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Chapter XVIII

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Abstract: Travelers' Descriptions of Land Once Occupied by Nephites—Cradle of an Imperial Race—The Productions of the Land in Modern Times Agree with Description of Same in Book of Mormon—Rapid Recovery from Effects of Disastrous Commotions and Wars Accounted for—Healthy Climate—Remarkable Longevity—Jacob, Enos, Jarom and Omni—Longevity of Indians in Ecuador and Peru

called Lehi, and North America was called Mulek by the Nephites. (Helaman vi. 10).



CHAPTER XVIII.

TRAVELERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF LAND ONCE OCCUPIED BY NEPHITES—CRADLE OF AN IMPERIAL RACE—THE PRODUCTIONS OF THE LAND IN MODERN TIMES AGREE WITH DESCRIPTION OF SAME IN BOOK OF MORMON—RAPID RECOVERY FROM EFFECTS OF DISASTROUS COMMOTIONS AND WARS ACCOUNTED FOR—HEALTHY CLIMATE—REMARKABLE LONGEVITY—JACOB, ENOS, JAROM AND OMNI—LONGEVITY OF INDIANS IN ECUADOR AND PERU.

A TRAVELER by the name of Markham, (Jour. of English Geog. Soc. Vol. xli., 1871, pp. 285, 286.) in speaking of the country between the northern line of Chili and the southern line of Ecuador—the country which we think was called the land of Nephi, and in some portion of which Nephi settled with his people when he fled from his brethren—says:

“This vast tract comprises every variety of climate, and contains within its limits most prolific tropical forests, valleys with the climate of Italy, a coast region resembling Sinde or Egypt, temperate hillsides or plateaux, bleak and chilling pasture lands, and lofty peaks and ridges within the limits of eternal snows. On one mountain side the eye may embrace, at a single glance, sugar cane and bananas under cultivation in the lowest zone, waving fields of Indian corn a little higher up, shaded by tall trees, orchards of tropical fruits, stretches of wheat and barley, steep slopes, covered with potatoes and quinua, bleak pastures where llamas and alpacas are browsing, and rocky pinnacles streaked with snow.”

Such a country, with such a variety of climates and products, was well adapted for the cradle of an imperial race as the Nephites proved to be. The mighty obstacles of nature, which

some portions of that country presented, were such as to tax their ingenuity to the utmost. But Humboldt has well observed that,

“When enterprising races inhabit a land where the form of the ground presents to them difficulties on a grand scale which they may conquer and overcome, the contest with nature becomes a means of increasing their strength and power as well as their courage.”

Stevenson, in his “Twenty Years in South America,” says, in speaking of one of the provinces of this region:

“The various climates, assisted by the various localities of the soil, would produce all the necessaries and all the luxuries of life; for in the small compass of fifty leagues, a traveler experiences the almost unbearable heat of the torrid zone, the mild climates of the temperate, and the freezing cold of the polar regions.”

The cities of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom, which Zeniff calls “the land of our fathers,” were, doubtless, delightfully situated and possessed every advantage of climate and soil. This appears evident from the anxiety of some of the children of those whom Mosiah, by the command of the Lord, led away from that land through the wilderness to Zarahemla, to go back there and live. Modern travelers speak in language of the highest praise of the region in some part of which we suppose those cities stood. Spruce, an English traveler, (*Jour. of English Geog. Soc.*, Vol. xxxi., 1861, p. 175) says, in speaking of the plains in Ecuador:

“A journey of four hours will place the traveler in the region of eternal frost, or, in the space of half a day, he can descend the deep and sultry valleys that separate the mighty chain of the Andes; or, finally, he may visit the tropical forest extending to the shores of the Pacific. This variation of temperature, dependent on elevation, and occurring within narrow limits, furnishes a daily and diversified supply of vegetable food: from the plantain, which as a substitute for bread, is largely consumed by the inhabitants of the coast, to the wheat, potato and other grains and roots, growing luxuriantly on the cool table-lands of the interior. Besides these, the market is furnished with pine-apples, chirunoyas (*anour chi-*

runoya) guayavas (*pridium promiferum*) guavas (*ingapachycarpa*), the fruits of different species of passion-flower, oranges and lemons; and, from January to April, certain European fruits, such as apples, pears, quinces, peaches, apricots, and strawberries.”

Stevenson says of a part of this region which he visited:

“These valleys are principally under cultivation, and bless the husbandman with a continued succession of crops; for the uninterrupted sameness of the climate in any spot is such as to preclude the plant as well as the fruit from being damaged by sudden changes in the temperature of the atmosphere, changes which are in other countries so detrimental to the health of the vegetable world. The fertility of some of these valleys exceeds all credibility, and the veracity of the description would be doubted, did not the knowledge of their localities and the universal description of the equability and benignity of these climates ensure the probability. An European is astonished on his first arrival here to see the plough and the sickle, the sower and the thrashing-floor, at the same time in equal requisition: to see at one step an herb fading through age, and at the next, one of the same kind springing up—one flower decayed and drooping and its sisters unfolding their beauties to the sun—some fruits inviting the hand to pluck them, and others in succession beginning to show their ripeness—others can scarcely be distinguished from the color of the leaves which shade them, while the opening blossoms, insure a continuation. Nothing can be more beautiful than to stand on an eminence and observe the different gradations of the vegetable world, from the half unfolded blade just springing from the earth, to the ripe harvest yellowing in the sun and gently waving in the breeze. An enumeration of the different vegetable productions of this province would be useless; it will be sufficient to observe, that grain, pulse, fruits, esculents and horticultural vegetables are produced in the greatest abundance and of an excellent quality, as well as all kinds of flesh meat and poultry.”

Another traveler, Hassaurek, who resided four years in that country as United States minister, gives us an equally enchanting description of portions of Ecuador which he visited.

Speaking of the country around Cotodachi and Hatuntaqui, he says, it "is chiefly a grain region. Indian-corn, barley, wheat, and potatoes grow in unlimited abundance. All the grains and fruits of the temperate zone could be introduced here. In the gardens and orchards, the peach, the fig-tree and the wild grape grow by the side of the chirimoya, the aquacate, and the raspberry. The climate is delightful. It is the same all the year round: no torrid season enervates the inhabitants of this favored realm; no icy winter sends him shivering to the chimney fire. In fact, stoves and chimneys are unknown; and to know what heat is, one would have to descend to the sultry valley of the Chota, where the negro hums his merry tunes among coffee and plantain trees and the sugar cane. There is no starvation in this neighborhood; nobody dies from cold; nobody sinks sunstruck to the ground; no troublesome insects molest the inhabitants; epidemics are unknown; healthy faces peep at you through the long hedges of aloes; healthy faces stare at you from every Indian cottage. It is not sickness, it is foreign war and internecine strife and perpetual convulsions, that decimate the population and scatter death and decay where wealth and bliss should smile.

"The golden harvests spring; the unfailing sun
Sheds light and life; the fruits, the flowers, the trees,
Arise in due succession; all things speak
Peace, and harmony, and love. The universe,
In Nature's silent eloquence, declares
That all fulfill the works of love and joy.
All but the outcast man! He fabricates
The sword which stabs his peace; he cherisheth
The snakes that gnaw his heart."

The description of Ecuador, its climate and its productions, by modern travelers agrees with that which is said in the Book of Mormon concerning the lands of Lehi-Nephi and of Shilom, which Zeniff and his company entered into treaty with the king of the Lamanites to re-possess. They raised all manner of seeds—corn, wheat, barley, neas and sheum—and all kinds of fruits. From this brief description by Zeniff of the productions of the land we can gather a very correct idea of the character of the climate and the soil. The climate was not too

hot for wheat and barley, nor too cool for all kinds of fruits; in fact if not exactly the same land as that visited by the modern travelers from whom we quote, it was a land resembling it in climate and productions. Zeniff also says, they multiplied and prospered in the land. In such a healthy country as Hassaurek describes, they would multiply: in such a fruitful country, they would prosper.

