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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 35—Nephi, Son of Helaman

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is to show that when we sacrifice and exercise faith in the Lord, he gives us power to accomplish great things.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 35—Nephi, Son of Helaman

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Helaman, chapter 5:5 through chapter 12)

For Tuesday, December 6, 1955

Objective: To show that when we sacrifice and exercise faith in the Lord, he gives us power to accomplish great things.

Missionary Activities of Nephi and Lehi

Nephi and his brother Lehi were very much impressed with the instructions their father Helaman gave to them, in which he emphasized the need of their believing that Jesus Christ would come and redeem mankind by means of his atoning sacrifice. This message loomed so large in the eyes of young Nephi and Lehi that Nephi had no difficulty in deciding to resign as chief judge and to devote all his energies to missionary work. (Read Helaman 5:5-12.)

The people were ripening for destruction, for their laws had become corrupted. Those people who elected to do evil were far more numerous than those who chose to do right. In a representative form of government this trend signifies decadence.

For the purpose of correcting this condition, Nephi and Lehi knew that they must cast everything else aside and preach of the atonement of Christ. They started their work in the city Bountiful, proceeded to Gid, and Mulek, and from there to all the people of Nephi who were in the land southward. Then they traveled to Zarahemla to labor among the Lamanites.

So forceful and cogent was the message of Nephi and Lehi among the Lamanites that they succeeded in baptizing 8,000 of them.

From Zarahemla, Nephi and Lehi went to the land of Nephi to continue their work with the Lamanites. In the land of Nephi, they were committed to the same prison in which Ammon and his brethren had been incarcerated years before by the servants of King Limhi. They were confined without food for many days.

Miraculous Conversion of the Lamanites

Determined to slay them for their missionary activities, the Lamanites came to the prison. As they entered the prison they discovered that Nephi and Lehi

. . . were encircled about as if by fire, even insomuch that they durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned. Nevertheless, Nephi and Lehi were not burned and they were as standing in the midst of fire and were not burned (Helaman 5:23).

The Lamanites watched in terror. Nephi and Lehi, recognizing that they were being divinely protected, admonished the Lamanites not to fear, for it was God who had shown them this power. Then the earth shook and the prison was overshadowed with a cloud of darkness. From above this cloud, all present heard a voice saying:

. . . Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings (Helaman 5:29). (Read Helaman 5:30-33.)

One among the crowd, Aminadab, a Nephite dissenter, saw the faces of Nephi and Lehi through the cloud of darkness. They shone even as the faces of angels, and were turned as if addressing heavenly beings. At the request of Aminadab the multitude looked, and soon they were asking with whom Nephi and Lehi conversed, and what they, as Lamanites, might do to remove the cloud of darkness which overshadowed them. Aminadab called them to repentance and asked them to believe in Christ.

The multitude prayed and soon the cloud was dispersed and they

were all encircled by a pillar of fire. The Spirit of the Lord descended upon them, and:

. . . there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying: Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world (Helaman 5:46-47).

The people saw the heavens open, and angels came down and ministered to the three hundred who were present.

Intensive missionary activity on the part of many who were present on this occasion convinced most of the Lamanites of the truth. They laid down their weapons of war, and cast aside the hatred they had for the Nephites. They gave back to the Nephites the lands which rightfully belonged to them, and by twenty-nine B. C. the Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites.

In twenty-eight B.C. Nephi and Lehi went into the land northward to preach. They were assisted by many righteous Lamanites. The Nephites and Lamanites mingled freely with each other during this period. There was free commercial and social intercourse between the two peoples. Both groups were prosperous. The land south was called Lehi, and the land north was called Mulek, after the son of King Zedekiah, ". . . for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south" (Helaman 6:10).

Decline of Righteousness Among Nephites

In twenty-six B.C., however, political and economic difficulties

arose. The people began to commit murder, to rob and to plunder to gain riches. The Gadianton band was revived. It was members of this band who had murdered the chief judge Cezoram. Organized crime soon flourished among the people, and a period of decadence set in among the Nephites. It was the Lamanites now who were the bearers of the truth. They succeeded in eradicating the Gadianton robbers from their midst, however the band grew to such power among the Nephites, that, by twenty-four B.C., it controlled the government.

Because of wickedness among the Nephites in the land northward, Nephi returned from the land northward to Zarahemla. Government itself began to totter, and Nephi knew that he must undergird it with righteousness or it would collapse. His soul was filled with sorrow because of the wickedness of his people.

Nephi Calls Nephites to Repentance

Nephi entered a tower in his garden in Zarahemla and supplicated the Lord in sorrow for the wickedness of his people. (Read Helaman 7:7-9.) The people saw him and assembled together. Nephi called them to repentance and foretold their utter destruction except they repented. He prophesied that unless they did repent their lands would be taken from them, and they would be exterminated. He told them of the corruptness of their laws.

