

STUDY NOTES

Lesson 6: Mosiah Chapters 8-10

“And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin.

And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me.

For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin.

D&C 84:49-51

BONDAGE

One of the great themes of the Book of Mosiah is bondage. It is all about what it takes to get into it, and what you have to do to get out of it. The incident that provides the original type of the theme of bondage in scripture is the story of the children of Israel being brought out of bondage under Pharaoh by the prophet Moses. All the elements are there—a people in bondage who can only be delivered by God's mighty arm in their behalf. If you recall the symbols from that story, it took the blood of a spotless lamb painted over their doorways and then the mighty miracle of being brought through the Red Sea and guided in the wilderness by the fiery pillar. Many see these things as emblematic of the power of covenants to deliver God's people: the blood of the lamb symbolizing the blood of Christ's atonement and the Red Sea and the pillar of fire symbolizing the waters of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

So if you look for some of these basic elements in Mosiah, do you find them? One of the first details you see in both the Old Testament and Exodus is people in bondage through no fault of their own. The children of Israel were born into bondage in Egypt. The people of Limhi were also born into bondage. The sins that caused their problems were the sins of their leaders. Is that fair? Well, it certainly is life. We all start life as infants born into a fallen world through no fault of ours. Yet we are affected by Adam and Eve's transgression, by our parent's choices, and by our genetic inheritance. We are all born into some degree of bondage as “natural” men and women. In other words, things have a hold on us that we must free ourselves from.

If a drought wipes out a farmer's crop and sends his family into financial ruin, it brings poverty on the family, a bondage that the children must live with. Joseph Smith's family had to cope with this very thing—the bad luck of the parents being visited upon all the children. The best way to think of these things is that it takes opposition to gain strength. God's plan for us includes the opposition of difficulties that come from both without and within. Gravity pushes us down. It also makes us strong. In the ease and weightlessness of space, astronauts lose muscle strength, muscle volume and bone density. Truly does the Book of Mormon say “it must needs be that there is opposition in all things.” (2 Nephi 2:11)

THE GOOD NEWS

We have read in Mosiah 7 the abbreviated account given by Limhi of how his people ended up in bondage. He points out the sins of past leaders that brought them to this point, but also sounds a powerful note of hope, affirming “...lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and caused that they should walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, and fed them with Manna that they might not perish in the wilderness...” (Mosiah 7:19)

The last words of Limhi's speech are “if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.” (v 33) Here is the key. When we find ourselves in bondage (and we all do), we have a choice to make. The Lord will free us, but there is a “deal” that must be made, a covenant, an agreement. “Yes, I will free you, “ the Lord says, “but in return, you must give me your life and serve me.”

FINDING OUR OWN BONDAGES

Limhi's people are ready for deliverance because they see their need for it and their dependence on God. In the same way Benjamin's people needed to see their “worthless and fallen state” in order to be receptive to the idea of a savior, so all of us need to see our individual bondages in order to appreciate the need for a deliverer. Christ is the one who saves us from our fallen state as humans and Christ is the one who redeems us from the different bondages we find ourselves in. “Know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” “I am the truth, the way, the life.”

Here are some bondages that we may find ourselves in: Food—eating it, fixing it, or both; sloth, anger, fear, anxiety, shyness; addictions to entertainment, abusive relationships, bitterness, various drugs or substances, fashion, or the internet; making false gods of money, youth, power, fame, educational attainment; perfectionism or the drive to be better than others, an overly competitive spirit (D&C 58:41 “I, the Lord, am not well pleased with him, for he seeketh to excel”). Have I left any out? Of course. There are so many ways that we can be in captivity that it's impossible to make a complete list. But as Christ said when he started his earthly ministry, “[God] hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” (Isaiah 61:1, see also Luke 4:18) That would be all of us. And the first thing we must do in order to be free is to come unto Christ, because as we read in Ether: “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.” (Ether 12:27)

A HISTORY BOOK

The Book of Mormon was not intended as a history book per se, but rather, as a guide to “coming unto Christ.” Still, surveying the history is useful in recognizing spiritual patterns that can apply to our own lives. When we see the patterns in the history of Book of Mormon peoples, we can look at our own lives and see if those same patterns exist. Perhaps that is why Limhi is so anxious to find out what is in the mysterious 24 plates of gold that his people found by accident when looking for a route to Zarahemla and freedom. Limhi says, “Perhaps they will give us a knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed, from whence these records came; or, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of this very people who have been destroyed; and I am desirous to know the cause of their destruction.” (M 8:12)

