

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 36: “On the Morrow Come I into the World” (3 Nephi 1-7)

LESSON GOAL: To help us understand the need to endure faithfully in times of trial and temptation.

As we strive to faithfully keep the commandments, we will face opposition and learn the importance of remaining faithful in spite of trials and temptation

David A. Bednar: “I personally do not know of a principle more central, important, or essential to spiritual learning than the principle of acting as agents and not being acted upon as objects. Learning and living the gospel of Jesus Christ require us to:

- read and study the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets and apostles—as agents and not as objects.
- pray and ask in faith and submit to the will of the Father—as agents and not as objects.
- worship and serve God with all of our heart, might, mind, and strength—as agents and not as objects.

Each and every member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bears a *personal responsibility* to learn and live the truths of the Savior’s restored gospel. . . Our individual responsibility is to **learn what we should learn, to live as we know we should live, and to become what the Master would have us become.** . . . We cannot expect simply to attend Church meetings and to participate in programs and thereby receive all of the spiritual fortification and protection that will enable us to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). (*Increase in Learning*, xii, 1-3).

1. The signs of the Savior’s birth vindicate [prove right/true] those who have endured in faith.

3 Nephi 1:5-8: But there were some who began to say that the **time was past for the words to be fulfilled**, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite. And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, **your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.**

And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very **sorrowful**, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass. But behold, they did watch **steadfastly** for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, **that they might know that their faith had not been vain.**

3 Nephi 1:15, 21: And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun **there was no darkness**; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came. . . And also that **a new star** did appear, according to the word.

Faith, not signs, brings true change. Change occurs within the heart and is not due to external signs.

D&C 63:7-10: And he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but **not unto salvation.** Verily, I say unto you, there are those among you who seek signs. . . But, behold, **faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe.** Yea, signs come by faith, not by the will of men, nor as they please, but **by the will of God.**

President Joseph F. Smith: “Show me Latter-day Saints who have to feed upon miracles, signs, and visions in order to keep them steadfast in the Church, and I will show you members of the Church who are not in good standing before God, and who are walking in slippery paths. **It is not by marvelous manifestations unto us that we shall be established in the truth, but it is by humility an faithful obedience to the commandments and laws of God**” (*Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, 7).

Neal A. Maxwell: “Unlike Jesus, sometimes we first provide access for, and then augment, our own temptations. By paying even small heed to a temptation, **we thus forget that temptations are like a poison gas**—they spread through the time and space available to them. Once inside, they are not easily contained or rebuked.

Surely it should give us more pause than it does to think of how casually we persist in savoring temptations and how **we sometimes give to Satan** who could not control his own ego in the premortal world **such awful control over our egos here.** We often let the adversary do indirectly now what we refused to let him do directly then.

“Thus **we can expect no immunity from either trial or temptation**, because these are the common lot of mankind. **Mortality without the dimension of temptation or trial would not be full proving**; it would be a school with soft credits and no hard courses. These features of mortality were among the very conditions **we agreed to** before we undertook this mortal experience. We cannot renege on that commitment now” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 45).

2. The Gadianton robbers come to battle against the Nephites.

Bruce R. McConkie: "Spiritual deafness describes the state of those who are lacking in spirituality, whose spirit ears are not attuned to the whisperings of the still small voice of the Spirit. Similarly, **spiritual blindness** is the identifying mark, which singles out those who are unable to see the hand of God manifest in the affairs of men. Such have 'unbelief and blindness of heart' (D.& C. 58:15); **they are 'hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds.'** (3 Ne. 2:1) (*Mormon Doctrine*, 184).

Giddianhi, leader of the Gadianton robbers, was a type of Satan; Lachoneus, chief judge/ governor of Nephites, was a type of prophet of God. Mormon records these types in a bold epistle that Giddianhi sent to Lachoneus.

- First, he **flattered** Lachoneus: "Lachoneus, most noble and chief governor of the land, behold, I write this epistle unto you, and do give unto you exceedingly great praise because of your firmness, and also the firmness of your people, in that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty." (3 Nephi 3:2)
- Then he **belittled** Lachoneus: "And it seemeth a pity unto me, most noble Lachonues, that ye should be so foolish and vain as to suppose that ye can stand against so many brave men who are at my command." (3 Nephi 3:3)
- Next, he tried **to frighten** Lachoneus: "And I, knowing of their unconquerable spirit . . . if they should come down against you they would visit you with utter destruction." (3 Nephi 3:4)
- Then he **sympathized** with Lachoneus: "Therefore I have written this epistle, sealing it with mine own hand, feeling for your welfare, because of your firmness in that which ye believe to be right." (3 Nephi 3:5)
- And he **recruited** Lachoneus to join him: ". . . yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us. . ." (3 Nephi 3:6-8)
- And lastly, he **threatened** Lachoneus: "...but if ye will not do this, I swear unto you with an oath, I will command that my armies shall come down against you, shall slay you, until ye shall become extinct." (3 Nephi 3:8)

Isn't this what Satan does today? He boldly flatters us, then belittles us by saying we are too smart to believe in our religion, then he tries to frighten us from acting against him, he sympathizes with us, and offers to help us if we abandon our righteous cause, he threatens us with evil consequences if we stick with our religious practices.

When the Gadianton robbers announced their intention to destroy the Nephite and Lamanite believers, Lachoneus and the people began at once to prepare. **We need to learn from their actions in this time of danger to help us prepare for our own spiritual battles. You might consider some of all of the following:**

3 Nephi 3:12. "**The governor Lachoneus . . . could not be frightened.**" Never make decisions based on fear.

3 Nephi 3:12. Lachoneus admonished "**Cry unto the Lord for strength.**" Pray for strength *before* temptations come.

3 Nephi 3:13,22. Lachoneus caused the people "**to gather together.**" Our associations with other Church members can increase our ability to withstand the forces of evil.

3 Nephi 3:14. "**He caused that fortifications should be built round about them**" and "**placed . . . guards round about to watch them, to guard them.**" The priesthood fulfills this important function. Also Home and Visiting Teachers.

3 Nephi 3:16-19. The Nephites "**exerted themselves in their might to do according to the words of their prophets.**" in our own time of spiritual war fare, we need to be led by men who have the spirit of revelation and prophecy.

3 Nephi 3:20,21. "**Prepare ourselves in the center of our land**" If we lose the battle with Lucifer to control the environment of our own homes, where will we ever be able to win it? We must win this battle in the "center of our land."

3 Nephi 3:26. "**They should be strong with armor.**" Put on the "**whole**" armor of God. Meaning what?

Richard G. Scott: "Nephi lived in a time of tremendous upheaval and dissension when morals and standards were abandoned, government had disintegrated, and Gadianton robbers ruled the land, yet he remained faithful and engendered faith in others willing to hear the message of Jesus Christ. **He taught with power. He was fearless** in proclaiming truth no matter what opposition he encountered. When Satan applied more pressure, **he became more determined in living and acting righteously. He perfected his ability to be led by the Spirit** and followed its direction without hesitation. **His fearlessness came from a righteous heart. He possessed great humility and compassion. He blessed others with a knowledge of truth. His total faith in Jesus Christ allowed him to be protected and empowered to do good. He taught us how to pray** for an answer when we urgently need it. **He showed those who hold the priesthood how to exercise that sacred authority properly.**

"...I love this prophet. I humbly testify that **Nephi's greatness came from his humility, his unflinching obedience, and his firmly rooted faith in Jesus the Christ.** When truth was taught, he listened carefully and obeyed it consistently. May our study and pondering of the example of this admirable servant of the Lord **enrich us with a desire to be more submissive when tested, more obedient when tempted, more forgiving when falsely accused, and more resolute in our faith in the Master**" (*Heroes From The Book of Mormon*, 155-6).

