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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 30—Moroni and the Nephite Armies Serve Their Country and Their Church

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 30—Moroni and the Nephite Armies Serve Their Country and Their Church

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma, chapters 43-49)

For Tuesday, March 1, 1955

Objective: To show that the Lord will not suffer his people to be destroyed, if they remain righteous and uphold the truth.

Invasions of Lamanites

FOLLOWING Alma's great teachings and admonitions to his three sons, they went forth in the power of the Priesthood among the people to preach the gospel. Alma "himself could not rest" so he also preached.

At this time in the history of the Nephites, about seventy-three years before the birth of Christ, there began a series of invasions by the Lamanites who captured some cities of the Nephites.

During the dark years of war, a great military leader Moroni arose among the Nephites who was named chief captain at twenty-five years of age, and given command of all the armies of the Nephites. Not only was he a great military genius, he

was also a mighty spiritual leader. When Moroni was faced with a decision on the war, he turned to Alma and sought the will of the Lord through him.

The first invasion of the Lamanites was into the land of Antionum, occupied by the apostate Nephites, the Zoramites, who had become Lamanites. Zerahemnah, leader of the Lamanites, wished to ". . . usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage" (Alma 43:8). Through this knowledge of those under him, he recognized that the Amalekites, who were also apostate Nephites ". . . were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were . . ." (Alma 43:6),

and so all the chief captains whom he appointed were either Amalekites or Zoramites.

The intention of the Lamanites throughout the wars that followed was either to destroy the Nephites or bring them into bondage that they might hold sway over all the land. The desire of the Nephites, on the other hand, was to preserve their lands, to be allowed to support their wives and children, to preserve their liberty, and their Church. When successes came to the Nephites, they came because of the righteousness of Moroni, his prayerful conduct of the war, and the valor of his armies who put their trust in the Lord and called upon him to spare them in their dire extremity. However, many of the Nephites, at this time, were unrighteous, and so brought upon all the Nephites afflictions and troubles.

The way Moroni armed his men and fortified his cities as told in The Book of Mormon, reminds one of the way the Europeans did in the Middle Ages. He put on them breastplates, arm-shields, head shields, and thick clothing. Their weapons were the sword, cimeters, bows and arrows, stones and slings.

When the Lamanites observed the protection given the Nephites by their armor, they copied it and armed their own warriors in like manner. However, when they came upon a Nephite city in their new armor, they discovered that the wisdom of Moroni had kept the Nephites a step ahead in the wonderful new way he had fortified the city. (See Alma 50:1-6.)

Battle at Manti

In the beginning of the war, the

Lamanites withdrew from Antionum when they found how well protected the Nephite army was, even though fewer in numbers. When the Lamanites withdrew into the wilderness, Moroni was very desirous of knowing their next point of attack, so he sent spies after them in the wilderness and then:

. . . knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people . . . (Alma 43:23-24).

Through this warning, Moroni prepared the people of Manti, and by dividing his army and through stratagem (for “. . . he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem . . .” (Alma 43:30) because of the evil intentions of the Lamanites), the Lamanites were defeated although “. . . never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceeding great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning” (Alma 43:43). When the Nephites, whose army was less than half as large as the enemy’s, were about to flee, Moroni inspired them with “. . . thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage.” Thus inspired “. . . they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God . . . and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them . . .” (Alma 43:48 ff.)

When the Lamanites saw they were encircled and Moroni saw they were "... struck with terror" (Alma 43:53), so charitable was Moroni that he stopped the fighting and said:

... Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you (Alma 44:1).

He then pointed out that the Lord was with the Nephites:

... because of our religion and our faith in Christ . . . and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith (Alma 44:3-4).

Have a class member read all of Alma 44:4.

Moroni pled with Zerahemnah. If the Lamanites would deliver up their weapons and go their way, and vow to come no more to war against the Nephites, he promised the Lamanites he would spare their lives. Zerahemnah agreed to deliver up his weapons, but he said, "... we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children . . ." (Alma 44:8), nor would he acknowledge that God had delivered the Nephites, but said it was their superior armor.

