

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #43

“HOW COULD YE HAVE DEPARTED FROM THE WAYS OF THE LORD?”

Mormon 1-6; Moroni 9
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

“As I participated in the Mexico City Temple dedication, I received the distinct impression that God is not pleased with our neglect of the Book of Mormon. The object of studying the Book of Mormon is to learn from the experiences of those who have gone before us that blessings come by keeping the commandments of God and that tragedy is the result of disobedience. By learning from the lessons of the past, mistakes need not be repeated in our own lives. You will gain a firm and unshakable testimony of Jesus Christ and the absolute knowledge that the origin of the Book of Mormon, as described by Joseph Smith, is true. Reading and pondering the Book of Mormon and other scriptures brings spiritual-mindedness. The Lord has instructed: "Let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your mind" (D&C 43:34), and "treasure up in your minds continually the words of life" (D&C 84:85)” (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.51)

INTRODUCTION: Few men have ever lived who were like Mormon. A list of his accomplishments would fill pages. At age 15 he received a personal visitation from the Lord (Mormon 1:15). At age 16 he began what is almost certainly the most remarkable military career in the history of the world, a career which lasted 58 years (Mormon 2:16). What qualities did he possess that caused his people to appoint him to the position of commander in chief at age 16? Among other things, most of us have to coaxed and begged to do our duty. Mormon had to be held back (Mormon 1:16,17) What a man? His career began when he was 16, but at age 74 he was still leading his men, and Mormon 6:11 tells us that he led from the front, not the rear! Mormon was also a great statesman, leading his people (when they were willing to be led) under the direction of revelation from Almighty God. He was as important an author as the world has known, preparing a record that has changed

and will change the lives of millions and millions of people, containing a message that, if universally followed, would save the world. (These concepts are paraphrased from *The Upward Reach*, by Sterling W. Sill, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962], pp. 248,249, 252-254)

It is the life and times of Mormon that we will study in this lesson.

1. MORMON IS GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SACRED RECORDS

(Mormon 1)

Do you sense, as I do, a great modesty in Mormon. We are stunned by his accomplishments while still in his youth, but we must read between the lines to appreciate what he is really like.

At the age of 10 years, Amaron came to him and made him custodian of the Nephite records. The reason, according to Mormon, is that Amaron had perceived that he was “a sober child, and . . . quick to observe.” (Mormon 1:2)

There were other reasons than these. I cannot conceive that responsibility for the greatest treasure of the Nephite nation was given to a ten-year-old because he was serious and a quick study. To whom would you entrust your life’s work? No doubt revelation and deep spirituality were a part of Amaron’s motivation, but Mormon will not tell us this.

At age 15 Mormon “was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew the goodness of Jesus.” (Mormon 1:15) Why did he have this experience at such a young age? He tells us he “was somewhat of a sober mind . . .” Is that the whole reason? Must we not believe that he, like Joseph Smith, had poured out the desires of his heart to the Lord, probably in behalf of his wicked people (see Mormon 1:16) who had “wilfully rebelled.”

In his sixteenth year, Mormon was appointed leader of the Nephite armies. Again he gives us a reason: “I being young, and large in stature, therefore . . .” (Mormon 2:1,2) And for no other reason? My skepticism runs rampant! I have no doubt that he was large in stature, but it does not seem likely that in a nation of millions, he was the only large person available. Why, with so few years of experience, was he selected by his people for this duty? And this is a people of whom Mormon says:

“But behold, the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites; and notwithstanding the great destruction which hung over my people, they did not repent of their evil doings; therefore there was blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land, both on the part of the Nephites and also on the part of the Lamanites; and it was one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land.” (Mormon 2:8)

Perhaps the reason for his selection is implied in 3 Nephi 3:19.

“Now it was the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains, (save it were in their times of wickedness) some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy . . .”

Anyway, it seems clear that there is more to Mormon’s character and personality than he is willing to tell us.

What do you suppose Mormon was referring to when he said he had “tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.” ? Have you tasted? If you were asked to pen a paragraph describing the “goodness of Jesus” what would you write? Has that *goodness* influenced your life?

MORMON BECOMES THE LEADER OF THE NEPHITE ARMIES. THE NEPHITES SUFFER IN BATTLE BECAUSE OF THEIR WICKEDNESS.

