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The Lands of the Nephites: The Land of Nephi

Author(s): George Reynolds

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Abstract: A series of essays on Book of Mormon geography. To the earlier Nephites “the whole of North America was known as the land of Mulek, and South America as the land of Lehi.” From the period of Mosiah until Christ South America was “divided into two grand divisions”: Zarahemla and the land of Nephi.

Woodruff and Lyman Wight landed from a steamboat at Nauvoo.

Once more there was a quorum of Apostles among the Saints; once more they had those who held the keys of the priesthood and presidency in their midst, and though gloom reigned in the city for the death of the loved ones who had gone, yet men rejoiced, and a feeling of relief filled the heart of every faithful Saint. The guardians whom God had appointed were there, and the thought gave comfort and strength.

(To be Continued.)

THE LANDS OF THE NEPHITES.

THE LAND OF NEPHI.

BY G. R.

THE exact place where Lehi and his little colony first landed on this continent is not stated in the Book of Mormon; (47)* but it is generally believed among the Latter-day Saints to have been on the coast of Chili. In fact it is widely understood that the Lord so informed the Prophet Joseph Smith.

In this land, Lehi died (68). Soon after his death, Nephi, and those of the colony who wished to serve the Lord, departed for a far country. They did so by direct command of heaven. The reason for this command was the murderous hatred shown by Laman and Lemuel towards Nephi and his friends. These vicious men determined to kill Nephi, that he might not be a king and a ruler over them. Their hearts were wicked, they loved sin, and were determined that they would not be governed by their virtuous and heaven-favored brother.

Nephi and his company journeyed in the wilderness for many days. (70). By the expression "the wilderness," we understand the inspired writer to mean the uncultivated and uninhabited portion of the land. This word appears to be frequently used, in after years, with this signification. At other times it is applied to the desert and uninhabitable regions, the tropical forests and jungles infested with wild beasts. The journey of the Nephites was northward, as is shown by their later history; but Nephi, in his very brief account of this migration, says nothing with regard to the direction in which they traveled.

At the end of many days a land was found which was deemed suitable for settlement. Here the company pitched their tents, and commenced the tillage of the soil. In honor of their leader, it was called the land of Nephi; or, to use the modest language of Nephi, "My people would that we should call the name of the place Nephi; wherefore we did call it Nephi." (71).

No doubt the choice of location was made by Divine inspiration. It was a highly-favored land; rich in mineral and vegetable productions, and yielded abundant crops to the labors of the husbandman.

In this happy country the Nephites dwelt, prospered and increased for nearly four hundred years, when by God's command they again moved northward. From that time the Lamanites became the rulers of the land of Nephi.

It may be asked: In what portion of the South American continent lay the region occupied by Nephi and his people?

This cannot be answered authoritatively. We are nowhere told its exact situation. Still, there are many references in the Book of Mormon from which we can judge, to some extent, of its location. Elder Orson Pratt suggests that it was in the country we now call Ecuador. The writer of this paper entirely agrees with Elder Pratt's suggestion. Other brethren have placed it considerably further south, but in our reading of the Book of Mormon we have found no evidence to confirm their suppositions, but much to contradict them.

Our readers must not forget that there were two lands called by the name of Nephi. The first was a very limited district immediately surrounding the city of Nephi. This was the original land of Nephi, where he and his people settled. The other land of Nephi occupied the whole of the continent south of the great wilderness. This wilderness formed its northern boundary, and its frontier thereon ran "in a straight course from the east sea to the west," (383) or, to use our modern geographical names, in a straight line from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

As this wilderness, though of great length east and west, was but a narrow strip north and south, (302) and its northern edge ran close to the head waters of the River Sidon (or Magdalena), it is evident that the land of Nephi covered by far the greater portion of South America. Within its wide boundaries was situated the original land of Nephi, as well as many other lands called by various local names, just in the same way as there are many States in these United States, all together forming one great nation.

The original land of Nephi was the centre of Nephite civilization during their occupancy of the country, and from thence they spread out and colonized. It was also the seat of government when the Lamanites were its rulers. (375). It is very obvious how there grew to be these two lands of Nephi. At first, the small district round the city of Nephi comprised all the territory occupied by the Nephites. As they spread out, whatever valley, plain, etc., they reclaimed from the wilderness was considered a part of that land; and thus, year by year, its borders grew wider and wider, while for convenience sake or governmental purposes, the newly built cities and the land surrounding were called by varied names according to the wishes of the people, most frequently after the leader of the out-going colony or founder of the city. Thus we have a land of Nephi within the land of Nephi, just as we have now-days Utah County within Utah Territory, and the city of New York and the County of New York within the State of New York. To distinguish the smaller or original land of Nephi from the whole country, it is sometimes called the land of Lehi-Nephi.

We have stated above that the original land of Nephi was a very limited district. We think this is easily proved. It was so limited in extent that we are told King Noah built a tower near the temple "so high, that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook" not only the land of Lehi-Nephi where it was built, but also "the land of Shilom and the land of Shemlon," which last named land was possessed by the Lamanites. No matter how high the tower, these lands must have been comparatively small (or at any rate the land of Lehi-Nephi was) to have enabled a man to overlook the whole three from the top of one building.

