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Chapter I

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THE LIFE OF NEPHI.

CHAPTER I.

NEPHI'S CHARACTER—HE GIVES GOD THE GLORY—BORN AT JERUSALEM—PROBABLE TIME OF BIRTH—HIS EDUCATION—KINGS KNOWN TO LEHI—EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH AND OTHER PROPHETS—FAMILIARITY OF NEPHI WITH WRITINGS OF PROPHETS.

OF all the lives which have come down to us in the ancient records, there is, probably, not one, excepting our Savior's, which can be studied with more profit than that of Nephi, the son of Lehi. The influence which he exerted over his associates was most wonderful; but it did not end there. We think we do not overrate it when we say that no man of the nation of which he was the founder did so much as he towards giving shape to the methods of government, to the forms of worship and to the mode of life which prevailed for about a thousand years among that people. He was to them what Moses was to the children of Israel, and though the Nephite nation was prolific in great men, there was not one, it seems to us, who exceeded, if indeed he came up in every particular to, the full measure of his greatness. So far as the record of his life has come down to us, it presents the picture of a man of such perfections as has rarely been seen on earth. He does not leave us in doubt as to why this was the case. The success which attended all his undertakings he claimed no credit for. At no time does he indulge in self-glorification; but in all that he says the disposition to give God the glory is very apparent. He gives him the glory for it all. To this, more than any other cause, do we attribute the prosperity which attended him through life, and which made him the truly great man that he

was. Speaking of himself, he says that he had been highly favored of the Lord in all his days.

Nephi, the son of Lehi, was born at Jerusalem. The exact year of his birth is not given; but we can form a very good idea of the time from what he says respecting himself. His father, Lehi, and family left Jerusalem six hundred years before the coming of the Savior. Nephi, alluding to himself soon after this, while they were in the wilderness, describes himself as "exceeding young, nevertheless large in stature." The record leads us to the conclusion that he was a man in size, though a boy in years—probably not more than fifteen years old. From the language of his brother Jacob in the beginning of his book we infer that Nephi did not live long after the year fifty-five of their exodus from Jerusalem. Jacob says, "he began to be old." He was doubtless at least seventy years old at that time. We judge, therefore, that he was born not far from the year 615 B. C. This would be in the reign of Josiah, the father of Zedekiah, and whose reign closed between eleven and twelve years before the latter was put upon the throne of Judah by the conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

We are not told as to how his childhood was spent. It is evident, however, that his father was in affluent circumstances; for besides his house and land, he had gold, silver and other precious things in abundance; in fact, so much of this kind of personal property did he have, that upon one occasion, it was coveted, as we shall see as we proceed with his history, and was the cause of an attempt to kill Nephi and his three older brothers. Nephi, himself, says he was "born of goodly parents," and he doubtless received an education suitable to his station; he "was taught somewhat in all the learning" of his father.

Lehi had always lived at Jerusalem. He was a descendant of Manasseh, the oldest son of Joseph, who was sold by his brothers. He must have witnessed stirring times in his native city; for though he doubtless shared in the peace and prosperity which prevailed during the long and successful reign of the faithful king, Josiah, he saw no less than four kings on the throne of Judah in the brief space of eleven or twelve years. King Josiah was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, whose reign of three months was brought to a close by the king of Egypt

carrying him to Egypt and laying the land of Judah under tribute and making Jehoiakim, his brother, king in his stead. Jehoiakim reigned eleven years, and in the first part of his reign was a tributary to the king of Egypt, who had put him on the throne. Afterwards he fell into the power of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and for three years he acknowledged him as his superior; then he rebelled. But there was a curse upon him and his family, because of his wickedness; the Lord had taken their strength from them; they could not break the yoke of the foe which was raised up against them. Josephus informs us that:

“The king of Babylon made an expedition against Jerusalem and was received by the king Jehoiakim into the city. But he slew such as were of the flower of their age and such as were of the greatest dignity, together with their king Jehoiakim, whom he commanded to be thrown before the wall without any burial.”

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, whose inglorious reign of a little over three months, was terminated by the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and his marching out of the city and surrendering himself, his wives, his mother, his princes and officers to that king. He and they were all carried prisoners to Babylon. The king of Babylon also took as prisoners upwards of ten thousand of the nobility and leading men of the land, among whom was the prophet Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar then made Zedekiah, the uncle of the last king, and brother of his father, king of Judah.

It was in the midst of scenes like these that Nephi's childhood was spent. His father must have been familiar with the predictions of the Prophet Jeremiah, who for upwards of thirty years before Lehi and family left Jerusalem, had been declaring the word of the Lord unto the people. It is more than likely that he knew him personally. At the time of Nephi's last visit to Jerusalem the Prophet Jeremiah was in prison. There were other prophets also, whom Lehi either knew personally, or, at least, was acquainted with their predictions. Nephi, as a child, was trained in the knowledge of the prophecies. This is apparent in his teachings. He quotes the words of three prophets, of whose predictions we have no record

—Zenock, Neum and Zenos—except the quotations from them which appear in the Book of Mormon. Their predictions and the predictions of another prophet—of which none have yet come to us—Ezais by name, as well as those of Moses, Joseph, Isaiah, and all the prophets from the beginning down to his own day, they brought with them upon plates of brass to this land. Nephi, in speaking of the prophecies of Isaiah, from which he quoted largely, says that the Jews understood the things of the prophets spoken unto them as no other people not taught after their manner could. That he was trained in these things at Jerusalem is easily perceived from what he says; for he understood their style, and their predictions were plain to him. This was an advantage to him afterwards in teaching his people.

CHAPTER II.

TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS—LEHI'S VISION—HE WARNS THE PEOPLE—THEY PERSECUTE AND TRY TO KILL HIM—COMMANDED IN A DREAM TO TAKE HIS FAMILY INTO THE WILDERNESS—CAME TO RED SEA—CAMPED NEAR IT—BUILT AN ALTAR AND MADE OFFERING TO THE LORD—LAMAN AND LEMUEL—THEIR UNBELIEF—SHAKEN AND CONFOUNDED BEFORE THEIR FATHER.

IN the beginning of the first year of Zedekiah's reign there were many prophets in Jerusalem. The events connected with the recent siege of that city were of such a character as to arouse thought and prompt men who feared God to feel after Him. We learn from another source than Nephi's record that there were many false prophets at those times who misled the people and were the means of causing them to harden their hearts against the truth. The prophets of God told the people of Jerusalem they must repent, or that great city must be destroyed. These predictions had their proper effect upon Lehi. He undoubtedly believed them, and he went out and called upon the Lord with all his heart in behalf of his people. While pray-