

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #36
“ON THE MORROW COME I INTO THE WORLD”
3 NEPHI 1-7
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

Every accountable person on earth -- there is no exception; this principle has universal application; no living soul is exempt -- every such person who will read the Book of Mormon, ponder its truths in his heart, and ask God the Eternal Father in the name of Christ, in sincerity and with real intent, "having faith in Christ," shall come to know, "by the power of the Holy Ghost," that the book is true. (Moro. 10:3-5.) All such persons can then, by the same power, testify to the truth of all things pertaining to the glorious restoration now in process. They can say:

We know that the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith because the Book of Mormon is true.

We know that the angelic ministrants conferred priesthoods and keys upon mortals in this day because the Book of Mormon is true.

We know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God because the Book of Mormon is true.

We know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on earth, the one place where salvation may be found, because the Book of Mormon is true.

We know that the Lord Jesus Christ will come in the clouds of glory in due course because the Book of Mormon is true.

The truth and divinity of the Book of Mormon is an absolute and unshakable witness that there will be a second coming of Christ!
(Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, p.181)

INTRODUCTION: Elder George A. Smith told the following story in Salt Lake in 1857. It was repeated in part by Carlos E. Asay in “Opposition to the Work of

God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 67:

This makes me think of an old Chinese fable. A man travelling through the country came to a large city, very rich and splendid; he looked at it and said to his guide, This must be a very righteous people, for I can only see but one little devil in this great city.

The guide replied, You do not understand, sir. This city is so perfectly given up to wickedness, corruption, degradation, and abomination of every kind, that it requires but one devil to keep them all in subjection.

Travelling on a little further, he came to a rugged path and saw an old man trying to get up the hill side, surrounded by seven great, big, coarse-looking devils.

Why, says the traveller, This must be a tremendously wicked old man! Only see how many devils there are around him!

This, replied the guide, is the only righteous man in the country; and there are seven of the biggest devils trying to turn him out of his path, and they all cannot do it. [Journal of Discourses, Vol.5, p.363,364. George Albert Smith, November 1, 1857]

As you study this lesson, ask yourself, “Could anything turn me away from my covenants?” How many “*great, big, coarse-looking devils*” will be necessary to turn me out of the path? Today’s lesson will focus on why some in these chapters endured in spite of all opposition, while others, even after receiving great blessings, quickly “turned from their righteousness.” (3 Nephi 7:8,15)

1. THE SAVIOR’S BIRTH VINDICATES THE FAITH OF THOSE WHO ENDURED.

3 Nephi 1

Review quickly the signs prophesied by Samuel that would accompany the birth of the Savior. According to 3 Nephi 1:1, how many years have gone by since the coming of Samuel? (The five years prophesied by Samuel have passed)

What circumstances described in 3 Nephi 1:1-10 would make this a particularly difficult trial for those who believed Samuel’s words and waited for the birth of

Christ? You may wish to consider some of the following:

- the disappearance of Samuel. (Helaman 16:7,8)
- the departure of the great prophet Nephi. (3 Nephi 1:2,3)
- some began to say the time was past. (3 Nephi 1:5)
- unbelievers began to “rejoice over their brethren.” saying “Your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.” (3 Nephi 1:5,6)
- (3 Nephi 1:7) There was “A great uproar throughout the land.”
- (3 Nephi 1:7) “People who believed began to be very sorrowful.”
- (3 Nephi 1:9) A day was selected to put to death all believers.

In spite of these challenges to their faith, what did the believers do? (3 Nephi 1:8-“They did watch steadfastly”) How can we remain faithful in spite of adversity and affliction? What simple counsel did the Lord give Joseph Smith about how to remain faithful in times of trial? (D&C 122:9-“Hold on thy way”)

What message was given to Nephi after he had prayed all day for his people? (3 Nephi 1:11-14) Why would it have been impossible for Nephi to have had time to share the good news with all the believers?

Consider the circumstances alluded to and described by these verses. How many nights had passed while believers watched with great anticipation the setting of the sun. How many times had their hopes fallen as the darkness came again. How strong their faith must have been to ignore the ridicule of neighbors and other unbelievers night after night!

How would you have done in those circumstances? Are you faithful even when logic and experience tell you that your hopes cannot be realized? Even when the fulfillment of your hopes and dreams seems impossibly remote? What if your life and the lives of your loved ones were at stake. I do not know how many faithful there were, waiting and watching, but I love them.

How do you think the believers felt when the sun went down and it did not get dark? Can you feel their growing hope as the minutes pass after the sunset? Can you imagine the quiet whispers of believers as they watch and wonder and begin finally to know that the sign has come.

I wrote the following paragraphs about this event in a letter to my missionary son on December 20, 2002

Think of . . . the Nephites in the ninety-first year of the reign of the judges. As much as any people who ever lived, the disciples at this time truly had nowhere else to go but to the Savior.

