

Elder Richard J. Maynes

A perilous time for the Nephites

From ancient days to modern days, true disciples of Jesus Christ have understood the importance of making and keeping covenants with the Lord.

In approximately 64 B.C., the Nephite nation was living in extremely perilous times. Because of iniquity, dissensions, and intrigue, they found themselves in the most dangerous circumstances (see Alma 53:9). The government teetered on the brink of collapse. The war with the Lamanites had been ongoing for years. Nephite dissidents were leaving to join forces with the enemy. Many Nephite cities had been attacked and captured.

In the midst of this dangerous and chaotic situation, righteous men were sought after to lead the Nephite armies—men like Moroni and Helaman. These Nephite leaders understood that their nation’s ability to defend itself was in direct proportion to their obedience to the Lord. They constantly struggled to motivate the population to remember the Lord and keep His commandments.

Stripling warriors enter into a covenant

At this very critical point in time, after many Nephite cities had been lost and the balance of power seemed to be shifting toward the Lamanites, a miraculous thing took place. A group of people, once Lamanites, now known as Ammonites because they were converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ through the teachings of Ammon, came forward desirous to take up arms in the defense of their newly inherited land, country, and way of life (see Alma 53:13).

The fathers of these Ammonite families had previously made an oath to the Lord never to take up arms again. Helaman, the Nephite prophet, counseled these men to keep their promise to the Lord (see

Alma 53:15). Mormon relates what transpired after Helaman shared that counsel:

“But behold, it came to pass they had many sons, who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies; therefore they did assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites.

“And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty. . . .

“Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men, who entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country. . . .

“And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

“Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.

“And now it came to pass that Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people” (Alma 53:16–18, 20–22).

Faith and obedience of stripling warriors

Helaman and his 2,000 stripling soldiers fought valiantly to protect their families and their liberty. Their entrance onto the field of battle changed the course of the war. Momentum swung back in favor of the Nephites.

In a letter written to Moroni, Helaman describes the faith and courage these young men exhibited:

“And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites. . . .

“Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:45, 47).

Brothers and sisters, “they did not doubt, [and] God [did] deliver them.” In their first great battle, not one of the 2,000 was slain. After the battle, 60 more young Ammonite men joined the small army. Helaman tells us, “They did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them” (Alma 57:21).

The second battle in which this small army was engaged was more intense than the first. In its aftermath Helaman writes:

“And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, . . . there was not one soul of them who did perish. . . .

“And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, . . . and we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith” (Alma 57:25–26).

Making and keeping sacred covenants

Helaman and his young stripling soldiers understood the importance of making covenants with the Lord. They were also recipients of the blessings that come to those who faithfully keep their covenants.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have also taken upon ourselves sacred obligations. We have done this in the waters of baptism and in the temples of the Lord. We

call these obligations *covenants*. Covenants are promises we make to the Lord. They are extremely sacred in nature. The most important thing we can do in this life is to keep the promises or covenants we have made with the Lord. When we keep our promises to the Lord, He allows us to progress spiritually.

A covenant-keeping family

During the past two years, Sister Maynes and I have been assigned to serve in the Philippines. We have come across many examples of Filipino families and individuals who understand and keep the covenants they have made with the Lord. Let me share with you an experience that we have had with one of these families.

A few months ago I was assigned to preside at the Talisay Philippines Stake conference. During the Sunday general session, I began my talk by thanking the congregation for their reverence. While speaking, I looked down to my left and saw a very large family sitting a couple of rows back from the front of the chapel. I was impressed to point them out and use them as an example of a family who understood and lived the principle of reverence. The parents were sitting there surrounded by many, many reverent children.

Upon the completion of the meeting, we had the wonderful opportunity to meet the Abasanta family. The more I learned about them, the more I was impressed with the fact that they truly understood what it meant to keep covenants and live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brother Lani and Sister Irene Abasanta joined the Church 22 years ago. Together they have had 17 children. Among the 17 children is one set of triplets. We all know that raising a family is not an easy task anywhere in the world, and the Philippines is no exception. The Abasanta family is a living example that it can be done, and it can be done in the right way.

The successes they have enjoyed raising their children in the Church are made manifest in many ways. A family of 19 sitting reverently through Church meetings is just one example.

Another example is illustrated by how they work hard and how they work together to meet their everyday financial needs. Brother Abasanta works as an electrician. Sister Abasanta, with the help of her daughters, makes and sells jewelry out of their home. Together they have succeeded in providing the necessities of life for their family.

