

STUDY NOTES

Lesson 5: Mosiah Chapters 5-7

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Romans 8:14

BEGINNING AS A BEGGAR

King Benjamin's speech found in Mosiah 2,3, and 4 is quite remarkable—in both its content and its effect on the people who listened to it. As we learned in the last lesson, the response of the people to the angel's strong message was particularly powerful. King Benjamin took advantage of their humility (they had fallen to the earth) to pound home a forceful sermon that reinforced the angel's basic message. That message is actually simple when broken into its fundamental elements. They are: 1) There is a Creator God to whom we owe everything good in our lives, and 2) He has given us laws upon which we will all be judged after our lives are over. In this judgment those who are found disobedient will be damned. 3) You are all disobedient to one degree or another. 4) The only way out of damnation is by believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and repenting and taking upon yourselves His name in a covenant relationship.

Many of the people who found themselves under King Benjamin's kingship were in need of conversion. Recall that when Mosiah (the First) came to Zarahemla, he joined with a people who had "at the time that Mosiah discovered them...become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions... and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and *they denied the being of their Creator...*" (Omni 17) Thus King Benjamin's address had a missionary element to it for many of his listeners. The former "Zarahemlites" who had converted to the Law of Moses as it was taught in the Book of Mormon were still fairly new at it. So one of Benjamin's goals in this address was to unite his people in a solid belief in Israel's God and system of worship.

The great power in this message comes from the realization that mankind is in a mortal predicament that requires a Savior. The Spirit poured down upon the people when "they had seen themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth," and cried out "Oh have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ!" This signals their acceptance of Jesus Christ and their desire for His salvation. For those Nephites who had been brought up in the Mosaic Law and customs, they too had to humble themselves, see clearly their own human weaknesses and ask for help to overcome. Like the Jews who would convert to Christ years later, they had to realize that the keeping of the Mosaic tradition was not sufficient to change the fallen nature within. They were in need of radical heart change that could only come through a new covenant that brought "re-birth" and the life-changing influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

ON A SPIRITUAL HIGH

The outpouring of the spirit that came upon the people brought overwhelming feelings of joy and goodness. Filled as they were with that spirit, the people cried out with one voice that they had "no more disposition¹ to do evil, but to do good continually." (Mosiah 5:2) On a superficial reading, this statement could be taken to mean that this whole group of people, including many new converts, never did anything wrong again. In one fell swoop, on their first day as new Christians, they had reached the finish line of life. This view says they were so utterly changed by their covenant that they never again even *wanted* to do wrong—that they were somehow now beyond temptation.

This reading is not, however, supported by the rest of the text, or in fact, by any other scripture or even historical instance. The great conversion to Christ that took place that day put these people on the starting line, not the finish line. There is no magic point we can reach in life that guarantees we'll never sin again because we will never again desire a wrong thing. As long as we live in this fallen world, not sinning is always *a choice* we have to make. That is why King Benjamin warns the people that they must "watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, [or] ye must perish." (M. 4:30) That is also why much of Chapter five consists of King Benjamin's counsel to his people to help them build upon the experience they have had. He warns them to be careful not to fall away from the path

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary gives one meaning of the word "disposition" as: "a state of mind; a feeling;" The example given is from Gulliver's Travels: "I rose up with as melancholy a disposition as ever I had in my life."

they have begun to walk on. Being born again means having a change within that adds the gift of the Holy Ghost to what we already are: a spirit being in a physical body.

Then why *did* the people cry out, “We have no more disposition to do evil”? Because that is how they felt when filled with God’s spirit. That is how such an overwhelming spiritual “drenching” would make any of us feel. If you think of the moments in your own life when you were the most completely filled with the Spirit of God, you will remember that in that moment, you never wanted to do anything wrong again either.

THE CHOICE WE MUST ALWAYS MAKE

We have an inner spirit, clothed in a mortal physical body. When we are born again, we add a third element—the gift of the Holy Ghost, which resides in us and will give us guidance and strength, if we choose to follow it, to walk the narrow path to eternal life. But we must continue to choose the will of the Spirit rather than the will of the flesh as long as we are on the earth. (2Nephi 2:28-29).

The fact that King Benjamin’s people said “We have no more disposition to do evil,” is a perfect example of the New Testament principle that teaches, “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6) Everyone listening to King Benjamin was spiritually minded that day. It would be great if the pull of the flesh disappeared forever when one is born again, but alas, it does not. The task becomes keeping the spirit so strong in our life that we are always “spiritually minded” rather than “carnally minded” so that we always “have no disposition (or feeling) to do evil.”

