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CHAPTER X.

THE REIGN OF KING BENJAMIN—THE PROGRESS OF HIS PEOPLE—HIS LAST GREAT SPEECH—HE ESTABLISHES THE CHURCH OF CHRIST—ALL THE PEOPLE COVENANT WITH GOD—MOSIAH II. ANOINTED KING.

A MIGHTY man in the midst of Israel was Benjamin, the son of Mosiah. Blessed were the people over whom he reigned, for he governed them in righteousness, and for their welfare he labored with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul. Holy and pure in his individual life, he was ministered to by angels, and was the frequent recipient of revelations from on high.

The reign of Benjamin was a long one; he died at a very advanced age. Some time during this period, the aggressive Lamanites, not content with occupying the Land of Nephi, actually followed the Nephites into the Land of Zarahemla and invaded that also. The war was a bloody one. King Benjamin led his forces, armed with the historic sword of Laban, which appears to have been handed down from monarch to monarch from the days that Nephi first wielded it, and with his own strong arm slew many of the enemy. Benjamin was ultimately successful in driving the invading hosts out of all the regions occupied by his people, with a loss to the Lamanites of many thousand warriors slain.

The reign of Benjamin was also troubled with various religious impostors, false Christs, pretended prophets, etc., who caused apostasy and dissensions among the people, much to the sorrow of the good king.

However, by the aid of some of the many righteous men who dwelt in his dominions, he exposed the heresies, made manifest the falsity of the claims of the self-styled Messiahs and prophets, and restored unity of faith and worship among his subjects; and in such cases where these innovators had broken the civil law, they were arraigned, tried, and punished by that law. It must not be forgotten that freedom of conscience was absolutely protected amongst the Nephites, and even the civil law was administered with great mercy in the days of these kings. In his last great speech to his people, Benjamin reminded them of the justice and clemency with which he had caused the law to be administered, how none of them had been arbitrarily cast into prison or otherwise punished, except for actual proven violations of the law. He also reminded them how he, their king, had labored with his own hands to defray the expenses of royalty, in order that they might not be ground down by excessive taxation. No wonder that he was so greatly loved and his name held in such high reverence by his people. Recorded history scarcely affords such another instance of kingly humility and regard for the welfare of his people.

We may presume that the original inhabitants of Zarahemla, just awakening to a newness of religious life, were particularly subject to the influences brought to bear by these impostors. They had but lately learned the mysteries of the plan of salvation and of the coming of the Messiah to dwell among the sons of men. The glory and beauty of this Divine advent filled their new-born souls with joyous hope. Looking forward for the arrival of that happy day, with their first love undiminished and their zeal unslackened, they were

especially open to the deceptions of those who cried, Lo, the Christ is come! or, Behold, a great prophet hath arisen! To this peculiar phase of spiritual condition in the midst of the lately consolidated races in the land of Zarahemla, we may attribute the frequency with which false prophets troubled the reign of Benjamin.

There was another class who, moved by the spirit of unrest, were a source of perplexity to the king. They were those who, having left the Land of Nephi with the righteous, still permitted their thoughts and affections to be drawn toward their former homes and old associations. Like Lot's wife, these Nephites were ever hankering for that which they had left behind. The natural consequence was that they were constantly agitating the idea of organizing expeditions to visit their old homes. The first of these that actually started, of which we have an account, was led by an austere and bloodthirsty man. When they approached the Land of Nephi, a great dissension arose in the company. The leader and some others desired to attack, and if possible destroy, the Lamanite inhabitants, but others, seeing that there was good amongst them, desired to make a treaty with them. This division of feeling led to a disastrous battle, in which the members of the expedition fought against each other with such fury that they ceased not to contend until all were slain except fifty men, who, in shame and sorrow, returned to Zarahemla to recount the miserable end of their venture. Yet some remained unsatisfied, they were still over-zealous to inherit the land of their forefathers, and, under the leadership of a man named Zeniff, another company started on the ill-advised journey. Nothing was heard from them while Benjamin reigned.

