

PDF version of the lesson notes.

## I. Big Picture

- Subbing for the next few weeks.
- Today's lesson primarily revolves around the origin of the Anti–Nephi–Lehies and their choice to bury their weapons and not fight an invading army.
- *Do you find it difficult to connect with the narrative? Does it not resonate because of the distance in terms of life experience between you as a reader and the Anti–Nephi–Lehies?*
- *What principles or parts of the narrative are generalizable?*
- *Is the experience of the Anti–Nephi–Lehies of limited applicability because of the uniqueness of the situation?*
- *Is there a danger in dismissing the Anti–Nephi–Lehi experience as unique and idiosyncratic?*

## II. A Proclamation Protecting the Sons of Mosiah[1]

- Read Alma 23:3:

(3) And thus they might go forth and preach the word according to their desires, for the king had been converted unto the Lord, and all his household; therefore he sent his proclamation throughout the land unto his people, that the word of God might have no obstruction, but that it might go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers, and that they might be convinced that they were all brethren, and that they ought not to murder, nor to plunder, nor to steal, nor to commit adultery, nor to commit any manner of wickedness.
- The King wants the "word of God might have no obstruction." He hopes to accomplish this through his decree described in verse 2:

(2) Yea, he sent a decree among them, that they should not lay their hands on them to bind them, or to cast them into prison; neither should they spit upon them, nor smite them, nor cast them out of their synagogues, nor scourge them; neither should they cast stones at them, but that they should have free access to their houses, and also their temples, and their

sanctuaries.

I really like the phrase "that the word of God might have no obstruction." *Do you think that this phrase can be usefully applied to us? Might there be a similar decree proclaimed by each one of us that would allow the word of God to have no obstruction. Would it have anything in common with the King's decree?*

- I am struck by the fact that Mormon mentions that one of the goals of the King was that the "people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers ..." I guess this language surprises me a little bit. It seems like a reference to the traditions started by Laman and Lemuel.

- ◆ *Are you surprised that 500 years later that these traditions are identified as one of the primary causes of Lamanite wickedness particularly in light of the fact that the Lamanites are an oral culture with no written record? What does this imply about the strength of traditions on behavior?*

- ◆ Second, it seems like the worst of the Lamanites troubles in terms of wickedness stems from wicked Nephites (those that follow the order of the Nehors) like the Amulonites and Amalekites. For example, in the aftermath of the Lamanite conversions we find out the following:

(14) And the Amalekites were not converted, save only one; neither were any of the Amulonites; but they did harden their hearts, and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land wheresoever they dwelt, yea, and all their villages and all their cities.

or in verse 1 of chapter 24:

(1) And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who were in the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and who were in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about, who had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren.

- ◆ *Should the blame more squarely fall on the teachings of Nehor and the former Nephites? Do you see a relation between the teachings of Nehor and the wicked traditions of the Lamanites' fathers?*

- ◆ *Does Ammon's missionary narrative (in the previous few chapters) give us any insight into how the traditions of their fathers might still be affecting the Lamanites in general?*

- Another goal is that the Lamanites might be convinced that they were all brethren. *How is*

*this goal different from the goal of removing the wicked traditions of their fathers? Could it be the same goal repeated using different language or are the goals different?[2]*

### **III. The Origin of the Anti–Nephi–Lehies[3]**

#### **A. Conversion**

- In verses 4–5 we find out that the missionaries are very successful. "[T]housands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord ..." In verses 6–7 we are given more information about these converts:

(6) And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away. (7) For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren.

- Maybe the most striking part of this pericope is that we find out that none of the converts fall away. Do these verses or the surrounding chapters give us any hints about why this group was so stalwart and faithful?
- *The weapons of the Lamanites are called "weapons of their rebellion." Isn't it a bit much to consider that Lamanites in rebellion after 500 years of being a separate state or people? Or might the rebellion part not be a political and territorial statement?*
- *What is the relation between the Lamanites becoming a righteous people and laying down their weapons? Did the righteousness cause them to lay down their weapons or is laying down the weapons a prerequisite to righteousness? Does Alma 26:31–34 give us insight into the relation between laying down their weapons and righteousness?[4] Does these verse help us generalize the situation?*

(31) Now behold, we can look forth and see the fruits of our labors; and are they few? I say unto you, Nay, they are many; yea, and we can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us. (32) For behold, they had rather sacrifice their lives than even to take the life of their enemy; and they have buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their brethren. (33) And now behold I say unto you, has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites. (34) For behold, they would take up arms against their brethren; they would not suffer themselves to be slain. But behold how many of these have laid down their lives; and we know that they have gone to their God, because

of their love and of their hatred to sin.

