

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #34

“HOW COULD YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR GOD?”

HELAMAN 6-12
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: From the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, the Prophet learned that one of the two purposes of the book was the “convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.

For the accomplishment of this purpose, the book is from beginning to end a witness for Christ. It’s first chapter contains an account of a vision in which Lehi beheld Jesus “descending out of the midst of heaven” in luster above the noonday sun. (1 Nephi 1:9.) Its last chapter concludes with Moroni’s great exhortation to come unto Christ and be perfected in him, with this assurance: “. . . and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be . . . sanctified . . .” (Moroni 10:32.)

Numerous and great are the stirring testimonies that illuminate the five hundred pages between these two chapters. (Elder Marion G. Romney, C.R., Oct. 1970, p. 28)

INTRODUCTION: Scripture is always composed of words—inspired words—words best calculated by inspiration and prophetic power to convey the truth clearly. Thus, unconditional statements always catch my attention. They seem to show us the way to safety like lighthouses in a treacherous passage of water. In 1 Nephi 15:34, Nephi recorded a remarkable, and unconditional, promise.

And I said unto them that [the iron rod] was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would *never perish*; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. (1 Nephi

15:34, *emphasis added*)

Here we find a promise of exaltation and safety expressed in simplest terms. *If we will hearken and hold fast to the word of God, we will never perish and Satan will not have the power to blind us and lead us to destruction.*

As you read and reflect on the messages of these chapters in Helaman, notice the repetitive unwillingness of the Nephites to hearken and hold fast. Watch what happens to them as they drift in and out of favor with God because of their disobedience. And then, analyze your efforts and the efforts of those you love to “hearken and hold fast” to the words of God. On the basis of this one requirement alone, answer this question: *How safe am I?*

These remarkable chapters will help you answer that question, and will give you fundamental truths to consider as you teach them to others.

1. THE PEOPLE ARE RIGHTEOUS AND BLESSED WITH PROSPERITY (Helaman 6:1-14)

What a surprise it must have been to the Nephites to see the results of the preaching of Nephi and Lehi (see Hel, 5), and to see that

the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith. (Hel 6:1)

These people who had for so long been idle and bloodthirsty and rebellious were now hearkening to the word and holding to it firmly and steadily. But at the same time, something tragic was happening to the Nephites:

For behold, there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that *they did reject the word of God* and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them. (Hel. 6:2, *emphasis added*)

One of the certain duties of those who hearken to the word of God is to carry the message to unbelievers, and so, in An astonishing reversal of roles,

. . . many of the Lamanites did come down into the land of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance. Yea, and many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority, unto the bringing down many of them into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God and the Lamb. (Hel. 6:4,5)

The result of this combination of righteous Nephites and Lamanites was that “in the sixty and fifth year they did also have great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies concerning that which was to come.” (Hel 6:14)

2. THE NEPHITES BECOME PROUD AND WICKED. NEPHI CALLS THEM TO REPENTANCE

(Hel. 6:15-10:1)

People like us who know the power and value of the word of God are forced by these chapters to ask a question: *why would anyone who understands the protection that can come from diligent obedience to the word of God ever turn away from it?*

Mormon uses these chapters to give us at least one of the answers.

For behold, the Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; therefore they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain. (Hel. 6:17)

What are the people holding fast to, rather than the Word of God? Where have they set their hearts? Brigham Young said on one occasion that God would make of us the richest people in the world.

This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greater fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth; and yet they have to be tried with riches, for they will become the richest people on this earth." (Reported in James S. Brown, *Life of a Pioneer*, pp. 122-23 [1900]; quoted in Bryant S. Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1956], p. 13.)

And most of us have been richly blessed with the things of the world. We have been relatively free from anger and wars and bloodshed. Where have we set our hearts? What are we seeking?

In such an environment, secret combinations began to flourish. Gadianton learned how to organize them in the same way Cain learned: by revelation from Satan (see Hel. 6:26-28). The Lamanites destroyed these bands from among themselves, but the Nephites built up and supported them. (see Hel. 6:37,38) "Thus, by the end of the 67th year of the reign of Judges, "they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction." (Hel 6:40)

Nephi returned from the land northward to Zarahemla to find this disastrous condition among his people. In his discussion with those who had gathered to hear him pray (see Hel. 7:11-15) he asked a universal question:

. . . how could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo? (Hel. 7:16)

Well, that is the question, isn't it? To those who for whatever reason let go of the word of God and seek to hold fast to something else—anything else—Nephi would still ask that question. "How could you . . .?"

Chapters 8-9 are an account of a wonderful demonstration of the prophetic power of Nephi. Nephi announces the murder of the chief judge and then the identification of the murderer. When the true murderer had confessed according to the words of Nephi, the people seemed to suitably impressed.

And now there were some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet. And there were others who said: Behold,

he is a god, . . . (Helaman 9:40,41)

The chapter break that follows Helaman 9:41 seems unfortunate to me. Those who are reading chapter may miss the conclusion to this affair in Helaman 10:1. And it is a most important conclusion. These people have been talking about Nephi, calling him a prophet or a god.

And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them. (Hel. 10:1)

Pardon me! If you have decided that the man is either a prophet or a god, perhaps you ought to stick around and see what he has to say, instead arguing about it and then dividing and drifting away, “leaving Nephi alone . . .”

You should remember that there are two things we must do with the word of God according to 1 Nephi 15:24 if we want to be safe. We must hearken *and* hold fast. These people refuse even to hearken.

I remember one General Conference weekend. We were watching at home on Saturday. The TV was on, but I had also turned on the radio in my room, and had retreated there for a little while to listen and ponder. When President Hinckley began to speak, I returned to the living room to watch him; the TV was on and the Prophet was speaking, *but no one was listening*. Some of the children were in the back yard, visible through the window. My wife had retreated to the kitchen for some preparations for lunch. Perhaps someone was in the bathroom. But we had “divided and gone [our] ways, leaving [the prophet] alone” in our living room.

Just how important is it that we hearken? How much does it mean to you to have the chance to listen to a living prophet as he speaks the words of God under the influence of the Spirit?

In a talk entitled “Remembered and Nourished by the Good Word of God,” given at BYU on September 26, 1976, Elder Jeffrey Holland told the story of a visit by President Kimball to Tonga for an area conference. The

conference was to be held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The island of Vivau was 1-1/2 hours away by plane; 24 hours away by boat. But only one boat was available for the Saints of Vivau to travel to Nuku'alofa to hear the prophet speak. The boat was designed to hold 150 people. "If you stuffed bodies into every possible corner of the ship, you could get close to three hundred people," Elder Holland said. Well, what happened? How important was it for these people to hear what the prophet had to say when he was in the neighborhood? "Eight hundred Tongans jammed onto that boat and stood up for twenty-four hours without sleep, without food, without drink, without anything—because they knew that a prophet of God was going to be in their islands and they were not going to miss him for anything in the world."

I told that story in a sacrament meeting a few years ago, and afterward had a Tongan family come forward to speak to me. They had been in Vivau when it happened. They said members were jumping off the dock trying to swim to the boat after it departed, so anxious were they to hear to the prophet.

In order for us to "hold fast" to the word of God, we must hear it. Do you want to hear it that badly? Would you stand for 24 hours without food or drink in order to hear President Hinckley and others speak the words of God?

Many years ago I wrote a story about my own experience with this principle. Here is a part of it.

SHE COULDN'T SIT STILL. The mention of a living prophet had aroused in her a great enthusiasm. As I continued the lesson, the woman was up again and again, her hands flying as she asked for clarification and elaboration. She wanted to know everything she could about David O. McKay and his calling.

"He's a prophet," I repeated. "Like Jeremiah or Moses or Peter." The concept was powerful, and she wanted desperately to understand.

"How does a man get to be a prophet?" she asked?

I spoke then of years of preparation, and talked to her of obedience and faithfulness and study and prayer and service -- those qualities that enabled a man to fulfill such a calling.

"But the most important requirement is that he be called by God," I explained, "because he receives revelation from the Lord and delivers it to the people. He speaks to us the words and the will of God."

"How?"

"Pardon me?"

"How does he speak to you?" she asked. "I mean, how does he let you know what the Lord says and what he expects? When he has a message, how does he deliver it?"

This was a missionary's dream. In nineteen months of proselyting and teaching I had never seen anyone so excited about the restoration of the gospel and the idea of a living prophet. She seemed aflame with a need to know the present word of God.

"Every six months, the Church holds a General Conference," I said. "People attend from all over the world, and President McKay speaks, usually three or four times, during the three days of the conference."

I could see in her eyes a great desire to sit and listen to the living words of a living prophet.

"But, does everyone attend?" she asked. Then, thinking of herself, she added, "What about those who can't come to conference?"

I smiled. This woman was a joy to teach. "The Church publishes a magazine called the *Improvement Era*," I responded. "A month or two after conference, the entire proceedings of the conference are published in one of the issues. Everyone who wants to can get a copy and read the talks."

But there was more, and speaking of the magazine had reminded me. "That isn't all." I was nearly as excited as she was now.

"Every month President McKay writes the editorial in the *Improvement Era*. Every month we get a written message from the Prophet of God."

"That's wonderful!" she exclaimed, and I agreed. In my mind the faucets were running, the baptismal font already filling. She said she had one more question. I didn't mind. After nineteen months as a missionary, I could answer any question about living prophets that an investigator could ask. Any question, that is, except this one. As she spoke, I saw the plug being pulled, the water draining from the font.

Her eyes shining with delight and anticipation, she asked, "What did he

say last month?" (From *The Talking Cat*, pp. 3,4, by Ted L. Gibbons)

I could not answer her question. I knew that President McKay had been writing the editorials for the Improvement Era during most of the years of my life. But I had never read a single one of them.

THE LORD GIVES NEPHI THE SEALING POWER. THE UNREPENTANT NEPHITES FACE WARFARE AND FAMINE

(Hel. 10:2-11:6)

There is a word used twice in Hel. 5 that is not used anywhere else in the scriptures. It is a wonderful word. It is *unwearyingness*.

Nephi was on the way home, "much cast down because of the wickedness of the people . . ." (Hel 10:3), when the Lord spoke to him and used this word.

Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with *unwearyingness* declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such *unwearyingness*, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will. (Hel. 10:4,5)

What an endorsement! The Lord promised Nephi the power to do anything, because he knew that Nephi would hearken and hold fast to the word of God, no matter what happened. The Lord knew that Nephi was utterly reliable, and so Nephi became absolutely free. Parents, can you imagine a situation in which you might say to one of your children, without any reservation, "you can do anything you want to do"? I think it would only

happen if you had the confidence in them that the Lord had in Nephi—if you knew that they would not do anything contrary to your will.

For an additional evidence of Nephi's unwearyingness, note his response to the Lord's command, given during his walk home, that he go and preach repentance to his people.

. . . he *did stop and did not go unto his own house*, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent. (Hel. 10:12, *emphasis added*)

People who truly hearken and hold fast, do the Lord's will at once. Paul, after his conversion, "straightway . . . preached Christ in the synagogues . . ." (Acts 9:20) When Paul had determined to go preach in Bythnia, he had a vision and learned that the Lord wanted him somewhere else. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to into Macedonia." (Acts 16:10) When the Lord gave Abraham the command to sacrifice Isaac, "Abraham rose up early in morning" to fulfill the command. (Genesis 22:3)

1. The people would not listen to Nephi (see Hel. 10:13 ff). A civil war began, and the conflict increased until

. . . there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi." (Hel 10:18; 11:1) Nephi prayed that the people might be deterred from works of warfare and murder by a famine, "and perhaps they will repent and return unto thee." (Hel. 11:4) And the famine began. The people "did perish by the thousands in the more wicked parts of the land. And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi. (Hel. 11:6,7)

The question for us is this one. If we have strayed from the rod. If we are

no longer hearkening and holding fast, what will the Lord have to do to get us back to the rod? Can a good Family Home Evening turn us around? A great and unwearied home teacher? A crisis? A tragedy?

When Nephi returned from the land northward, he longed to have lived in the days of the first Nephi:

. . . then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord— (Hel. 7:7)

I hope we are easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments, slow to do iniquity, and quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord. Helaman 10 and 11 warn us of the consequences if we are not.

Notice, by the way, what happened in the 82nd year, just after the end of the famine and the repentance of the Nephites.

And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God. And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity. And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways. And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction. (Hel. 11:36,37)

Helaman 12 is most interesting. Like Ether 12, it is a full-chapter editorial. Mormon has just taken us through the cyclic lifestyles of the Nephites. He with us has seen them soar and plummet. They have prospered in righteousness and descended into great wickedness, often in the space of just a few years. Perhaps it had sickened him. These Nephites were into re-cycling before it became fashionable.

Mormon begins the first three verses of Helaman 12 with the phrase he

always uses to teach a lesson:

And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him. Yea, ***and we may see*** at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One--yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity. ***And thus we see*** that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.(Hel. 12:1-3, ***emphasis added***)

His frustration at the instability of the Nephites, and of the children of men in general is made evident by the words and phrases Mormon uses to describe the children of men.

- 1.FALSE
- 2.UNSTEADY
- 3.FOOLISH
- 4.VAIN
- 5.DEVILISH
- 6.QUICK TO DO INIQUITY
- 7.SLOW TO DO GOOD
- 8.QUICK TO LISTEN TO LUCIFER

9. QUICK TO SET HEARTS ON WORLDLY THINGS
10. QUICK TO BE LIFTED UP IN PRIDE
11. QUICK TO BOAST
12. QUICK TO DO ALL MANNER OF INIQUITY
13. SLOW TO REMEMBER GOD
14. SLOW TO LISTEN TO GOD'S COUNSELS
15. SLOW TO WALK IN WISDOM'S PATHS
16. DO NOT DESIRE THAT GOD SHOULD GUIDE THEM
17. NOTHING
18. LESS THAN THE DUST OF THE EARTH

Why are we less than dust? Because

. . . the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God. (Hel . 12:8)

The dust moves when God commands, but sometimes we don't. Mormon suggests this same comparison with regard to

--hills and mountains (12:9, 10)

--the earth (12:11-15)

--the waters of the great deep (12:16)

--hidden treasures (12:18,19)

CONCLUSION:

All of us, given a choice between something good and something bad, are bright enough to choose the good thing. *It is dinner time. Do you want to eat road kill or sirloin steak? We are quite skilled at choosing very good over pretty good. I want to buy you a new car. Do you want a Geo Metro or a Mercedes 500SL?*

Why then is it so difficult for so many of us to choose something fantastic over something horrendous? Would a reasonable person choose this:

Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:14)

or this?

Yea, how could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo? (Hel. 7:16)

Mormon's hope is that we will choose eternal life.

And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works. (Hel. 12:24)

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