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Book of Mormon: Some Preliminaries

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Guide Lessons For October

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in October)

BOOK OF MORMON: SOME PRELIMINARIES

1. *Preview of Lesson*: For the next lesson read the first fourteen chapters of the *Book of Mormon*—to page 32.

This covers the following points: First, the visions of Lehi, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the commandment of the Lord for him to take his family “into the wilderness” and across the sea to the Promised Land; second, the actual journey as far as the Valley of Lemuel, which was “near the borders” of the Red Sea at the mouth of a river that emptied into it; third, some things that happened in this valley—the return of the four sons of Lehi to Jerusalem for the Brass Plates, their return there for the family of Ishmael, and an extended vision to Nephi in confirmation of one already given to his father. Put into a brief outline, it would be:

- I. Visions to Lehi.
 1. Concerning Jerusalem.
 2. Concerning the Promised Land.
- II. Journey to and Encampment in Lemuel.
- III. Events in the Valley of Lemuel.
 1. Return of the sons to Jerusalem.
 - (a) For the Brass Plates.
What these were.
How they compare with our Bible. (See 13:23.)
 - (b) For the family of Ishmael.
 2. Visions in the Valley of Lemuel.
 - (a) To Lehi, concerning the iron rod.
 - (b) To Nephi, concerning
Christ in Palestine and America,
The apostate church,
White colonists in America,
Later developments.

2. *A Look Ahead*: It may be well perhaps to give here a suggestion of what the present course in the *Book of Mormon* is to cover, since it is to extend over the next three years.

For one thing we shall read the *Book of Mormon* from cover to cover. That is the only way in which one can catch the spirit of the book. This will take about two years of nine lessons each,

and maybe more. During the progress of this reading we shall attempt to study the story of the Book of Mormon peoples in connection with their social, political, and religious ideas, and to ascertain the spiritual doctrines contained in the Record of the Nephites, section by section.

And then we shall consider in the last year of the course, the teachings of the *Book of Mormon* in their relation one to another, as a system of religion, and also we shall seek to ascertain how we may know the truth of the *Book of Mormon*, through internal evidences, external evidences, and the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

Speaking of evidences, we ought probably to begin with the same thought with which we shall end, namely, the way in which the *Book of Mormon* itself advises that we find out its truth. It is in the very last chapter, verses 3-5. In order to emphasize the point it would be well to read it in the class and spend a few minutes talking about it.

We have doubtless heard a great deal about the external evidences of the Nephite Record—that is, about the confirmation we have in Indian traditions, in the ruins of ancient America, and other ways. All this is good enough in its place, but we must know what that place is. No amount of study of these evidences will give us a testimony of the *Book of Mormon*. At best they can but confirm the testimony we may already have. There is only one way in which that testimony can come, and that is the way suggested by the book itself—through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This way gives us personal experience—the only way in which we can know anything, so as to be sure about it.

3. *A Wonderful Book*: Three things are to be noted under this head.

The *Book of Mormon* is wonderful in its contents as history. It tells us of some very singular events. Some of these are such as cannot be duplicated in any other volume for their dramatic nature. And then there are some very remarkable people described there, and in such a way as to make them stand out in our minds.

The *Book of Mormon* is a wonderful book in its teachings. The Prophet Joseph said once that the Nephite Scriptures are the “most correct” in their teachings of any in the world and that one can get nearer to God by living according to these teachings than by any other book whatsoever. And he ought to know. The doctrines of the *Book of Mormon* are explained in a way that can be understood by any one. Moreover, it contains the fulness of the gospel.

The *Book of Mormon* also is wonderful in its spirit. Every person, as you know, has a spirit peculiar to himself. So has every home. Similarly every book emits an influence, because it was written by some person with an influence. The spirit of

the *Book of Mormon* is highly spiritual, devotional. The keynote of this spiritual volume was struck by the first Nephi when he wrote that he would set down only "the things of God" and ordered that his successors of the pen should do the same. No one can read the *Book of Mormon* through, believing what he reads, without experiencing a feeling of exaltation and faith in God.

4. *The Nephite Record*, as we have already stated, is to be read from beginning to end. But in order that this reading shall be the easier and the more intelligent, it is necessary to keep certain things clearly in mind.

The *Book of Mormon* is not a modern book, either in form or in content. It is a translation, not an original composition, by Joseph Smith. Its people lived ages ago—the Jaredites more than twenty-five centuries ago and the Nephites more than sixteen hundred years ago. They thought in terms of their own simple lives and civilization and culture. And the language of the *Book of Mormon* is the language of a young man in our own generation who had had no training at all in literary work. This fact must never be lost sight of in reading the Nephite Record.

Out of this basic fact come two very important things, also to be kept in mind.

One is that the form in which the *Book of Mormon* is cast is ancient, not modern. It begins, as you may know, with the migration of the Lehiters from Jerusalem to America, and goes on to detail the history of the colonists to the year four hundred twenty-one, A. D. Toward the end of the volume we are given a brief history of a people who lived here for a thousand years before the Lehiters came to America. If the *Book of Mormon* were a modern composition, it would most likely begin with the earlier people, and proceed in chronological order.

Again, the record of the Nephites and their conflicts with the Lamanites is sometimes hard to follow by reason of the structure. The sections of the book are named from the writers of them, instead of from the nature of the subject-matter, as it would be were it a modern composition. Besides, groups of people every now and then form colonies and have their own history recorded, which, when it furnishes any material such as Nephi would think dealt sufficiently with "the things of God," are told in the general narrative. In modern dress these side-accounts would be indicated by the necessary typography.

Another fact growing out of the antiquity of the *Book of Mormon* which must be borne in mind, lies in the nature of its contents. Its people are simple, primitive folk, not the sophisticated sort we read about in the histories of other ancient peoples. And so when we read here of kings and queens, of palaces and thrones, or of judges and courts, we must guard against reading

into these terms ideas that we have attached to similar words in the histories of European nations. Moreover, we do not have the entire history of the Book of Mormon peoples. Instead we are given the life of the nation as it bore on the main theme of the Record, which was, as you may remember, whatever brought out the "things of God."

Questions

1. Suppose the head of your family should ask that you and the children go with him to, say, the interior of Africa, on foot or, at best, on animals, in the primitive fashion, and he gave as a reason that he had had a dream or vision. What would be your reaction, and the reaction of other members of the family, to this request? Consider in detail what you would be leaving, what you would be going to, the probable hardships you would endure on the way. (The Lehite women bore children on the way, including Sariah.) This will help you to realize the situation in the case of Lehi and his family.

2. Since the customs of the Book of Mormon peoples will be very important in our study, it would be a good thing to have one or two persons appointed from the class to set down from time to time, and keep a record of these, as we go along in our reading. For instance, in the present lesson we read that the language used was Egyptian, that they lived in tents in the Valley of Lemuel, that they knew of wine and drunkenness, that metallic plates were used as records, and so on. At the end of the course, when this material will be called for, we shall have it pretty much collected and arranged.

3. Also it will be a good thing to set down the doctrinal points as we come to them. Maybe some one or two could be appointed to do this work—not the same, of course, as take care of the other. This, too, will come in handy later on. If all the members of the class will do this, so much the better.

4. What differences do you find between Nephi and Laman? Can you account for these differences? What was it that made Nephi the leader?

5. How did Nephi come to know that his father had really received a vision? Is there any other way by which he could have learned this? Why did not the other members of the family do as he did—especially Lehi's wife?

6. Read in the class the words of Nephi (3:7) about the Lord preparing a way to fulfill his commandments. What does this mean? Recall other similar cases where this has been done.