(Mormon 2; 3:1-16)

Mormon recorded that during his lifetime, with very few exceptions, “wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land. . .” (Mormon 1:13) As he describes the futility of the battles and the destructions of the wars, he shows us over and over the depravity of the Nephite people, for “not withstanding the great destruction which hung over my people, they did not repent of their evil doings . . .” (Mormon 2:8)

There is a lesson for us in Mormon’s descriptions of his degenerate people. I believe we who live in another time of increasing iniquity and awful wickedness can learn great lessons from Mormon about how to remain righteous in the midst of continuing corruption. Consider the following principles:

1. **Love your enemies:** Don't respond the way the Nephites did.

“And they did swear by the heavens, and also by the throne of God, that they would go up to battle against their enemies, and would cut them off from the face of the land.” (Mormon 3:10)

“And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and seventh year, the Nephites being angry because the Lamanites had sacrificed their women and their children, that they did go against the Lamanites with exceedingly great anger, insomuch that they did beat again the Lamanites, and drive them out of their lands.” (Mormon 4:15)

We must not under any circumstances seek revenge, nor must we retaliate in anger.

The Sermon on the Mount shows how to stop the escalation of war and hatred. We are commanded to love our enemies, and do good to them and pray for them. The alternative, which is to hate as we are hated, and to return evil for evil and pain for pain, is to escalate the influence of misery in the world, and support Satan's plan for all mankind (see 2 Nephi 2:18, 27). One of the responses of the “natural man” (see Mosiah 3:19) to injury or insult is to say, “I will do worse to you than you did to me.” That course, if pursued, leads to the awful scenes described in Mormon's letter to his son (see Moroni 9:8,9). Mormon says of the hatred of the Nephites,

“For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death; and they have lost their love, one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually.” (Moroni 9:5)

When you discover a fire in your garage, you do not try to douse it with gasoline. When you discover mice in your pantry, you do not go to the pet store for more mice. When you hit your thumb with a hammer, you do not react by hitting your other thumb. We always look for the remedies that will eradicate the problem: water for the fire, mouse traps for the tiny rodents, pain killer for the smashed thumb. Why then, when we are subjected to misery because of the actions of others, would we respond by causing more misery?

Mormon loved both the Nephites and the Lamanites. He spoke of his feelings about his wicked people:

Behold, I had led them [the Nephites], notwithstanding their wickedness I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and my soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long for them; nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts. (Mormon 3:12)

Chapter 7, the final chapter of Mormon's writings, is an invitation to "the Lamanites of the latter-days to believe in Christ, accept his gospel, and be saved" (see chapter heading, Mormon 7).

2. ***Never give up:*** We discussed earlier in this lesson the free-fall of the Nephite nation. The Book of Mormon itself warned the Nephites of their ultimate destruction (see 1N. 12:19; 15:5; Enos 1:13; Hel. 13:5,9). Mormon must have known from his immersion in the records and the actions of his people that the time of their destruction was at hand.

"And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away."
(Mormon 2:15, emphasis added)

Even when he poured out his soul in prayer for them, it was "without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts." (Mormon 3:12)

When he relented from his refusal to lead them (Mormon 3:11), he tells us he

"was without hope, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them; for they repented not of their iniquities, but did struggle for their lives without calling upon that Being who created them." (Mormon 5:2)

He even tells us that he knew the Nephite struggles for victory were "all in vain" because of the number and nature of their enemies (Mormon 5:6)

He tells Moroni and us that he did not dare to recommend his people to God, for fear God would smite him (see Mormon 9:21). But he never quits trying! In spite of the hopelessness of this situation, Mormon wrote to his son, Moroni as follows:

“And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 9:6)

3. ***Maintain your integrity; make no compromise with evil:*** The time came when

Mormon knew that the iniquity of the Nephites had removed all hope of assistance from the Lord.

“And it came to pass that I, Mormon, did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people, because of their wickedness and abomination” (Mormon 3:12)

“And it came to pass that I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard, according to the manifestations of the Spirit which had testified of things to come” (Mormon 3:16)

As I read this, I thought of the courage of Joseph Smith as he excommunicated the three witnesses. What a danger these men posed to him and to the work of the Lord if they were to recant on the testimony they had given to the world. But like Mormon, Joseph refused to compromise. Something was wrong and it needed action. Both acted without consulting the consequences.

