

In the Space of Not Many Years

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Katika Kipindi Kisicho cha Miaka Mingi

Na Mzee David A. Bednar
Wa Akidi ya Mitume Kumi na Wawili

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If we are not faithful and obedient, we can transform the God-given blessing of prosperity into a prideful curse that diverts and distracts us.

My beloved brothers and sisters, sitting on the stand today, I have watched this Conference Center fill up three times, for the first time since COVID. You are devoted disciples of Jesus Christ who are eager to learn. I commend you for your faithfulness. And I love you.

Ezra Taft Benson served as the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from November 1985 until May 1994. I was 33 years old when President Benson became the President of the Church and 42 when he passed away. And his teachings and testimony influenced me in profound and powerful ways.

One of the hallmarks of President Benson's ministry was his focus upon the purpose and importance of the Book of Mormon. He emphasized repeatedly that "the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion—the keystone of our testimony, the keystone of our doctrine, and the keystone in the witness of our Lord and Savior." He also often emphasized teachings and warnings about the sin of pride found in this latter-day testament of Jesus Christ.

A particular teaching by President Benson greatly impacted me and continues to influence my study of the Book of Mormon. He said:

"The Book of Mormon ... was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was

Ikiwa sisi si waaminifu na watiifu, tunaweza kubadilisha baraka ya Mungu ya mafanikio kuwa laana ya kiburi ambayo inatupotosha na kutuvuruga.

Wapendwa akina kaka na akina dada, nikiwa nimeketi jukwaani leo, nimetazama Kituo hiki cha Mkutano kikiwa kimejaa mara tatu, kwa mara ya kwanza tangu janga la UVIKO. Ninyi ni wanafunzi waaminifu wa Yesu Kristo ambao mna tamani la kujifunza. Ninawasifu kwa uaminifu wenu. Na ninawapenda.

Ezra Taft Benson alihudumu kama Rais wa Kanisa La Yesu Kristo la Watakatifu wa Siku za Mwisho kuanzia Novemba 1985 hadi Mei 1994. Nilikuwa na miaka 33 wakati Rais Benson alipokuwa Rais wa Kanisa na miaka 42 wakati alipofariki dunia. Na mafundisho na ushuhuda wake vilinishawishi katika njia za kina na zenye nguvu.

Moja ya alama za huduma ya Rais Benson ilikuwa lengo lake juu ya kusudi na umuhimu wa Kitabu cha Mormoni. Alisisitiza kwa kurudia rudia kwamba Kitabu cha Mormoni "ni jiwe la katikati la teo la dini yetu—jiwe la katikati la ushuhuda wetu, jiwe la katikati la mafundisho yetu na jiwe la katikati kwenye ushahidi wetu juu ya Bwana na Mwokozi wetu." Pia mara nyingi alisisitiza mafundisho na maonyo kuhusu dhambi ya kiburi inayopatikana katika agano hili la siku za mwisho la Yesu Kristo.

Fundisho la kipekee la Rais Benson lalinisaidia na linaendelea kunishawishi kujifunza Kitabu cha Mormoni. Yeye alisema:

"Kitabu cha Mormoni ... kiliandikwa kwa ajili ya siku yetu. Wanefi hawakuwahi kuwa na kitabu hiki; wala hata Walamani wa kale. Kiliku-

meant for us. Mormon wrote near the end of the Nephite civilization. Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us.”

President Benson continued: “Each of the major writers of the Book of Mormon testified that he wrote for future generations. ... If they saw our day, and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon ... to include [this account] in his record? What lesson can I learn from [this admonition] to help me live in this day and age?’”

President Benson’s statements help us to understand that the Book of Mormon is not primarily a historical record that looks to the past. Rather, this volume of scripture looks to the future and contains important principles, warnings, and lessons intended for the circumstances and challenges of our day. Hence, the Book of Mormon is a book about our future and the times in which we do now and will yet live.

I pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost as we now consider relevant lessons for us today from the book of Helaman in the Book of Mormon.

The Nephites and the Lamanites

The record of Helaman and his sons describes a people who were anticipating the birth of Jesus Christ. The half century recounted in the scriptural record highlights the conversion and righteousness of the Lamanites and the wickedness, apostasy, and abominations of the Nephites.

A series of comparisons and contrasts between the Nephites and Lamanites from this ancient record are most instructive for us today.

“The Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.

