



Type: Magazine Article

Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 33—Review—The Book of Mormon

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Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 42, No. 7 (July 1955), pp. 465-470

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 33—Review—The Book of Mormon

Book of Ether and 1 Nephi through the Book of Alma

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For Tuesday, October 4, 1955

Objective: To renew our understanding of the lives and teachings of The Book of Mormon prophets.

The Book of Ether

LOOKING back upon the history of the Jaredites and Nephites (so far as we have studied their history) as it is reflected in the lives of their great leaders, we recall a few who have marked milestones of progress in the history of that civilization.

The Book of Ether, “The record of the Jaredites, taken from the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of king Mosiah,” gives an account of Jared, the brother of Jared (by name Mahonri Moriancumer, as stated by the Prophet Joseph Smith), their families, and a few friends who came from the Tower of Babel at the time of the confusion of tongues.

Mahonri Moriancumer, The Brother of Jared

Mahonri Moriancumer, known only as the brother of Jared in the Book of Ether, became the first great Jaredite leader. He was “. . . a large and mighty man, and a man

highly favored of the Lord . . .” (Ether 1:34). The Jaredites through Moriancumer were directed by the Lord to cross the sea to the “land of promise.” Great faith in the Lord was shown by their leader when he asked the Lord to touch the “molten” stones that they might give forth light. (See Ether 3:1-6.)

The Lord heard the prayer and “. . . stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger . . .” (Ether 3:6). After the Lord had prepared the stones to give forth light, the brother of Jared placed one in the end of each barge, and they gave light to the vessels.

So great was the faith of the brother of Jared, that he beheld the finger of the Lord. Struck with fear he fell to the ground. The Lord said to him:

. . . 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.

Sawest thou more than this? (Ether 3:9).

Then it was that the brother of Jared, in great faith, asked the Lord to show himself unto him. As the Savior showed himself to Mahonri Moriancumer, great truths were established. The brother of Jared was shown that the Lord lived as a personage in the spirit world before his advent into mortality. It proved to him that man is created in the image of God and that he, Jesus Christ, would come in the flesh to redeem his people (Ether 3:13-16). We also learn from the study of the life of the brother of Jared that faith brings an answer to prayer.

The Jaredite people became a great and prosperous nation as long as they were governed by a righteous leader and heeded the word of the Lord. But during the reign of unrighteous kings, the people became wicked. Idolatry became common. The "secret combinations" of old were introduced and many were slain by those desiring power and wealth.

Ether

Near the end of the Jaredite civilization, Ether, one of the greatest prophets to the Jaredites, came forth in the days of the last king Coriantumr. Ether began to prophesy and warn the people of impending destruction, if they did not repent (Ether 12:1-5). For safety, Ether "... hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people" (Ether 13:13). The two leaders Coriantumr and Shiz fought the final battle of swords. As Ether watched from a cavity in the rock, Shiz was slain. Thus the prophecy

of Ether to Coriantumr, that Coriantumr would be the last of his people to live, was literally fulfilled. (Ether 13:20-21. See also Omni 20:22.)

The Book of Mormon

Lehi

When we think of The Book of Mormon it is the more detailed history of the followers of Lehi whom we especially recall. Lehi, divinely directed, led his little colony composed of his wife Sariah and his sons and daughters, Ishmael and his family, and Zoram, from Jerusalem across the mighty waters to the promised land. There, as a patriarch and father, before his death he called them together and blessed and instructed them.

For, behold, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished.

But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.

Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their

sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever (2 Nephi 1:4-7).

Disappointed and wearied over the wicked activities of Laman and Lemuel, and pleased with the willing obedience with which Nephi had responded to the good and the beautiful, Lehi passed to the great beyond.

Nephi

Nephi, under the immediate leadership of his patriarch father, had early learned to listen to the teachings of the still small voice. Showing obedience, faith, and courage, he had led his older brothers from the Red Sea back to Jerusalem for the Brass Plates, which he knew contained a genealogy of his forefathers. After two vain attempts, he had been successful in securing these records from Zoram, the servant of Laban. Only then was he willing to return to his father. We remember Nephi's inspirational statement.

