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A Man Called Jacob

Author(s): Sterling W. Sill

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Abstract: Briefly discusses some of the characteristics of Jacob, son of Lehi. Jacob is portrayed as a man to whom others look for an example of spiritual living.

From the Book of Mormon, a record that tells us "Who's Who To God in Ancient America," we learn of the life, sermons, and teachings of . . .

A MAN CALLED JACOB

*by Elder Sterling W. Sill
Assistant to the Council of the Twelve*

The ancient Romans had a very interesting custom of making statues of their most illustrious men and setting them up in their homes. Then, as they associated with some particular likeness, they felt they absorbed the good qualities it represented. In America we do something similar when we declare holidays to commemorate the birthdays of our great men. This is a time when we point out their virtues and talk about the traits that made them famous. It is a natural principle that you cannot look upon a great man without gaining something from him. That is, when we think about the leadership of Washington and the honesty of Lincoln, we tend to transplant those traits and make them grow in our own lives.

Acting upon this same idea, a beautiful memorial called "The Hall of Fame for Great Americans" was erected on the campus of New York University in 1899. Membership is limited to those who have been dead for at least 25 years and who have received a majority vote of the 100 prominent Americans who make up the electoral college. Eighty-nine famous Americans have now qualified for this hall of fame, and each of these is permanently represented in it by a bronze bust, a pedestal, and an explanatory tablet. It is the assignment of these 89 great men and women to draw us up to their level.

But there is another interesting hall of fame that some people have set up in their homes. It is made up of the pre-Columbian Americans whose spiritual likenesses have been molded in the word pictures contained in their great scriptural history—a history known as the Book of Mormon. It resembles the modern volume entitled *Who's Who in America*, except that the Book of Mormon is a kind of spiritual "Who's Who." We might say that it tells

(For Course 9, lesson of January 21, "A Latter-day Saint Is A Worker and Is Helpful"; for Course 17, lessons of November 19 and January 7, "Jacob" and "Life and Teachings of Jacob"; for Course 27, lesson of January 14, "Servants of God"; to support family home evening lesson 15; and of general interest.)



us "Who's Who to God in Ancient America."

One of the most important things one needs to consider about any great man is who it is that says he is great. The Book of Mormon prophet, Jacob, was one of those who were great in God's sight. He was the fifth son of Lehi, born while Lehi and his family were in the wilderness on their way to a new land. Another important thing about a man is the kind of family he has. Jacob was born of goodly parents, and he had three wonderful brothers. But the family was one of extreme contrasts, and his

brothers Laman and Lemuel represented evil. They had the same goodly parents, but Laman and Lemuel lacked the family characteristics of faith and righteousness. Instead, they carried in their hearts so many seeds of disobedience and rebellion that eventually they brought death upon an entire civilization. This entire family left Jerusalem 600 years before Christ was born, under instructions from God to repeople the land He would give them (the western continent) and reestablish righteousness there.

While Jacob was growing up, some wonderful things were happening in his family. His father and his older brother, Nephi, were being given directions through heavenly manifestations. They were also given a divine instrument called the Liahona, to guide them. This compass-like instrument worked according to the faith of those who operated it. (See *Nephi* 16:10; *Alma* 37:38.) Its spindles pointed the way in the wilderness, and important messages appeared on its surface to give them other necessary information.

This small Israelite colony arrived in the promised land in 589 B.C., when Jacob may have been about eight years old. From his earliest youth, his life was guided by the principles of the gospel learned from his father, Lehi, and his older brother, Nephi. Like all other righteous people, Jacob was highly favored by the Lord.

Soon after their father's death, the family broke up into factions called Nephites and Lamanites. Under the leadership of Nephi the righteous part of the family moved away, and the Lamanites, left to themselves, without the uplifting influence and high standards of their brethren, experienced further decline. A "skin of blackness" soon came upon them because of their evil ways, and their wickedness made them a scourge to their brethren. (2 Nephi 5:21.)

The Nephites built up their culture by following the scriptures. They erected a temple patterned after the one Solomon had built in Jerusalem. (2 Nephi 5:16.) And because of his personal excellence Jacob was appointed to be a priest and a teacher of the people. (2 Nephi 5:26.)

Jacob loved the words of Isaiah, as did his brother Nephi. Both of them spent a great deal of time teaching these words to the Nephites. Nephi was a great admirer of his younger brother and included many of Jacob's teachings among his own works. An entire book of these ancient American scriptures was written by Jacob under his own name. Jacob looked forward with great eagerness to the

blessings the Savior would bring into the world. And he received information direct from the divine presence. Jacob said, "For I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time." (Jacob 7:5.) What a great thrill it should be that we can associate, even indirectly, with a man who has this kind of spiritual background.

Jacob taught with great clarity and plainness all his long life. In looking into the future he saw the time when his own people would be destroyed and our own modern culture would be built up in America to take their places. He was also aware of the problems that would threaten our own destruction upon this choice land, because of our failure to follow his teachings.

Certainly one of our greatest opportunities is to set up the spirit of Jacob in our homes, and to learn to love the great eternal truths as he did, building into our lives the attitudes of devotion and righteousness that will draw us upward to eternal life.

Library File Reference: JACOB.

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