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## Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 34—Political and Religious Disintegration

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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## *Theology*—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

### Lesson 34—Political and Religious Disintegration

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Helaman chapters 1-5:5)

For Tuesday, November 1, 1955

Objective: To show how unrighteous desires and acts bring political and religious disintegration, but the Lord is merciful and prospers those who repent.

#### *Struggle Over the Judgment-Seat*

**I**N the fortieth year of the reign of the judges, there was much contention over the judgment-seat. Pahoran had died and three of his sons, Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni, contended for the position. This created a three-fold division among the people. An election was held, and, according to democratic procedure, Pahoran was elected. But the minority who supported Paanchi refused to abide by the decision of the majority. Paanchi who was seeking to overthrow the legitimate government and thus destroy the liberty of the people, was tried according to the voice of the people and condemned to death, “. . . for he had raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people” (Helaman 1:8). His followers then sent Kishkumen to murder Pahoran “. . . as he sat upon the judgment-seat” (Helaman 1:9). So speedy was Kishkumen’s flight, after the murder, that no one overtook him, and, as he was disguised, he went unpunished and formed a

secret combination with his band. Pacumeni was then chosen by the voice of the people to be chief judge and governor over the land.

#### *Moronihah Defeats the Lamanites*

The following year the Lamanites armed “. . . with swords, and with cimeters and with bows, and with arrows, and with head-plates, and with breastplates, and with all manner of shields of every kind” (Helaman 1:14), came to battle against the Nephites. The leader of these Lamanites was Coriantumr, a dissenter from the Nephites, and a descendant of Zarahemla. They attacked the city of Zarahemla in the center of the land. Because of their internal conflict over the judgment-seat, the Nephites had neglected to station a sufficient number of guards in the land of Zarahemla, feeling that the Lamanites would not attack it.

In the battle which resulted, Pacumeni was slain by Coriantumr. Not satisfied with the capture of this great city, Coriantumr started

for the city of Bountiful. He captured many cities and strongholds between Zarahemla and Bountiful, for he wanted to obtain the north parts of the land.

Coriantumr's march through the center of Nephite territory gave advantage to Moronihah, leader of the Nephite forces. Moronihah was the son of the former chief captain Moroni. Moronihah, like his great father, was not only a military leader but a man of God. ". . . Moronihah did preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity . . . and did prophesy many things unto them concerning their iniquities, and what should come unto them if they did not repent of their sins" (Helaman 4:14). He brought fresh forces and supplies from the outer strongholds and, ultimately, surrounded the Lamanites. Retreating towards Zarahemla, Coriantumr was slain. The Lamanite forces yielded. "And it came to pass that Moronihah took possession of the city of Zarahemla again, and caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace" (Helaman 1:33).

#### *Rise of Gadianton Robbers*

The murder of Pacumeni and the capture of Zarahemla made necessary the calling of another election in which Helaman, son of Helaman, was raised to the position of chief judge. Possessed of an overweening ambition for power, Gadianton, ". . . who was exceeding expert . . . in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery . . ." (Helaman 2:4) made himself ruler of the Gadianton band which was composed of Kishkumen and his followers. Gadianton sought to

place himself in the judgment-seat. Flattered by Gadianton with promises of power, Kishkumen attempted to murder Helaman, and was stabbed in the back by one of Helaman's servants. Helaman, knowing the danger of this secret combination of conspirators, sought to destroy the organization by killing the leaders. For safety, Gadianton and his band fled unharmed into the wilderness.

For three years there was peace, but in the forty-sixth year of the reign of the judges, ". . . there was much contention and many dissensions . . ." (Helaman 3:3) among the Nephites. Dissenting groups left for the land northward to inherit the land.

And they did travel to an exceeding great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers . . . they did spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land . . . the people became . . . expert in the working of cement . . . . And the people . . . did dwell in tents, and in houses of cement (Helaman 3:4 ff.).

#### *Peace and Prosperity*

##### *Under Helaman*

Helaman filled ". . . the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land.

"And it came to pass that he had two sons. He gave unto the eldest the name of Nephi, and unto the youngest, the name of Lehi.

And they began to grow up unto the Lord” (Helaman 3:20-21).

“And it came to pass that in this same year [49th year of the reign of judges] there was exceeding great prosperity in the church, insomuch that there were thousands who did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance.

“And so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure.

“And it came to pass that the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands.

“Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.

“Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God” (Helaman 3:24-28).

#### *Nephi As Chief Judge*

“And it came to pass in the fifty and third year of the reign of the judges, Helaman died, and his eldest son Nephi began to reign in his stead. And it came to pass that he did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did keep the commandments of God, and did walk in the ways of his father” (Helaman 3:37).

Dissensions from the Church, murder, and other crimes continued through the period in which Nephi served as chief judge. The rebellious part of the population, however, was slain or driven among the Lamanites. These exiled deserters,

hating their Nephite brethren, stirred the Lamanites up to a point where they agreed to unite with the dissenters in a battle against the Nephites.

Again, in the fifty-seventh and fifty-eighth year of the reign of the judges, the Lamanites captured Zarahemla, and “. . . also all the lands, even unto the land which was near the land Bountiful” (Helaman 4:5). The Nephites fortified themselves in the land Bountiful “. . . from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country” (Helaman 4:7).

In the sixtieth year of the reign of the judges, Moronihah recaptured many of the cities between Bountiful and Zarahemla. Commenting on these battles and their consequences, the historian Mormon interpolates:

“Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.

“And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, commit-

ting adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites—

“And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper . . .” (Helaman 4:11-13. See also Helaman 4:23-25.)

#### *Nephi Devotes Life to Church*

Repentance again brought back to them some of their former prosperity, for they now realized that possible annihilation faced them.

“Yea, they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah; and they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God;

“And that they had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people, insomuch that they were wicked even like unto the Lamanites.

“And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face.

“And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve

them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples—

“Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness; and they saw that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous than they, and except they should cleave unto the Lord their God they must unavoidably perish” (Helaman 4:21-25).

It was then (in 30 B.C. the sixty-second year of the reign of the judges) that Nephi who “. . . had become weary because of their iniquity . . .” (Helaman 5:4), relinquished the judgment-seat to Cezoram, “. . . and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days” (Helaman 5:4).

Nephi knew that “. . . wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10), that nations cannot sin with impunity.

#### *Questions and Topics for Discussion*

1. Who were the sons of Pahoran who contended for the judgment-seat?
2. What did the secret combination, called the Gadianton robbers, do to injure the Nephites?
3. Which was the most important office to Nephi, being chief judge or high priest? Give reasons for your answer.
4. What causes political disintegration? Religious disintegration?
5. How did the historian Mormon answer this question?