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Our Duty as Custodians of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Members of the Church are expected to obtain a spiritual testimony of the Book of Mormon and then help move it toward its divine destiny. The mission of the book is described on the title page. The book is to be taken to the descendants of Lehi and the time will come when substantial numbers of them will respond.

Our Duty as Custodians of the Book of Mormon

BY ELDER MELVIN J. BALLARD, OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

IN directing the attention of the members of the Mutual Improvement Associations of the Church at this particular time towards the Book of Mormon, in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the plates having been delivered to the Prophet Joseph Smith, we earnestly urge that our membership shall read the book. Our slogan calls for a fuller knowledge of it, and by earnestly and prayerfully reading it a testimony of its divine origin will be obtained through the Holy Ghost.

We desire to impress upon the young people of the Church, as they read this sacred book, in search of a testimony of its divine authenticity, the fact that we are its custodians. That is a very sacred responsibility. We must not only know that the sacred record is true, but we must see that it shall go forward to its destiny.

What is the purpose and mission of the Book of Mormon? The answer is clearly set forth in Mormon's preface, as found on the fly leaf of the Book of Mormon itself. It is there stated that these plates were written and preserved "to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations."

In the third section of the Doctrine and Covenants we find that the Lord has revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the testimony that Jesus is the Christ must come "to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations;

"And for this very purpose are these plates preserved which contain these records, that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

"And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus

Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved.”

All this, therefore, clearly indicates that the chief mission of the Book of Mormon is to bring to pass the conversion, redemption,



TYPICAL INDIANS OF THE GREAT ANDEAN PLATEAU OF BOLIVIA AND PERU.
THERE ARE MILLIONS OF THEM

and restoration of this branch of the House of Israel—the descendants of Lehi.

Now, when is the hour to come that this mission and responsibility is to be discharged? It was the anxiety of the prophet and the early elders of the Church to carry the knowledge of the Book of

Mormon to the Indians of this country. The Prophet began the work. It was carried forward by many missionaries. A few received the message. Some have partaken of the blessings and privileges of the gospel, but the masses of the Indians in this country, as well as in other portions of America, have not yet heard of the Book of Mormon.

I remember my own contemplations upon the subject, many years ago, while engaged in missionary work among the Indians of Montana. I recall having an opportunity to speak to some three hundred of them, and while waiting for my translator there were many questions that came to my mind; one of them: Why had not the Indians received the gospel before this time? The answer came as clearly as anything I have ever received; the right time was not yet come, for there were many things that had to be done by the hand of the Gentiles in preparing the Lamanites for the reception of the gospel. Many of the things that were to be accomplished were manifest to me, and so I feel that the Lord has been working in preparing this branch of the House of Israel for the reception of the gospel.

While in South America, last year, I recall pondering upon this same subject and reading those precious words of promise concerning the restoration of Lehi's children. There came very clearly to me then the conviction that the day of their redemption is approaching.

In the 45th section of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord plainly reveals to the Prophet Joseph Smith the events of the latter days, and describes the introduction of the gospel as the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. Speaking of the House of Israel, in the 25th verse of that section, he says:

“But they shall be gathered again, but they shall remain until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

So that their hour was not to come until the times of the Gentiles had been accomplished. The beginning of the times of the Gentiles is clearly set forth as the time when the light should break forth, or the beginning of this gospel dispensation. In the 39th verse it is stated:

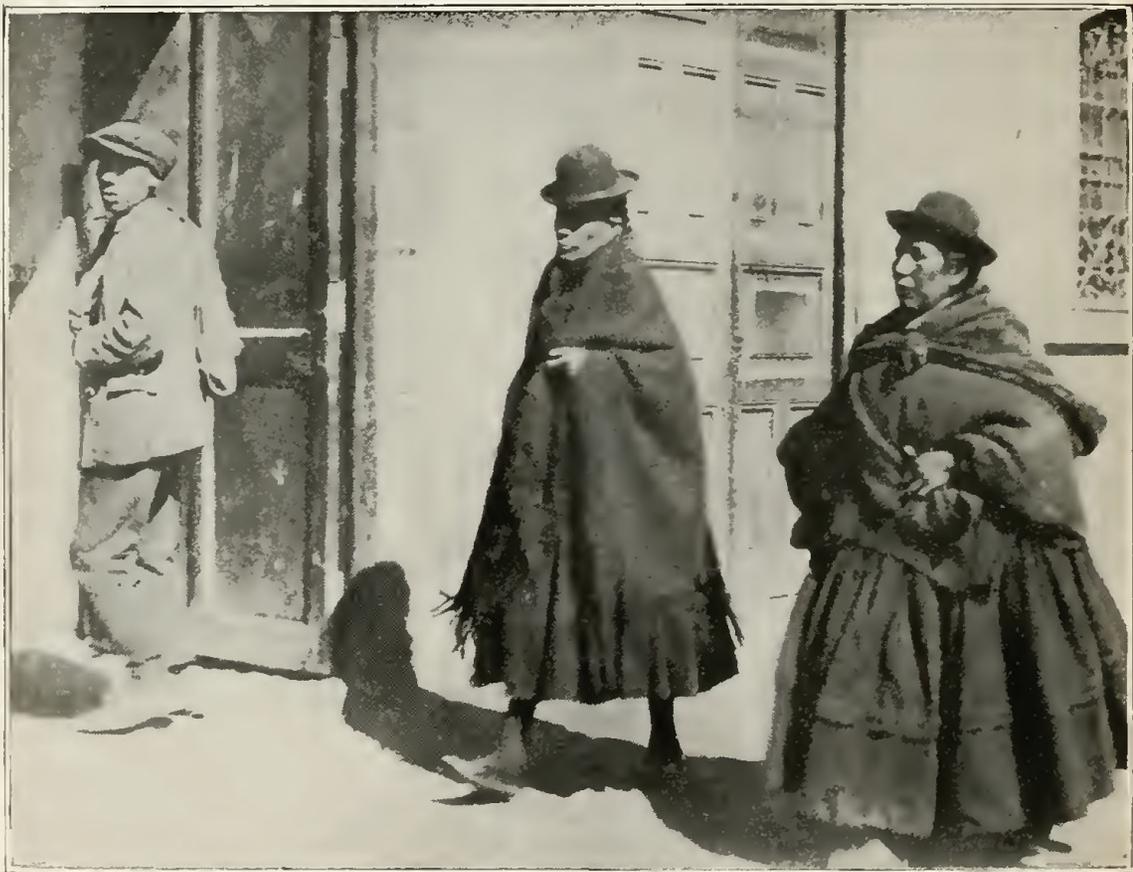
“And in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

