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## Science and Literature Among the Nephites

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**Abstract:** The Nephite civilization began with highly intelligent and learned leaders who were well acquainted with geography and astronomy. They had access to unpolluted scriptures, including the otherwise unknown writings of Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias. They may have been familiar with the books of Abraham and Joseph.

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SCIENCE AND LITERATURE  
AMONG THE NEPHITES.

BY G. R.

THE Nephites were unusually happy in having, as the founders of their nation, men who were not only wise in the ways of the Lord, but also learned in the knowledge of the world. Most races that have made a mark in history, have had to grope their way for centuries from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge. Little by little such races have advanced in the path of civilization, falling into manifold errors, and committing grievous blunders. With Lehi and his posterity it was not so. They were taken from the midst of a people who were surrounded by the most powerful and refined nations of antiquity, with whose wisdom and learning Lehi was undoubtedly well acquainted. We can readily conceive that the Lord, in planting this mighty and vigorous offshoot of the house of Joseph, on the richest and most favored land of all the world, would not only choose one of His most faithful, but also one of His most intelligent servants, to commence the work. Indeed, on the very first page of the Book of Mormon, Nephi incidentally refers to the learning of his father; which learning, we infer from many passages in the sacred record, was obtained by Lehi in Egypt, as well as in Palestine, the associations between the inhabitants of these two countries being, in his day, very close, and the inter-communication very frequent.

As the basis of their literature, Lehi and his colony carried with them a copy of the sacred scriptures, which contained not only an account of God's dealings with mankind, from the creation to the age of Jeremiah, but also the only complete history in existence of the people who lived before the deluge. The Egyptians, Chaldeans and other nations, had mangled, mythic and jumbled-up accounts of man's history, from the creation to the flood; but the Nephites possessed the details of this epoch in much greater completeness than even Christendom does to-day. These scriptures—historical and doctrinal—being numerous reproduced and scattered amongst the people, formed the basis of Nephite literature, giving them the immense advantage over all other people, of possessing the unpolluted word of God in every age then passed, supplemented by a correct and undisputed history of the results, to the world, of man's obedience or disobedience to these heavenly messages. How much more complete these scriptures were than the Bible of Christendom, is shown by the numerous references to the lives, and quotations from the teachings of the ancient worthies—Melchizedek, Jacob, Joseph and others—to the acts and infamies of Cain, etc., not found in the Bible, as well as by lengthy quotations from ancient prophets, whose names—Zenos, Zenoek, Neum, Ezias—are not even mentioned in its pages. How much modern Christianity has lost by these omissions, may be partially inferred from the beauty and grandeur of the extracts given in the Book of Mormon, from the writings and prophecies of Zenos alone. Take, as a single instance, his inspired parable of the wild and tame olive trees, given in the Book of Jacob; no more important, no more sublime prophecy can be found in the whole contents of the holy scriptures.

The connection of Lehi with Egypt, which language he appears to have adopted, doubtless gave him an experimental knowledge of the condition of the whole civilized world in his day, when the glories of Chaldea had departed, and those of

Assyria and Egypt were passing away; when Babylon was at the zenith of its power, but when the growing strength of Persia and Greece was as yet scarcely felt. To this practical information, he, like Moses, added an acquaintance with the learning of the Egyptians, a people wise above all other uninspired races in the numerous branches of science and art, in which they excelled. With this knowledge, combined with the information of immeasurable value contained on the sacred plates, the foundation was laid for a stable civilization; guided by past revelation and present inspiration, to which was super-added the experiences of other nations, as beacon-lights to warn the Nephites of the dangers to which all communities are subject, and to guide them to havens of governmental and political safety.

The Nephites, then, at the outset of their career, had at least all the important historical and geographical knowledge possessed by the most favored nations of the eastern hemisphere, with as much more as it pleased Heaven to reveal. They had one advantage over the peoples they had left—they were well acquainted with them and their condition, etc., but of the Nephites, the dwellers in the old world knew nothing. With regard to the knowledge received through revelation, it is evident, from several incidental expressions scattered through the record, that the Lord did give to His faithful servants information with regard to historical and geographical matters. We will cite one instance: Jacob, the brother of Nephi, in one of his impressive exhortations, while encouraging his brethren (often somewhat downcast on account of their lonely condition, so far from the rest of mankind), remarks: \* "We have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea. But great are the promises of the Lord unto they who are upon the isles of the sea; therefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren."

How could Jacob have known, except by revelation, that the vast continent which the Nephites inhabited, was entirely surrounded by the waters of the great oceans? He and his companions had, but a few short years before, first landed on its shores, and had now explored but a very small portion of its vast extent, and there were no others in communication with them who could supply the information that North and South America were one immense island. Evidently the Lord had revealed this fact to them. And, by the way, this simple statement is a strong testimony of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. At the time that this portion of the sacred plates was translated (A. D. 1827-8), or even when the whole book was published and the Church of Jesus Christ was organized (A. D. 1830), it was not known to modern science that the American continent was indeed an island. Joseph Smith could not have received knowledge of this fact, so unhesitatingly affirmed, from any learned geographer or practical navigator. The hope of centuries, in Europe, had been to discover a north-west passage to India, but to that date all attempts had met with disastrous failure, so far as the chief object was concerned. Little or nothing was then known of the North American coast, west of Hudson's Bay. It was not until after repeated expeditions, that in May, 1847, the truth of the statement of Jacob could be affirmed, from actual knowledge of the geographical features of the country, as at that date, the explorations and surveys by land and sea, from east and west, were brought sufficiently near to leave the matter with-

\*—Book of Mormon, new edition, page 85.

out a doubt. It was not until 1854\* that the first and only ship's crew (that of Captain McClure), which ever sailed across the Arctic Ocean from the Pacific to the Atlantic, along the northern coast of America, returned from their perilous voyage. We thus find that human geographical knowledge could not have aided the prophet Joseph Smith, in making this statement, had it originated with him and not with the son of Lehi.

