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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 31—Helaman, Son of Alma, and His Two Thousand Sons

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 31—Helaman, Son of Alma, and His Two Thousand Sons

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma, chapters 50-58)

For Tuesday, April 5, 1955

Objective: To show the power of mothers in teaching their children to obey the commandments and not to doubt, but to put their faith in the Lord for their preservation.

Dissension With the King-Men

EVEN though there was temporary peace in the land, Moroni continued to prepare for war. In the twentieth year of the reign of judges he further fortified the cities and the boundary line between Zarahemla and the land of Nephi. The Nephites were blessed by the Lord in accordance with the promises if they would keep his commandments.

In the thirty-fourth year, however, a boundary dispute arose between the people of the land of Morianton and the land of Lehi. Morianton, leader of the rebellious inhabitants of Morianton, tried to escape northward with his followers “. . . which would have been a cause to have been lamented . . .” but Teancum,

one of Moroni’s great leaders, killed Morianton and carried his army back as prisoners to Moroni. Upon covenanting to keep peace, they were restored to their lands.

That same year, Nephiah, second chief judge, died. The record states that while filling “. . . the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God . . . he had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman” (Alma 50:37-38). Nephiah’s son Pahoran was appointed chief judge and governor over the people.

In the beginning of the next year

a part of the Nephites sought to dethrone Pahoran because of his unwillingness to alter the law so that the free government could be changed to a monarchy. The dissenters were called king-men and they were of high birth; but the voice of the people favored the cause of the freemen and Pahoran retained the judgment-seat.

At this critical time Amalickiah again stirred up the Lamanites to battle against the Nephites. The army of the enemy was so great that they were unafraid to come down even to the land of Zarahemla.

When the rebellious king-men heard of the approach of the Lamanites, they refused to take up arms to defend their own country. Moroni was given the authority either to compel them to fight or to put them to death. Four thousand were killed in the ensuing struggle and their other leaders were thrown into prison. The remainder:

... yielded to the standard of liberty, and were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defence of their country (Alma 51:20).

Ammaron New King of Lamanites

While Moroni was thus engaged in overcoming internal troubles, Amalickiah was able to capture many Nephite cities. These were so well fortified that they afforded strongholds for the Lamanites when they fell into their hands. Teancum with his great warriors, however, repulsed the enemy as they were marching to take possession of the land Bountiful. That night Teancum with his servant stole into the camp of the Lamanites and killed Amalickiah as he lay asleep in

his tent. Ammoron, Amalickiah's brother, was then appointed the new king of the Lamanites. At this time Moroni instructed Teancum to "... secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side" (Alma 52:9).

Moroni with the help of Lehi and Teancum won a great victory over the Lamanites. The Nephite city of Mulek was recaptured, but the beloved leader Moroni was wounded. Lehi, we are told:

... was a man who had been with Moroni in the more part of all his battles; and he was a man like unto Moroni, and they rejoiced in each other's safety; yea, they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi (Alma 53:2).

Teancum, at the order of Moroni, caused the Lamanite prisoners to fortify Bountiful and they were guarded therein, but on another front the Lamanites captured other cities.

Sons of Helaman

At this time the converted Lamanites, known as the people of Ammon, who had covenanted never to bear arms again and who had been protected by the Nephites while they helped support the army with provisions, became so concerned over the reverses of the war that they felt they ought to take up arms in defense of their country. They felt themselves to be a burden to the Nephites. Helaman, however, "... feared lest by so doing they should lose their souls..." (Alma 53:15). However, they had many sons who had not entered into the

covenant and they assembled together, two thousand of them, and asked Helaman to be their leader:

And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted. Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him (Alma 53:20-21).

