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## Great Teachers in the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** Lehi, Jacob, King Benjamin, mothers, and other characters are honored as being great Book of Mormon teachers.

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# Great Teachers in the Book of Mormon

by H. George Bickerstaff

**T**HE Saviour indicated that service to others is service to God. (*Matthew 25:31-40.*) The great teacher, **King Benjamin**,<sup>1</sup> expressed the same thought on the Western Hemisphere when he said, “. . . when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.” (*Mosiah 2:17.*) Teaching the Gospel in an effort to share its joys with others ranks high on the list of loving services given at once to God and to man. Many Book of Mormon characters exemplified the words of Jesus and King Benjamin, among them some outstanding missionaries.

The love of **Lehi** for his fellow citizens evoked from him an earnest prayer on their behalf. Having been instructed in vision concerning Jerusalem's impending doom, he went forth preaching the repentance which could have averted that doom, and telling of a coming Messiah. As with other contemporary prophets, he was unsuccessful. The Jews rejected the message and mocked the messenger. The Lord rewarded Lehi's faith and devotion with a multitudinous posterity and with an inheritance in the land choice above all others. (*1 Nephi 1.*)

Lehi's son, **Jacob**, was equally zealous for the spiritual welfare of his fellows. He labored diligently on behalf of the growing community of Nephites, striving by precept and example to increase their faith in Christ and their adherence to righteous principles. Some of the people had fallen into sin. Others were led away from the truth by the flattering words of Sherem, who preached that there was no Christ. Jacob contested Sherem's blasphemies. Sherem's request for a sign from heaven was answered quickly and fatally. Before he died, he publicly retracted his lying words. Jacob's teachings were thus dramatically vindicated, and peace and love were restored to the community. (*Jacob 2-7.*)

At the Lord's command, the prophet **Abinadi** publicly condemned the evils of the wicked king Noah and his people and predicted the tribulations which would befall this unrepentant community. Alone and in bonds he bore his testimony of Christ and reiterated his forthright denunciations before the king and his corrupt priests, cutting them to the heart with his words. Despite a great mani-

festation of spiritual power, during which his face “shone with exceeding luster,” the wicked leaders rejected his testimony of Christ and burned him at the stake. King Noah later met the same fate—as Abinadi had prophesied. Abinadi's words and example were not in vain, for they converted the older **Alma**, who in turn converted and baptized others and led them back to the main body of the Nephites. (*Mosiah 12-17.*)

In the land of Ammonihah, **Alma** the younger and **Amulek** joined forces to make a powerful missionary team and preached repentance to the wicked citizens. The clarity and vigor of their discourses confounded their critics and caused many to mend their ways, but the majority of the people were hostile. The two missionaries were taken bound before the chief judge and there accused of infringing on the law. Their converts were forced to produce their scriptures, which were then burned; and Alma and Amulek were forced to witness the martyrdom by burning of men, women and children who had believed their words. With indignities heaped upon them, they were cast into prison. Finally, miraculously strengthened, they broke their bonds; an earthquake destroyed the prison, and with it their persecutors; and they walked out unharmed. Shortly after this, the wicked city was destroyed by the Lamanites. (*Alma 9-14.*)

**Ammon**, **Aaron**, **Omner** and **Himni** were sons of king Mosiah. Formerly persecutors of the Church, they had been converted by an angel and thereafter were great teachers of righteousness. With others they fulfilled a brilliant mission to the Lamanites, as a result of which many souls were lifted from gross darkness to the light of the Gospel and became fine examples of the Christ-like spirit. In keeping with this spirit and with the abhorrence and repentance they felt for their former life of war and bloodshed, these Lamanites vowed never again to take up arms, and buried their weapons in the earth. Future events sorely tested them, but they remained true to their vow and to their new-found Gospel. (*Alma 17-24.*)

As in all ages, **Mothers** were great teachers in Book of Mormon times. In a time of crisis, over 2,000 young sons of the converted Lamanites, who were not under their father's vow of pacifism, took arms to defend their new country. They were exceedingly faithful and fought with great valor, although they had never before fought. They had great trust in God, having no fears, for “. . . they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did

(For Course 5, lesson of July 9, “Missionaries and Righteousness”; for Course 9, lessons of May through December; and for Course 15, lessons of May through December.)

<sup>1</sup> Bold-faced type is used to indicate some of the great Book of Mormon teachers.



not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed . . . the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it." Though they were in the thick of heavy fighting, not one of these striplings was killed in the campaign. Their courage and tenacity turned the scale in favor of the Nephites in at least two battles and perhaps in the whole campaign. The lives and characters of these young men demonstrate that their mothers taught them great truths by gentle precept and humble example. (*Alma* 53-58.)

At a time when laws were corrupt and wickedness prevailed, the brothers **Nephi** and **Lehi** set out on a mission of reform. They had much success and even converted 8,000 Lamanites. A Lamanite army took them, however, and cast them into prison. Days later their would-be murderers found them protected by an encircling pillar of fire. The earth shook, a cloud of darkness overshadowed the 300 or so onlookers, and a voice called on them to repent. The witnesses saw other heavenly manifestations, all of which they reported to others. The majority of the Lamanites then accepted the Gospel, and peace and love took possession of their hearts. (*Helaman* 5.)

At a period when the Lamanites were righteous and the Nephites wicked, the Lord sent **Samuel**, the Lamanite prophet, to Zarahemla to preach repentance. Standing on the city wall, he delivered his message, which included predictions respecting the Saviour's birth. Most of the people rejected his words. Some stoned or shot arrows at him but were unable to hit him. He succeeded in converting some of his hearers, who repented and were baptized. (*Helaman* 13-16.)

When the resurrected Lord appeared to the Nephites, He called **Twelve Disciples**. While He gave much counsel and blessing to all who saw and heard Him, He gave special instructions to the twelve specially chosen. These men went forth teaching His word, and building up His Church under the order of the Gospel. Those were wonderful, happy days. As a result of the Saviour's visits and the diligence of the Nephite Twelve and those under their direction, ". . . the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites . . ." Peace and harmony prevailed over the whole land.

The Saviour granted each of the twelve Nephite disciples the wish of his heart. **Three Disciples** wished to linger in the flesh, until Christ should come in His glory, and spend their time bringing

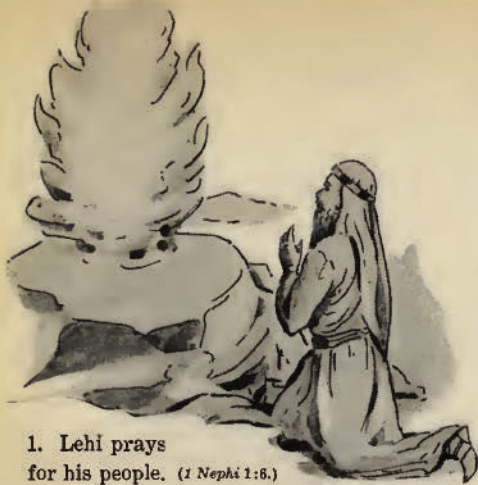
souls to Him. The wish was granted; the three were temporarily caught up to heaven and a change came over them by which death was indefinitely stayed. They ministered to the people as did the other disciples. Unbelievers persecuted them, but neither prisons, nor pits, nor any other human device could hold them, so great was the power of God which they wielded. To this day they continue to serve on the earth in the Lord's cause, working always to the goal of bringing souls to Christ and strengthening the faith of the believers. (*3 Nephi* 28.)

The good times which followed Christ's ministrations came to an end. Wickedness returned. The Nephites and the Lamanites fought a war of extermination. **Mormon** commanded the Nephite armies, though he despaired of their success because of their great wickedness. A last great battle left only 24 on the Nephite side. The Lamanites later hunted and destroyed them and others who had escaped previously until only **Moroni** remained. By abridgement **Mormon** produced the greater part of our Book of Mormon. His writings rank him as a great teacher. (*Mormon* 1-7.)

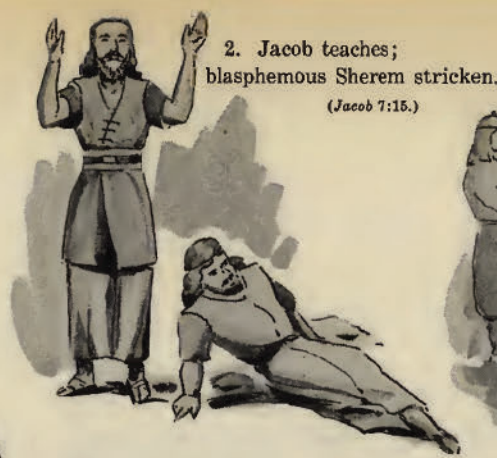
**Mormon's** son, **Moroni**, who had fought in the war against the Lamanites, took over the plates from his father and abridged the Jaredite record. He was the sole survivor of the great Nephite nation, which had perished through wickedness; and in his lonely state, he wrote the concluding writings in the Book of Mormon. No one remained for him to teach, yet, like his father's, his written words ring through the centuries and continue to inspire and uplift wherever they are sincerely and prayerfully read. He it was who promised divine assurance of the book's authenticity. (*Moroni* 10:4.) And he it was who personally instructed **Joseph Smith**, the prophet of the new dispensation. (*Mormon* 8-9, *Book of Moroni*.)

The Book of Mormon contains the stirring words and powerful examples of many convincing teachers. But just as the whole is greater than the part, so is the book greater than any of the individuals it portrays. For the book is in very deed the written word of God. It contains the elements of first-class teaching — convincing precept, noble example, a wealth of illustrative detail. Together the teachers who fill its pages have produced a book which is a great teacher of righteousness. It has brought hundreds of thousands to a knowledge of truth and continues with increasing power to carry its great message to the world.

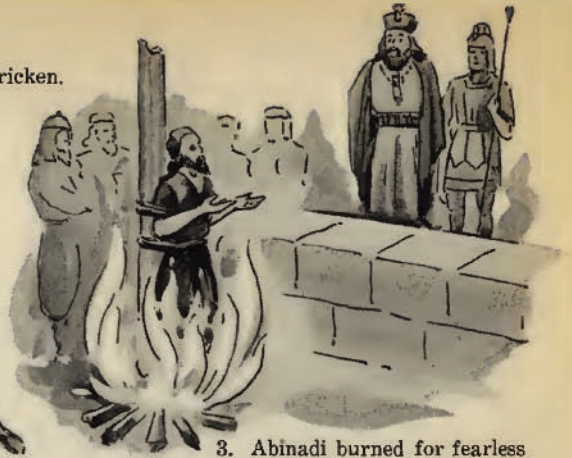




1. Lehi prays for his people. (1 Nephi 1:6.)



2. Jacob teaches; blasphemous Sherem stricken. (Jacob 7:15.)



3. Abinadi burned for fearless testimony. (Mosiah 17:13-20.)



12. Moroni, now alone, completes Nephite record. (Mormon 8:3.)



11. Mormon surveys scene of Nephite extermination. (Mormon 6:15.)



10. Three Nephite Disciples walk from cloven prison. (3 Nephi 28:19.)



9. Resurrected Lord instructs Nephite Twelve. (3 Nephi 11:19-41.)



8. Samuel the Lamanite preaches from city wall. (Helaman 16:2.)



4. Alma and Amulek accused before chief judge. (Alma 14:4.)



5. Converted Lamanites renounce bloodshed, bury weapons. (Alma 24:17.)



6. Lamanite mother teaches children faith, trust in God. (Alma 56:47, 48.)



7. Nephi and Lehi protected by fire. (Helaman 5:28.)

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MOSIAH 2:17