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Agriculture and Stock Raising Among Book of Mormon Peoples

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Abstract: Pioneers and New World peoples often place an emphasis on agriculture when settling a new land. Such was the case with the Book of Mormon peoples who brought fruits and grains to America.

Guide Lessons.

LESSON I.

Theology and Testimony.

FIRST WEEK IN JUNE

AGRICULTURE AND STOCK RAISING AMONG BOOK OF MORMON
PEOPLES.

A learned and particularly well traveled gentleman who chanced to be in the state of Utah a few weeks ago, responded to a remark in relation to the beauty and profusion of the flowers in Brighton, Utah, that nowhere in all his travels, and, by the way, travel is his business, has he ever seen such beautiful flowers as he saw while in the Holy Land.

From this land of flowers, Lehi and his followers went forth to South America, their first abiding place, where the vegetation is rank and luxuriant, and all nature is featured in "the large."

The inspiration of the Almighty God, coupled with innate practical sense, had led them to carry with them seed grains, that they might produce food, when they arrived in the land that they were slowly being guided to by the sure hand of Providence.

Peoples who pioneer, who build up new lands, must always make agriculture fundamental. It can never cease to be of first importance to any civilization; but in a new country it must of necessity receive an emphasis out of all proportion to the emphasis placed on any other occupation or industry. Moreover, if conditions of society become unusual, the importance of agriculture is at once apparent. The present war has made the art and science of producing food the paramount industry of the whole world.

Seeking for information in relation to the Jaredites and their agricultural and stock-raising pursuits, we find the following significant paragraphs in Ether 9:16, 17, 18:

"And the Lord began again to take the curse from off the land, and the house of Emer did prosper exceedingly under the reign of Emer; and in the space of sixty and two years, they had become exceedingly strong, insomuch that they became exceedingly rich.

"Having all manner of fruit, and of grain, and of silks, and of fine linen, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things.

"And also all manner of cattle, of oxen, and cows, and of sheep, and of swine, and of goats, and also many other kind of animals which were useful for food of man.

"And they also had horses and asses."

Nor did they till the ground with the primitive instruments used by many peoples in earlier ages. These peoples on this Western continent had learned the art of making tools.

"And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth, both to plough and to sow; and to reap and to hoe, and also to thresh.

"And they did make all manner of tools with which they did work their beasts" (Ether 10:25, 26).

History was young in the making, with Lehi and his little band, when we learn something definite in relation to their agricultural activities, as well as the animals which they speedily used to sustain life and further their civilization.

"And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore we were blessed in abundance.

"And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals; which were for the use of man" (I Nephi 18: 24,25).

Lehi's people seemed to rejoice greatly when they discovered that such grains as wheat, corn and barley would grow and flourish in their new found home. Nor do we wonder at this rejoicing, for all persons know that these grains are staples.

Wheat, corn and barley were known to the peoples of Bible lands. Oats appear not to be mentioned either in the Bible or Book of Mormon. Rye is mentioned in the Bible, but the word seldom appears. However, the Nephites speak of two grains which they called neas and sheum, for which no English equivalent seems to have been available.

Fruit grew in abundance, on this land, under the careful cultivation of its horticulturists. Often they speak of vineyards and grape culture. They made wine which was sometimes used for worthy purposes, but often as an aid to accomplish the most diabolical of crimes. No land is more wonderful than this land of America in the production of fruits, for all the fruits of both temperate and tropical climes are native to it, and the peoples who earlier inhabited this continent had a variety of fruit.

The wisdom of a wise policy seldom appears all at once. No doubt the protection from their enemies appeared to the Nephites the chiefest reason why they should build in communities and then go forth from these settlements and till their soil; just as in the pioneer days of Utah the people built forts in which they gathered to protect themselves from the Indians.

Protection, however, is only one of the blessings afforded to people who build hamlets, towns and cities, and then go forth to their labors on the farm or in the mine, as necessity requires. All the religious, intellectual and social uplift that is a part of the life of those who live in communities is lost to those who scatter great distances and live on immense farms. Persons thus isolated can seldom gather at the church, the school, the amusement hall, and in too many instances they are without the church, the school and the amusement hall; for the simple reason that being without the community they lack also the valuable assets of community effort.

That the Latter-day Saints have made history for themselves in this respect was made most noticeable in 1913, when the National Education Association met in Salt Lake City. Many excursions were made by the visitors into surrounding counties.

Again and again, these men, used to school supervision, remarked: "Why, you are practically without the rural school problem; a problem that is proving most vexatious and difficult to cope with in many parts of our country."

Now, the same advantage and opportunities that are ours through having grouped ourselves in settlements, were undoubtedly enjoyed in large or small measure by the Nephites. The inspired leadership of President Brigham Young, and the stalwart men and women who builded with him is the source to which we trace the superiority of our community life; and we doubt not, could we hold converse with the Nephites, that they would attribute the advantages of their community life in their agricultural districts to precisely similar sources.

Another point of resemblance between our methods and their methods of agriculture, will be readily recognized when we say that there is every reason to believe that they knew and applied the science of irrigation in arid regions. In other parts, as with us, they depended on the rainfall, and were greatly distressed over a season of drought.

If the Latter-day Saints are to be distinguished because of what they have contributed to the world's knowledge in relation to irrigation, what shall we say of these former-day Saints, the Nephites, who dwelt upon this continent many centuries ago?

PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS.

1. Why must agriculture be a fundamental vocation of all peoples?
2. Why does a crisis or universal condition in the economic life of the people, bring the importance of agriculture immediately to the fore? Illustrate.
3. Did the peoples of the Book of Mormon know anything of the manufacture of tools to carry on their work? Quote passage in proof of contention.
4. Tell why the Nephites would rejoice greatly when they discovered that such grains as wheat, corn and barley would grow in their new found home.
5. Account for the Nephites finding the cow, horse, oxen and ass, the goat and wild goat, in the woods and forests of this country.
6. Why would you expect the inhabitants of America, if industrious, to have a great variety of fruit to eat?
7. Would the Lamanites, when nomadic, caring most for the hunt, have the fruit and grains to eat that the Nephites would?
8. Discuss the advantage coming to people who, living in agricultural districts, build communities and work together.
9. What disadvantage must be borne by persons who, cultivating farms, elect to live on these farms far away from others?
10. What practice that has distinguished the Latter-day Saints in the cultivation of the soil, was in vogue to an extent among the Nephites?

LESSON II.

Work and Business.

SECOND WEEK IN JUNE.

LESSON III.

Genealogy.

THIRD WEEK IN JUNE.

ENGLISH RACIAL HISTORY, 55 B. C. TO 1066 A. D.

We have seen that the northern European nations were all descended from the Teutonic race—the Franks and Germans from the Goths, the Scandinavians, Saxons and Normans from the Northmen, and the Welsh, Irish and Scotch from the Celts—all coming down probably from the sons of Japheth. The Latin