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The Book of Mormon: Lesson 6 - A Nephite Colony

Editor(s): Alice Louise Reynolds

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Guide Lessons for March

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in March)

BOOK OF MORMON

Lesson 6. A Nephite Colony

In this lesson, which covers the matter between pages 181 and 212 of the Book of Mormon, we have a continuity which we have not had in any of the lessons thus far studied. It is mainly narrative—the story of one of the Nephite colonies. But in order to understand the whole situation, it is necessary to know certain historical facts in connection with Nephite migrations.

1. *Zarahemla and the Land of Nephi.* As has been hinted already once or twice, it is not very material just where the places mentioned in the Book of Mormon were in the absolute sense. About all we can now hope to do is to locate these places with respect to one another. To be sure, it would be helpful if we could put our finger on our present map of the Americas and say with confidence, “Zarahemla was here” and “The Land of Nephi was there.” But as we cannot do that, we must do the next best thing, which is to locate the Book of Mormon places relatively.

The Land of Zarahemla is where we find King Mosiah, father of King Benjamin, about one and a quarter centuries before Christ. Yet King Mosiah was born in the Land of Nephi. How does all this come about?

On the death of Lehi, Laman became murderous in his purpose to rule, and he embittered his followers toward Nephi and Nephi’s friends. So Nephi, warned of God, took all his friends and their belongings into the wilderness, where they might live in comparative peace and safety. Doubtless they did not go any great distance away from their first home. That is why their enemies found them presently, and renewed their disturbance. And so Nephi moved again. These removals were rather numerous, we are led to believe, and continued long after Nephi’s death—continued, in fact, as long as his people were unable to resist the encroachments of the Lamanites. They happened, however, these removals, within what is very generally termed in the Record, the Land of Nephi, named after their first great leader.

Within this territory, probably the last removal before Mo-

siah I's time, was a smaller district called by the same name, the Land of Nephi, but sometimes also called Lehi-Nephi. It was here that Mosiah I lived and reigned in his earlier years.

As often occurred among the Nephites, the people were divided as to their disposition and works. Some were what the Book of Mormon calls "wicked," and others were "righteous." Besides, the Lamanites were becoming more and more troublesome. And so the Lord instructed Mosiah to take all those who would go with him out into the "wilderness", and He would lead them to a place of safety. This Mosiah did. We are not informed how many remained behind nor what became of them. But this fact we must not lose sight of—that it was the Land of Nephi or Lehi-Nephi which Mosiah I and his people abandoned.

Now the place to which the Lord guided these emigrants was called the Land of Zarahemla. But Zarahemla, too, had a larger and a smaller territory called by the same name, with a city of the same name, situated in the heart of the smaller district. And it had a numerous population, under the rule of a man named Zarahemla. These people were also Israelites, probably of the tribe of Judah, who had come to America under divine guidance not a great while after the Lehiters landed in America. Having come here without records of any kind, their religious habits had degenerated to a point where they no longer believed in God, and their language had become so corrupted that Mosiah's people could not understand them. All this had taken place in about four hundred years. The two people became one, with the ruler of the superior as head of the government.

And here we come to the lesson of today.

2. *The Zeniff Colony.* As time went on, those who had left relatives and friends in the old home, naturally wanted to know what had become of them. You know how it would be. For religion often divides husbands and wives, sweethearts and lovers, parents and children, brothers and sisters. It is assuredly a two-edged sword, as we are told in the Good Book.

Well, one of these anxious ones was a man named Zeniff: Zeniff says of himself, as you will read in the Record, that he was "taught in all the language of the Nephites," that he had "a knowledge of the Land of Nephi", and that he was by profession a spy for the Nephite army in their encounters with the Lamanites.

In this business of spying out the enemy's secrets—and this is an interesting point—he had learned that the Lamanites were not such a bad lot after all. And so he was for entering into a treaty with them and teaching them the ways of peace and civilization through ideas rather than the sword. A very good suggestion, as we think today. But the "ruler"—by which term it is presumed he meant the head of the army—would have none

of it. Being "an austere and blood-thirsty man," we are told, he was not only against the idea, but against the man who suggested the idea. And so Zeniff had to be rescued by his fellow soldiers. He was avenged, however—if he needed vengeance—by the great slaughter of Nephite forces in their encounters with the Lamanites, for the "greatest number of our army was destroyed", and the survivors went home to tell the tale to the widows and orphans. A wonderful lot of romance, philosophy, adventure, emotion, what not is packed away in those twenty-five lines about Zeniff before his great adventure to the southland.

3. *This Picture and That.* The Nephite Record abounds in contrasts—contrast of character, of ideas, of setting, of emotions, of everything in fact. One of the most illuminating of these is the character of King Benjamin set beside that of King Noah.

