

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #33

"A SURE FOUNDATION"

HELAMAN 1-5

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: I bear you my witness that I have obtained for myself a personal knowledge that the Book of Mormon is all the Prophet Joseph said it is; that from it radiates the spirit of prophecy and revelation; that it teaches in plain simplicity the great doctrines of salvation and the principles of righteous conduct calculated to bring men to Christ; that familiarity with its spirit and obedience to its teachings will move every contrite soul to fervently pray with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." (Ps. 51:10.) [Elder Marion G. Romney, Conference Report October 1970, p.28]

INTRODUCTION: When I lived in Arizona, I had a home in a community with substantial clay content in the soil. This uncertain foundation from time to time caused a shifting in the ground with the result that houses sometimes cracked like dropped eggs

I lived near the brow of a hill at the east end of town. Across the street on the edge of the hill, two families built homes at about the same time. Because of the questionable composition of the soil of the hill, one of the families, before building, spent much extra time and money driving huge cement pylons into the ground through the hill to the bedrock below. It was on the certain security of those stone pillars that they built their lovely and unusual home. The other family, just a few rods down the road, scraped away the top soil, poured a foundation and built their home.

Two years later, when the rains came and came again and then again, the soil became saturated with moisture. The house built on the clay shifted and cracked, I saw two inch gaps between the bricks on the front wall as I

drove by. The other house remained steady and unaffected, for it was built on a rock. Luke wrote of this very condition. He said,

. . . a man . . . built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. (Luke 6:48)

This is one of the great lessons of these chapters. As you read and ponder, reflect on the calamities that came into the lives of those who elected to build their lives on some foundation other than the rock of Christ.

1. INTERNAL STRIFE DEVELOPS AMONG THE NEPHITES

(Helaman 1-2)

Over the years I have received many letters from former students, mostly written from the mission field, lamenting the time and effort they wasted during their seminary experience because they built their lives on false foundations. One young man was a football and basketball star. He could slam-dunk a Dodge Truck. But he had no time for the scriptures. His happiness, he was sure, could not be Christ-centered. He learned something different in the mission field, and wrote to apologize and agonize over what he had missed.

In Helaman 1 & 2, what do many of the Nephites choose as a foundation on which to build their lives? What mattered most to Paanchi and those who supported him? (Helaman 1:7-11) What circumstances weakened the Nephite nation and their defenses at this time? (Hel. 1:18)

When Coriantumr led his great Lamanite Army against the Nephites (Hel. 1:14-24), what part of the land did they attack? (See 1:24,25) Are there lessons here for us?

Has Lucifer launched an attack against the center of our "land?" Is he trying to disrupt the effectiveness of the oldest and most established parts of the church, or is his work most effective in the mission fields?

What did Gadianton offer his followers for their support of his plans? (Hel 2:5) What made his rewards more attractive than the rewards offered by Christ? Why did Gadianton's followers switch their allegiance from the church to a secret combination?

How far-reaching and detrimental was the influence of Gadianton on the Nephite Nation? (Hel 2:13) Of course this final destruction and the intermediate ones did not occur because Gadianton forced the people of Nephi into wickedness, but because he chose what he and his disciples offered over what Christ and his disciples offered. If you were to identify the composition of the foundation selected by the Gadianton Robbers, what would you call it?

**2. THOUSANDS JOIN THE CHURCH; SOME CHURCH MEMBERS ARE
LIFTED UP IN PRIDE**
(Helaman 3)

By 46 BC, things had settled down a little, except for one small problem "which was in the church." What was it? (Hel 3:3)

[Pride] is an attitude that commences with personal comparisons with others and leads to demeaning thoughts or oppressive actions directed at other sons and daughters of God. The pride of self-satisfaction imposes its primary effects upon the one who is proud. His attitude blocks his own progress. In contrast, the pride of comparison is pernicious because of its tendency to the oppression of others. C. S. Lewis described the pride of comparison when he said: Pride is essentially competitive. . . . Pride gets no pleasure out of having

something, only out of having more of it than the next man. . . . It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Lewis called pride "the utmost evil" and "the complete anti-God state of mind," because this kind of comparison leads men to enmity and oppression and every other kind of evil. This insightful Christian saw that every person should look up to God as "immeasurably superior" to him or her. He continued: Unless you know God as that--and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. (Mere Christianity [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1960], pp. 109-11.) President Ezra Taft Benson expressed a similar thought when he said:

Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. It looks sideways to man and argues who is right. Pride is manifest in the spirit of contention. [("Cleansing the Inner Vessel," Ensign, May 1986, p. 6.); Dallin H. Oaks, Pure in Heart, p.96]

The Chief Judge, Helaman II, and his sons, offered a great example to Nephites with construction problems. (See Hel. 3:20-21) What was the result of this influence on the people? (Hel 3:22)

This new stability led to

. . . exceedingly great prosperity in the church, insomuch that there were thousands who did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance. (Hel 3:24)

These verses in Helaman 3 reflect many of our own

observations about the success of the work in our day.

