

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #12
“SEEK YE FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Jacob 1-4
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Quote of the Week: “The Book of Mormon is the most remarkable book in the world from a doctrinal, historical, or philosophical point of view. Its integrity has been assailed with senseless fury for over 170 years, yet its position and influence today are more impregnable than ever.

“The Book of Mormon did not come forth as a curiosity. It was written with a definite purpose—a purpose to be felt by every reader. From the title page we read that it was written ‘to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.’ The message it contains is a witness for Christ and teaches the love of God for all mankind. Its purpose is to bring people to accept Jesus as the Christ. The book tells of the actual visit of Christ to ancient America and records the teachings and instructions He gave in clarity and great power to the people. The Book of Mormon substantiates the Bible in its teachings of the Savior, speaks of Christ more than any other subject, and teaches that our Savior is the Redeemer and Atoner of mankind, constantly emphasizing that He is the central figure in God’s plan of salvation. This divine record makes converts to its message and to His Church, which teaches it” (David B. Haight: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2001, 28).

INTRODUCTION: Perhaps it is strange to begin with a conclusion, but some of Jacob’s most precious insights into his own life came at the end of his writings as he finished the work of engraving his messages to us on the small plates.

And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old; and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi, wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn

people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days. (Jacob 7:26)

Jacob does have one other thing to tell us—a promise reminiscent of the final declaration of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 33:11)

I bid you farewell, until *I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God*, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen. (Jacob 6:13, *emphasis added*)

I look forward to that encounter with Jacob. Few men in the history of the world seem to have been as devoted to truth and righteousness as Jacob, son of Lehi.

1. JACOB MAGNIFIES HIS CALLING FROM THE LORD (Jacob 1)

As we begin this discussion of the ministry of Jacob among the Nephites, we ought to insert a note about the priesthood authority under which the Nephites functioned. Elder B. H. Roberts explained it this way:

There was a priesthood that administered the ordinances of [the] gospel, and as the gospel was a higher law than the law of Moses, it is reasonable to conclude that the priesthood which administered in those ordinances was a higher order of priesthood than that conferred upon Aaron and the tribe of Levi, and undoubtedly the higher priesthood could, on occasion, administer in the ordinances of the inferior law. It was, doubtless, this higher order of Priesthood that such characters as Abraham, Melchizedek, and other prophets in Israel held, and by which they administered in sacred things. *It was this order of priesthood that was held by Lehi and Nephi, and which the latter conferred upon his brothers, Jacob, and Joseph.* The former referring to his priesthood says, that he had been "ordained after the manner of this (the Lord's) holy order," that being the way in

which this higher priesthood, of which I am speaking, is designated throughout the Book of Mormon. Called also a priesthood "after the order of the Son of God." It was this priesthood, therefore, that was conferred upon the Nephites--not the Aaronic priesthood--and by which they officiated in sacred things; of things pertaining to the gospel as well as to the law given of Moses. The justification for administering in the things of the law by this priesthood consist in the fact that the superior authority includes all the rights and powers of the inferior authority, and certainly possesses the power to do what the inferior authority could do. (B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, Vol.3, p.469, *emphasis added*)

Since there were no Levites in the colony of Lehi, the priesthood by which they functioned was exclusively Melchizedek until after the coming of Christ among them in 634 A.D. The ordinations to the offices of priest and teacher spoken of in the Nephite record do not refer to the Aaronic Priesthood.

Among the Nephites, brethren holding the Melchizedek Priesthood were selected, consecrated teachers, and given teaching and administrative powers and responsibilities. (1 Ne. 2:22; 2 Ne. 5:19; Mosiah 23:17; 25:19; 26:7; Alma 4:7.) They had jurisdiction over the churches and, along with the priests, were "to preach and to teach the word of God." (Alma 23:4.) They had power to baptize (Alma 15:13), a privilege not enjoyed by teachers in the Aaronic Priesthood. (D. & C. 20:58.) (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.776)

Jacob tells us about his calling and his feeling about that calling.

For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi. And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come

upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:18,19)

From Jacob we learn at least three great lessons about what it means to *magnify an office unto the Lord*. Notice what Jacob did:

1. **He obtained his errand from the Lord** (Jacob 1:17). A danger in a church as well-organized as ours is that we will fulfill all of our callings in pretty much the same way that those who held them before us fulfilled them. There is nothing wrong with that unless the Lord has something else in mind. The fact that the Lord has called *us* to a responsibility, rather than someone else, suggests that we ought to find out if he has something special in mind for us to do. The following statements might prevent us from seeking the Lord's will as diligently as Jacob did.

