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Book of Mormon: Lesson 2 - The American Bible

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Guide Lessons for November

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in November)

BOOK OF MORMON

Lesson 2. The American Bible

1. *Assignment*: This lesson covers the Book of Mormon from page 36 to page 70. It includes the matter from First Nephi, Chapter 16, to Second Nephi, Chapter 5. It is a mechanical, not a logical, unit, and this fact must be kept in mind as the lesson is read.

2. *Preponderance of Explanation*: Also it must be kept in mind that the backbone of the Book of Mormon is the narrative and that its teachings are insets, if we may so speak. It is probably true, however, that the main thing in the minds of its various writers is, not to tell a story, but rather to expound some ideas. Still it is helpful to keep this broad distinction constantly before us.

The proportion of what goes on and what is explained is not hard to estimate in these two lessons. They cover seventy pages. The story covers about twelve years in time and includes the leaving Jerusalem, the two trips to the city for the Brass Plates and Ishmael's family, the journey through the wilderness, the voyage across the sea, and the landing—possibly ten or fifteen pages out of the seventy. As for the rest—about fifty-five to sixty pages—we have the visions to Lehi, those to Nephi, the admonitions of the patriarch to his sons, and the counsel of Nephi to his brothers, in explanation of his father's words.

Of course, we must place the same emphasis on the ideas as Nephi intended. And this is characteristic of all the writers of the Book of Mormon—which indicates what they had in mind when they wrote.

3. *Preview*: In Lesson I we left the Lehites "in tents in the Valley of Lemuel." We don't know, of course, where that is, and it doesn't matter. In the present lesson, they leave this place, continue their travels till they reach the sea, build there a ship, embark and cross the ocean, and land in what is now America. We do not even know where they landed. And that does not matter, either.

The doctrinal part begins with the "hard things" that Nephi had said to his brothers, and goes on to quote from the

prophet Zenos, of whom we know nothing from any other source, and from the prophet Isaiah (two chapters), a disquisition on the House of Israel by Nephi, and an exhortation by Lehi to his sons, together with some comments by the youngest son.

Following is a brief outline of the entire lesson:

I. Narrative.

1. Travels in the Wilderness.
 - (a) Nephi breaks his bow.
 - (b) What they ate.
 - (c) They build a ship under difficulties.
 - (d) They embark.
2. The Voyage and Landing.
 - (a) Incidents en route.
 - (b) Probable conditions of the voyage.
 - (c) The landing.

II. Ideas.

1. From Zenos—prophecies concerning Christ.
2. From Isaiah—words “to the remnant of the House of Israel.”
3. From Nephi—explanation to his brethren of the words of Zenos and Isaiah.
4. From Lehi—address to
 - (a) His older sons.
 - (b) Jacob.
 - (c) Joseph.

4. *An American Bible*: The Book of Mormon has often been called the “Mormon” Bible, chiefly in scorn and derision. It is not, of course, our Bible in the sense in which it is intended by that term. For the Latter-day Saints do not have a Bible of their own at all. If they did, it would be rather the “Doctrine and Covenants.”

A Bible, as the word has come to be used, means a collection of sacred literature. And in this sense the Book of Mormon is a bible. But it is in reality the American Bible, just as the Hebrew Scriptures is the European Bible. For it bears the same relation to the New World that the Jewish volume does to the Old World. And for that matter, it is just as valuable a collection, viewed from the standpoint of its teachings.

Most people, in truth, have a mistaken notion of the term “bible” as applied to the sacred writings of the Hebrew people. While it is a collection of books, a library in fact, it does not contain all the sacred writings of the Jews. The Book of Zenos, mentioned by Nephi, who quotes from it, is not in that volume. And there are many others. Besides, it never was intended by anyone, except indeed by some wrong-headed Christians of the early centuries, that the “canon of scripture” should at any time

be "full." For, as a matter of fact, God has the right, whenever He pleases, to reveal His will to man, and, if that be set down in writing, it becomes "scripture," and in a sense part of a "bible."

The Book of Mormon thus becomes a "bible" not only, nor indeed the American Bible distinctively, but the only collection of ancient American writings known to us, and therefore all the more valuable. Of course, we know that it does not contain all the literature of the Nephites, nor even all the religious writings of the Nephites. It contains rather what its authors, if they knew the word, would call the quintessence of the word of God to the ancient inhabitants of the Americas.

5. *The Point of Origin*: Another thing of no small interest in connection with the Book of Mormon is its origin as compared with that of other sacred books. Of that origin we shall have something to say later on in this course, but this point of source must be mentioned casually here.

