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Since Cumorah: New Voices from the Dust, Part XVIII

Author(s): Hugh W. Nibley

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Abstract: This series argues that the changing attitudes of biblical scholars toward basic questions about scripture allow room for claims made by the Book of Mormon. It discusses external evidences, the primitive church, Lehi, Zenos, the olive tree, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The eighteenth part continues the discussion of various ancient texts.

SINCE CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

BY HUGH NIBLEY, PH.D.
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND RELIGION
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

The scholarly study of the Book of Mormon goes forward with the discovery of ancient documents. We continue a brief glance at some of these which have not yet appeared in book form nor been translated into English.

● The next section tells how Jesus went about making his disciples and his followers perfectly one with each other, with him, and with the Father: "Have ye not heard, O my beloved, the love of Jesus for his Apostles; which was so great that he withheld nothing from them in all the works of his godhead?" This blessing was im-

parted in three steps, "the first time in blessing the five barley loaves, the second time when he prayed and glorified the Father, the third time when he blessed the seven loaves." In 3 Nephi 19 the Lord also imparts his glory to the disciples in three steps as they prayed three times "to the Father in the name of Jesus." (Verse 8.)

After this, "Thomas says unto Jesus, Behold, O Lord, thou hast in thy goodness bestowed every grace upon us. But there yet remains one thing which we would that thou wouldst grant unto us." This is a common theme in the "forty-day" accounts, where the Apostles, after having received all knowledge and enlightenment and become perfectly one with Jesus, have yet one question to ask him,

but are abashed at the presumption of asking until Jesus, who knows what is in their hearts, tells them he knows what it is they desire and that they need not be ashamed for it is a worthy request.⁸⁷ In the present text the Lord simply encourages Thomas and his brethren not to be embarrassed to ask what is in their minds, though usual commendation is lacking. It is not lacking in the Book of Mormon account:

"And it came to pass . . . he spake unto his disciples *one by one* [they always question him individually in the 'forty-day' literature], saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me . . . ?

"And when he had spoken unto them, he turned himself unto the three. . . .

"And they sorrowed in their hearts, for they durst not speak unto him the thing which they desired.

"And he said unto them: Behold. I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved . . . desired of me.

"Therefore, more blessed are ye. . . ." (3 Nephi 28:1, 4-7. Italics added.)

Here we are directly referred to an identical situation in the Old World. And what is the special boon granted the three? That they "shall never taste of death . . . even until all things shall be fulfilled. . . ."

"And . . . shall never endure the pains of death; but . . . shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. . . ." (*Ibid.*, 28:7-8.)

A like request is granted in our Coptic account: "We desire, O Lord, that we may see how things are with the dead who lie in their tombs, whom thou hast raised up to be a sign of thy resurrection to take place for us. . . . We desire to see the bones which have fallen apart in the tomb, how they are reunited one to another, that the dead may speak." What follows shows that this is plainly a post-resurrectional tradition, for in answer to their request Thomas and two friends are shown the raising of Lazarus, at whose coming forth the whole cemetery revolves on its axis, and "the dead arose and came forth because of the voice of Jesus."

Such a mass resurrection could, of course, only take place after the Lord himself had been resurrected. The descriptions of the *descensus* (the visit of the Lord to the spirits in prison) and the *kerygma* (his preaching to them and liberating of them) that follow also clearly belong in a post-crucifixion setting. At the moment Jesus calls Lazarus forth, Adam also hears his voice and cries: "This voice

which I hear is the voice of my Creator and my Redeemer. This is the voice of Him who was my glory when he addressed me in Paradise. . . . O my son, Lazarus, take my greetings to My Creator. O when will the time come when I too may hear the voice of life calling me?"

Before he grants the wish of the Apostles, Jesus says to the people, "More blessed are they who have not seen but believed than they who have seen and not believed," which is akin to the Book of Mormon, ". . . blessed are ye if ye shall believe . . . after that ye have seen me. . . ."

"And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words . . ." (i.e., without having seen). (3 Nephi 12:1f.)

Then the Coptic text adds, "You see how many miracles and signs I did among the Jews, and yet they did not believe me." This again compares with 3 Nephi 19:35: "So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief."

It is always one to three apostles who are singled out for special blessings and manifestations after the resurrection. In the first of all our early Christian Coptic texts to be discovered, the famous *Pistis Sophia* (c. 42f), we are told that Jesus appointed three of his disciples to keep official written records of what he said and did, conformant to the ancient order (Deut. 19:15) requiring that all things be established by three witnesses. In this case the three are Matthew, Thomas, and Philip, which accounts for the prominence of their names in the earliest Christian records. The significance of the "three witnesses" theme for the Book of Mormon needs no comment.

In the so-called *Gospel of Philip* we have another mixing of sacra-

ment and transfiguration motifs, when Philip tells how Christ "made the disciples great, that they might be able to see him in his greatness. He said on that day in blessing the sacrament: 'Thou who hast joined the perfect, the light, with the Holy Ghost, unite with angels with us also. . . .'"⁸⁸

Compare this with the 19th chapter of Third Nephi, where ". . . they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. . . . And angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them.

