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Moroni, A Sketch of the Nephite Republic, II

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Abstract: Roberts discusses the peculiarities of succession in the Nephite kingship, both in the land of Nephi and later in the land of Zarahemla, while also presenting a summary history of the governance of the people of Nephi up to the point of King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin.

MORONI

A SKETCH OF THE NEPHITE REPUBLIC.

II.

Of the migration of Lehi's colony from Jerusalem to America; of the dissensions which broke out among them; of their adventures by sea and land; of those circumstances which developed that Nephi, the fourth son of Lehi, possessed, in a larger degree than his brethren, the characteristics which make men leaders, and that he consequently became the leader of the colony—I need not speak. It will be sufficient, for my purpose, to refer to that division in the colony, which resulted in two distinct peoples being established in America. One civilized, the other barbarous; the first inclined to follow the arts of peace, the other delighting in war; the one deeply religious, the other as deeply irreligious; the one known as Nephites, the other as Lamanites.

Envious and jealous of the abilities and strength of character possessed by Nephi, the two elder sons of Lehi, Laman and Lemuel, were ever ready to revolt against their younger and more favored brother, except in the case of some crisis or other arising in the affairs of the colony, when they, in common with the rest, were willing enough to listen to his counsel, trust in his courage, and endure, and even solicit his leadership. But shortly after the death of Lehi—the nominal leader of the colony, while Nephi was the real one—Laman and Lemuel took counsel together, saying: "Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; therefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For, behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people."

Before they could accomplish their murderous designs, however, their intended victim was warned by the Lord of their intentions, and commanded to depart from them, and take all who would go with him into the wilderness.

What proportion of the colony consented to follow him cannot be determined. But his own family, his brother

Sam, next older of the sons of Lehi than himself, and his family, his two younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, born to Lehi after his departure from Jerusalem, his sisters, number not known, one Zoram and his family, and others whose families are not named, agreed to follow him. The company was, doubtless, considerable.

The direction taken was northward; for it is known that Lehi's colony landed on the west coast of South America, thirty degrees south latitude; and the remains of the great Nephite civilization are to be found north of that point, as also the great cities spoken of in the Book of Mormon. The distance to which Nephi removed from his brethren, and their adherents, is not known. It may only be estimated by Nephi's indefinite expression—"We did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days."

Finding a suitable location, they prepared for permanent settlement, and called the place Nephi; and it was at this time that the followers of Nephi took upon themselves the name of Nephites. In their new home they were prospered in material and spiritual things, and increased rapidly in numbers.

The people were in this prosperous condition when they came to Nephi and requested him to be their king. To this he did not give his consent without protest. With the record of the Jews before him, he doubtless knew that the Lord did not favor kingly governments. He knew that Israel had done evil in rejecting the direct government of their God, and clamoring for a king, that they "might be as other nations." With these facts before him, it is no wonder that he objected to a monarchy being founded; but finding his objections in vain, like Samuel, among the Hebrews he yielded.

Thus was the Nephite kingdom founded. Its constitution grew out of the character of the Nephite people. To understand it, and the revolution which overthrew it and led to the creation of the great republic, the reader must remember that the Nephites were Israel-

ites. The founders of the kingdom were men who had dwelt in Judea, intimately acquainted with the law of Moses, and the customs of the Jews; which law and customs they would continue in the new nation they were founding. And that the law of Moses might be known and held in reverence, the first king appointed his two younger brethren, Jacob and Joseph, priests. So, though we lack sufficient data in the Book of Mormon for a full exposition of the Nephite Constitution, we may reasonably conclude that it was not, in the main, unlike that of the Jews.

The kings on their accession to power took the name of Nephi, with a numeral prefix, thus: II Nephi, V Nephi, VI Nephi, and so on down. This was done by a grateful people, to retain in remembrance the name of their first and much beloved king.

