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## Book of Mormon Lesson 4 - Prophecies and Doctrines

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# Guide Lessons for January

## LESSON I

### Theology and Testimony

(First Week in January)

#### BOOK OF MORMON

#### LESSON 4—PROPHECIES AND DOCTRINES

This lesson includes the matter between Second Nephi, chapter 25, and the end of the Book of Jacob—pages 106 to 150, inclusive.

There is almost no narrative or story details in the lesson, the only thing of the kind being the account of the kings after Nephi I, the incident about Sherem, and the suggestion of difficulties between the Nephites and the Lamanites. The great bulk of the matter, as suggested in the title of the present lesson, is an explanation of doctrines. Following is a brief outline:

#### I. The Word of Nephi.

##### 1. Prophecies (Chapter 25-30).

- a. Concerning the Jérusalem of Nephi's day.
- b. Concerning Christ among the Jews.

- (1) His name foretold.

- (2) Rejection of him by Jews.

- . Concerning the "last days."

- (1) Coming of the Book of Mormon.

- To whom given.

- How viewed by Gentiles.

- Value to mankind.

- (2) Conditions at time book is given.

- (3) Times subsequent to appearance of book.

##### 2. Teachings.

- a. Baptism of Christ—significance.

- (1) Obedience in ordinances.

- (2) Narrowness of way suggested.

- b. Reception of Holy Ghost.

- c. Prayer a safeguard afterwards.

#### II. Book of Jacob.

- 1. Jacob receives "Small Plates."

- 2. Political events—kings.

- 3. Teachings and warnings.

- a. Pride over riches.

- b. "Fornication and lasciviousness."

- 4. Parable of the Vineyard.

- a. The parable itself.
- b. Interpretation of it.
- 5. Incident of Sherem.
  - a. Sherem's fascination and doctrine.
  - b. What became of it.
- 6. Conflicts with Lamanites.

### Notes

1. *The Miracle of Prophecy.* Of all the miracles we read about in sacred literature, the least explainable or even understandable is that of prophecy. Yet it was one of the commonest with the ancient prophets, whether in the Hebrew or the Nephite nation. And certainly one of the most remarkable is the one by Nephi in this lesson. For in it he tells us about Christ among the Jewish people and the Nephites, who was not to come for almost six hundred years; about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and how it would be looked upon by the people among whom it appeared; about the religious conditions at the time of its appearance; and what would take place among the nations after its coming forth.

One part of this prophecy, or rather series of prophecies, is equally striking whether we regard the prediction as being uttered by Nephi twenty-five hundred years ago or by Joseph Smith a year or so before its fulfilment. It is the statement of how the book the prophet was then translating would be received, or, strictly, rejected by the people. "A bible!" they are made to exclaim, "a bible! we have a bible and need no more bible." As a matter of fact, that is the very language objectors to the Book of Mormon have been using for a hundred years—Christians, all. The remarkable character of this forecast would at once appear, if we should ask any author today in the beginning of his work to foretell the exact words the public will use when it is issued.

One of the puzzling things about this attitude of Christian people towards the Nephite Record is their thoughtless inconsistency in the matter. For here they are, on the one hand, hopelessly divided religiously, a condition due to the inadequacy of the Hebrew Scriptures, and there they are, on the other hand, refusing even to consider a volume that purports to be from God and that makes plain what is obscure in the book they accept as the word of God. "Oh, consistency, thou art a jewel!"

2. *Nephi on Baptism.* It is a strange thing that Nephi should give a discourse on baptism six hundred years before John the Baptist teaches it. Which goes to show that it is one of the oldest of the ordinances in the Church, and not at all confined to the Christian dispensation and after.

But Nephi has some views on the subject that have not been sufficiently considered, even by those who have taught and prac-

ticed the ordinance as much as we have. For instance, he gives two reasons for the baptism of our Savior, and this centuries before the event. They are, first, that Jesus wanted to set the pattern in obedience and, second, that he wanted to show how strait and narrow the Way is. (The word is improperly spelled "straight" in the Book of Mormon; in the Gospel it is given as "strait," which means "confined, distressful, difficult"—very obviously Nephi's meaning.) In addition to that he throws light on the remission of sin in baptism. It is in the "baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost" that sins are remitted or forgiven, whereas we have always connected it with baptism by water; and Nephi's explanation appears the more reasonable.

The prophet says nothing about faith and repentance here, but takes it for granted that they will have been already adopted by the candidate for baptism. For no one would be baptized unless he had repented first, and he would not have repented unless he had believed before that. So Nephi's exposition may be termed an exposition of the "first principles and ordinances of the gospel," and certainly it is one of the finest to be found anywhere—brief, clear, simple, easy to understand.

