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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 26—Missionary Activities of Ammon

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 26—Missionary Activities of Ammon

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma, chapters 17-20; 21:18-23)

For Tuesday, November 2, 1954

Objective: To show the change which takes place in the souls of men when the light of the gospel enters.

Departure of Sons of Mosiah

DURING the period when the Church organization was growing strong throughout the land of Zarahemla and in the surrounding territory, the four sons of Mosiah engaged in their great missionary activity among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. These four stalwart missionaries, Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni were faithful exponents of the gospel. So great was their interest in the eternal welfare of their brethren, the Lamanites, that each, in turn, had renounced the honor of serving as king over the Nephites in order that he might preach the gospel to the Lamanites. They had faith in God, and they wanted to share it with others.

The results of their labors reveal that they were men who had

“... waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (Alma 17:2). They had gained a basic understanding of the Lamanites, and they were submissive to divine guidance as they felt the hand of the Lord directing them. In addition:

... they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God (Alma 17:3).

It was not easy to serve as a missionary among the people who had been taught from childhood to hate their neighbors, a people who were idle, idolatrous, greedy, and bloodthirsty. They suffered:

. . . much, both in body and in mind, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, and also much labor in the spirit (Alma 17:5).

They had left the land of Zarahemla in the first year of the reign of the judges, when Alma the son was serving as high priest and chief judge. They took with them their swords, spears, bows, arrows, and slings, not that they intended to use them in hand to hand combat with the Lamanites, for their mission was one of love, but that they needed them to provide themselves with food in the wilderness. These four sons of Mosiah selected a group to accompany them to the land of Nephi. They traveled many days in the wilderness, during which time:

. . . they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct (Alma 17:9).

The Lord did visit them with his spirit, and said unto them: "Be comforted" (Alma 17:10). Later Ammon tells us:

Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success (Alma 26:27).

Arriving in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, they separated from one another, each one trusting in the Lord to take him where he should go.

Ammon Serves King Lamoni

Ammon went to the land of Ishmael, which was ". . . called after the sons of Ishmael, who also became Lamanites" (Alma 17:19). As Ammon entered this land, he was taken by the Lamanites and bound as was their custom with all Nephites who came into their territory. Ammon was then taken before the king, Lamoni. The king asked Ammon if he desired to live among the Lamanites and Ammon said ". . . Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die" (Alma 17:23).

King Lamoni was pleased with Ammon and suggested to him that he become his son-in-law. But Ammon tactfully refused, suggesting that he be made a servant to the king. This request was granted. Ammon was assigned with other servants to guard the flocks of Lamoni. After three days while he and the other servants were driving the king's flocks to the waters of Sebus, Lamanite troublemakers scattered the flocks. The king's servants were frightened, for they knew that King Lamoni had formerly killed servants when the flocks had been scattered. The servants began to weep; but Ammon rejoiced, for he realized that he would have an opportunity to win favor with the king and his fellow servants by restoring the flocks to the king.

By following the directions of Ammon, the servants successfully rounded up the scattered flock; but the wicked Lamanites stood ready to scatter them a second time. Ammon instructed the other servants to encircle the flocks while he contended with the robbers. Standing alone

he cast stones at them with his sling. So accurate was Ammon's aim that he slew six of these Lamanites. They had returned stone for stone, but God protected his servant against their stones. The Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of the hands of the Lamanites.

Finding that they could not hit Ammon with their stones, they rushed upon him with clubs. With his sword, Ammon cut off the arms that were lifted against him, ". . . but he slew none save it were their leader with his sword . . ." They were so astonished that they fled before him. After driving these men away, he returned to the waters of Sebus, and the servants drove the flocks to the pastures of the king. They then carried the arms Ammon had severed from the men unto the king as evidence of Ammon's power.

Lamoni Becomes Converted

The servants reported to the king all that had happened. He was impressed with Ammon's faithfulness as a servant, but was more deeply affected by his power. King Lamoni and his followers believed in a Great Spirit who had created the world. Lamoni, hearing of the spectacular feats of Ammon, and believing the reports, drew the conclusion that Ammon was the Great Spirit. Fear crept into Lamoni's heart, for he realized that he had done wrong formerly by slaying his servants.

The king inquired concerning the whereabouts of Ammon. He was informed that Ammon was preparing the horses and chariots for Lamoni's trip to the land of Nephi. It was then that the king remem-

bered that he had given his servants that assignment, for he was planning to attend a feast that was to be given by his father, who was king over all the Lamanites, and who had his headquarters in the land of Nephi. King Lamoni wanted to see this faithful servant, but he was afraid, for he still thought he must be the Great Spirit.

After Ammon had made ready the horses and chariots for their journey to the land of Nephi, he went to the king. Quickly observing a change in the king's countenance, ". . . he was about to return out of his presence" (Alma 18:12). One of the king's servants, knowing the desire of the king, detained Ammon, saying, ". . . Rabbanah, the king desireth thee to stay" (Alma 18:13).

Turning himself ". . . unto the king," Ammon asked, "What wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king?" (Alma 18:14). Twice Ammon asked the question and received no answer. Being filled with the Spirit, Ammon perceived the thoughts of the king, and asked:

. . . Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings? (Alma 18:16)

Discerning that Ammon had power to read his thoughts, King Lamoni questioned him: ". . . Who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things?" (Alma 18:18) Ammon answered "I am not." The king promised Ammon whatsoever he desired. In reply Ammon asked, ". . . Wilt thou

hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things? And this is the thing that I desire of thee" (Alma 18:22). Ammon then identified Lamoni's Great Spirit with God. Lamoni believed in the words of Ammon and asked, ". . . Art thou sent from God?" (Alma 18:33) Ammon told Lamoni, ". . . I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true" (Alma 18:34). Observing the receptive mind of Lamoni, Ammon then started with the story of the creation and instructed him concerning the fall and the redemption, and the many prophecies which appeared on the brass plates and on the records kept by the Nephites. The king believed the things which Ammon told him, including the account of the rebellion of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael. He prayed to the Lord for mercy, and then ". . . fell unto the earth, as if he were dead" (Alma 18:42). His servants carried him to his wife. He lay on the bed for two nights and two days as if he were dead:

. . . and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss (Alma 18:43).

