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## EARLY AMERICAN RELIGIONS.

If the Book of Mormon record can be relied on as an authentic record of the aboriginal Americans, there will exist in the relics left upon the land tokens of powerful religious feelings and extensive practices. Indeed, a deep interest in religious subjects and observances characterized the ancients of all lands and climes.

The religious ideas brought to America by the Jaredites would naturally be of that primitive pattern whose tokens and monuments are still seen upon the plains of Shinar, and the sites of Egypt and Babylon.

The religion imported by the Lehitcs would be of a decidedly Jewish type.

It may not be an easy matter, in every instance, to distinguish between the remains and works of the different races, for in some cases there might be quite a resemblance in the altars, temples, and religious mementoes of the Jaredites to those of their later successors. Nevertheless each possesses peculiar characteristics which are sufficiently marked and well defined.

The Jaredites occupied North and Central America; and those are the countries where we will find their remains, rather than in the land south of the isthmus. They penetrated the forest in the south in quest of game, and to replenish their stock of domestic animals, but we have no account of any permanent settlement of the Jaredites further south than "the narrow neck of land by the place where the sea divides the land." (See Ether 10, 10-21.)

And it is in North and Central America where the monuments of the race bearing signs of the greatest antiquity are found. Here are seen the works of the mound and pyramid builders; the strange and gruesome employments of the cave diggers, and the rugged haunts of the cliff dwellers.

At the first sight of the pyramids and mounds of North America explorers were struck with the remarkable resemblance they bore to the ancient tumuli of eastern Asia.

We have accounts of the symbols of most elaborate religious systems; and there certainly must have existed a powerful order of priesthood. This is true of the localities occupied by both the early and later races. The Book of Mormon speaks very fully of the religious matters of the Nephites and Lamanites, but references to the subject in the Jaredite annals are very meager. We know that idolatry existed among

them, and that this practice was vigorously opposed by ministers of the true God.

In Ether 7:23, we read:

"And also in the reign of Shule there came prophets among the people, who were sent from the Lord, prophesying that the wickedness and idolatry of the people were bringing a curse upon the land, and they should be destroyed, if they did not repent."

The Book of Mormon history tells us that America was first inhabited after the flood by a colony from the plains of Shinar. They reached the new world probably early in the second century after the deluge. Their ideas about religion were of the most primitive character. "They came from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people." (Ether 1:33.)

"The Lord blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." This implied that the descendants of Noah should be divided into distinct nations, inhabiting different countries till the whole earth should be repopled. But consistent with wicked perverseness and opposition to the designs of the Almighty, Nimrod, who had broken through the boundaries of patriarchal rule, and had united all who adhered to him under one government, induced them to follow him westward to the plains of Shinar where they combined together to build "a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven." The motive is evident; it was to gratify vain ambition, and to thwart the divine purpose. "And let us make us a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth." They planned this enormous building and mighty city that they might establish a metropolis as a center for the universal government of the entire earth. But this cunning scheme was frustrated.

In Gen. 10:25, we read:—"And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided."

The division here mentioned may have been a physical or geographical separation of the earth into continents and islands. Or it may refer to the distribution of the inhabited earth between the different families, as stated by Moses: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." (Deut. 32:8.)

Peleg means division, and probably he held a high position at the time, and was prominently concerned in making

the important apportionments. The division was made by divine appointment and authority, but was not complied with until after the confusion of tongues.

After giving the names of the sons of Japhet the sacred historian says:

"By this were the isles of the Gentiles divided, every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations." (Gen. 10:5, 20, 31.)

Verse 32 gives the summary:—"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood."

Paul refers to this division in Acts 17:26. "God hath made of one blood all nations for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." But the plans of the Lord did not suit the ambitious designs of the enemy, and he cunningly contrived to defeat them. Under satanic promptings Nimrod, "a mighty hunter," or "a hunting giant" (Septuagint translation) began very early after the grand division of the earth to claim authority, and demand subjection to his rule. No doubt his daring conflicts with fierce and savage beasts hardened his nature, and led him to aspire to dominion over men. He is the first king known in history. "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel," afterwards called Babylon, and surely the huge walls and stupendous edifices of that city even in its ruins bear testimony to the towering ambition and powerful character of its founder. In defiance of the divine decrees he added state to state and city to city. "He went forth out of that land into Assyria (see marg.) and builded Nineveh." There is no record of the names of the leaders or prominent persons among the tower builders, but in all probability as Nimrod was the founder of the city of Babel, his was also the mind that planned the gigantic tower.

There were some of Noah's family, chiefly the descendants of Shem, of the line of Eber, that did not follow Nimrod. They were not present when the language of the Babel builders was confounded, and they retained their original language. This was the case with the Jaredites:

And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord and the Lord had compassion upon Jared; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared. \* \* \* and the Lord had compassion upon their friends, and their families also, that they were not confounded. [Ether 1:34-37]

The language, therefore, which was first spoken upon the continent of