AFTER GREAT BLESSING COMES THE TEST

It is interesting to note that after great spiritual blessing often temptation comes. The pattern is established in Christ’s life when Satan comes to him with powerful temptations after the spiritual triumph of a 40-day fast. This pattern holds true in the history of our own church. The dedication of the Kirtland temple in Ohio in 1836 came during a modern day season of Pentecost, with many saints having visions, speaking in tongues, seeing and hearing angels, etc. If you had asked people in the middle of this season of spiritual outpouring if they would ever leave the church or turn against the prophet, they would have been shocked. “No! Never!” But not many months later the church experienced the Kirtland bank failure and the greatest period of apostasy it had yet faced. It may even make sense to prepare for the “spiritual letdown” that comes after some important spiritual effort such as teaching a lesson or giving a talk. No one lives forever on the heights of our mountaintop experiences. We must stay a steady course even in the inevitable valleys of life.

THE NECESSITY OF COVENANT

That is why the first step that Benjamin’s people must make is to covenant. A covenant with God is the guide that allows us to “stay the course.” A covenant is also the necessary next step to insure that the power of God will continue to aid and bless you in your pursuit of righteousness. Without it, you only have the power of your own self to try and be good, but the “self” does not have the power to lift and refine and change its own heart. Try actually lifting yourself by your own bootstraps! No, in order to rise to a higher place, someone or something already higher must lift you. This requires humility: “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up.” (John 4:10) Covenants also give us a vision of what we should be trying to be. If we covenant to keep a commandment, that commandment becomes a beacon in our lives.

When we bind ourselves in covenantal contract with the Almighty, He makes available His Power and His Spirit to get the job done. The Holy Ghost can act like a radar beam to a pilot trying to reach a certain destination, and the nearness or distance we feel from the Holy Ghost corrects us as we make our way.

But the “will of the flesh” is still there as well, needing to be resisted and conquered in Christ. Do not think when you find yourself in this battle that you have somehow failed! By continuing to fight the flesh patiently and faithfully you will experience little by little that sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost that eventually makes us partakers of “the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). You will live with “Christ in you”, as Paul puts it. (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27) Remember, even with this gift, Paul said “I die daily...” showing the continuing nature of our struggle. Growth comes slowly and in stages, as a child grows from a baby to an adult, or an acorn to an oak.

Yet it is our covenant that keeps us from despair. Without a covenant in Christ, there is no gift of the Spirit, and man is left to struggle to lift himself by those impossible bootstraps. Any Christian’s life is filled with spiritual highs and lows. If you think that being “born again” means a magical one-time permanent change of nature, you will be easily discouraged as you deal with the stubborn elements in your own personality and genetic makeup that persist and must be patiently struggled against. Being born again gives you the new life of

the Holy Ghost living within you. This helps and guides you as you patiently strive toward sanctification and perfection. But it is not a magic carpet ride there.²

A CONTRACT OF ADOPTION

The covenantal contract that the people of Benjamin enter into has additional remarkable advantages besides the gift of the Holy Ghost. Remember it is not just a legal contract, but also a change so great that it is called a “new birth.” And a birth requires that there be a father. Benjamin tells his people that by means of their covenant they have entered into a new relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ, taking upon themselves Christ’s name as a new family name. They, or we, if we have made this same covenant, have received what the apostle Paul calls “the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.” (Ephesians 1:5) We have always known Christ as the Savior who loved us enough to suffer and die for us, but now we can also know Him as a tender father who will take charge of our growth and development through the curriculum of earth-life school. Benjamin says we are now “His sons and His daughters.” (Mos 5:7)

We read also in Romans, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15) This cannot refer to Heavenly Father, the father of our spirit bodies. We don’t need an adoption process to relate us to Him for we are already His natural spirit children. But the covenants we make with our Savior do tie us to him in an adoption process that makes us “the children of Christ,” (Mosiah 5: 7 & Mormon 9:26) and allow us to call him “Abba.”

NOW DON'T BLOW IT

The last six verses of chapter five are a succinct sermon of practical advice on how to “retain the name written always in your hearts.” Notice he does not say retain this new identity in your *minds*. He says *hearts*. This is a relationship built on love. This is why Benjamin asks the rhetorical question, “How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” The implication is that this name and relationship must be kept precious to us by serving our new “master” and by thinking about Him and making Him paramount in the intents of our hearts. And how do we serve Him? In the words of King Benjamin’s angel, “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.” (Mosiah 3:19)

King Benjamin warns against Christ’s name being blotted out. Great metaphor. If you were to write something in ink and then blot it, each time you pressed down, the ink would grow fainter and fainter. Finally the writing would be entirely faded out. Sin is like that. It blots our commitment and love for the Savior off of our hearts. If sin is repeated and repeated without a repentance process, finally the name will be blotted out and gone. We will have forgotten Him and our promises to him. Every one of us has seen this process occur tragically in the lives of someone we know. King Benjamin knows that unrepented sin has the deadly power of undoing all the marvelous spiritual gains made that day by his people

Verse fourteen in an interesting sermon contained in a one-sentence metaphor. King Benjamin gives us the image of a farmer or shepherd who keeps flocks of animals. Of course he knows which ones are his, and wouldn’t think of letting another farmer’s animals get mixed up in his flock. He is only obligated to feed and take care of those animals that are his. He would not steal what belongs to another or use his resources to feed them. By implication, Benjamin is warning his listeners that Christ will know perfectly well those who are truly his. You can’t fool Him and He will not claim those that do not really belong to Him, even though they may hang around in the same pasture with his flock. This is a warning to make the covenant real, binding and lasting, so that Christ can claim you as His at the last day. Just attending the right church is not the answer. You must really belong to the shepherd.

