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Since Cumorah: New Voices from the Dust, Part XX

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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 twentieth part covers some external evidences.

SINCE CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

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Continuing the exploration of the fascinating discoveries that have come to light since the publication of the Book of Mormon 136 years ago in the upstate New York village of Palmyra.

Problems, Not Solutions. What we have come up with in this long and rambling presentation is a miscellaneous jumble of problems—all of them unsolved. There have been hints, suggestions, and conjectures but absolutely nothing solved and nothing proven unless it is the tentative proposition that the Book of Mormon is still open to serious discussion. Until we come to realize that the most we can expect from any investigation is not solutions but only more problems, the study

of Book of Mormon antiquities will remain as barren as it has been in the past. Let us explain what we mean by “problems instead of solutions.”

In 1835 Josiah Priest wrote in his *American Antiquities*: “The manner by which the original inhabitants and animals reached here, is easily explained, by adopting the supposition, which, doubtless, is the *most* correct, that the northwestern and western limits of America were, at some former period, united to Asia on the *west*, and to Europe on the *east*.”¹¹⁷ Therewith, for Priest, the question was settled: instead of being a fruitful and exciting *problem*, the theory of settlement by the Alaskan land bridge was the final solution. And as such it has been accepted by North American an-

thropologists to this day, even though their colleagues in Europe and South America may chuckle and shake their heads at such naive and single-minded devotion to a one-shot explanation of everything. We may find it odd that back in 1835, with no evidence to go by but a glance at the map, anyone could have settled for such finality—the *problem* was real and wonderful, the *conclusion* premature and absurd. But has the situation changed? Few people realize that more time and money have been spent trying to confirm this particular theory than any other in the field of anthropology, with dismally meager results. It is still a problem and very much alive, but the solution rests exactly where it did in Josiah Priest’s day: on a common-

sense interpretation of the map.

Or take another example. Late in the eighteenth century a Scottish farmer walking along a beach noticed some ripple marks on a slab of rock high above the present level of the water. Here was a problem indeed, but it did not remain a problem for long. The farmer, so Prof. Hotchkiss tells us, "could look back into the past and imagine a numberless succession of . . . cycles. . . . There must have come to him at that time the vision of the vast sweep of the ages which go to make up the story of the billion years of the earth's history. His

simple but epoch-making discoveries started geological science on the way. . . ."¹¹⁸ Here an important problem was met by a splendid theory, but to treat the mere recognition of the problem and the most imaginative and adventurous speculations to explain it as "discoveries," nay, as a final solution, was premature, to say the least.

"I wonder how many of us realize," writes a present-day geologist, "that the [geological] time scale was frozen in essentially its present form by 1840 . . . ? The followers of the founding fathers went forth across the earth and in

Procrustean fashion made it fit the sections they found even in places where the actual evidence literally proclaimed denial. So flexible and accommodating are the 'facts' of geology."¹¹⁹ The trouble was that the experts mistook a problem for its solution and thereby failed to recognize the real difficulties involved. "In geology," wrote Hotchkiss, "most of the important facts are easily understood. All that needs to be done in order to give a very satisfactory knowledge of things geological is to call them to our attention."¹²⁰ But how does one call Hutton's billion years to our attention? We cannot in any way experience a billion years; the best we can do is to try and imagine, as Hutton did. But what we imagine is the construction of our own minds; it is not a fact at all, but an interpretation, pure and simple.

A third case, the most impressive of all, is Newton's theory of gravitation. "There never was a more successful theory," Karl Popper assures us, noting that even the great Poincaré believed "that it would remain the invariable basis of physics to the end of man's search for truth." But in our own time "Einstein's theory of gravity . . . reduced Newton's theory to . . . a hypothesis competing with others." Instead of the absolute truth, it again became a problem open to discussion. This, according to Popper, "destroyed its authority. And with it, it destroyed something much more important—the authoritarianism of science."¹²¹

All "proofs" and "disproofs" of the Book of Mormon present problems instead of solutions. Thus when carbonized stumps of trees were found in the Middle West, some early Latter-day Saints declared that their presence deep in the earth proved the Book of Mormon. It did nothing of the sort; at most it presented an interesting problem that might or might not have any
(Continued on page 422)