Judges belonging to the secret band of Gadianton robbers were present. Angered by Nephi's criticism, they tried to stir the people

to opposition. Defended by some who were righteous, Nephi presented an abundance of evidence to validate his faith that Christ would come and redeem all who would believe in him and keep his commandments.

As a climax to his talk, Nephi warned the people that destruction was at their doors unless they repented. As an indication of that destruction, he said:

. . . go ye in unto the judgment-seat, and search; and behold, your judge is murdered, and he lieth in his blood; and he hath been murdered by his brother, who seeketh to sit in the judgment-seat. And behold, they both belong to your secret band, whose author is Gadianton and the evil one who seeketh to destroy the souls of men (Helaman 8:27-28).

Five men, all of whom were skeptical of the power of Nephi, went to see if they would find what Nephi had spoken. They found the chief judge lying in his blood. So astounded were they that they fell to the ground in fear of the judgments Nephi had predicted, and were oblivious to everything about them. The servants of the murdered chief judge, Seezoram, had already raised the cry of murder among the people and soon a group assembled. The five men who had fallen to the ground were accused of the murder and committed to prison.

When all the evidence came to the fore, however, these men were released. Then the judges accused Nephi. He gave them a second sign, telling them to go to the house of Seantum and to examine him and they would ". . . find blood upon the skirts of his cloak" (Helaman 9:31), which would be the

blood of Seezoram and that he would confess to the murder and exonerate Nephi. Seantum was examined and all Nephi had predicted came to pass. Many who knew all the circumstances concerning Seezoram accepted Nephi as a prophet of God.

Promises of the Lord to Nephi

The people, however, were divided. Nephi, cast down because of the wickedness of the Nephites, started for his house. On the way, he was blessed and comforted. A voice from heaven said:

. . . I have beheld how thou hast with unweariness declared the word And thou hast not feared them, [the people] and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments . . . behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction (Helaman 10:4-7, 11).

God gave to Nephi a power which few men have exercised—power over the elements. He was given this power because he had grown in righteousness to the point where

God knew he would exercise the power with wisdom.

From that time onward Nephi intensified his teachings to the people that they could choose between repentance and destruction. In their wickedness they chose destruction and reviled Nephi, “. . . and did seek to lay their hands upon him that they might cast him into prison” (Helaman 10:15). Nephi, however, “. . . was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst . . .” (Helaman 10:16).

To prevent the destruction of the people by the sword, for wars were being conducted throughout the land, Nephi asked the Lord to send a famine to win the people unto their God. God sent the famine in nineteen B.C. For three years the famine took its toll. Thoroughly disciplined by hardship and sorrow, the people turned to God and repented of their evil ways. They pleaded with their chief judges and rulers to ask Nephi to use his power in their behalf with the Lord to turn away the famine. Nephi asked the Lord to send rain and the rains came. The people recognized Nephi as a prophet, a man of God, having great power and authority given him from God. During this time Lehi was “. . . not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Helaman 11:19).

Peace was among the people for several years, but by eleven B.C. the Gadianton band of robbers was revived. The band grew in numbers until it was large enough to defy the armies of the Nephites and Lamanites. By seven B.C. the people “. . . did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wicked-

ness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction" (Helaman 11:37).

God had blessed and prospered the people as long as they placed their trust in him. Because a majority of the people had chosen to be wicked, their government itself was endangered.

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world

. . . and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved (Helaman 12:3-5, 23).

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Distinguish between Cezoram and Seezoram.
2. Why does the Lord find it necessary to chasten his people?
3. Why did the Lord give Nephi power over the elements?
4. What often happens to a people when God blesses them abundantly?
5. What made Lehi and Nephi such great missionaries?
6. What happens to representative government when a majority of the people choose iniquity?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 35—"But When Thou Doest Alms Let Not Thy Left Hand Know What Thy Right Hand Doeth; That Thine Alms May Be in Secret; and Thy Father Who Seeth in Secret, Himself Shall Reward Thee Openly" (3 Nephi 13:3-4).

Edith S. Elliott

For Tuesday, December 6, 1955

Objective: To point out that alms should be given in secret and the Lord shall reward openly.

IT is the nature of women to be generous. Usually a mother's whole life is one of giving to her family. Relief Society members are well schooled in the meaning of sharing, giving, helping, alms, compassionate service, generosity, and other related words and phrases. In fact, the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to see the needs of our brother and alleviate them. To love

our neighbor as ourselves will bring the blessings of eternity to this earth.

The friendly Lebanese writer and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, says, "Your friend is your needs answered And he is your board and your fireside. For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace" (*The Prophet*, page 66). May each of us be that friend.