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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 47—A Review of Outstanding Characters of the Book of Mormon

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 47—A Review of Outstanding Characters of The Book of Mormon

Elder Leland H. Monson

For Tuesday, April 2, 1957

Objective: To show through a study of the lives of the characters of The Book of Mormon that true greatness is found in a love of God and service to one's fellow men.

A man standing on the shoulders of a giant, ought to be able to see farther. We have had that privilege as we have walked, talked, prayed, and thought with those giant characters in spirituality who led their people in The Book of Mormon history. In retrospect, we may see Jared, his brother Mahonri Moriancumer, and Ether from the Jaredite civilization; and at least Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni from the Nephite civilization. A quick review of the contributions of these men to their peoples will give us a sort of kaleidoscopic scene of the changing nature of life among The Book of Mormon peoples.

Book of Ether

Jared and his brother, Moriancumer, came from that stretch of territory between the Tigris and Eu-

phrates rivers, a part of the land which is known as "The Fertile Crescent," within which territory is the ancient city of Babylon. Under divine guidance, the Jaredites left this land of Shinar at the time the Lord confounded the tongues of the people building the Tower of Babel.

Moriancumer, at the solicitation of Jared, prayed that the Lord would have compassion upon them, their families, and their friends. This prayer was answered, and a colony of people known as the Jaredites came to the Western Continent. They crossed the ocean in eight boats, built after the manner of "barges" which they had previously built. (See Ether 2:16, 17.) These boats were lighted by sixteen stones, ". . . white and clear, even as transparent glass . . ." (Ether 3:1) which were made luminous by the finger of the Lord. At the time the Lord

touched these stones and gave them luminosity, “. . . the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood And . . . behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ In me shall all mankind have light, and that eternally And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image” (Ether 3:6 ff.).

The civilization built by these men flourished in North America from about the time of the Tower of Babel to about 600 B.C. when it suffered extinction because of unrighteousness.

The abridged record of the Jaredites in The Book of Mormon is called the Book of Ether after Ether the last prophet of the Jaredites. Moroni made the abridgment from the twenty-four gold plates which had been found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah. Ether prophesied the destruction of the Jaredite civilization, for he knew that the people were living unrighteously and that America was a choice land only to those who worshipped the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ.

Coming of Lehi to the Promised Land

The civilization of the Nephites and Lamanites, which followed the

Jaredite nation, was founded by Lehi, who left Jerusalem about 600 B.C. and came to the promised land with his family, Sariah his wife, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and some daughters; and Ishmael and his sons and daughters; and Zoram. Lehi was the great patriarch of his day. He blessed his sons and daughters and encouraged them to live righteously.

Nephi

Nephi, after the death of his father, took charge of the righteous branch of the people and built a great civilization, while his older brothers, disobedient, shiftless, and lazy, lived in tents and dwindled in unbelief. Those who followed Nephi were called Nephites; those who followed Laman and Lemuel were called Lamanites. The remainder of The Book of Mormon history concerns these two groups of people, for the Mulekites, a third group to come to America about 590 B.C., merged their civilization with that of the Nephites.

Nephi, faithful, intelligent, forgiving, industrious, and resourceful founded a city in the land of Nephi. He gave to his culture a spiritual foundation at the same time that he taught the people to be industrious and to care for their material welfare. He knew that the real purpose of wealth was to provide for the improvement of his people.

Jacob

Jacob, brother of Nephi, followed Nephi as a teacher of the people and a keeper of the records. He sought to persuade the people “. . . to come unto Christ . . .” (Jacob 1:7).

Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi (Jacob 1:8).

Jacob was a great preacher of righteousness all his days. He denounced unchastity, encouraged his people to seek first the kingdom of God, promised them that if they did so they would obtain riches, material wealth, which he encouraged them to use for righteous purposes—“. . . to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:19). He condemned pride and noted that riches are not necessarily a sign of excellence. Jacob was also a doctrinal preacher, and explained fundamental principles of the gospel.

From Jacob the plates were handed on to Enos, Jaron, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, Amaleki, and Mosiah to Benjamin, the next prophet leader we shall discuss.

Benjamin

King Benjamin, about 130 B.C., was a ruler who assiduously worked for the welfare of his people. Near the close of his life, he built a large tower from which he instructed the people concerning doctrines of the gospel and concerning their self-improvement, and announced that his son Mosiah would succeed him. He will be long remembered for his comment that “. . . when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). We also remember him for his instructions concern-

ing the atonement of Christ. He also taught the people that man is not naturally good, but that:

. . . the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father (Mosiah 3:19).

He also stressed the fact that Jesus Christ would come in the future and visit the people. The people made a covenant with God to keep his commandments and took upon them the name of Christ.

