

Nephi was preeminently a witness for God and for the truth in his day. He was the principle instrument through which an imperishable copy of the Old Testament was transplanted into America; for which noble act he deserves honor and gratitude from every Christian and lover of mankind; and he supplemented this in estimable missionary enterprise by labors of a relative character of equal magnitude and importance.

Shortly after the arrival of the colony Nephi commenced writing the history of his experience and of the general movements of his people. He says:

"And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper. And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore, I did make plates of ore, that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made, I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them."—1 Nephi xviii: 25 xix: 1.

These plates were not the ones discovered or revealed to the Prophet Joseph, which were made a thousand years after, by Moroni, but were probably similar to them in general features. They were called the "larger plates of Nephi," and were probably bulky in size and the engravings copious, as they contained, when complete, the history of a numerous people for a thousand years.

The characters used by Nephi were the hieroglyphics or sacred runes of the Egyptians. The writer was well acquainted with this ancient language, as well as skillful in the art of engraving its beautiful symbols of facts and ideas. But some of the subsequent writers complained of "weakness in writing" and the "awkwardness of their hands." This was partly due to the disuse of the primitive Egyptian among them, and the introduction of cursive and more rapid modes of writing. See Book of Mormon, page 598, and foot notes.

The historical records of Nephi were handed down from scribe to scribe through the centuries till 710 years had passed since Lehi left Jerusalem, then we find them in the hands of a disciple of Christ called Nephi the Fourth. From him they passed to his son Amos, who kept them for 85 years. IV Nep. i: 18, 21. The plates then passed to the sons of Ammon, Amos and Ammaron.

"And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away (from the sign of the coming of Christ), Ammaron being constrained by the Holy Ghost, did hide up the records which were sacred: yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation." IV Nephi, i: 48.

By referring to page 228 and note a, we learn that the sacred things spoken of consisted of the two sets of the plates of Nephi; the sword of Laban; the miraculous ball; twenty-four plates of gold; the brass plates, and the interpreters, or Urim and Thummim. These sacred and important relics of by-gone ages had been carefully preserved and handed down from king to king, and prophet to prophet till they were entrusted to Ammaron, 320 years from the birth of Messiah.

The place where Ammaron deposited the sacred treasures was in a hill called Shim, situated in a section of country named Antum. Moroni i: 3. They were afterwards removed by Mormon, and inhumed in the hill Cumorah. Mor. vi: 6. We have thus traced to their long resting place the "first" and "larger" plates of Nephi; but there is another set of plates which were made and engraved upon by Nephi, the contents of which are of the greatest value and importance. It was thirty years since Lehi left Jerusalem, and during that time Nephi had walked blameless before the Lord and had been a constant recipient of revelations and divine communications; and now the word of the Lord came to him, saying:

"Make other plates, and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people." 2 Nephi, v: 30.

These second plates were to be devoted to the special purpose of Nephi's ministry, and sacred things, and their space was not to be occupied with the registers of wars and contentions, or other secular concerns. 1 Nephi, ix: 3—6; xix: 1—6. They were to contain the "plain and precious" prophecies, doctrines and dealings of the Lord for the knowledge and benefit of the people who had settled the country.

This metallic tomb contained not only the writings of Nephi, but the precious thoughts and gems of other inspired minds enriched the sacred treasury. Jacob, the brother of Nephi, Enos, Jacob's son, and Amaleki were all prophets and holy men of God, and they engraved much valuable matter upon this record. Ja

cob says that his brother Nephi gave him a commandment that he should write upon these plates,

"A few of the things which I considered to be most precious \* \* And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon those plates, and touch upon them as much as possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people." Jacob i: 2-4.

This record spake plainly of Christ, —His coming, birth, ministry and crucifixion; of His atonement for the sins of the world; of His Church and Kingdom that should be established at His advent. These writers believed:

In prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in all things that are good." Omni i: 25.

The Nephites had the brass plates upon which were engraven the most of the matter contained in the Old Testament; but the small plates of Nephi supplied to them the gist and substance of the information and spiritual nourishment supplied to us by the New Testament. Realizing this important fact, we can appreciate the value of Nephi's service to his people.

There is further a very remarkable circumstance connected with the history of the plates which, while it enhances their worth, adds material evidence to the rapidly increasing proofs of the divinity of the Book of Mormon.

Nephi says, page 18:

"The Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a *wise purpose* in Him, which purpose I know not. But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way for to accomplish His works among the children of men."

It is well known to the careful reader of the Book of Mormon that the Prophet Mormon made an abridgement from the plates of Nephi, from the beginning of the record down to the reign of King Benjamin. When the transcriber had reached this point and was searching the records for further matter, he accidentally lighted upon

"These plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this King Benjamin. \* \* \* I shall take these plates, which contain their prophesying and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. And I do this for a *wise purpose*, for thus