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Book of Mormon: Lesson 3 - Teachings of Jacob, Lehi's Son

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Guide Lessons for December

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony.

(First Week in December)

BOOK OF MORMON

LESSON 3: TEACHINGS OF JACOB, LEHI'S SON

1. This lesson, which centralizes thought and discussion on the teachings of Jacob, son of Lehi, covers the Book of Mormon from page 70, chapter 5, to page 106, chapter 25.

I. Narrative.

1. The colony divides into
 - (a) Nephites, and
 - (b) Lamanites.
2. Conditions of Nephites.
 - (a) Distance (many days).
 - (b) From tents to buildings.
 - (c) Temple for worship.
 - (d) Industries.
 - (e) Religious life.

II. Doctrines Taught (chapters 9, 10).

1. The resurrection.
 - (a) It is literal.
 - (b) It has been taught often.
2. The Atonement of Christ.
 - (a) Jesus is to appear among Jews.
 - (b) Christ is God.
 - (c) Resurrection is universal as the fall.
 - (d) Atonement must be "infinite"; that is, divine.
3. The Spirit of Man.
 - (a) There is a human spirit.
 - (b) Spirit without a body subject to devil.
 - (c) Spirit knows guilt or innocence after resurrection.
 - (d) After resurrection men are "righteous" or "filthy" still.
4. Qualities of God.
 - (a) Righteousness.
 - (b) Mercy.
 - (c) Justice.
5. Woes pronounced upon.
 - (a) The "learned" in things of this world only.
 - (b) The rich in things of this world only.

- (c) The deaf as to things of God.
- (d) The blind as to things of God.
- (e) **The liar.**
- (f) Those who "commit whoredom."
- (g) The idolators.

6. Invitation to come to Christ.

2. The words of Jacob, found especially in chapters 9 and 10, constitute a very remarkable exposition of doctrines, one of the finest we have in any sacred book. Also it is remarkable in some of its ways of putting these teachings.

To summarize its ideas, we have there the idea that there is a human spirit distinct from the body; that this spirit will, after death, be reunited with the body literally; that Jesus Christ is God and will offer himself for sin; that the atonement must be by some divine person in order to be efficacious; that God has devised a "plan" for the salvation of man, through which are shown His mercy, justice, and goodness; that this plan is free to all, "without money and without price;" that things of the spirit are not to be known through human learning, but only through revelation.

Jacob is here speaking not from information derived from reading books, but from absolute knowledge derived from experience. He says himself that an angel appeared to him and taught him divine things, and Nephi tells us that "Jacob also has seen him [the Lord] as I have seen him." Here then is the unadulterated testimony of one who is a witness of the things concerning which he speaks.

In these days when everybody thinks himself competent to speak of spiritual matters—heaven and hell, angels and devils, the human soul and immortality, God and Jesus Christ—too much emphasis cannot be placed on this matter of the source of knowledge of divine things. For there is a distinction between what we experience and what we read, between mere information and knowledge. When a person has experienced religious truth, he is competent to talk about religious truth, and not otherwise. This would rule out such persons as Clarence Darrow, Luther Burbank, and others when they tell us that there is no human spirit or a future world, because they are telling us what they *think*, not what they *know* through experience. And this distinction cannot be called to the attention of our younger generation too often. Because a man is an authority in law or biology or what not is no reason why his utterances are of any value on religion.

3. One of the chapters quoted in the lesson from the Prophet Isaiah includes that oft-repeated phrase about "beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks." Professor Moulton says about this passage in Isaiah in its whole setting: "Quite apart from any question of theology, it may be said that no more precious legacy of thought has come down to us from antiquity than

this Hebrew conception of a golden age to come. It is difficult to overestimate the bracing moral influence of an ideal future. The classical thought of Greece and Rome took an opposite course; their age of gold was in the remote past, the progress of time was a decline, and the riches of philosophy claimed to be no more than a precious salvage. The result was the moral paralysis of fatalism, or at best individualism. The imaginative pictures of Biblical prophecy inspire spiritual energy by bringing a future to work for, and, on the other hand, the weakness of a luxurious optimism is avoided in the writings of an author who, while he puts forth all his powers to exalt the future, insists always that the only way of entrance to this future is the forcible purging out of evil."—Introduction to Isaiah in the *Modern Reader's Bible*.

4. Of the thirty-five pages covered by the present lesson, twenty-one pages are quoted from Isaiah. The passages quoted are almost identical with those by that Prophet in our English Bible.

