

Obedient to the will of the Lord, Nephi, and his brothers Laman and Lemuel, undertook the hazardous task of obtaining this treasure from the hands of its custodian.

Laban is described as "a mighty man." He was a military commander, and a valiant warrior. 1 Nephi iii: 31, iv: 1. The first attempt of the young man to get the records failed. When they reached the neighborhood of the house, they decided by lot which of them should go in, and Laman was indicated as the one. The young man told his story and made his request in respectful language, but Laban grew furious and ireful, called him a robber and chased him away, threatening to kill him.

The brothers then went to the house where they had left their wealth. And they gathered together their gold, and silver, and precious things

"And it came to pass that we went in unto Laban, and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and our precious things. And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property, and that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it, insomuch that he thrust us out and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property. And it came to pass we did flee before the servants of Laban, and we were obliged to leave behind our property, and it fell into the hands of Laban. 1 Nep. iii, 24-26.

Laman and Lemuel became discouraged at these failures,* and desired to abandon the effort to obtain the record; but Nephi braved their opposition and ill-treatment, and after some delay determined to go and face the formidable Laban, singly, and make a final effort to obtain the object of their mission.

Undoubtedly this man disbelieved the plea of the young messengers, that the Lord had sent him upon this errand; or, like Pharaoh, he disregarded the divine command. He might have framed plausible excuses for retaining possession of the plates, but he took wicked and criminal measures to retain them. He exhibited the qualities of the robber and the murderer.

Nephi chose the darkness of night for his visit to the house of Laban for the purpose of inducing him to give up the records. It was probably a late hour of the night, as all but the night watchers had retired to rest, and stillness reigned in the city. We learn from 1 Nep. iv: 22, that Laban was in the habit

of being out at night with some of the elders or prominent men of the city. It is further evident that the vice of drunkenness was among the dark qualities of his character.

As the intrepid youth approached the entrance to the Jew's abode he encountered a brawny figure lying in his pathway.

"I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine. And when I came to him I found that it was Laban. And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof, and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine. And I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel. And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit to kill Laban; but I said in my heart, never at any time have I shed the blood of man, and I shrunk and would that I might not slay him. And the Spirit said unto me again, Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands; yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he had also taken away our property.

And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me, Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth His righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief. And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which He spake unto me in the wilderness, saying, that inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise. Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they have the law. And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. And again I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause, that I might obtain the records according to his commandments. Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head and I smote off his head with his own sword."—1 Nephi iv: 7-18.

Some, who have not given the subject careful attention, have doubted whether Nephi was justified in taking the life of Laban. Nephi acted in accordance with a divine command; he had no choice; but as a servant of God his duty bound him to act as he did. He believed in God Almighty, that His will was supreme, and His wisdom and power infallible and infinite. How could Nephi have acted differently and retained his consistency?

The question as to how far men should obey God in defiance or opposition to the sentiments, opinions

and mandates of his fellow men is one of profound gravity. The question exists only where sin and unbelief abound. Its conflicts and arbitrament have cost blood and treasure beyond price and computation.

All Christians, to be consistent, must give the priority of allegiance to the Almighty. "Yes," say they, "God's commands must be obeyed in preference to man's; but how are we to know that God does command?" Thus doubt, as a bottomless gulf, cuts off the possibility of obedience. Many people are as honest in their doubting as they are in their faith. It seems to be simply a matter of faith and infidelity. The believer will obey God in preference to man, and this is consistency. The sceptic will make the laws of man his supreme rule of conduct; hence the deadly conflict. If the believer, in obeying the voice of inspiration offends against man-made laws, he must abide the consequences, and answer to man for his rebellion; but he will surely reap the reward of his obedience to the Almighty. But the unbeliever, while he enjoys the favor of his fellow man must answer to God, not only for his rebellion against his Maker, but for his unjust treatment of His loyal subjects. The fatal delusion of the age is that God has ceased forevermore to speak to man. There is, as it were, an universal spiritual deafness. The Lord might send the most important messages, and threaten the direst judgments, while man, cursed with this fearful insensibility, will go down to destruction.

Nephi, having got possession of the records, secured to a mighty race the knowledge of the true God, and thus conferred upon his fellow men the greatest boon that it is in the power of mortals to bequeath. He now devoted the full energies of his forceful character to the great work before him.

The wanderings of the pilgrims in the wilderness lasted through eight weary years. In the early part of their travels they were joined by an Israelitish family, the head of which was called Ishmael. This family, whose descendants for many generations were called Ishmaelites, consisted of the patriarch, his wife, two sons and five daughters. The sons were married and had families. 1 Nephi vii: 1-6.

Nephi and his three brothers, and Zoram, the servant of Laban, each took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; thus the company at