While ancient Greek and other philosophers were groping among the fallacies of the absurd system of astronomy, given to the world by Ptolemy, and teaching that the sun with all the stars revolved around the earth, the Nephites were in possession of the true knowledge with regard to the heavenly bodies, etc. Possibly they were the only people of their age blessed with a comprehension of these sublime truths. It is altogether probable, that among their scriptures were copies of the Book of Abraham, from which they could acquaint themselves with the beauties and harmonies of celestial mechanism. They undoubtedly had the writings of Joseph (the son of Jacob) as these are quoted in the Book of Mormon; and, as the prophet Joseph Smith found the writings of Abraham and Joseph together in the Egyptian mummies, it is far from improbable that the Nephites, as well as the early Egyptians, possessed both. To show the astronomical knowledge possessed by the Nephites, we will draw attention to the words of two of their prophets. The first is from the reply of Alma, the younger, to Korihor, the Anti-Christ (B. C. 75), when the latter asked for a sign to prove the existence of a God. His words are † "Thou hast had signs enough: will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion; yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form, doth witness that there is a Supreme Creator." The next quotation is from the reflections of one of the servants of God (probably Mormon) inserted in the Nephite history about seventy years later. The writer is speaking of the greatness and goodness of God, and among other things declares: ‡ "Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake; yea, by the power of his voice doth the foundations rock, even to the very center; yea, and if he say unto the earth, move, it is moved; yea, if he say unto the earth, thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours it is done; and thus according to his word, the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for sure it is the earth that moveth, and not the sun." § Thus we find that in these points, the astronomical knowledge of the Nephites was, at least, equal to that of the moderns.

HYPOCRISY desires to seem good rather than to be so. Honesty desires to be good rather than to seem so. The worldlings purchase reputation by the sale of desert; wise men buy desert with the hazard of reputation. We should do much to hear well, more to deserve well, and rather lose opinion than merit.

\*—On October 26th, 1870, the passage was discovered and in 1851, Captain McClure, of the *Tarleton*, received the gold medal for the discovery, from the Royal Geographical Society.

†—Book of Mormon, new edition, page 21.

‡—"I, Mormon, being one of the servants of God."

§—The context should be read.

## MY NINTH SERMON.

BY H. C. B.

SOON after my second effort to preach the gospel, Elder S. Shelton sent me away sixty miles to Botetourt Co., Va., to respond to a call from John's Creek to preach and open a new field of labor. Why he sent me away alone, I never knew. But so it was, and I assure my readers it took all the faith in God that I could gather to my assistance, to enable me to take my valise and start afoot and alone, "without purse or scrip."

This trip was a severe test of my faith, and without help from above I could not have undertaken such a task. My first day's travel ended by my staying over night with a kind-hearted infidel, after I had asked at five different places for lodging, and as often been refused.

The infidel thought it very singular that the parson, the deacon, the class leader, and two prominent members of the church should have turned me away, while he, a sinner, had taken me in. I also shared in his surprise. And I might as well state in this connection that in my twenty years' experience as a missionary since, I have ever found it so. The priests are our most bitter enemies, and next to them, their most religious members. And the favors extended to us have come from those that the priests call sinners. No wonder the Savior kept company with publicans and sinners. The religious portion of the people shunned and rejected Him.

I reached my field of labor the second day, and commenced the work earnestly. I soon had all I could do, and was pleased to find that the Lord raised up friends to me, and was much encouraged to know that I was able, through the Spirit of God, to do some good.

I soon had the privilege of baptizing two persons. One was a school teacher; the other had a college education, and was intended for a minister in the Methodist church.

I sent an appointment into Monroe Co., Va., some twenty miles away from John's Creek. It was to be at the Methodist chapel, and as I was on my way to fill the appointment I heard the news of Joseph and Hyrum Smith's martyrdom at Carthage jail. I had heard many reports about Joseph that I never believed, but this report brought with it a conviction of its truth. And it would be in vain for me to describe the gloom and sadness that rested upon me. I have always since remembered it as one of the darkest, saddest hours of my life.

The time of my appointment had arrived—11 o'clock, a. m. on the 3rd Sunday in July, 1841. The large chapel was full and not half of the people were able to get inside of the house. But I was to be disappointed. Two or three Methodist priests were present, through whose influence the ten or a dozen hired preachers that were there occupied the time in abusing the "Mormons," and rejoicing in the murder of the prophet and patriarch.

But the congregation was not to be disappointed. A Mr. Luna, with a dozen other men to help him, arranged seats with slabs from a saw mill near by, in a shade within sight of the meeting house, and notified the people that the "Mormon" preacher would hold forth in the shade there. The result was that the people all left the chapel and repaired to the shade, and all the priests followed, and while I talked to the assemblage, eleven of these priests sat on one of the nearest seats in front of me.

The Lord on this occasion blessed me with His Spirit in proportion to what I had to meet. I was able to bear a powerful testimony to the Divine calling of Joseph Smith as