- *Is fighting against God and fighting against a brother considered to be equivalent in these verses?*

## ***B. What's in a Name***

- Read Alma 23:16–18:

(16) And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished. (17) And it came to pass that they called their names Anti–Nephi–Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites. (18) And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them.

- First, I don't think anyone really knows what "Anti–Nephi–Lehies" means. I suspect we will never have a convincing answer. However, it's probably worth noting that Royal Skousen indicates that it is all one non–hyphenated word in the original and printer's manuscript. So the hyphens were probably introduced by E.B. Grandin.
- Second, do you think the meaning of Anti–Nephi–Lehi is important or is it more important that they have a new name that distinguishes them?
- *The goal of the new name is to be "distinguished from their brethren?" Who are the "brethren" in this passage? The Lamanites or the Nephites? Both? Is this an important textual clue in terms of understanding what Anti–Nephi–Lehi might mean?*
- Chapter 23 makes multiple references to brethren. Verse 3 indicates that one goal of the missionary program was to convince the Lamanites that they were all brethren. Verse 7 also uses the word "brethren": "they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren." Thus the chapter has a pretty expansive use of the word "brethren." It seems to include both the Nephites and Lamanites. I think verse 7 may be just referring to the Nephites as brethren. Thus I do think the Anti–Nephi–Lehies want to distinguish themselves from both the Lamanites and the Nephites. *Why would they want to distinguish themselves from the Nephites?*
- *What are some possibilities in terms of the meaning of the word "Anti–Nephi–Lehies?"*
  1. The lineage of Lehi but not from Nephi's lineage: Anti–Nephi Lehi.
  2. Some (including Nibley) have argued that anti could mean mirror image. So in

that case Anti–Nephi–Lehies would refer to those who imitate the Nephites.

3. Nephi–Lehi could designate the territory or kingdom of Lehi–Nephi. The converts are against or stand in opposition to the kingdom of Lehi–Nephi which is comprised of unconverted Lamanites, Amulonites, etc.

4. Anti could be an untranslated proper noun. Anti does show up in multiple Book of Mormon names (think, Antipas).

- Also, the name doesn't appear to last very long. Just a few chapters later they are called the people of Ammon. Read Alma 27:26–27:

(26) ... And they went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession of the land of Jershon; and they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after. (27) And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end.

- *Why are they now called the people of Ammon? What has changed?*
- *Did Anti–Nephi–Lehi's really change their name internally or did only the Nephite name for them change?*
- *Do this name change help answer the question of whether knowing the meaning of the word "Anti–Nephi–Lehi" is important?*

#### ***IV. King Anti–Nephi Lehi's Address[5]***

- Read Alma 24:11–13:

(11) And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain-- (12) Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren. (13) Behold, I say unto you, Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren; for perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.

- *Why not fight? Why not engage in self–defense?*
- *Are the Anti–Nephi–Lehies showing a lack of faith? Why or why not? If they are born again and new creatures in Christ then aren't their past actions irrelevant in terms of how they behave going forward? Why or why not?*
- *Does verse 13 suggest that the King believed the atonement was limited in some sense? Or does it mean something else entirely?*
- Read 24:14–16:

(14) And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations. (15) Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby. (16) And now, my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords, yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright, as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day; and if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved.

- *How should we understand the burying of the weapons? Is it a symbolic action or are the Anti–Nephi–Lehies burying the weapons as a commitment device? A way to ensure that the don't yield to temptation in the face of the advancing army?*

## Endnotes

1. Hardy, Grant (Editor), 2003, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, University of Illinois Press, 318.
2. Faulconer, Jim, 2004, *Sunday School Lesson 26*, Times and Seasons.
3. Hardy, Grant (Editor), 2003, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, University of Illinois Press, 319.
4. Faulconer, Jim, 2004, *Sunday School Lesson 26*, Times and Seasons.
5. Hardy, Grant (Editor), 2003, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, University of Illinois Press, 320.