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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 43—The Nephites and Lamanites Become a United People

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is to show that peace and happiness come to individuals and nations through living the gospel of Christ in unity.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 43—The Nephites and Lamanites Become a United People

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi)

For Tuesday, December 4, 1956

Objective: To show that peace and happiness come to individuals and nations through living the gospel of Christ in unity.

Church of Christ Flourishes

IN Fourth Nephi, Mormon who abridged the Plates of Nephi as The Book of Mormon, which we know, summarizes in four pages the history of the Nephites and Lamanites from about 35 A.D. to 321 A.D., a period of about two hundred and eighty-six years. Details concerning their religious, social, and political life were eliminated. The original history of the period under discussion was written by four prophets: Nephi, son of the disciple Nephi; Amos, son of Nephi; Amos, son of Amos; and Ammaron, brother of Amos. Ammaron “. . . being constrained by the Holy Ghost . . .” (4 Nephi 48) hid all the sacred records “. . . up unto the Lord . . .” (4 Nephi 49).

All Things Had in Common

Nephi, son of Nephi, one of the disciples of Christ, was historian from about 34 A.D. to 111 A.D., a period of about seventy-six years. It was a period of righteousness which resulted in peace and happiness among the Nephites and Lamanites, who became a united people. The ability to unite was a result of their having transformed their lives by living the gospel Jesus had taught them. “. . . Every man,” wrote the historian, “did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 2-3).

It resulted in a period of great growth and development. The peo-

ple rebuilt many of the cities that had been destroyed at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus on the eastern hemisphere, including the great city of Zarahemla. They were not able to rebuild all of the cities, however, because some had been covered by water. “. . . The people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightful people” (4 Nephi 10).

And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord (4 Nephi 12).

With a united people serving God by doing that which was just, the disciples of Jesus did many marvelous works; they healed the sick, raised the dead, made the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the deaf to hear, “. . . and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus” (4 Nephi 5).

Two Hundred Years of Righteousness

When a hundred years had passed away, “. . . the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead . . .” (4 Nephi 14).

Fourth Nephi, impressed with the blessings God had given his people, wrote:

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ has passed away, and there was no contention in all the land (4 Nephi 15-18).

Amos, son of Nephi, in 111 A.D. became historian and kept the records in his father's stead. He was historian for eighty-four years. Summarizing what Amos engraved on the plates of Nephi, Mormon wrote:

. . . and there was still peace in the land, save it were a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land (4 Nephi 20).

This is all we know about this great people during this period of time, 111 A.D. to 194 A.D.

Amos, Son of Amos, Keeps the Record

Upon the death of Amos in 194 A.D., his son Amos became the keeper of the record “. . . and he [also] kept it upon the plates of Nephi” (4 Nephi 19). During the one hundred and twelve years he served as historian (194 A.D. through 305 A.D.) “. . . the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land,

and that they had become exceeding rich, because of their prosperity in Christ" (4 Nephi 23). But wickedness crept in among them in the form of pride, ". . . wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and the fine things of the world" (4 Nephi 24). From this time of wickedness they ceased to have their goods in common and they divided into classes. Some of the people denied the true church of Christ and built up other churches, ". . . to get gain . . ." (4 Nephi 26). Members of the iniquitous churches soon ". . . did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility and their belief in Christ; and they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them" (4 Nephi 29). They threw the disciples into prisons, into furnaces of fire, and into dens of wild beasts, but the disciples, ". . . by the power of the word of God, which was in them . . ." (4 Nephi 30) came forth unharmed.

Degeneracy Among Nephites

Increasing wickedness among those who did not belong to the true Church of Christ led to a great division among the people in 231 A.D. The first group, the Nephites, included the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Among them were the ". . . three disciples of Jesus who should tarry . . ." (4 Nephi 37). The second group, those who rejected the Church of Christ were called Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. ". . . They did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ . . ." (4 Nephi 38).

. . . And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning (4 Nephi 39).

They soon exceeded in number the Nephites and ". . . began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton" (4 Nephi 42).

And the Nephites ". . . began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites" (4 Nephi 43), which brought to the disciples ". . . sorrow for the sins of the world" (4 Nephi 44). By 300 A.D. ". . . both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceeding wicked one like unto another" (4 Nephi 45).

The robbers of Gadianton flourished and ". . . spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus . . ." (4 Nephi 46). The people had gold in abundance, and ". . . did traffic in all manner of traffic" (4 Nephi 46).

Ammaron, Keeper of the Record

It was at this time that Amos died and the record was given to his brother Ammaron. Ammaron, fifteen years later, constrained by the Holy Ghost, buried the records in Hill Shim and instructed Mormon concerning the plates.

During the two hundred and eighty-six years covering this period, the people experienced peace and prosperity and the Church flourished as long as they were living the commandments of the Lord and dealing justly with one another. Then they fell from the heights of

happiness to the depths of wickedness when pride and other evils developed among them.

We know God rules in the affairs of men and nations cannot sin with impunity because when they become ripe in iniquity their sins destroy them.

Mormon concludes the Book of Fourth Nephi with the words about the record:

And he [Ammaron] did hide them up unto the Lord, that they might come again unto the remnant of the house of

Jacob, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron (4 Nephi 49).

Questions on the Lesson

1. Why did the united Nephites and Lamanites prosper for two centuries?
2. What kind of economic order existed among the Nephites and Lamanites in the first and second centuries after Christ?
3. What factors contributed to the decline of the Church of Christ?
4. How can this evil that ushered in the decadence of the Nephites also ruin our individual lives?

Visiting Teacher Messages— Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 43—"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).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, December 4, 1956

Objective: To stress the great importance of developing charity.

MUCH has been said and written concerning charity, but Mormon's definition, as recorded by his son, Moroni, is clearly expressed. We are deeply moved by Mormon's earnest appeal that his people seek this divine attribute, and we realize how diligent we, too, should be in cultivating this quality.

If charity is the pure love of Christ, or even might we say if it is the kind of love that Christ has, then nothing could be more precious than its possession! Surely if we love Christ with a pure love and

thus acquire the kind of love he has, all will indeed be well with us.

Mormon reminds us that to gain faith and hope one must first be meek and lowly of heart, and in order to be meek and lowly of heart, one must have charity. Paul the apostle tells us that of the three—faith, hope, and charity—charity is the greatest. It seems, then, to be one of the paramount qualifications for a righteous life. Paul's inspiring discourse on the subject of charity always stirs within us an appreciation for this virtue. To quote in part: