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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 32—Peace Comes to the Nephites Through Righteousness

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is to show the necessity of maintaining righteousness within a country in order to withstand the enemies without.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 32—Peace Comes to the Nephites Through Righteousness

Elder Leland H. Monson

Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma, chapters 59-63

For Tuesday, May 3, 1955

Objective: To show the necessity of maintaining righteousness within a country in order to withstand the enemies without.

Moroni's Letter to Pahoran

WHEN Moroni received Helaman's letter in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, he rejoiced over the success of Helaman in his part of the country for winning back the land the Nephites had lost. This information was sent to all the Nephites near where Moroni was, so that they might join in the rejoicing.

Immediately, in response to Helaman's query as to why more strength was not sent him so that he could continue to maintain the re-conquered lands, Moroni addressed a letter to Pahoran, the chief judge, in the land of Zarahemla. He requested Pahoran to send reinforcements to Helaman's armies. Moroni then continued to make plans for winning back the remainder of the cities and possessions of the Ne-

phites still held by the Lamanites. Before he was ready to proceed, however, he learned that the government had also neglected to reinforce the city of Nephiah as he had expected, for it fell into the hands of the Lamanites. This Moroni learned from those inhabitants who escaped and joined him.

... when Moroni saw that the city of Nephiah was lost he was exceeding sorrowful, and began to doubt, because of the wickedness of the people, whether they should not fall into the hands of their brethren. Now this was the case with all his chief captains. They doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people, and this because of the success of the Lamanites over them (Alma 59:11-12).

Moroni was angered with the government because of its indifference to the cause of freedom, and he

wrote a second letter to Pahoran, comprising chapter 60 of Alma, couched in very strong words. Not only did he address Pahoran, but also:

. . . all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war. For behold, I have somewhat to say unto them by the way of condemnation; for . . . ye yourselves know that ye have been appointed to gather together men, and arm them with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind, and send forth against the Lamanites, in whatsoever parts they should come into our land. And now . . . myself, and also my men, and also Helaman and his men, have suffered exceeding great sufferings; yea, even hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and all manner of afflictions of every kind . . . great has been the slaughter among our people; yea, thousands have fallen by the sword, while it might have otherwise been if ye had rendered unto our armies sufficient strength and succor for them. Yea, great has been your neglect towards us (Alma 60:1 ff.).

Moroni then demanded to know the cause. "Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor . . .?" (Alma 60:7). After setting forth the tragic results of their neglect of the armies, Moroni then asked and answered a question which has ever been of vital concern:

Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness? I say unto you, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain; for I say unto you, there are many who have fallen by the sword; and behold it is to your condemnation; For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God (Alma 60:12-13).

Wickedness of King-Men

Moroni told Pahoran that he feared the judgments of God would come because of the slothfulness of the government and declared:

. . . were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies . . . had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; yea, were it not for these king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, at the time we were contending among ourselves, if we had united our strength as we hitherto have done; yea, had it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us; had they been true to the cause of our freedom, and united with us, and gone forth against our enemies, instead of taking up their swords against us, which was the cause of so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, if we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies, for it would have been done, according to the fulfilling of his word (Alma 60:15-16).

In contrast, Moroni depicted the true picture of the condition of the Nephites, with the Lamanites coming upon them, taking over their lands, murdering the people, and carrying women and children away as captives. Moroni even raised the question concerning the personal integrity of all to whom his letter was addressed. He asked if they were neglectful because they sat in the heart of the country in security, and he reminded them of the ". . . thousands round about in the borders of the land who are falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding" (Alma 60:22).

Moroni also said to the Nephite rulers:

. . . Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall

the outer vessel be cleansed also. And now, except ye do repent of that which ye have done, and begin to be up and doing . . . it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great head of our government. And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom . . . I will leave a part of my freemen to maintain this part of our land And I will come unto you . . . if there be even a spark of freedom remaining, behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct (Alma 60:23 ff.).

The great patriot Moroni, lover of righteousness, merciful and kind, lover of freedom, declared that he did not fear their authority or power, he feared his God. He closed his great epistle with the commandment, “. . . Now see that ye fulfil the word of God,” and concluded: “Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country. And thus I close mine epistle” (Alma 60:35-36).

Pahoran's Patriotic Reply

In reply, Pahoran answered Moroni:

. . . I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul. But behold, there are those who do joy in your afflictions (Alma 61:2-3).

Pahoran then confirmed the fears of Moroni in the need of cleansing the inner vessel. The king-men by flattery had won over the people and withheld provisions and freemen from the armies. Pahoran himself had been driven out and had

fled to Gideon with as many men as he could get. From there he had sent a proclamation throughout that part of the land, and the freemen were rallying to Pahoran in great numbers. While the king-men did not dare to come out to battle against Pahoran, they had taken possession of the city of Zarahemla, and had appointed a king Pachus over themselves. This king had entered into correspondence with the king of the Lamanites and had promised to maintain the city of Zarahemla, leaving the Lamanites to conquer the rest of the country of the Nephites. When it was all conquered, then Pachus expected to be made king over the Nephites “. . . when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites” (Alma 61:8).

While Pahoran had been censured by Moroni, he said he was not angered, but rejoiced in the greatness of Moroni's heart. Pahoran did not desire power, save only to retain his judgment seat. He declared, “. . . My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free” (Alma 61:9).

Pahoran stated, as had the other righteous leaders of the Nephites, that the Nephites would not destroy the Lamanites if they had not taken the sword against the Nephites. He even observed with humility:

We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us so to do. But behold he doth not command us that we shall subject ourselves to our enemies, but that we should put our trust in him, and he will deliver us (Alma 61:12-13).

Moroni was asked by Pahoran to

bring a few of his men with him, and to gather such other forces as he could on the way, so that they might conquer Zarahemla. He instructed Moroni to leave Teancum and Lehi in charge of the army, “. . . to conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the spirit of freedom which is in them” (Alma 61:15). When Zarahemla would again be captured, Pahoran promised provisions could be sent to Lehi and Teancum.

Pahoran confided in Moroni that he had been worried as to what course to pursue, as to whether it would be just to fight his Nephite brethren. But Moroni had eased his mind because he had said that unless they repented, the Lord had commanded Moroni to go against them. Pahoran concluded:

See that ye strengthen Lehi and Teancum in the Lord; tell them to fear not, for God will deliver them, yea, and also all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free. And now I close mine epistle to my beloved brother, Moroni (Alma 61:21).

When Moroni had read the epistle of Pahoran, he was very joyful to learn that Pahoran was not a traitor, but his heart was grieved because of the wickedness of the Nephites who had driven Pahoran from the judgment-seat. Moroni followed the instruction of Pahoran, and in whatever place he entered he raised the standard of liberty and joined to his force those thousands who wished to remain freemen and not be brought into bondage.

King-Men Overthrown

When Moroni and Pahoran had joined their forces, they proceeded to

go down into the land of Zarahemla. In the ensuing battle, Pachus was slain and his followers were captured and tried with the king-men who had previously been cast into prison. In compliance with the law they were executed, as refusing to take up arms in defense of their country but rather fight against their country. Thus peace was restored to Zarahemla and Pahoran was restored to the judgment-seat.

Immediately thereafter Moroni had provisions and an army of six thousand men sent to the assistance of Helaman. Six thousand men and a quantity of food were also sent to the armies of Lehi and Teancum. Moroni and Pahoran with a third large body of men marched against Nephiah. Four thousand Lamanites whom they captured on the way, after entering into a covenant of peace, were sent to dwell with the people of Ammon.

Lamanites Driven Out

When Moroni was camped outside Nephiah, he desired the Lamanites to come out to battle against him, but they feared the courage of the Nephites as well as their numbers, so they did not come out to battle that day.

In the nighttime Moroni came upon the top of the wall of the city to discover in what part the Lamanites were camped. He then returned to his army and had them prepare strong cords and ladders which his men could let down into the city on the west side, while the Lamanites were asleep on the east side. By morning all the Nephites were within the walls of the city. When the Lamanites awakened they were so frightened that they sought

to escape by the pass, but Moroni sent his men after them and killed many and captured many others. The remainder fled to the land of Moroni on the seashore. The Nephites regained the city without the loss of one man. The Lamanite prisoners desired to join the people of Ammon, so Moroni was relieved of a great burden, and those Lamanites began to till the fields and raise grain and all kinds of flocks.

