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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 13—Separation Into Nephites and Lamanites

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Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 13—Separation Into Nephites and Lamanites

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 5)

For Tuesday, February 3, 1953

Objective: To show the power of righteousness and spirituality in building a great civilization.

THE time came when Nephi found it necessary to separate from his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, and their followers. Because of their malicious and revengeful natures, they resented being corrected by their younger brother. They felt that it was their right to govern, for they were older than Nephi. They could not understand that the mantle of leadership in this God-directed colony, so far as the Lord was concerned, must fall upon the individual who could undergird the civilization with the spiritual qualities which make a nation endure. Nephi was that leader.

They sought to take the life of Nephi. Warned of the Lord, Nephi separated from his brethren and fled into the wilderness in much the same manner that Lehi had done about thirty years earlier when he left Jerusalem for his first encampment in the valley of Lemuel by the Red Sea. Nephi took with him the plates of brass, the ball or compass, and the sword of Laban.

How far Nephi and his followers

traveled from the place of their original disembarkation, we are not told. Nephi records that they journeyed into the wilderness for a space of many days and then pitched their tents in a place they called Nephi. He gives us accurate data on the membership of the group which followed him. It comprised: first, Nephi's family; second, Zoram and his family; third, Sam and his family; fourth, Jacob and Joseph, his younger brothers; and fifth his sisters. It was only the group which believed in the warnings and revelations of the Lord which accompanied him.

With this group, among whom there existed a spirit of unity, cooperation, and love, it would be much easier to establish a great colony. The members of this colony may remind us of the group under the leadership of Brigham Young that came from Nauvoo, Illinois, and its vicinity across the plains to the Rocky Mountains. They had a common purpose and could work co-operatively to achieve a common goal. What a contrast

there was between these two groups and the colony Lehi led from Jerusalem to the land of promise! The separation into Nephites and Lamanites was a means of giving Nephi an opportunity to use his leadership for the purpose of building a civilization of greatness and power. And we must bear in mind that such a nation cannot be measured by modern concepts of greatness wherein the material aspects far outweigh the cultural and spiritual.

Woodrow Wilson caught the vision and gave it to us in his address at Swarthmore College, delivered October 25, 1913, in which he said:

William Penn crossed the ocean, not merely to establish estates in America, but to set up a free commonwealth in America and to show that he was of the lineage of those who have been bred in the best traditions of the human spirit. I would not be interested in celebrating the memory of William Penn if his conquest had been merely a material one. Sometimes we have been laughed at—by foreigners in particular—for boasting of the size of the American Continent, the size of our own domain as a nation; for they have, naturally enough, suggested that we did not make it. But I claim . . . that the size of America is in some sense a standard of the size and capacity of the American people. And yet the mere extent of the American conquest is not what gives America distinction in the annals of the world, but the professed purpose of the conquest, which was to see to it that every foot of this land should be the home of free, self-governed people, who should have no government whatever which did not rest upon the consent of the governed (Woodrow Wilson, address at Swarthmore College, as quoted in John A. Beaty, et. al. *Facts and Ideas*, pp. 190, 191).

The thing that makes a country really great is its spirituality, and the activation of high purposes in the lives of its citizens. A great

country, like a great man, must enrich the world.

Turning our attention to the kind of nation Nephi encouraged, we discover that he founded it on a strong spiritual base. Nephi knew that his kingdom must supply, in addition to daily needs, something for the mind and spirit without which life is not worth living. For that purpose he had separated from his brothers. He exhorted his people to keep the statutes and commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses. He built a temple constructed after the Temple of Solomon. Undoubtedly, this temple was a factor in measuring the spirituality on which the superstructure of their civilization was built.

He selected his two younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, and consecrated them priests unto the people. He was cognizant that he must continually teach the people correct principles and inspire them to transmute these principles into terms of daily living, if he were to build his nation on a foundation of rock.

