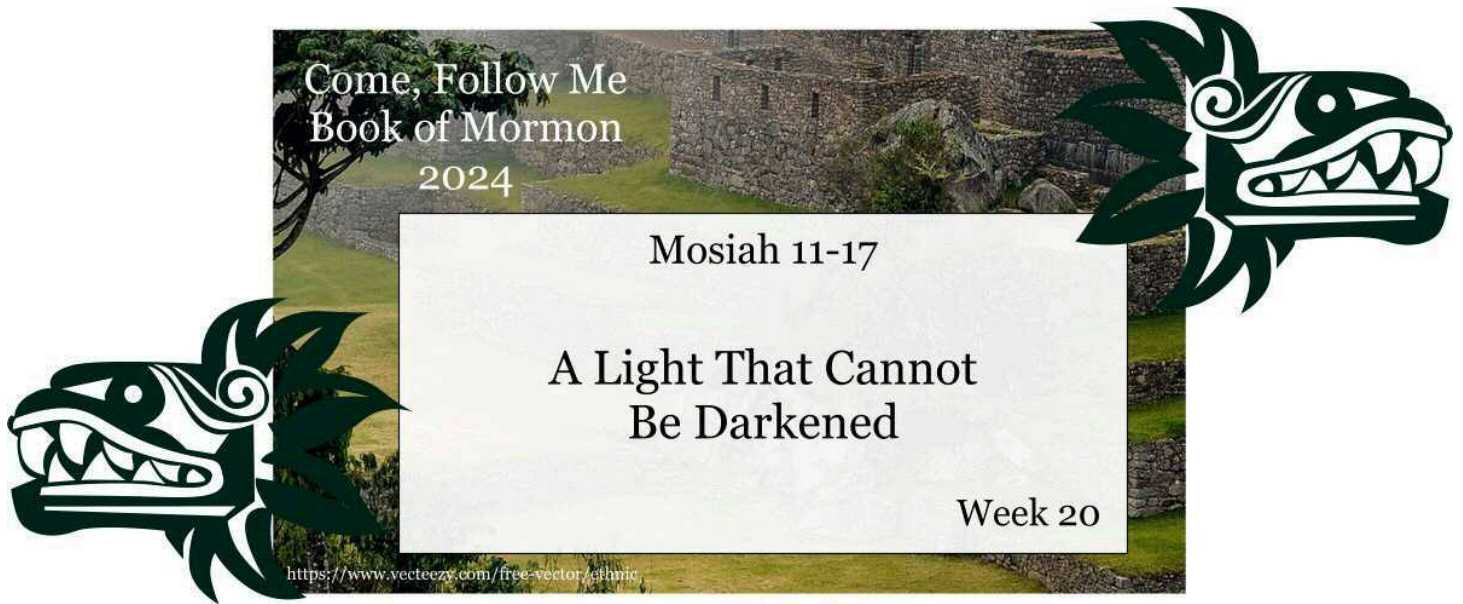




Week 20 is scheduled for study May 13-19, 2024. Each of us is responsible for sharing the light of Christ within our soul with others. We cannot afford to have our light darkened.

Day 1

Mosiah 11-13; 17 - I can stand for Jesus Christ, even when I stand alone.

One of the first questions asked of us in this lesson is as follows: "How would you describe Noah and his people?" Every time I read about Noah and his people I am fascinated that they don't seem to resent his heavy taxes or his wickedness. When Abinadi comes and calls the people to repentance they seem to resent Abinadi for insulting their "beloved" king. They actually defend Noah. These same people had been righteous under Noah's father, Zeniff.

Noah appears to have known what he was doing. He replaced the righteous priests Zeniff had appointed to teach the people, and instead appointed priests who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts. This means the priests were in it for the money and the influence they could gain by their positions with the king. This appears to have been a necessary change in order to get the people to find their happiness in sin. The priests supported the agenda of the king and helped him teach the people to embrace sin and whoredoms. And because it was coming from their religious leaders in a unified front with their political leader, people fell into line and thought they were happy, even with

the heavy taxes and the departure from what the Lord had commanded them to do. This simple change allowed Noah and his priests to relax and revel in sin, for they had convinced the populace to do the same. All their personal wickedness was now common place and no longer out of the ordinary. Referring to the people in the kingdom Mormon records:

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.

