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The Book of Mormon—Christ in America

Editor(s): Mary Connelly Kimball

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Lesson Department

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in March)

BOOK OF MORMON—CHRIST IN AMERICA

Assignment

Read the matter in Third Nephi, chapters 8 to 20, including both. The time is A. D. 34. It will be helpful if the section about Christ can be read in Reynold's *Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*, and chapters 28, 29 and 30 of Evans' *Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon*.

Outline of the Lesson

- I. Three hours of natural convulsions.
- II. Three days of total darkness.
- III. The Voice out of the darkness.
 1. Gathering of the people.
 2. Their lamentations.
 3. Message of the Voice.
- IV. The great silence.
- V. Christ appears.
 1. Introduction by the Father.
 2. Message of Jesus.
 - a. Physical test of His presence.
 - b. Instructions concerning: Baptism, Harmony in the Church, The twelve disciples, Things to do in life, The sacrament of the Lord's supper, The "other sheep," Attendance at religious meetings.
 3. Acts of Jesus before the multitude.

- a. Heals the sick, etc.
- b. Blesses the children.
- c. Prays before the people.

Story of the Lesson

The lesson opens with great convulsions of nature—thunder and lightning, earthquakes, floods, and other eruptions. Whole cities, with their inhabitants, are completely destroyed in these events. After this there comes a period of excessive darkness—three days of it—when it is impossible to strike a light of any kind.

This period coincides with the time of the crucifixion of Christ in Palestine and that during which His body lay in the tomb.

Then comes the Voice from out the darkness. It is heard by all the inhabitants of the continent. Following this is a great silence. Afterwards, when some two thousand five hundred people are gathered near the temple in the land of Bountiful, Christ appears.

On His first appearance among the Nephites Jesus invited the people to come forward and touch the wounds in His hands and feet and side—which they did. Then He taught them essentially the same principles and ordinances that He had done in Palestine—repentance, baptism, confirmation, with their common basis, faith; prayer, the

sacrament of the Lord's supper, attendance at religious meetings; and the various ideas in what is the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospels, with differences.

Also He chose twelve disciples, the understanding being, presumably, that these men would organize the Church. Before He ascended to heaven after this first visitation, He healed the sick, the blind, the deaf, the halt, and whoever in the multitude was afflicted in any way; and blessed the children amid heavenly manifestations.

Notes

This description of Christ's appearing to the Nephites is a valuable addition to what is given in the New Testament concerning Him, and deserves the most careful attention from this point of view. A great many Christians have yearned for more information about Jesus than is given there, more intimate details concerning Him. Well, here it is, if they will receive it. For, as a matter of fact, we *do* get a more intimate view of the Master in Third Nephi, which has been called the Fifth Gospel, than we do in the biblical account. This is due to the greater, more child-life faith of the Nephites. Jesus says this Himself.

For one thing, He speaks more plainly to the Nephites than to the Jews. Observe what He says about contention, about baptism, about the "other sheep."

For another thing, He gives way to His feeling of joy and thanksgiving here more than He did among the Jews in Palestine. He seems to be under less restraint. He does not hesitate to weep in the presence of the people around Him. Across the waters He wept only in the presence of a few close friends. And then, too, He opens His heart in praise

and thanksgiving to God before all the people.

And for still another thing, He grants even the wishes of the multitude. He heals all their sick. He did not do that in Palestine. Only occasionally did He perform miracles there. Besides, note how He yields to their unexpressed desire that He stay longer. They are hungry, too, and tired.

This is a great scene—one of the very greatest in all history.

2. Skeptics have found fault with the *Book of Mormon* on account of the almost identical language of what is sometimes called the "quotations" from the King James version of the Bible. The fact is, however, that this is not a real objection to the Nephite Scriptures, as is sometimes claimed by outsiders.

Most probably, when the Prophet Joseph came to a "quotation" in the Nephite Record from, say, Isaiah or Matthew, he turned to the passage in the version of the *Bible* with which he was acquainted, and copied it. But that it was not a mere copy, set down without thought or inspired guidance, is evident from the differences between the passage in the *Book of Mormon* and that in our *Bible*.

For instance: Blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled *with the Holy Ghost*. In both of these verses the italicized words are not in the *Gospel* of Matthew. There are many other instances of a similar nature, where the *Book of Mormon* version clarifies the thought or adds to it.

A difference on a larger scale is to be found in the thirteenth chapter of our lesson, beginning with the twenty-fifth verse.

