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Abstract: This article argues that Book of Mormon references and archaeological evidences (i.e. complex irrigation systems and terraces) from early agricultural sites demonstrate advanced knowledge and practice in tilling the land among the Nephite peoples.

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Agricultural Conditions in Book of Mormon Times

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When America was discovered by Columbus, its inhabitants were far from being a highly specialized agricultural people. It is true the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru had a fairly advanced civilization; yet, taking North and South America as a whole, the great majority of the people depended for their food on hunting, fishing, and the bounties of the native vegetation rather than on the products of farms as we know them today. Only the most fertile regions were tilled, and these did not produce any great variety of crops or domestic animals.

That a much higher state of agricultural development had existed in America at some previous time, cannot be doubted by any student of the subject. The aborigines of America gave to the world a number of its most important crops—corn and potatoes being notable examples. The farmers of the world each year produce more than five billion dollars worth of these two crops alone. This amount of money, although inconceivable, shows something of what the world owes to the inhabitants of the Western Continent agriculturally, even though they did not till the soil intensively at the time of the European discoveries.

Those who have made a study of the Book of Mormon lands have been struck by the high state of agriculture that must have existed in earlier times. The remains of irrigation systems that almost baffle modern engineering skill have been found; and in certain places very complex terracings are seen, showing that a great amount of labor was spent in making the land produce as

much as possible. From these remains we cannot tell many of the details of methods. We are simply left to conclude that civilizations have risen and fallen; and with them systems of agriculture of no uncertain merit have gone hand in hand.

Let us turn to the records of these times to see what light they throw on the subject. The Book of Mormon is full of references to agricultural operations. These make clear the fact that the original settlers of the Americas were tillers of the soil. They planted and harvested as well as tended their flocks and herds. Each company, in preparing for the journey to the promised land, gathered and took with it "seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also the seeds of fruit of every kind" as well as "flocks, both male and female, of every kind." (I Nephi 8:1; Ether 1:41). And in all their movings from place to place and settling new country they were careful to take seeds with them. It may be a following out of this idea that has given the Indian the characteristic that is often attributed to him that he will starve, with seed corn in his house, before he will eat what he has saved to plant.

Whenever the people moved from place to place, either in quest of better lands or because of being harassed by their enemies, they gathered together their flocks and herds and the products of the soil. The record usually mentions this fact, inferring that their agricultural possessions were among the most precious things they had. Usually the first event that is recorded concerning them when they arrived at a place where they expected to make a new home is that they "began to till the earth, and to plant seeds." In describing the regions through which they traveled there was usually some reference to the fertility of the land and its adaptation to agriculture.

At many times during the history of their occupancy of the American Continent a spirit of exceeding democracy seemed to be over the land, so much so that even the rulers practiced agriculture. Thus: "King Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth, and he also, himself, did till the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people, that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things." (Mosiah 6:7). Ammon and his brethren found that even the Lamanite King Lamoni was interested in agricultural pursuits and that he had his lands with his flocks and herds.

The Book of Mormon tells us that in those days they had troubles to contend with the same as we have today. There were insects that devoured their crops; hot winds blighted them before they matured; and droughts and famines were not unknown. In the account of the first settlers of the land, the Book of Ether (Ch. 9:30) tells us that: "There began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceeding

fast, because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth." In the descriptions given of the depredations made by robbers, it is usually stated that they stole products of agriculture, showing that these things were common.

This record of the Nephites is full of instances where prosperity followed the serving of the Lord and where the people ceased to get along well when they turned away from him. Indeed, the whole book is a succession of chronicles of alternating prosperity and failure dependent of their attitude toward their Creator. Their religious life was bound up closely with their daily affairs, and it is from some of the religious teachings that we learn most about their agriculture. The illustrations used in giving instructions regarding sacred things were drawn largely from their daily life. Just as in the New Testament we learn much of the agricultural conditions of the Jews from the parables of the Savior, so in this record similar teachings give us a better idea of some of the routine of their lives than can be had from the mere narrative.

There is no definite account of just what kinds of crops they had, except that the following are mentioned: corn, wheat, barley, neas and sheum, as well as all manner of fruits. We do not know just the nature of neas and sheum, but we are familiar with the other crops. We are told that the Jaredites brought honey bees which they called Deseret and that they had "all manner of cattle, of oxen, and cows, and of sheep, and of swine and of goats, and also many other kinds of animals which were useful for the food of man; and they also had horses, and asses, and there were elephants and cureloms, and cumons." (Ether 9:18-19). We are not aware what the last two were, but the record says they were especially useful to man. That they had implements is made clear by the following quotation from Ether 10:25-26: "And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth, both to plough and to sow, to reap and to hoe, and also to thresh. And they did make all manner of tools with which they did work their beasts."

A very great deal could be written along this line, from the information that is given, but sufficient has been said to give a general idea of some of the agricultural practices of the early inhabitants of America.

In studying the Scriptures purely for the religious gems they contain, we sometimes get a distorted idea of the people described. The fact is, they were men and women just as we are today, with similar joys and sorrows, with temptations and trials, and all the other things that contribute to human life. If we can be made to understand as fully as possible the conditions under which they lived, it will enable us to be in closer sympathy with them. Such an attitude will make us better able to understand the

hand dealings of the Father with his children in all the ages that are passed.

AGRICULTURAL REFERENCES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON.—I Nephi 8:1; 16:11; 17:5; 18:6; 18:24-25; II Nephi 5:11; 15:2-10; Jacob 5:3-77; Enos 1:21; Mosiah 6:7; 7:22; 9:9-14; 10:2, 4, 21; 11:15-17; 12:6; 21:16; 22:8, 11; 23:1, 5, 25, 31; 24:18; Alma 1:29; 3:2; 7:27; 17:25-39; 18:9-12; 27:14; 34:20, 24, 25; 62:29; Helaman 3:5-10; 6:12; 11:6, 17; III Nephi 3:22; 4:3, 4, 5, 6; 6:1, 2; Ether 1:41; 2:1, 3; 6:4, 13; 9:17, 18, 19, 31, 35; 10:12, 25, 26.

LOGAN, UTAH

My Testimony of Joseph Smith the Prophet

I believe Joseph Smith to be a true prophet of God for many reasons:

First, I think he could not have been deceived, because so many of his visions came in broad daylight; he was physically and mentally strong, and the work which he accomplished could not have been done by a man who was so mentally feeble as to become deceived.

Second, I can see no motive for his being a wilful deceiver.

Third, the rule that God gave us by which we could judge a true prophet was utterly fulfilled in him.

Fourth, I think God would choose a man with a sweet, lovable disposition such as he had to do His work.—*Eunice Wilkinson*, Student Brigham Young University.

An Irrigation Parable

Two men strove at the bright day-dawn for the use of the trickling stream which meandered slowly down the thirsty ditch. They employed words to show their rights to use this stream, and when that availed not to decide the matter, they came to blows and beat each other on the breast and back.

And the sun arose, and the heat shriveled the young plants, while the shimmer of the noon-day drought was over the face of the plain.

But the men were broken and spent with their strife. Both lay prone upon the sands.

And the sun rode high, then dipped downward on his course and soon was lost to view.

The little stream had found a gopher hole, and down into this rude and useless cup the life-giving waters poured. But the men still lay spent and broken upon the plain, and the moon rose upon their folly.—*Susa Young Gates*.