It is difficult to determine just what the rule of succession to the throne was. Previous to his death the first Nephi chose a man and anointed him to be king. But there is nothing to indicate in the brief annals we have of the Nephites that he was a son of the first Nephi. The reasonable presumption would be that he was not; for had he been, the record most likely would have stated it. Yet, in the next succession recorded, some three centuries later, one Benjamin succeeds his father, Mosiah; and Benjamin was succeeded by his eldest son, Mosiah. And since it was in the days of this Mosiah, and under his direction that the revolution occurred, which changed the form of government from a monarchy to a republic, the foregoing cases are about all the data we have on which to base our conclusions.

There are other facts which render the manner of succession still more difficult to understand. The first Nephi was chosen king by his people. And when the Nephites joined the people of Zarahemla, an event of which I shall speak more at length presently, the first Mosiah, spoken of above, already leader of the Nephites, was appointed—by the people, I suppose—king over the land of Zarahemla. He was succeeded by his son

Benjamin, but whether that happened through a recognition of the hereditary principle, by revelation, or by choice of the people, there is no means of determining. But the successor to King Benjamin, his son, Mosiah, was appointed by direct revelation from God. But when Mosiah began to consider who should be his successor, he sent among the people to know their will in the matter, and they gave their voice in favor of his second son, named Aaron. From these facts it would seem that the kings were sometimes elected by the people, sometimes appointed by revelation, and sometimes the hereditary principle seems to have obtained. So that the succession to the kingly office was irregular, but perhaps no more so than among the Jews.

The king in the Nephite constitution was the recognized source of all legislative and executive power, limited, doubtless, though nowhere is the limitation definitely expressed, or its lines distinctly drawn, by a deep respect on the part of the whole people for the law of Moses. To them the Mosaic institutions were what the common law has been to England—the foundation alike of their liberties and the security of society.

In the records we have of the Nephites there is no trace of a legislative assembly of any character or even council of state. Whenever the king desired the advice of his subjects on any matter, he appealed to them direct. The representative principle appears to have been unknown under the monarchy as it was afterwards unused in the republic.

This kingdom, the outlines of whose constitution I have briefly and imperfectly sketched, continued an uninterrupted existence, so far as may be learned from the record contained on the smaller plates of Nephi, for a period of four centuries. This fact alone is very respectable testimony of the excellence of the government under the monarchy, since a people, such as the Nephites were, would not long endure a government that gave them no security of their rights or that was destructive of their liberties.

The peace of the Nephites was not so free from interruption as was the con-

tinuance of their government. The Lamanites were constantly upon the alert to invade their country and make war upon them. They were, indeed, what the Lord promised they should be—a scourge, to stir them up to a remembrance of Him. Even in the the first two centuries after their landing in America, they were not free from war, though one would judge the nation to be measurably righteous. According to one of their writers, Jarom, who lived at the close of the second century from the departure of Lehi's colony from Jerusalem, the Nephites had become very numerous and wealthy; and though there was some pride and wickedness among them, still others walked so strictly in the pathway of righteousness that they enjoyed communion with the Holy Spirit, and hence were guided by the revelations of heaven.

The Prophets of the Lord and the priests and the teachers also, were diligent in instructing the people, in warning them, and reminding them of the threatened destruction if they permitted themselves to drift into wickedness. Their kings, too, according to the writer above alluded to, were mighty men in the faith of the Lord, and taught the people the righteous laws of heaven. Their courage and vigilance preserved the kingdom from destruction under the frequent assaults of the Lamanites, who were far more numerous and war-like than the Nephites, delighting in war, in murder and in drinking the blood of beasts.

Fortunate indeed is that nation that possesses such kings and such prophets as lived and reigned and taught the Nephites during these two centuries. But such is the weakness of humanity, and such the tendency of society to corruption, that neither long periods of prosperity nor of righteousness may be expected under human governments. Righteous kings, just laws, impartial judges and pious and earnest religious teachers can do much, very much for a nation, but they cannot do all. If the people, in spite of all that such kings, laws, judges and religious teachers can do, love, iniquity and revel in corruption, it is but

a question of time when the nation will be debased, if not destroyed. No proposition can be more completely demonstrated from the experience of mankind than that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

So it proved to be in the case of the Nephite Monarchy. In the third century corruption increased, wars became more frequent; and finally, early in the fourth century, after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, the "more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed."

