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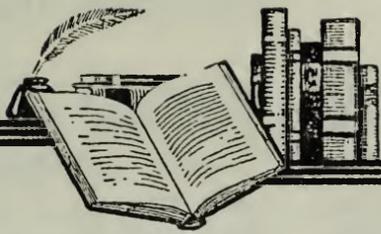
Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 18—The Completion of the Small Plates of Nephi

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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Theology—Characters and Teachings
of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 18—The Completion of the Small Plates of Nephi

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Enos, Jarom, Omni, Mosiah, chapter 1)

For Tuesday, November 3, 1953

Objective: To appreciate the value of the characters and teachings of seven prophets and a king.

THIS lesson concerns seven prophets who wrote the last three books engraved on the small plates of Nephi. It also considers the king who received the small plates from Amaleki, the last Nephite prophet who wrote on them. The history covers the period from sometime before 421 B.C. to about 124 B.C.

A common theme among the seven prophets is that as long as the people kept the commandments of God they prospered, and that when they did not keep the commandments they sorrowed. Each of the prophets who wrote the concluding portions of the small plates obeyed the instructions of Nephi and wrote those things most sacred to him. Their words are of great value for us today.

Enos

Enos, the son of Jacob, tells us of the wrestle he had with himself before God, before he received a remission of his sins. On one occasion when he was hunting beasts in the forest, he began to think seriously about the words his father

had told him concerning eternal life and the joy of the saints. So serious was his meditation that he determined to pray.

The prayer was far reaching in supplication and involved three separate and distinct requests. He first cried for forgiveness of his sins, and after crying all day long and into the night, a voice said, "Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed" (Enos 5). As soon as he had received assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, he asked how it was done. The Lord told him, "Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen . . . wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Enos 8).

Then Enos thought beyond his own problems and prayed for his brethren, the Nephites. The Lord promised to bless them to the degree that they were diligent in keeping his commandments, and said to Enos: "And their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads" (Enos 10).

Enos then prayed with many long

strugglings for his brethren, the Lamanites, who were enemies to his people. Enos prayed as the Christ commanded during his mortal existence, for those who had despitefully used him. Enos realized fully that they were a wild, ferocious, bloodthirsty, idolatrous, and filthy people, that they hated the Nephites, and had sought to destroy the Nephite records. But the knowledge of their wickedness did not discourage him from seeking their eternal welfare. Enos asked that these Lamanites should become powerless to destroy the records, that, rather, God would preserve them to come forth to the Lamanites at a future time, that the Lamanites might come to a knowledge of God and receive salvation. God covenanted with Enos that he would preserve the records and would bring them forth at a future time for the purpose of converting the Lamanites.

Enos and the people of Nephi labored diligently to restore the Lamanites to the true faith, but their labors were in vain. The hatred of the Lamanites had been fixed by their ancestors, and they were led continually by their evil natures. They dwelt in tents and wandered about in the wilderness with shaven heads, clad in a short skin girdle, which they wore about their loins. Many lived on raw meat and were forever seeking the destruction of the Nephites.

The Nephites also were hard to keep in the path of righteousness. They were a "stiffnecked people, hard to understand" (Enos 22).

There was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and

prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God . . . nothing short of these things . . . would keep them from going down speedily to destruction" (Enos 23).

The Nephites, however, lived on a much higher plane than the Lamanites. The Nephites of this period were tillers of the land. They raised all kinds of grain and fruits. They also engaged in stock raising, particularly the raising of cattle, goats, and horses.

Jarom

Enos died about 420 B.C. (Enos 25), leaving the small plates to his son Jarom, who engraved on them a short account of the Nephites. Jarom knew, he wrote, that the small plates were written for the benefit of the Lamanites. Analyzing conditions among the Nephites, he felt that it was expedient that much should be done among the people "because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks" (Jarom 3).

It is evident that when Jarom began to write, many of the Nephites were wicked. There were some, however, who were righteous (Jarom 4). They were living the law of Moses; they did not profane or blaspheme; and the laws of the land were exceedingly strict. Their kings and leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord and taught the people ways of righteousness.

The Nephites had increased in

numbers by this time and had spread upon the face of the land. They became:

. . . exceeding rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin . . . (Jarom 8).

The Lamanites were wicked. They loved murder and drank the blood of beasts; they came many times against the Nephites.

The Nephites, however, won most of the battles, thus fulfilling the promise of the Lord that if they lived righteously they would prosper in the land.

In order to keep the Nephites in ways of righteousness, the priests and teachers exhorted them to live the law of Moses, to look forward to the coming of Christ, and to be diligent and long-suffering.

Omni

Jarom passed the plates on to his son, Omni. Omni declared that he fought much with the sword to preserve his people the Nephites from falling into the hands of the Lamanites. Then he added "I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 2).

Omni received the plates about 323 B.C. and delivered them to his son, Amaron, before 317 B.C. He writes: ". . . we had many seasons of peace; and we had many seasons of serious war and bloodshed . . . and I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my

fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end" (Omni 3).

