



Type: Book Chapter

Chapter I

Author(s): George Reynolds

Source: *The Story of the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City; Joseph Hyrum Parry, 1888

Pages: 20-29

Abstract: Ancient Jerusalem—Lehi—His Vision—His Call to Preach to the Jews—They Persecute Him—He is Commanded of God to take his Family into the Wilderness—Their Departure—The Return of his Sons to Jerusalem to obtain the Records. They are ill-treated by Laban—His Death—Zoram Accompanies the Brothers into the Wilderness

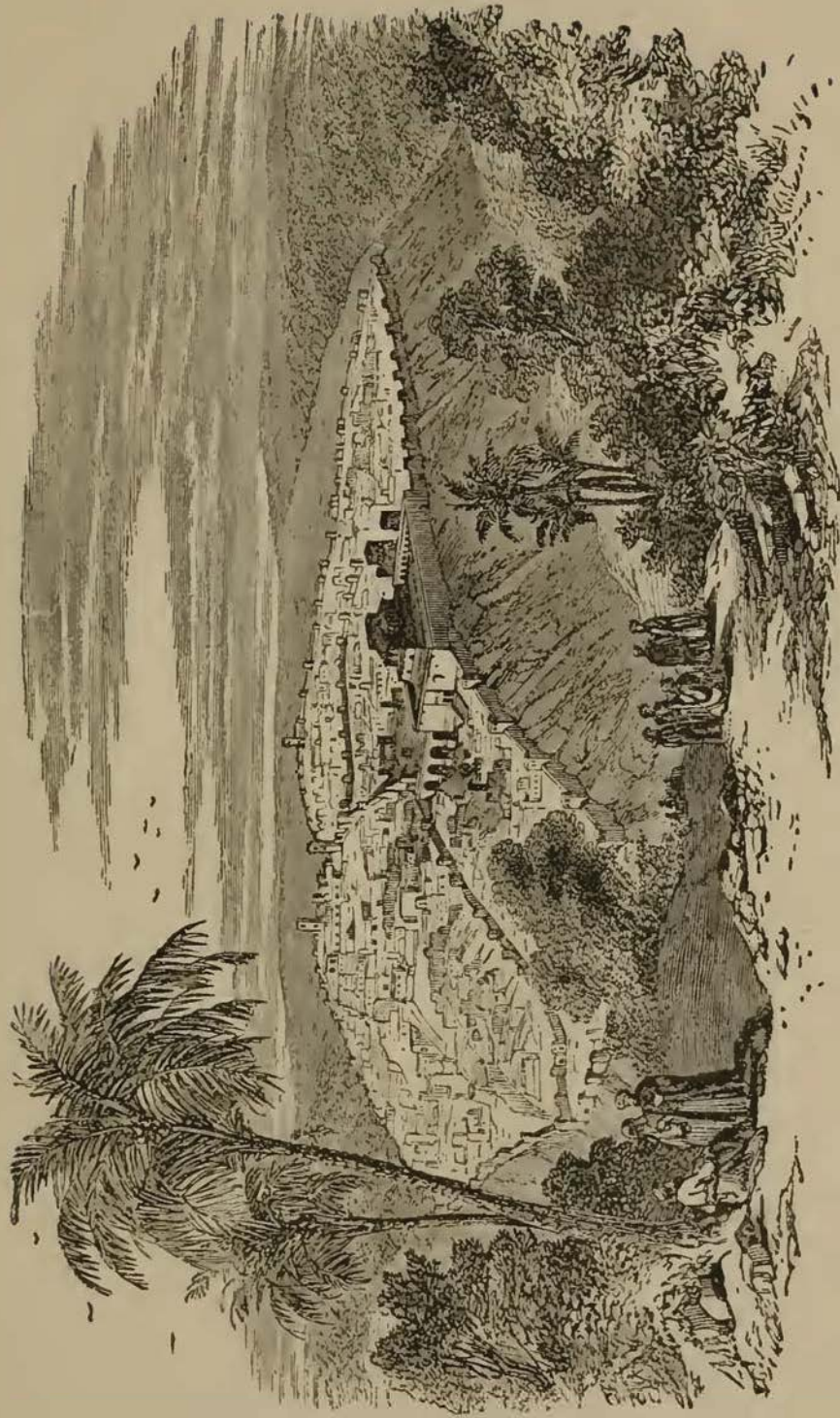
declared, "If iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes; but unto the righteous it shall be blessed for ever." (11 Nephi 1. 7.)