Indeed it goes farther than the first step in salvation, for it includes the rest of the plan. And what do you suppose that is? Prayer. Nothing can go to the heart of the matter any better than that. For prayer keeps one in close touch with the divine Spirit, and keeping in tune with that, one is not likely to stray far from the path or be in a quandary what to do as one goes along.

An excellent little treatise on the subject, these two chapters, and excellently worded too.

3. *The Small Plates.* Here is as good a place as any to take up a matter that is often found puzzling in the study of the Book of Mormon. It is the matter of plates.

One gathers from several passages in the Record that the people of Nephi were taught to read, that there was popular education to that extent at least. In connection with Sherem we are told that the people "searched the scriptures," after which they "hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man." These scriptures, Orson Pratt thought, were "probably copies made from the Brass Plates"—that is, the writings which Lehi brought with him from Jerusalem. If so, then the Nephites would most likely have copies on some other material than gold plates. For Jacob (4:1) speaks of the "difficulty of engraving our words upon plates," and infers that the reason for writing on plates was "that the things which we write upon plates must remain." And he goes on to say that "whatsoever things we write upon any thing, save it be upon plates, must perish and vanish away." The clear inference here is that they did have "other things" upon which they wrote "things" that were not intended to be per-

manently preserved. What these were the Book of Mormon does not inform us.

Nephi began and carried on a history of his people from the time the colony left Jerusalem till his death, and requested that the work be continued by his historian successors—which was done. This work was on what he called the “larger plates,” and covered mainly political events. But as he went on, he was requested to make “smaller plates,” for a “wise purpose” in the Lord of which he, Nephi, was in the dark, and on these he was to record the distinctively religious history of his people—prophecy, doctrine, religious development, miracles, revelation, and so on. And this he did.

This “wise purpose” did not come to view till Joseph Smith translated the golden volume, in 1829. With Martin Harris as amanuensis, he translated the first leaves of the larger plates of the book—which covered one hundred sixteen pages of manuscript. This manuscript Martin Harris lost, and the Prophet was advised not to attempt a re-translation but instead to substitute the “smaller plates” for that part of the “larger plates” of the regular record. Thus it is that we have “the more religious part” of the Book of Mormon to begin with—the first one hundred fifty-seven pages of our present volume.

As for the rest of our book, it is nearly all an abridgment of the general record of the Nephites, made by a man named Mormon, who lived toward the close of the Nephite nation—almost a thousand years away from the first Nephi. This is why the Nephite Record as we have it is called the “Book of Mormon.” Between the “smaller plates” of Nephi and this abridgment is an introductory chapter, called the “Words of Mormon.” So that the Book of Mormon in its present form comprises (1) the small plates of Nephi, (2) an abridgment of the general history of the Nephites by Mormon, (3) an abridgment of the record of an earlier people called Jaredites by Moroni, son of Mormon, and (4) some closing chapters by Moroni.

4. *The Sealed Book.* In our present lesson Nephi calls attention to a point in connection with the golden volume delivered by Moroni to Joseph Smith, which deserves a paragraph or two here.

That book, as we know, consisted of two parts—one of free leaves, about two-thirds, and another of leaves that were sealed, about one-third. Only the unsealed part was translated by the Prophet. What was the sealed part about? When are we to know its contents? Nephi answers these questions in a general way in our text.

The sealed part of the book, according to our authority, is “a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof.” It was not translated by the Prophet and its contents made known at the time because of the “wickedness and

abominations of the people." Moreover, "the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world to the end thereof." Then these words of the sealed part "shall be read upon the house tops; and they shall be read by the power of Christ; and all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be, even unto the end of the earth."

Hence the Latter-day Saints have something to look forward to in connection with the Book of Mormon. After Joseph had finished translating the Record, he gave the plates, sealed and unsealed, back to the angel, "who has them to this day." So that when the time comes for the part which was sealed to be made known, the book will be available for the purpose.

It is a very interesting world in which we live.

### Questions

1. Tell about the sealed and the unsealed part of the Book of Mormon.
2. Explain the larger plates and the smaller plates of which Nephi speaks in the text.
3. What was the "wise purpose" in the making of the small plates?
4. Give the substance of Nephi's discourse on baptism.
5. Why is prophecy miraculous? Would it be a good thing for us to know all about what is to happen to us before it comes? Why?
6. Is what is prophesied bound to happen *because* it is foreseen? Or has the foreseeing of it anything to do with making it come to pass? Explain in the light of Martin Harris's episode and the small plates.
7. What does Jacob have in mind when he speaks of wives and concubines?

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## LESSON II

### Work and Business

#### TEACHERS' TOPIC FOR JANUARY

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

#### CHEERFULNESS

- I. *Cheerfulness implies a bright and equable temper and shows itself in the face, the voice, the action.*