It was on the borders of this land, at the outer edge of its cultivated grounds, in the forest (or thicket) of Mormon, that Alma used to "hide himself" in the daytime, from the searches of the king," (201) while he ministered among the people when the shades of evening gave him security. It was here

*The figures refer to pages in the Book of Mormon, new edition.

he gathered the believers in his teachings, baptized them in the waters of Mormon, and organized the church of Jesus Christ. From the waters of Mormon to Zarahemla it was twenty-two day's actual travel for an emigrant train.

Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of King Noah would come upon his people, "they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain and departed into the wilderness" (213), which divided the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. "And they fled eight days' journey into the wilderness" (213), when they rested and commenced to build a city, which they called Helam. Being afterwards compelled to leave this city, on account of the persecutions of the Lamanites and Amulonites, they again took their journey northward, and reached the homes of the main body of the Nephites in Zarahemla in about fourteen days (218).

Here we have a people encumbered and delayed with flocks and herds; heavily laden with grain, etc., making the journey (in two separate stages) in twenty-two days. It is scarcely supposable that they traveled in a direct line; mountains, rivers, swamps, etc., would render the journey somewhat circuitous or winding. But even supposing that they did advance in an almost direct line from point to point, it would only make the distance between Nephi and Zarahemla 220 miles, if they traveled ten miles a day; 330, if they traveled fifteen miles; and 440 if they journeyed twenty miles a day.

Our readers must decide for themselves which distance per day is the most likely that a company driving their flocks and herds before them, would advance, through an unexplored wilderness, full of natural hindrances, and without roads, bridges, ferries and other helps to the traveler.

(To be Continued.)

GOOD THOUGHTS.

BY W. H. APPERLEY.

GOOD thoughts generally lead to noble actions, and generous deeds always bring contentment to the mind. The children of the Latter-day Saints have a great work to perform, and all should commence now. There is no time to lose by those who wish to become truly great, and the only way to become truly great is to become truly good.

Every child that intends to make himself great in the kingdom of God must commence with himself.

We should pray very earnestly to God to give us pure thoughts and wisdom to act aright at all times. If we will then do our part, God will answer our prayers. But our Heavenly Father is not very likely to give us pure thoughts, and make us wise, if we pray ever so earnestly and then quarrel with some one, or use bad language of any kind.

I think that boys and girls will generally have good and pure thoughts if they will observe the following advice very carefully:

Give the mind something good to think about; read the history of the great and good—ponder over it, and try to imitate it. Take very careful notice of everything that is beautiful to the eye, such as flowers, paintings and birds, and all that is beautiful in nature and art.

And we should not only observe all these beauties, but we should try to learn all we can about them, by talking to our playmates about them, and asking questions of our parents or those who are older than ourselves.

We must carefully avoid the following: Speaking evil of the absent, and talking of others' faults. If we think some one

has injured us, it is not our right to tell others about it. It would do us no good, and would likely injure his character. We should go to the person that we think has done us the wrong, and explain our complaints in as nice a way as we can. If we will do so, we will generally find that it has been a slight misunderstanding.

It takes moral courage to do so, but this is the only right way to act. I don't think there is an Apostle in our Church that would be unwilling to listen attentively to any such complaints from any little boy or girl.

All who read this should try very hard to live one week without speaking one unkind word. Ask your parents not to scold or provoke you, but to correct your errors in a very quiet and gentle way. Then, with the assistance of God, you may be able to do so. If you should fail the first week, keep trying until you can.

LETTER FROM ONE OF THE BOYS.

SPRINGVILLE CITY,
November 27, 1880.

Mrs. Hannah T. King,

DEAR SISTER:—I have always felt backward in making my first attempt to write a few lines for the INSTRUCTOR. I have overcome my timidity at last, and have made a blundering start. Although I may make a great many mistakes the first time, I hope to improve and do better, if I do not find it too great a task, which I hope I will not.

If it is too much of a task for the boys to write a small piece occasionally, I should think that you would find it a great task to keep up your correspondence.

My parents have been trying so long to get me to write a piece for the JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR, that I cannot put it off any longer.

I have been born and raised in the Church of Jesus Christ, and taught to be honest, and to honor and respect the Priesthood which is placed over us. I have always taken a great interest in the Sunday school, which I consider a good place to spend an hour on Sunday morning.

If any of us do not feel disposed to go to Sunday school, we should stay at home and read our books and the history of the Church, instead of going hunting or rambling around on the streets.

Young folks should feel grateful to our Heavenly Father for the privileges we have, when we think of the small chance our parents had to learn and educate themselves, in the early rise of the Church, when they were persecuted and burned out of house and home by the blood-thirsty mob, and had not clothes enough to cover their bodies from the cold.

It is supposed that the law of the land will protect the human race; it failed in this case, but the law of God will never fail, worlds without end.

For fear your correspondence would stop, I thought I would do my part in keeping it up. I will continue to do so henceforth, as long as I am able. I read your letters with great pleasure, and shall anxiously await your next one. I feel to keep up my end of the chain that you spoke about.

My next letter will come from the south, as I am going on a journey.

I will close, hoping to see your correspondence continued.

Your brother in the gospel,

WILLIAM WALLACE RUBEY.

LIFE is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties but of little things in which smiles and kindnesses and small obligations, are what win and preserve the heart and secure comfort.