North America was the first of all lands to be inhabited; it was here that Adam and Eve dwelt. The Jaredites from the Tower of Babel also first landed here. But the Nephites made their earliest settlements on the western shores of the southern continent, where by degrees they spread north and south, then east and west, until their cities and villages could be seen in every part of the land.

CHAPTER I.

ANCIENT JERUSALEM — LEHI — HIS VISION — HIS CALL TO PREACH TO THE JEWS — THEY PERSECUTE HIM — HE IS COMMANDED OF GOD TO TAKE HIS FAMILY INTO THE WILDERNESS — THEIR DEPARTURE — THE RETURN OF HIS SONS TO JERUSALEM TO OBTAIN THE RECORDS — THEY ARE ILL TREATED BY LABAN — HIS DEATH — ZORAM ACCOMPANIES THE BROTHERS INTO THE WILDERNESS.

OUR story opens in the royal city of Jerusalem, in the first year of the reign of King Zedekiah, or exactly six hundred years before the birth of our Savior. It was then very grand and very beautiful, the capital of the Kingdom of Judah, and the chief city of all Israel. In name it was holy, for the Temple of the Lord was there. Its busy streets were crowded with a mixed multitude. Priests and Levites who officiated in the ordinances of the law of Moses, worshipers from the other tribes of Jacob, warriors of the armies



ANCIENT JERUSALEM.

of Judah, courtiers and attendants on the king, merchants from Egypt, from Tyre and Sidon and from many other parts, artificers in various trades, all these combined to make it wealthy and renowned, a busy mart of trade, a centre of civilization, and a sacred city.

Holy it should have been, but the glory of the Lord had departed from his house. Its people had become very wicked. They were filled with pride and greed; they heeded not the law of the Lord; their affections were set upon the things of this world; they served God with their lips only, while their hearts were far from him. He had sent unto them his prophets, but one after another they had rejected these holy men; many they had persecuted, and some they had slain.

In this city, at that time, dwelt a worthy man named Lchi. He was of the tribe of Manasseh, but had made his home in Jerusalem all his days, though it was a city of the Kingdom of Judah. He was a man who had been prospered of the Lord and had gathered around him considerable wealth. His wife's name was Sariah, and they had four sons and some daughters. The names of the sons, in the order of their ages, were Laman, Lemuel, Sam and Nephi; the number or names of the daughters are nowhere given in the sacred history.

To this good man the word of the Lord came. God raised him up to be a prophet. He sent him with a message to the people of Jerusalem. As a servant of the Lord he had to warn them of many evils that would come upon them if they did not cease from their wicked ways. But they paid no heed to his

words; they refused to listen to his warning. Indeed, they became very angry because he told them of their sins, and before long they sought to kill him.

God gave to Lehi many dreams and visions. One day a pillar of fire came and rested on a rock before him; and then he heard and saw many wonderful things. The things which he had seen and heard so overpowered him that he went home to his house at Jerusalem, and threw himself on his bed. Then being overcome by the Holy Spirit he was carried away in a vision. In that vision he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded by vast hosts of angels who were singing and praising the Lord. And he saw a holy Being, surrounded by a glory as bright as the sun at noon day, come down out of the midst of heaven. It was the Lord Jesus. Our Savior was followed by twelve others whose brightness exceeded that of the stars. They were Christ's Apostles. These came down and went forth on the face of the earth.

