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## Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 17—Jacob and His Teachings

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## *Theology*—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

### Lesson 17—Jacob and His Teachings

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: The Book of Jacob)

For Tuesday, October 6, 1953

Objective: To gain an appreciation of the teachings of Jacob.

**P**RIOR to his death, Nephi anointed a king over the people. Because of the devotion of the people to Nephi, they named succeeding kings after him, Second Nephi, Third Nephi, and so forth.

Those who were friendly to Nephi and his cause were called Nephites; and those who sought to destroy the people of Nephi were called Lamanites. For a clear understanding of Book of Mormon history, we ought to remember always that the Lamanites are not necessarily descendants of Laman and Lemuel, and that the Nephites are not always descendants of Nephi and other righteous progenitors. The people who accepted and lived the gospel were Nephites; those who rejected this course of action were Lamanites. (See Jacob 1:14.)

Nephi not only stabilized political affairs in his kingdom before his death, but he also took definite action regarding the engraving and preserving of the small plates of Nephi. He handed them to his

brother Jacob, many of whose teachings were given in lesson 16. He was ordained a priest and a teacher to the people, and was instructed by Nephi to engrave on this record a few of the things he considered most precious — their preaching which was sacred, their great revelations and prophecies. Jacob wrote that they had the spirit of prophecy, and that they had received many revelations, resulting in their knowing of Christ and his kingdom which should come.

Jacob and others labored diligently to persuade their people to accept this message and to live in accordance with it. Like their brother, Nephi, Jacob and Joseph had faith in the coming of Christ, and took upon themselves the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon their own heads if they did not teach them the word of God with all diligence.

Jacob was a great teacher. He taught the Nephites the words of his father, Lehi, and the scriptures

on the brass plates. His brother Nephi had consecrated him, and Nephi himself tells us that Jacob saw the Redeemer even as Nephi saw him (2 Nephi 11:2-3).

### *Jacob Calls People to Repentance*

During the reign of the second king, many men began to “indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son” (Jacob 1:15). They also searched greedily for gold and silver and developed a spirit of haughtiness and pride. Jacob knew that these sins would bring about the moral deterioration of his people.

Having first obtained his errand from the Lord, Jacob was told to go to the temple and give the people the word of God. Jacob was constrained because of the strict commandment he had received from God, to call the men to repentance and admonish them in the presence of their wives and children. He told the audience that he felt reluctant to do so, for he knew the feelings of many of the wives and children were tender, chaste, and delicate before God, and “instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (Jacob 2:9).

### *On Obtaining Riches*

Jacob declared:

... Many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores. . . . And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have ob-

tained more abundantly than that of 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 (Jacob 2:12-13).

That the wealthy might understand fully their responsibility with their riches, Jacob said:

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 (Jacob 2:17).

Jacob did not discourage the acquisition of wealth. It was the love of money for itself, with no intent to use it for the benefit of others that Jacob condemned. He knew that ill-gotten gain, and wealth hoarded as an end in itself, canker the souls of men.

Jacob did more, however, than criticize base means of acquiring wealth and base ends in its use. He offered a positive program:

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted (Jacob 2:18-19).

### *On Pride*

Jacob's discussion of pride was closely articulated with his discussion of wealth, for he felt that the pride of the Nephites was a result of their affluence. Directing his remarks specifically to those who had afflicted their neighbors, and persecuted them because of their own pride, Jacob submitted a rhetorical question, “Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto



him who created all flesh?" (Jacob 2:21). He then called their attention to the fact that one being is as precious in the sight of God as another.

### On Chastity

After chiding his hearers for their improper use of wealth and for their pride, Jacob remonstrated with them concerning a greater sin:

For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son (Jacob 2:23).

He then told the people that the Lord had led Lehi and his followers from Jerusalem for the purpose of raising up unto himself a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. For this reason, Jacob pointed out, God would not suffer that this people should do like unto them of old. He gave them a command from the Lord:

For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me (Jacob 2:27-28).

These commandments had been given to Lehi, and the people had known them before. (See Jacob 2:34.)

Jacob recorded the following:

For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things (Jacob 2:30).

Jacob declared that the Nephites had committed greater iniquities than the Lamanites, and that God

would use them as a scourge against the Nephites, except they repented. He urged his people not to revile the Lamanites, because of the darkness of their skins or their filthiness, but to remember their own filthiness.