“[And] there were many of the Nephites who

sudiwa kwa ajili yetu. Mormoni aliandika karibu na nyakati za mwisho za Wanefi. Chini ya mwongozo wa Mungu, ambaye anaona mambo yote kuanzia mwanzo, [Mormoni] alifupisha karne za kumbukumbu, akichagua masimulizi, hotuba, na matukio ambayo yangekuwa ya maana zaidi kwetu.”

Rais Benson aliendelea: “Kila mmoja wa waandishi wakuu wa Kitabu cha Mormoni alishuhudia kwamba aliandika kwa ajili ya uzao wa siku zijazo. ... Kama waliziona siku zetu, na wakachagua mambo yale ambayo yangekuwa ya thamani kuu kwetu, Je, hivyo sivyo tunavyopaswa kujifunza Kitabu cha Mormoni? Tunapaswa kujiuliza wenyewe kila mara, ‘Kwa nini Bwana alimshawishi Mormoni ... kujumuisha [maelezo haya] katika kumbukumbu zake? Ni somo gani ninaloweza kujifunza kutokana na [maonyo haya] ili kunisaidia niishi katika siku hii na nyakati hizi?’”

Kauli za Rais Benson zinatusaidia tuelewe kwamba Kitabu cha Mormoni kimsingi sio kumbukumbu ya kihistoria ambayo inaangalia ya kale. Badala yake, kitabu hiki cha maandiko kinaangalia siku zijazo na kina kanuni muhimu, maonyo, na masomo yaliyokusudiwa kwa hali na changamoto za siku zetu. Kwa hivyo, Kitabu cha Mormoni ni kitabu kuhusu mustakabali wetu wa baadaye na nyakati ambazo kwa sasa tumo na ambazo tutakuwamo.

Ninaomba msaada wa Roho Mtakatifu tunapofikiria sasa kuhusu masomo muhimu kwa ajili yetu leo kutoka kwenye kitabu cha Helamani katika Kitabu cha Mormoni.

Wanefi na Walamani

Kumbukumbu ya Helamani na wanawe inaelezea watu ambao walikuwa wanatarajia kuzaliwa kwa Yesu Kristo. Nusu karne iliyosimuliwa katika kumbukumbu ya maandiko inaonyesha uongofu na uadilifu wa Walamani na uovu, ukengeufu, na machukizo ya Wanefi.

Mfululizo wa kulinganisha na kutofautisha kati ya Wanefi na Walamani kutoka kwenye kumbukumbu hii ya zamani ni wa kuelimisha zaidi kwetu sisi leo.

“Walamani walifikia kuwa sehemu yao kubwa, watu wenye haki, mpaka kwamba haki yao ilizidi ile ya Wanefi, kwa sababu ya uthabiti wao na uadilifu wao katika imani.

“[Na] kulikuwa na Wanefi wengi ambao

had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them.”

“And thus we see that the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him.

“And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts.

“And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words.”

Perhaps the most stunning and sobering aspect of this decline into apostasy by the Nephites is the fact that “all these iniquities did come unto them in the space of not many years.”

The Nephites Turned Away from God

How could a once-righteous people become hardened and wicked in such a short period of time? How could people so quickly forget the God who had blessed them so abundantly?

In a powerful and profound way, the negative example of the Nephites is instructive for us today.

“Pride ... began to enter ... into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God ... because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land.”

“[They] set [their] hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world” “because of that pride which [they] ... suffered to enter [into their] hearts, which ... lifted [them] up beyond that which is good because of [their] exceedingly great riches!”

Ancient voices from the dust plead with us today to learn this everlasting lesson: prosperity, possessions, and ease constitute a potent mixture that can lead even the righteous to drink the spiritual poison of pride.

Allowing pride to enter into our hearts can cause us to mock that which is sacred; disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and revelation; trample under our feet the commandments of God; deny the word of God; cast out, mock, and revile

walikuwa wagumu na wasio tubu na waovu kupindukia, mpaka kwamba walikataa neno la Mungu na mahubiri yote na unabii ambao ulikuja miongoni mwao.”

“Na hivyo tunaona kwamba Wanefi walianza kufifia katika kutoamini, na kukua kwenye uovu na machukizo, wakati Walamani nao walianza kukua zaidi katika ujuzi wa Mungu wao; ndiyo, walianza kutii sheria na amri zake, na kutembea katika ukweli na haki mbele yake.