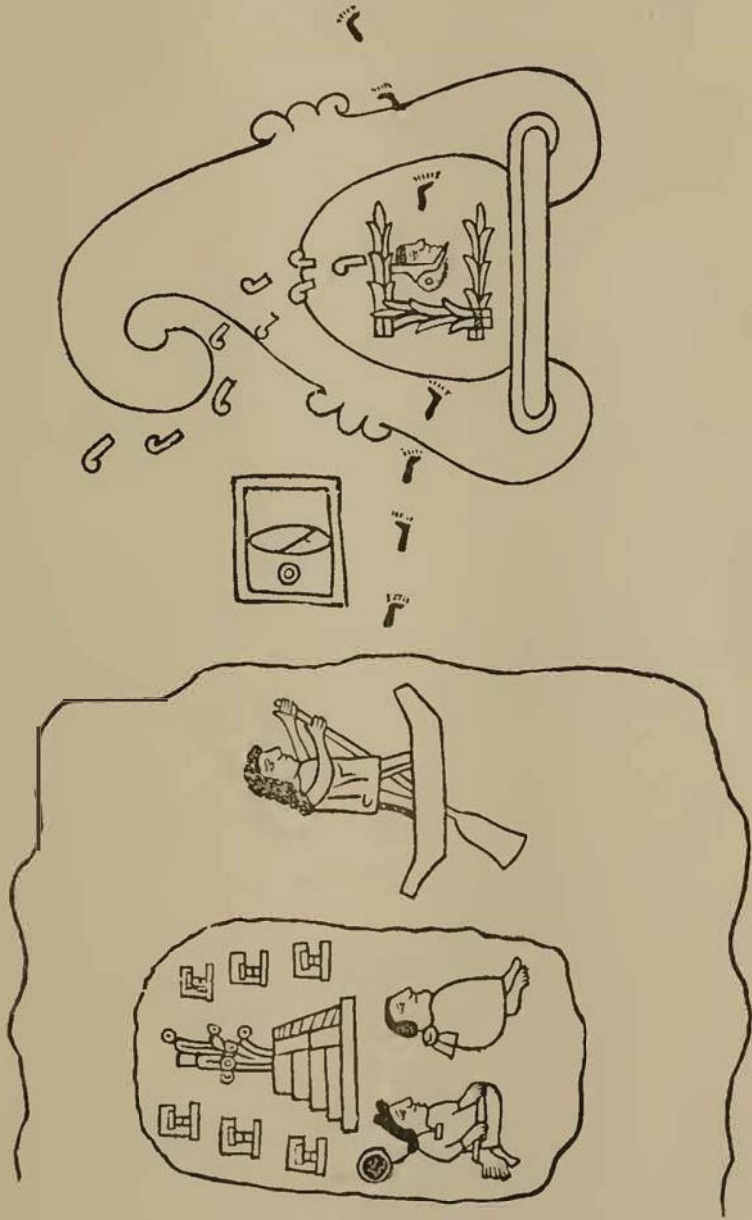
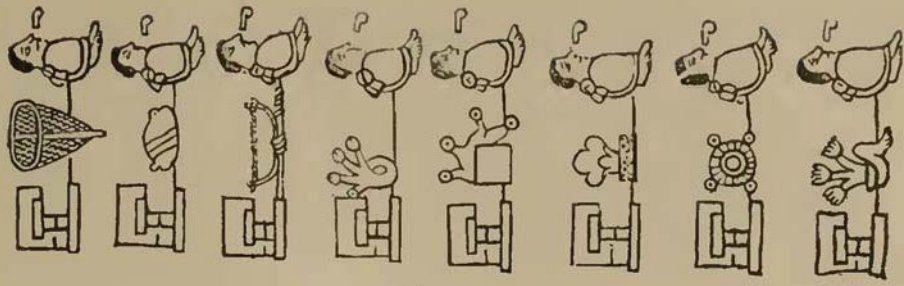
And in the vision the Savior came to Lehi and gave him a book, and bade him read it. In that book was an account of events that had not yet taken place. It was full of the woes that should happen to Jerusalem and her people, if they repented not of their sins and follies. It told how that great city should be taken by her enemies and destroyed; how numbers of the inhabitants should perish, while many should be carried captive into Babylon. All of which was fulfilled a few years later. These things with others were what Lehi told the Jews; and as they did not believe his words they became enraged at him and ill treated him. How gracious was our heavenly Father to shew such great things to Lehi, and to reveal to him so much

with regard to the earthly life of our Lord and Savior, whose coming in the flesh was yet six hundred years in the future.

Before long the Lord was satisfied with what Lehi had said and done. He told him, in a dream, that as the Jews had rejected his message and sought his life, to leave them to the destruction that would surely come upon them. God then directed him to leave Jerusalem and take his family and journey into the wilderness. This Lehi did. He left behind him his gold and other precious things, and only carried with him what was needful for the use of his family during their travels. Like Abraham before him, he went not knowing whither he was going, but went because God had commanded him; and, like Abraham, he was led by Divine power to a blessed land of promise.

When Lehi and his family left Jerusalem they traveled southward to the borders of the Red Sea. When they reached there they pitched their tents and rested for a season in a valley near a river which emptied into the sea. In this valley Lehi built an altar, and upon it he offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and gave thanks unto him for his great goodness in bringing them out of the doomed chief city of Judah.

It was while Lehi's little company were camped in this valley, to which he gave the name of the Valley of Lemuel, that the dispositions of the four young men began to shew themselves. Laman and Lemuel here commenced to grumble, to complain and to rebel; while Nephi was obedient in all things to the word of God and the wishes of his father. He sought the Holy One in earnest prayer in his own behalf and in that



ANCIENT AZTEC CHART, SHOWING LEHI'S TRAVELS. No. 1.

of his brothers, and the Lord made him many precious promises, all of which were, in due time, fulfilled.