"And . . . Jesus came and stood in the midst. . . ."

". . . and behold *they* were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus. . . ." (Vs. 13-15, 25. Italics added.)

The same source also furnishes an interesting commentary on the name of Christ and how it changes from language to language, as the name of Jesus does not, depending on how a speaker thinks of Christ.⁸⁹ This explains the use of the name in the Book of Mormon (where it has been criticized as an anachronism), distinguishing the true Messiah from the Messiah expected by the Jews in general. Also considered an anachronism in the Book of Mormon is the reference to faith, hope, and charity, a formula on which the new Coptic texts cast some light, and which was known to be not a Pauline invention but a well-known expression in very ancient times; most recently the Dead Sea Scrolls have amply shown that many supposedly unique Pauline expressions were actually borrowed by Paul from much older sources.⁹⁰ The newly found *Apocryphon of James* has a remarkable parallel to Alma's teaching of the growth of faith in terms of a seed.⁹¹ When we read in the *Gospel of Thomas*, "Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel and they all spoke about thee,"⁹² we

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think of the words of Helaman:

“. . . even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; . . .

“. . . and also almost all of our fathers . . . have testified of the coming of Christ. . . .” (Helaman 8:19, 22.)

The very existence of many of the basic concepts in these early

Christian and Jewish writings has always been denied up until now, for the ideas have been repugnant to all the established churches. The idea of a small and elect “Israel within Israel” runs counter equally to rabbinic teachings and to the fundamental Christian doctrine that with the coming of Christ the Church became universal, embracing all mankind, wheat and tares, good and bad, indiscriminately. The concept of the Lord’s preaching to the spirits in prison and the

vicarious work by which they were to be liberated has usually been denounced as a Gnostic aberration. The idea of a strict hierarchical organization of the Church and careful concern for rites and ordinances is completely opposed to the conventional view of the primitive Church as a spontaneous brotherhood of love devoid of all set forms. The idea of any secrecy or reticence in the preaching of the gospel is, as we have seen, offensive to the present-day Christian teachers.

Peculiarly obnoxious to the churchmen of the past is that great concern for progeny, which is a mark both of the Scrolls and of the Coptic writings, the latter having much to say about a very special ordinance of marriage; in fact, according to the Philip, the main purpose of Christ’s coming to earth was to reunite Adam and Eve in a covenant of marriage which would last for the eternities.⁹³ Re-unite? To be sure, for the doctrine of the pre-existence, vigorously condemned by the doctors of the church from the 4th century on, runs like a red thread through the Nag Hammadi writings and the Dead Sea Scrolls alike.

Bridging the Gulf: Granted that we seem to be in the same universe of discourse in the newly found Christian and Jewish writings as in the Book of Mormon, how can we explain the coincidence in view of the vast gulf of space and time that separates the Old World from the New? Actually the gaps dwindle away on close inspection. As to space, it needs no elaborate demonstration to show that culture is a highly portable and mobile commodity under certain conditions, spreading rapidly and persisting with great tenacity. One need only consider how the salient elements of Buddhism, Hellenism, Romanism, Arabism, and “Hispanidad” quickly conquered large areas of the globe and remained in possession for centuries. From the earliest times all the regions of the world



“THOUGH I CANNOT SEE ALL THE WAY . . .”

RICHARD L. EVANS

“If someone were to ask you to go with him . . . to a moving picture of the things that are going to happen . . . would you go?” asked William Frederick Bigelow. “Would you be willing to risk seeing the things [of the future]. . . ?¹ Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing, onward through life he goes²—that is the biography of most men, and few would change it if they could, or ask to look forward to the days of rejoicing or³ of sorrowing. “What the ultimate significance of life is, I do not know,” said Dr. Arthur E. Morgan. “It seems to be an adventure, and that means risk, with uncertainty as to success or failure. I do not know how great is the risk. . . . It has been a long struggle for humanity to come thus far. . . . I must not fail. . . . Though I cannot see all the way . . . courage is essential, and patience. . . . Open-minded search for truth is essential. . . . And I must learn to enjoy life . . . for . . . unless we find goodness [and happiness] from day to day, it will not appear to us at the end.”⁴ “We have climbed to here by faith.”¹ “The look ahead is always intriguing . . . [with] gratitude for a fresh opportunity.”⁴ This is the substance, the spirit of facing the future: faith, hope, happiness, patience; preparation; a willingness to trust and to take the next step without asking “to see the distant scene.” Some have seen something of the future. To the prophets there has been some opening of it. But the usual and intended plan and pattern is to face our problems and opportunities a day at a time, an hour at a time, with an awareness that it was a kind and loving Father who gave us the principles, the commandments, the laws of conduct, of causes and consequences, with faith to move into the future without seeing all of its events, but with assurance as to eternal certainties, and as to the purpose and importance of doing and enduring. And we may know that we are in good hands, and well would keep prayerfully close to Him who gave us life, and loved ones and all our opportunities. “Though I cannot see all the way . . . courage is essential, and patience . . . I must learn to enjoy life . . . Whatever the goal may be, this is the true path.”³ And happiness is part of life’s great purpose.

