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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 11—The Value of Records

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Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book
of Mormon

Lesson 11—The Value of Records

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi, Chapters 19-22; 2 Nephi, Chapters 1-27)

For Tuesday, December 2, 1952

Objective: To demonstrate the value of records to a people of God.

THE Nephites appreciated the value of records and acted accordingly. The Lord instructed them concerning the importance of records from the beginning of their history. In preparation for their journey to the land of promise, Lehi was commanded to send his sons back to Jerusalem for the plates of brass, as we learned in lesson 9.

As soon as Lehi's sons returned from Jerusalem with the brass plates he searched the plates from the beginning. He discovered that they contained the genealogy of his forefathers. Lehi seems not to have known before reading the brass plates that he was a literal descendant of Joseph who was sold into Egypt (1 Nephi 5:14, 16). From his study he also learned that Laban was a descendant of Joseph, therefore, he and his fathers had kept the records.

In an earlier lesson in the course, we learned that special blessings were given to Joseph and his seed, who were also entitled to all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob. To learn that he and his seed were entitled to all these blessings gave to Lehi information of value in teaching his posterity.

Not only did the brass plates contain the genealogy of Lehi's forefathers, but they also contained the first five books of Moses, including the story of the creation of the world; a record of the Jews from the time of their beginning down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah (about 598 B.C.) and also an account of the prophecies uttered by the prophets from the beginning down to that period.

Lehi prophesied that these brass plates "should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed" (1 Nephi 5:18).

Alma refers to this and other prophecies, saying that the brass plates should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, "And be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation,

kindred, tongue, and people" (Alma 37:4).

During the period of Nephite civilization, these plates were passed down from king to king and prophet to prophet. Amaleki, writing of the people of Mosiah, who moved northward and discovered the civilization of the Mulekites in Zarahemla, comments as follows: "Now, there was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla; and also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews" (Omni 1:14).

The Nephite prophets recognized the value of these records, for they frequently quoted from them when they instructed the people. Nephi is very specific as to why he read much from the brass plates to his people. He wrote:

I read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old. And I did read many things unto them which were written in the book of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning (1 Nephi 19:22, 23).

He quoted Isaiah 48 and 49 (1 Nephi, chapters 20 and 21) and expounded them to his people. In 2 Nephi he quoted chapters 2-14 inclusive, from Isaiah (2 Nephi, chapters 12-24), explaining, "my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ" (2 Nephi 11:4).

Living as we do in a day when

much of the Christian world has lost its belief in the divine mission of Jesus Christ, how valuable the Book of Mormon can be to us and to our Lamanite brethren as a new witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ. Restricted space prevents my making an analysis of Isaiah as quoted by Nephi, but even a cursory examination of the material will be rich in dividends to a reader.

Nephi, however, is not the only prophet who quotes from the brass plates. The prophet Abinadi used the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah to establish the fact that Jesus would come down among the children of men and redeem his people (Mosiah 14:1-12; 15:1). Moroni also encouraged his people to read from the brass plates, writing: "Search the prophecies of Isaiah" (Mormon 8:23).

Thus far we have been discussing the brass plates as being valuable because they contained the genealogy of Lehi, and because they contained history and doctrine. Now let us turn our attention to another value recognized by Nephi: "And behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers" (1 Nephi 3:19).

To one unfamiliar with language changes, this may not seem significant. Without the use of a common book, however, the language of a people changes in a few hundred years until the written word of former times is unintelligible. We need only observe the changes that have taken place in English between 600 A.D. and the present day to indicate what happens. I quote two examples, the first from Old

English, and the second from Middle English:

Hwaet, we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum
Theod cyninga thrym gefrunon
Hu the aethelingas ellen fremedon!
—*Beowulf*

When that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to
the rote.

—Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

The use of one common record would do much to prevent the radical changes that took place in English. The fact that Moroni encouraged his people to read from Isaiah may indicate that such radical language changes as have occurred in English did not occur among the Nephites, that the language of the fathers was preserved.

It is clear from evidence presented that the Nephites did consider the brass plates significant. Nephi records: "And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, inso-much that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children" (1 Nephi 5:21). And we must remember that the brass plates represent only one of the cherished records of the Nephites.

Nephi refers to the fact that he was instructed to keep the history of his people on two different sets of plates (1 Nephi 19:1-7) which were passed by kings or prophets to their successors in office. On the small plates they engraved an account of the ministry of the people. Mormon thought so much of the small plates that he attached them to his plates and passed the two records

on to Moroni (The Words of Mormon: 6).

