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## Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 38—Conditions Among the Nephites in the Days of Nephi the Disciple

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**Abstract:** The objective of this lesson is to experience with Nephi the signs of the Savior's birth; to witness the partial fulfillment of early prophecy; and to have our faith in the power of the Priesthood increased.

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## LESSON DEPARTMENT

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

Lesson 38—Conditions Among the Nephites in the Days of Nephi  
the Disciple

*Elder Leland H. Monson*

(Text: The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi, chapters 1-5:8; 6-7)

For Tuesday, March 6, 1956

Objective: To experience with Nephi the signs of the Savior's birth; to witness the partial fulfillment of early prophecy; and to have our faith in the power of the Priesthood increased.

**I**T was six hundred years after Lehi had left Jerusalem that Nephi, son of Helaman, gave to his son, Nephi, all the records and the sacred relics which had been preserved. Then the father, Nephi, departed out of Zarahemla, and no man knew where he went.

#### *Jesus Declares His Approaching Birth*

Those who believed began to look forward to the appearance of the signs of the Savior's birth. Those who did not believe began to rejoice, saying that the time had passed. The disbelievers finally set aside a day on which to kill all who believed in the signs unless the signs had been given to them.

Nephi, exceedingly sorrowful

over the wickedness of the people, "... cried mightily ..." (3 Nephi 1:11) to the Lord concerning this matter. The answer came:

Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets (3 Nephi 1:13).

#### *Signs of the Savior's Birth*

When the sun set that evening there was no darkness. No darkness came during the whole night, but it was as light as at midday. A new star also appeared in the heavens. The people were astonished, for they knew that the signs had been given. Many who had not be-

lieved, “. . . fell to the earth and became as if they were dead . . .” (3 Nephi 1:16).

The wicked now knew that the Son of God was soon to be born, and they began to fear because of their iniquity and unbelief. As a result of the signs, however, the major part of the people were converted. Signs, nevertheless, did not effect a permanent conversion. It was not long until the Gadianton band won the support of many and Satan led away the hearts of the people. The Nephites and Lamanites, therefore, united to suppress them (3 Nephi 2:11). The war was intense by thirteen A.D., and the Nephites were threatened with utter destruction.

#### *Lamanites Become a White People*

The Lamanites who had been converted, and who had united with the Nephites, became a delightful people for, “. . . their skin became white like unto the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:15). They no longer kept the name of Lamanites, but were numbered among and called the people of Nephi.

#### *Nephites Prepare for Battle*

Because of the wickedness of the Nephites in fifteen A.D., and their contentions and dissensions, the Gadianton robbers gained many advantages over them. So strong was the position of the Gadianton robbers that their leader Giddianhi wrote a letter to Lachoneus, chief judge of the Nephites, in which he demanded that Lachoneus give to him the Nephite cities, lands, and other possessions. Among other things, he wrote that it was difficult

to restrain his armies any longer, for they had an unconquerable spirit, which had been proved in the field of battle, and that they knew of the many wrongs the Nephites had committed against them. Giddianhi said that he wanted them as brethren and not as slaves.

He wrote:

I swear unto you with an oath, that on the morrow month I will command that my armies shall come down against you, and they shall not stay their hand and shall spare not, but shall slay you, and shall let fall the sword upon you even until ye shall become extinct (3 Nephi 3:8).

Although astonished by the boldness of the demand of Giddianhi, Lachoneus “. . . did not hearken to the epistle . . .” (3 Nephi 3:12). He, however, began to prepare for the day when the robbers would come.

. . . he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength against the time that the robbers should come down against them . . . he said unto them: As the Lord liveth, except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in nowise be delivered . . . (3 Nephi 3:12, 15).

He commanded the people to gather with all movable possessions into two places, the land of Zarahemla and the land Bountiful. By seventeen A.D. this had been accomplished.

. . . they had taken their horses, and their chariots, and their cattle, and all their flocks, and their herds, and their grain, and all their substance, and did march forth by thousands and by tens of thousands, until they had all gone forth to the place which had been appointed that they should gather themselves to-



gether, to defend themselves against their enemies (3 Nephi 3:22).

They fortified this territory “. . . in the land southward . . .” (3 Nephi 3:24), the land of Zarahemla and the land of Bountiful. Gidgiddoni was made chief captain. “Now it was the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains . . . some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy; therefore, this Gidgiddoni was a great prophet among them, as also was the chief judge” (3 Nephi 3:19). He had the people make all kinds of weapons of war, armor, shields, bucklers, etc.

#### *Robbers Attack Nephites*

It was in the nineteenth year that Giddianhi led his soldiers against the Nephites. They wore a lamb-skin about their loins, were dyed in blood, and wore headplates for protection on their shorn heads.

“. . . there never was known so great a slaughter among all the people of Lehi since he left Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 4:11). Despite their sense of security and their great boasting, the armies of Giddianhi were defeated and forced to flee. Exhausted by much fighting, Giddianhi was overtaken and slain.

