

[LESSON #14]

“FOR A WISE PURPOSE”

Enos, Jarom, Omni, Words of Mormon

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

A second powerful testimony to the importance of the Book of Mormon is to note where the Lord placed its comings forth in the timetable of the unfolding Restoration. The only thing that preceded it was the First Vision. In that marvelous manifestation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned the true nature of God and that God had a work for him to do. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the next thing to follow.

Think of that in terms of what it implies. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon preceded the restoration of the priesthood. It was published just a few days before the Church was organized. The Saints were given the Book of Mormon to read before they were given the revelations outlining such great doctrines as the three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, or work for the dead. It came before priesthood quorums and Church organization. Doesn't this tell us something about how the Lord views this sacred work? (Ezra Taft Benson, “The Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1992, 2).

INTRODUCTION: An interesting pattern appears in the Bible that closely corresponds with the structure of the Book of Mormon. Most students of the scriptures know that the books of Kings and Chronicles roughly cover the same time period as the early books of the Book of Mormon, but that the accounts contained therein differ slightly in perspective and presentation. The reason for the dual record and the diversity of content is, at least in part, a result of the role of those responsible for the records. The Books of 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings were a record of the events occurring during the reign of the kings of Israel and Judah. The books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles tell the story of the same time period, but the records thereon were kept by the religious leaders of the two nations. Jewish tradition tells us Ezra was the author of Chronicles.

It was out of this time period that Lehi led his people to the ocean and thence to America, where record keepers followed the same pattern—one record for the kings and another for the religious leaders.

As we complete our study of the small plates of Nephi, it is worth noting that the preservation and compilation of two records has an apparent basis in the historical model of the Bible as well as in the revealed will of the Lord.

1. ENOS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF, THE NEPHITES, AND THE LAMANITES (Enos 1)

Among other things, Enos teaches us by example of four great principles associated with powerful prayer focused on a particular need. Interestingly enough, all of them can be written beginning with the letter “A”. This assists greatly with efforts to remember the lessons. The words are:

1. **ALONE:** Enos made his first great petition while he was hunting. In the course of his pursuit of beasts, he had a deep and rich experience and stopped hunting and started praying. His prayer, at least in terms of its location, was much like the prayer of Joseph in the Sacred Grove. Joseph said, “After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God.” (JS–H 1:15) Amulek taught, “But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.” (Alma 34:26) President Kimball said “We, too, ought to find, where possible, a room, a corner, a closet, a place where we can “retire” to “pray vocally” in secret.” (*Ensign*, Oct. 1981, p. 4)
2. **ALOUD:** Enos knelt before his maker and “cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication. . . . I did raise my voice high that it reached the heavens” (Enos 1:4) Nephi said it this way: “I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, My God . . .” (2 Nephi 4:35.)

Nearly one hundred times in the Book of Mormon some form of the verb “to cry” is used to denote prayer. A “cry” is usually vocal. Amulek indicates this in his stirring sermon on prayer when he counsels: “And when you do not *cry unto the Lord*, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually.” (Alma 34:27, emphasis

added.) In other words, when we do not or cannot pray vocally, then we should pray in our hearts. (Ted Gibbons, *Put off Thy Shoes*, p. 68)

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

We recall the many times the Lord instructs us to pray vocally. "And again, I command thee that thou shalt pray vocally as well as in thy heart; yea, before the world as well as in secret, in public as well as in private. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 19:28.) So central is this to our prayers and personal religious life that the Lord instructed the priesthood brethren to "visit the house of each member, exhorting them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties. (*Ensign*, October 1981, p. 2.)

3. **A LOT:** Not all answers come at the first petition. Our repeated requests are not an effort to change the Lord *but to change ourselves*. Read the seventh paragraph in the entry under *Prayer* in the *Bible Dictionary*. We are not trying to get the Lord ready to answer our prayer, but to get ourselves ready to receive the answer he wants to give us. "All the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens." (Enos 1:4) Speaking of this experience of Enos, Pres. Harold B. Lee said,

"I once read that scripture to a woman who laughed and said, "Imagine anybody praying all night and all day." I replied, "My dear sister, I hope you never have to come to a time where you have a problem so great that you have to so humble yourself. I have; I have prayed all day and all night and all day the next day and all night the next night, not always on my knees but praying constantly for a blessing that I needed most. (*The Improvement Era*, October 1966, p. 898.)

Boyd K. Packer said,

Sometimes you may struggle with a problem and not get an answer. What could be wrong?

It may be that you are not doing anything wrong. It may be that you

have not done the right things long enough. Remember, you cannot force spiritual things.

Sometimes we are confused simply because we won't take no for an answer. (*Ensign*, November 1979, p. 21.)

4. **ANSWER:** After we have prepared ourselves and done “the right thing long enough,” the answers will come: “And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed. And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.” (Enos 1:5,6) I think we must have a great faith in the willingness of the Lord to speak to us. Joseph Smith said, “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another . . .” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345)

There is at least one other aspect of prayer demonstrated by the experience of Enoch. We learn reading this tiny book that prayer is hard work. Review the following phrases and consider what they teach about the way Enos prayed and about the way we ought to pray.

