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Lesson XIII. The Resurrection

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Abstract: The traditional belief of the Indians—Christ shall rise—The bands of death shall be broken—The resurrection universal—Hope of the resurrection a source of joy—Christ the firstfruits of the resurrection—Promises of Christ's resurrection and their fulfilment—Saints arose with Christ—The first resurrection—The resurrection of the just and of the unjust—The final resurrection—The resurrection literal—Summary and conclusion.

GUIDE DEPARTMENT.

Teachings of the Book of Mormon.

LESSON XIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

It is asserted by students of American archæology that the "seemingly extraordinary doctrine" of the salvation of the dead was one of the "most deeply-rooted and widespread convictions among the American Indians. The resurrection of the body "is indissolubly connected with their highest theories of a future life, their burial ceremonies, and their modes of expression." The Indians generally held, and do still hold, the soul to be immortal. The Moravian Brethren express clearly their belief that the body of the dead will rise again when they say, "We Indians shall not forever die; even the grains of corn we put under the earth, grow up and become living things." It was with the same incontrovertible argument that Paul defended the doctrine of the resurrection in the famous epistle to the Corinthians. And the highest, and the typical creed of the American Indian, we are told, is that "when the soul has been a while with God, it can, if it chooses, return to earth and be born again." This re-birth was not a reincarnation, however, as that word is commonly used to designate a certain doctrine popular among some people. The re-birth, believed the Indian, consisted of the re-clothing of the spirit in the body which it had laid down. Hence there arose among the American aborigines many peculiar customs

of preserving the bones of the deceased.^a

It is very interesting to find the doctrine of the resurrection well developed, and firmly established, among the American Indians. At one time it was stoutly maintained that the doctrine was entirely unknown and impossible among them. Later investigations have proved not only the presence of the doctrine, but its presence in "deeply-rooted and widespread convictions." Whence did the American Indian learn of the resurrection of the dead? We recall the fact that the Indians are descended from the peoples whose history and theology are preserved in the Book of Mormon. Is it possible that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead has been preserved in Indian tradition from the time of the ministry of the inspired men of God whose words are recorded in the Book of Mormon? Let us turn to the sacred Nephite record and learn what is taught there of the resurrection.

We have learned already that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus was the saving hope of the Nephites long before Jesus actually came to minister in the flesh. The atoning sacrifice meant death. Jesus must lay down His life in order to redeem man from the consequence of the

^aFor particulars read *Myths of the New World*, pp. 295ff, and the references there cited.

fall. But the Nephites understood, too, that Christ should not remain long dead. Lehi, the progenitor of the Nephites and the Lamanites, taught his children nearly six hundred years before the birth of the Savior, that, "after (the Jews) had slain the Messiah, who should come, He should rise from the dead."^b Thus the bands of death should be broken. For, even as Jesus rose from the dead, so, through His atoning sacrifice should all men be enabled again to live in the flesh. "For as death hath passed upon all men," explained Nephi, the second great prophet of the Book of Mormon, "to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection."^c And that resurrection, the breaking of the bands of death, was to be brought about by the great Creator, in "that He suffereth Himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto Him."^d So it appears that in the Nephite theology it was clearly taught that Jesus, the Savior of the world, should possess power to rise again from death, and that through His atoning sacrifice and resurrection, the bands of physical death should be broken.

The Nephites did not teach that the resurrection from death should apply to only a favored few. Since the bands of death were broken by the sacrifice of the Savior, future physical life became possible to all men. That is to say, then, the gift of resurrection from death should be conferred, through the atonement, upon all men, bond or free, sinful or righteous. It is so that Nephi explains the effect of the atonement. Says he:

"He [the Christ] cometh into the

^bI Nephi 10:11.

^cII Nephi 9:6.