When king Benjamin was well stricken with years, the Lord directed him to consecrate his son Mosiah to be his successor on the Nephite throne. Feeling that age was impairing his energies he directed his son to gather the people together at the temple that had been erected in Zarahemla, and he would then give them his parting instructions. (B. C. 125.) Agreeable to this call the people gathered at the temple, but so numerous had they grown that it was too small to hold them. They also brought with them the firstlings of their flocks that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the Mosaic law. As the assembled thousands could not get inside the temple they pitched their tents by families, every one with its door towards the building, and the king had a tower erected near the temple from which he spake.

The teachings of king Benjamin at these meetings were some of the most divine and glorious ever uttered by man. He preached to them the pure principles of the gospel—the duty which men owed to their God and to their fellows. He also told them how he had been visited by an angel, and what wondrous things that angel had shewn him concerning the coming of the God of Israel to dwell with men in the flesh. So great were the things that this angel revealed and king Benjamin repeated to the people that we think it best to give you his own words. They are:

For behold the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent, who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven, among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing

the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue, even more than men can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him and shall crucify him. And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold he standeth to judge the world; and behold all these things are done, that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

When Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered to him by the angel, he observed that the power of his testimony had so worked upon the Nephites that they, in the deep sense of their own unworthiness, had fallen to the ground. And they cried out confessing their faith in the coming Messiah, and pleading that through his atoning blood they might receive the forgiveness of their sins, and that their hearts might be purified. After they had lifted their deep felt cry to heaven, the Spirit of the Lord came down upon them, and because of their



NAZARETH, THE HOME OF MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

exceeding faith they received a remission of their sins.

Their inspired ruler then continued his discourse. He enlarged therein on the truths of the atonement and other soul saving doctrines. Having finished his address he sent amongst his hearers to know if they believed and accepted the heavenly truths he had been teaching. Great was his joy when he found that they not only believed, but because of the working of the Spirit of the Lord in their hearts they knew of their truth. Still more, the Holy Spirit had wrought such a change within them that they had no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. The visions of eternity were opened to their minds, their souls were filled with the spirit of prophecy, they longed to serve the Lord with undivided hearts, and declared themselves willing to make a covenant with him to keep his commandments and do his will the remainder of their days.

The king then gave them a new name, because of the covenant they desired to make, which thing he greatly desired. The name they were to bear for ever after was the name of Christ, which should never be blotted out except through transgression. Thus was established the first Christian church in Zarahemla (B. C. 125), for every soul who heard these teachings (except the very little children who could not understand) entered into this sacred covenant with God which most of them faithfully observed.

King Benjamin's truly royal work was now done. He had lived to bring his people into communion with their Creator, his spirit was full of heavenly joy, but his body trembled under the weight of many years.

So before he dismissed the multitude he consecrated his son Mosiah to be their king, appointed priests to instruct the people in the ways of the Lord, and, with his patriarchal blessing, dismissed his subjects. Then according to their respective families they all departed for their own homes.

Mosiah now reigned in his father's stead, whilst Benjamin, beloved and honored, remained yet another three years on the earth before he returned to the presence of his Father in heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

ZENIFF RETURNS TO THE LAND OF NEPHI—HIS TREATY WITH THE LAMANITES—THE PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE OF ZENIFF—THE TREATY BROKEN—WAR—PEACE AND WARS AGAIN—THE DEATH OF ZENIFF—NOAH'S WICKED REIGN—HIS WARS WITH THE LAMANITES—THE PROPHET ABINADI—HIS TERRIBLE MESSAGE OF GOD'S WRATH—HE IS MARTYRED—ALMA—HE PLEADS FOR ABINADI—IS CAST OUT—FLEES TO THE PLACE OF MORMON.

BEFORE proceeding with the story of king Mosiah's reign, we will return to the land of Nephi, and learn how matters are progressing there. It will be recollected that during the reign of king Benjamin a company started from Zarahemla to return to the old home of the Nephites. Their leader's name was Zeniff. What became of him and them was a question that was never answered during that king's lifetime.