The believers in the night with no darkness were to be put to death on a certain date (3 Nephi 1:9). Thereafter, faithful Nephites must have spent every evening out of doors watching the disappearing sun and the diminishing light. And praying. And the unbelievers must have watched the believers with some derision. These Nephites seemed to actually expect that it could be light at night. For those without faith in a living and powerful God, this must have seemed ridiculous; as ridiculous as Jehosaphat going out to battle a great army with singers rather than soldiers (see 2 Chron. 20). Without difficulty we can imagine the public meetings and the assertions that the time for fulfillment of the prophecy was past. We can believe in a “great uproar throughout the land . . .” (3 Nephi 1:7). To many of the scoffers it must have seemed perfectly defensible to devise a plan to rid an enlightened society of people so out of touch with reality.

I can envision a sophisticated skeptic leaning over the fence, watching his neighbors retreating to the house in accumulating darkness after another evening of unrewarded watching. I can almost hear him: “My friend, give it up! There are only seven days left. Think of your children and your beautiful wife. Come with us. Save them! You cannot really believe that some night this week the sun will go down and you will still be able sit in your yard and read your scriptures. It gets dark when the sun goes down. It always has. It always will.”

The sorrowful appeals of family prayer and personal pleading must have filled the darkened rooms of the homes of the devoted. How hard it must have been to be faithful to the words of Samuel when it *kept getting dark!* No one had seen him for five years (Hel. 16:8). For that matter, the great prophet Nephi, the son of Helaman, had disappeared as well (3 Nephi 1:2). What a test to believe in absent prophets and ancient scriptures when the lives of loved ones were at stake!

Those who remained faithful watched steadfastly (3 Nephi 1:8). These were people who believed in the star and the Son and the manger and the miracle. They were not people who thought it all might be true. They must have been people to whom the Spirit had born powerful, personal witness.

On the night it happened, how many minutes passed after the sun went down before people began to wonder? How long did they wait before they were sure? And in those first stunning moments of awareness, what must those with murder in their hearts have been thinking, waiting hopelessly for the darkness to come?

Among the most believable words in all of scripture are those describing the agnostics on that night.

And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand (3 Nephi 1:16).

They seem to have been paralyzed by their fear. And every time those infidels regained their senses and opened their eyes, it was light! That brightness was a powerful physical witness of a brilliant spiritual reality. The sun had set, but another Son had risen, in a stable, in a manger, in an obscure village in Judea. And that Son would never set. In fact, because of the light of that night, believers knew, it would never be absolutely dark again.

But why the delay? Why require these faithful Nephites to endure night after night of laughter and disappointment, and fear? Why even give their enemies a chance to specify a date for their deaths and make an uproar? Samuel might have said “six years” instead of five (see Helaman 14:2). The Savior, with his omnipotence and omniscience, might have rearranged the sequence and timing of events to insure the peace of his people and bypass the anxiety of those long, dark nights.

“The exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is always subject to the order of heaven, to the goodness and will and wisdom and timing of the Lord. That is why we cannot have true faith in the Lord without also having complete trust in the Lord’s will and in the Lord’s timing. When we have that kind of faith and trust in the Lord, we have true security in our lives. President Spencer W. Kimball said, ‘Security is not born of inexhaustible wealth but of unquenchable faith’” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, pp. 72–73; cited by Dallin H. Oaks, “Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 100).

I tried to teach this reality to my children on Christmas Eve one year. We left the house and made our way to the front porch from where we could observe the setting sun. As it dissolved behind the western mountains, I read to them verses from the accounts in Third Nephi, and then asked them to tell me when they were certain that the darkness was increasing. In fifteen or twenty minutes they were sure enough (and cold enough) to retreat to the house. There we talked about faith in the *timing* of the Lord, and about having faith in Jesus Christ even when keeps getting dark.

“Patient endurance permits us to cling to our faith in the Lord and our faith in His timing when we are being tossed about by the surf of circumstance. Even when a seeming undertow grasps us, somehow, in the tumbling, we are being carried forward, though battered and bruised” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Endure It Well,” Ensign, May 1990, 34).

