



600 BC

THE DEPARTURE OF LEHI

A Landmark of Time

CLAY McCONKIE

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Chapter One

The Setting of 600 b.c.

SIX HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE the birth of Christ, at a place near the city of Jerusalem, a man and his family began a historic journey. Logically it might have taken place at night when no one would see their departure, because this was not an ordinary occasion. The man was running for his life, trying to avoid those who earlier had threatened him and were now planning to kill him.

Like Jeremiah, Lehi was a prophet, and it was God who warned him in a vision to flee. It was necessary under the conditions to leave quickly and to take his family with him. So it was that, most likely under the cover of night, he left his homeland and the famous city of Jerusalem and silently departed into the wilderness.

Lehi's family at that time consisted of his wife and four sons, and the only things they took with them in their hurried flight were their tents and camels and a few possessions. They left their home and property behind, and in addition all of their gold and silver and precious things.

In the time of history it was in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the last king to rule over the kingdom of Judah. The calendar date was 597 BC, but in the personal account kept by Lehi and his descendants, it was given as a different date, one which for centuries would be a landmark of time and a pivotal date in history.

It was in 600 BC, the family said, when they left the city and area of Jerusalem, six hundred years before the birth and advent of Jesus Christ. Often they used the date as a reference point in their writings.

"Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem," one of Lehi's sons wrote, "a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world."²

Certainly it was the date of 600 BC above all others in the history of Lehi

that became a standard of measurement among those who came after him. It was this particular aspect of their heritage that helped set them apart as a unique civilization, though they were outcasts from Jerusalem and wanderers in a strange land.

And yet as far as history is concerned, it was in 597 BC, and not 600, that Lehi left the city. It was on the later date that the man known as Zedekiah acceded to the throne and became the king of Judah. Also in that year other important events were taking place, including an earlier invasion of the city of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans of Babylonia and the continuation of what eventually became known as the Babylonian Captivity or Exile.

Many centuries later a similar discrepancy of dates would arise in relation to the birth of Christ. Biblical scholars often affirm, for example, that Jesus was not born at the beginning of the first century AD, according to the present calendar, but instead several years earlier, anywhere from 1 BC to 8 BC. Since the more common estimate appears to be between the years 3 and 4, it is significant how this relates to the 600 BC date given by Lehi.

Just as Lehi's history places the accession of Zedekiah at 600 instead of 597, a discrepancy of three years, so also do modern biblical scholars set the birth of Christ at 3 or 4 BC, a difference in calendar date of approximately the same amount.

But whatever the correct answer to these situations might be, 600 BC still remains an important date in history. To the people who followed Lehi in the early sixth century, it was a time of genesis and hope, the beginning of a migration to a distant land of promise, as well as a profession of faith in the person known as Jesus Christ. Indeed it was this particular date that announced the exact time in the future when Jesus would be born at a place not far from Jerusalem.

Definitely the time of 600 BC is a historic landmark and pivotal point in time, not only for the departure of Lehi and his family but for many other significant events which were taking place. More important, it was a time when the hand of the Almighty manifested itself in an extraordinary way. It was one of those occasions when God chose to intervene at a certain time and place and significantly change the course of history. Yet in another

sense, it was also a time of adventure and discovery, a time of resolution and dedication. And as the small group of pilgrims left their home near Jerusalem that day, most likely under cover of night and with a death threat hovering over their leader, it was a dramatic moment, heralding a new beginning for the family of Lehi and also a promise for the future in the coming birth of the Messiah!

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