

STUDY NOTES

Lesson 11: Mosiah Chapters 24-25

*In God is my salvation and my glory:
The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.
Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him:
God is a refuge for us. Surely men of low degree are vanity, and
men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance,
they are altogether lighter than vanity.
If riches increase, set not your heart upon them. God hath spoken
once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also
unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy:
for thou renderest to every man according to his work.
Psalm 62:6-12*

The families who followed Alma were God's covenant people. They had left everything they owned to flee from King Noah's army and follow Alma into the wilderness armed only with their covenants and courage. With faith in God and in their leader, Alma, they carved out a new life and a new city in what was probably rugged but fertile territory, given how often people got lost there. They began to prosper. Life was good. But God did not intend for them to remain in this little wilderness outpost. Since we know the end of the story, we know that Alma will end up being an important church leader back in the big city of Zarahemla, a man who is destined for great things. Alma's group knows none of this. They only know that one awful day, a Lamanite army surprises them in their fields and they end up subject to a particularly nasty enemy, as Amulon and his fellow priests are put in charge of Alma's people under Lamanite bondage.

HABAKKUK'S ANSWER

There is a little known and rarely read book in the Old Testament called Habakkuk. In it is a wonderful summary of the issues raised in Mosiah 24, as well as throughout history, when the righteous have suffered injustice at the hands of the wicked. Habakkuk lived in Judah before the Babylonian captivity. This book is not the usual message from a prophet decrying the people's sins. It consists of two "complaints" or questions for God, and God's answers to the prophet's pleas for understanding. In the first complaint (Habakkuk 1:2-4) the prophet complains that he and others are suffering violence and oppression at the hands of fellow Jews. How can God be just, he asks, when the wicked man prospers at the expense of the righteous? God's first answer is in Habakkuk 1:5-11. He tells the prophet that He is raising up the Babylonian nation and before long they will sweep the nation of Judah before them in judgment for her sins.

Habakkuk is stunned. His second complaint is a result of this answer from God. He replies with frank honesty. How God, can you be just if you use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked one? Many innocents will suffer. Where is your justice in this? Chapter two begins with Habakkuk's statement that he is going up to his tower and not come down until God answers him. Habakkuk 2:2-5 is God's second answer: In time He will judge Babylon too for her sins, but not until after using that nation to punish Judah. Then God tells Habakkuk His plans for the wicked nation of Babylon; she has lifted herself up in pride and she shall be brought low. The key verses are 2:3-4: "For the vision [of God's judgment on the wicked and restoration of the righteous] is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it [seems to] tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry [in the end]. 4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up [proud] is not upright in him [and will receive a just reward in the end]: but the just shall live by his faith.¹" In other words, the righteous man must acknowledge God's sovereignty—His complete authority to do what He chooses in the working out of History—and live by faith in the ultimate goodness and justice of God in this life where bad things happen to good people, and where the wicked often seem to prosper. The third and last chapter of Habakkuk is the prophet's prayer or psalm of praise to God and expresses trust in the ultimate triumph of God's purposes in history and in His ultimate justice for each individual.

¹ Paul quotes this phrase from Habakkuk three times in his New Testament letters: Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17; and Hebrews 10:38. Paul, an apostle who gave his whole life over to God, was beaten several times, shipwrecked, sick, imprisoned unjustly, stoned and left for dead, constantly traveling in hard conditions and ultimately executed. The principle that "the just shall live by faith," undergirded his whole life.

ZECHARIAH'S PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

One more precious verse in the Old Testament helps us understand how and why God "tries the faith and patience of his people." (Mosiah 23:21) It is tucked away in another of the minor prophets²: "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God." (Zech. 13:9) God's purpose in relation to His people is to purify them as gold and silver in the furnace of affliction. Our goals for ourselves are often modest—we want to be left alone in a little corner of life to tend our garden and have peace. God's plans for us are much bigger than that and we have to trust that He knows what He is doing and put ourselves in His hands in faith so that He can refine us and bring us unto Himself.³ Though Alma and his people have done nothing wrong, it is God's purpose to bring them back into contact with wider Nephite society. Alma will eventually be put in charge of all the churches in the Nephite lands. We sometimes think too small. Disappointments in our lives may be part of His plan to move us to a different sphere of influence.

Therefore Alma and his people must spend time under the boot of Amulon's hate motivated persecutions. This is the very kind of thing that caused Habakkuk to demand of God, "Where is your justice?" God's assurance is that He knows exactly what is happening to his people at all times and His perfect plan is in operation in individual lives as well as in history. *The just must live by faith.* (Habakkuk 2:4)

BRINGING US CLOSER

One practical result of this unjust persecution was that it turned the people to God in humble prayer. With the cruel decree of Amulon that the people would be killed if they prayed in public, they were forced to turn in their hearts to God in prayer, and they began to pray to him with great fervor all day long. This in turn increased their faith and they began to have blessings poured out upon their heads of strength to bear their burdens with patience and faith. Many saints have found God in their extremity and would not trade the closeness they thus develop with God for any earthy riches.

When it is in God's timing to act, He can do whatever He wants to do. His power is unlimited. That is why Habakkuk's psalm at the end of his book recites all the mighty things God has done, such as bringing Israel out of Egypt. Remembering God's past miracles of deliverance gives him confidence that He will do again as He has done in the past. Looking only at the present can bring worry and uncertainty. Looking at God's past actions brings assurance that all present uncertainties will be resolved in perfect justice and mercy.