... I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them (1 Nephi 3:7).

Subsequently, with these same brothers, he returned to Jerusalem to induce Ishmael and his family to join them in their migration to the land of promise, in order that they might intermarry. As a leader among his brothers, Nephi, resourceful and energetic, helped the family to overcome great difficulties—the problem of securing food in the desert after their bows were broken,

and the problem of building a ship to take them to the land of promise. After the death of his father in the promised land, Nephi found it necessary to separate from his disobedient and wayward brothers. In this new location, named the land of Nephi, he built an advanced civilization at a time when his brothers became a dark and loathsome people leading a nomadic life. Nephi built a temple and provided for the spiritual welfare of his people, which, of course, contributed more to their happiness and eternal life than the great material benefits which he showed them how to obtain. Before his death he made two sets of records, the Small Plates of Nephi, to be used for the religious history of his people, and the Large Plates of Nephi, to be used for the secular history of his people. He also instructed his people to keep future records of God's dealings with them.

Jacob and Joseph

Nephi's two younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, born in the wilderness as the colony journeyed to the land of promise, became priests and teachers unto the people. Jacob stressed the need of spirituality and pointed to the value of material wealth as a means to the development of men and women, and not as an end in itself. Jacob instructed:

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted (Jacob 2:18-19).

The immediate successors to Jacob and Joseph taught the people that sin erodes happiness and peace from life, that the happy nation is the God-fearing nation.

In the meantime the Nephites in the land of Nephi, under the leadership of King Mosiah, father of King Benjamin, fled northward to escape from Lamanite domination. They discovered the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla. These Mulekites had left Jerusalem a few years after Lehi and his colony had departed, and had come to the land of promise and settled north of the land of Nephi. They were a numerous people and had built up a civilization with Zarahemla as its central city (Book of Omni 15-23).

The Nephites joined with the Mulekites in building a civilization there, which was henceforth known as a Nephite civilization. King Mosiah, father of King Benjamin, was made king over the inhabitants of Zarahemla (Omni 19).

Benjamin

After Mosiah's death his son Benjamin became king over the united nations. ". . . King Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness . . . (Words of Mormon 17). During Benjamin's reign there was ". . . a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites . . ." (Omni 24), [the Lamanites were living in the land of Nephi (Words of Mormon 13-14)] ". . . But behold, the Nephites did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 24). During the remainder of

his days he had peace. Before his death he called his people together before the temple and announced to them that his son, Mosiah, should be their king and instructed them concerning the gospel (Mosiah 2:9). Among other things, he told them that he had labored with his own hands in order to avoid burdening them with taxes, and informed them that he wanted them to understand that ". . . when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). So it was that he urged them to serve one another. He also prophesied concerning the future appearance of Christ (Mosiah 3:5-12). He also taught them how to activate the gospel principles in their own lives, how to make their religion life-service rather than lip-service.

And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God (Mosiah 4:16-18).

Benjamin concluded his address by admonishing the people to watch their thoughts, their words, and their actions, and to exercise faith in the future coming of Christ (Mosiah 4:30). He took the names

of all people who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments and take upon them the name of Christ.

During his address, Benjamin named his son Mosiah to become their king. It was, perhaps, during Benjamin's reign that some of the Nephites in Zarahemla became restless and were ". . . desirous to possess the land of their inheritance," the land of Nephi, then controlled by the Lamanites (Omni 21-30). After one unsuccessful attempt, Zeniff led a group southward to the land of Nephi. This little colony made peace with the Lamanites in the land of Nephi but were ultimately taken into captivity by them (Mosiah 9:1-6).

