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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 44—The Fall of the Nephite Nation as Recorded by Mormon

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 44—The Fall of the Nephite Nation As Recorded by Mormon

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Book of Mormon, chapters 1-7; Moroni, chapters 7-9)

For Tuesday, January 8, 1957

Objective: To show how continued wickedness destroys a nation when it does not repent.

THE Book of Mormon which follows Fourth Nephi was written by Mormon, the son of Mormon, who was a descendant of Nephi. This same Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi on gold plates which he himself made and thence the entire abridgment of the history of the Nephites which was translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith goes by the name The Book of Mormon.

In Mormon's writings on the history of the Nephites which he personally witnessed (from about 322 A.D. to 400 A.D.) Mormon recounts the fall and virtual extinction of the Nephite nation.

Records Entrusted to Mormon

Mormon was born into an environment that could have made him an unbeliever, a skeptic, a man of the world. During his lifetime the Nephites and the Lamanites

were living in sin and abomination. Mormon says, ". . . a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man" (Mormon 2:18). It was a period of superstition, idolatry, and self-indulgence. Witchcraft, sorcery, and magic abounded among the people. It was in this world of magic, human sacrifices, and unrestrained indulgence that Mormon lived, not an environment to encourage the elevation of the human spirit or the expansion of the human mind.

Mormon was born about 311 A.D. He was named after the land of Mormon where Alma baptized and established the Church. (See 3 Nephi 5:12.) In 321 A.D. Ammaron, keeper of the sacred records, came to Mormon, who was then ten years of age, and said:

I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe;

Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people.

And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people (Mormon 1:2-4).

The following year when Mormon was eleven, his father took him southward to the land of Zarahemla (Mormon 1:6). It was a densely populated area, with a people who are described as being “. . . as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea” (Mormon 1:7).

Mormon Forbidden to Preach Because of the Nephites' Wickedness

In that year, a war broke out in the borders of Zarahemla by the waters of Sidon between the Nephites and the Lamanites. The Nephites, with an army of over thirty thousand, overcame the Lamanites and restored peace for a period of four years.

Concerning the state of wickedness that existed at that time among the Nephites, Mormon wrote that:

. . . wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples, and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people.

And there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon

any, because of their wickedness and unbelief (Mormon 1:13-14).

At fifteen years of age amidst these conditions, Mormon “. . . was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15). Mormon tried to preach to the people, but he was forbidden because they had willfully rebelled against God. The Nephites suffered because of the hardness of their hearts and the Lord “. . . cursed the land for their sake.” Their treasures “. . . became slippery . . .” as the Gadianton band was renewed.

And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite (Mormon 1:19).

Mormon, large in stature in his sixteenth year, was called to lead the armies of the Nephites. The Nephites retreated before the armies of the Lamanites and lost a fortified city and other lands. Finally, they gathered in the land of Joshua on “. . . the borders west by the seashore,” (Mormon 2:6) in one body. They still refused to repent, even in the midst of “. . . a revolution throughout all the face of the land” (Mormon 2:8). In 330 A.D. the Nephites, with an army of 42,000, defeated King Aaron of the Lamanites with an army of 44,000.

Then followed a period of repentance from which Mormon took joy:

But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowings was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.

And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives.

. . . my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away (Mormon 2:13-15).

Mormon Leads the Nephites

By 345 A.D. the Nephites were again fleeing from the Lamanites, this time to the Land of Jashon, near the place where Ammaron had hid the records in the Hill Shim. By this time Mormon had taken the plates of Nephi and had engraved thereon a full account of all the wickedness and abominations, but upon "these plates" [the abridgment] he engraved only a part (Mormon 2:18).

In the future, Mormon tried to encourage the Nephites to fight. With thirty thousand they defeated a Lamanite army of fifty thousand. By 349 A.D. the Nephites again had possession of the lands of their inheritance. A treaty of peace in 350 A.D., however, divided the inheritance and gave to the Nephites ". . . the land northward, yea, even to the narrow passage which led into the land southward . . ." (Mormon 2:29).

Mormon records:

And it came to pass that the Lord did say unto me: Cry unto this people — Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared.

And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that

it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God (Mormon 3:2-3).

In 360 A.D. the king of the Lamanites sent an epistle to the Nephites telling them that they were preparing to attack the Nephites. Three times Mormon ". . . delivered them out of the hands of their enemies . . ." (Mormon 3:13), but they still refused to repent. In fact, they swore:

. . . by the heavens, and also by the throne of God, that they would go up to battle against their enemies, and would cut them off from the face of the land.

And it came to pass that I, Mormon, did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people, because of their wickedness and abomination (Mormon 3:10-11).

Nephites to Be Destroyed

At this time the voice of the Lord came to Mormon, saying:

Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth (Mormon 3:15).

Mormon writes:

. . . I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard (Mormon 3:16).

Mormon Addresses

Future Generations

Therefore, Mormon then says:

. . . I write unto you, Gentiles . . . unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem . . .

unto the remnant of this people . . . that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam . . . to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil. And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very God (Mormon 3:17-21).

Nephites Wage War of Revenge

In 363 A.D. the Nephites went to battle against the Lamanites, otherwise “. . . the Lamanites could have had no power over them. But behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished . . .” (Mormon 4:4-5).

Now Mormon wrote:

And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.

And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people (Mormon 4:11-12).