“Na hivyo tunaona kwamba Roho wa Bwana alianza kujiondoa kutoka kwa Wanefi, kwa sababu ya uovu wao na ugumu wa mioyo yao.

Na hivyo tunaona kwamba Bwana alianza kuwamwagia Walamani Roho yake, kwa sababu ya wema wao na hiari yao ya kuamini maneno yake.”

Pengine kipengele cha kushangaza na cha umakini zaidi cha kuanguka kwa Wanefi kwenye ukengefu ni ukweli kwamba “maovu haya yote yaliwajia katika kipindi kisicho cha miaka mingi.”

Wanefi Walimkataa Mungu

Ni kwa jinsi gani watu waliokuwa wenye haki wakawa wagumu na waovu katika kipindi kifupi kama hicho? Watu wangewezaje kumsahau Mungu kwa haraka sana ambaye alikuwa amewabariki sana?

Kwa njia yenye nguvu na ya kina, mfano mbaya wa Wanefi unatufundisha sisi leo.

“Kiburi ... kilianza kuingia ... ndani ya mioyo ya watu waliodai kuwa wa kanisa la Mungu ... kwa sababu ya utajiri wao mwingi na ustawi wao katika nchi.”

“[Wao] wanaweka mioyo [yao] juu ya utajiri na vitu vya bure vya ulimwengu huu” “kwa sababu ya kile kiburi ambacho [wao] ... waliruhusu kiingie [katika] mioyo yao, ambacho ... kime-wainua [wao] juu kupita yale yaliyo mema kwa sababu ya utajiri [wao] mwingi!”

Sauti za kale kutoka mavumbini zinatusihi leo tujifunze somo hili la milele: ustawi, mali, na rahahutengeneza mchanganyiko wenye nguvu ambao unaweza kusababisha hata wenye haki kunywa sumu ya kiroho ya kiburi.

Kuruhusu kiburi kuingia katika mioyo yetu kunaweza kutusababishia tudhihaki kile kilicho kitakatifu; kutoamini katika roho ya unabii na ufunuo; kukanyaga chini ya miguu yetu amri za Mungu; kukataa neno la Mungu; kutupa nje,

against the prophets; and forget the Lord our God and “not desire that the Lord [our] God, who hath created [us], should rule and reign over [us].”

Therefore, if we are not faithful and obedient, we can transform the God-given blessing of prosperity into a prideful curse that diverts and distracts us from eternal truths and vital spiritual priorities. We always must be on guard against a pride-induced and exaggerated sense of self-importance, a misguided evaluation of our own self-sufficiency, and seeking self instead of serving others.

As we pridefully focus upon ourselves, we also are afflicted with spiritual blindness and miss much, most, or perhaps all that is occurring within and around us. We cannot look to and focus upon Jesus Christ as the “mark” if we only see ourselves.

Such spiritual blindness also can cause us to turn out of the way of righteousness, fall away into forbidden paths, and become lost. As we blindly “turn unto [our] own ways” and follow destructive detours, we are inclined to lean upon our own understanding, boast in our own strength, and depend upon our own wisdom.

Samuel the Lamanite succinctly summarized the turning away from God by the Nephites: “Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.”

The prophet Mormon observed, “The more part of the people [remained] in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part [walked] more circumspectly before God.”

The Lamanites Turned to God

In the Book of Helaman, the increasing righteousness of the Lamanites provides a stark contrast to the rapid spiritual decline of the Nephites.

The Lamanites turned to God and were brought to a knowledge of the truth by believing the teachings in the holy scriptures and of prophets, exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of their sins, and experiencing a mighty change of heart.

“Therefore, as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith they have been

kukejeli, na kuwatukana manabii; na kumsahau Bwana Mungu wetuna “wala kutotamani kwam-ba Bwana Mungu [wetu], ambaye alituumba [sisi], anapaswa kutawala na [kutuongoza].”

Kwa hivyo, kama sisi si waaminifu na watiifu, tunaweza kubadilisha baraka ya Mungu ya mafanikio kuwa laana ya kiburi ambayo inatupotisha na kutuvuruga kutoka kwenye kweli za milele na vipaumbele muhimu vya kiroho. Lazima tujilinde siku zote dhidi ya hisia-shawishi za kiburi na za kujipendelea kupitiliza, kujitathimini kwetu kusiko sawa juu ya uwezo wetu na kujiona wenyewe badala ya kuwatumikia wengine.

Tunapofokasi kwa kiburi juu ya nafsi zetu, pia tunaathiriwa na upofu wa kiroho na kutoona vingi, vingi zaidi au pengine vyote ambavyo hututokea sisi wenyewe na vinavyotuzunguka. Hatuwezi kumtazama na kufokasi kwa Yesu Kristo kama “alama” ikiwa tunajiona sisi wenyewe tu.

Upofu huo wa kiroho pia unaweza kutufanya tutoke katika njia ya haki, kuanguka katika njia zilizokataliwa, na kupotea. Kwa upofu “tunapo-geukia njia zetu wenyewe” na kufuata njia za uharibifu, tunaelekea kutegemea ufahamu wetu wenyewe, kujikweza kwa sababu ya nguvu zetu wenyewe, na kutegemea hekima yetu wenyewe.

Samweli Mlamani alieleza kwa ufupi Wanefi kugeuka mbali na Mungu: “Kwani mmetafuta siku zote za maisha yenu yale ambayo hamwezi kuyapata; na mmetafuta furaha kwa kufanya uovu, kitu ambacho ni kinyume cha asili ya kile cha haki ambayo ipo katika Kichwa chetu kikuu na cha Milele.”

Nabii Mormoni alisema, “Sehemu kubwa ya watu [walibakia] katika kiburi chao na uovu, na sehemu ndogo [walitembea] kwa uangalifu mbele ya Mungu.”

Walamani Walimgeukia Mungu

Katika Kitabu cha Helamani, kuongeze-ka kwa wema wa Walamani kunaleta utofauti mkubwa ukilinganisha na kudidimia kiroho kwa haraka kwa Wanefi.

Walamani walimgeukia Mungu na wakaletwa kwenye ufahamu wa ukweli kwa kuamini mafundisho katika maandiko matakatifu na ya manabii, wakitenda kwa imani katika Bwana Yesu Kristo, kutubu dhambi zao, na kupitia mabadiliko makubwa ya moyo.

“Kwa hivyo, vile wengi wamekuja kwenye ukweli huu, mnajua wenyewe kwamba wako imara na thabiti katika imani, na ambamo katika

made free.”

“Ye should behold that the more part of [the Lamanites] are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments. ...

“... They are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth.”

As a consequence, the “righteousness [of the Lamanites] did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.”

A Warning and a Promise

Moroni declared: “Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.”

Please remember that the Book of Mormon looks to the future and contains important principles, warnings, and lessons intended for me and you in the circumstances and challenges of our present day.

Apostasy can occur at two basic levels—institutional and individual. At the institutional level, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will not be lost through apostasy or taken from the earth.

The Prophet Joseph Smith proclaimed: “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhalloved hand can stop the work from progressing ... ; the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

At the individual level, each of us must “beware of pride, lest [we] become as the Nephites of old.”

May I suggest that if you or I believe we are sufficiently strong and stalwart to avoid the arrogance of pride, then perhaps we already are suffering from this deadly spiritual disease. Simply stated, if you or I do not believe we could be

hilo wamefanywa huru.”

“Mnapaswa kuona kwamba sehemu kubwa ya [Walamani] wako kwenye kazi yao, na wanatembea kwa uangalifu mbele ya Mungu, na wanatii amri zake na sheria zake na hukumu yake. ...”

“... Wanajaribu kwa bidii bila kuchoka ili walete ndugu zao waliosalia kwenye uelewa wa ukweli.”

Matokeo yake, “haki [ya Walamani] ilizidi ile ya Wanefi, kwa sababu ya uthabiti wao na uadilifu wao katika imani.”

Onyo na Ahadi

Moroni alitangaza: “Tazama, Bwana amenionyesha vitu vikubwa na vya ajabu kuhusu kile ambacho lazima kitokee hivi karibuni, katika siku ile ambayo vitu hivi vitatokea mbele miongoni mwenu.

“Tazama, ninawazungumzia kama vile mko hapa, lakini hamko. Lakini tazama, Yesu Kristo amenionyesha ninyi kwangu, na ninajua yale mnayofanya.”

Tafadhali kumbuka kwamba Kitabu cha Mormoni kinaangalia siku zijazo na kina kanuni muhimu, maonyo, na masomo yaliyokusudiwa kwa ajili yangu na wewe katika hali na changamoto za siku zetu ya leo.