2. THE NEPHITES PREPARE FOR THE GADIANTON ROBBERS

3 Nephi 2-4.

Even though the sign caused “the more part of the people” to believe, how did Satan begin to turn the people out of the path? (3 Ne 1:22,29,30; 2:1-3) As the people begin to increase in wickedness, what was the greatest problem they faced? (3 Nephi 2:11-13,18)

When the Gadianton robbers announced their intention to destroy the Nephite and Lamanite believers. Lachoneus, Gidgiddoni, and the people began at once to prepare. What can we learn as members of the church from their actions in this time of danger to help us prepare for our own spiritual battles? You might consider some of all of the following:

- < 3 Nephi 3:12. **“The governor . . . could not be frightened . . . therefore he did not hearken”** Why is it important not to make decisions based on fear? Discuss with the class how fear might cause one to “hearken” to temptation. For example, how might fear of losing a friend cause someone to do something contrary to their covenants?
- < 3 Nephi 3:12, 15. **“Cry unto the Lord for strength”** Why is it important to pray for strength *before* the temptations or challenges come? (See also 3 Nephi 13:12)
- < 3 Nephi 3:13,22. **“They should gather together”** Why was it important for the Nephites to gather into one place to defend themselves? How can our associations with other members of the Church increase our ability to withstand the forces of evil? Where has the Lord commanded us to gather? (D&C 101:21,22; D&C 115:5,6; D&C 124:36)
- < 3 Nephi 3:14. **“He caused that fortifications should be built round about them”** What are the “fortifications” that the Brethren have placed about us for our protection? You may wish to discuss with your children or youth classes the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*.

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- < 3 Nephi 3:14. **“Placed . . .guards round about to watch them, and to guard them”** Who are the guards the Lord has placed in his church to watch over us? How does the priesthood fulfill this important function? (See D&C 20:42,53-55; 1 Peter 5:8). How can Home and Visiting Teachers be guards?

 - < 3 Nephi 3:16-19. **“Exert themselves in their might to do according to the words of” their prophets.** What title did Mormon give to Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni? (3 Nephi 3:19--great prophets) How did the Nephites follow the directions of these leaders? (3 Nephi 3:16) What qualifications determined who the Nephites “appointed for their chief captain”? (Spirit of revelation and prophecy) Why is it an advantage in our own time of spiritual warfare to be led by men who have the spirit of revelation and prophecy?

 - C 3 Nephi 3:20,21. **“Prepare ourselves in the center of our land”** Why did the Nephites choose to meet their enemies in the center of their land instead of in other places? What is the lesson for our times from this decision? Why is it so dangerous to fight Satan on his own ground? Think about environments or influences that should be avoided because they place us in increased danger as we confront our enemies. There is another matter to be considered here. How many places are there in the world where you have nearly complete control over the environment? I suspect that outside of our homes, there are very few such places. If we lose the battle with Lucifer to control the environment of our own homes, where will we ever be able to win it? We must win this battle in the “center of our land.”

 - < 3 Nephi 3:26. **“They should be strong with armor”** What armor have we been counseled to put on in the Latter-days? (D&C 27:15-18) Why is it important to put on the **“whole”** armor of God. Note what happened to one man who apparently had only a single place where his armor could be penetrated.

“And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel *between the joints of the harness*: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded” (1 Kings 22:34, *emphasis*)

added).

What was the eventual result of these preparations when the Gadianton Robbers came against the Nephites? (3 Nephi 4) Why were the Nephites so successful? (3 Nephi 4:10,15)

3. MANY NEPHITES FAIL TO PREPARE FOR THE SAVIOR'S COMING.

3 Nephi 5-7

The Nephites defeated the Gadianton Robbers in the 21st year (21 AD). How long would it be before the Savior came among the Nephites? (3 Nephi 10:18,19—about 13 years) Mormon's record shows us that the Nephites and Lamanites came withing a few years of “having great favors shown unto them and great blessings poured out upon their heads” when the Savior came among them. (see 3 Nephi 10:18)

Look at the following numbers. Each number represents one of the years following the defeat of the Gadianton Robbers in 21 AD and the Coming of Christ in 35 AD. Read the verses below that describe the spiritual standing of the Nephites and Lamanite in the years preceding the Savior's coming.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34<--**Coming of Christ**

- C 22-25 AD. 3 Nephi 5:1-8 (Served God with all diligence)
- C 26, 27 AD. 3 Nephi 6:4,5 (Great order)
- C 28 AD. 3 Nephi 6:9 (Peace)
- C 29 AD. 3 Nephi 6:10-16 (Some disputings)
- C 30 AD. 3 Nephi 6:17,18,28 (Awful wickedness. See also 3 Nephi 6:19-30; 7:1-13)
- C 31 AD. 3 Nephi 7:14,21 (Few converted to the Lord)
- C 32, 33 AD. 3 Nephi 7:23,26 (Nephi did cry unto the people)

What would have happened if the people had continued in righteousness for a few more years? Can you remember times in your life when great blessings came because you endured in righteousness in spite of trials and temptations. What a tragedy it would be if we failed to endure and missed our own “great blessings” by only a few years.

CONCLUSION:

Think about the fable used in the attention activity. The Lord has also promised us “great favors and great blessings” but sometimes we must wait for these blessings to come. While we wait, Satan will try to turn us out of the path as he did to the Nephites and as he tried to do to the man in the fable. If we prepare ourselves as did the people in the time of Lachoneus, and endure, we will receive all that the Lord desires to bestow upon us.

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