Moroni said, "... I cannot recall the words which I have spoken . . ." (Alma 44:11), therefore the battle was resumed. But when Zerahemnah rushed forward to kill Moroni, a soldier of Moroni's broke Zerahemnah's sword off at the hilt and took off his scalp. Zerahemnah withdrew among his own soldiers. Many Lamanites then came forth willing to enter into a covenant of peace. These, the Nephites allowed to de-

part into the wilderness. The battle then was waged more fiercely than ever, until finally Zerahemnah capitulated and entered into a covenant of peace, and the remainder of his army departed into the wilderness.

And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands. And thus ended the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written upon the plates of Nephi (Alma 44:23-24).

Alma Entrusts Records to Helaman

The Nephites rejoiced to be delivered from the Lamanites and "... they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceeding great joy" (Alma 45:1). Helaman, son of Alma, continued the record of the wars (Alma, chapters 45-62). Helaman wrote that his father, Alma, came to him in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges. After testing the faith of Helaman by asking if he believed in Jesus Christ, in the words which he, Alma, had spoken concerning the records which had been kept, and, after Helaman's promising to keep Alma's commandments with all his heart, Alma revealed a prophecy to his son Helaman which Helaman was told to record, but not to make known to the people living at this time. Alma declared: "... what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled . . ." (Alma 45:9).

Then Helaman was told of the dwindling in unbelief of the Nephites:

... in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them Yea, and then shall

they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct . . . yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge . . . that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled (Alma 45:10 ff.).

When Alma had said these things to Helaman, he blessed him and also his other sons and “. . . blessed the earth for the righteous’ sake” (Alma 45:15). Alma also said:

. . . Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be . . . this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe . . . for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance (Alma 45:16).

After saying these words Alma blessed the Church and:

. . . departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And . . . he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of. Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses . . . (Alma 45:18-19).

Rise of the King-Men; Title of Liberty

Helaman and his brethren went through all the cities to “. . . establish the church again . . .” (Alma

45:22) and appointing “. . . priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches” (Alma 45:22), but because of pride in their great riches, many would not heed the words of Helaman. The leader of the dissenters who were seeking power was Amalickiah who desired to be king. Thus, in spite of their recent great victory over the Lamanites, the Nephites again became divided and their affairs were:

. . . exceedingly precarious and dangerous Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one (Alma 46:7-8).

When Moroni heard of the dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah, and Moroni rent his coat and took a piece of it on which he wrote:

. . . In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole (Alma 46:12).

The Christians (the true believers of Christ) came forth, and casting their rent garments at the feet of Moroni, they covenanted that they would maintain their rights and their religion so that the Lord would bless them.

Moroni related to them a significant prophecy made by Jacob, father of the twelve tribes. (Have a class member read Alma 46:23-27.)

Then Moroni sent throughout the land rallying to his cause all those who would fight for liberty. When Amalickiah saw that his followers were outnumbered, he fled with them. Moroni sought to intercept them and succeeded in bringing most of the dissenters back

to Zarahemla, but Amalickiah escaped with a small number of men to the Lamanites.

Through treachery Amalickiah made himself king of the Lamanites after killing the king and marrying the queen, but servants who were guarding the king escaped to the land of Zarahemla and joined the people of Ammon. Amalickiah:

. . . was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time (Alma 47:35).

Character of Moroni

The successful conclusion of the series of battles with the Lamanites was due, in large measure, to the character of Moroni. We are told:

. . . Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery; Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God . . . a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people . . . a man who was firm in the faith of Christ . . . Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shak-

en forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God (Alma 48:11 ff.).

At the conclusion of the nineteenth year peace was restored, and there was:

. . . exceeding great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent forth to preach among the people (Alma 49:30).

Questions on the Lesson

1. What were the differences in the objectives of the Nephites and Lamanites?
2. What were the Nephites taught about defending themselves? (See Alma 43:46-47.)
3. Give instances of the truth of the words ". . . we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men" (Alma 46:9).
4. Comment on the significance of the statement ". . . they [Nephites] were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God" (Alma 48:23).

There Will Always Be a Christmas

Adelia M. Pierce

There will always be a Christmas;
It will forever bring
New faith, new hope, new courage,
As joyous carols ring.

And always through the darkness
The Christmas star will shine,
A pledge of peace and freedom
To this land of yours and mine.