



Type: Magazine Article

The Laws of the Nephites (Concluded)

Author(s): George Reynolds

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1 March 1880), pp. 59

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.

(Concluded.)

THE NEPHITES DIVIDED INTO TRIBES.

WE can well understand that the originating or primal cause of the destruction of the Nephite republic, was the corruption of the people, especially of those whose duty it was to administer the law. This class being greedy for power, formed a secret combination (as those of old time) to establish a kingdom; and as a means to this end, they had the chief judge assassinated, while they selected a man named Jacob, for their king. These royalists, or kingmen, were not as successful in obtaining the sympathy of the majority of the people as they anticipated; they therefore decided to remove in mass to "the northernmost part of the land," and there establish the monarchy. This design they successfully carried out. Those who remained at home favored the division of the people into tribes, and there being none strong enough to effectually oppose this suicidal policy, the republic became a thing of the past.

The organization of these tribes, was evidently on the patriarchal principle; the head, or most influential member of a family, gathering his kinsmen around him. The historian states: "And the people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another, into tribes, every man according to his family, and his kindred, and friends" (p. 402).

Each of these tribes chose a chief, leader, or ruler, as it is written: "And every tribe did appoint a chief, or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes. Now behold, there was no man among them, save he had men's family, and many kindreds and friends."

The laws of the various tribes were not uniform, but there was a general understanding by which they prevented the outbreak of actual war. It is stated that in the thirty-first year (after Christ), "they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, inasmuch that in some degree they had peace in the land" (p. 493).

THE TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF PERFECT PEACE.

The destruction of the wicked, the visits of the crucified Redeemer, the ministry of His disciples, the universal acceptance of the fullness of the gospel by the people throughout the length and breadth of the land, bring us to a time when there was no need of civil law, for all men lived above the law, being controlled and guided at all times by the higher law of heaven. There was no need of courts of law, for there were no disputations nor contentions. No judges or magistrates were required, for there were no offenders nor offenses. There were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor thefts, nor violence, nor murders. For the love of God dwelt in the hearts of the people; they all dealt justly one with another; temptation was removed; they had all things in common; they were one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God (p. 536, 544, 545). It has been said: "Happy are the people who have no history;" and thrice happy were the Nephites of this era, whose history was one

of continued peace and joy. Well may it be written of them, "there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (p. 545). We can scarcely conceive of such a people on this fallen world of ours; an entire continent on which dwelt perfect peace; a people among whom there were no rich, nor poor—all were alike; a race in whose hearts dwelt the sweet influence of the spirit of God, the wisdom of which illumined every mind. How they must have increased, how they must have prospered, how they covered the land with millions of human souls, how the arts and sciences must have been developed, and how greatly must true and heavenly knowledge have been spread abroad! The law of Moses was no longer observed, but the holy priesthood, after the order of the Son of God, ministered in might in their midst; and the faith of the people made angels their frequent visitors; and the purity of each life caused the Holy Spirit to be the constant companion of every soul. This happy, glorious state of holiness, continued a full two hundred years, and then commenced the fall of the nation; rapid indeed was its descent, and great was its fall.

DECLINE AND FALL OF THE NEPHITE NATION.

The first signs of the decrease in the righteousness of the people, recorded in the Book of Mormon (p. 546), are: That some became lifted up in pride; these took to wearing costly apparel, jewels, and the fine things of the world. The people ceased to have their goods and their substance in common. They began to be divided into classes; rich and poor appeared. They commenced to deny portions of the gospel, and to build up churches to suit their peculiar ideas; others began to deny the true church of Christ. They administered that which was sacred (temple ordinances), to the unworthy; and before long they devised all manner of wickedness, and commenced to persecute the servants of God, even to death, when permitted to do so by the powers that rule in the heavens.

Thus matters went on, growing worse every year, until the people were again divided into two nations, Nephites and Lamanites (p. 547), with their old traditions and ways; which, as was natural, ultimately culminated in war, and such a war! For savageness, brutality, and utter devilishness, we doubt if it were ever equalled in this suffering world. But it is not our province, in this article, to enter into historical details. The law is our subject, and of that we can say little. If it were possible to conceive of such a contradiction, we should say that the law of anarchy reigned supreme. Might made right, and the more numerous Lamanites ultimately overcame and annihilated their Nephite brethren. We can well conceive of the nature of the laws during the fierce struggle that preceded this dire calamity from the light afforded by this nation's previous history; they were no doubt framed, enacted and administered for the benefit of the rich and the strong, and to the injury of those in whose bosoms burned one lingering spark of righteousness. The history of the Nephites from beginning to end, fully justifies the saying of the wise man, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

NEVER sit down and brood over trouble of any kind. If you are vexed with yourself or the world, this is no way to obtain satisfaction. Find yourself employment that will keep your mind active, and depend upon it, this will force out unwelcome thoughts. It is the person of chosen or enforced idleness, not the busy, industrious person, who is overcome by despair.