

FIRST VOICES

“. . . in the land of their first inheritance . . .”

“I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust . . .”

-prophetic words from the past-



EDUCATION; IMPORTANT THEN; IMPORTANT NOW

The editors of FVJ were visiting various Oklahoma tribal organizations last year. They noticed something of interest; it is the importance that is being placed on the education of the people – young and old. It wasn't lip service; it was active involvement and wholehearted participation. Should we be surprised? Not at all. Native Americans have a long history of stressing education going back at least to the sixth century before Christ. An ancient Native American by the name of Nephi stated in his record, "I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father." What did that learning consist of?

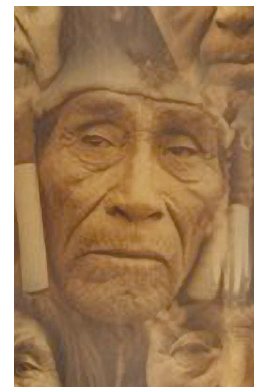
This will be addressed later in the article.

About five hundred years after Nephi spoke, a king by the name of Benjamin, spoke to his three sons. The record states that he taught them the language of their fathers that they may be men of understanding. How did mastering a language help them? To be in positions of leadership requires an educated mind. The Greeks used the word "rhetoric" to describe the use of language. Specifically, they defined it as the art and study of the use of language with persuasive effect. Think of the case of Moses. He was raised in the house of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. That training proved valuable when he was chosen by God to lead the children of Israel out of bondage to freedom in the Promised Land. Similarly, Israel's King David spent time in the court of King

Saul, learning about managing a kingdom before he was anointed of God and became the second king of Israel.

Let's step back even further to Joseph, son of Jacob. Because of his dreams – revelations from God – and the special love of his father, his brothers sold him into slavery. But his God-given abilities and education allowed him to rise to the top wherever he found himself – housekeeper, prisoner, or royal courtier. Through God's gift to interpret dreams, he was lifted out of prison into Pharaoh's court to the number two position – Pharaoh's chief operating officer. He then put his education to good use, leading the Egyptians through seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, and also the saving of the same brothers who callously sold him into Egypt.

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7).



*The blessings
of thy father
have prevailed
above [proved
to be greater]
the blessings of
my progenitors
[ancestors]...*



In the ancient record, commonly called the Book of Mormon, which begins with Nephi's writings, we also learn some other important points. A priest by the name of Jacob stated that, "to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God." His son noted, "for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And then added, "blessed be the name of my God for it."

So besides language, what else was learned? Nephi implies that he also learned from his parents about trusting God, the importance of the Israelite prophecies, and his family's genealogy.

We see that Ancient Native Americans exceeded the Greeks by combining rhetoric with a belief in God. Moreover, we see that language skills provide clear thinking, strong communications both as a speaker and as a listener, and deep understanding. For Native Americans, these language skills include English and tribal tongues. But the time is coming

when their learning and education will be called on to lead not only their people, but the whole House of Israel. More on that point in the next issue.

ANCIENT ELDERS AND PATRIARCHS *Part One*

It is in our human nature to desire to have an understanding of not only who we are but from where we came. We are interested in our family ancestry. We are interested in those who played a part in whom we are today. It is good for us to take time and reflect upon the importance of our predecessors who struggled through life for us so we might be who we are today. There is a great interest in looking into our family history and lineage as demonstrated by the number of websites dedicated to that purpose.

Growing up we sang an old hymn that says, "In ancient times men feared the Lord." Of course it is different in each culture. Some may say, "In the old days people feared the Great Creator" or

some might say, "Our people lived in awe and fear of the Great Spirit." However, it appears that long before we started our walk on this planet our ancestors realized that there was something greater than ourselves and it was wise to pay heed to His directions.

We are going to be looking at several men whose lives are of great relevance to us today. In particular we will be looking at Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's son Joseph. We are starting with these men since they were the Patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, who we know were dispersed throughout the world at various times. We are beginning with Abraham and ending with his great-grandson Joseph because Joseph's life had and will have a great impact on the Americas.

Abraham lived over 4,000 years ago. It is hard to visualize that far back in time, but that is where we are going to begin. The following information and that written in quotation marks from the Bible are paraphrased to relate a



*God said
to him,
"As for me,
this is my
covenant
with you:
You will be
the father of
many nations."*

portion of what has been written about Abraham's life.

The LORD told Abraham that He wanted him to leave his country, his people and his father's house, and go to the land He would show him. What was unusual about Abraham is that he believed in only one God, who was invisible. This was contrary to the normal beliefs at that time which included gods carved in wood and stone.

The first time we read about Abraham (known as Abram at this time) in the Bible, it relates not only instructions on where to go but what the Creator was going to do for him:

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12).

It is recorded that Abraham believed what the Lord told him. He was living in an area called the Ur

of Chaldees which later became the center of the Babylonian Empire and today is known as Iran. He took his family, packed his belongings and left as he was directed. Traveling with him was his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot.

As we noted above, Abraham's name was originally Abram, but was changed by the Lord. Abraham means "Father of a multitude." It is recounted this way,

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'"

Abram fell face-down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I

will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

It is recorded in the New Testament of the Bible that because of Abraham's belief that God would do as He promised that "it was credited to him as righteousness."

As was promised, in his elderly years the Lord blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son who was named Isaac. In the Apostle Paul's writing to the Hebrews he

states that, "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised" (Hebrews 6:15).

This was the beginning of many generations that would eventually fulfill the promises that the Lord made to Abraham even down to the lineage of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel.

In the next issue we will follow along from Isaac through Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) and his son, Joseph, who played an important role in the settlement of the Americas by his descendants, who were here when the Europeans began arriving.

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way for the fulfilling
of his covenants,
which he hath made
to his people who are
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