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The Gadianton: A Story of Zarahemla, Chapter XII

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The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARAHÉMLA

By E. Heloise Merkle

XII.

So engrossed did Orpah become in her care of the wounded man they had rescued, that she had very little time to be nice to Jarom. And Zemnahah, not suspecting how he tempted Jarom to murder him in cold blood, laughed at her susceptibility, boasted of how he could always win the love of a woman, exaggerated his weakness, pretended to be impressed with her arguments against the Gadianton system, and as soon as she was gone, renewed his confidences to Jarom until the spy was fairly distracted; indeed, he cursed the scheme he had himself proposed and which had brought them together.

Then came the day when he and Zemnahah were talking quietly together in the room next the Chief Captain's and a careless servant left the door between the two open. Gidgidoni could be heard distinctly as he interviewed, one after another, the apparently numberless keepers of the great storehouses. Lachoneus arrived in the midst of the reporting, and listened with Gidgidoni to the tales of trouble brought in.

Zemnahah, hearing this one tell how rodents had carried off thousands of bushels of grain from a storehouse yet unopened; listening to that one relate how dampness and mold had ruined his entire charge, and catching the report of another one that fire had somehow been started in his vast supply and only a little of it saved, grew ever more cheerful.

Finally, when the last one had reported and Lachoneus and Gidgidoni summed it all up in the gloomy decision that they could not possibly hold out more than six months longer, the robber chieftain could scarcely restrain a shout of triumph.

But that was not all he was to hear. Now came the keepers of vast herds of cattle and sheep to report enormous losses among the animals. By the time Lachoneus was gone Zemnahah was so overjoyed that he could scarcely lie on his couch.

"Help me dress," he commanded Jarom, "find my clothing quickly. I am going back this very night and organize a siege. They decided to start tilling the soil. I must not allow a Nephite outside the wall for six months. Oh, hurry, Jarom! Let me go!"

"But your wound, your sickness?" Jarom protested.

"My wound has been healed for over a week, and my sickness since then is feigned for Orpah's benefit."

"Are you going without bidding her good-bye?"

"What do I care for her? There is no time to waste upon women now. After the Nephites are subjected will be soon enough. Then she and any others I may desire will be mine." And with that threat he was gone.

Jarom hastily sought Gidgidoni to tell him of the wounded chief's departure and of the success of their plans.

Knowing that Zemnahah would soon demand his services, Jarom sought Orpah to bid her goodbye. He explained to her why Zemnahah had departed, and the entire plan they had used to deceive the robber into thinking the Nephites on the verge of starvation. Nor could he resist telling her what Zemnahah had said about her, in response to her regret that he had not bid her goodbye.

"And you listened and did not kill him?" she demanded, with flashing eyes.

"But he is the chief of the Gadian-

tons," Jarom stammered, "I had to let him live in order to carry out our plan for exterminating them."

"Oh, your precious plan! Could not the Gadiantons choose another chief as they did when you killed Giddianhi? If you can listen to such insults about your promised wife, I think you care more about your plans than about me," and without another word Orpah turned her back and left him.

Miserably Jarom went out of the house and out of the city and along the road to the mountains. It seemed to him that all his hopes and plans had become as dust and ashes. It was to win Orpah that he had struggled and worked so long to compass the destruction of the Gadiantons, and now she had quarreled with him and even if he should succeed in his great scheme, what reward would there be in it for him? For a long time he fought the question out, tempted to give up and stop trying. But after awhile, the memory of their crimes against the innocent among the Nephites and Lamanites came back, and with it the sense that he had consecrated himself to a great undertaking in the cause of righteousness. So, though still bitter at heart, he took new resolution and determined more strongly than ever not to turn back until the Gadiantons were exterminated.

He had plenty of opportunity for action now in which to forget his personal grief. For Zemnarihah very promptly organized the siege he had been tempted into, and Gidgiddoni as promptly sent out parties to cultivate the land and to go hunting in the wilderness. Between the two Jarom was very busy—too busy indeed to even attempt to see Orpah. For he undertook to see that no Gadianton party should succeed in destroying any Nephite, and to lead the Nephites in their nightly raids upon the besiegers.

So well did he accomplish his aims that thousands upon thousands of Gadiantons fell the victims of their Nephite enemies, whom they had sup-

posed starving. Hunger, too, was increasing among them. The relays of hunters had to go farther and farther to seek game, and there were less now to go. Zemnarihah grew desperate.

When at last it became evident that in this strange siege, it was the besiegers and not the besieged who should be exterminated, he remembered the suggestion of the old man in their council and ordered them to prepare for flight into the northland.

Jarom, conceiving this the final opportunity, reported their plans to Gidgiddoni.

"Do you know their exact route?" Gidgiddoni inquired.

"Yes, for I planned it myself. I shall have no difficulty in heading them with your armies."

"And are there none left behind?"

"Not any, even those who are unable to walk will be carried along. Zemnarihah seems more humane than Giddianhi, though he does it to encourage those who love the weak. Still it will be well to send a small army to circle between them and their retreats, lest some escape and return to the mountains. None must escape us this time."

But Gidgiddoni seemed troubled over something not apparent to Jarom, so he waited for the older man to break the silence that fell. At last he said, "There are women and children among them, Jarom."

"Yes, though not nearly so many as one would naturally expect. So many have starved."