The large plates contained the secular history of the Nephites and Lamanites. So important was this history in the eyes of the Lord, that he commanded Nephi to make the record.

Centuries later, the importance of keeping proper records was taught to the Nephites by the Savior himself on his visit to the Western Hemisphere following his resurrection, when he directed the Nephites living in that day to "bring forth the record which ye have kept."

And when Nephi had brought forth the records, and laid them before him, he cast his eyes upon them and said: Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so? And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled. And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them? And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written. And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded (3 Nephi 23:8-13).

Subsequently, in the twilight period of Nephite history, the prophet Ammaron instructed Mormon, then a lad of ten, to take the large plates from their depository when he was twenty-four and to engrave on them an account of the doings of the people (Mormon 1:2, 3).

Mormon felt that records were so important that he devoted a good portion of his life to the study of Nephite history and to engraving it in abridged form on a record which he made. Moroni, the last prophet of the Nephites, devoted much time to the same undertaking for the Jaredite nation from The Book of Ether (Ether 1:1-2).

From the beginning to the end of the one-thousand year period of Nephite history, the prophets stressed the need of records and kept them. Helaman, living near the middle of the period, wrote:

And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them . . . a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work. But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites (Helaman 3:13-15).

The Nephites were a record-keeping people because God had commanded it.

They were also a record-preserving people for the same reason. Individual prophets were so concerned about the records that they made their preservation a matter of prayer. Enos prayed about them and writes: "And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time" (Enos 1:16), thus pointing out another one of the major values of the records. Nephi also stressed the fact that the record should come forth in our day (2 Nephi 27:1-22).

The value of the record, The

Book of Mormon, to our day and time has been aptly summarized by Brigham H. Roberts:

First, to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers.

Second, to teach them the covenants the Lord made with their fathers that their remnants may know that they are not cast off forever.

Third, that this record may convince both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, and that He manifests himself to all nations.

Fourth, that the knowledge of a Savior might come especially to the remnants of the house of Israel on the Western Hemisphere, through the testimony of the Nephites and Lamanites as well as through the testimony of the Jews, that they might more fully believe the gospel.

Fifth, that the Jews might have the testimony of the Nephites as well as that of their fathers, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Sixth, and I think mainly, to be a witness for the truth of the Bible, to establish its authenticity, and its credibility by bringing other witnesses to testify to the same great truths that are contained in the sacred pages of the Bible; to restore to the knowledge of mankind many plain and precious truths concerning the gospel which men have taken out of the Jewish scriptures, or obscured by their interpretations; for which cause many have stumbled and fallen into unbelief. In a word, it is the mission of the Book of Mormon to be a witness for Jesus, the Christ; for the truth of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation; for that purpose it was written, preserved from destruction and has now come forth to the children of men through the goodness and mercy and power of God.

Above everything else the record is a new witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ. Moroni, as he bade farewell to the Gentiles of our day and to his brethren, emphasized this value, saying:

And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood. And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face (Ether 12:38-39).

Writing directly to the Lamanites of the last days, Moroni closes the record exhorting them to read the record with a sincere heart and with faith in Christ, and promising that God would manifest the truth of it unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10).

Suggestion to Class Leaders

Writing the selections of Old and Middle English (as given in the lesson) on the blackboard, will be helpful in showing how a language can change.

Questions on the Lesson

1. Why were the Nephites commanded to keep records?
2. How were the plates of brass valuable to the Nephites?
3. Of what value are Book of Mormon records to the Gentiles of our day? To the Lamanites?
4. What is the chief mission of The Book of Mormon?
5. How are Church records being kept today?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 11—"I Work Not Among the Children of Men Save It Be According to Their Faith" (2 Nephi 27:23).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, December 2, 1952

Objective: To show that faith is necessary in order to receive blessings from God.

THE scriptures are filled with instances in which faith has wrought mighty miracles. When Jesus turned and saw the woman who had touched the hem of his garment, he said, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour."

On another occasion, two blind men followed the Savior, crying: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us . . . and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes,

saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened" (Matt. 9:27-30).

To the brother of Jared Jesus said, ". . . Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger" (Ether 3:9).

The scriptures relate many instances in which lack of faith was responsible for failure to receive desired blessings. When Peter was walking on the water toward the