While encamped in this valley the Lord, in a dream, commanded Lehi to send his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain certain plates on which was engraven a record of the Jews. They also contained a genealogy or list of Lehi's forefathers. These plates were kept by a rich man named Laban, who held them because, like Lehi, he was a descendant of that Joseph who was sold into Egypt.

When Lehi's elder sons heard this they murmured. They did not want to go back to the city. They said it was a hard thing to do, and they claimed to be afraid of Laban. But Nephi neither feared nor murmured, for he was a man of much faith. On this occasion he said to his father, I will go and do the things which God has commanded, for I know that the Lord gives no commandment to the children of men, save he prepares a way that they may do the thing that he requires of them. When Lehi saw how strong was his son's faith he greatly rejoiced, for he perceived that Nephi had been much blessed of the Lord.

At last all the sons consented to return and get the plates. They took their tents with them, traveled as they came, and in a few days reached Jerusalem. When they arrived they cast lots to decide which of them should first visit Laban. The lot fell upon Laman. As he had no faith in his mission, we can readily understand that he failed to get the records. He went to Laban's house, which was a very fine one, and talked with him on the matter. But Laban grew angry, would not let him have the plates, called him a robber,

and drove him out of the house. When Laman returned to his brothers they were very sad at hearing how violently Laban had acted. All but Nephi wished to return to their father in the wilderness; but he would not consent. He had come up to Jerusalem to do what God had commanded, and he was not going back until he had done it. He said to his brothers, "As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness, until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord has commanded us." Brave words from a heart of faith, and they accomplished their purpose.

Nephi next proposed that they should go to their father's house and collect some of the gold, silver and other precious things which he had left behind, take them to Laban and offer them to him in exchange for the records.

They did all this; still Laban would not let them have the plates. But when he saw how great was the value of the property which they offered him, he desired very much to get it; for he was a wicked man, filled with greed and covetousness. So he thrust the brothers out of his house and kept their property. Not content with this he sent his servants after them to slay them. But the servants did not overtake them, for Nephi and his brothers ran very swiftly and hid themselves in a cave in the wilderness outside of the walls of the city.

Laman and Lemuel were now furious at their lack of success. In their anger they spoke many hard words to Sam and Nephi, and moreover they beat them with a rod. While thus engaged an angel of the Lord stood before them and rebuked them for their cruel treatment

of their younger brothers. He further told them to go up to Jerusalem once again, and Laban should be delivered into their hands.

Even though an angel from heaven had appeared to them, Laman and Lemuel still murmured and did not want to go back to the house of Laban. But after some persuasion from Nephi they reluctantly followed him. His faith had made him their leader, which position he ever afterwards held.

Nephi caused his brethren to hide themselves without the walls, and then went forward alone, not knowing exactly where he was going, but suffering himself to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord. It was now night. When near the house of Laban he came across a man lying in a drunken stupor on the ground. It proved to be Laban himself.

The Spirit of the Lord now directed Nephi to slay Laban, telling him that it was better that one man should die than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief. 'This the Nephites undoubtedly would have done had they not had the law of the Lord with them; and this law was engraved on these plates. As we proceed we shall find that both the Lamanites and the people of Zarahemla sank in sin and dwindled in unbelief from this very cause, that they had no Divine records.

For all that the Spirit thus prompted, still Nephi felt loath to slay Laban, although he had robbed him and his brothers of their father's property and sought to take away their lives. But at last he obeyed the voice of the Spirit, and drawing Laban's own sword from its sheath with it he smote off this wicked man's head.

Nephi next removed Laban's armor from the dead body and put it on his own person; he also took the

sword of Laban and girded it around his waist. Then he went to the dead man's house, and, imitating Laban's voice, he commanded the servant who had the keys of the room where the records were kept to go with him and get them. The servant, whose name was Zoram, obeyed, and brought forth the records, for he thought it was his master who was talking to him.

Nephi, still acting as though he was Laban, had Zoram go with him to where his brothers were hid. When Laman, Lemuel and Sam saw him coming they became greatly afraid, for they did not know him, dressed as he was, in the armor of Laban; and he had some little difficulty in making them understand that he was their brother, and that they had no cause for fear. But when Zoram discovered that Nephi was not his master, he also was seized with fear, and would have run away had not Nephi held him. We may be sure Nephi did not want Zoram to return to Jerusalem, lest he should gather a body of men and follow him and his brothers into the wilderness and slay them. So he spake kind and encouraging words to Zoram, who very soon consented to make a covenant of friendship with Nephi and go with him to the place where Lehi had pitched his tents.