3. The Nephites live righteously and prosper, but pride and dissensions arise.

3 Nephi 6:5: And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, **except they should fall into transgression.**

Mormon characterizes the dizzying dissolution of order and peace in this way:

3 Ne. 7:8: “And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire.”

Joseph B. Wirthlin: “In addition to the scriptures and the words of modern-day prophets, **the promptings of the Spirit can help Latter-day Saints to discern clearly what they must do to be on the Lord's side.**”

“We must be cautious of seemingly **small thoughts** and **actions that can lead to large consequences.** Just a little **anger, unkindness, or disobedience**; a **dishonest deed**; a few **unclean thoughts**; a little pornography; one experiment with drugs; a few **lies**; a little **fraud**; or a feeling of **hate** can lead us into the camp of the adversary. Giving just an inch here and there can put us close enough to the line that **one slip will take us right over it**” (*Finding Peace in Our Lives*, 13, 15)

Henry B. Eyring: “A little prosperity and peace, or even a turn slightly for the better can bring us feelings of self-sufficiency. We can feel quickly that we are in control of our lives, that the change for the better is our own doing, not that of a God who communicates to us through the still, small voice of the Spirit. **Pride creates a noise within us which makes the quiet voice of the Spirit hard to hear. And soon, in our vanity, we no longer even listen for it. We can come quickly to think we don't need it**” (Conference Report, October 2001).

Jeffrey R. Holland: “That kind of faithfulness brought prosperity so great that “nothing in all the land [could] hinder the people from prospering continually, **except they should fall into transgression.**” But fall into transgression they did, as a result of those two challenges that were forever the destruction of Nephite righteousness—**pride and riches.**”

“in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; some were lifted up unto **pride and boastings** because of their exceedingly great riches” (3 Ne. 6:10). “And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their **chances for learning**; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive **great learning because of their riches**” (3 Ne. 6:12).

In a short time, great inequality developed in the Nephite church, insomuch that it “began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year **the church was broken up** in all the land **save it were among a few of the Lamanites** who were converted unto the truth faith; and they could not depart from it” (3 Ne. 6:14) (*Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon*, 254).

Neal A. Maxwell: “...changing circumstances can likewise affect nearly a whole people's faith...Listen to this verse: ‘**There was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt** in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken; for they knew that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled.’ (3 Nephi 5:1.) Now, listen to this: ‘**There began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people**, notwithstanding so many signs had been given.’ (3 Nephi 8:4).

“As I check the years of these two verses, I note that **this decline happened in the space of a mere ten years or less!** Circumstances changed from one in which ‘not a living soul’ doubted the prophecies to a time in which there were ‘great doubtings.’ It isn't very confidence inspiring, is it?” (*We Talk Of Christ, We Rejoice In Christ*, 64).

The Spiritual Standing of the Nephites and Lamanites in the Years Preceding the Savior's Coming

A.D. 21-26	3 Nephi 5:1-3	The people served God “with all diligence ”-----5 years
A.D. 26-27	3 Nephi 6:4-5	There was great order and prosperity -----1 year
A.D. 28	3 Nephi 6:9	There was continual peace -----1 year
A.D. 29	3 Nephi 6:10-16	There were disputings, pride, and boasting -----1 year
A.D. 30	3 Nephi 6:17-18	They were in a state of awful wickedness -----1 year
A.D. 31	3 Nephi 7:1	A few people were converted to the Lord-----1 year
A.D. 32-33	3 Nephi 7:23	Nephi continued to cry repentance -----1 year

Can you remember times in your life when great blessings came because you endured in righteousness in spite of trials and temptations?

4. Conclusion: Choose Righteousness; Be Christ-Centered

The words of the Lord's prophets shall all be fulfilled.

D&C1:38: What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, **my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.**

Visiting Teaching Message: “Although most of us don’t have to deal with persecution, **we are often ‘provoked’ by small things. Rudeness, nagging, disobedience, waiting, disagreements, disappointment, and unfulfilled expectations** can irritate us, particularly when we are tired, sick, or in a hurry. At such times, our first impulse may be to react with irritation, anger, or contention. But **we can choose to react instead with charity** and not be ‘easily provoked.’ (Moro. 7:45.) We can turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-39) and respond with patience and kindness. **Getting in the habit of...returning good for evil drains the heart of anger.**
By learning to avoid contention and to control our anger, we stop evil from being passed along and become more like the Savior” (*Ensign*, July 1988, 47).

