

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #35

“REPENT AND RETURN TO THE LORD”

HELAMAN 13-16

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: “The Book of Mormon, above all other books that I know of, is the greatest source we have for answers to real-life problems. . . .

“How many times peace has come into the lives of those who are struggling with real problems when they read the Book of Mormon! The examples of spiritual guidance that emanate from the book are without number. My love for the Book of Mormon is ever-increasing. It seems that every time I read from it, new light flows to me from its pages. I love this sacred and choice book” (Elder M. Russell Ballard: “We Add Our Witness,” Ensign, Mar. 1989, 8-9).

INTRODUCTION: Draw a line on a piece of paper. Now draw another one somewhere below it. Label the top one “beliefs” and the bottom one “behavior.” From the perspective of one who has entered into covenants with the Father and the Son, the distance between the top line and the bottom line is “sin.” When we perceive that our behavior does not match our beliefs, we have two choices. We can either modify our behavior to coincide with our beliefs, which is repentance; or we can modify our beliefs to coincide with our behavior, which is rationalization.

Samuel came to Zarahemla during a period of Nephite history when the Nephites became experts at rationalization. It was this attitude (among others) that Samuel sought to destroy. He not only preached with great power and an amazing endowment of the protection of God, but he predicted signs and wonders that would be almost impossible to rationalize; these included the signs of Christ’s birth announced by Samuel, including the night with no darkness, It was even more difficult to rationalize the cataclysmic destructions and the days of darkness that came upon the Nephites at the time of the death of the Savior.

**1. SAMUEL WARNS THE NEPHITES THAT THEY WILL BE DESTROYED UNLESS THEY
REPENT
(Helaman 13)**

Abinadi went to the people of Noah. Alma went to Ammonihah to cry repentance. Nephi, son of Helaman, went to the Nephites. Samuel went to the Nephites also. In each case they were rejected and in each case, they were commanded to return. (See Mosiah 12:1; Alma 8:13-18; Hel. 10:11,12; Hel. 13:1-4) Why do you suppose the Lord would instruct his messengers to return to

people who had already rejected them?

I think we must see this pattern as an evidence of divine love. How many times would you be willing to call your own children to repentance before you abandoned them to the powers of Satan? If we with our imperfect love are able to interact with our children with such patience, what would you expect from a being of perfect love?

This brings to mind once again the testimony of Amulek in Alma 10:6: "I was called many times and I would not hear . . . I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know . . ." D&C 43:25 lists 16 different voices the Lord might use to call us to repentance, Paul was called by a bright light and the voice of Christ. Alma and Amulek by the voice and appearance of an angel. Consider the following example of one who was called in a rather unusual way, but in such a way that he listened.

A man living in Michigan had been born in the church but had gone in the military instead of on a mission and had become fully inactive, had married a non-member and raised a family outside the church. One Sunday afternoon he was mowing the lawn. At the same time, the bishop of the ward where he lived was sitting in his office going over the ward list as bishops often do. He came across this man's name and decided on the spur of the moment to call him on the phone. As the man in Michigan was mowing his lawn, his son came out the front door and hollered, "There's a Mormon bishop on the phone for you." The man shut off the mower and went in to take the call. The bishop said "With a name like — (here the bishop called him by name, a name with both Church History and Book of Mormon roots), why in the hell aren't you in church?" The man answered, "I don't know." Arrangements were made for the two to meet. The man's family were all converted and he later became a counselor in a temple presidency. (Personal correspondence from Elder Larry Gibbons, who heard the story from both the converted member and his bishop)

Samuel on the wall is, in essence, saying, With a name like Nephites, why in the hell are you so sinful!

What two things will the Nephites lose if they continue to rationalize rather than repent? (Hel. 13:8) Losing the word and the Spirit is not just a matter of the Lord pulling a plug. When we know that the prophets will preach against the things we are doing, our natural response is not to listen. It is much easier to rationalize in the absence of condemning voices. In the midst of

such accelerating coarseness, it would be almost impossible to hear the still small voice. Thus, we may lose the word and the Spirit, not from its unavailability, but from our unwillingness.

We all run the risk of losing these two things if we are reluctant to repent.

Notice the consequences that can come as a result of not having the word of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord.

--Hel. 13:5—"the sword of justice hangeth over this people"

--Hel. 13:6—"heavy destruction awaiteth this people"

--Hel. 13:8—"I will suffer them no longer"

--Hel. 13:8—"I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them"

--Hel. 13:9—"I will cause that they shall be smitten"

--Hel. 13:6—"I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence"

--Hel. 13:10—"I will visit them in my fierce anger"

--Hel. 13:10—"there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction"

Only one way exists to avoid this: quit rationalizing and repent.

But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord; yea, thus saith the Lord, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not. (Hel. 13:11)

Samuel does not seem very hopeful about the chances of these people repenting. He describes the way in which they rationalize the messages of repentance that come to them:

. . . if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil. (Hel. 13:26, emphasis added)

If messages come from false prophets or sinners or the devil, there is no need to repent, of course. Convince yourself of this and it is business as usual.

However, when people tell sinners what they want to hear, the rules change:

But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth-- and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Hel. 13: 27,28)

There seem to be prophets in our day who fit this description precisely. Next time you go to the movies, note the messages that are being sent by the words and lifestyles of the heroes and heroines of the film. So many of those messages are contrary to the meaning and the spirit of the gospel of Christ. Lie a little. Steal a little. Cheat a little.. Be immoral a little, or a lot . . . there is no iniquity in any of this . . .

In return for their willingness to teach us these things, we give these folks our money and enable them to be clothed in costly apparel and to ride in expensive cars and to live in mansions.

One day, Samuel warns, it will no longer be possible to repent. In that day, you will cry

O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them. Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those days. But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head. (Hel. 13:36-38)

The phrase "everlastingly too late" in the passage above is terrifying, not just for the content, but also for the context. It is possible to come to a time when it is no longer feasible to obtain some blessings.

Years ago I knew a wonderful young man, who seemed to be a devout member of the church, an excellent athlete, a worthy priesthood holder. But one day he called me and took me for a ride in his vehicle. He finally parked and told me through his tears that his girl friend might be pregnant. His anguish was heart-rending. He was filled with regret and resolve. He said something like this: "If she is not pregnant, I will end our relationship and do whatever I have to do to serve a worthy mission." He made other declarations of intent, but, in fact, it was everlastingly too late for some blessings. He had ignored the counsel of prophets and priesthood leaders and dated steadily when he was not ready for that kind of relationship. He had rationalized on the basis of his strength and wisdom (see Alma 39:2), and was no longer in a position to serve the mission he had dreamed of all his life. It was everlastingly too late.

**SAMUEL PROPHECIES OF THE SIGNS THAT WILL PRECEDE THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF
THE SAVIOR. HE CONTINUES TO CALL THE PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE
(Helaman 14)**

The issue of signs and conversion and obedience gets interesting treatment in the final chapters of Helaman. In most scriptural passages, signs are not good news for unbelievers. In fact, I think one could safely assume that unbelievers seek signs not because they want to believe, but because they do not want to believe. Among unbelievers, signs are associated with wickedness and adultery (see Matt. 16:4). But when the Lord announces signs and then those signs are fulfilled, the wicked are left without excuse. Only a veteran at rationalization could ignore the evidence of the signs proclaimed by Samuel. The signs of the birth of Christ were:

1. It will happen in "five years more" (Hel. 14:2).
2. "There shall be great lights in heaven" (Hel. 14:3).
3. "There shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night" (Hel. 13:4).
4. "There shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld" (Hel 13:5).
5. "There shall be many signs and wonders in heaven" (Hel 13:6).

These signs would be so dramatic—particularly the final three—that Samuel told the Nephites, "ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth." (Hel. 14:7)

The signs of the death of Christ were even more remarkable.

1. There shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up. (Hel 14:21)
2. There shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great. And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate. (Hel. 14:23,24)
3. And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. (14:25)
4. Darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days. (Hel 14:27)

Why all these dramatic events? The angel who told Samuel of these signs also told him the reason:

And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men— (Hel. 14:28)

What will be the result of this?

And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation. (Hel. 14:29)

Signs of such power eliminate any excuse for unbelief. But where there is a will (to sin) there is a way.