Mosiah

Later, King Mosiah, son of King Benjamin, sent sixteen men under the leadership of Ammon back to the land of Nephi to locate Zeniff and his colony, who previously had gone there (Mosiah 7:2-6). They found the descendants of Zeniff and his followers in captivity because of wickedness. Previously, Alma the Elder had withdrawn with some righteous followers to the waters of Mormon. Alma had become converted through the teachings of Abinadi. (See Mosiah, chapter 17.) Alma's followers and the descendants of Zeniff returned safely to Zarahemla. (See Mosiah, chapters 22 and 24.) King Mosiah gave Alma authority over the Church.

Before his death, the great King Mosiah established a democratic form of government among his people when his four sons refused to be king. (See Mosiah, chapter 29.) In the Western Hemisphere, then,

people were granted religious liberty at a time when monarchies held sway over the eastern world.

Alma the Younger

Alma, the Younger, son of Alma, was the first chief judge and high priest in this democracy, however recognizing the vital importance of sound religious practices, he resigned the judgeship so that he could devote his time to the ministry, and preach repentance among the people. Alma, the Younger, in his early life had been associated with the four sons of Mosiah in trying to destroy the work of God which Alma, the Elder, and King Mosiah had so zealously endeavored to build. After a miraculous conversion, however, Alma the Younger became one of the greatest missionaries in the thousand year period of Nephite history. He became a great doctrinal preacher and reformer. He started a reform movement in Zarahemla, trying to divest his people of their envy and pride by preaching the doctrine that Christ should come and redeem mankind. He taught them that Christ should be born of a virgin who should "conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost" and that Christ should redeem mankind from their sins, provided they would repent and come unto him. The reform movement, started in Zarahemla, spread to Melek, and Ammonihah. Alma was assisted in part of this missionary work by Amulek, who also was able to exercise the Priesthood with much power.

Later, Alma and seven men, including his sons, carried on missionary activities among the Zoramites, whom they encouraged to follow

the true spirit of prayer, teaching of Christ and his power to redeem mankind. Soon after his return, Alma reproved his youngest son Corianton for his wayward conduct among the Zoramites, and commended his son Shiblon for his patience in adversity and instructed him to bridle all his passions, to work industriously, to be temperate in all things, and to set his life right so that God could answer his prayers.

Helaman

Alma gave to his faithful son Helaman the sacred records and other sacred objects and impressed him with the magnitude of his responsibility as custodian of these sacred things. He taught Helaman to develop in the people an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity, and to preach repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He instructed Helaman concerning his own welfare. He informed him that it would be wise to “. . . learn wisdom in thy youth . . .” (Alma 37:35) and to counsel with God. It was Helaman, serving under Moroni, who led “. . . his two thousand stripling soldiers . . .” (Alma 53:22), faithful Lamanite sons of the people of Ammon. Not one of these “sons” of Helaman perished in the battles because:

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 56:47-48).

Moroni

When wars broke out between the Nephites and apostate Nephites and Lamanites, Moroni, a courageous, God-fearing, liberty-loving Nephite, was made chief captain of all the Nephite armies at the age of twenty-five. Using strategy and counseling with his Father in heaven, he defeated the Lamanites who made an oath that they would never again come against the Nephites.

When civil war threatened, Moroni rent his own coat and made a banner of liberty which he carried among the Nephites to enlist them in the preservation of their democracy.

There is much we can learn from a study of the lives and teachings of these outstanding Book of Mormon characters. The examples they set us can be a source of strength to us in meeting our present-day problems. Let us always remember that these great men, in the face of unusual obstacles and adversities, remained staunch defenders of the truth and preservers of the liberties inherent in God's great plan.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What did the Lord say to Morian-cumer concerning his faith?
2. What promises to Lehi about this land are vital to our country today?
3. Contrast the life of Nephi with the lives of Laman and Lemuel.
4. Discuss Jacob's statement on riches.
5. Name two principles of the gospel taught by King Benjamin.
6. What form of government did King Mosiah set up?
7. Discuss Alma's missionary activities, and his instructions and blessings to his sons.
8. Why was Moroni a great general?