This kind of makes you wonder how far a people will go if lied to and flattered long enough. Evidently, at least according to Abinadi, they became wicked enough that they were about to be completely destroyed by God for their idolatry and whoredoms. That is quite a fall from grace in one lifetime. The people had gone from venerating prophets to killing prophets in just a few decades. We need to be careful about having wicked leaders at the head of our government, any government. When wicked leaders get into power they always promote wickedness so what they do doesn't seem shocking to the people. Individually, we must all resist such things. If we don't, eventually we will end up embracing them.

This situation answers the second question in the manual about why it required courage for Abinadi to stand up to the king and his priests. By the time Abinadi came to prophesy to the people he was more or less a lone voice. The people had been bought and paid for. They were steeped in sin and supportive of the sinful practices of the government and their own church. There were those who believed Alma when he repented and started to preach the words of Abinadi to the people, but they were only a small handful compared to the general populace.

Truths about Abinadi

As you read the statements made by Abinadi, notice a few things.

Confidence - Abinadi seems to know where he stood before God. The Lord spoke to Abinadi and Abinadi listened and did what the Lord commanded. The Lord trusted Abinadi to do what needed to be done. This only comes from a life that has been lived in the service of God and those around him. Abinadi was a man who served others.

Close to the Spirit - Abinadi was influenced by the Spirit. He had studied the word of God and had put it into practice in his daily life. We can deduce this because he

understood doctrine and how it is to be applied in one's personal life. This kind of knowledge can only be known through personal experience.

Knowledge of the plan of salvation - Abinadi had a sure knowledge of where he was going after death. Death itself held no fear for him. He was confident in his knowledge of Jesus and the atoning sacrifice that was to come. Abinadi preached of the coming of Jesus to Noah and his priests with all the confidence of one who has seen for himself that it would happen. His confidence was so strong that he was unafraid of actually dying for delivering his message to the people. Even as Abinadi was burning to death he continued to deliver the Lord's message to the king. Now that is a focused man!

Fearless - When Abinadi came to deliver his second message to the king, the king's guards tried to lay their hands on him to drag him away. But Abinadi hadn't finished saying what he was sent to tell them. He knew that he had no other support than the Lord Himself. Abinadi was truly alone among these people. So he told the people not to touch him, because God would smite anyone who tried to get in the way of him delivering God's message to the people. He almost seemed to know, like Moses did with Pharaoh, what their response would be and what the Lord wanted him to do in that situation. He may have been told ahead of time how the people would respond and what the Lord expected of him. Abinadi may have known all along that the Lord was sending him in to be martyred and seal his testimony in blood so that God's judgments on the people would be justified. The scriptures don't come out and say as much, but they give every indication that this might have been the case.

Truths about us

There are almost certainly a time or multiple times in our lives when we must stand for what we know to be true. Often we will feel or at least appear to be all alone in our position. Strength to do what needs to be done in these times comes from knowing God, knowing our position before Him, and feeling confident in His promises to the faithful. This confidence comes from keeping the commandments and living the gospel in our daily life.

We don't have to have had the apparent visions that Abinadi probably had, but we are required to have lived up to what we have been taught and understood to be true. Only

when we have experiences with the Spirit and have felt the love of God in our life can we feel the confidence to do what is otherwise so scary when we are challenged and feel alone in our testimony. Feeling like we are on good terms with our Father in Heaven, have felt the Savior's loving embrace as we repent of our sins, and have felt the comfort that comes from the Holy Spirit, gives us the strength and confidence to stand firm in our faith when it is challenged.

These are only a few thoughts on how to answer the questions in the manual. What situations and feelings have come into your mind as you have read the questions posed by the manual? I encourage you to write some of them down. It will help you in the future to have those thoughts to refer back to for strength and encouragement. It is good to see during a time of struggle that in times of comfort we knew and had the strength that we might, at the moment, be questioning.

Day 2

Mosiah 12:19-37 - I need to apply my heart to understanding God's word.

