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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 37—Samuel the Lamanite

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is to point out that signs of the Savior's birth and crucifixion were given to warn the people of impending destruction and call them to repentance.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 37—Samuel the Lamanite

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Helaman, chapters 13-16)

For Tuesday, February 7, 1956

Objective: To point out that signs of the Savior's birth and crucifixion were given to warn the people of impending destruction and call them to repentance.

Samuel Warns the Nephites

ABOUT six B.C. Samuel, the Lamanite, came into Zarahemla and began to preach to the Nephites. Because he called them to repentance, they cast him out. As he was leaving for his own country, the Lord spoke to him and told him to go back to Zarahemla and to prophesy to the people the things which he put into his heart.

The people blocked his entrance into the city, so he climbed the wall:

. . . stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice . . . Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people (Helaman 13:4-5).

Continuing with his prophecy, he told of definite destruction unless the people repented and had faith on the Lord Jesus Christ who was coming to redeem all who had faith in him. Because of the wickedness of the people, he told them the Lord would take away his word from among them and his Spirit would also cease to strive with them. He further instructed them that there would be those among their enemies of the fourth generation who would live to see the destruction of the Nephites, except they repented. He warned the people in Zarahemla, in Gideon, and in the land roundabout.

Samuel gave to the people a specific example of the trouble that would come to them. Because of the wickedness and abomination of the people, and for their sakes, the

Lord would send a curse upon the land, even a curse of slippery treasures.

And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them (Helaman 13:31).

He informed them the time would come, unless they repented, that they would weep and howl in sorrow, saying:

Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land (Helaman 13:34-35).

Signs of the Savior's Birth

After calling the people to repentance and foretelling their destruction, if they did not cease seeking happiness in iniquity, Samuel gave to the people the signs of the Savior's birth and crucifixion. He said:

. . . five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name. And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born. And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. And

behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven (Helaman 14:2-6).

Samuel made it clear to the people that he gave these signs of the Savior's coming for the purpose of persuading them to believe in Christ. Believing in him would cause them to repent and to receive a remission of their sins.

Signs of the Savior's Crucifixion

Having completed his enumeration and discussion of the signs which should precede the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem of Judea, Samuel gave them the signs of the crucifixion of Christ. Jesus Christ would be crucified, he told them, to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, making it possible for all men to come back into the presence of God, redeeming them from their first death, which was spiritual, or banishment from the presence of God. The crucifixion, Samuel testified, would also make it possible for men to repent of their individual sins and receive a forgiveness of them. Those who would not repent would suffer a second spiritual death, banishment from God and from things which pertain to righteousness.

Concerning the signs of the Savior's crucifixion, he said:

. . . in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead. Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and

tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up (Helaman 14:20-21).

Samuel Declares Free Agency of the People

Again Samuel told the people these signs were made known to them that "... there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men" (Helaman 14:28). Following his announcement of the signs which would precede the birth and follow the crucifixion of the Master, Samuel pleaded with the people to repent saying:

... remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free (Helaman 14:30).

As one ponders over these great signs of the Savior's birth and crucifixion, he is impressed by the significance of the symbols. God used a symbol of light to indicate the birth of the Savior, and a symbol of darkness and destruction for his crucifixion. There is something beautiful, something poetic, about these symbols because they represent so aptly the great events they were designed to explain.

Samuel the Lamanite was not finished when he completed his discussion of the signs of the Savior's birth and crucifixion. He continued by foretelling additional troubles which they faced because of their wickedness. Except they repented, he told them, their houses would be left desolate, their women would

suffer, for they would attempt to flee and there would be no place of refuge. God chastened his people during periods of wickedness, Samuel said, because he loved them.

Lamanites to Be Preserved

Samuel paid a tribute to his own people for their faithfulness after conversion, pointing out the fact that they had buried their weapons of war and had worked diligently to keep the commandments of God. Because of their steadfastness in Christ after conversion, the Lamanites would not be "utterly destroyed" even though they should dwindle in unbelief. He foretold:

... the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth . . . and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them. And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep (Helaman 15:11-13).

Nephites Warned to Repent

No such promise of perpetuity was given to the Nephites. On the contrary, they were warned that unless they repented from their wicked ways, the Lord would "utterly destroy them."

As a result of the predictions and promises of Samuel, many Nephites believed on his words. They sought Nephi, repented, and confessed

their sins, and went into the waters of baptism.

Those who disbelieved the words of Samuel, and they were in the majority, cast stones at him and even shot arrows “. . . but the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows” (Helaman 16:2). When these people saw that they could not hit him, they started to climb after him, intending to bind and imprison him. Samuel, however:

. . . did cast himself down from the

wall, and did flee out of their lands, yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people. And behold, he was never heard of more among the Nephites; and thus were the affairs of the people (Helaman 16:7-8).

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. How was Samuel received by the Nephites?
2. What signs concerning the birth and crucifixion of the Savior did Samuel give to the Nephites?
3. What was the attitude of the people towards the message?
4. What was his attitude towards the principle of free agency?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 37—“. . . Yea, We Can See That the Lord in His Great Infinite Goodness Doth Bless and Prosper Those Who Put Their Trust in Him”

(Helaman 12:1).

Edith S. Elliott

For Tuesday, February 7, 1956

Objective: To show that trust in the Lord brings blessings.

OFTEN we hear or use the trite phrase: “history repeats itself.” Nephi the son of Helaman was aware of this fact, as experienced in the history of the Nephites, when he reminded his people that the Lord would prosper them when they put their trust in him. He reviewed for them how blessed they were in their fields, flocks, and herds and how they had become wealthy in “. . . gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies . . .” (Helaman 12:2). Then Nephi recalled to them that during this period of prosperity the people had hardened

their hearts and forgotten the Lord who, in turn, had to chasten them to repentance.

Other examples in history showing the reward for trusting in the Lord are the staying of the waves when the children of Israel crossed through the Red Sea, and the crumbling of the walls of Jericho, when the city was circled seven times as bidden by their Heavenly Father. Crossing the plains in our latter day is also an example of the saints trusting in God wherein he blessed and prospered them.

Complete trust in our Heavenly Father brings rewards beyond our fondest hopes. He tells us in Matthew 25:21 “. . . thou hast been