Noah had the usual kingly impression that he was of better clay than his subjects; Benjamin, that he had come from the same mold as those he ruled. Accordingly, while Benjamin earned his own living by hard work and did only what he thought was for the best good of his people, Noah taxed his subjects heavily in order that he might live sumptuously in "spacious buildings," ruling from a costly throne and surrounded by a group of corrupt, hypocritical sycophants. Benjamin saw to it that his home was a source of pleasure and benefit to his children; Noah had "wives and concubines," and encouraged a life of harlotry in his priests. The difference lay in their conflicting root qualities. The ideal of Noah, if it can be termed an ideal, was selfishness; that of Benjamin was service. And see how they ended—the one in a peaceful bed, surrounded by a nation of weeping friends; the other in bundles of faggots, set on fire by a host of infuriated enemies.

4. *Community of the Spirit.* One of the singular things about the Nephite prophets is that they seem to have known as much as, and some of them more than, we do about our Savior. And yet they lived, most of them, hundreds of years before his advent. This is especially true of King Benjamin, whose life we studied in the last lesson, and of Abinadi, of whom we read in this lesson. And the delightful thing about it all is the great clearness of the views expressed. Here are some of the high water marks in the teachings of Abinadi.

(a) *His views of Christ.* Opinion is divided today among Christians as to whether Jesus was divine or not. Indeed it is coming to be more and more the sentiment of people that He was not. And this in the face of a belief in the New Testament. But there can be no two opinions on the subject with those who accept the Book of Mormon. "God himself," Abinadi says, "shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

And because He dwelleth in the flesh, he shall be called the Son of God." And this agrees with what Benjamin said before him, that "the Lord Omnipotent. . . . who is from all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. . . . And He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things."

(b) *His views of the law of Moses.* These are clarity itself compared with what we find in the Old Testament, and are on a par with the utterances in the New Testament on the subject. "It is expedient," he says to Noah's priests, "that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet, but the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses." This "strict law," he further explains, was given to the Children of Israel because "they were a stiff-necked people." And he calls it "a law of performances and ordinances," a law to keep them in remembrance of the Lord. It was a type, a shadow of things to come.

(c) *His Views on Redemption.* All men are "carnal, sensual, devilish," subjecting themselves to the devil, although they know good from evil. This has come about through the "fall" of our first parents. Now, unless something occurred to redeem them from the consequences of this "fall," all mankind would be lost "endlessly." But God has provided a means of redemption through Christ's death and resurrection. It is effective, however, only where man repents and mends his ways; for if he "persists in his own carnal nature," he is as if "there was no redemption made." Christ breaks the bands of death, robbing the grave of its victory. And so "there is a resurrection" from the dead, and "this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption."

It is all as clear in the mind of Abinadi as if he were speaking of the events after they had taken place. This is the true fellowship of the Spirit, the communion of souls that have drunk of the same all-pervading influence, though separated by hundreds of years in time. Christ is eternally the same, whether He speaks to Moriancumr on the mount, to King Benjamin through an angel, to the poetic intelligence of Isaiah, to a humble farm-boy in the nineteenth century, looking for light and wisdom—they are all one in spirit and purpose and heart.

Questions

1. Tell how the Nephites came to Zarahemla. Who was their leader? Whom did they find there? What was their condition after four hundred years?
2. Contrast King Benjamin and King Noah. Who was Zeniff?

3. Describe the conditions of Zeniff's colony under Zeniff and under Noah. How do you account for the difference?

4. Who was Abinadi? What kind of man would you think him to be from what he says and does? Was his fine exposition of doctrine wasted on the priests? Explain.

5. Who was Alma? Describe his character from the things he does in the text.

6. Who was Ammon? Limhi? Gideon?

LESSON II

Work and Business

TEACHERS' TOPIC FOR MARCH

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

COURAGE

I. *Courage enables us to encounter danger and difficulties fearlessly.*

It makes us stronger, braver, and more resolute.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."—*Psalms 31:24.*

II. *Moral courage or the courage of one's convictions.*

a. Joseph Smith the Prophet
Inception of Relief Society movement.

b. The L. D. S. missionaries.

c. Pioneers.

d. Historical examples among women.

1. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in the face of ridicule, worked for women's suffrage.

2. Harriet Beecher Stowe worked for the abolition of slavery.

3. Florence Nightingale, first as well as one of the greatest of war nurses, devoted her life to the care of the sick.

III. *Physical Courage*—the type displayed by the soldier.

a. David, the shepherd lad who slew the great Goliath.

b. Washington at Valley Forge.

c. Examples from the World War.

IV. *Everyday Courage.*

a. Do daily tasks cheerfully.

b. Make brave decisions.

c. Go on with our work, even though unjust things are said of us.

d. Seize opportunities with eagerness and zeal.

"If I want to be a happy, useful citizen, I must be brave—This means I must be brave enough and strong