



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living: IV

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Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (April 1948), pp. 165-169

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living

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IV.

“... One being is as precious in his sight as another.” (Jacob 2:21.)

IN Nephi's farewell words to his people, he writes, “. . . hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.” (II Nephi 33:10, note entire chapter.)

Read the Book of Mormon to find out how to think of fellowmen—your children, wife, neighbor, enemy, Jew and Gentile—and you will find it filled with the Spirit of Christ. Its teaching will remind you of the parable of the Good Samaritan or again of Paul's great sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17) or of his eulogy on faith, hope and charity (I Cor. 13).

Book of Mormon writers can call a spade a spade. Like the Savior they are direct in their instruction; they condemn men in their sins and shallow living. Like Him too, their hearts are full of love and compassion for all men.

Running through the book, like a theme in a symphony, is the doctrine of the brotherhood of man phrased in original and varied expression. “The Lord esteemeth all flesh as one” and “one man shall not think himself above another,” are typical Book of Mormon counterparts of the Golden Rule and the Second Great Commandment. Let us consider the Book of Mormon concept of the brotherhood of man—its foundation and also its practical application.

“All are alike unto God”

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that our Father in Heaven is just and impartial. His goodness and love are extended to all men. He plays no favorites; He has no prejudices. All men are His children and the one is as precious in His sight as another.

Nowhere in any scripture, we believe, is this truth told so forcefully and with such strong feeling as it is by Nephi. (Read II Nephi 26:23-33 from which we quote a few lines.)

"For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness.

"He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. . . .

"Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

"Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden. . . .

". . . for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile." (II Nephi 26:23, 24, 27, 28, 33.)

Earthly parents are capable of loving all their children regardless of their capacities, temperaments, or even behavior. How much more does God, being the Father of all men, love all men? "He inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness."

Among men we say, 'this is my country, my race, my family.' As one reads the Nephite record these divisions among men with their accompanying hates, prejudices, and fears melt away. We become one human, divine family with a loving, gracious, impartial Father extending His love, goodness, and truth to all men.

There are many differences among men—differences of capacity and opportunity to understand and receive the goodness and salvation of God. An explanation of these differences is not to be sought in the partiality of our Father, but rather in the lives of men. The Lord does not deny men His blessings, but men often deny themselves and each other the goodness of God.

Nephi also wrote, "*Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God.*" (I Nephi 17:35.) The righteous are favored because they have learned the great principles and values of life and live in harmony with them.

Man too should strive to think of men with the same impartial love and regard as our Eternal Father does. The dominant note in Book of Mormon references to love of men is this idea of equality. Again and again we are told not to think ourselves better than someone else but to "think of your brethren like unto yourselves."

Pride

A great sin in ancient America was pride. Pride came with riches and the love of wealth. Abundance of material goods became a meas-

uring stick for man's intrinsic worth. Men felt themselves better than those of less means. Jacob condemns the transfer of this sense of worth from the whole man to his possessions: ". . . because some of you have obtained more abundantly than your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they. . . . O that he would rid you of this iniquity and abomination. . . . *Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all* and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." (See Jacob 2: 12-21.)

Alma in mellow but forceful language also strikes at pride, "And now my beloved brethren, . . . can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts on the vain things of the world, upon your riches? Yea, will ye *persist in supposing that ye are better one than another . . . ?*" (Alma 5:53, 54.)

Moroni, the last survivor among the Nephites, witnessing their destruction, lays it to pride and its accompanying evils. Every one had become polluted because of the pride of their hearts unto envyings, and strifes, and malice, and persecution, and all manner of iniquities. "For behold," he writes, "ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning

of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. . . . *why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?"* (See Mormon 8:36-39.)

The Book of Mormon does not condemn riches. It even encourages us to seek them "for the intent to do good." The love of money, however, is the root of much evil. It divides men through pride, envy and strife, and this on every social level—in the family, a community, a nation and among nations. Peace cannot be in the heart of man; in a family, in a community, in a church, in a nation, or in a world wherein love of riches exceeds love of men. Such is the Nephite teaching on the evils of the pursuit of wealth.

Equality among men

Under the inspiration and impetus of the Savior's visit and teaching, the Nephites and Lamanites were able to live under some kind of system in which "they had all things in common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another." (III Nephi 26:19.)

This condition was achieved not through dictatorship nor other political formulae and panaceae but "because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

"And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whore-

doms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

"There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of —ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God." (IV Nephi 16, 17.)

This spirit of equality, which reached its highest state following Christ's appearance, was the teaching and practise of all the great prophets and leaders of the Nephites. Nowhere, known to us, have so many political leaders lived and taught such a Christian ideal of leadership as in the Book of Mormon.

King Benjamin's purpose in rule was not wealth nor power but to serve God and fellowmen. To this end, he said, "I have labored with my own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne . . ." (See Mosiah 2:12-19.)

Mosiah, his successor, did also "till the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people." What a contrast to David and Solomon in Israel and to many kings and politicians down to our time!

When Alma was asked to be king by his grateful followers and converts, he replied, "Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one

man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king." (Mosiah 23:7.)

Mosiah, chapter 29, the famous chapter on government by law referred to in the February *Instructor*, has as its underlying philosophy a belief in the brotherhood of man and equality among men—goals quite impossible to attain under a king or dictatorship.

Charity

The brotherhood of man is expressed in charity. Charity means love in King James English. The Book of Mormon asks us to give to the poor, the sick, and the needy. This is not to be done blindly nor rashly but, "see that all these things are done in wisdom and order, for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength." Men are also advised to administer to the relief of the needy, both spiritually and temporally. (See Mosiah 4:16-27.)

Love of men is not to be confined to providing things for the body. It is to create in us humility and mercy towards others. Alma tells Shiblon, his son, how to pray, "Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times." (Alma 38:14.)

The Nephites are dead and gone, but their sins remain with us. We

too are lovers of material goods. We too feel pride and look down on those with less. We too think ourselves better than the other children of God. We forget the intrinsic worth and equality of every child of God.

Their words also remain with us. And as we read them our hearts are humbled, our pride is lessened, our gratitude increased. Our compassion and love reach out to all men. We would help all men partake of God's goodness and salva-

tion. We are better able to distinguish between what a man is and what he has and does. We remember his intrinsic worth. We remember too our own worth, neither making it more nor less than the worth of the Creator's other children.

The Book of Mormon is indeed a witness of Christ through its teaching on the brotherhood of man.

Readings: II Nephi 26; Mosiah 2-4; Alma 5:28 ff.; Mormon 8.

April Brings Us Witness



When April brings us heralding of spring,
When raindrops gently kiss the chalice cup
Of daffodils, my heart soars up and up
In thankfulness for earth's bright blossoming.

For then the winter's dull monotony must break
(Through grief comes light of love). There rings
A truer message when fair April brings
Us witness of our immortality.

—Merling D. Clyde