKS.

(For Tuesday, Oct. 26, or Sunday, Oct. 17.)

To know the Book of Mormon is to know a great book. Not to have read it not only leaves a person ignorant of the history of a most fascinating people, but robs him of an acquaintance with some of the choicest literary gems ever recorded. Hours spent with this book are hours spent with the Master and His holy prophets. They are hours which will bring to the reader an inspiration and an enrichment of spirit almost beyond comprehension. Indeed many readers declare that the reading of the Book of Mormon thrills them with a testimony of the truth, as the reading of no other book can. They enjoy the fulfillment of the promise of Moroni as he sealed up the records of Nephite history.

"And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.

"Behold I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam, even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the

power of the Holy Ghost." Moroni 10:2, 3, 4.

Of course every man must determine his own choice of books. He chooses them as he chooses his friends—for the joy, companionship, and inspirational help that they give him. But there are certain books which everyone ought to know—the master books—those volumes which come to us as a heritage from the great characters who are so largely responsible for the progress of civilization. Surely the soul of that man must be thirsty who has not drunk at the fountains of the world's best literature. The Bible, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Burns, Dickens, Emerson, and scores of others, call to us to enter into the higher world of thought. They offer us a course in soul expansion for the mere price of enjoyment.

To Latter-day Saints the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Book of Mormon, offer the same—with the additional blessing that they bear the stamp of approval of the Lord Himself. Through them we can know Him.

The question "What constitutes a great book" is a query which of course cannot be fully and satisfactorily answered in a brief chapter. Literature divides itself into such various types that it is diffi-