So, we are left to conclude that the generation that saw the light break forth should not pass away until the times of the Gentiles were concluded.

I am not saying how long a period a generation is. I recognize that the Book of Mormon has generally referred to a hundred years

as a generation, so that even though this may not be accurate, it is approximately correct. Therefore, are we not already in the dawn of the times of the House of Israel? This does not imply that when the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled that the gospel will not continue with the Gentiles to provide that the blood of Israel, still with them, shall be searched out, but a new day will dawn—the day of Israel.

Other signs that indicate that this day is at hand may be found



INDIANS OF SOUTH AMERICA. SHAWLS, SKIRTS AND OTHER CLOTHING
MADE BY THE INDIANS THEMSELVES

in the Book of Mormon, I Nephi 14, the whole chapter, wherein the Lord describes to Nephi the events of the latter days, in the conflict that shall be between the great and abominable church and the Church of Christ—this Church. Also the war that should be poured out upon all nations, and that this would be a sign that the anger of the Lord is kindled against the mother of abominations, and when we saw these signs we would know that the day of Israel was at hand. Reading the 17th verse we find:

“When the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great abominable church

of all the earth, whose foundation is the devil, then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel."

Another important event that signifies the closing of the Gentile period, and the beginning of the day of Israel, is found in those marvelous circumstances that have occurred in the land of Palestine. The Lord himself predicted, Luke 21:24, that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Now the fact that the land of Palestine is no longer trodden down of the Gentiles, but has been freed from the hands of the oppressor, and that the day of its deliverance has come, is a sign that the prophecy is being fulfilled.

The Lord himself says that the first should be last, and the last should be first. In further explanation of that statement he declares that he came to the Jews, first, in the meridian of time; and, afterwards, the gospel went from them unto the Gentiles, but in the last days it would go to the Gentiles first. What for? To find the children of Ephraim sifted and scattered among the Gentile nations. And after the work was accomplished, then the gospel would go to the Jews and to the rest of the House of Israel.

Teaching the gospel to Israel is our duty and responsibility. The day is approaching when we are to discharge it, hence the need of every young man and young woman in the Church being familiar with these great promises and realizing that the responsibility of being the saviors of the House of Israel rests upon us. Like Joseph of old, we are to come out of our isolation to be the saviors of that House of Israel—not to feed them with the physical bread, as he did, but succor them with the bread of life. Greater things than have ever heretofore been accomplished, more wonderful events than have ever, up to this day, transpired, are before this Church. As the day approaches when those events will be consummated, let us be prepared.

So that, in knowing that the Book of Mormon is true, my anxiety is that the young people of the Church will also come to know what their responsibility is, and prepare themselves and be ready for the time when the Lord shall bring to pass the redemption of the House of Israel.

While in the midst of millions of the descendants of Father Lehi, in South America, witnessing their bondage and the ignorance and darkness that has been over them, for lo, these many centuries, my heart was stirred! I felt like Moses in Egypt; I wanted to lead

them out of bondage. I realize, however, that their deliverance can only come by and through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am firmly convinced that the day approaches when their hearts will be touched and the power of the Almighty will work upon them, and they shall be brought to the light and knowledge of the truth.

May the Lord prepare the young men and women of this Church to discharge this holy obligation, and find them willing servants in his cause, that redemption may come to the whole of Israel. May he speed that day!

On "Keeping" Christmas

WHILE thinking of the many different manners, in the many different lands, of observing Christmas day, I came to the conclusion that there is something better than the mere observance of Christmas day—and that is "keeping" Christmas.

To keep the day in the true spirit of the One whose birthday it is, we must be willing—like him—to forget what we have done for others, and let our thoughts dwell on what others have done for us.

Are we willing to forethink the needs of the little ones who are coming into the world every day in the year? To remember the spent and lonely hearts of those who have seen many Christmas days? To stop wondering how true our friends may be to us, and be a more true friend to them? To endeavor to understand and appreciate the everyday folk about us? To burn up our ugly hates and petty jealousies in the Yule fire, and to let its glow penetrate to every recess of our hearts, that others may see and be warmed? Are we willing to do this for a-day—Christmas day? If so, then we are "keeping" Christmas.

And in addition, are we willing to radiate the belief that Love is the greatest thing in the world—greater than evil—so great that even the grave cannot smother it—and that he who was born on Christmas day, kindled the fire of eternal Love, on earth, that we might keep it brightly burning? Then we are really "keeping" Christmas.

And if we can keep one day—Christmas day—why not every day, and for always?

A. HENDERSON