

Book of Mormon 25
They Taught with Power and Authority of God
Alma 17-22
By Lenet Hadley Read

I. The Sons of Mosiah were powerful missionaries because of their spiritual preparations.

A. We too can be more effective missionaries when we specifically prepare to do so.

B. In preparing to serve a mission to Ireland and re-reading the scriptures, I realized how many of them spoke of our great Latter-day missionary work. One example: "I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth" (Isaiah 41:15). I realized this meant **the Lord would make Latter-day Israel itself into a new powerfully sharp threshing instrument.**

C. Being inspired by many scriptures like this and the powerful testimonies of the Book of Mormon, I overcame any fears. I was actually quite moved by just how much the earnest study of the scriptures does increase our testimony and does make us bold in testifying. Thus I delighted in going forth and bearing my testimony to many.

II. Ammon was a great missionary because he served those outside of his faith.

A. Ammon's example shows how reaching out to serve those outside our faith can greatly soften the hearts of the most hard hearted.

B. The Lamanites were arch enemies of the Nephites and considered "beyond redemption." It was Ammon's service to the King that began to soften his heart (See Alma 18:2, 18-20).

C. Similarly, when we serve others not of our faith, we soften animosities toward the Church.

After returning from my mission in Ireland I decided the best community service I could give was to the Red Cross. I knew it was an organization which served people of all faiths and all walks of life. Service through this organization allowed me to strengthen the faith of less active members outside my ward boundaries, and to soften the hearts of some anti-Mormons. Through service, I had the opportunity to have a pleasant and meaningful conversation with a Baptist pastor in our community.

More recently I have taught classes in Elder Quest, which is a continual education program for seniors of many faiths. It was rewarding to find and emphasize common beliefs among all of us.

If we give all of our service to those within our faith, how can we change the hearts of others? Service outside our faith enables us to build brotherhood, breaks down religious barriers, and we have more missionary opportunities.

I have long felt that our service should be balanced by including regular service to those of our faith and those outside of it.

III. King Lamoni was receptive to the word because his heart was not poisoned with jealousy.

A. Lamoni, a descendant of Ishmael, was able to hear Ammon's words because he was not jealous of his powers.

In fact Lamoni was so unsettled by the events surrounding Ammon's defense of his flocks that he dared not even call Ammon into his presence (Alma 18:11). But that fear was not jealous fear that his own power was threatened, but righteous fear that his own actions had been unworthy --- a mark of justice in his character.

He had seen Ammon's great powers. But unlike Laman and Lemuel's jealousy of Nephi and the jealousy of the Sadducees and Pharisees of Christ, Lamoni responded to Ammon's powers with curiosity (Alma 18:18).

While others before him were destroyed because their jealous hearts would not allow them to hear and accept truth, the absence of jealousy saved King Lamoni. The absence of jealousy allows all our hearts to be open to new truths, from whatever source they may come.

As Lamoni's mind was filled with a desire for truth, not envy, he received truth in all its beauty and power. In response to Ammon, "Wilt thou hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things," Lamoni replied, "Yea, I will believe all thy words" (Alma 18:22-23).

IV. It was also King Lamoni's humility which allowed the clearing of darkness from his eyes.

A. Lamoni's response to Ammon's words is amazing. Most of what Ammon said had to be hard to hear. It was counter to everything he had been taught. Especially when Ammon "rehearsed ... the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael" (Alma 18:38). One would certainly not want to hear such criticisms about one's fathers. And this version of past history was coming from a hated Nephite. It would have been easy for Lamoni to reject him as a biased source. The traditional story was that Nephi had usurped the place of honor belonging to the older sons, and thereby the right and power to rule (See Mosiah 10:12-17).

The anger against Nephi was still alive, as shown by Lamoni's father. "Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar? ... Behold, he [Nephi] robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property" (Alma 20:10,13).

In addition to the fact that Ammon's teachings would be hard to bear, it is certainly not the way of kings to humble themselves before anyone and become teachable, especially an enemy.

Yet King Lamoni was humble enough to listen. **And so his humility also saved him.**

V. Through a keen spiritual experience, the scales of darkness were removed.

A. Because of Lamoni's absence of jealousy and his humility, he was blessed with a special spiritual experience. First he cried to the Lord for mercy, for himself and for his people. Then he "fell unto the earth, as if he were dead" (Alma 18:42) and remained that way for three days. Many thought he was dead.