Already deeply impressed with the necessity of record keeping, he brought, as we have said, the plates of brass with him. The spiritual ideals of his race could now become part and parcel of the civilization he was to build. He also continued to engrave on the large plates of Nephi a chronicle of the political and social activities of his people. Moreover, following divine instructions, he made a set of small plates upon which he engraved an account of the ministry of his people. (See 1 Nephi 9, also 2 Nephi 5:30.)

Nephi encouraged and developed agriculture and stock raising. He took care to mention on the small plates that the people sowed seeds in abundance and that they reaped bountiful harvests. He also explained that they had flocks and herds of all kinds of animals.

Nephi was also much interested in mining and smelting. That he knew the process is certain, for he mined and smelted ore from which to make tools to construct the ship that brought the colony to the land of promise. He tells us that ores existed in great abundance in the land of Nephi. He also pointed out that he taught his people to work in all manner of wood, iron, copper, brass, steel, gold, silver, and precious ores.

He was not content to have his people live in tents, for he records that he taught them to build buildings. Undoubtedly, this refers to homes and public buildings, including a temple.

If he had not mentioned the fact, we should have known that the people were industrious, because the type of civilization he described calls for industry. But Nephi does not leave us in doubt. He wrote: "And it came to pass that, I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands" (2 Nephi 5:17).

To me this statement is significant. He must have realized the two-fold value of work: (1) It is the foundation of success in achieving one's goals; and (2) it exercises a potent curative power on man. We are all familiar with the fact that industry is an indispensable accompaniment of progress, and it is the second value, the cura-

tive power of work, which we need to value more. Henry W. Longfellow confirms this curative value of work by writing, "Idleness makes me unhappy."

The founding of this independent nation, highlighted with noble spiritual purposes and indispensable means of material progress, fulfilled earlier prophecies. Nephi, according to prophecy, had been a ruler and teacher over his brothers, and now the Lord, because of wickedness cut them off from his presence. They did not have the sacred records, and they had deprived themselves of power to communicate with God. In accordance with prophecy and because of their iniquity, the older brothers were cursed with a dark skin (2 Nephi 5:21). The Lord wanted them to be loathsome to the Nephites, for he desired to prevent intermarriage, warning the Nephites that whoever intermarried with the seed of Laman and Lemuel would be subject to the same curse.

These Lamanites became an idle people, "full of mischief and subtlety."

They however, were used by the Lord in his wisdom:

And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction (2 Nephi 5:25).

In writing of the thirteenth year, thirteen years since they left Jerusalem, Nephi records: "And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27).

These two civilizations, resultants

of two widely contrasted ways of life, stand before us, the one producing love, generosity, and progress; the other resulting in hatred, selfishness, and retrogression. The one was developed by high purposes and much industry; the other with low ideals and idleness.

Questions on the Lesson

1. What principles of progress applicable to our nation, are found in the development of the Nephite civilization?
2. What is the two-fold value of work?
3. Specifically, what can we do to help build our civilization on a spiritual foundation?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 13—"Yea, I Know That God Will Give Liberally to Him That Asketh. Yea, My God Will Give Me If I Ask Not Amiss" (2 Nephi 4:35)

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, February 3, 1953

Objective: To encourage praying to the Lord for guidance, and to point out that he will answer our prayers aright.

TWO conditions are required in this quotation as being necessary for receiving blessings from God: the asking of our Heavenly Father and the asking not amiss. We are advised, "Ask and it shall be given you; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7).

Perhaps we do not supplicate our Father in heaven for guidance and help often enough. Some may have the idea that we should ask him for help only in times of great stress or emergency. But Amulek says:

Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies. Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase (Alma 34:21-25).

We learn from scripture that light and understanding come to the children of men after they have earnestly sought after it. The Doctrine and Covenants contains many instances which demonstrate this truth. In translating The Book of Mormon, and in setting up the organization of the Church, the Prophet Joseph Smith and the brethren aiding him, were often puzzled over some point of doctrine or some question concerning procedure. They took their problems and questions to the Lord, and the answer that was needed to go forward in the work came to them in answer to their sincere prayers.

On the other hand, we recall the unfortunate experience of Martin Harris with the 116 pages of The Book of Mormon manuscript. He pleaded with the Prophet Joseph