

“ETERNALLY INDEBTED TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER”

(Mosiah 1-3)

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: The Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the everlasting Gospel--the record of the ancient Nephites, translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith, by the gift and power of God in him--that we may come to a knowledge of the principles of the Gospel in simplicity and in purity. It makes clear many dark sayings of the Jewish Scriptures, as they have come down to us. It sheds a flood of light over the Bible; it contains the key of knowledge and understanding; and it is more precious than all the works of modern times, and is worth more. . . . there is more to be learned out of it, my young friends, that is calculated to prove of real worth and blessing to the soul, than can be acquired at all the universities, colleges and schools of science and of modern times. . . . Therefore, study the Scriptures; acquaint yourselves with the Book of Mormon. Read them in your Sunday Schools; read them at your firesides; let them always be found upon your tables, and never permit your families to be without them; and if you are poor sell your coat and buy them; for you are far better without a coat than without the word of God to teach your children. Let our Bishops, and Elders and Teachers attend to it; and enquire whether you are surrounded by those milk-and-water Saints who love fine dress more than the love of God, and who love to furnish their children with musical instruments and toys, and who neglect to furnish them the words of life; if you are, labor with them and teach them in all sincerity the duties of a Latter-day Saint, a Saint of the living God; and God will bless you in your labors, and you will have more joy in doing this than anything else you could do. (Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.23, p.300 - p.301)

INTRODUCTION: Among the great political leaders in the history of the world, King Benjamin shines like the sun. By virtually any standard, he is as good a man and great a king as ever lived. The cursory descriptions given by Amaleki and Mormon show us the intriguing outlines of a life centered in Christ and his service. Here are the things King Benjamin did and did not do as he blessed his people:

- i (Words of Mormon 1: 13) “he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban.”
- i (1:14) “they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out

- of all the lands of their inheritance.”
- i (1:15) “after there had been false Christs, and their mouths had been shut . . .”
 - i (1:16) “And after there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers among the people, and all these having been punished according to their crimes . . .”
 - i (1:16,18) “ and after there having been much contention and many dissensions away unto the Lamanites . . . King Benjamin . . . did once more establish peace in the land.”
 - i (1:17) “king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness . . .”
 - i (1:18) “king Benjamin, [labored] with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul.”
 - i (Mosiah 2:11) “I . . . was suffered by the hand of the Lord . . . to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.”
 - i (2:12) “I . . . have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you”
 - i (2:13) “Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons”
 - i (2:13) “Neither have I suffered . . . that ye should make slaves one of another”
 - i (2:13) “Neither have I suffered . . . that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery”
 - i (2:13) “nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness”
 - i (2:13) “I . . . have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you—“
 - i (2:14) “And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—“
 - i (2:15) “I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.”

This is an election year and candidates are lining up and clamoring for my vote already. I will cast my vote for the man whom I think to be the best choice. But I would be much happier in the voting booth if Benjamin were on the ballot.

1. KING BENJAMIN TEACHES HIS SONS AND HAS MOSIAH CALL THE PEOPLE TOGETHER (Mosiah1)

Mosiah's first description of Benjamin shows him not as a king but as a father. What does Mosiah 1:2,3 tell us that he did for his children?

And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord. And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

Benjamin desired to provide the best of every benefit and opportunity for his children. And he did, by teaching them the scriptures. Erastus Snow (see *Quote of the Week*) would have approved. Benjamin teaches us a great lesson about the benefits of the scriptures and gives great counsel about how to take advantage of those benefits:

I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct. (Mosiah 1:5)

What a blessing to have the opportunity to “have his commandments always before our eyes . . .” Have you taken advantage? Or have you, by reason of neglect of the scriptures., dwindled in unbelief from time to time in your life? Have you sometimes “suffered in ignorance, not knowing the mysteries of God”? I have heard that Mark Twain once said, “ A man who won't read is no better off than a man who can't.” This is certainly true of reading the scriptures. If we do not read the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price and the Bible, what advantage do we have over those who cannot read them for whatever reason?

