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The Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This series discusses the origin of the Book of Mormon. It includes topics such as the Hill Cumorah, Joseph Smith's first vision, the visit of the angel Moroni, the description of the gold plates, the translation and historical importance of the Book of Mormon, the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses, Native American traditions that correspond with concepts in the Book of Mormon, legends from Tongan Islanders that are similar to those of Judaism, and the prophecy of no kings in America and its fulfillment. The third part continues the discussion of the Eight Witnesses, Native American traditions, and Tongan legends.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'
MILLENNIAL STAR.

[ESTABLISHED 1840.]

*“Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”*

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THE BOOK OF MORMON.

(Continued from page 823.)

JOSEPH SMITH, SR.

Joseph Smith, Sr., was the next witness, in the order in which the names appear. I need not say anything about him except that he was the prophet's father, and was faithful and true in every respect—one of God's noblemen. He died on the 14th of September, 1840, as a result of the persecutions he had suffered in the State of Missouri.

HYRUM SMITH.

Hyrum Smith, a brother of the Prophet Joseph and the father of our present esteemed president of the Church, was martyred in Carthage jail, June 27th, 1844, for the testimony he bore in regard to the Book of Mormon and the truth of the great latter-day work. He was another of the eight witnesses. We need only say here that he sealed his testimony with his blood, and that no one can possibly give greater proof of sincerity than this: that he is willing to die for his testimony.

SAMUEL HARRISON SMITH.

The same may be said of Samuel Harrison Smith, another brother of the prophet and one of the eight witnesses. He, also, was persecuted to death; and I may say that while his blood was not shed outright like that of his brothers, Joseph and Hyrum, yet within

six weeks of the time that these two martyrs fell in Carthage jail, he himself fell a victim to persecution. He died on the 30th of July, 1844, in consequence of exposure while being chased by a mob.

I have given you these data and these facts, my brethren and sisters and friends, that you may know that of all the men who bore testimony to the divinity of the Book of Mormon, and who saw the plates, heard the voice of God declare that the Book was true, and who saw the holy angels, not one of them ever went back on that testimony.

PROVEN BY INDIAN TRADITIONS.

Soon after the Spaniards had discovered America, a most disgraceful warfare was waged against the Indians in Mexico and elsewhere. We have, perhaps, all read the lamentable story of Montezuma, and how Cortez destroyed all he possibly could in the way of relics and records that he found among Montezuma's people. The conquerors of Mexico did not look upon records in the light that we do now. It was apparently their object to destroy anything and everything that could testify of the past, everything that could perpetuate knowledge of the Toltecs and Aztecs, whom the Spaniards called heathens.

It seems a great calamity that these conquerors should thus wantonly destroy that which to us historians is valuable beyond all price; yet, notwithstanding this destruction, some knowledge, based mostly upon the traditions of American natives, has come to us; and both Spanish and English writers have gathered and preserved for us information of very great importance. From this source we learn that the Aztecs of Mexico and the aborigines of South and Central America were acquainted with the early history of the world. There were found among them many different traits, customs and characteristics which seemed identical with Jewish civilization. Thus these early Americans practised the ceremonial law of Moses most faithfully. They used a great many Hebrew words in their speech, and there was everything to induce the Spaniards (who came among them to investigate their traditions and customs) to conclude that they perchance were a branch of the house of Israel. In fact, several books have been written by different authors who believe the American Indians are the ten lost tribes of Israel. Of course we cannot accept this as a whole, but there certainly was and is such a resemblance between these people and the Jews that the early Spanish explorers could not close their eyes to the fact that they were Jewish in their traditions, Jewish in their Jehovah or Great Spirit worship, Jewish in their ceremonial laws, and Jewish, in part, in their language. Notwithstanding the destruction wrought by Cortez and others, there are such remains of an old civilization and such other evidences as to prove to us, as Latter-day Saints, that the historical part of the Book of Mormon is true, so far as it speaks of a highly civilized

people once occupying this land. And all who accept this book as being true can easily understand why these people were so thoroughly trained in Hebrew ceremonies and customs. Certainly they belonged to the house of Israel; they could hardly be called Jews; the term Hebrew or Israel would perhaps be better; we only use the term to designate them.

