



Type: Magazine Article

The Laws of the Nephites

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Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1 January 1880), pp. 5

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: Discusses the Nephite political system under the monarchy and judges. Also considers legal matters under the judges, such as procedures for being heard as the “voice of the people,” various sanctions for crime, and treatment of prisoners of war.

THE LAWS OF THE NEPHITES.

BY G. R.

IF the existence of wise, just and liberal laws, administered in righteousness, be the rule by which we can judge of the true greatness of a nation and of the happiness and prosperity of its citizens, then the Nephites were a far happier and more prosperous people than were their cotemporaries on the eastern continent. If this be not so, then we have not read history aright.

The Nephite nation was co-existent with the great Roman power that for so long triumphed over and crushed the surrounding people in Europe, Asia and Africa. True, Rome was founded more than a century before Lehi left Jerusalem, (*) but at the time of his exodus its growing power had scarcely begun to be felt outside of Italy. At the time that Moroni's record closed, the Nephites, as a nation, had become extinct, and the glory of the mistress of the world was rapidly fading away. Rome had been sacked by barbarians, the empire had been divided into two governments, the legs of Nebuchadnezzar's great image were forming; people and nations were rebelling and throwing off the iron yoke, and the idea of universal empire had become a thing of the past. (†) But how different the theory and genius of the two nations! The Nephite rulers governed by the power of just laws, the Romans by the might of the unsheathed sword. Amongst the former, every man was a free man, with his rights as a citizen guaranteed and protected by just laws. Amongst the latter, few could assert, as did the Apostle Paul, "Civis Romanus Sum"—I am a Roman citizen. The vast majority of the millions who formed its people were either abject allies, vanquished enemies or degraded slaves. (‡) Neither of these had many rights that the Roman citizen felt himself called upon to respect. (§) We are apt to be awed by the grand military exploits of the Roman generals, and to be dazzled with the magnificence in art and architecture of Rome, but we must recollect that the history of that city is the history of tyranny. Its power, during the greater portion of its continuance, was in the hands of the few, who used it for the interest of their class. The masses of the population were the subjects of oppression and violence.

No language could so well describe the spirit of Roman aggrandizement as that used by the Prophet Daniel when interpreting to the Babylonish king the import of the terrible image he had seen in his dream. These are his words: "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: for as much as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." (Daniel ii. 40.) And thus did Rome rule the eastern world as with a rod of iron. We need not refer to the other nations that existed on the eastern continent, for the people that Rome neither conquered nor destroyed were barbarians, who, during the existence of the Nephites, filled but a small page in the world's history.

These facts are presented as worthy of the consideration of all who study the social and political condition of the great

*—The generally accepted date for the foundation of Rome is 753, B. C.

†—The eastern and western empires were divided A. D. 395. Alaric, the Goth, sacked Rome A. D. 410. Britain broke away from the empire A. D. 418. Gaul, Spain and Africa were soon afterwards lost.

‡—In Sicily alone, goaded by ill treatment, the slaves rebelled. Their army numbered 200,000 (B. C. 134-132).

§—It was no uncommon thing for a Roman consul to order the magistrate of an allied town to be flogged for some trifling offense. A mere citizen, passing through Venusia, had a free peasant whipped to death for jestingly asking the citizen's slaves if they were carrying a dead body in the litter on their shoulders.

and highly-favored people who flourished on this continent for so many centuries; and we imagine the student cannot fail to be impressed with the thought that they were at least a thousand years in advance of their fellow men in the science of true government; and in their polity find a type of the most advanced and most liberal forms of government of the present age. That this should be so, will not surprise us when we consider that they were a branch of the house of Israel, a people who enjoyed more political liberty (until their own follies had cut them off therefrom) than any of the other nations of antiquity, and that to the law of Moses they had added the divine teachings of the everlasting gospel, which in themselves are a perfect law of liberty. Further, it is a noteworthy fact, which stares us in the face from the beginning to the end of the Book of Mormon, that when the people departed from the gospel principles, it was there and then only that they fell into bondage, of whatever nature that bondage might be.

The political history of the Nephites may be consistently divided into five epochs:

First. When they were governed by kings.

Second. The republic when they were ruled by judges and governors.

Third. A short period of anarchy when they divided into numerous independent tribes.

Fourth. The Messianic dispensation, when they were controlled entirely by the higher law of the holy priesthood.

Fifth. The chaotic state of internecine war which preceded their final extinction as a nation and as a race.

(To be Continued.)

BOILING BROTH IN THE HIGHER ANDES.

IN Byam's "Wanderings in Chili and Peru," we find the following remarkable illustration of one of the well-known laws of heat:—"Feeling very cold, we determined to make some soup to warm us, and as we had plenty of meat and onions, we cut them up, put them into a saucepan with salt and Cayenne pepper, and set them onto boil. I only relate this for the information of those who have not been to great heights, those who wish to go there, and also of those who, perchance, may believe that boiling must be the same thing all over the world. After our soup had bubbled away in the most orthodox style for more than two hours, we naturally concluded that our 'bouillon' was ready and the meat perfectly done, especially as the last had been cut into rather small pieces; but, to our great surprise, we found the water almost colorless, and the meat almost as raw as when it was first put into the pot. One of the miners told us it was of no use trying to boil anything, as nothing could be cooked by water on the top of that mountain; for, although the water bubbled away very fast, the heat was not great enough to boil a potato.

"At great altitudes the water begins to boil long before it arrives at the heat of 212 deg. of Fahrenheit and as water cannot get hotter than boiling point, except by the compression of the steam, nothing can be cooked unless some safe means of confining the steam be adopted. I saw directly how the matter lay, and, sticking the lid tight on the pan, made it fast with heavy lumps of silver ore that were lying about, attaching them to the handle, and putting others on the top of all. In a very short time the steam got up, and, though it made the lid jump a little, I managed to get a good broth, to the great surprise of the miners, who could not conceive what I was about."