And so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure. And it came to pass that the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands. (Hel. 3:25,26)

It feels like Mormon gives us this account in this way in order to emphasize the need to be men and women of Christ,

Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (Col. 2:27)

In fact Mormon, using the phrase he so often uses to make the application of his account in the lives of his readers—"Thus we see"-- teaches us this:

Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked-- and land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Hel 3:27-30, emphasis added)

This renewed commitment to the gospel of Christ gives a startling clear picture of the benefits of building on the only sure foundation:

And in this year there was continual rejoicing in the land of Zarahemla, and in all the regions round about, even in all the land which was possessed by the Nephites. And it came to pass that there was peace and exceedingly great joy in the remainder of the forty and ninth year; yea, and also there was continual peace and great joy in the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges. (Hel 3:31,32)

What happened in the 51st year of the reign of the judges? (3:33) How long did it take for this problem to reach epidemic proportions? (Hel. 3:36) What caused this foundational weakness to reappear so suddenly and powerfully among the Nephites? (Hel. 3:36)

4. NEPHITE AND LAMANITE DISSENTERS DEFEAT THE NEPHITES (Helaman 4)

Chapter four of Helaman shows a nation in rapid dissolution, practically free-fall! And note that this is only 5 years after a time when everybody was amazed at the prosperity of the church. This is sobering stuff. We live in just such a day-a day of stunning growth and prosperity. My guess is that our success has not come because Satan is on Sabbatical. This may well be a time for renewed vigilance, especially in the "center of the land."

The Nephites suffer their most dramatic defeat in Helaman 4, at least to this point in the Book of Mormon. They are driven into the land of Bountiful, where they were able to fortify themselves and resist further advances from the Lamanites. What is the cause of these Lamanite triumphs?

Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the

great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God. (Hel. 4:11)

If you like scripture chains, tie Helaman 4:11 to 1 Nephi 2:21-24 > Alma 60:15 > Alma 59:11 > Alma 53:9 > and Alma 51:16.

Mormon was precise in pointing out the causes of these destructions:

And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites- (Hel. 4:12)

I would like to believe—all of us would like to believe—that such a thing could not happen in our day. But Mormon's record, written by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, was written for us. It behooves us to take a careful look at ourselves against the backdrop of Helaman, and to repent if such a thing is necessary. And I am convinced that it is. Otherwise, what happened to the Church among the Nephites might happen to us:

And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare

them in the face. And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples-- Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness . . . (Helaman 4:23-25)

**4. NEPHI AND LEHI REMEMBER THEIR FATHER'S COUNSEL.
MIRACLES ATTEND THEIR MINISTRY
(Helaman 5)**

There is another rather interesting way to teach these chapters. I have often begun a discussion of Helaman 1-5 by suggesting that these chapters may contain the original source for one of the most famous parables of all time—a parable that has been modified by the world, but that still contains a wonderful lesson for people everywhere. I then read to my students a brief version of *The Story of the Three Pigs* (the version in which the first two pigs are eaten by the wolf), and invite them to take a look at Helaman 5:12 and find the parallels.

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because (Hel. 5:12)

The word *parable* comes from the Greek language and means "side by side." A parable is really two stories, side by side, one is told, the other is implied. If you are willing, try to make the application of the elements of

the Three Pigs to our own lives in mortality.

- ' Who is the parent who sends his sons out to seek their fortune?
- ' What is the road down which the pigs travel?
- ' Who are the pigs?
- ' What are the elements with which they choose to build their houses—the straw, sticks, and bricks?
- ' Who is the wolf?
- ' What is the huffing and puffing which causes some houses to fall?

As you review these chapters, notice the kinds of houses Nephites are living in at different points in the narrative. For example,

- # Helaman 4:13 is probably a straw house.
- # Helaman 3:1 might be a stick house.
- # Helaman 3:24-26 seems to indicate a brick house.

You will find multiple examples of all of these kinds of houses throughout these chapters and throughout the Book of Mormon.

CONCLUSION:

This matter of building on the Rock of Christ is referred to throughout the scriptures, as are the storms (the huffing and puffing) of Lucifer. Perhaps the most dramatic passage is found at the end of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon

the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27; 3 Nephi 14:24-27)

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