^dII Nephi 9:5.

world that He may save all men, if they will hearken unto His voice; for behold, He suffereth the pains of all men; yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. And He suffereth this, that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before Him at the great and judgment day."^e

So also Helaman, hundreds of years after Nephi but still before the birth of Jesus, says:

"Behold His [Jesus's] death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam, being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord."^f

So it appears that a second great truth concerning the resurrection was clearly set forth in the Nephite theology: the resurrection of the dead is universal in its application. None shall be denied the privilege of taking up again the physical body. And to the Nephites this knowledge was a source of joy.^g

Now, while the doctrine of the resurrection was taught hundreds of years before the coming of the Savior, it was thoroughly understood by the Nephite prophets, that there could be no resurrection before that of Christ. Christ was to be the first fruits of them that rise from death. This truth was preached at the very beginning of Book of Mormon history. Lehi explained the doctrine to his son Jacob.^h Alma, too, the great high priest and chief judge, assured his son Corianton that "this mortal does

^eII Nephi 9:21, 22.

^fHel. 14:15-17.

^gAlma 4:14.

^hII Nephi 2:8, 9.

not put on immortality; this corruption does not put on incorruption, until after the coming of Christ."ⁱ A third great principle of the resurrection was clear to the Nephites. To those who lived before the Christ it was a hope—a faith in a redemption yet to come. To those who lived after the resurrection of Jesus it was an accomplished fact—a promise of redemption fulfilled.

Some of the predictions of Christ's death and resurrection have already been cited. There are many other similar predictions in the Book of Mormon. It is interesting to note that in this sacred book may be traced, in a way, the whole story of the Savior's life on earth in promises, predictions, and fulfillments. In the remarkable vision given to Nephi, six hundred years before Christ, Nephi saw that Christ was to be born of a virgin in Nazareth; he saw John the forerunner; he saw the twelve apostles; and he saw the ministry of the Savior till He was lifted up on the cross.^j A few years later, Nephi promised his people that the Savior should appear to them and minister to them after His resurrection.^k Alma likewise taught that the Savior would appear to the Nephites after His resurrection; "and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness."^l In due time, the Savior came, a resurrected being, and declared, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified should come into the world."^m From that time forward the living could testify that Jesus had risen.

The living could testify to even more than this. Christ was to be the first-fruits of the resurrection.

But after He had risen from death, the power of the resurrection would become effective upon many others. Jacob promised those who were faithful that they might become through the power of the resurrection "the first-fruits of Christ unto God."ⁿ Samuel, the Lamanite, declared boldly that at the time of Christ's death and resurrection, "many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many."^o The fulfilment of a prediction similar to this is recorded in the New Testament. Among the Nephites, too, the prediction was fulfilled. To the Savior Himself, His disciples testified that Samuel had so prophesied, and that his words "were all fulfilled."^p

The resurrection in which Jesus and the Saints thus came forth from their graves, is known as the first resurrection. There are two resurrections, in point of time, mentioned in prophecy—the first and the final. It is stated that in the first resurrection shall come forth "those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ." Immediately, however, the careful Nephite prophets modify this statement thus: "the souls and the bodies are re-united of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ." As for the rest, "their resurrection cometh to pass before the resurrection of these [of the same class] who die after the resurrection of Christ."^q But the first resurrection did not close apparently with the resurrection of Jesus and the righteous who rose with Him. That was only the beginning of the first resurrection. From that time, the first resurrection has been going on

ⁱAlma 40:2.

^jI Nephi 11.

^kII Nephi 26:1, 9.

^lAlma 16:20.

^mIII Nephi 11:8-15.

ⁿJac. 4:10, 11.

^oHela 14:25, 26.

^pIII Nephi 23:7-13.

^qMos. 15:20-24; Alma 40:15-23.

and will continue until the great and final resurrection at the end of the world.^r

From what has been said of the first and final resurrections, it may be assumed that the resurrection is determined by other elements besides the time element. In fact, the time element is secondary. There are two resurrections, it is true—the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust—and the time at which one will be resurrected will depend upon the class to which one belongs. Abinadi states the matter thus: Men shall “be judged of (God) according to their works * * * If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness, and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation.”^s So also said Jesus, during His ministry among the Nephites.^t In modern revelation the doctrine is stated even more clearly, thus: “They who have done good in the resurrection of the just, and they who have done evil in the resurrection of the unjust.”^u In the Nephite theology this essential truth was well established: even in the resurrection men shall be judged—rewarded—according to their works.