It would appear that war was not the only means employed to preserve a righteous people upon the continent of America. There were, besides, occasional separations of the righteous and the wicked, the Lord through inspired men leading away the more worthy to remote parts of the country, that they might be free from contact with the ungodly. Such was the case when the first Nephi separated from his brethren, Laman and Lemuel, and their adherents, and took his long journey northward. A similar exodus occurred some time after the disastrous war of 320;* just how long afterwards cannot be determined; but either toward the close of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century. One Mosiah, whether he was at the time king of the Nephites or not, cannot be determined, was warned of the Lord to flee out of the land of Nephi into the wilderness; and was commanded to take as many as would go with him. He was obedient to the divine commandment, and with his followers was led, by the inspiration of the Almighty, northward through the wilderness to the land of Zarahemla. "The land Nephi," from which Mosiah was commanded to depart, says the late Apostle Orson Pratt, "is supposed to have been in or near Ecuador, South America. The land Zarahemla," to

* That is, 320 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; and since that is the epoch from which the Nephites dated the principal events of their annals—until some time after the birth of Messiah—and as this sketch of the Nephite Republic does not extend to Messiah's birth, I shall follow the chronology of the Nephites without further explanation.

which Mosiah was led, "is supposed to have been north of the head waters of the river Magdalena [South America], its northern boundary being a few days' journey south of the isthmus."* It is this land of Zarahemla that will be the principal theatre of those events of which these papers will treat.

When Mosiah and his company came into the land known afterwards to the Nephites as Zarahemla, to their surprise they found it inhabited by a numerous people, outnumbering their own host two to one, and governed by Zarahemla.

This people were the descendants of Mulek and a party he led from Jerusalem to North America. Mulek* was one of

* Book of Mormon—N. E.—p. 155, *note*.

* The Bible account of the destruction of Jerusalem informs us that King Zedekiah was taken captive, his sons slain in his presence, his eyes then put out, and he led in bonds to Babylon, where he afterwards died [II Kings, xxv]; but it is evident from the Book of Mormon that his son Mulek escaped. Of this circumstance the late Apostle Orson Pratt makes the following statement, and cites the remarkable prophecy of Ezekiel to sustain it: When Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon, the Lord took one of his sons, whose name was Mulek, with a company of those who would hearken unto his words, and brought them over the ocean, and planted them in America. This was done in fulfillment of the 22nd and 23rd verses of the seventeenth chapter of Ezekiel, which read thus: "Thus saith the Lord God, I will take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will cross off from the tops of the young twigs a *tender one*, and will plant upon an high mountain and eminent; in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." By reading this chapter it will be seen that the Jews were the "high cedar," that Zedekiah, the king, was the "highest branch," that the "tender one" cropped off from the top of his young twigs, was one of his sons, whom the Lord brought out and planted him and his company upon the choice land of America, which he had given unto a remnant of the tribe of Joseph for an inheritance, in fulfillment of the blessings of Jacob and Moses upon the head of that tribe—Gen. xlviii and xlix; Deut. xxxiii. *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon.*

the sons of king Zedekiah who escaped the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar, at the time that monarch took Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, eleven years after Lehi had left Jerusalem. The information contained in the Book of Mormon in regard to their colony is very meagre. It is known, however, that Mulek's company landed somewhere in North America, that by his followers the land was called Mulek, that they discovered Coriantumr, the last of the Jaredites, a people who in very ancient times had been led from the Tower of Babel to America, but who in consequence of their wickedness were destroyed by a merciless civil war: all had perished except this Coriantumr, and he was found by the people of Mulek, and lived with them for nine months to tell the sorrowful story of the splendor and destruction of his nation.