Amaron

Amaron, in recording the history of his people on the small plates, was about as brief as his father had been. He tells us, however, that by 280 B.C. the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed, and he points out the fact that their destruction fulfilled the prophecy spoken by the Lord unto their fathers "Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land." Nevertheless, the Lord "did spare the righteous" and "did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies" (Omni 6-7).

Chemish

Amaron delivered the plates to his brother, Chemish. Chemish wrote only one verse, in which he testified that he saw Amaron write the last which he wrote on the day that he delivered the records to Chemish. "And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end," Chemish concludes (Omni 9).

Abinadom

Chemish passed the plates to his son, Abinadom, who wrote that he had killed many Lamanites in defense of his people, for the Nephites and Lamanites had much war and contention during this period. Calling attention to the fact that "the record of this people is engraven upon plates which is had by the kings, according to the generations" (large plates of Nephi), Abinadom

states that he knows of no revelation except that which had been written, neither prophecy, "wherefore, that which is sufficient is written," he says in closing his succinct account (Omni 11).

Amaleki

Amaleki received the plates from his father, Abinadom. Amaleki felt the need of giving an account of the movement of his people northward from the land of Nephi, under Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla, and of their discovery of the civilization of Zarahemla.

Amaleki wrote that Mosiah was warned by the Lord to flee the land of Nephi with as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord. They "were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness, until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla. And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla" (Omni 13-14).

The leader of this people, Zarahemla, rejoiced in the presence of Mosiah and in the fact that they would now have access to the plates of brass containing the record of the Jews.

The language of the people of Zarahemla had become corrupted. They had brought no records with them when they came from Jerusalem at the time when Zedekiah, King of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon (about 590 B.C.). They denied the being of their Creator.

Mosiah caused that the people of Zarahemla should be taught in the language of the Nephites, and he was made king over the two peoples in Zarahemla, his own followers, and those known as the Mulekites (Helaman 6:10; 8:21) then under the leadership of Zarahemla.

From Helaman we learn that Zedekiah's son, Mulek, had brought, under the Lord's direction, a group of people to this continent. They had landed in the north country, for Helaman writes, "The Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south" (Helaman 6:10). With the coming of Mulek to the promised land, we have three of the twelve tribes of Israel represented here, the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah.

During the reign of Mosiah, the people brought to him a large stone with engravings upon it. Mosiah "interpreted the engravings by the gift and power of God" (Omni 20). It narrated the account of Coriantumr and his people, the Jaredites, who had come out from the tower of Babel at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people; and who built a great civilization in the land northward, and whose bones were scattered there. Mosiah learned that Coriantumr had been discovered by the people of Zarahemla, and that he had lived nine months with them.

Amaleki then gave an account of two groups of Nephites from Zarahemla who were interested in returning to the land of Nephi, the land of their first inheritance. We do not know the name of the leader of the first group, but he was strong willed and con-

tentious. As a result, all except fifty of the first group were slain. Those fifty returned to Zarahemla.

Amaleki's brother went with the second group under the leadership of Zeniff, who was one of the fifty to return. (See Mosiah 9:1-3.)

Amaleki was the last prophet to write on the small plates, as they were full, and, since he had no seed, he intrusted the record to King Benjamin, a son of Mosiah.

Benjamin

Benjamin had three sons: Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman, to whom he taught the language of his fathers, and the contents of the plates of brass, which were written in the Egyptian language (Mosiah 1:4).

King Benjamin was very much concerned over his sons. He wanted them to be men of understanding, to be able to read and interpret the prophecies of the Lord. He desired that they should understand the real significance of the brass plates and the large and small plates of Nephi, all of which had come into his possession. He begged his sons to remember that the records were true, to study them diligently,

and to translate their teachings into deeds.

Benjamin conferred his kingdom on his son, Mosiah, and gave him charge of all the records, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director.

Suggested Readings:

Bible: II Kings 24:17-20; 25:1-7. II Chronicles 36:10-21. Jeremiah 21; 24:8-10; 32:1-5; 37:16-21; 39:1-7.

Questions for Discussion

1. What theme predominates in these books of Enos, Jarom, and Omni?
2. What does the prayer of Enos unfold concerning his character?
3. Name the prophets who wrote on the small plates of Nephi.
4. Why did Enos try to create fear of the Lord in the hearts of the people?
5. Name differences existing between the Nephites and the Lamanites.
6. How does the history recorded by Amaleki on the small plates of Nephi connect with the history recorded by King Mosiah and King Benjamin?

Note to Class Leaders:

In teaching this lesson, the use of a blackboard on which the names of the different characters may be listed, will prove helpful. The following lesson (lesson 19) will set forth the teachings of King Benjamin, so this lesson, in relation to Benjamin, concerns itself only with the account of Benjamin as given in Omni and the first chapter of Mosiah.

Dusk in Bouquet Canyon

Ethel Jacobson

Sage, mesquite, and tumbleweed
 Quilt the canyon walls.
 Every bush a plump bouquet—
 Russet, green, saffron, gray,
 The colors change and interplay
 As desert twilight falls
 On sage, mesquite, and tumbleweed,
 And a late dove calls.