Understanding God's word is not just an intellectual exercise. The kind of understanding that is needed is the practical kind that comes from experiencing the results of living God's word. Only when we have lived His words and seen what happens in our life can their power and influence be truly manifested in the life we currently live. The priests of Noah had intellectual knowledge, but no practical experience with God's word. Hence, they had no understanding at all.

The point of God giving us the scriptures - His words - is that they are meant to lead us to a life of happiness. All of His messages to us are designed to help us become like Him, happy. And happiness isn't found in mental or study exercises. God's kind of happiness is found in service and practice of principles and attitudes. All spiritual advancements are achieved in this way, and only in this way. No amount of revelation will do us any good - no amount of knowledge given to us will teach us anything, unless we put that knowledge into practice and live it. Only in the living does the realization and revelation of the divinity of it come.

The goal of living God's words and our seeking guidance by the Spirit is to have our hearts changed from being carnal in nature to divine in nature. We are looking to

become more than what we were born into in mortality. We need to go from being an enemy of God to being the sons and daughters of God, heirs to His kingdom. This requires a lot of change. That kind of change must be sought and deliberately attempted by us on a constant basis. The Holy Spirit will teach us and correct us as we go out and do what we can according to what we currently understand. The more we try to do right, the more the Spirit will teach us to do it better.

I know that the following thought may be depressing to some, for many of us don't enjoy study and learning. But to understand God's word requires at least a basic amount of academics. We must first read and learn what it is God says in the scriptures. Only after we have learned what is expected can we go out and put that into practice. We don't have to be intellectual giants to go to heaven, but we have to at least be willing to seek the knowledge of God from the scriptures He has given us. If we aren't willing to at least read His words then how can we expect Him to bless our efforts to be better people and more like His Son?

Day 3

Mosiah 13:11-26 - God's commandments should be written in my heart.

This is the key verse in this lesson.

11 And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.

The priests of Noah were well versed in wicked ways and practices. They didn't have to think about them. Their lives were surrounded by things of evil. They had been studying how to accomplish evil, and had practiced it for so long, it now came naturally for them. This is what is meant by having something written in your heart. It is what comes natural to you. You have studied and practiced it for so long that you no longer have to worry about whether you are doing it right, it all comes without thinking. Abinadi is telling us that we need to have God's word written in our hearts.

Unfortunately for us today, wickedness is all around us. We don't even have to seek it out. If we have time on our hands and want some entertainment there are many options that are produced by people in a pervasively wicked society. They are right

there in front of our faces in the music we can listen to, the games we play, the movies we watch, etc. I call this passive evil. We don't have to actively seek it out, it is just ever-present before us. Choosing it doesn't even take thought. It's just there.

Choosing good takes effort. We have to seek it out and weigh our options. Doing good, thinking good, and possessing good takes thoughtful effort. So many times choosing good over evil is like choosing the plain brown paper bag over the fancy wrapped gift, complete with ribbons and glitter. We have to learn to see the beauty in the good we choose, not the wrapper it comes in. Much of good comes in the form of inconvenience, struggle, sacrifice, and longsuffering. Packages of good are rarely adorned with labels that read "Fun!", "Exciting!", or "Thrilling!" Good often requires us to experience sorrow, a testing of patience, exercising forgiveness, and serving when it is inconvenient to do so.

Writing God's word and His ways in our heart is not something that happens by accident. This is a choice that must be deliberately made and thoughtfully pursued. This has to be something we choose to do and become, even against the odds that will most assuredly be stacked against us. The end result of having God's word written in our heart is a life filled with peace, happiness, and joy. Oh, and understanding. Lot's of understanding.

Day 4

Mosiah 14-15 - Jesus Christ suffered for me.

The commentary for this lesson is difficult for me to put into words. Every time I read the description of Isaiah's words about Christ I see another aspect of my Savior that escaped me in previous readings. I never feel like I can present to you a final version of Christ that is definitive in nature. I probably never will have a definitive version of his life. I'm so glad.