Ukengeufu unaweza kutokea katika ngazi mbili za msingi—kitaasisi na mtu binafsi. Katika ngazi ya taasisi, Kanisa la Yesu Kristo la Wakatifu wa Siku za Mwisho halitapotea kupitia ukengeufu au kuchukuliwa kutoka duniani.

Nabii Joseph Smith alitangaza: “Kiwango cha Ukweli kimeinuliwa; hakuna mkono ambao haujateuliwa kiungu unaweza kuzuia kazi kuendelea ... ; ukweli wa Mungu utasonga mbele kwa ujasiri, uadilifu, na kwa uhuru, hadi utakapopenya kila bara, kutembelea kila tabia ya nchi, kufagia kila nchi, na kusikika katika kila sikio, hadi pale makusudi ya Mungu yatakapokuwa yamekamilika, na Yehova mkuu atakaposema kazi imekamilika.”

Katika ngazi ya mtu binafsi, kila mmoja wetu lazima “ajihadhari na kiburi, tusije tukawa kama Wanefi wa kale.”

Naomba nipendekeze kwamba kama wewe au mimi tunaamini tuna nguvu vya kutosha na ni waumini hodari kuepuka dhara ya kiburi, basi labda tayari tunasumbuliwa na ugonjwa huu hatari wa kiroho. Kwa ufupi, ikiwa wewe au

afflicted with and by pride, then we are vulnerable and in spiritual danger. In the space of not many days, weeks, months, or years, we might forfeit our spiritual birthright for far less than a mess of pottage.

If, however, you or I believe we could be afflicted with and by pride, then we consistently will do the small and simple things that will protect and help us become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us].” “Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble.”

As we follow President Benson’s counsel and ask ourselves why the Lord inspired Mormon to include in his abridgment of the book of Helaman the accounts, admonitions, and warnings that he did, I promise we will discern the applicability of these teachings to the specific conditions of our individual lives and families today. As we study and ponder this inspired record, we will be blessed with eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to comprehend, and hearts to understand the lessons we should learn to “beware of pride, lest [we should] enter into temptation.”

I joyfully witness that God the Eternal Father is our Father. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten and Beloved Son. He is our Savior. And I testify that as we walk in the meekness of the Lord’s Spirit, we will avoid and overcome pride and have peace in Him. I so witness in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

mimi hatuamini tungeweza kuathiriwa na kiburi, basi tuko kwenye hali hatarishi na kwenye hatari kiroho. Katika kipindi cha siku chache, wiki, miezi, au miaka, tunaweza kupoteza haki yetu ya uzaliwa wa kiroho kwa ajili ya kitu duni kisicho na thamani.

Ikiwa, hata hivyo, wewe au mimi tunaamini tunaweza kuathiriwa na kiburi, basi tutafanya kila wakati mambo madogo na rahisi ambayo yatatulinda na kutusaidia tuwe “kama mtoto, mtiifu, mpole, mnyenyekevu, mvumilivu, aliyejaa upendo, aliye tayari kutii vitu vyote ambavyo Bwana anaona vinafaa kutuletea [sisi].” “Heri wale wanaojinyenyekeza wenyewe bila kulazimishwa kuwa wanyenyekevu.”

Tunapofuata ushauri wa Rais Benson na kujiuliza kwa nini Bwana alimpa uvuvio Mormoni kujumuisha katika ufupisho wake wa Kitabu cha Helamani maelezo, kuasa, na maonyo ambayo aliyajumuisha, ninaahidi tutatambua matumizi ya mafundisho haya kwa hali maalum za maisha yetu binafsi na familia zetu leo. Tunapojifunza na kutafakari kumbukumbu hii ya msukumo wa kiungu, tutabarikiwa kwa macho ya kuona, masikio ya kusikia, uwezo wa kupambanua na mioyo ya kuelewamasomo tunayopaswa kujifunza ili “kujihadhari na kiburi, kwamba [tusiingie] katika majaribu.”

Kwa furaha ninatoa ushahidi kwamba Mungu Baba wa Milele ni Baba yetu. Yesu Kristo ndiye Mwanawe Mzaliwa wa Pekee na Mpendwa Wake. Yeye ni Mwokozi wetu. Na ninashuhudia kwamba tunapotembea kwa unyenyekevu wa Roho ya Bwana, tutaepuka na kushinda kiburi na kuwa na amani katika Yeye. Ninashuhudia hivyo katika jina takatifu la Bwana Yesu Kristo, amina.