B. Many cultures have no tradition of swooning; **other cultures do!** Sister Kaye Judd, wife of Daniel Judd, a mission president in Ghana, says this episode in the Book of Mormon was verified there. **"Falling to the ground" in a swoon is something people there often experienced.**

1. This is also a part of the Native American culture!

In the late 1700's in New York State, a Seneca Indian leader by the name of Handsome Lake, lay ill and very saddened by how far his once proud people had fallen, many seeking refuge in alcohol. His wife heard him cry out, "So be it", and found him lying near the door, senseless. She and others thought he was dead. They were preparing to bury him when someone discovered his heart was still warm. They waited through the night and into a second day. When he finally awoke, he said he had been taken by three messengers, dressed in white shining clothes, on a journey into the Heavens where he was taught many truths that could save his people. He was eventually led to a brilliant place, where he was told he could not enter now, but which would hold a place for him when he returned after this life. While on this journey, he was taught many truths consistent with Latter-day Saint beliefs (*This Land: Willard's Cumorah Land*, pp. 114-136, based on research of Willard Bean of Native American traditions. He was sent by the First Presidency to live in Palmyra, N.Y., in 1915 to care for the Joseph Smith Farm).

C. Furthermore, some of us might recall the joy we have felt when just a small portion of darkness regarding a simple principle has been replaced by light and understanding. So we can catch a hint of the vast joy that was Lamoni's as a heavy burden of darkness and ignorance gave way to a great and beautiful light. Particularly we must be sensitive to the joyful transition from belief in a vague "Great Spirit," with an indeterminate effect on people's lives, to a knowledge of the glory and goodness of the true and living God, who created man in His image, suffered with and sustained him through all tribulations, and would offer His Son to redeem him, then promise him the powerful joys of Eternal Life. **Here was indeed cause to be overcome with joy.**

VI. These mock "deaths" and "rebirths" pointed to the future reality of "death" and "rebirth."

A. Did not the Lord have great purpose in these events? The seeming "deaths" and then "reawakenings" of Lamoni and the others, were **witnesses of the actual rising from physical/spiritual death to physical/spiritual life --- through Christ.** Just as there was purposeful witness in Jonah's three days of "death" in the belly of the fish and his subsequent "resurrection" (Matthew 12:40), so there was purposeful witness here. Bringing life out of death was what Christ's coming was all about. The hope and belief in that coming and its promise had been previously lost to the Lamanites.

This was the time of a great breakthrough, **of the need for great miracles ---** to bring back to God's bosom a people who had been lost for hundreds of years. The Lamanites needed these great witnesses that men could truly be reborn after death --- because of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, the king after being reborn testified, "behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth ... and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name." (Alma 19:13). The queen arising exclaimed, "O blessed Jesus who has saved me from an awful hell!" (Alma 19:29).

1. President Daniel Judd and his wife said that it was extremely common in Ghana for those who came into the church to have first experienced a "dream" which prepared them for truth.

VII. Ammon's great love softens the heart of Lamoni's father, and leads to even greater love.

A. Many things helped bring about the great changes among the Lamanites: The power and authority in the teachings of the sons of Mosiah; Ammon's service; Lamoni's absence of jealousy and his humility; the deep spiritual experience of death and rebirth.

B. But the final conquering was by love.

When King Lamoni's father came across his son and Ammon, he certainly did not feel any love. So great was his anger, the great King sought to kill Ammon first, and then his own son.

But Lamoni's father was "astonished exceedingly" when he beheld Ammon's love for Lamoni. He saw Ammon endanger his own life to save Lamoni. Because of this great love, great righteousness came to pass.

Ammon's brothers were freed; Lamoni's father was converted; the gospel was preached to the people of Ishmael; synagogues were built. King Lamoni's Father rejoiced over his people, personally teaching them and freeing them from all oppression.

C. The King manifest true conversion when he did not force his new faith upon his people. It requires far greater wisdom and faith, like unto that of God the Father and Jesus the Christ, to provide for the teaching of truths to those who will listen, and then allowing those taught the freedom to worship "according to their desires" (Alma 21:18-23).

But this wisdom, done with love, will produce the greatest results: A free people who serve God and keep His commandment, not out of subservience or fear, but out of their own deep love.