Jacob then told his people why the Lamanites would not be destroyed but the Lord would be merciful unto them and one day they would become a blessed people:

Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our fathers—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.

And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people (Jacob 3:5-6).

### Zenos' Allegory of Tame and Wild Olive Tree

After warning his people against fornication and lasciviousness, Jacob asked a pertinent question concerning the Jews, and then answered it. "How is it possible that these [the Jews], after having rejected the sure foundation [the Christ], can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?" (Jacob 4:17).

In answering this question, Jacob retold from Zenos the allegory of the tame and the wild olive tree. The tame tree and its fruit were preserved by means of grafting wild

branches onto the tame tree, and of grafting tender branches onto wild trees. Ultimately, the tame branches were grafted into the mother tree, the tame tree, and the fruit thereof was good. By grafting, and by burning and destroying the bad branches, the Lord of the vineyard preserved that which was good. Like unto the Lord of the vineyard, Jacob told his people, the Lord of heaven will set his hand a last time to recover the tribes of Israel, thus answering the question he had asked concerning the Jews, a part of the house of Israel.

Calling his people to repentance, Jacob asked:

After ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire? (Jacob 6:7).

### Sherem

Jacob relates, near the end of his book, the story of Sherem a man who was an anti-Christ. Because of the facility with which he could use the language, Sherem flattered the people, and persuaded many that Christ would not come. Feeling that he could convince Jacob, Sherem presented his arguments directly to him and even accused Jacob of blasphemy. Jacob, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, confounded Sherem in all his words. Finally, Sherem demanded, "Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost in the which ye know so much."

Jacob answered:

What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? . . . Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if

God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come (Jacob 7:14).

The power of God came upon Sherem and he fell to the earth. After many days, Sherem, from a sick bed, called the people together and denied the things he had taught the people and "confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels," and then Sherem died. "Peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man" (Jacob 7:23).

Jacob sought to have the gospel taken to the Lamanites, but they delighted in war and bloodshed and had an eternal hatred for the Nephites. Instead of taking the gospel to them, the Nephites found it necessary to fortify themselves in order to avoid invasion.

### *Jacob Entrusts Records to Enos*

Almost at the conclusion of his book, Jacob records:

I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days (Jacob 7:26).

When Jacob saw that he must soon go down to his grave, he gave the small plates to his son Enos and told him the things which his brother Nephi had commanded him in relation to them and Enos promised to obey the commandments.



Like Paul the apostle and like Joseph Smith, Jacob was loyally devoted to the cause of Christ. He gave with great energy and ability a full measure of devotion to God. From the beginning of his career to the end, he encouraged his people to apply gospel principles to their lives and to reap a reward of peace and tranquility of soul. Yet, despite all this, he lived to see his people "mourn out" their days.

### Suggested Readings

Smith, Joseph F.: *Gospel Doctrine*, The Deseret News Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1920, pp. 386-388.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why are we encouraged to seek first the kingdom of God, and then riches?
2. What premium does Jacob place on chastity?
3. Is pride one of the besetting sins of our civilization?
4. What is your impression of Jacob?

## *Visiting Teacher Messages*

### Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

#### Lesson 17—"But Before Ye Seek for Riches, Seek Ye for the Kingdom of God" (Jacob 2:18)

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, October 6, 1953

Objective: To point out that the pursuit of riches should be secondary to seeking the kingdom of God.

**L**IFE is made up of an endless series of choices and decisions. To make the decisions wisely, we must first seek the kingdom of God (the Church). It is extremely important to have the strength of character to make decisions in harmony with the kingdom of God. Such decisions will keep us constantly moving in the right direction.

As mothers we have a sacred obligation not only to see that our own lives conform to the right pattern, but to give careful direction and guidance to our children.

A young father who was asked to be assistant scoutmaster in his ward, answered, "I'm sorry, but if I am ever going to get ahead financially,

I will have to concentrate on it now. Until my business is running along smoothly, I just won't have time to devote to anything else. Perhaps later." Twenty years later he died, still having taken no part in building up the kingdom of God.

Many young people attending college decide that in order to do justice to their studies, they must temporarily give up all Church activity. They point out that after their schooling is completed, and they are launched on their careers, then they will resume their religious activities. However, service in the Church cannot be put off at will, as we might a cloak. It is not something to resume after seemingly more pressing matters are finished.