Moroni Rejects Prisoner Exchange

In the twenty-ninth year of the judges, Ammoron and Moroni wrote letters concerning the exchange of prisoners. Moroni agreed to exchange one of Ammoron's men for a Nephite man, his wife, and children. In Moroni's answer he warned:

Behold, I would tell you somewhat concerning the justice of God, and the sword of his almighty wrath, which doth hang over you except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands, or the land of your possessions, which is the land of Nephi. Yea, I would tell you these things if ye were capable of hearkening unto them; yea, I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother have been, except ye repent and withdraw your murderous purposes, and return with your armies to your own lands . . . and except you withdraw your purposes, behold, ye will pull down the wrath of that God whom you have rejected upon you . . . and ye shall soon be visited with death (Alma 54:6-7, 9-10).

In his reply, Ammoron closed his letter with the words:

And as concerning that God whom ye say we have rejected, behold, we know not such a being; neither do ye; but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you. And if it so be that there

is a devil and a hell, behold will he not send you there to dwell with my brother whom ye have murdered . . . I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem (Alma 54:21-23).

Moroni was so incensed by the false assertion of Ammoron that he refused to exchange prisoners; but by strategy he won the Nephite prisoners in the city of Gid, and, also, the city without any bloodshed. This was pleasing to Moroni who delighted in saving his people from destruction.

By the close of the twenty-ninth year, Moroni was making preparations to attack the city of Morianton which the Lamanites were daily strengthening.

Letter of Helaman to Moroni

In the beginning of the thirtieth year, Moroni received a letter from Helaman set forth in chapters 56, 57, and 58 of Alma. The contents of this letter comprise the remainder of this lesson. Helaman addressed Moroni as “. . . My dearly beloved brother, Moroni, as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare . . .” (Alma 56:2). He then recounted the circumstances, four years previously, which had surrounded his coming with his two thousand sons (“for they are worthy to be called sons”) to support the army of Antipus in the city of Judea.

Antipus, Helaman wrote, rejoiced exceedingly to have them because the Lamanites had killed such a vast number of his men:

. . . for which cause we have to mourn. Nevertheless, we may console ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their country and of their God,

yea, and they are happy (Alma 56: 10-11).

Capture of City of Antiparah

When Ammoron learned of the added strength of Antipus' army he forbade the Lamanites to go against Judea. Thus Antipus was given added time to prepare. During the lull he received two thousand other reinforcements from Zarahemla and many provisions from the fathers of Helaman's two thousand sons. With such strength Antipus devised a successful stratagem to recapture the city of Antiparah. According to the plan, the sons of Helaman lured on the Lamanites for two days into the wilderness. On the morning of the third day the Lamanites halted.

Helaman asked his sons whether they should turn and attack the Lamanites, who might be laying a snare, or attack them in case Antipus had caught up to the rear of the Lamanites, according to the plan, and a battle might be in progress. Helaman asked:

Therefore what say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle? And now I say . . . my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites (Alma 56:44-45).

Helaman continues:

For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army of Antipus. Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed unto

me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it (Alma 56:46-48).

They found that Antipus had indeed attacked the rear of the Lamanites and had fallen by the sword, and his army was about to fall into the hands of the Lamanites. Instead of winning a victory, there would have been a disastrous defeat had not Helaman and his two thousand sons returned.

After the surrender of the Lamanites, Helaman numbered the young men, fearing that many were slain.

But behold, to my great joy, there had not one soul of them fallen to the earth; yea, and they had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men known to have fought with such miraculous strength; and with such mighty power did they fall upon the Lamanites, that they did frighten them; and for this cause did the Lamanites deliver themselves up as prisoners of war (Alma 56:56).

Capture of City of Cumeni

In the twenty-ninth year, Helaman received reinforcements and provisions from Zarahemla, and sixty more sons of the Anti-Lehi-Nephis joined the two thousand. With this strength the city of Cumeni was taken. Helaman decided to send the great number of prisoners back to the land of Zarahemla, since he did not have sufficient provisions to feed them, and he was reluctant to slay them. After the prisoners had left under a heavy guard, a new army of Ammoron's attacked Cumeni. The guards in charge of the prisoners, being warned by Nephite spies, returned to the city to help Helaman in the battle. A part of the Lamanite prisoners fled; but the greater number were slain in trying to escape from the guards.