I now desire to draw your attention to a work published in London in 1833, written by C. Colton, on the origin of the American Indians. This book was published in London before any of our elders trod the soil of Great Britain. In this book it is stated that the Indians in Mexico asserted that a book was once in the possession of their ancestors which told them that the Great Spirit used to foretell future events to their ancestors, that angels had talked with them, that all the Indian tribes had descended from one man who had twelve sons. These Indian tribes also believed that the spirit of prophecy and miraculous interposition, once enjoyed by their ancestors, would yet be restored to them, and they would recover the book, all of which had so long been lost.

CHRIST APPEARS TO THE NEPHITES.

Some time ago I visited Logan and called upon some of our Spanish speaking missionaries. Among others that I visited was our old friend James Z. Stewart, who filled a mission in old Mexico many years ago. He has a book in his possession, written in the Spanish language and published in Madrid, Spain, in the year 1746, entitled: "Idea De Una Neuva Historia General De La America Septentrional." I am sure I did not pronounce all those words right. However, in this book we read of the traditions of the Indians, from which it is apparant that the Indians were acquainted with the history of the creation of the world, the tower of Babel, the separation of the people, their wanderings after the division through Asia, and their arrival in the promised land; the preaching of Christianity in America by Christ, etc. All this was written as Indian tradition, but the author of the work, who, if I remember right, was a Spanish friar of the Roman Catholic Church, argues against the Indian theory of Christ visiting America, and substitutes St. Thomas as the probable personage who crossed the great ocean and preached Christianity to the Indians. On page one hundred and thirty-nine of said work commences the legend which tells of the wanderings in Asia till the arrival in the new world, which corroborates the Book of Mormon story given in the Book of Jared. When the Spaniards brought the Bible to America, the Indians said that the contents of that book reminded them very much of their own ancient Bible or records.

This, my brethren and sisters, is plain as daylight to the Latter-day Saints. The Indians were right; the author of the work referred to was wrong. It was not Saint Thomas, it was Christ Himself who visited the ancient inhabitants of this land. The Book of

Mormon tells us of the great destruction that occurred at the time of the crucifixion. It tells us that Christ appeared to the Nephites in the land Bountiful, that Christ Himself spake to them and revealed principles of eternal truth, and that He also taught them the gospel the same as He had done on the eastern hemisphere. It was Christ Himself—not Saint Thomas—who descended from heaven in the midst of the Nephites in the land Bountiful.

By way of digression, I will here simply remind you of the very extensive ruins in Central America described by Stephens and Catherwood, and later by other explorers, who have written volume after volume about the ruins of temples, cities and walls, such as were built by the Nephites in the days of their power. Other writers have enlarged upon the religion of the aborigines, which exhibited many Christian features.

Of course this Christian religion of the Indians had, to a certain extent, become corrupt; but even after the Lamanites had slain the Nephites there was sufficient truth left among the former to enable their descendants, the Indians of the sixteenth century, to tell the Spaniards a pretty correct story of Christ, His crucifixion and doctrines. On this subject we have such authorities as the following: Adair's "History of the American Indians," published in London in 1776; Catlin's "Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians," published in 1841; Rivero and Van Tschudi's "Peruvian Antiquities," translated into English by Dr. Hawks, published in New York in 1854; Bernal Diaz's "History of the Conquest of Mexico," chapter 20; Professor Short's "North Americans of Antiquity"; Gomora's "History of the Indians"; Rosales' "History of Chili"; Lord Kingsborough's "Mexican Antiquities."

These are a few of the very many works written in regard to the religion, customs, habits and origin of the American Indians, which prove that they were not only of Jewish origin, but that they knew considerable about Christianity—all of which goes far in proving that the Book of Mormon is true. Lord Kingsborough, the author of the last work I mention, "Mexican Antiquities," sums up his findings in this language:

INDIANS OF HEBREW DESCENT.

"The first reason for concluding the Indian tribes to be of Hebrew descent is in their belief in the symbolical purification of water. The inhabitants of Yucatan gave to water, with which they baptized their children, the title of the water of regeneration. The Indians of Yucatan invoked Him whom they believed to be the living and true God, of whom they made no graven image. The second reason for believing that the religions of the Indians was Judaism is that they used circumcision. Third, that they expected a Messiah. Fourth, that many words connected with the celebration of their religious rites were obviously of Hebrew extraction. Fifth, that Las Casas, the bishop of Chiapa, who had the best means of verifying the fact, was of that opinion. Sixth, that the Jews themselves, including some of the most eminent Rabbis, such as Menasse Ben Israel and Montesinos, maintained it both by verbal

statement and in writing. Seventh, the dilemma in which some of the Spanish writers, such as Acosta and Torquemada, have placed their readers, by leaving them no alternative, than to come to the decision, whether the Hebrews colonized America, and established their rites amongst the Indians, or whether the devil had counterfeited in the new world, the rites and ceremonies which God gave to His chosen people. The eighth is the resemblance which many ceremonies and rites of the Indian bear to those of the Jews. Ninth, the similitude which existed between the Indians and Hebrew moral laws. Tenth, the knowledge which the Mexican and Peruvian traditions supplied, that the Indians possessed the history contained in the Pentateuch. Eleventh, the Mexican tradition of the Teo-moctli, or Divine Book of the Toltecs. Twelfth, the famous migration from Aztlan (Asia). Thirteenth, the traces of Jewish history, traditions, laws, customs, manners, which are found in Mexican paintings. Fourteenth the frequency of sacrifice amongst the Indians, and the religious consecration of the blood and fat of the victims. Fifteenth, the style of the architecture of their temples. Sixteenth, the fringes which the Mexicans wore fastened to their garments. Seventeenth, a similarity of the manners and customs of the Indian tribes, far removed from the central monarchies of Mexico and Peru, to those of the Jews, which writers, who were not Spaniards, have noticed—such as William Penn.”

TONGAN ISLANDERS' LEGENDS.

A few years ago I made a trip around the world, and among the islands that I visited in the Pacific Ocean was the Tongan group. That group of Islands lies about as far away from America as one can get and still be in the Polynesian part of the great Pacific. We had missionaries in Tonga a few years ago, trying to introduce the gospel, but they were not successful. When I visited this people in 1895, I read the experience of a certain missionary, the Rev. Thomas West, who had spent several years among the Tongans. After he left the group he published a book entitled, “Ten Years in South Central Polynesia,” in which he writes as follows:

“There can be no doubt that the Tonguese religion bore in several particulars a striking resemblance to the ritual and economy of the Jewish ceremonial law. Indeed, this similarity prevails more or less in the various groups of Polynesia. Nor can it be denied that many of the inhabitants have strongly marked Jewish features.”

A few of these points of resemblance may here be specified as a matter of interest:

1. There obtain, among the Tongans, regular divisions of time into months and years, these divisions being marked by the recurrence of sacred seasons and public feasts, which were observed with religious ceremony, and were under the sanction of the most rigorous laws. It is also remarkable that the Tongans have some knowledge of an intercalary month, the use and disuse of which have led to many discussions among themselves.

2. The entire system of tabu, by which times, persons, places or things are made sacred, and the many religious restrictions and prohibitions connected therewith, may be easily interpreted as a relic, much changed and corrupted, of the ceremonial observances of the Jews.

3. The great feast of the offering of the first-fruits to the gods every year seems a custom of religious ceremony of purely Jewish origin.

4. The same may be said of the rite of circumcision, which was regularly practised by them. An uncircumcised person was considered mean and despicable, and the custom has only disappeared in recent years.

5. Every person and thing that touched a dead body was considered unclean, and remained so until after the lapse of a certain number of days. During that allotted time those whose duties compelled them to do the rites of the burial were not allowed to feed themselves, or touch the food prepared by others. They were therefore carefully fed by attendants.

6. Females after childbirth, and after other periods of infirmity, were enjoined strict separation; and were subjected to ceremonial purifications.

7. The Tongans had cities of refuge corresponding to those instituted among the Jews; their uses and functions resembled, in some of their features, those of the Mosaic law.

These conditions prevailed in Tonga when Captain Cook first discovered the group, and still prevail to a certain extent. Now, how do we trace Jewish origin so far away from America as that? Listen. The Book of Mormon gives us the keynote. We find the following recorded in the sixty-third chapter of Alma, fifth and eighth verses:

NEPHITE SHIPBUILDERS.

“And it came to pass that Hagath, he being an exceeding curious man * * * built him an exceeding large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck of land which led into the land northward. And behold there were many of the Nephites who did enter therein, and did sail forth with much provisions and also many women and children, and they took their course northward. * * * This man built other ships. The first ship did also return, and many more people did enter into it; and they also took much provisions and set out again to the land northward. And it came to pass that they were never heard of more. * * * And it came to pass that one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go, we know not.”

But in the light of our present knowledge we can easily surmise where they went. When I left America on a missionary tour around the world, twelve years ago, I took passage on a steamer at Vancouver, British Columbia, bound for the Sandwich Islands; and on this voyage an incident occurred which I shall mention, as it has a bearing on this question. We had been on the water for five days without seeing anything to attract our attention, except sea and sky. On the whole trip we had not seen a single ship or boat, or anything else, until the last day, when we observed, to the right of the ship, a tree, or a large trunk of a tree, floating in the water. On making inquiries of the ship's officers as to what it was, when we first saw it at a distance, we were told: “This tree

has come from the mouth of the Columbia river. Every season, as we pass through these waters, we see a great many such trees floating in the ocean; they come from the rivers of America, and many of them are washed ashore on the islands of the sea."

REASONABLE CONCLUSIONS.

Now I reason like this. If a dead tree, floating in the water, can be carried by the current and winds to the Hawaiian group or other islands in the great Pacific, how much easier it would be for a ship, properly manned and supplied with rudder and sails, to be carried before the trade winds and by the ocean currents to these distant islands? The Polynesians undoubtedly belong to the same race of people as the American Indians, and are, like these, Jewish in their appearance, to a remarkable extent.

We do not find much trace of Christianity on these islands of the sea, but we can easily account for that, as Hagath built the ships that journeyed to these islands before the gospel was preached to the inhabitants in America. Hence we find the Mosaic law, and not Christianity, practised by the Polynesians. Hagath's ships left the American shores nearly a hundred years before Christ appeared to the Nephites in the land Bountiful. Is not this still more corroborative evidence that the theory of Hagath's ships is correct?

We have still other proofs. As we associate with the Hawaiians, Maoris, or other Pacific Islanders, we find that they have traditions going way back to very early days—traditions which have been handed down by them for fifty or sixty generations—to the effect that their forefathers came from a great land to the eastward, where they lived before they came to Hawaii; and that before that time they came from a great country still farther away. All of these traditions, in our estimation, corroborate the Book of Mormon history.

(To be continued.)

PEACE AND GOOD WILL.

"What means this glory round our feet," the Magi mused, "more bright than morn?"
 And voices chanted clear and sweet, "to-day the Prince of Peace is born!"
 "What means this star," the shepherds said, "that brightens through the rocky glen?"
 And angels answering, overhead, sang, "Peace on earth, good will to men!"

'Tis eighteen hundred years, and more, since those sweet oracles were dumb;
 We wait for Him like them of yore; alas! He seems so slow to come,
 But it was said, in words of gold no time or sorrow e'er shall dim,
 That little children might be bold, in perfect trust to come to Him.

All round about our feet shall shine a light like that the wise men saw,
 If we our loving wills incline to that sweet life which is the law.
 So shall we learn to understand the simple faith of shepherds then,
 And, kindly clasping hand in hand, sing, "Peace on earth, good will to men!"

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.