Have you seen the differences between Lamanites and Nephites, described in these verses by Benjamin, manifested in people in our own culture?

Benjamin gave instructions to his son to call the people together in a great convocation. Mosiah 1 tells us that there were two purposes for this meeting. They are in Mosiah 1: 10,11. What are they?

Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him; and these are the words which he spake unto him, saying: My son, I would that ye should make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land, that thereby they may be gathered together; for on the morrow I shall proclaim unto this my people out of mine own mouth that thou art a king and a ruler over this people, whom the Lord our God hath given us. And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I do because they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord. (Emphasis added)

What did Benjamin give Mosiah besides the crown?

And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him. (Mosiah 1:16)

2. KING BENJAMIN TEACHES THE PEOPLE OF THEIR ETERNAL INDEBTEDNESS TO GOD (Mosiah 2)

Note where the people pitched their tents when they came to hear the words of their King (see Mosiah 2:6). I have come to believe that it is much easier to hear the words of our 'King' if our 'tents' are pitched towards the temple. Where did Lot pitch his tent in Genesis 13:12? What danger does such a decision pose for people in our own day? When angelic messengers came to destroy the city of Sodom and Gomorrah, where was Lot living (See Genesis 19)? What is the modern equivalent of pitching our tents toward Sodom? If a non-member neighbor visiting your home

were asked to make a judgement about where you have pitched your tent on the basis of what is on your walls, on your video shelf, or on your TV, what conclusion would he or she reach?

Benjamin told his people

I have not commanded you to come up hither to *trifle* with the words which I shall speak . . . (Mosiah 2:9, *emphasis added*)

My dictionary says that the verb ‘trifle’ means *to talk or act jokingly, mockingly, or lightly. To play or toy with something.* The noun refers to *something of little value of importance. A trivial thing or idea.* Benjamin does not want his people to *trifle* with his words. How do you trifle with

- i The law of chastity?
- i General Conference?
- i The scriptures?
- i The sacrament?
- i The priesthood?
- i Church callings?
- i Family obligations?

The messages of Mosiah 2 are centered in attitude and service. Benjamin tells us many of the things the Lord has done for us: (see Mosiah 2:20-23)

1. He has created us
2. He has preserved us
3. He has caused that we can rejoice
4. He has granted that we can live in peace
5. He is preserving us from day to day
6. He lends us breath
7. He allows us agency—that is, the power to live and move according to our wills
8. He has granted unto us our lives

And Benjamin lists the things we can do for God: (see Mosiah 2:20-22) There are only three of them:

1. We can be grateful.

2. We can serve him (see also Mosiah 2:17)
3. We can keep his commandments.

Of course, when you do these things,

he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast? (Mosiah 2:24)

When we look at our meager efforts in this light, we begin to see why Benjamin could call us “unprofitable servants (see Mosiah 2:21).” Of course, God’s investment in the welfare of his children and his involvement in their lives is not a business venture from which he hopes to turn a profit. Benjamin’s explanation of the goodness of God makes it seem very much as though God pays reverse interest: *the more we try to repay him for his goodness and blessings, the more his goodness and blessings upon us increase.*

Benjamin uses another interesting word in this chapter---a word that may be worth a lesson of its own:

But, O my people, beware lest . . . ye *list* to obey the evil spirit . . .
(Mosiah 2:32, *emphasis added*)

My dictionary defines the word ‘list’ in this way: “To incline; to bend toward; to tilt.”

For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge. (Mosiah 2:33)

This *listing* is not the same as the “open rebellion” in Mosiah 2:37; it is rather a subtle drifting, a slight inclination, a nearly invisible attraction to the enticements of sin, one that might go almost unnoticed without the right tools. This reminds me of a passage in Amos.

Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto

me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them [ignore their transgressions] any more . . . (Amos 7:7,8)

The purpose of a plumbline on a wall is to see if the wall is bending or tilting or inclining—to see if it is *listing*. God told Amos that he meant to measure Israel with a plumbline, to see if they were guilty of the thing Benjamin warned his people about—of listing to obey the evil spirit.