Just as every people have a history, so does every family. All of us have the opportunity to leave records of the spiritual patterns in our lives, and to read about the spiritual patterns of our fathers and forefathers. Written records are an extremely important means of teaching the gospel to those in the generations that come along behind us. When we neglect recording the stories of what God has done in our lives we put our children and grandchildren at risk. Last Sunday we had a lesson about Joseph Smith. Two ward members shared incidents of their own ancestor's interactions with the prophet—one a descendant of Jacob Hamblin and the other a descendant of Joseph Knight. It has been 180 years since these events took place but they still have a powerful effect upon the descendants of those to whom they happened.¹

ZENIFF'S CHANGE OF HEART

The reason the book of Mosiah is confusing to readers is that it follows several different “story lines”, jumping backward and forwards in time to do so. Chapters nine and ten are one of those places in the record that skip back to a former time. These two chapters are in the words of Zeniff -- the man who was zealous to return to the lands of his people's former inheritance. Now instead of reading about him, we are going to get his own words.

He describes the conflict that came about during the first expeditionary force that went to Lehi-Nephi. It was military in nature. Zeniff describes it as an army and says there were no women and children with them. Their object seems to have been to wipe out the Lamanite settlers that had moved into former Nephite lands. Their “ruler” (M 9 v2) was “austere” and “blood-thirsty.” He seems to have been a stickler for rigid military discipline as well, for when Zeniff questioned their plan, having seen good among the Lamanites and having compassion for them, he was summarily condemned to death for questioning the command of a superior officer. Zeniff must have been either very charismatic and persuasive or from an important family who had friends and relatives among the group of men in the expedition, because this order for Zeniff's death caused a rift that quickly became a bloodbath. Zeniff reports that “the greater number of our army was destroyed.”

In spite of this terrible tragedy, Zeniff describes himself as “over-zealous” to return and try colonization again, this time through means of a treaty with the Lamanites. It helps to understand the nature of this description as over-zealous, when we read in the same paragraph Zeniff's admission that they were “slow to remember the Lord our God.” Zeniff's plan may or may not have been a good one, but it was a plan that was made without consulting God. We read the plain truth of that folly in a modern day scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants: “Behold, thus saith the Lord unto my people—you have many things to do and to repent of; for behold, your sins have come up unto me, and are not pardoned, because you seek to counsel in your own ways.” (D&C 56:14)

¹ Read the wonderful conference address by President Henry B. Eyring on this very subject from Oct 2007 General Conference, called “Oh Remember, Remember.” This can be accessed at <<http://lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-775-24,00.html>>

OVER ZEALOUS

According to the dictionary, zealous means “enthusiastic, eager, fervent, passionate, intense.” We don’t think of these things as necessarily bad. In fact, being lukewarm, so-so or ho-hum about the gospel will get us nowhere. The scriptures contain references to both good and bad “zealous-ness.” Phineas, the grandson of Aaron in the Old Testament, is promised “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, he and his seed after him,” because he was “zealous for his God.” (Numbers 25:13)

But Zeniff was said to be *over-zealous*. In light of how he later turns to God to help his people defeat their enemies in battle, he seems to have repented of his over-zealousness and to be doing all he can to make the best of a difficult situation by leaning upon the Lord. Zeniff’s “overzealousness” is meant to make us see ourselves better. He is a type of all the times we have been determined to get what we want. Haven’t we all learned through hard experience that stubbornly following our own way gets us in trouble. The joke comes to mind about the renowned business leader who was being interviewed. Said the interviewer, “How did you come to be such a great success in your industry?” “Good decisions,” he replied. “I see, and how did you learn to make such good decisions?” “Experience.” “Ah, and how did you gain this experience?” “Bad decisions.”

Like Zeniff, when we find that our decisions have brought difficulties into our lives, we should use that experience to humble us and turn us to the Lord. He will then be able to show us what we can learn from our situation and how to turn it into good. The last thing we need to do is lay blame or wallow in self-pity of the “Oh how did I get into this situation!” variety. Perhaps your difficult situation is the very one ordained by God to teach you some of the most important lessons of your life. God is able to redeem every situation for good.