4. ***Seek support from righteous people:*** Even though Mormon lived in a world of nearly undiluted iniquity, there were righteous beings about to lend support. He sought them and received instruction from them and gave instruction to some of them. The most obvious of those were Amaron (Mormon 1:2); Christ (Mormon 1:15); the Three Nephites (3 Nephi 28:26); and Moroni, his son (Moroni 8, 9). In addition, during part of the ministry of Mormon, there must have been one or more

righteous congregations, for the text of Moroni 7 is a transcription of the words spoken by Mormon to his “beloved brethren” as he taught in a synagogue.

This is a significant example for all of us. As we struggle toward exaltation and sanctification, we must seek the support of those who know enough to help us on our journey

“The way to get along in any important matter is to gather unto yourselves wise men, experienced and aged men, to assist in council in all times of trouble. Handsome men are not apt to be wise and strong-minded men; but the strength of a strong-minded man will generally create course features, like the rough, strong bough of the oak. You will always discover in the first glance of a man, in the outlines of his features something of his mind” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.299)

This counsel also brings to mind the oft repeated advice of Alma to his people at Helam:

“And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments” (Mosiah 23:14)

We must seek support from righteous people, people of experience: worthy, godlike folks who walk in his way obediently.

5. ***Have an anchor and a sail in God and Christ:*** This wonderful imagery for people trying to sail the uncharted waters of their own morality. Mormon uses it to describe people who have neither anchor or sail:

“For behold . . . they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind. They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father. But now, behold, they are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they”

(Mormon 5:16-18)

I have been inclined from time to time to regard the gospel with its attendant truths and certainties as a collection of sails and anchors: sails to move us forward along the path that leads to eternal life, and anchors to hold us safely on the path. What better anchor is there for the soul of a man than the iron rod? What better sails than the hope of heaven, a fulness of joy, eternal family unity? What parts of the gospel plan keep you from wandering? What hopes do you nourish that cause you to press forward with a steadfastness?

You have seen people who have neither sail nor anchor. The world in the year 2004 is filled with them—men for whom the greatest good is the thing that brings the quickest happiness or thrill or reward. They are indeed as chaff before the wind.

3. MORMON EXPLAINS THE PURPOSES FOR THE RECORDS HE HAS ABRIDGED AND WRITTEN.

(Mormon 3:17-22; 5:8-24)

In Mormon 3:17-19 Mormon identifies his audience. He is writing to the house of Israel, including the remnant of the descendants of Lehi, and to the ends of the earth. Mormon tells us that his message is for the “twelve tribes of Israel.” James wrote his message “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad . . .” (James 1:1)

“I write unto you all,” he declares (Mormon 3:20) Why?

“And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil . . .” (Mormon 3:20)

But there is another reason:

“And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very

God” (Mormon 3:21)

In Mormon 5:8, Mormon suddenly stops his historical narrative to speak to *us*. This portion of chapter 5 is worth a careful review. His messages to the Gentiles are particularly significant, for, we are told, we “have care for the House of Israel” (Mormon 5:10)

4. IN THE FINAL GREAT BATTLE, ALL BUT 24 OF THE NEPHITES ARE KILLED.

(Mormon 4; 5:1-7; 6; Moroni 9)

The time may finally come when a society, a nation, a city, an individual can no longer be reclaimed through repentance. We have been taught that the Spirit of the Lord will not strive with man always (see Gen. 6:3; 2 Nephi 26:11; Ether 2:15; D&C 1:33, etc.). A time can come when the pervasiveness of wickedness can cause a segment of the Lord’s children to forfeit the right to occupy real estate, especially in a promised land.

By the 6th chapter of Mormon, that time has come for the Nephites. When the twenty-four survivors of that final battle were gathered at the top of Cumorah, they became the final, solemn witnesses to the inescapable imperatives of the Judgements of God. The land for miles in every direction must have been littered with the bodies of the dead—men, women, children—all of them sacrificed on the flaming altars of Nephite iniquity.

Mormon’s anguish at this sight reaches out across the ages to us, wrenching our hearts and souls with a reflection of his own sorrow:

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people,
and I cried:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord!
O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with
open arms to receive you!

Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold,
ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!

But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return. And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to be judged according to your works and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

CONCLUSION: Moroni, who had been a witness to the destruction of the Nephites, added a postscript to the Book of Mormon, a highly condensed recitation of a storyline made familiar to us in the record of the Nephites. He added the Book of Ether to the plates given him by his father.

This book is a message for us. It was engraven when there were no Nephites to read it and no Lamanites who wanted to read it. It was a message from one who knew of the consequences of trying to live in the land of promise on principles that did not come from God.

“And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off” (Ether 2:9,10)

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