Theodore M. Burton: “Whenever you get red in the face, whenever you raise your voice whenever you get “hot under the collar,” or angry, rebellious, or negative in spirit, **then know that the Spirit of God is leaving you and the spirit of Satan in beginning to take over.** At times we may feel justified in arguing or fighting for truth by contentious words and actions. **Do not be deceived.** Satan would rather have you contend for evil if he could, but **he rejoices when we contend with one another** even when we think we are doing it in the cause of righteousness. **He knows and recognizes the self-destructive nature of contention under any guise.”** (CR, Oct 1974, 77).

Boyd K. Packer: “We live in troubled times—very troubled times. We hope, we pray, for better days. But that is not to be. The prophecies tell us that. **We will not as a people, as families, or as individuals be exempt from the trials to come. No one will be spared the trials common to home and family, work, disappointment grief, health, aging, ultimately death”** (“The Cloven Tongues of Fire,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 8).

Thomas S. Monson: “**Whether you like it or not, you are engaged in the race of your life.** At stake is eternal life—yours. What shall be the outcome? Will you be a leader of men and a servant of God? Or will you be a servant of sin and a follower of Satan? **Decisions determine destiny.** In the quiet of your study, surrounded by books written by the finest minds of men, **listen for and harken to the Master’s invitation:** “. . . **learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls”** (Matthew 11:29-30). Such learning transcends the classroom, it endures beyond graduation, it meets the test of experience” (*Pathways to Perfection*, 253).

M. Russell Ballard: “We would do well to remember the prosperity cycle found in the Book of Mormon when those persons blessed for their righteousness became wealthy and then forgot the Lord. **Let us not forget the Lord in our day of prosperity.** Let us maintain the spirit of the law of sacrifice and **always thank Him for what we have, even if it is not as much as some others have.**

If I have a fear, it is that the principle of sacrifice may be slipping away from us. This principle is a law of God. We are obliged to understand it and practice it. **If being a member of this Church becomes too easy, testimonies will become shallow, and the roots of testimony will not go down into the soil of faith** as they did with our pioneer forefathers. May God grant each of us an understanding of the law of sacrifice and a conviction that it is necessary today. It is vitally important that we understand this law and live it” (*The Law of Sacrifice*,” *Ensign*, October 1998, 11, 13).

L. Tom Perry: “**A disciple of Christ is one who is learning to be like Christ**—learning to think, to feel, and to act as he does. To be a true disciple, to fulfill that learning task, is the most demanding regimen known to man. No other discipline compares . . . in either requirements or rewards. **It involves the total transformation of a person from the state of the natural man to that of [a] saint, one who loves the Lord and serves with all of his heart, might, mind, and strength”** (Conference Report, October 2000, 77)

Spencer W. Kimball: “**Security is not born of inexhaustible wealth but out of unquenchable faith”** (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 1982).

Marvin J. Ashton: “Certainly one of our **God-given privileges is the right to choose what our attitude will be in any given set of circumstances.** We can let the events that surround us determine our actions—or we can personally take charge and rule our lives, using as guidelines the principles of pure religion. **Pure religion is learning the gospel of Jesus Christ and then putting it into action.** Nothing will ever be of real benefit to us until it is incorporated into our own lives” (Conference Report, October 1982, 91).

Mormon sets the example for us to emulate as we aspire to understand and appreciate our discipleship.

3 Nephi 5:13: Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.

Stephen A. West: “Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life’...**I can rarely say that scripture without choking up. I think it says everything about what I want to be and do”** (*Ensign*, May 1998, 108).

We, like the Nephites, also wait for the coming of the Savior. While we wait, Satan will try to turn us toward wickedness as he did the Nephites. Be aware.