PATIENCE AND PUNISHMENT

RICHARD L. EVANS

We change much in our feelings and reactions at different times. Some hours, some days, the physical or mental mood will make even serious problems seem somehow solvable, while some days, some nights, may make even lesser problems seem more serious. There is much in the mind, much in the spirit, much in the intangible, indefinable mood of the moment. Sometimes irritations irritate more, yet at times we seem to have an easy antidote to irritation. We sometimes keep our tempers and hold our tongues and sometimes let them loose in what would seem to be somewhat the same situation. Something said at one time will pass with good humor which at another time will cause offense. The same comment which at one time will bring laughter will at another time turn to tears. Such are the variabilities. And it isn't only words that make the difference. It is who says them, and how, and when, and what we feel. And in sorrow problems are likely to seem even larger than they are, and people are likely to lose perspective—all of which points up the importance of patience, of understanding, of self-control, of sensitivity to the feelings of others, sensitivity to situations. One facet of this subject suggests that we shouldn't punish others for what really is within us. When a child does some harmless but irritating act, if we ourselves are tired and tense, we may give way to hard or cutting words or retaliation far beyond what would be called for. The time, the mood, may dictate what is done, quite apart from any rightness or wrongness of what it was that triggered our temperament or temper. And so children sometimes suffer for our impatience, for our complaints. This all suggests restraint, control, temperate consideration in all circumstances, and meeting problems with patience—for all of us have them. And striking at a child in anger, whatever else it is, must be a mark of immaturity. "No man is free," said Epictetus, "who is not master of himself."¹ And no man is mature, he might have added, who punishes others for his own impatience. And as to children: We should blame them less for what we feel; hold them more accountable for their own errors and less accountable for ours.

¹Epictetus (50 A.D. - ?), Stoic philosopher.

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square, presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System March 13, 1966. Copyright 1966.

bearing on the Book of Mormon.

For the past twenty years we have repeated in the pages of *The Improvement Era* and elsewhere that nothing is to be gained by trying to prove or disprove the Book of Mormon, but that a great deal can be gained by reading it and discussing its various aspects. This point of view, which has not been a popular one, is best explained in the writings of the greatest living philosopher of science, Karl Popper. "Bacon's naive point of view,"

Popper tells us, "concerning the essence of natural science . . . is a dogma to which scientists as well as philosophers have tenaciously adhered down to our own day."

It is the view, already expressed by Hotchkiss above, that "all that was needed was to approach the goddess Nature with a pure mind, free of prejudice, and she would readily yield her secrets." Today in the scientific journals—the more popular of which we duly peruse every six months—there is an im-

pressive outpouring of articles showing that the inductive method of Bacon does not really apply in science, that Popper is right when he says that "the idea that we can at will . . . purge our mind from prejudices . . . is naive and mistaken," and indeed downright pernicious, since "after having made an attempt or two, you think you are now free from prejudices—which means, of course, that you will stick only more tenaciously to your unconscious prejudices and dogmas."¹²²

The old authoritarianism of science is now being supplanted by a new approach, which Popper sums up in three words: "Problems—theories—criticism." Things start moving with a problem, some difficulty, something that has to be explained. To account for the thing, a theory is proposed; it does not have to be a foolproof theory, since it exists only to be attacked, for "there is only one way to learn to understand a serious problem . . . and this is to try to solve it, and to fail." As soon as one comes up with a theory, then, one must try to devise some test to refute it, "for to test a theory, or a piece of machinery, means to try to fail it."¹²³ By that standard, the land-bridge theory and Hutton's vast sweep of time have never been in danger of any real testing: they have been accepted from the beginning as final solutions. The one way to progress in knowledge of things is "to use in science imagination and bold ideas, though always tempered by severe criticism and severe tests." How can we be as-