I would like to take just two verses and illustrate the kind of thinking that can be done for all the verses in these chapters. These are some thoughts that might help us when we contemplate taking the sacrament. Feel free to read a little of my commentary then come back and reread these verses as many times as you feel the need.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

These verses paint for me a portrait of betrayal and ingratitude on our behalf. All that exists in the universe was created by Jesus, under the direction of God, our Father. The earth, with all its wonders are gifts to us from God. Yet when Jesus came to earth to pay the penalty for our sins, and to bear all by himself the eternal payment for our disobedience, what did we do? What do we do? We hid our faces from him. That is a polite way of saying that we turn our backs on him to deny that we know him. In all his perfection we despised him and esteemed his sacrifice as a thing of naught.

He personally bore all our griefs, so that those who repent won't have to spend time in hell to pay for their sins. He personally redeemed all those who died as children, who went through life without knowledge of God's plan for our salvation, and for all those incapable of making covenant choices for themselves. And for all this we, his brothers and sisters considered him a sinner, smitten and afflicted by God - unworthy of our respect. We had him crucified along with common criminals.

Where Isaiah should have been able to speak in glowing terms of the salvation Jesus brought with him, and our acceptance of that sublime gift, instead he had to paint a picture of shame for our lack of gratitude and acknowledgment for the suffering and price Christ paid for our sins. Each of us needs to think about what Jesus is owed by us for all he has done to save us from ourselves. We need to place our lack of respect and our daily disobedience against his perfect gift of salvation. Hopefully we will begin to feel a welling up of a thankful heart, an appreciation for what he did for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

Day 5

Mosiah 15:1-12 - How is Jesus Christ both the Father and the Son?

By definition, a father is one who creates. As the creator of the universe Jesus is the father of all that is around us, for he created it all. He is a father to us in that he was sent to us representing and demonstrating to us the love of our Father in Heaven. As

our Savior Jesus stood in the place of our Father to save all of God's children. He is the Father to us in that he was born into mortality as partial God, our Father being his literal Father in the flesh.

Moses lived a life that represented the Savior in physical terms. In many ways we can draw parallels between the life of Moses and Jesus of Nazareth. God told Moses that he was to be as God to the children of Israel, that they were to obey all his words as if from the mouth of God, Himself. Aaron was to be their prophet, because he was the mouthpiece of Moses, who was already acting as God to the people. This is how Moses is described in the Old Testament. Jesus came to us representing our Father in all things. In everything Jesus did he was portraying the will and attitudes of the Father to us. So in that sense as well Jesus was God the Father to us, for his purpose on earth was to execute the love and will of the Father for the benefit of the Father's children.

But Jesus was also the Son of God. He was the Son because he subjected himself in all things to the will of the Father. He was the Son because he was born into mortality by a mortal woman, taking upon himself the influences and temptations of fallen man. Jesus was a son, because he came to learn by the things which he suffered. He subjected himself to all the sufferings of the flesh that he might better understand how to love and help (succor) his brothers and sisters who suffer in this life.

As the creator of all things Jesus is the Father of all things. As the Son of God he fulfilled his Father's will to save God's children and open the way back to God for us all. So Jesus is both the Father and the Son. It depends on what you are referring to when you say it. Any way you cut it he qualifies for either of the designations.

Personal Study

Teach by the Spirit

What does it mean to teach by the Spirit? You can be a regular member of a class, but when you open your mouth don't you still need to communicate by means of the Holy Ghost? We can't bear testimony without Him, make a gospel point or admonish someone to do something or be a certain way without the influence of the Spirit. If we try to do these things without the Holy Ghost present we are shooting ourselves in the foot, for no spiritual learning or influencing will take place. Isn't it just as important for

each contributing member of the class to have the Spirit with them as for the teacher to teach by the Spirit? (Spoiler: the answer is yes!)

The scriptures are very clear that if we don't have the Spirit we shall not teach. Well that is not meant for teachers only. If the member who shares a point in class doesn't have the Spirit with them then chances are people will not be touched by what was said, and will collectively forget very quickly what was said. The learner must also have the Spirit, for it is by the Spirit that the truths spoken and felt in class are conveyed to the heart of the individual. Let's face it, we are not going to walk away from a class having any kind of spiritual experience without taking our personal worthiness for the companionship of the Holy Ghost with us into the class in the first place.

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