Four peoples of the world have sacred writings, not counting the Latter-day Saints. They are the Chinese, the East Indians, the Arabians, and the Hebrews. And these sacred writings may be termed bibles.

The Chinese Bible was written by the disciples of Confucius. Confucius, born in 551 B. C., was of a distinguished family, became a public teacher in his early manhood, later held positions in the government of China, but in his old age wandered from state to state, puzzled as to why his teachings were generally rejected by the potentates. "No sooner was he dead, however, than his wisdom was recognized by peasant and emperor alike; admiration rose to veneration, veneration to worship. Sacrifices were offered to him, temples built in his honor, and a cult established which has lasted almost two thousand years." His disciples of about the fourth century, B. C., set down what they could remember of his sayings, "making free use of the written memorials concerning him, which they had received, and the oral statements which they had heard, from their several masters."

"The Hindu Bible centers in Gautama, or Buddha, the "Awakened." Born a warrior prince about the middle of the sixth century B. C., he renounced his wife and child and possessions to give himself up to asceticism and concentration of thought. After years of disappointment, self-discipline, and failure, he one day became suddenly "illumined" and saw the Great Truths. He too wandered about from place to place preaching his new creed, with extraordinary results. H. G. Wells calls Gautama "one of the most penetrating intelligences the world has ever known," and comments sarcastically on the anxiety of his later disciples for the preservation of the tree under which their master saw his "vision of the way" instead of preserving the thoughts which

he received under the tree. His teachings have been summarized under eight heads—right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right rapture.

Among the Moslems in Arabia the "Koran" holds the same place that Hebrew Scriptures do among Christians. It contains the revelations to Mohammed written down by his followers mostly after the prophet's death. Some of these, it is claimed, were given him while he was in a trance; others in the form of pages or scrolls, which he was to read by the "grace of God." The central idea in Mohammedanism is, that "there is but one God, and Mohammed is his prophet."

The Hebrew Bible is too well known to need extended mention. It is sufficient to remark that it was written by some forty different men and contains almost every form of literature—stories, orations, drama, and so on.

The Book of Mormon is the work chiefly of two men—Nephi the First and Mormon. Joseph Smith was merely its translator. The entire volume was revealed to the Prophet by an angel of the Lord, the original plates having been given back to the heavenly messenger when the translation was finished.

6. *Some Comparisons:* (a) The Book of Mormon is the only one of the five sacred books that was given intact at one time to man; (b) it is the only one in which an angel was concerned in the book as a whole; (c) in it the religious element is more pronounced than in any of the others, not excepting the Hebrew Scriptures; (d) there is greater unity in it than in any of the others; (e) as compared with the Hebrew Bible, its translation can be more depended upon, for the reason that that translation was done "by the power of God"; (f) and as compared with the others, the work comes to us direct, instead of through the memory of disciples.

A quotation from each may be helpful, though inadequate, in showing the spirit and style of these Bibles:

Confucius—Love makes a spot beautiful: who chooses not to dwell in love, has he got wisdom? Loveless men cannot bear need long, they cannot bear fortune long. Loving hearts find peace in love; clever heads find profit in it.

Buddha—There are three conditions under which deeds are produced. And what are the three? Freedom from covetousness is a condition under which deeds are produced; freedom from hatred is a condition under which deeds are produced; freedom from infatuation is a condition under which deeds are produced.

Mohammed—Oh, you who believe! If you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back upon your heels, so you will turn back losers. Allah is your Patron, and He is the best of helpers.

Book of Mormon—It is better that one man should perish, than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

The things which some men esteem to be of great worth, to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet.

Questions

1. Give the story part of this lesson.
2. Tell the substance of what Zenos gives concerning Christ.
3. The word "prophet" has two meanings—to foretell and to see into truth. Show how Lehi stands for these two meanings; how Nephi does.
4. Show (a) that the Book of Mormon is not our bible; (b) that it is a bible, and (c) that it is the American Bible.
5. What are some main differences between the Book of Mormon and the other sacred writings mentioned?
6. Of the various quotations given, which strikes you (a) as the best thought? (b) as the best phrasing?

LESSON II

Work and Business

TEACHERS' TOPIC FOR NOVEMBER

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

OBEDIENCE

- I. *Obedience to*
 - a. Parents
 - b. The Laws
 - c. God

is the outstanding need of today.

"We believe in being subjects to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."—*Twelfth Article of Faith*.

- II. *Training in Obedience Should Begin in the Home.*

"These early years from birth to seven years old are the most important ones in the child's whole life, for in them is laid the basis, physical and moral, of what the future man is to be."

"We must begin not with the adults whose habits and