¹William Frederick Bigelow, “When the Bells Ring,” *Good Housekeeping*, January 1941.

²Longfellow, “The Village Blacksmith.”

³Dr. Arthur E. Morgan (quoted by William Frederick Bigelow, above).

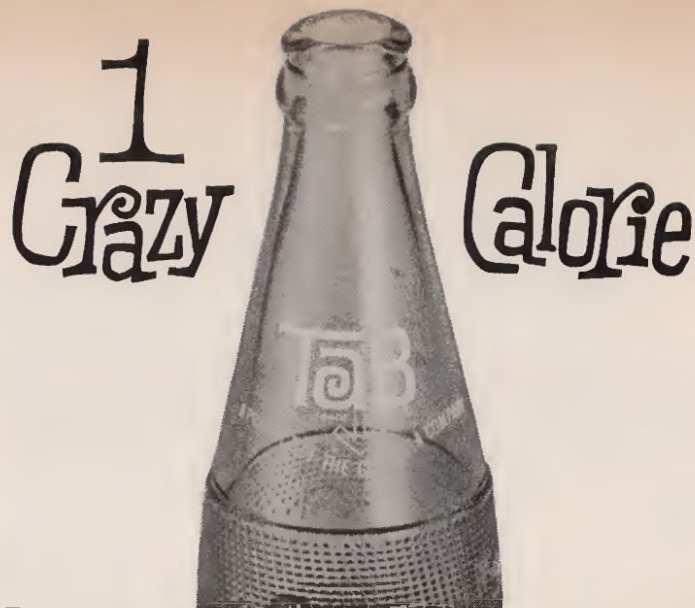
⁴James Francis Cooke, “The Challenging New Year,” *Etude*, January 1955.

“The Spoken Word,” from Temple Square, presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, January 9, 1966. Copyright 1966.

have been accessible to men, and year after year steadily accumulating evidence shows that the ties between the great classical civilizations have been far closer than anyone had hitherto suspected.⁹⁴ Space is no obstacle to the transplanting of culture—least of all empty space.

As to the time gap, the Scrolls have presented the most interesting anomalies from the beginning. Eminent Jewish scholars have seriously assigned them to the Middle Ages while others have found them to belong to pre-Christian times. Christian communities such still survive. And these Mandaean carried on the teachings and customs of Qumran in distant places many centuries after the Dead Sea community had disappeared; remnants of the Mandaeans, in fact, still survive. And these Mandaeans and the society at Qumran have both been traced back, independently and together, to the Rechabites, who before the days of Lehi sought to live as true Israel in the Judean wilderness. We have here a remarkably stable tradition, for the life was simple and the sectaries always followed the same handbook—the writings of Moses—and thus perpetuated a timeless and unchanging tradition. And Lehi definitely belongs to that tradition—consciously so, according to Helaman, who puts him squarely in that line of prophets of whom Zenos (like the Zadok of the Scrolls) is the type.

Let us hark back briefly to the case of Zenos. Could he have been the author of the *Thanksgiving Hymns*? He could have, but that is not necessary—he could have lived centuries before the Qumran poet and still resemble him very closely. After all, half a dozen Zadoks have been identified, all related and all engaged in the same type of activity. It is a commonplace of the apocryphal writings that two heroes who behave alike become identified in the minds of



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later generations. Like the religious writings of the Egyptians (to which they have genuine affinity), the documents we have been considering are wholly taken up with types and images rather than with unique historical events and personalities; ancient religious texts operate to a degree which we often fail to appreciate, with interchangeable parts, characters, and names. It is hard for the analytical-minded Westerner to understand what goes on, and a vast amount of ink has been wasted on studies attempting an exclusive pinpointing of this or that character or event in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But for the people who wrote the Scrolls, it was quite possible for John to be an Elijah or the Teacher of Righteousness a Messiah.

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTES

⁸⁷The situation is depicted in the *Epistle of the Apostles*, c. 20 (31)f (Ethiopian text), and xiv (Coptic text), and in the newly discovered *Apocryphon of James*, discussed by H.-C. Puech and G. Quispel, in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 8 (1956), pp. 10-11.

⁸⁸*Gospel of Philip*, 106.

⁸⁹*Gospel of Philip*, 104, cf. 110.

⁹⁰Puech and Quispel, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹²*Gospel of Thomas*, 52.

⁹³*Gospel of Philip*, 116, 118.

⁹⁴For a recent treatment of these ideas, S. Piggott, ed., *The Dawn of Civilization* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1961.)

NEW SHOES FOR SUZIE

BY ETHEL JACOBSON

One shoe,

Two shoes,

White and spanking

New shoes,

Good for puddles—

She hopes for a flood!

And even better

For sloshing through mud.

One shoe,

Two shoes,

Who'd ever believe

They're new shoes?