IN TOUCH WITH YOUTH

RICHARD L. EVANS

" . . . a clue to much of the heartbreak of our age," said Dr. Franz E. Winkler, is "the parent who complains he cannot 'reach' his children; the teacher who cannot hold the attention of his pupils or inspire in them a wholesome enthusiasm for their future tasks in life. . . . The teacher who cannot hold the attention of his pupils, the parent who fails to understand his children, has never learned to reach out to his charges with his whole and undivided mind, in short, to be 'all there.'"¹ To this Mark Van Doren added: "There is one thing we can do, and the happiest people are those who do it to the limit of their ability. We can be completely present."² In a writing on the rift between generations, a professor had some searching things to say: "There has hardly been a time . . . when students needed more attention and patient listening to . . . than today. The pity is," he continued, "that so many of us retreat into" other activities (and he named some of them specifically). ". . . In so doing we deepen the rift between the generations. . . ."³ Unfortunate as this may be, yet more unfortunate would be a rift between young people and their parents, young people and their families. A parent has two jobs—two at least among many, many more. One is to provide physical needs and facilities for a family; but beyond this, to keep close, in oneness, in love, in spirit, to be present and available for counsel and confidence, and to provide an example of honor for the family. The one sure base on which life is founded is the home, the family. There is not and never can be any adequate substitute for solid, happy homes, for confidence, consideration, for love and understanding relationships between parents and children. They owe so much to each other. Schools and social institutions and all manner of other relationships may make their contribution. But we need to narrow the gap between us and our children. In the words of Jane Addams: "The mature of each generation run a grave risk of putting their efforts in a futile direction . . . unless they can keep in touch with the youth of their own day and know at least the trend in which [their] eager dreams are driving them."⁴ There is nothing more important for which to live our lives than the teaching of our children and helping them to set a safe course in conduct, with sure standards on which to fix their feet.

¹Franz E. Winkler, M.D., "Beware of Background Music," *This Week Magazine*, September 17, 1961.

²Mark Van Doren, "On Being All There," *This Week Magazine*, December 7, 1952.

³Professor J. Glen Gray, "Rift Between Generations."

⁴Jane Addams, "The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets."

"The Spoken Word" from Temple Square, presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System February 27, 1966. Copyright 1966.

NOTE WITH A LITTLE RUG
BY ELAINE V. EMANS

*Not only within the perimeter
Of this rug may your tread
Be cushioned as you come and go;
But every step ahead
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sured of the necessary controls? By taking sides: therein resides the objectivity of science, and not in the minds of individual researchers. "It would be a mistake," writes Popper, "to think that scientists are more 'objective' than other people"; in fact "there is even something like a methodological justification for individual scientists to be dogmatic and biased [!], since . . . it is of great importance that the theories criticized should be tenaciously defended."¹²⁴

No matter how severe and un-sparing the criticism, no bones are broken, since one's object in proposing a theory is not to settle the issue once and for all but only to lead to more knowledge. "Observation and experiment cannot establish anything finally. . . . Essentially, they help us to eliminate the weaker theories," and thus "lend support, though only for the time being, to the surviving theory." Hence, "the method of critical discussion does not establish anything. Its verdict is always and invariably 'not proven.'"¹²⁵

(To be Continued)

FOOTNOTES

¹²¹A. R. C. Leaney, *Guide to the Scrolls*, pp. 85, 95.

¹²²J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery*, p. 97.

¹²³R. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts*, pp. 136f.

¹²⁴K. G. Kuhn, in *Zeitschrift für Kirche und Theologie*, 47 (1950), p. 210.

¹²⁵Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹²⁶C. F. Potter, *The Lost Years of Jesus* (Hyde Park: University Books, 1963), p. 148.

¹²⁷Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities* (Albany, N.Y., 1835), pp. 61-62.

¹²⁸In S. Rapport & H. Wright (eds.), *The Crust of the Earth* (New York: Signet Books, 1955), p. 17.

¹²⁹E. M. Spieker, in *Bulletin of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists*, 40 (Aug. 1956), p. 1803; cit. N. D. Newell, in *Proceedings of American Philosophical Society*, 103 (1959), p. 265.

¹³⁰Hotchkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹³¹K. R. Popper, "Science: Problems, Aims, Responsibilities," in *Federation Proceedings of the American Societies for Experimental Biology*, 22 (1963), p. 964.

¹³²*Ibid.*, pp. 961f.

¹³³*Ibid.*, pp. 968, 964.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 965. He quotes Darwin: "How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view. . . ." p. 967.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 970.