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The Book of Mormon—The Great War

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Guide Lessons For November

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in November)

BOOK OF MORMON—THE GREAT WAR

This lesson covers the material in the *Book of Mormon* from Chapter 45 to Chapter 52, including both chapters.

The Story

We have now reached the year 19 of the reign of the Judges, or 72 B. C. The Lamanites are south of a strip of wilderness running east and west from sea to sea, with the Nephites on the north of it. Just where this strip is and how wide it is, we do not know, and it does not matter.

Alma the prophet, after instructing his son Helaman concerning the records, disappears and is not heard of again. Helaman, with other high priests, goes out to preach to the people. They meet with opposition.

Then Amalickiah, a large man physically and an aspirant for place and honor, stirs up trouble. He wants to be king. Moroni, however, is so wrought up over this threat upon freedom that he rouses all liberty-loving men to oppose Amalickiah. The result is that the traitor escapes, with some others, to the Lamanites.

Moroni now foresees trouble with the Lamanites. So he prepares for war. He fortifies the cities by surrounding them by high earth-works, on the top of which he builds breast-works of timber. Then he waits for the inevitable.

Meantime, Amalickiah, in the south, perfects his own schemes

First, he stirs up the sleeping enmity of the Lamanite chief against the northern people. The king orders a war. But the army is divided by fear of Moroni. Most of them revolt. Next, the crafty Nephite is sent to subdue the rebellious soldiers. He poisons Lehonti, their leader, becomes head of the combined forces, marches back to the king, has him run through with a sword, marries the queen, and rouses the whole barbarous nation to war-heat. It is a story that matches Iago's in "Othello."

Then there is a period of war—which lasts through this lesson, with an interval, and into the next. Amalickiah is killed by a pretty strategem of Teancum's, and his brother Ammoron succeeds him. Several Nephite cities are taken by the Lamanite army, which is very numerous.

The interval of peace, as between the two peoples, comes after the first Lamanite army is sent home in defeat by the resourceful Moroni. But it is not a period of entire peace among the Nephites. For some persons of "noble birth," presumably unworthy descendants of men who did something for the community, seek to break up the republic and to establish a monarchy.

That is what happens in this lesson.

Outline

- I. Spiritual (Chapter 45).
 1. Alma instructs Helaman.

2. Alma disappears.
 3. Helaman preaches to the people.
 4. He meets with opposition.
- II. Treachery of Amalickiah (Chapters 46 and 47).
1. Who he is—description of
 2. His purposes.
 3. His escape to Lamanites.
 4. His plotting among them.
- III. Efforts of Moroni (Chapter 46).
1. His concern over Amalickiah's conduct.
 2. His "title of liberty."
 3. His success.
 4. Traits of character.
- IV. War with Lamanites (Chapters 50, 51, 52).
1. Preparation for it by Moroni.
 2. First attack by Lamanites.
 3. Interval of peace.
 4. Attacks under Amalickiah and Ammoron.

Notes

1. *Amalickiah*. This is one of the most striking, well outlined characters in the *Book of Mormon*. To be sure, he is not an admirable character, as we measure men, for he is engaged in building up himself instead of others. And, after all, that is the supreme test of human worth. Nevertheless, he is a well-defined portrait in the Nephite record. He is a perfect antithesis of liberty-loving Moroni.

He is a large man, we are told, and powerfully built. We could imagine as much. And he has a keen mind, too, with imagination. He loves power, has unbounded energy, and knows how to plan so as to attain his ends. It would seem, too, that he has a persuasive tongue. He raises about him, by that means it would seem, a rather large following among the Nephites; and

then he leads the Lamanite chieftain and later the chieftain's widow into his trap.

If all the details in his life were known, it is not at all improbable that he is the counterpart, in the main outlines of his character, of Shakespeare's Iago, in "Othello." Having chosen his end—the headship of the Lamanites first and then of the Nephites as well—he goes about the matter of attaining that end in the most cunning and systematic way, and utterly without scruples. It is a pity that such a restless, ambitious, far-seeing mind cannot be set to work on some fine constructive purpose. But very likely he was not of the type that can be trusted. His main flow is selfishness. In our next lesson we shall be concerned with his opposite—Moroni.

2. *Teancum* is another character whose outlines are clearly drawn in the very few details we have of him in the *Book of Mormon*. But he is not of the same class as the selfish Amalickiah. He plans and works for the common good.