As the guards arrived at Cumeni, the Lamanites were about to overpower the Nephites:

But behold, my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately; yea, they were firm before the Lamanites, and did administer death unto all those who opposed them. . . . Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them (Alma 57: 19, 21).

It was to the sons of Helaman and the guards who returned, that Helaman gave credit for the great victory in holding the city.

Miraculous Preservation of Sons of Helaman

After the Lamanites had fled, Helaman ordered the wounded to be taken from the dead. He found that two hundred of his sons had fainted from loss of blood, but, to the astonishment of the whole army, not one of the two thousand sixty died, although every one had received many wounds. It was ascribed:

. . . to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power (Alma 57:26).

Helaman was under the necessity of maintaining the parts of the land which his army had won, before seeking to capture Manti, their next objective. He waited for reinforcements to arrive from Zarahemla, and sent an embassy to the governor with a dispatch telling of

the happenings in that part of the land and asking for new strength. After many months two thousand men came to their assistance, bringing food, just as they were about to perish from hunger.

Capture of City of Manti

In addressing Moroni, Helaman remarked that he did not know why more strength had not been sent to them as they were opposing an innumerable enemy. While in these precarious circumstances, Helaman reported, he and his men did “. . . pour out our souls in prayer to God . . .” that he would give them strength to retain the cities and possessions for the support of their people. And the Lord, Helaman asserted, visited them with an assurance that he would save them. Peace and great faith then came to comfort the small army, and Helaman decided to go against the city of Manti without waiting for reinforcements.

Because of Helaman's small number of soldiers, the Lamanites allowed themselves to be lured out of the city and sent their numerous army into the wilderness in pursuit of only a part of Helaman's forces. The two small detachments which he left hidden near the city, then overpowered the few guards left in Manti and took possession of it. The Lamanite army finally feared an ambush as they were drawn nearer to Zarahemla, so they began to retreat and pitched their tents for the night. Helaman then led his troops, under cover of darkness, back to Manti, which was retaken “. . . without the shedding of blood.”

The Lamanites were so struck with fear that they fled out of all that quarter of the land, but carried

away many Nephite women and children with them. Helaman reported that all the Nephite cities which had been taken by the Lamanites in that part of the land were in the Nephites' possession once more, but he did not have sufficient strength to maintain them against a new invasion of the Lamanites. In the letter, Helaman asked Moroni if all the reinforcements had had to be sent to Moroni. If that was not the case, then Helaman said, he feared that there must be factions in the government which denied him assistance.

Helaman finished his letter in the latter part of the twenty-ninth year. The Lamanites had fled back to the land of Nephi. Before closing his letter to Moroni, Helaman again spoke of his two thousand sixty sons:

And those sons of the people of Ammon, of whom I have so highly spoken, are with me in the city of Manti; and the Lord has supported them, yea, and kept them from falling by the sword, insomuch

that even one soul has not been slain. But behold, they have received many wounds; nevertheless they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free; and they are strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day; yea, they do observe to keep his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments continually; and their faith is strong in the prophecies concerning that which is to come. And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma (Alma 58:39-41).

Questions for Discussion

1. How is the character of Moroni shown by the words ". . . he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness"? (Alma 55:19).
2. Relate instances which reveal Helaman's great character both as a spiritual leader and a military leader.
3. Show how the teachings of mothers can train their children in righteousness and instill faith in God.

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 31: "For That Which Ye Do Send Out Shall Return Unto You Again, and Be Restored . . ." (Alma 41:15).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, April 5, 1955

Objective: To lend incentive to the performance of good deeds

THIS truism is as certain to be fulfilled in each of our lives, as that, in the usual course of things, the sun will rise and set. The law of cause and effect is ever at work in

the physical universe and applies equally to God's children and their behavior here on earth. Many passages of scripture verify this principle: