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Lesson IV. The Divine Nature of Man

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Abstract: Two questions concerning man—Another question—Man the offspring of God—How God is Father—The testimony of the Nephite prophets—Jesus the Only Begotten—An apparent difficulty—The two senses in which God is literally the Father of man—How man may become perfect—Summary of preceding lesson—The spiritual rebirth—Summary.

2. What is the testimony of archaeologists in support of Charlevaix's statement?
3. Whence, according to the scientists, did the Indians learn of the doctrines of immortality?
4. Whence really did the Indians get their knowledge of these doctrines?
5. Relate briefly the story of the marvelous manifestation beheld by the brother of Jared.
6. What two points concerning the life of Jesus are taught in this manifestation?
7. What did the Nephite prophets teach of the pre-existence of Jesus?
8. How did Jesus Himself teach His own pre-existence on the night before His birth?
9. In His life, what did Jesus say concerning his pre-existence?
10. From the example of Jesus, what may we argue concerning mankind generally?
11. How is this argument supported by the Nephite prophets?
12. How is the doctrine of pre-existence confirmed by the doctrine of immortality?
13. What did the Nephite prophets teach concerning the immortality of the Spirit?
14. What would happen to the souls of men if there were no redemption from death?
15. For what purpose was the earth created?
16. What is the purpose of man's life upon the earth?
17. In what sense is this life a probationary state?
18. Review briefly what you have learned in this lesson.

LESSON IV.

THE DIVINE NATURE OF MAN.

Perhaps no questions are so commonplace as those ascribed to man, Whence came I? Whither am I going? In every age, in every clime, from every people, come these questions. And following hard upon the questions come the answers. Again in every age and in every clime, men have tried to account for their existence upon the earth and to give that existence a purpose. Some answers are simple, even crude; some are complex, abstract, almost if not wholly beyond the comprehension of the ordinary man. Naturally, a conclusive answer to the questions can not be given by man's wisdom alone. Only revelation from the Divine Author of our beings can settle once and for all the origin and the destiny of man. In the foregoing lesson we learned what the Nephites believed concerning the pre-existent and the future state. Their belief was founded on revelation.

Another question arises now from the discussion of the preceding les-

son. If the spirits of men existed before with God, if they come to this life merely to gain experience, if after this life they return to their former home with God, what relationship does man bear to God? In this lesson we shall learn what the Nephites taught concerning the divine nature of man.

In the Nephite theology, man was considered to be a child of God, literally the offspring of God. The first Nephi wrote of the Great Creator as the Eternal Father.^a Mosiah and Alma spoke of Him as the very Eternal Father.^b And Mormon and Moroni, the last of their people, taught that men should pray in the name of the Eternal Father.^c God was known to the Nephites as the Eternal Father, so also He was

Note.—It will be well to remember in this lesson that Christ is both the Father and the Son as explained in lesson II. Many of the references, therefore, name the Son as the very Eternal Father.

^aI Nephi 11:21; 13:40.

^bMos. 16:15; Alma 11:38.

^cMoro. 8:23; Moro. 10:4.

known as the Everlasting Father,^d and as the Heavenly Father.^e And Moroni speaks of Him, simply, as the Father. In an epistle to his son, Moroni, Mormon says, "I am mindful of you always in my prayers, continually praying unto God the Father, in the name of His holy child, Jesus."

Now, one may ask, In what sense is God the Eternal Father, the Everlasting Father, the Heavenly Father, or simply the Father? The convert, Amulek, answers this: "He is the very Eternal Father of heaven and earth, and all things which in them [are]; He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last."^f There can be no mistaking the comprehensiveness of this statement. God is the Creator. He formed the heavens and the earth. But not only the heavens and the earth came into being through His divine fiat; everything that in them is was likewise organized by Him. God is therefore the author of life. He is the very Eternal Father, the Everlasting Father, the Heavenly Father, the Father, because He gave man life.

It is this thought of the Fatherhood of God, that the first Nephi had in mind when he engraved his record on the small plates. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of My hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify My name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel."^g The Lord God Himself declares that the children

of Jacob are the work of His hands. But Israel was not different from other peoples, except that it was chosen to bring forth the Redeemer of the world, and to accomplish the purposes of the Lord. If then the children of Israel are the work of God's hands, all the children of men are so also. We are all His creatures. So did Nephi understand the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. And Nephi was not alone in presenting this doctrine. All the Nephite prophets taught the divine relationship of Father and children between God and man. Says Benjamin, seeing by inspiration the coming of the Lord Jesus, "He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning."^h The multitude, who heard the words of the king, understood their significance and believed; they fell to the earth and cried, "We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things."ⁱ Limhi, the grandson of Zeniff, who lived in the land of Lehi-Nephi, had been taught by a prophet "that Christ was the God, the Father of all things."^j And even many years before the time of the Nephites, the Jaredites guided in spiritual matters by the exalted brother of Jared, had worshiped "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are."^k Clearly, in the Nephite theology, man was considered to be literally a child of God.

Here an apparent difficulty arises. In the Book of Mormon, as in other Christian scripture, Jesus Christ alone is spoken of as *the* Son of

^dII Nephi 19:6.

^eMos. 2:34; III Nephi 13:14.

^fAlma 11:39.

^gII Nephi 27:33, 34.

^hMos. 3:8.

ⁱMos. 4:2.

^jMos. 7:27.

^kEther 4:7.

God. It is conceded that men are all children of God, sons and daughters of God. Yet it is emphatically asserted that Jesus is the Only Begotten of the Father. Five hundred years and more before the Christ was born in the flesh, Nephi called him "the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and earth."^l Alma, too, the great High Priest, declared that he knew that Jesus Christ should come, "yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth."^m And elsewhere Alma repeats the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God the Father.ⁿ This doctrine can not be contested. It is a fundamental tenet of Christianity. It is confirmed by modern revelation. Jesus Christ is indeed the Only Begotten of the Father. But we have shown that in the Nephite theology all men were considered to be sons and daughters of God. In what sense is man a child of God?

The question is very easily answered. The difficulty presented is only apparent. First, men are the children of God, as is taught by the passages already cited, in the sense that all men have derived the gift of life from the Divine Creator. Men have earthly parents. Directly, children owe their lives to their earthly fathers and mothers. But earth-life did not come of itself. It, too, has a source. That source is God. God is the author of life. Thus are men all God's children.

But man is a child of God even more directly than this. Indeed, man is literally the offspring of God. How then does his relationship to God differ from that of Jesus? In this: man is fundamentally a spirit. In the earth-life,

that spirit is clothed in a physical body. The earth-parents are father and mother of the earth-body. But God is Father of the spirit. In the case of Jesus, however, God the Father is parent not only of the spirit but also of the body. That is how Jesus is the Only Begotten of the Father; that is how man is literally the offspring of God. Alma, whose mind was clear on most doctrinal questions, understood this relationship well. Says he, "the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life."^o

With this doctrine of man's true relationship to God thoroughly understood, it becomes clear that the nature of man is really divine. It was no idle behest of Jesus that man should strive to become perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect.^p It is possible for man to attain a state of perfection. Indeed, the plan of salvation is an outline of life whereby man may grow, acquire knowledge, gain experience, progress, evolve, until he shall become a god, perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect. In the preceding lesson, we learned, that, according to the Nephite theology, the earth was prepared for man, and man was created to possess the earth; that men are that they may find joy; that the glorious purpose of life is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. It is in the accomplishment of that purpose that man develops the divine within him. And proportionately as he grows in the knowledge and the service of God, he becomes more intimately a child of God. That is, obedience and righteousness make men children of God.

In the Nephite theology, the spiritual relationship effected by right

^l1 Nephi 25:12.

^mAlma 5:48.

ⁿAlma 9:26; 13:9.

^oAlma 40:11.

^p1 Nephi 12:48.

living was much emphasized. To the Nephites who had expressed their willingness to enter into a covenant with God, King Benjamin declared, "Because of the covenant which ye have made, ye shall be called the children of Christ, His sons, and His daughters; for behold, this day He hath spiritually begotten you."^q That is to say, this day the divine nature within you has responded to the divine mandate of your God. The spirit within you has recognized the voice of its Father. And by subduing thus the flesh to the divine impulse of the spirit, you have undergone an awakening of the spirit, a spiritual birth—"Your hearts are changed through faith on His name; therefore, ye are born of Him, and have become His sons and His daughters."^r In like manner, all who espoused the cause of Jesus were called the children of God. The observers of the word of God were so called.^s Believers, peacemakers, and the righteous generally were so called.^t Indeed, amongst the Nephites, as in olden days when giants lived in the land, those who observed the will of God were distinguished by the title, children of God. And thus we learn another sense in which man is a child of God.

In this lesson we have learned that the Nephite theology presented the following propositions: 1. Man is literally a child of God. 2. God is really, not figuratively, the Father of man. 3. Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son in the flesh of the Father. 4. Man is a son of God in that God is the author of life, the Creator of all things. 5. Man is

further a son of God in that God is literally the Father of man's spirit. 6. Thus the fundamental in man—the real principle of life—is of divine origin. 7. Therefore the awakening of the spirit of man to a spiritual consciousness constitutes a kind of spiritual re-birth whereby man becomes yet more intimately a child of God.

OUTLINE.

Two questions concerning man—Another question—Man the offspring of God—How God is Father—The testimony of the Nephite prophets—Jesus the Only Begotten—An apparent difficulty—The two senses in which God is literally the Father of man—How man may become perfect—Summary of preceding lesson—The spiritual re-birth—Summary.

QUESTIONS.

1. What questions concerning man arise amongst every people?
2. What kinds of answers are given to these questions?
3. How did the Nephites answer these questions?
4. What further question arises from the discussion of the foregoing lesson?
5. What was the relation of man to God in the Nephite theology?
6. By what names was God called by the Nephite prophets?
7. What is Amulek's brief explanation of the fatherhood of God?
8. What did Nephi say concerning the children of Jacob?
9. How did the Nephite prophets teach the Fatherhood of God?
10. What, then, in the Nephite theology was the relationship of man to God?
11. What did the Nephite prophets teach concerning the Sonship of Jesus?
12. Explain how Jesus is the Only Begotten of the Father.
13. Explain in what two ways man is literally a child of God.
14. What effect do obedience and right living have upon man's relationship to God?
15. What did King Benjamin mean when he said that Jesus had spiritually begotten those who believed on Him?
16. In what further sense, then, may man be a child of God?

^qMos. 5:7.

^rMos. 5:7.

^sMos. 18:22.

^tSee Alma 6:6; 30:42; III Nephi 12:9; 45; IV Nephi 1:17.