LIVING AMONG THE ENEMY

Zeniff and his group begin to build and farm and create a good place for their people. There is just one major problem. They now live in the middle of enemy territory. Their prosperity and industry were an irresistible temptation to a people who were already pre-disposed to hate them because of the traditions of their fathers. It seems probable that the Nephites had a higher culture than the surrounding Lamanites. The buildings from old times and the city walls had fallen into disrepair and had to be rebuilt. The Nephites called the Lamanites “lazy.” They were probably hunters and herders rather than farmers, which takes a more advanced economy, market and trading system. They were also called “idolatrous,” probably having taken up the primitive idol worship of the native peoples they encountered and intermarried with in the area. There was hardly a more pejorative term than “idolatrous” for Israelites to use. Everything bad in the Old Testament came from the idolatrous cultures around Israel and from the Israelites themselves falling into idolatry.

The two cultures were on a collision course. Eventually the Lamanites become more openly hostile and fearful of what the Nephites might be up to, and open conflict results. But the whole set-up should make us ponder what it means to live in the midst of an enemy culture. This author is a baby boomer, raised in the 50’s when television was a safe place to park a child because “Father Knows Best” and “Leave it to Beaver” were the models for family life, not “Married with Children” or “Modern Family.” The single working girl was depicted on “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” not “Sex in the City.” Killing the inconvenient unborn babies of our society was not an option. Can we find any clues in the Book of Mormon that will give us encouragement and direction as we try to live our lives in what is today, in many ways, enemy territory?

PROTECTION

There are several simple things we can pick out of the text that Zeniff did for his people’s protection. They armed themselves with all manner of weapons they had made. Zeniff seems to have gained humility from his experiences living among the Lamanites. Now he made sure they battled “in the strength of the Lord,” and “cried mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers.” (M 9 v17) They depended on their faith; they cried to God for guidance and protection; then they went to work. This scheme was successful and Zeniff’s people defeated the enemies who attacked them. We can certainly do the same.

A TIME OF PEACE

After a decisive victory against the Lamanites, Zeniff’s people had twenty-two years of peace. It is worthy of note that they did not boast in their own strength or allow themselves to get lulled into a false sense of security, but set up a system of guards around the land and continued to develop weapons and men able to use them. These things require work and activity. Faith in God is not a passive reliance on His mighty power, but a willingness to be led and guided by Him in all things, including being willing to work very hard in righteous endeavors. As the saying goes, “No crops were ever harvested after turning a field over in your mind.”

MORE WAR, MORE HATRED

When the old Lamanite king dies, his hot headed son replaces him, stirring up his people to go to war against the Nephites, probably for the glory and the spoils. In more primitive times, war was what men did to gain glory and status and was a much more constant part of life than we have known it in the 20th and 21st centuries. Nevertheless, in mentioning war as often as it does, we should remember that the Book of Mormon was written for our day, and war between the Nephite and Lamanite cultures can be seen as symbolic of the greater war between good and evil, between Christ, the King of Kings, and Satan, the great pretender to the throne.

It is interesting to realize that the old hatreds between the Lamanites and the Nephites, that continued to fester during hundreds of years, are in many ways a reflection of the original reasons for what we call the War in Heaven. Satan, like Laman and Lemuel, feels that his rightful place as mankind's savior was taken from him by Christ. In his wrath and hatred toward Jesus Christ, Satan never ceases his enmity toward God's work and people and, like the Lamanites, has "taught [his] children an eternal hatred towards the children of [God]." (Mosiah 10:17)

Zeniff's parting comment is a fitting end to his legacy as a king and leader of his people. He says that he "did stimulate them to go to battle with their might, putting their trust in the Lord; therefore, we did contend with them, face to face." (Mosiah 10:19) We, as Latter Day Saint women in the last days of the struggle in the eternal conflict between good and evil, must not "shrink or shun the fight." That is the song we sang nearly every Wednesday night in my youth, when we attended "Mutual" and belted out the words to the hymn "True to the Faith." (Hymn # 254)

"Shall the youth of Zion falter, in defending truth and right; while the enemy assaileth, shall we shrink or shun the fight? No! True to the faith that our parents have cherished, true to the truth for which martyrs have perished; To God's command, soul heart and hand, faithful and true we will ever stand!"

While we know the powers of darkness Seek to thwart the work of God, Shall the children of the promise Cease to grasp the iron rod? No! True to the faith that our parents have cherished, true to the truth for which martyrs have perished; To God's command, soul heart and hand, faithful and true we will ever stand!"

It is not only men who must be warriors in today's world. In our schools and city governments, on the Internet and in community groups, there are many ways in which we women can let our voices be heard and battle for "truth and right." God expects no less of his people. His mighty arm will be revealed in our behalf if we, like David of old, are willing to pick up our slingshot and five smooth stones, and go out and meet Goliath. The Book of Mormon gives us the insights and the courage to do just that.