The king’s final caution is that they must be “steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you His.” In all of our lives there must be decision and determination. The Lord says in the Book of Revelation, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:16) Living the life of a covenant child of Christ is worthy of your life’s greatest efforts. It is not something you do with the leftovers of your life.

A CHURCH: THE BODY OF CHRIST

We learn in Mosiah chapter 6 that King Benjamin recorded the names of all those who had made the covenant and taken upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ. Christ’s covenant people are always organized in this way into a body of believers. All of his “adopted children” form an organization that is called in scrip-

² Lucky are the sisters in Christ who live honestly and lovingly with one another, strengthening each other, forgiving one another, not needing to pretend to be further along the path than they really are.

ture “the body of Christ.” We read in the New Testament about the church established in that dispensation: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Being organized into a group with structure enables members to stay in contact, watch over and teach one another, and accomplish larger goals than they could accomplish alone. Priests are appointed to teach and watch over the flock. One of their important tasks “is to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made.” (Mosiah 6:3) Isn't this the very reason we go to church every Sunday, attend Stake and General conferences and read the scriptures daily? Everyone needs the “stirring up” process to bring back to us the feelings and commitments that were so strong when we first committed our lives to Christ and his work.

Some might wonder if King Benjamin's people were baptized, because it isn't mentioned in the text. Yet we know it was understood by earlier Book of Mormon prophets because one of the most beautiful explanations in all of scripture for the necessity of baptism is found in 2 Nephi 31. The subject of this chapter is following Christ down into the waters of baptism in order to covenant with Him. It seems probable that baptism was part of the covenant making process that King Benjamin's people underwent. Whether they had already been through this ordinance and it was only at the time of his speech that the people received the spiritual baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, or whether this ordinance came later, as the newly ordained priests went out among the people, we don't know. The Book of Mormon does contain the example of King Lamoni, the Lamanite convert of Alma, who repented and had a mighty change of heart and intense spiritual experience, and was baptized later. (See Alma 19)

CHAPTER SEVEN: HISTORY LESSONS

In Chapter seven, we return to historical narrative. King Benjamin has turned over the kingdom to his son, Mosiah (the second). Mosiah's subjects want to know what became of those who left the land of Zarahemla with Zeniff to return to Nephi-Lehi, the land “of their first inheritance.” If current Mormon archeologists and scientists who study these things are right, this land of first inheritance was probably in the highlands of Guatamala, a beautiful and fertile area with a temperate climate. Zarahemla was to the North and West, in the jungle lowlands, perhaps swampy and a more difficult place to grow crops in. You can see why some people always wanted to go back and “wearied [Mosiah] with their teasings.”

A search party goes to find what has become of the group who left. In a stroke of good fortune, Ammon and three companions come upon a king named Limhi. He recounts his people's sad tale. His grandfather Zeniff was “zealous”, well actually, “over zealous” from Limhi's current perspective, to settle in the lands of the Nephites' first inheritance. But because he trusted the Lamanite kings to keep their word to his people, he ended up in bondage to them, forced to pay half of all their crops and flocks in an oppressive tax and guarded to prevent them from escape. They are, in fact, slaves.

PHYSICAL BONDAGE/SPIRITUAL BONDAGE

Limhi is aware of the spiritual implications of their bondage. This has come, he says, because of the past sins of his people. Among these are the conflict and bloodshed that aborted Zeniff's first attempt to find the land of Lehi-Nephi. (Omni 1:27-28) He also feels his people are paying for is the death of the prophet Abinadi. Limhi lays this sin at the feet of the wicked priests and his own father, King Noah. Limhi himself is a man of faith. He rejoices that Ammon's group has found them. He realizes that there must be an “effectual struggle” yet to be made, but he has firm faith that Ammon's arrival is a sign of God's coming deliverance.

He speaks to his people to encourage them to have faith. He points to the deliverance that became forever the hallmark of divine rescue from bondage: the parting of the red sea. This miracle is mentioned more than any other in scripture, over and over again. “Remember the parting of the red sea!” And when we remember, we must take faith, because whatever bondage we might be facing in life, if God can deliver His people by parting a sea, then he can undoubtedly solve your problems if you put your trust in Him.