Concerning the final resurrection but little is said in the Book of Mormon. It would appear, however, from various contexts that the Nephites understood that in the great final resurrection, before the final judgment, would rise all those who had not been worthy of resurrection before.^v In this resurrection will appear a great multitude.

Besides the principles involved in the doctrine of the resurrection as

already explained the Nephites seemed to understand one other important point very clearly. To them, the resurrection was a literal resurrection. That is, in the future life, the spirit of man is to be clothed again in a real, tangible, physical body of flesh and bones, like that which is laid down in death, and similar to it in form, appearance, and constitution. Amulek explained the doctrine to Zeezram and the assembled Nephites in these words:

“Now, there is death which is called a temporal death: and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death; The spirit and the body shall be re-united again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.”^w

Again, the Nephites understood clearly the important, fundamental principles underlying the doctrine of the resurrection.

To sum up, the Book of Mormon teaches very clearly these points: 1. Jesus, the Christ, should possess power to rise from death, and to break the bands of death; 2. Through the atonement of Jesus all men should be redeemed from death; 3. Christ should be the first-

^rTalmage, *Art. of Faith*, p. 396.

^sMosiah 16:7-11.

^tIII Nephi 26:5.

^uDoc. and Cov. 76:17.

^vMos. 16:1; III Nephi 26:3, 4.

^wAlma 11:42-44.

fruits of the resurrection; 4. The Nephites were promised that the resurrected Christ should minister to them; 5. This promise was fulfilled, also the promise that the saints should rise with Jesus; 6. There are two resurrections—the first and the final; 7. These resurrections may also be called the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust; 8. The final resurrection shall be a resurrection of the unjust; 9. The resurrection is a literal re-clothing of the spirit in a physical body.

In view of the fact that the Nephites were taught so thoroughly all that pertains to the doctrine of the resurrection, it is small wonder that some knowledge of it has persisted in the traditions of the American Indians.

OUTLINE.

The traditional belief of the Indians—Christ shall rise—The bands of death shall be broken—The resurrection universal—Hope of the resurrection a source of joy—Christ the first-fruits of the resurrection—Promises of Christ's resurrection and their fulfillment—Saints arose with Christ—The first resurrection—The resurrection of the just and of the unjust—The final resurrection—The resurrection literal—Summary and conclusion.

QUESTIONS.

1. What belief concerning the future life is deeply-rooted and widespread among the American Indians?
2. How can it be shown that the Indians believed in a literal resurrection?
3. Whence might the Indians have learned of the resurrection?
4. When did the Nephites learn that Jesus should rise from death?
5. What should be the effect of Christ's resurrection?
6. Upon how many should the saving power of the resurrection be effective?
7. Why was the knowledge of the resurrection a source of joy to the Nephites?
8. Who was to be the first fruits of the resurrection?
9. Why could there be no resurrection before that of Christ?
10. What did the Nephites who lived before the time of Christ know of His life and ministry?
11. What promise of a personal ministry of Jesus was made to the Nephites?
12. What predictions had been made of a resurrection of saints at the time of Christ?
13. Relate how both these points were fulfilled.
14. How many resurrections are there?
15. Explain each time and kind of resurrection.
16. Show how the Nephites believed in a literal resurrection.
17. Give a brief resume of the doctrine of the resurrection as understood and taught by the Nephites.

LESSON XIV.

THE SALVATION OF THE DEAD.

It is doubtful whether there is in the Book of Mormon any other passage more beautiful in spirit and word than this:

"Behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Lord God worketh not in darkness. He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for He loveth the world, even that He layeth down His own life, that He may draw all men unto Him. Wherefore He commandeth none that

they shall not partake of His salvation.

"Behold, doth He cry unto any, saying, Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but He saith, Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price. Behold, hath He commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. Hath He commanded any that they should not partake of His salvation? Behold I say unto