Nephi and Jacob both, it seems, laid great store by Isaiah's writings, as also did our Savior when he visited the Nephites, after his resurrection. Nephi excuses himself for quoting so much from Isaiah by saying that "whoso of my people shall see these words, may lift up their hearts for all men," thus expressing exactly the same idea of "a bracing moral influence" just quoted from Professor Moulton. In all, sixteen chapters are thus included complete in the two Books of Nephi, besides isolated passages here and there. And Jesus in his personal ministry among the Nephites quotes one chapter, with the introductory clause, "Great are the words of Isaiah."

It appears that the mind of the average Nephite struggled as much as the average modern mind in its endeavor to understand the writings of the Prophet Isaiah. For Nephi explains that "Isaiah spoke many things which were hard for many of my people to understand." And he tells us why they found them hard to comprehend. It was because, having for the most part been born after Lehi and his party had left Jerusalem, "they knew not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews." This is the reason, in the main, why we also find the old prophets difficult, especially Isaiah.

For one thing, the prophets were always more or less dramatic, as when Jeremiah went about the streets of Jerusalem with a common yoke on his neck to show his countrymen that the Babylonish king would take them captive. And for another thing, they often spoke of the future as if it were present, as when Isaiah, more than six hundred years before the event, says concerning Christ, "He is despised and rejected of men."

It is interesting also to note the striking difference between such a prophet as Isaiah and the Nephite writers when their proph-

ecies concern the same thing. Both Isaiah and Jacob, for instance, speak of the coming and the earthly ministry of Christ. But the language of the Hebrew prophet is highly figurative and imaginative, even poetic, while that of the Nephite is couched in homely, plain, understandable phrases, such as one person would use to another. The result is greater clarity in the latter, but greater beauty in the former. That is why the writings of Isaiah are prized today for their expressoin almost as much as for their substance. It may, of course, be that this difference is due in part to the languages in which these two men wrote, but it was due most likely in the greater part to what Nephi calls "the manner of prophesying."

5. Recurring to the thought that Jacob is an expert in things of the spirit, we ought to add another thought in this lesson.

It has become fashionable in certain quarters in our times to deny the existence of a personal devil, of angels, of a personal God even, as well as of a human spirit as a thing of itself. The best answer to such a teaching is to set beside these negative ideas, which admittedly have no basis at all in a spiritual experience, the very positive ideas of Jacob and men like him, who experienced the things they talk about.

Experience is the only way in which we can really know anything. This has been said before, but it can hardly be said too often in days like ours when those who have no experience in spiritual matters talk as glibly and as loudly about religion as those who have had such experience. How then can a person without that experience expect to be seriously listened to when he tells us that there is no such being as a personal devil, or a personal God, or angels, or another life? The idea itself is negative, and you cannot of necessity experience what does not exist. About all one can really say in the situation is that one does not believe in these things; one cannot by any possibility *know* that they do not exist.

Compare with this the absolute knowledge of Jacob in the text. He knew because he had experienced. He had seen God, he had been visited by angels, he had felt the power of the Holy Ghost. It was not guesswork with him, it was not a conjecture, nor the result of the reasoning processes; it was a knowledge based on experience. This knowledge any one can obtain for himself, just as Jacob received it. Indeed, Nephi makes a point of this. He had tried to get all his brothers to go to the Lord for confirmation of their father's visions, as he, Nephi, had done. And Jacob had followed Nephi's advice, and received knowledge direct from God.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the cause of division in the colony of Lehtes? Tell some of the results of this division to both sections.

2. Why is this text (chapters 9, 10) so remarkable? Who was Jacob? How did he get his knowledge of the things he spoke about?

3. What does he say of the human spirit, of the resurrection, of the atonement, of God, of the cost of salvation? What is meant by the term "plan" as applied to salvation? Does salvation cost anything?

4. What is the difference between "information" and "knowledge?" How do men obtain knowledge of spiritual truth? Why don't people have a right to speak of spiritual things when they have not had spiritual experience? Apply this thought to the scholars of our own day.

5. Give the substance of the quotation from Professor Moulton concerning Isaiah. Can you think of any ideas taught by our Church that furnish such a moral stimulus by looking forward? How can this forward look be made more powerful in our lives today?

6. Contrast the teachings of the text and the ideas that prevail today on the topics mentioned there. On what grounds would you place your preference for the Book of Mormon teachings respecting these points?

LESSON II

Work and Business

(This topic is to be given at the special teachers' meeting the first week in December)

TEACHERS' TOPIC FOR DECEMBER

REVERENCE AND RESPECT

I. *Reverence for God and respect for worthiness in mankind are prerequisites for progress and perfection.*

Real life rises no higher than the ideal.

We grow like what we revere.

II. *Reverence is an unconditional fealty to some one completely worthy of respect and love.*

"It is an affection, a love, as positive, real, warm and imperative in its demands for activity, as the parental instinct."

It is best expressed in prayer and service.

III. *Respect is a just regard for the worth of self and others.*