Before taking his body to the sepulchre, the queen, who had heard of Ammon's power, sent for him. When Ammon came she told him of her husband's condition. Ammon knew that he was not dead:

. . . he knew that king Lamoni was under the power of God; he knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from his mind, and the light which

did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God . . . yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul, yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God (Alma 19:6).

The Queen's Great Faith

When Ammon saw the body of the king, he told the queen that the king would arise on the following day. The queen expressed complete faith in what Ammon told her, and Ammon said:

. . . Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites (Alma 19:10).

At the appointed time, the king arose. He told those present:

. . . behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. Now, when he had said these words, his heart was swollen within him, and he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit (Alma 19:13).

Ammon ". . . fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God . . . and he was also overpowered with joy . . ." (Alma 19:14).

Astounded by what had happened, the servants also began to pray and all except a Lamanitish woman, Abish, fell down and were overpowered by the Spirit.

Abish had been converted previously and knew it was the power of God which had produced this prostration of many people, supposing that if others saw the scene

and knew the circumstances that they also would accept the gospel. Abish went from house to house and soon had a multitude assembled.

Most of the assemblage, however, took a different attitude, feeling that the king by helping Ammon had brought evil to his people; others felt that the evil resulted from the king's having slain his servants. One of those present tried to kill Ammon with a sword, but he fell dead. The people marvelled and were afraid. Many said Ammon was the Great Spirit, and others that he was sent by him, but others said, ". . . he was a monster, who had been sent from the Nephites to torment them" (Alma 19:26).

When the contention became sharp as they tried to determine the cause of what they had seen, Abish took the queen by the hand and she arose and cried in a loud voice:

. . . O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people! (Alma 19:29).

The queen took the king by the hand, and he stood before her. He, seeing the contention, rebuked the people and taught them the words he had heard from Ammon. "As many as heard his words believed . . . But there were many . . . who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way" (Alma 19:31-32).

Soon Ammon arose, and then the others. All bore testimony that their hearts had been changed and said they no longer had any desire to do evil.

As a result of these miraculous happenings, Ammon was able to establish a Church among them, for

many believed and were baptized. It was in this manner that the work of the Lord began among the Lamanites.

Ammon and Lamoni *Go to Middoni*

After the Church had been established in the land of Ishmael, King Lamoni wanted to introduce Ammon to his father, who was king over the land of Nephi. Lamoni asked Ammon to accompany him to that land. Ammon refused, saying that the Lord had commanded him to go to Middoni to secure the release of Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah from prison. Ammon invited Lamoni to go to Middoni with him. Lamoni agreed, saying that he could help, for Antiomno, king of that land, was his friend.

As Ammon and Lamoni were traveling, they met the father of Lamoni. When he saw his son with a Nephite, he was angry and reproved Lamoni for traveling with the son of a liar, for so he called the Nephites. And when he learned that his son and Ammon were going to secure the release of Nephites from prison, he chided his son saying:

. . . He [Nephi] robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property (Alma 20:13).

The father of Lamoni commanded his son to kill Ammon. This Lamoni refused to do. It angered his father, who unsheathed his own sword to kill his son. Ammon interceded and overpowered him. Knowing that he was in Ammon's power, Lamoni's father agreed to re-

lease the missionaries, and to allow Lamoni to continue as king of the land of Ishmael and promised to govern him no more.

Ammon and Lamoni then went to Middoni and freed the missionaries. To see their condition aroused pity in Ammon's heart, for they were naked and their skin was raw from having been bound. They were also emaciated from lack of food and water and from other afflictions, but were patient in their sufferings.

Ammon and Lamoni returned from Middoni to the land of Ishmael, where King Lamoni helped Ammon to spread the gospel. They

built synagogues and encouraged the people to meet together often to worship God. Lamoni told them they were a free people, free from the oppressions of his father, the king, and free to worship the Lord. The people were zealous in keeping the commandments.

Questions on the Lesson

1. Why was Ammon willing to sacrifice so much to build the kingdom of God among the Lamanites?
2. What are some faith-promoting incidents in the life of Ammon?
3. How did the converted Lamanites reveal their faith?

Visiting Teacher Messages Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 26—"But If Ye Will Nourish the Word, Yea, Nourish the Tree as It Beginneth to Grow, by Your Faith With Great Diligence, and With Patience, Looking Forward to the Fruit Thereof, It Shall Take Root; and Behold It Shall Be a Tree Springing Up Unto Everlasting Life" (Alma 32:41).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, November 2, 1954

Objective: To point out that faith and great diligence are required in order to gain life everlasting.

WHAT a beautiful parable is here given us — beautiful in language and glorious in context! Truly there is no more important message to be presented to mankind. Alma describes the requirements for growth of the good seed into the tree and shows how the "word" also must be nourished if the rich harvest is to be garnered and enjoyed. It is an apt comparison, as at every point it corresponds to the growing

process of the "word of God" in one's life.

Alma urges us to make the experiment by planting the seed in our hearts, to see if it will swell and grow within us. If it does begin to swell and sprout or, in other words, if it begins to enlarge the soul and enlighten the understanding, then we can be sure that that seed is good, for those are the signs. When the seed is proved to be good, as it grows