Mulek had brought no records with him from Jerusalem, and at the time his descendants were found by Mosiah their language was very much corrupted, they disbelieved in God, yet they readily amalgamated with the Nephites, adopted their language, their manners, and doubtless their religion; and accepted Mosiah for their king. From that time forth they became identified with the Nephites, and their separate national existence was lost.

How long Mosiah reigned over the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla is not known, but his son Benjamin was chosen by the people and consecrated by his father to succeed to the throne. In his reign a fierce war broke out between his people and the Lamanites; the latter invading the land of Zarahemla. The war ending in the success of the Nephites, and the invaders were driven out of the land.

Another event of great importance in the reign of King Benjamin was a great revival in religion. This king was not only a just and upright ruler, but he deserves also to be numbered among the prophets and holy men of God. Some three years before his death he assembled his people, proclaimed to them that God had appointed his son Mosiah to be their king, and at the same time he foretold

them of the coming and mission of the promised Messiah, and made such an appeal to them that they repented of their sins and entered into a covenant to serve God in faithfulness all their days.

Mosiah began his reign three years be-

fore the death of his father, in the four hundred and seventy-sixth year of the Nephite annals. It was in his reign that the great revolution occurred which established the Nephite Republic on the ruins of the monarchy. *B.H. Roberts.*

TEMPERANCE IN ALL THINGS.

TEMPERANCE, so necessary in drink, is no less essential in food and in our every act and condition in life. As Christians we believe that light, intelligence and knowledge come from God, and that the more superlative these qualities become in us, the nearer we approach to the fountain of all intelligence and become models for the human race. It is a desirable thing to live so that one's mind is bright, quick, active and capable of receiving knowledge and light from the divine source. Our bodies, in a great measure, govern our minds; and it is a fact that an impure body has never a pure mind, and that a pure mind never dwells in an impure body. If, then, we desire pure minds, we must of necessity purify the body which exerts such a potent influence in exalting the mind. To make the body pure, that which enters into its composition and builds it up must be pure—that which we eat must be pure and wholesome. Pork or much meat clogs the fountain of life, dulls the feelings and tends to deaden the intellect. If so much can be said of meats how vastly much more evil may be said of tobacco, which is used by the ton among mankind until it has become a rarity to find a man or boy who does not use this deadly leaf. "Have a cigar, Mr. B?" "No thanks, I do not smoke, but I thank you just the same." "Step down and have a drink then, a smile?" "And so solicitous do men become with whom I have had pleasant dealings," said a well known young business man recently, "that because I must decline they think I am offended, so rare are anti-smilers; so prevalent has become the popular but degrading and destructive habit of treating to narcotics and intoxicants, and pampering the appe-

tite of one's friend to gain his good will and favor." It is one of the intemperate acts of the people of our country that has caused the downfall of many and led hundreds from the temperate path of right. Do not tempt the appetite of your neighbor; if you wish him well, show him your good will by not tempting his appetite rather than by tempting it. Discard the evil now; it will be for your good; it will redound to your benefit. Do it now, or if you are not touched by the remarks, resolve never to let them apply to you. Don't wait till to-morrow nor stand arguing the technicalities. Turn now.

Now, only one word on temperance in our talks, walks and acts in life. To follow out the first illustration, if men wish to have pure minds the tongue must be guarded that no profanity shall escape the mouth. How rank the intemperance of profanity, lightmindedness and scoffing! How often it leads to a disregard of the precepts of God which leads to infidelity and spiritual death, a condition in itself most deplorable. It is often the talks of a man that lead him into trouble. Be temperate in speech. Sam Jones, though not always a good authority, gives the following as a sure cure for infidelity: Shut your mouth. This is good temperance advise, not only in its application to words, but also to articles taken into the body.

Smiles, in one of his characteristic works, truthfully says that, "Were it possible to conceive the existence of a tyrant who should compel his people to give up to him one-third or more of their earnings, and require them at the same time to consume a commodity that should brutalize and degrade them, destroy the peace and comfort of their families, and sow in themselves the seeds of disease and pre-