King Mosiah

King Mosiah, son of Benjamin, founded democracy among the Nephites when his four sons refused to be king, making, so far as we know, the Nephite civilization the cradle of democracy in America. He gave laws to the people and instructed them concerning the manner of electing their judges, concerning their money, and concerning their duties to one another. He began to reign when he was thirty (Mosiah 7:4), in about 124 B.C.

In setting up the reign of the Judges over the Nephite people, Mosiah advised them:

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then

is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land, yea, even as long as any of our posterity remains upon the face of the land (Mosiah 29:26-27, 32).

It was during Mosiah's reign that his four sons went to preach to the Lamanites.

Alma the Younger

After the death of King Mosiah, Alma, the younger, was appointed to be the first chief judge of the Nephites. At the same time he was the high priest having had the office conferred upon him by his father Alma, and thus he was in charge of the religious welfare of the people. (See Mosiah 29:42.)

Alma, who in his youth had been wicked and, with the sons of Mosiah, had sought to destroy the Church, developed into one of the greatest characters in Book of Mormon history. He was, after his conversion, a great preacher of righteousness and a doctrinal teacher and one of the greatest missionaries in Book of Mormon history. He built up churches in and around Zarahemla, teaching the people of Jesus Christ and that he would be born of Mary, the Son of God in the flesh. (See Alma 7:10.) He encouraged the people to have faith, and hope, and charity—the three cardinal virtues of Christianity. With Amulek he performed a great missionary work. Later, with two

of his sons, he performed an illustrious missionary service among the Zoramites.

Grieving over the wickedness of his people, he called his three sons and gave “. . . unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness . . .” (Alma 35:16). His instructions contain great doctrinal dissertations. His commandments to his sons concern taking care of sacred things, to look to God and live, to declare the word among the people, the sin of adultery, on the resurrection, and the state of the soul between death and the resurrection, a literal restoration, on justice and mercy, mortality a period of probation, spiritual and temporal death, and the necessity of repentance, the atonement, and law, and punishment. (See Alma chapters 36-42.) He urged his son Corianton:

. . . let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility (Alma 42:30).

Nephi the Disciple

Nephi, son of Nephi, son of Helaman, son of Helaman, son of Alma, had the privilege of seeing the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite concerning the signs of the Savior's birth and death literally fulfilled. Subsequently, he was called from the multitude by Jesus and given power to baptize the people after the departure of Jesus (3 Nephi 11:21). He was in the group that heard the Father introduce his Son, Jesus, to the Nephites, and knew of a surety concerning the divinity of Christ. He became a member of a

group of twelve called by the Savior to supervise the work of the Church in the meridian dispensation among the Nephites.

Mormon

Mormon, the next great character whom we shall consider, gave his name to The Book of Mormon. He took the plates from the Hill Shim as he had been instructed to do by Ammaron, who had placed them there about 320 A.D. Mormon, as we studied in a previous lesson was a great spiritual leader and a commander in chief of Nephite forces, who witnessed the almost complete destruction of the Nephites. He was also a great scholar, an historian, who made the set of records on which he wrote the abridgment of the large plates of Nephi and to which he attached the small plates of Nephi.

Moroni

Moroni, the son of Mormon, finished his father's book in the record, abridged the twenty-four gold plates giving the history of the Jaredite civilization, and wrote a

book of his own on his father's plates, called the Book of Moroni. Moroni lived to see the complete destruction of the Nephites because of wickedness, and remained a lone survivor of a once righteous, powerful, and blessed people.

Living with these men who mark milestones of progress in the history of the two great civilizations that flourished in America from about the time of the Tower of Babel to about 421 A.D., we have come to understand what true greatness is, that it is to be found in the love of God and service to one's fellow men.

Questions on the Lesson

1. Explain how a study of a great man gives us an understanding of the history of a period.
2. What were the chief characteristics of Nephi?
3. Show how powerful the doctrine of repentance is by an explanation of the early life and repentance of Alma.
4. What kind of testimony concerning Jesus Christ did Alma and Nephi have?
5. What was Mormon's great contribution to The Book of Mormon, besides his own historical account?
6. What was Moroni's great contribution?

Mountain Snowstorm

Eva Willes Wangsgaard

"These flakes resembling velvet stars," she said,
 "Are clever camouflage to hide our jail."
 I sat in silence, for my thoughts had fled,
 Riding a snowflake down a time-hid trail,
 Where children, pulled by cords of school or home
 Climbed drifts as high as hillocks. Twinkly bright
 Were eyes that loved the bout with brittle foam
 Which topped the waves of frozen crested white.
 Now hills were growing whiter steadily
 Where sumac lately brewed a rich maroon,
 But being snowbound waked no dread in me.
 The years ran back to meet my life's high-noon.
 The storm would hold us prisoners on the hill,
 But joy is always free to roam at will.