There is one noticeable feature in the record of the Nephites which strikes one who has lived only in our northern climate and zone: it is the rapidity with which they recovered from the disastrous effects of civil and religious commotions and bloody wars. The frequent allusions through the record to the wonderfully rapid prosperity which followed the cessation of strife is apt to strike the northern reader with surprise. But, when we become familiar with the character of the lands occupied by the Nephites, this surprise ceases. That which was known as the land of Nephi, comprehending an immense district of country, was so favored in climate and soil, was so abundantly blessed in all vegetables and minerals, and was generally so healthy that an industrious people like the Nephites would surround themselves with every comfort and luxury in, what would appear to the inhabitants of less favored localities, an incredibly short space of time.

The land settled by Nephi and his company had, without doubt, a healthy climate. We are not informed as to the age of Nephi or his brothers or their immediate descendants at their demise. But from the dates which are given, it is very evident they lived to a great age. Correct habits of living, with pure lives and the blessing of God upon them, promoted longevity. We think it is apparent from the record that, immediately after leaving Jerusalem, there was a remarkable increase in the duration of life among those who were called Nephites.

Jacob, who was born in the wilderness of Arabia, took charge of the plates after the death of his brother Nephi, and he bequeathed them to his son Enos. The year in which he gave them to Enos, in consequence of his own great age and approaching departure, is not given. Neither are we informed what the age of Enos was at the time he took possession of

the plates. But Enos tells us that, one hundred and seventy-nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem, he himself began to be old and he saw that he must soon go down to the grave. How long he lived after this it is not stated; but from this date it is plain that Jacob and Enos must have lived to be very old men. Jacob was probably born soon after his parents left Jerusalem, so that his life and that of his son Enos must have nearly covered the period mentioned by the latter—one hundred and seventy-nine years.

The son of Enos and grandson of Jacob, whose name was Jarom, took charge of the plates after Enos. We do not know how old he was at the time they were handed to him; but we learn that he finished his writing upon them two hundred and thirty-eight years after Lehi left Jerusalem; that is, he had possession of the plates about fifty-nine years. From this it appears that he lived to be very old; for if Jacob, his grandfather, was born within four years after Lehi left Jerusalem, and Enos was born before Jacob was seventy-five years of age, Enos must have been at least one hundred years old at the time that he writes concerning his approaching descent to the grave; and if Enos was born within seventy-nine years after Lehi left Jerusalem, and Jarom was born to Enos at the time the latter was fifty-nine years old, Jarom also must have been one hundred years old when he delivered the plates to his son Omni. If he lived to be one hundred years old, he must have been about forty-one years of age when his father delivered the records to him; but we are inclined to think he was older than this, and that his father Enos was at least one hundred and twenty years old when he died.

The plates containing the records were in the hands of Omni forty-four years, or until two hundred and eighty-two years from the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem. Thus we have four men in direct descent whose lives, from the birth of the first to the death of the fourth, cover a period of but little, if any, less than two hundred and eighty years! These are very remarkable instances of longevity. It speaks highly for the correctness of their habits and the salubriousness of the climate where they lived, and shows how greatly they were favored of the Lord.

Travelers inform us that in portions of the countries of Ecuador and Peru the inhabitants attain a very high age. In one valley in Ecuador visited by Hassaurek, the curate told him that persons who lived a hundred or more years did not at all constitute exceptional cases. Another traveler says:

“Longevity is common among the Peruvian Indians. I witnessed the burial of two, in a small village, one of whom had attained the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, and the other of one hundred and nine; yet both enjoyed unimpaired health to a few days before their decease. On examining the parish books of Barranca, I found, that in seven years, eleven Indians had been buried, whose joint ages amounted to one thousand two hundred and seven.”