As Moroni and his victorious army approached the other Nephite cities held by the Lamanites, they fled before them. Moroni's forces became joined with those of Lehi and Teancum:

And the armies of the Lamanites were all gathered together, insomuch that they were all in one body in the land of Moroni. Now Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites, was also with them (Alma 62:33).

When the two armies were thus facing each other, because of the weariness of both, none but Teancum conceived any stratagem. He, however, blamed Amalickiah and his brother Ammoron for all the wars and bloodshed, and famine, and in his anger, he let himself down over the walls of the city:

. . . And he went forth with a cord, from place to place, insomuch that he did find the king; and he did cast a javelin at him, which did pierce him near the heart. But behold, the king did awake his servant before he died, insomuch that they did pursue Teancum, and slew him (Alma 62:36).

The death of Teancum grieved Moroni and Lehi exceedingly, for:

. . . he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many

exceedingly sore afflictions . . . (Alma 62:37).

On the morrow Moroni drove the Lamanites out of the land and they did not then return against the Nephites. Moroni fortified sufficiently the parts of the land most exposed to the Lamanites, and then returned to Zarahemla; Helaman ". . . returned to the place of his inheritance. . . ." (Alma 62:42) and there was once more peace in the land in the thirty-second year of the reign of the judges, after many years of war.

There had been great wickedness among the Nephites, but they had been spared because of the prayers of the righteous. Moroni yielded up the command of the army to his son Moronihah. Helaman and his brethren again went forth to preach the word of God and regulate the Church. The people humbled themselves and again began to multiply, to become strong in the land and rich. However, they remembered the great mercies of the Lord to them and remained steadfast.

Deaths of Helaman and Moroni

During this happy period Helaman died, in the thirty-fifth year of the reign of the judges, and Shiblon took possession of those sacred things delivered to Helaman by Alma. We find that Shiblon and also Corianton did good continually and kept the commandments of the Lord. Moroni the great prophet-patriot died, ". . . And thus ended the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges" (Alma 63:3).

It was during the next year that Hagoth, ". . . he being an exceedingly curious man . . ." (Alma 63:5) built a large ship in which many

Nephites, with provisions, sailed away, taking their course northward.

The following year Hagoth built other ships, and the first ship returned “. . . and many more people did enter into it. . .” (Alma 63:7) and they sailed again northward, but they were never heard of again.

Many people went into the land northward and Corianton went to carry provisions to them. In the absence of Corianton, Shiblon, before his death, conferred the sacred things upon Helaman, son of Helaman. And all the records which Helaman possessed were written and sent forth among the children of

men, except those parts which Alma had instructed should not go forth.

The Book of Alma ends with the thirty-ninth year of the reign of the judges and completes the account of Alma and his sons Helaman and Shiblon.

Questions on the Lesson

1. What comparisons can be drawn between the internal conditions among the Nephites, and those in countries of the world today?
2. Show how the teachings of Alma to his sons bore fruit.
3. How do you account for the lack of jealousy among the great Nephite leaders?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 32: “. . . My Soul Standeth Fast in That Liberty in the Which God Hath Made Us Free” (Alma 61:9).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, May 3, 1955

Objective: To show that we must hold fast to that God-given liberty which ensures our freedom.

LIBERTY is a privilege for which men have fought and died since the beginning of time. And why have men been so tenacious in defense of this privilege? Because liberty is the God-given right of every individual, and there is inherent within man the desire to act for himself. The plan of salvation was founded upon the principle that man is an agent unto himself, and only by his own volition may he advance.

But liberty is often confused with

license. Liberty gives one the right to do as he wishes only in so far as he does not infringe upon the rights of others, while license may mean the abuse of freedom, or freedom used in contempt of law.

There are two aspects to be considered regarding liberty: the freedom to act, and the responsibility that liberty imposes. Often we think only of the first, and give little consideration to the latter. We may be free to act but not free to avert the consequences of our actions — they