- ' “I will tell you of the **wrestle** which I had before God . . .” (Enos 1:2)
 - ' “I cried unto him in **mighty prayer** and supplication” (Enos 1:4)
 - ' “**All the day long** did I cry unto him” (Enos 1:4)
 - ' “I did **pour out my whole soul** unto God. . .” (Enos 1:9)
 - ' “while I was thus **struggling in the spirit** . . .” (Enos 1:10)
 - ' “I prayed unto him with **many long strugglings** . . .” (Enos 1:11)
 - ' “After I had **prayed and labored with all diligence**, the Lord said . . .” (Enos 1:12)
 - ' “I **cried** unto him **continually** . . .” (Enos 1:15)
- [emphasis added in all verses]

The message of these phrases is that prayer—effective prayer—is hard work. I am not speaking here of “saying prayers” which often seems to be a routine recital of familiar phrases in a praying position. I am talking about “praying”; about “conversing” with our Father in Heaven.

Enos prayed for himself and then for the Nephites. Finally he prayed for the Lamanites “with many long strugglings.” Notice Enos’s description of these people he is praying for:

And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

Both the efforts of the Nephites and the prayers of Enos for a people apparently as lost and fallen as the Lamanites are powerful evidence of the expectations of God for his disciples. We must not spend all our efforts and all our prayers on those who look most like Mormons. The lesson of the scriptures is that you cannot tell who will repent just by looking. Almost all the things that will make a man a true disciple are hidden from the natural eye. The Lord taught us that we “are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect . . .” And how do we recognize them? “Mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts.” (D&C 29:7)

We ought to mention here (since Enos does) that the Nephites had problems of their own:

And the [Nephite] people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand. And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things--stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. And after this manner do I write concerning them. (Enos 1:22,23)

2, THE NEPHITES PROSPER THROUGH CONTINUAL REPENTANCE

(Jarom 1)

Jarom, the grandson of Jacob, perceived the same lack of spiritual discipline in the Nephites that his father had observed. He said:

Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; nevertheless, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land. (Jarom 1:4)

But the attentions of these two great leaders and their assistants had a salutary effect.

And there are many among us who have many revelations, for they are not all stiffnecked. And as many as are not stiffnecked and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith. And now, behold, two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land. They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict. (Jarom 1:4,5)

Inasmuch as the Nephites kept the commandments, they prospered (Jarom 1:9), but the prophets were obliged to warn and threaten them.

And it came to pass that the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments, but should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the land. (Jarom 1:10)

Jacob in his own day had made a similar prophecy, one that was to be fulfilled before the end of the small plates.

And the time speedily cometh, that except ye repent they shall possess the land of your inheritance, and the Lord God will lead away the

righteous out from among you. (Jacob 3:4)

But Jarom and his fellow-laborers sought diligently to prevent it from happening.

Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them. (Jarom 1:11)

3. OMNI, AMARON, CHEMISH, ABINADOM, AND AMALEKI KEEP THE RECORDS (Omni 1)

The Lord has often commanded the righteous to depart from among the wicked in order to find an environment less destructive to religious sentiment. Lehi received such a command. Nephi did also, and left the Lamanites behind after their arrival in America. Now Mosiah will fulfill the prophecy of Jacob (Jacob 3:4) quoted above, and lead the righteous away once again.

Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness-- And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him. And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla. (Omni 1:12,13)

Thus the unrighteous Nephites were left behind to contend with or to join the Lamanites, and the political arrangement of the Nephites underwent a radical change by the absorption of a new group of Israelites.

The migrations of Lehi and Nephi and Mosiah ought to teach us. When the prophet tells us we need to be somewhere we are not, we ought to follow him. We have the spectacular opportunity to sit at the feet of a living prophet in our own living rooms. What a blessing it is to hear his words and the words of his fellow workers, and to hear them with no more effort for most of us than is required to watch a basketball game or a TV movie. When in the history of the world has it been so convenient to learn what the prophet has to say? I hope that there are none of us languishing in the Land of Nephi when we ought to be moving in among the Mulekites in Zarahemla.

4. MORMON ADDS THE SMALL PLATES OF NEPHI TO HIS ABRIDGEMENT OF THE LARGE PLATES (Words of Mormon)

The cohesiveness of the Book of Mormon is a constant amazement to me. With so many opportunities to confuse the reader—with different books and groups and authors and historical activities, the Book is a fortress of consistency. The Words of Mormon are one example of the remarkable structure in this book that bears a constant witness of its truthfulness. No man could have held the threads together by innate intelligence and unflinching bravado without the threads of the narrative unraveling somewhere. The message of the Words of Mormon, together with their location and structure are one more witness to me of the inspiration moving the writers of the Book of Mormon.

Note (verse 1) when the Words of Mormon were written. The date at the bottom of page 143 is a huge jump from the date on the previous page.

It appears that Mormon, as he wrote about the life of Benjamin, searched among the records available to him, perhaps for additional insights and information about this wonderful king. He found the small plates of Nephi. He liked what he found enough that instead of extracting pertinent information from the small plates for his record, he included the entire set of plates with his abridgement..

And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will. (Words of Mormon 1:7)

Mormon then proceeds to give us enough information about King Benjamin to tie the record of the small plates to the abridged version of Mosiah on the large plates. We'll take a look at Benjamin in our next lesson.

CONCLUSION: We have again watched in these pages a number of revelatory processes at work. Enos's prayers and answers; Jarom's witness of revelations and communion with the Holy Spirit; Amaron's testimony of the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies; Mosiah's flight following a warning from the Lord; and finally, the testimony from Mormon, who tells us a great deal about how revelation usually comes.

For thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me . . . he worketh in me to do according to his will.
(Words of Mormon 1:7)

This is the process by which most revelation comes—the Spirit working in us in that remarkable process we call the “still, small voice” by which we are told in our minds and our hearts (D&C 8:2,3) what to do or how to do it.

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