Zemnah was then made commander-in-chief of the robbers. He, in twenty-one A.D., tried another plan. He surrounded Nephite territory to lay a siege. But the Nephites had stored provisions enough to last them for seven years. Faced with failure because of intermittent attacks by the Nephites and because of lack of food, Zemnah withdrew his forces to the north. Many were slain; others were taken cap-

tive. Zemnah, himself, was hanged on a tree.

#### *Nephites Thank God for Deliverance*

The Nephites rejoiced over their being preserved by the hand of God, and they acknowledged his goodness to them. Now they forsook their sins, their abominations and whoredoms, and served God with diligence and attention.

And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction (3 Nephi 4:33).

To prevent future difficulty, they “. . . condemned and punished according to the law” (3 Nephi 5:5) all prisoners who would not renounce their secret combination and enter into a covenant that they would murder no more. Thus they ended secret and abominable combinations among them.

The Nephites felt that they could now have security. In twenty-six A.D., they moved back to the cities whence they had come, taking with them their flocks and herds, horses and cattle, and whatever belonged to them. Again they began to prosper. Old cities were rebuilt, and new ones arose. A system of highways connecting the cities was constructed.

#### *Nephites Again Turn Away From God*

“But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up un-

to pride and boastings because of their exceeding great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions; For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers. And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches" (3 Nephi 6:10-12). Such inequalities bred contention and hatred. These qualities disrupted the Church. By thirty A.D. the people ". . . were in a state of awful wickedness" (3 Nephi 6:17).

It was when the Nephites were in this state of iniquity that prophets appeared among them calling on them to repent and foretelling the redemption of the human race by means of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Contrary to the laws of the land, some of these prophets were put to death secretly by the judges without the condemnation being signed by the governor of the land. Because of secret oaths among the judges and their kindred, the chief judge found it almost impossible to bring them to justice.

That same year the chief judge was murdered. This caused division among the people and soon the complete overthrow of the government. Since wickedness had become more prevalent and more powerful than goodness, the collapse of government was inevitable. This iniquity came because the people yielded to the power of Satan. The people now divided into tribes, each man going with his family,

kindred, and friends. Each tribe appointed a chief or a leader. These tribes were a unit in hating those who had destroyed their government.

The secret combination, however, united under the leadership of Jacob. They called him their king. He led his people northward.

### *Nephi Preaches Repentance*

Nephi saw the tribes stone the prophets and cast them out.

And it came to pass that Nephi—having been visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord, therefore having seen angels, and being eye-witness, and having had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ, and also being eye-witness to their quick return from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations; Therefore, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds—went forth among them in that same year, and began to testify, boldly, repentance and remission of sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 7:15-16).

He ministered with great power and authority, and angels ministered to him daily. In the name of Jesus Christ he cast out devils and unclean spirits, and raised his brother from the dead. Many people were:

. . . baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins (3 Nephi 7:25).

### *Questions and Topics for Discussion*

1. What were the signs given of the Savior's birth?
2. Did the signs produce permanent repentance?
3. What did Nephi preach to the people?



# *Visiting Teacher Messages*

## Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 38—"Therefore, Whoso Heareth These Sayings of Mine and Doeth Them, I Will Liken Him Unto a Wise Man, Who Built His House Upon a Rock—And the Rain Descended, and the Floods Came, and the Winds Blew, and Beat Upon That House; and It Fell Not, For It Was Founded Upon a Rock" (3 Nephi 14:24-25).

*Edith S. Elliott*

For Tuesday, March 6, 1956

Objective: To show the necessity of not only hearing the word of the Lord but in doing it also.

**T**H**ERE** is wisdom in the old adage, "We learn to do by doing." We can listen to masterful teaching, but unless we study and actually participate in the learning processes ourselves, we cannot possibly attain a successful goal. This is true in any branch of edification whether it be in the field of art, science, or religion, and particularly is this true in our spiritual development which requires doing the word of God as well as hearing it.

There are people who, for some reason, think that religious or spiritual knowledge will come to them without much effort on their part. Further, they seem to believe that it will suddenly be theirs and appear like magic, when and if they need it. But, like every other desired knowledge, a complete and continuous study is necessary for comprehension before it can become a part of our being.

We may agree with teachings of the prophets of old and those of today. Their philosophy is majestic and uplifting to contemplate.

We may go so far as to believe in the essentials required for our salvation. Yet, when it comes not only to hearing, but doing the word, some of us find that we are too weak in understanding and faith so to do. We tend to accept just parts of the gospel plan which suit us or are easy to embrace. However, if we want to journey to London, we must meet every requirement necessary to get us to that destination. A halfway ticket will take us only half of the way. So it is with eternal life as our goal; we must accept and live all our Heavenly Father's teachings to gain eternal life.

To have been stirred with the story of the "Good Samaritan" is a rich experience. To be one in reality, is to obey the second great commandment. How many of us walk the extra mile to give personal service? How many of us make the time to brighten the life of a neighbor weighed down with seeming insurmountable burdens? How many of us prepare a meal or run an errand for the homebound? How