Gidgiddoni shuddered, "How terrible that men should eat while women and children starve!" he exclaimed, "I cannot this time give orders that none shall be spared. We shall have them at too great an advantage. And you have proven to me that it is not impossible for a Gadianton to repent and turn to God. We shall therefore take prisoners, and those who surrender shall be allowed to live if they will entirely renounce the secret order. I am sure Lachoneus will agree with me."

Jarom hungered for a glimpse of Orpah; for one moment in which to try to justify himself and discover whether her love for him had entirely disappeared. But he was kept too busy and had to lead the army out of the city without a word with her. His heart ached as he saw the lights of Zarahemla growing faint in the distance. It seemed hard that on the morrow he must go into battle with no word of farewell from the woman he loved. But he must not falter now.

Leaving the main body when they were well upon their way, and with most careful instructions as to the route to pursue, Jarom circled back to conduct the smaller army toward the mountains to follow behind the Gadiantons and cut off their retreat. It was almost morning before he left these, to hasten once more, on a fleet-footed horse that he might join the first division and be with them for the morrow's battle. Then at last, assured that the Gadiantons were surrounded securely, he flung himself upon a rude couch to snatch a little sleep before the fight should commence.

When he opened his eyes, it was to look into the face of Orpah—Orpah armed from head to foot and looking like a slender boy.

"Orpah," he exclaimed, "How came you here, and thus?"

"I had to!" she replied, her lip trembling, "Father would not let me come, and so I disguised as a soldier and came anyhow, in the darkness. I could not let you go into the battle without bidding you farewell and begging you to forgive me for my hastiness the last time we were together. Oh, Jarom, if you knew how I have suffered—Can you forgive me?"

His answer was to catch her joyously in his arms and dry her tears with kisses. Then he answered, "I have suffered, too, Orpah, but I realize that you were partly right. I should not have allowed Zemnarihah to say such things about you. And today my one aim shall be to punish him. Ah,

sweetheart, I shall fight with the strength of ten now that I know you still love me! Bless you for coming to me thus!"

At that moment the signal was given for the battle to commence. The Gadiantons had awakened and discovered their foes and the Nephites must wait no longer.

"Oh, Jarom!" Orpah exclaimed, "be careful. They will fight with the strength of despair, and I could not endure to lose you now. Oh, please be careful!"

"Only pray for me, sweetheart," he replied, "and no harm can befall me today. Now that I know you love me God will let me live. But keep yourself in a safe place to watch the battle and pray that I may bear myself as a man and a soldier. I must go now. Farewell."

So he went into the fight with her kisses upon his lips, and the knowledge that she was praying for him like a shining armor about him. Once or twice he caught sight of her, standing upon a little hill and eagerly watching, and each time it seemed that his strength was renewed.

As Orpah had said, the Gadiantons fought with the strength of despair. But the Nephites fought with the strength of the spirit of God. So this battle, though at first even fiercer, did not last so long as had the first one. Jarom fought as valiantly as the bravest Nephite or the most despairing Gadianton. But he fought always with his eyes seeking at each opportunity for the sight of a certain headplate that he could never seem to locate.

At last he discovered it—the coiled serpent with head uplifted and flashing with brilliant jewels, upon the head of Zemnarihah. With a shout of triumph he sprang toward it, heedless of

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October 23

but said, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

10. He said that he found no guilt in Him?

11. He turned Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified.

12. Some of the women.

13. That they had need to weep for themselves and their children.

14. That His blood should be spilt.

15. For all who believe in Him.

16. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

17. Angels of heaven.

18. "He is not here, he is risen."

19. He appeared unto them on several occasions and showed them His wounds.

20. To teach to the world the things which He had taught them.

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Christmas Program

The Gadianton

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those who were between. It was a miracle that he was not struck down a dozen times by the uplifted swords of his foes as he darted ahead to face his supposed chief. But so swiftly did he pass them that none touched him and at last he stood face to face with Zemnarihah.

"Now we shall settle our accounts," he exclaimed as he lifted his sword, "I need wear my mask no longer, O Gadianton, but can tell you openly that for the death of my mother, for your insults to my promised wife, and for the crimes of your order, I face you today as a true Nephite!"

"Ah, traitor! So you have been working against us all the time! I suspected it, and now I am sure that none but you could have brought this destruction upon us. But I trust that I shall not die upon your sword."

"No, I shall not have the pleasure of killing you," Jarom replied, "for Gidgiddoni desires that you be taken alive in order that they may hang you as an example to the others."

But he had no more time to waste breath in talking. Fierce as was the battle raging about them, their duel was fiercer. The wound Jarom had formerly given Zemnarihah in the palm of the hand had slightly stiffened it, and

they were very evenly matched. All around the Gadiantons were surrendering, with cries for mercy, or being slain. Off to one side a portion of the Nephite army were guarding the women and children and those men who surrendered and were disarmed. But Jarom and Zemnarihah saw none of this. They only fought on and on with one bitter determination between them. Several times Jarom found an opportunity to kill his opponent, but he would only wound him and demand that he surrender. But Zemnarihah stubbornly refused. At last, for the second time, Jarom struck his sword from his hand and wounded it, then he tossed his own aside and flinging himself upon his foe, bore him to the earth and with the assistance of other Nephites who had been watching them, bound him and sent him to Gidgiddoni.

Then he turned away, while the great Gadianton was being hanged amid the victorious shouts of the Nephites, who praised their God together for his protection; for he was more interested in finding the girl for whom he had done all this. She came out upon the battlefield to meet him, in spite of its horrors; and when peace was once more established, he claimed her as his reward for the extermination of the Gadiantons.

