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Sketches from the Book of Mormon: Nephi

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Abstract: This article is a short description of Nephi's character. Maeser writes that Nephi had a strong character and was an excellent servant of God because of his temperance caused by his submission to the will of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

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"ARISE YE, AND LET US GO UP TO ZION, UNTO THE LORD OUR GOD."—Jeremiah.

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SKETCHES FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON.

BY ELDER KARL G. MAESER.

NEPHI.

One of the most striking peculiarities of the Book of Mormon, which it has in common with the Scriptures is, that without giving a direct description of its acting characters, the reader obtains nevertheless so clear and distinct a conception of the various persons; that each of them becomes as it were a living witness of its truth, and conviction of its authenticity steals upon the mind of the reading sceptic in spite of himself. This feature will be observed right in the beginning of this great book in the character of Nephi, the Prophet.

If we find a slight indication of his personal appearance in the remark made by himself, that although yet very young, he was large in stature and of great strength, we are otherwise aware of his bodily strength and robust health, by his endurance through all the unceasing trials and tribulations he was subject to from the beginning of his career to the end; and if we behold him at times going forth with the unflinching fortitude of

a hero in battle to execute some commandment of God that required the nerve of a man, we see him on other occasions as gentle as a child, forgiving at once his repentant brothers the insults and abuses they had heaped upon him. The even temper which this great servant of God manifested throughout his whole career, in so glaring a contrast with the passionate outbursts, violent actions, and consequent humiliations of his brothers Laman and Lemuel, forces upon us the conclusion that his mode of living, his food and his habits, were so regulated as not only to be in accordance with the laws of nature and the strictest principles of temperance, but were also in conformity with the directions of the Holy Spirit, making his mind, his body, his will and inclinations so entirely subservient to the will of his heavenly Father, that nothing was suffered to prevent him to perceive, at any moment, the whisperings and directions of the Spirit of God.

Like Joseph, Samuel, David, and other Prophets and servants of God,

so Nephi was instructed in early youth in useful sciences, and having a sound mind in a sound body, soon outreached his brothers not only in the mere amount of learning, but also in the comprehension of the great ultimate aim of all knowledge—God. Hence we see him alone among his brothers, turning to the Lord in humility, which resulted in the testimony he received for himself, that his father spoke by the Spirit of God, which gave him influence over the honest heart of his brother Sam, to whom and others in future he remained a teacher of righteousness, a benefactor, a Prophet, and a father to the end; even his own father selects him, in preference to all his other children, to execute the first mission in the new dispensation just then commenced.

A man like him, who, notwithstanding his rare attainments and comprehensiveness of mind, retained so remarkable a humility and childlike faith as we notice in all his words and actions—who, although of a strength and power of character that carried him triumphantly through all the adversities and vexations of his changeable life, proved himself, nevertheless, always a willing and self-denying in-

strument in the hands of his Maker; a man who, being so far ahead of his companions in light and power, never yielded to the temptations of vanity and pride, nor for one moment used his influence for his own aggrandisement, such a man could not but reach finally that height in the scale of beings, where he was considered worthy to see in visions the future of the kingdom of God, to have angels come to him to bring him messages from on high, to have a body capable to break the chains of his enemies, and to be invulnerable to the attacks of the destroyer; and, really, we do not observe in the progress of his life a slackening of his energies, but Nephi, the aged, rejoices with the enthusiasm and fervor of a youth in bearing the testimony of the coming Christ, and during all the fifty-five years of his labors as a Prophet, we see him enjoying the confidence and affection of the faithful and honest in heart of his people, and he leaves this place of action apparently not because he had become too weak for its requirements, but because he had grown strong and great enough for a more exalted sphere.

FRUITS OF FAITH.

“These signs shall follow them that believe.”

Many of the Scripture readers of the present day have the erroneous impression stamped upon their minds, that Jesus and his Apostles laid the foundation of the Church of Christ by going about from city to city, from village to village, to work miracles, to show signs and wonders among the unbelievers to convert them to their divine mission, and not by the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom—faith, repentance, and signs following.

Ever since Joseph Smith has declared unto this generation that he had received the Apostolic Priesthood by a divine ordination, the cry has been from all the hireling priests, “if you have received the same power as the ancient Apostles, why not do the

same as they did, go about healing the sick, raising the dead, &c.; they did it without asking any faith in the people, and if you do the same, we will believe in you.” That sounds very much like the Scribes and Pharisees, when they used to say, “Master, show us a sign that we might believe.” If the signs were intended to make believers, there was a good chance for Jesus, but he rather declined the offer.

But to the question, was it by working miracles or by preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, that Jesus and the Apostles made converts? According to the history which we have, many believed in the words of Jesus and the Apostles, and signs followed them, which signs caused many others