AN EVER PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE

Psalm 46:1-2 contains comforting these comforting words: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea." Alma's people could bear impressive testimony of this principle. During their bitter bondage under Amulon, they were treated with cruelty and harshness. They were forbidden to pray aloud, and their rights of worship taken away. The fruits of their labors were stolen by the wicked. Yet they lived by the principles contained in Psalm 62, the theme scripture for these notes: Their God was their rock. They trusted in Him at all times. They poured out their hearts to him. In the quiet refuge of their prayers God became their refuge. They did not look at worldly gradations of power, wealth or status as having any eternal significance, because they trusted in God's ultimate righteous judgment of all men. We tend to worry about how all things will come out right for God's people and for our own families. Remember: "The just shall [must] live by faith."

The Lord is able to accomplish purposes we can't see when He moves in human history. If we were in charge of Nephite history, we might have caused the Amulonites to be caught and burned at the stake with King Noah, for these were wicked men seemingly without a righteous bone in their bodies. But God was able to use them like he was able to use the wicked nation of Babylon to bring about His purposes.

The priests had something the Lamanites had not developed. They had written language and record keeping. They also had practical knowledge about how to use these skills to foster trade among the Lamanite peoples. The Lamanite king recognized these as valuable skills for his people to have so he appointed the Amulonites as priests and teachers. By teaching the Nephite language and writing system they made possible later missionary work among the Lamanites. These things remind us that the Lord can bring about His ultimate purposes even when He uses wicked men to do this.

VISITED IN AFFLICTION

God blesses Alma and his people with some extraordinary blessings during their hard bondage under the Amulonite priests. We are told that He spoke comfort to them in their afflictions and promised that He

² The prophets in the Old Testament are divided into 12 minor and 4 major prophets. These divisions are based solely on length, not their importance.

³ See vignette section after these notes for several contemporary stories of God's loving hand manifest in our trials.

would eventually deliver them from their bondage (v 13). He also "did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord." (v 14) Even life's rough stuff can have strengthening, sanctifying effects on God's people. This is the meaning of God's trying us in the furnace of affliction that He might bring us forth as silver and gold. The only way this fails is if we cease to trust Him and stop living by faith. We can "drop out" of His school by abandoning our covenants; but as long as we keep our covenants and keep our hearts trusting and soft, the promise is that all things shall work together for our good. (D&C 98:3)

The story ends with God's miraculous deliverance of Alma's people. One night the Lamanite guards are kept deeply asleep in a miraculous way. This permits the Nephites to leave with their families, flocks and as many possessions as they can carry. The first thing they do is offer thanks—all their men, women and children—lifting their voices in praise to God for His mercies in their behalf. Do we do the same?

BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Chapter 25 brings back together in Zarahemla all the groups who have survived and escaped bondage to return to the "mother ship," the main Nephite culture group. We are told here that the greatest percentage of the population is actually made up of Mulekites, (the group who left Jerusalem with Mulek, about the same time as Lehi's group left) who have become, for all intents and purposes, Nephites. They decided to submit to the kingship of Nephite descendants and to the Nephite religion as contained in the Brass plates and the Plates of Nephi. It was undoubtedly the occasion of King Benjamin's address that converted many Mulekites and Nephites to the truth, thus cementing the bonds that tied the two peoples together.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR STORIES

Several other organizational loose ends are tied up in Mosiah 25. Mosiah has the people gather together to hear the various accounts of the groups who left and returned. Because they kept records and could share their stories with the people, the "memory of the people was enlarged" and all the Nephites learned from the bondage experiences of the descendants of Zeniff and his group. They were deeply moved as they heard of the suffering and death of their countrymen, and also greatly rejoiced by their deliverance.

Have you ever wondered at the power of a well-written work of fiction to move you to tears as you read about a person's fictitious life? Such is the power of literature on the human heart and mind. This ability to learn by vicarious experience is a precious and God-given human gift. All of us have necessarily limited lives. Our set of human experiences is limited to our own life experiences: our family, our country, our education, etc. But when we take into account the experiences we can have by entering into the experiences of other people vicariously, our own borders are greatly enlarged.

This must be an important part of God's plan. How could we hope to become like God ourselves if we only have such limited experiences? But the gift of the written word enables us to enter wider worlds. That is what the scriptures can do for us. And that is what the stories of our own ancestors do for us and for our families. They enlarge our hearts and minds as we take those stores in and make them a part of ourselves.

Sometimes I think of all the children who have died in infancy. They barely had a toe in the water of human life before being yanked back to a heavenly home. But what about the importance of gaining experience with pain and suffering, with good and evil, with health and sickness and all the other opposites that earth life was supposed to teach us about? Don't they need these different kinds of experiences just as much as we do? When I read Mosiah I get a glimpse of how such spirits can gain the experience they need, by observing the life experiences of their earthly relations. Vicarious experience is critical to our growth.

THE CALL OF A PROPHET

King Mosiah recognized the talents and calling of God upon Alma and turned over to him the organization of churches in the country. We can't help but take for granted the wonderful and full organization of the church that we have today. But these people must have had a very different experience. They were trying to establish a Christian church before Christ had even come. Imagine trying to teach primary with no New Testament stories of the life of Christ! We are told that Alma formed seven churches. Limhi's people desire to seal the covenants they have made by receiving baptism from Alma. They are then added to the fold of committed believers. It's an exciting time for the growth of the church among the Nephites. The chapter ends with the observation that the Lord "did pour out his spirit upon them and they were blessed, and prospered in the land."(Mosiah 25:24)