Even more important than their example in supporting their large family financially is how they teach their children to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their regular family home evenings play an essential part in the teaching of their family. Referring to their family home evenings, Brother Abasanta said, “First we discuss any problems we might have in the family and how we can become more united; then there is a spiritual thought or lesson; then we play games.”

At a recent family home evening, Brother Abasanta used the *Liahona* magazine as a tool to help him teach his children not to spend so much time watching television but instead to use that time doing something of greater worth, like homework or reading the scriptures. Over the years during family home evenings, the children have been taught to practice being reverent. Because their children have been taught to be reverent in their home, it is easier for them to demonstrate reverence at church on Sunday.

Another example of living the gospel and keeping their covenants is the priority they have given in teaching their children the importance of paying an honest and full tithing. Brother Abasanta stated: “We teach our children that the food we have is a direct result of paying tithing. When our kids have their own work, we make sure to tell them that they need to pay their

tithing. It’s hard to provide for so many children, but when I pay my tithing faithfully and honestly, it’s not hard at all. We just trust in the Lord 100 percent that if we pay an honest tithing, we’ll be able to eat daily.”

Remember that I mentioned that Brother and Sister Abasanta have 17 children. Now let me tell you about the triplets. They happen to be all boys. They happen to be 19 years old. Their names are Ammon, Omni, and Omner. Yes, you guessed it. All three are serving the Lord as faithful and hard-working full-time missionaries. Ammon is serving in the Philippines Baguio Mission, Omni is serving in the Philippines Davao Mission, and Omner is serving in the Philippines Manila Mission.

Now I do not want you to get the impression that the Abasanta family is perfect. None of us are perfect. However, by trying their best to live the commandments and keep their covenants, the Abasanta family is able to enjoy the blessings of the Lord in their lives.

Earn the Lord’s trust by doing His will

Brothers and sisters, we are all looking forward to the day when we can return home to our Heavenly Father. In order to qualify for exaltation in the celestial kingdom, we must gain the trust of the Lord here on earth. We gain the trust of the Lord through earning it, and that is accomplished through our actual performance in living His gospel and keeping our covenants. In other words, we earn the trust of the Lord by doing His will.

Remember when the Lord warned Joseph Smith regarding those who “draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

Remember the admonition of James: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

Actions truly do speak louder than words. In fact, actions mean much more to the Lord than words. The Lord declared in the Doctrine and Covenants, “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments” (D&C 42:29).

Faithfully keep our promises to the Lord

Helaman and his young stripling soldiers are an ancient illustration of the blessings that come to those who faithfully keep their promises to the Lord. The Abasanta family is a modern-day example of a family doing their best to keep their covenants and live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have made promises to the Lord. We have promised to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments (see D&C 20:77). Faithful members of the Church keep those promises.

It is my prayer today that we might all recommit ourselves to do everything in our power to earn the trust of the Lord by doing His will, by living His gospel, and by keeping our covenants, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, President Packer, Sister Dalton, and Elder Maynes.

The choir and congregation will now sing “Now Let Us Rejoice.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder H. Bryan Richards of the Seventy will address us, after which we shall hear from Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop of the Church. He will be followed by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
“Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Elder H. Bryan Richards

Remember the teachings of your father

On January 10, 1945, I received my patriarchal blessing from my father’s mission president, John M. Knight. It was the only time I ever met him. After he pronounced my lineage, his next words—the first words of counsel in my blessing—were “Remember the teachings of your father.” That counsel has been and continues to be a great blessing in my life.

Not long after receiving my blessing, I came home from Sunday School. Our lesson had been about Joseph Smith’s First Vision, and I was wondering if it was really true. My father was leaving for a Church meeting. I stopped him and asked, “Dad, how do we really know that Joseph Smith

had that vision?” My father put his arm around me, and we sat on the sofa in our living room. There he shared with me the Prophet Joseph’s account, and my father bore his own testimony of its truthfulness. That experience with my father burns in my heart today. Since then I have never doubted the Prophet Joseph’s account of his First Vision.

Over my teenage years, I remember vividly my father’s regular study of the Book of Mormon. His love of the Book of Mormon and counsel to me to study and ponder over it were the beginning of a journey with that sacred record that is the foundation of my personal testimony today. It is a journey each of us must take.