Scoffers have ridiculed the idea

that Jesus should advise people generally to take "no thought" as to what they eat and drink, and trust to God for "food and raiment." The fact is that Jesus was speaking, not to the multitude when He said these and similar words, but rather to His twelve disciples. The *Book of Mormon* makes this clear. But one might be led to think, from the passage in Matthew, that He was speaking to the crowd.

It will be found that in very many instances where there are "quotations" in the *Book of Mormon* from the Hebrew *Scriptures*, the variations always throw light on the meaning or situation.

3. There is the same tolerance and wide sympathy on the part of Jesus in the *Fifth Gospel* that there is in the other *Gospels*. Only, in the Nephite Record it is shown in a slightly different way.

While the sacrament is not to be administered to those who are "unworthy" of it, yet they are not to be "cast out." On the contrary, they are to be worked with and prayed over, not spurned and ignored; for, says the Master, "ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them." Here, too, Jesus exhibits His great concern for the human personality, for salvation. The disciples are to "continue" to "minister" unto those who manifest indifference to Christ.

4. And this thought leads to another not far removed from it in kind. It is what Jesus calls "my doctrine." Here is the bedrock of the Christian ideal.

The idea is stated thus: "Ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in no wise receive these things. And again I say unto you,

ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God." Jesus deems this idea so important that He repeats it in almost identical words.

What does He mean?

Note that He says nothing here about faith. That is taken for granted. For no one will repent unless he first believes. But He stresses repentance. It is a great principle of life. Life consists of struggle, of trial and error. The main thing is to keep struggling against the tide of evil in the world. So repentance is just as necessary after baptism as before it.

He also emphasizes baptism. Baptism is not only a sign of our obedience and a symbol of a new birth, but it is a token of absolute trust. In baptism we put ourselves utterly in the hands of the one who is baptizing us. Here is a child-like simplicity.

Some people would have us believe that to be like a child is the worst thing that can happen to us. But what is the main trait of childhood? Is it not unconventionality, open-mindedness, an eagerness to learn, teachableness? Persons who object to this statement of Jesus about being like a child always assume that blind obedience is the main characteristic of childhood. It is not. Obedience need not be blind at all. Intelligent obedience is not. There is always a reason why we should obey those who know more than we do. As a matter of fact, do we not accept others' word in politics, in government, in education, in science, in business. Why should we not do the same thing in religion?

5. Jesus discourages "contention" as being "of the devil."

Contention is not the same with discussion and a good-natured ex-

change of views. Not all the wisdom of the world is in one head. Some of it is in other heads. In a class, for instance, it is not necessary for anyone to "contend" that his particular opinion is right—even if it is so. Others are entitled to their views, even though they may be in error. On any particular point it is a good thing for everyone to state his opinion, without argument, and let it go at that. Out of all the views there will assuredly come light. In the end, probably, everybody's view will be somewhat different from what it was to begin with—maybe more nearly right, certainly clearer.

Where a class, a debate, a discussion, is carried on in this spirit, the devil can have no leeway. He

always gets his work in where people "contend" over their opinions. This is what Jesus means, most likely.

Questions and Problems

1. Why do you think the people gathered round the temple after the natural disturbances?

2. Find other passages where there is light thrown on biblical verses.

3. Does God bring on calamities, or merely let them come upon the children of men?

4. What differences as to the body are there to be noted, so far as we have information, between Jesus before and after the resurrection?

Work and Business

TEACHER'S TOPIC FOR MARCH

(This topic is to be given at the special teachers' meeting the first week in March.)

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SUSTAIN CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

"No one can survey the history of modern progress—its philanthropy, its reforms, its industrial responsibility, its political democracy—without recognizing that the chief accession of moral force which these movements have received has come from the Christian religion."

"The whole duty of man is not to enjoy God forever, but to descend with the grace of God to the help of man. The Christian Church is not a place of refuge from the world, but a place of training for the world. The Christian life is not a retreat from stormy winds and tides of woe, but an advance

through them; not a hiding beneath the Mercy-seat, but a rising from one's seat for the sake of mercy."

"The sanctified life is the serviceable life, and in that service finds its freedom."

—*Francis Greenwood Peabody.*

"Not always on the mount may we
Rapt in heavenly vision be;

* * * * *

The mount for vision—but below
The paths of daily duty go."

Women, from the beginning, have been great inspirers, great teachers—they have been noted as most ardent supporters of the Church.