Equally unresting with that scheming apostate, Teancum thinks always of how he may further the cause of liberty in his nation. Both armies are asleep. Amalickiah is asleep, with his guards, for every one is tired from a hard day's fighting. Teancum alone is awake. He wonders if he cannot strike a fatal blow at the enemy by killing the king. It is a desperate chance to take. But he risks all for the cause. It is a fine picture—this courageous, heroic figure stealing over the wall, moving stealthily to the king's tent, plunging the blade into his heart without waking anyone, and then going back and rousing the Nephite soldiers and holding them in readiness for anything that might hap-

pen. It is a splendid act performed in a great cause.

3. *War* does not make very pleasant reading under any circumstances. It is probably what Sherman said of it, when he called it "hell." But there is this to say of the warfare in the *Book of Mormon* —the details are not given for their own sake.

Mormon, whose words we are reading—for it was he who made the abridgement of the "larger plates"—was himself a soldier in his day. And probably he could not altogether resist the temptation to set down some of the particulars in Moroni's defensive campaign. On the whole, however, he practices great self-restraint—for a warrior. And so we have usually only such details as bring out the policy of the Nephite people in their relations to the Lamanites and the purposes of the Lord with respect to the white population here.

(a) The Nephites fight only in self-defense. Never are they the aggressors. Their leaders have a horror of the taking of human life. They naturally do not like to kill, but they have a special objection to killing people in war because these do not have time in which to repent and prepare to meet death. It is a refinement of thought that, so far as I know, is found only in the *Book of Mormon*.

(b) The Nephites of this period have an intense love for political liberty. That is partly due, no doubt, to the passionate pleadings of Moroni. He is the Patrick Henry of the ancient Americans. Liberty to those people was more precious than life itself. Doubtless they felt, at least, during the period which we have now reached, just as our own beloved president John Taylor put it, "I would not be a slave to God—I'd rather be extinct!" And so they staked their

all for this one thing—freedom to think and act.

(c) God demanded righteousness of the Nephites. He demanded righteousness of all who inhabited the American continent. Mormon interjects this passage into his abridgement: "Cursed shall be the land unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe. The Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."

(d) In accordance with this law thus set down by Mormon and others in the *Book of Mormon*, the author of this abridged narrative takes pains to show that whatever blessings come to the Nephites are the result of their righteousness, and that whatever ills come upon them are the results of their wickedness. This war is one of the applications of this principle. And it is helpful to us in reading this account to remember that Mormon was writing this part of the story in full view of the fact that this nation was either going under or had actually gone under. He had before him the whole history of his people.

4. The details of the war are therefore chosen for the purpose of bringing out the larger purpose in the life of the Nephites, and not because the details of it are interesting in themselves. This is not true, say, in a history of the United States. For there these war particulars are set down because they happened to the people of this nation. But Mormon does not work that way. He is writing a religious history, not just a history. His emphasis on Moroni and Amalickiah shows that. So does that incident about Teancum. Always his particulars are subordinated to his main purpose.

If therefore we read these war

details with that idea in mind, this assignment and the one to follow will not appear so dry as they might otherwise be.

Questions

1. Is this idea of Mormon's about righteousness and wickedness being followed by prosperity and its opposite respectively, one that applies generally? Did it apply to the Lamanites? Why? Does it apply to the United States? Explain.
2. Does this idea apply to individuals? Give your reasons.
3. Just what acts do you consider "righteous" and "wicked" in indi-

viduals? In a nation or community?

4. Is the "prosperity" or the "evil" that comes to the "righteous" or the "wicked" a matter of "reward" and "punishment" or a matter of "results" coming after a "cause"? Explain your meaning, and justify your explanation.

5. Show from this lesson that the things in the *Book of Mormon* deal with the universal in life rather than the merely temporary.

References: *Dictionary to the Book of Mormon*, Reynolds; *The Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon*, Evans.

LESSON 2

Work and Business

TEACHERS' TOPIC FOR NOVEMBER

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

MEMBERSHIP IN RELIEF SOCIETY

"This charitable Society is according to your natures; it is natural for females to have feeling of charity. You are now placed in a situation where you can act according to these sympathies which God has planted in your bosoms. If you live up to these principles, how great and glorious. If you live up to your privileges the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates. * * * This Society is not only to relieve the poor but to save souls. * * * And I now turn the key to you in the name of God, and this Society shall rejoice, and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time. This is the beginning of better days to this Society."—Joseph Smith.

Nothing bigger can come to a human being than to love a great Cause more than life itself, and to have the privilege throughout life of working for that Cause.—Anna Howard Shaw.

Any good woman is eligible for membership in the Relief Society.

I. Admittance to Membership

1. Desire to join indicated
2. Explanation of obligations
3. Recommendation by member
4. Acceptance by majority vote

II. Responsibilities of Membership

1. Payment of dues
2. Attendance at meetings
3. *Relief Society Magazine* subscription
4. Participation in Activity — social, financial, service, or any call made by president
5. Loyalty to organization