SOME BELIEVE SAMUEL AND ARE BAPTIZED. OTHERS HARDEN THEIR HEARTS AND TRY TO KILL SAMUEL
(Helaman 15,16)

. . . wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them . . . (Hel 15:3)

After all the efforts of the Lord to call the Nephites to repentance, it would be a terrible thing if they should continue to rationalize. Samuel points out that the Lamanites—"the more part of them"--- are in the path of duty and are "striving with unwearied diligence" to convert unfaithful Lamanites.

The comparison between recently converted Lamanites (see Hel 15:7-10) and the original Anti-Nephi-Lehies is most interesting.

As the five years predicted by Samuel begin to pass and the signs begin to be fulfilled, we might reasonably hope for a great revival of faith and repentance among the seed of Nephi. And in fact, there were those who believed and went to Nephi for the ordinances. (Hel. 16:1)

But the unbelievers

were angry with [Samuel]; and they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall; but the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows. (Hel. 16:2)

This caused even more conversions (see Hel. 16:3).

The sad truth is, however, that "the more part of them did not believe." (Hel. 16:6) And so they did not repent. Even when they began to witness great signs and wonders (Hel. 16:13), and angels appeared unto men (Hel. 16:14), "the people began to harden their hearts." (Hel. 16:15)

Now the iniquitous Nephites were faced with a great dilemma. They had heard the prophecy of the signs, and had seen the literal fulfillment of some of them. They had found themselves unable to destroy Samuel with arrows of stones. If they are not willing to repent, what will they do?

The final 10 verses of Helaman show us rationalization at its most destructive level. Notice how the Nephites avoid the need to repent.

*(Hel. 16:16) "Some things they may have guessed right, among so many." The fact that Samuel and the believers were correct about a few things was nothing more than a lucky guess. If you throw enough baseballs, sooner or later you are bound to knock over the milk bottles. But since this is nothing more than a lucky guess, there is no need to repent. When we see the

warnings of the prophets being fulfilled, there are those among us who respond in this very way. There have been so many warnings over so many years. They are bound to get a few right.

*(Hel 16:18) "It is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come." As Spock might have said to Captain Kirk, "it is not logical." It is especially illogical since he will not come here. Could a god expect us to change our lives on the basis of something as implausible as this? Of course not! Therefore, I do not need to repent. President Benson encouraged mothers to leave the workplace and come home to their children (See "To Mothers in Israel," Feb. 22, 1988) I heard two lovely sisters who did not want to obey use almost these exact words. It's not reasonable. With inflation and the cost of housing and transportation and food, how can we survive on one income?

*(Hel. 16:20) "We know that this is a wicked tradition." For the Nephites, the wicked tradition was the hope of the coming of Christ, a tradition designed to "cause us that we should believe in some great and marvelous thing which should come to pass, but not among us . . ." Some had these feelings about President Benson's counsel to mothers about coming home and about having children and about not postponing the birth of children. That was all right for Brigham Young and John Taylor. But not in our day. It is a tradition in the church for moms to be at home or to have large families. But in this day, it makes no sense. And since it is a tradition rather than a revelation, I do not need to repent.

*(Hel. 16:21) "And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words." If the evidences of the truthfulness of the work cannot be explained in any other way, then call them the work of Satan. As long as you do not ascribe them to God, you do not need to repent.

*(Hel. 16:22) There is one final way in which Lucifer tries to keep us from repenting or even thinking about the need to repent. "He did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come." If your neighbor is about to fire-bomb your house, you may not be overly worried about the 2nd Coming. I have a dear friend who gives a talk on this subject—which subject he calls distraction. And Satan is a master of distraction. He will do anything to keep you from seeing the real problem, the real issue, the real solution. The talk my friend gives is called, "When Lightning Strikes, Watch Out For Rattlesnakes."

The message of these chapters, at least in part, is that we must bridge the distance between our belief and our behavior by changing our behavior. You have seen how desperately the Lord tried to get the Nephites to do this very thing. Do not allow yourself the luxury of trying the other option—that is, modifying your beliefs to correspond with your behavior. Rationalization is so destructive!

When people know right from wrong and find themselves in the broad way to destruction, they have two ways to go. They may repent and cleanse themselves and obtain eventual peace and joy, or they may rationalize and excuse themselves and try the "escape" road. Those who follow the latter road sometimes so completely rationalize that they become calloused and lose the desire to repent, until the Spirit of God ceases to strive with them. Those who choose to meet the issue, and transform their lives, find it the harder road at first but the more desirable one in the end. (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 82)

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