How would you recognize such a dilemma in your own life or in the lives of your children? What signs would you look for that might indicate inclining? Bending? Tilting? We have been commanded not to ‘list’ but to “walk uprightly before God”

And now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might *walk uprightly before God*, then ye would not murmur because of the truth, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us. (1 Nephi 16:3, *emphasis added*)

And we are enabled to do it, according to Nephi, as we hearken to the truth and give heed to it—the truth of the scriptures, the truth of the intimations of the Spirit, the truth of the words of the living prophets. These are the things that will prevent us from *listing*: from leaning and tilting and bending. And listing is a dangerous pastime, “For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey.” (Alma 3:27)

A man who “listeth to obey the evil spirit and becometh an enemy to all righteousness . . .” (Mosiah 2:37) is in a great dilemma, and

if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever. (Mosiah 2:38)

Of this condition of unquenchable fire and ascending flame, Joseph Smith said,

A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the

saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man. (Joseph Smith, Journal of Discourses, Vol.6, p.8, April 6, 1844)

On the other hand, Benjamin invites this consideration:

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

KING BENJAMIN REPEATS AN ANGEL'S PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND HIS ATONEMENT (Mosiah 3)

Mosiah 3 is a beautiful prophecy about the ministry and atonement of the Savior, in preparation for which the angel announces that he will declare "glad tidings of great joy." (Mosiah 3:3) This phrase, also used by an angelic messenger in Luke 2:10,11 is a wonderful way to describe the overall meaning of any message about the atonement of Jesus Christ: *glad tidings of great joy!*

For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy. (Mosiah 3:4)

Benjamin gives his people a powerful and descriptive account of the redemptive service of Christ (Mosiah 3:5-10), and even though the sufferings enumerated are anything but joyful, still the message is one of "great joy," because the Savior's sacrifice will atone for the sins of at least *three groups* of people:

1. For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned. (Mosiah 3:11)

The blood of Christ atones for the sins of those who do not know the law. This is

not a promise of exaltation. We cannot be saved in ignorance (see D&C 131:6).

2. And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins. (Mosiah 3:16)

The blood of Christ atones for little children. President John Taylor taught:

Without Adam's transgression those children could not have existed. Through the atonement they are placed in a state of salvation without any act of their own. *These would embrace, according to the opinion of statisticians, more than one-half of the human family who can attribute their salvation only to the mediation and atonement of the Savior, Thus, as stated elsewhere, in some mysterious, incomprehensible way, Jesus assumed the responsibility which naturally would have devolved upon Adam; but which could only be accomplished through the mediation of himself, and by taking upon himself their sorrows, assuming their responsibilities, and bearing their transgressions or sins. (John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, p.119, *emphasis added*)*

The finest article on the salvation of children that I have read is in *The Ensign*, April 1977, pp. 3-7. It was written by Elder Bruce R. McConkie and is called "The Salvation of Little Children."

3. For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. (Mosiah 3:18)

The blood of Christ atones for men who humble themselves and repent. Of course a time will come "that . . . none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent." In that day, none will be ignorant of the mission of Christ, because "the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people." (Mosiah 3:20)

CONCLUSION: The mission of Christ is to make possible our reconciliation to God. “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . .” (2 Cor. 5:18) But why was such a reconciliation necessary at all? If we are his children and his love for us is unblemished and eternal, what is the thing that has divided us from him? Sin has made us his enemies. But it has not made him our enemy! His love remains, and the proof of that love is in the mission of his Son.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:8-10, *emphasis added*)

When the scriptures describe us as his *enemies*, they mean to teach us that we are subject to the consequences of the fall unless and until we are regenerated by the atonement.

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

This wonderful sermon of the great and good King Benjamin teaches us this process of being reconciled as well as it is taught anywhere in the scriptures. And certainly the sermon in which he gives us these teachings is one of the five finest sermons ever recorded in the standard works. We will conclude our study of his words in the lesson next week.

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