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## Book of Mormon: Lesson 5 - The Good King Benjamin

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Large plates mainly historical events  
small plates the history of Nephi's people

# Guide Lessons for February

## LESSON I

### Theology and Testimony

(First Week in February)

#### BOOK OF MORMON

#### Lesson 5. The Good King Benjamin

This lesson, which includes the material between pages 150 and 181 of the Book of Mormon, falls naturally into three sections, as is shown by the following brief outline:

#### Outline

- I. Close of the Small Plates of Nephi.
  - 1. The words of Enos.
    - (a) His "wrestle before God."
    - (b) Conditions during his time.
  - 2. The words of Jarom.
    - (a) Who Jarom was.
    - (b) Conditions in his day.
  - 3. The words of Omni, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki.
- II. The words of Mormon.
  - 1. Who Mormon was.
  - 2. When he lived.
  - 3. His abridgment.
- III. Beginning of the Larger Plates (Mosiah).
  - 1. Conditions in 124 B. C.
  - 2. King Benjamin.
    - (a) Type of man and king.
    - (b) His speech from the tower.
      - (1) On service.
      - (2) On duties of kingship.
      - (3) On Christ.
      - (4) On Charity.
  - 3. Mosiah II.
    - (a) Character, Education.
    - (b) Delegation to Land of Nephi.

#### Notes

1. *The Words of Mormon.* It was said in a previous lesson that one of the difficulties found in reading the Book of Mormon lies in its structure. In the present lesson this difficulty comes into clear view. For, at the conclusion of the Small Plates of

Use before your study of  
and had to be preached to  
who was Jarom  
the small plates

Nephi (page 157), 200 B. C., we come all of a sudden upon "the Words of Mormon," a character who lived some four hundred years after Christ.

We learned in our last lesson how this comes about.

The larger plates of Nephi, which were but one set out of many during the history of the Nephites, were used to set down the events year by year as they took place. But the small plates of Nephi covered only the first four hundred years of Nephite history, and were "more religious" than the larger plates. And when Martin Harris lost the first part of the manuscript translation, Joseph made a translation of the small plates, instead of re-translating the other account. Of course the "Words of Mormon" form an introduction to what follows, or a link between the two.

Notice the difference between the two translations, so far as the form is concerned.

The translation of the small plates is in the first person, while that of the work that follows—at least the abridgment part—is in the third person. And this fact is in harmony with the assumption that the Prophet made a translation of a real record, instead of making up the work out of his head, as he is charged with having done. If the third person had been used throughout the first 157 pages, which is not supposed to be an abridgment at all, then it would have been a very serious objection to the Book of Mormon claims to being the history of a real people, which would be very hard to overcome, if not impossible. But as it is, it is a striking evidence to the truth of its claims.

2. *A Sidelight on Prophecy.* One of the illuminating sidelights on life and religion so often appearing in the Book of Mormon comes in connection with this episode of the Small Plates.

A good many people find themselves puzzled over the apparent casual connection between human agency and prophecy. If an event is foreseen a dozen or a thousand years before it happens, it is sometimes thought that the mere foreseeing of it makes it come to pass by a sort of predestination. But that is not the case. There is no relation whatever between the act and the foreseeing of the act by the Lord.

The Lord, twenty-four hundred years before the revelation of the Book of Mormon to the Prophet Joseph, foresaw that Martin Harris would lose the manuscript, and, foreseeing that act on the part of Martin, prepared for it. The act of Martin Harris in losing the manuscript would have happened anyway whether or not the Lord anticipated it and provided against it, for that was the man's disposition and nature, as brought about by the play of cause and effect. And the Lord did not see fit on this occasion to interfere in the situation. But, knowing that a certain condition



would arise, he provided for it beforehand. The Lord did not make Harris lose that manuscript.

3. *Benjamin a Just Ruler.* The account of King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon is surely one of the high lights of the Nephite Record as we have it. This covers the first six chapters of Mormon's Abridgment.