Mormon “. . . seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land . . .” (Mormon 4:23) went to the Hill Shim and removed “. . . all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord” (Mormon 4:23).

Mormon repented of the oath he had made that he would not help the Nephites any more and again he led their armies. Mormon,

however, was without hope, for they would not even call upon God.

Record to Testify of Christ

Mormon wrote he could not describe the bloodshed and carnage, but he said that:

. . . these things are written unto the remnant of the house of Jacob

and behold, they shall come forth according to the commandment of the Lord . . .

unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go—that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant;

And also that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles; for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry (Mormon 5:12-15).

Nephites Fight Last Battle Around Hill Cumorah

In 380 A.D. the Lamanites came in such great numbers that they defeated the Nephites. When 384 years had passed away since Christ's birth, Mormon, by means of an exchange of letters with the king of the Lamanites, had gathered in all his people around about the Hill Cumorah. The Nephites, 230,000 strong, were soon engaged in deadly conflict with the Lamanites.

Mormon writes:

. . . when we had gathered in all our people in one to the land of Cumorah,

behold I, Mormon, began to be old; and knowing it to be the last struggle of my people, and having been commanded of the Lord that I should not suffer the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred, to fall into the hands of the Lamanites, (for the Lamanites would destroy them) therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni (Mormon 6:6).

A dreadful battle was waged and, at the conclusion of the battle, all the Nephites had fallen except twenty-four who were with Mormon (including his son Moroni), and a few who had escaped into the south countries and a few who had joined the Lamanites. Mormon uttered an anguished lament as he saw the fallen of his people. (Read Mormon 6:16-22.)

Mormon Admonishes Lamanites of Latter Days

The seventh chapter of Mormon is addressed to the Lamanites of this day, calling upon them to repent and be baptized and “. . . lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you . . .” (Mormon 7:8).

Chapter eight of the Book of Mormon begins the writings of Moroni, the son of Mormon, who tells us that his father Mormon was killed by the Lamanites. Moroni tells us “Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof . . .” (Mormon 8:5).

Mormon's Teachings on Faith, Hope, and Charity

In the Book of Moroni, we find that Moroni presents some teach-

ings of his father, Mormon, on faith, hope, and charity in Moroni, chapter seven. These teachings and writings reveal the great revelations which came to Mormon on the subjects of faith, hope, and charity, culminating in the statement not found in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians:

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him (Moroni 7:47).

Two Letters of Mormon to His Son Moroni

In addition to writing his abridgment of Nephite history and attaching the small plates of Nephi to his record, Mormon wrote seven chapters of the Book of Mormon and the “Words of Mormon.” The Book of Moroni also contains two letters which Mormon wrote to Moroni found in Moroni chapters eight and nine.

In chapter eight Mormon states that little children have no need of repentance or baptism; and in chapter nine Mormon, after relating atrocities committed by the Lamanites, gives to Moroni “A Father's last and affectionate admonition.”

Mormon's Abridgment of the Plates of Nephi

Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi. Making the abridgment was a tedious process. Using the large plates of Nephi as source material, Mormon compiled the history of the Nephites and Lamanites from the time they left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. until 385 A.D., a period of almost a thousand years.

Mormon did not claim perfection for his work. (See 3 Nephi 5:8-26;

Mormon 9:32, 33.) Moroni, Mormon's son, relates that his father used reformed Egyptian because Hebrew required too much space. He further states that if Mormon could have used Hebrew there would have been no imperfection in the record.

To Mormon, the saints today owe an eternal debt of gratitude for his work in their behalf in the latter days.

Questions on the Lesson

1. Discuss the fulfillment of the prophecies of Samuel and Abinadi.
2. What kind of sorrowing did the Nephites express for sin?
3. What work did Mormon do with records?
4. When does God withdraw his spirit from us? What is the result?
5. Discuss Mormon as a scholar? A leader of men? A religious leader?

Visiting Teacher Messages— Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 44—"And Wo Be Unto Him That Will Not Harken Unto the Words of Jesus, and Also to Them Whom He Hath Chosen and Sent Among Them; For Whoso Receiveth Not the Words of Jesus and the Words of Those Whom He Hath Sent Receiveth Not Him; and Therefore He Will Not Receive Them at the Last Day" (3 Nephi 28:34).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, January 8, 1957

Objective: To point out that hearkening to the words of Jesus and to the words of those whom he has chosen to lead the Church are required of Latter-day Saints.

IN the above quotation Mormon gives us two closely related principles fundamental to our Church. The first one is that if we accept Jesus as the Christ, we must also accept his words and his doctrine. Jesus and his words are inseparable. He is what he has taught. Secondly, it is required that we wholeheartedly accept those who are ordained to act as his representatives and that we accept their words. This acceptance is an indication that we accept the Lord and his words.

In the General Church Conference of April 1955, Elder George Q. Morris stated:

. . . it is our most serious duty in life to know him [the Lord] and love him The Lord Jesus Christ is not on trial before the world The world is on trial before the Lord Jesus Christ, and we will have to account for the attitude taken toward him and his message, and we cannot accept him without accepting his principles and his doctrines Another thing that the world must understand if they will know the truth . . . is that those who receive or reject the teachings and testimonies and admonitions of the servants of God receive or reject the Lord Jesus Christ. He said to the seventy when he sent them out to preach the gospel: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me . . ." (Luke 10:16. *125th Annual Conference With Report of Discourses*, pp. 101-102).