"We have always handled the lessons in the High Priests this way. What's wrong with it?"

"We've never been able to get very many members of the Gospel Doctrine class to read their scriptures. There is no reason to expect things to change now."

All of our inhibitions and excuses may be perfectly reasonable, but Jacob would want to know what the Lord thought about it. And he would probably want us to know too. There is a suggestion of how to obtain some of this information in the D&C. The Lord., as he reveals the need for the church to build a temple at Kirtland, gives several purposes for temples. One of them is "That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine . . ." (D&C 97:14) Perhaps part of our preparation for any new calling ought to be a visit or two to the temple to *obtain our errand from the Lord*.

2. **Jacob took the responsibility for his calling** (see Jacob 1:19). He

taught “the word of God with all diligence . . . laboring with [his] might . . .” He was willing to answer for the sins of the people if he did not fulfill his calling in the correct way. This attitude about duty is reminiscent of the statements of other prophets on the same matter. For example, Pres. John Taylor said:

“God will hold you responsible for those whom you might have saved had you done your duty. How many of you can say, My garments are clean from the blood of this generation? I speak in behalf of the nations and the people thereof, and the honest in heart who are ignorant of God and his laws” (J.D., Vol. 20, p. 23).

D&C 4 teaches us to serve with all our ability and effort, “that [we] may stand blameless before God at the last day.” (D&C 4:2; see also Mosiah 2:15; 1 Thess. 2:9)

3. **He labored diligently.** “Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. 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 1:7,8)

Another part of Jacob’s duties given to him by Nephi was to become custodian of the small plates and to continue the work begun by Nephi in engraving on them.

Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven. And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a

few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi . . . And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people (Jacob 1:1,2,4)

In D&C 24:3 the Lord said something to Joseph Smith about magnifying a calling:

Magnify thine office; and after thou hast sowed thy fields and secured them, go speedily unto the church which is in Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester, and *they shall support thee*; and I will bless them both spiritually and temporally . . .(*emphasis added*)

Joseph Smith lived on 13 acres in Harmony, Pennsylvania. The date of this revelation is July(!) of 1830. And Joseph still had not planted his crops. He had given his effort, his time, his strength, to his calling. But the Lord did not want Joseph to excel in farming. He was promised that the Colesville saints would support him. He had a work to do for the Kingdom.

And in temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling. Attend to thy calling and thou shalt have wherewith to magnify thine office, and to expound all scriptures, and continue in laying on of the hands and confirming the churches. (D&C 24:9)

2. JACOB WARNS AGAINST THE LOVE OF RICHES, PRIDE, AND UNCHASTITY (Jacob, 2,3)

Jacob identifies three problems among the Nephites with which he will have to deal. Two are given here:

And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son. Yea, and they also began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride (Jacob 1:15,16).

1. Immorality
2. Materialism/pride

To these may be added one other

3. Racial prejudice.

Jacob discusses materialism and pride first. He has been commanded to (see Jacob 2:11).

And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they (Jacob 2: 12,13).

This seems to be a meaningful message for our day. Many of us have “begun to search for [riches] . . . in the which this land . . . doth abound most plentifully.” I have heard people, at times, use verses from Jacob 2 to justify this pursuit. Perhaps we ought to give ourselves Jacob’s test on riches:

1. [2:12] Are you seeking for wealth or riches? (“Seek not for riches . . .” D&C 6:7; 11:7).
2. [2:13] Can you resist the temptation to think you are better than others when you have more than they do?
3. 2:16] Can you resist the pride that may come with wealth and that may destroy your souls?
4. [2:17] Do you think of your brethren like unto yourself?
5. [2:17] Are you familiar with all and free with your substance?
6. [2:18] Is the kingdom of God more important to you than any business or financial success?
7. [2:19] Do you really have a hope in Christ
8. [2:19] Do you seek for riches for the intent to do good?
9. [2:20] Do you recognize that all you have is a gift from God?
10. [2:21] Do you truly believe that all humans are as precious as you are?
11. [2:21] Do you understand (and live as though you understand) that the true purpose of life is to keep the commandments and glorify God?

Jacob would have been pleased to conclude his rebuke of the Nephites at this point.

And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime, my heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you. (Jacob 2:22)

The grosser crime is immorality. It is a subject upon which so much is said in our day, the vast majority of it being said immodestly and irreverently. It has become a major theme of media and conversation. Jacob feels differently about it:

And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God . . .

Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds. But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God. (Jacob 2:7,9,10)

But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. . . . (Jacob 2:23)

Much discussion and some confusion has arisen because of the reference in these teachings to the practices of David and Solomon, both of whom had “many wives and concubines . . .” (Jacob 2:24). Some have used this passage to argue against the practice of plural marriage in any dispensation or at any time—and particularly as practiced by the Mormons in the 19th century. Take a careful look at the language of this and the following verses. Verse 24, after referring to the marital practices of David and Solomon, continues, “. . . which thing **was** abominable before me, saith the Lord.” The use of the verb *was* rather than the verb *is* suggests a specific application of this description. And for David and Solomon it was abominable, for it cost them both dearly. David lost his exaltation over the matter (D&C 132:39). Perhaps Solomon did also (See 1 Kings 11:1-5)

To the members of Lehi’s colony, those whom he had led forth “out of the land of Jerusalem” (2:25), he gave this commandment: “. . . my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none . . .” (Jacob 2:27) Again, the words *among you* in verse 27 suggest a commandment given specifically to this group. Without these words, this becomes a very different injunction.

And of course the Lord leaves himself with all of his options in this matter: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.” (Jacob 2:30)

But let us return to the iniquity among the Nephites. Jacob calls immorality a “grosser crime” (2:22,23). Throughout chapter 2 he uses phrases that speak with great power about the tragedy of immorality. These are words like *abominable, sorrow, mourning, wickedness, abominations, cries of the fair daughters, captive, sore curse, destruction, great condemnation, greater iniquities, broken the hearts of your tender wives, lost the confidence of your children, sobbing of their hearts*, and finally, *many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds*. For another image of a heart *pierced with deep wounds*, turn to the 38th Psalm, verses 1-14, and mark the words that define David’s agony following his transgressions.

Solomon, speaking of immorality, sends powerful images across the ages to us. He compares immorality to a woman and says of those that yield to her enticements,

With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. . . . Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. (Proverbs 7:21-27)

Later he says it this way:

Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell. (Proverbs 9:16-18)

Jacob knew that *the dead are there* and that *her guests are in the depths of hell*.

This matter of immorality extends beyond illicit physical contact between people. The New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants make a very clear case against immorality of the mind. D&C 42:23 instructs us this way:

And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out.

D&C 63:16 expands the warning:

And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear.

JACOB WARNS AGAINST RACIAL PREJUDICE

Jacob deals next, in the context of his discussion of immorality, with this matter of racial prejudice. “The Lamanites,” he says, “are not filthy like unto you” (Jacob 3:3).

Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father--that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them. And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people. Behold, their husbands love their wives, and

their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator? O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God. (Jacob 3:5-8)

The commandment in this case is no less explicit than the previous ones:

Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers. (Jacob 3:9)

This is a worthwhile lesson for all of us. We ought to worry less about the differences and the sins of others and spend more time dealing with our own filthiness.

4. JACOB TESTIFIES OF THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST (Jacob 4)

Jacob tells us in Jacob 4:1-3 a little about the difficulty of making the metal records. And he tells us why he has gone to the trouble: he wants to “give our children and also our beloved brethren a small degree of knowledge concerning us . . .” (4:2). Also he hopes that his brethren and his children might thereby “learn with joy and not with sorrow . . .” (Jacob 4:3).

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us (Jacob 4:4).

The interaction of Jacob and the righteous Nephites with the Law of Moses seems to be a much different thing from the interaction of the Jews with this same law.

And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness . . . (Jacob 4:5)

The results of this obedience and devotion are conditions for which we all must long.

Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea (Jacob 4:6).

This extension of divine power must not lead to pride of course. We are not permitted to glory in our own goodness, our own righteousness, our own humility. It is all grace—a gift of the Father to his children. He will remind us of this if we need reminding:

Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things (Jacob 4:7).

In the recognition of our utter dependence on the atonement and on the redemption and goodness of the Son and the love of the Father, we will certainly come to the conclusion that Jacob came to.

Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all

his works (Jacob 4:10)

CONCLUSION: The life of Jacob cannot have been easy. He was born in tribulation in the wilderness to a wandering family driven from its home by the threat of death and the decree of the Lord. His people were lonesome and solemn. (How many Nephites can there have been in those early years?) They were hated by their brethren and were required to spend their days in wars and contentions. Jacob tells us that he and his people mourned out their days. But Jacob never flinched nor faltered. He found out what the Lord wanted him to do and then he did it. Obediently, selflessly, tirelessly, he magnified his calling and labored for the welfare of his people. What a blessing it would be if someone should one day speak as highly of us as the Book of Mormon speaks of Jacob.

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