A ruler is supposed to be a guide to the people in their struggle towards the light. But how rarely has this been the case in the history of mankind. As a rule, the kings and emperors have acted on the assumption that the people were made for them instead of them for the people. And that was particularly true before the rise of the people to political power. It is too often true today, also, when self-seeking politicians get into office.

But here, in Benjamin, we have a model king. His character and acts cannot be duplicated in history. Alfred the Great in early England comes the nearest to being like Benjamin of any we can think of. And even if we look upon the Book of Mormon as a work of fiction, conceived by Joseph Smith, as some critics would have us believe, instead of a history of a real people, as the Saints contend, it is assuredly a fine and energizing thing to have created a character as noble and conscientious as King Benjamin.

He is as tender toward his subjects as a kindly father is of his own children, and as solicitous about their welfare. Moreover, he is a Christian—and that is saying a great deal,—for even Christians today do not always act like Christians. And the people respond nobly to his appeal to their better selves.

His teachings are far in advance of his day, whether you consider the Nephite nation or contemporary nations in Europe.

He works for a living instead of taxing the people to support him in regal state. While he has punished, as king, any transgression of the law, yet he has not attempted to be unjust, or to enslave any of his subjects, as he might have done. On the contrary, he has taught them the principles of self-government and helped them to put these into practice.

But most of all, he places himself on an equality with them, puts himself on the same level with them. This is most extraordinary in a king. He says, for instance, that he has the same infirmities of body and mind as they have. Nor does he take to himself any credit for being their king, for he was chosen king and has been "suffered" by the Lord to be their ruler. This, too, is extraordinary in a king.

And then look at his advanced views on service. Service is the slogan of the twentieth century, not only in religion but in business as well. But here is a king who made that his ideal twenty-one hundred years ago. Even if we make King Benjamin the creation of Joseph Smith, still he is three-quarters of a century ahead of his time. And the idea of service is elaborated upon

by this early ruler. "If I, whom you call your ruler," he says, "do labor to serve you, then had not ye ought to labor to serve one another?" And then he adds that since he serves the people, they should serve one another, and all serve God. "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings," he tells his people, "ye are only in the service of God." Here is the true Christian ideal of life, which the world has been nineteen hundred years trying to grasp, and our comprehension of it at the end of this period is not nearly so clear as that of this humble Nephite king.

Benjamin also had some fundamental ideas on charity. The Nephites had the poor among them, it appears—as indeed what nation has not? Also they had among them persons who felt that the poor were poor because they had brought upon themselves their poverty, and who said this to justify themselves in not relieving the distress they saw around them. But the kindly Benjamin told them plainly that in saying this they had "great cause to repent" and that except they repented they would "perish forever" and have "no interest in the kingdom of God." That was strong doctrine. The only legitimate motive for giving is love, the king taught. "Love one another," he said, "and serve one another."

A wonderful king was Benjamin, and a wonderful man—a true Christian.

### *Questions*

1. Explain how it is that we have the Small Plates of Nephi instead of the regular abridgment of Mormon. Suppose we had the lost manuscript abridgment, what difference would we observe?
2. Tell the incident of Martin Harris' loss of the Book of Mormon manuscript. (History of the Church, Vol. I, pp. 20-28.)
3. Refute the idea that a person's acts are predestined to take place. What is the difference between "predestination" and "foreordination?"
4. Who was Mormon? When did he live? How comes it that his "Words" appear in our Book of Mormon 125 years before Christ?
5. Describe the character of King Benjamin. Why is it remarkable that we should have such a person before the Christian Era? How do you account for his character and teachings?
6. Tell about Benjamin's ideas (a) on equality, (b) on service, (c) on charity.
7. Are his ideas on charity as applicable today as they were then? Why do you think so? What are our modern notions as to why some people are poor and how they should be looked after? What effect has indiscriminate giving (a) on the giver and (b) on the receiver?