



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon and Modern Research

Author(s): J. M. Sjodahl

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (December 1921)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 152–158

Abstract: This defense of the Book of Mormon concludes that archaeological and anthropological data about the pre-Columbian Americas do not contradict the Book of Mormon and often coincide with it.

The Book of Mormon and Modern Research

By J. M. Sjodahl

The question of when and how America was first settled is one of supreme interest to students of ethnology generally, and especially to the Latter-day Saints who have a testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon. But scientists, notwithstanding their untiring labors and marvelous discoveries, have so far been unable to suggest an acceptable answer to it.

Some eminent authorities hold that the American continents were peopled way back in geological ages.

There was a time when enormous glaciers covered a large area of what we call the temperate zones. This is known as the Glacial Period or the Ice Age. The ice sheet in the northern hemisphere then came down as far as the site of the present city of Boston on the Atlantic coast and stretched across the continent in an irregular line. Ice masses covered the Pacific slope as far south as the mouth of the Columbia river. It is supposed that this ice sheet receded during periods of mild climatic conditions, and then extended during long seasons of cold, whereupon it again receded and has continued to do so up to the present time. The first melting is called the Interglacial epoch, and the last is the Post-glacial era. During the glacial and early post-glacial periods it is supposed that the northern part of the American continent and the bottom of the Northern Atlantic were much higher than they are now, and that the earth's crust in those regions has sunk considerably. "The St. Lawrence river," we are told, "was then an arm of the sea, Lake Champlain was a deep bay, and the mouth of the Delaware river was where the city of Trenton now stands, the river itself being a wide inlet."

Dr. Daniel Brinton* takes the view that man existed in this country during those climatic and geological changes. "We know," the doctor says, "he was there, from the evidence he has left behind him in the various strata and deposits attributable to the different agencies I have described."

Some of this evidence may be briefly referred to. Quartz "chips" have been found in the "modified drift" deposited dur-

**The American Race*, Philadelphia, 1901.

ing the main Inter-glacial period, near Little Falls, Minn. Rudely chipped arrow heads have been unearthed in loess beds referred to the second glacial period, in the Missouri Valley. They were found beneath the vertebrae of an elephant. A primitive hearth has also been discovered along the old beach of Lake Ontario, which, according to an eminent geologist, dated from a period "when the channel of the Niagara river had not yet begun to be furrowed out of the rock by the receding waters." Implements chipped from hard stones, dating from the close of the last glacial epoch, have been found in deposits of loess and gravels in Ohio and Indiana. In the valley of Mexico, too, it is stated, relics of man have been dug out of the quaternary rock, and in the Argentine Republic Ameghino and Burmeister found bone and stone implements of rude form and the remains of hearths associated with bones of the extinct horse, the glyptodon, and other animals now unknown. "Such facts," Dr. Brinton asserts, after having stated them somewhat more extensively than is done here, "place it beyond a doubt that man lived in both North and South America at the close of the Glacial Age."*

But all authorities are not as confident of the correctness of the conclusions arrived at by Dr. Brinton as he is himself. Dr. W. H. Holmes, after a masterly presentation of the evidence, sums the case up in these words:

"Considering the evidence in all its phases, it can not be allowed that the Tertiary, or even the Pleistocene, occupancy of the American Continent by the race is demonstrated, and the writer prefers to favor the view, already fully expressed, that the continent was probably not reached and occupied until after the final retreat of the glacial ice from middle North America. At the same time it must be granted that there is no apparent reason why, if already occupying northern Asia, man should not have reached American shores by way of Bering Strait during any of the periods of mild climate which preceded and interrupted the Ice Age."†

Dr. Holmes adds that we may wisely await the results of further research and provide for the application to them of the severest scientific tests.

There is where the scientists stand at present in the question of when man first appeared in America. They have not yet been able to agree on a verdict, although the general trend of opinion is in favor of the assumption of a very high antiquity.

The Book of Mormon gives more definite information. It tells the wonderful story of the landing of the Jaredites somewhere on the coast of America shortly after the dispersion at

**The American Race*, p. 28.

†*Handbook of Aboriginal American Antiquities*, Vol. 1, p. 94.

Babel, and of the founding of the kingdom of Moron* (Ether 7:5), also called *The Land of First Inheritance* (Ether 7:16). It records the rebellion of Corihor and his flight to another country called "The Land of Nehor;" also the division of Moron into two parts, "The Kingdom of Shule" and "The Kingdom of Cohor." (Ether 7:20.) Then it mentions the rebellion of Jared against his father Omer (Ether 8:2) and the flight of the latter far away to a place called Ablom, by the seashore (Ether 9:3). It goes on to tell about the strife and wars of the Jaredites, of their dispersion to various parts of the continent, the warnings given by prophets, visitations that came upon the people, and their final extinction, which was so complete that only ruins and dry bones marked the locations of their once populous settlements (Omni 22; Mos. 8:8; 21:26, 27.)

These Jaredites, from the account given of them in the Book of Mormon, came from the place where the Tower of Babel was erected. From that center, the human family branched out. Some reached eastern Asia. Others crossed the water and landed in what is now generally called the western world. Some went to Europe and came as far as the Baltic coasts and the British isles, while others took possession of other parts of the world.

The Jaredites, whose history is recorded in the Book of Mormon, were hunters and fishers. Their principal food may have been taken from the sea, or the rivers and lakes, since on their journey from their homeland they carried with them "the fish of the waters," in a receptacle made especially for that purpose. They were also agriculturists, for they had "seeds of every kind." They had "flocks" of such animals as had been domesticated in that early day of human history, and they had bees, having learned, evidently, the value of honey as an article of food (Ether 2:1-3).

Now it should be observed that the Book of Mormon has nothing to say about the occupation of America by man before the arrival of the Jaredites. If scientists find, beyond controversy, that there were human beings here before the building of the tower; in fact, before the flood and way back in glacial ages, the authors of that volume offer no objection at all. They do not touch that question. They only assert that the Lord led the brother of Jared and his colony to this country shortly after the dispersion, and they give the briefest possible outline of the political and ecclesiastical history of their descendants until their final overthrow. This has never been, and cannot be, disputed on scientific grounds. If America was oc-

*If, as I surmise, this word is akin to the word *Maran*, which Paul uses in I Cor. 16:22, it means "The Land of the Lord."

cupied by any race of people—pre-Jaredites, we may call them—information concerning them must be gathered, not from the Book of Mormon, but from geological strata, or from archeological remains extant. No *truth* that scientists may discover by these or any other means is contrary to anything set forth in the Book of Mormon. Mr. John Fiske very well observes that it is not unlikely that the glacial men perished from off the face of the earth, having been crushed and supplanted by stronger races. That is exactly what the Book of Mormon, it seems to me, leads us to believe may have occurred. Mr. Fiske adds:

“There may have been successive waves of migration, of which the Indians were the latest.”*

The question of the origin of the present Indians covers too much ground for a thorough discussion in this article.

Many theories have been advanced. The consensus of opinion at present is that the Indian really is an immigrant. Dr. Brinton admits that “Paul was not so wide of the mark” when he said that God had made of one blood all nations of men (Acts 17:25).† But from what nation did the Indians spring?

The first to suggest that they are of Semitic origin was, according to Schoolcraft, the Hollander Hugo Grotius, who died in 1645, and Schoolcraft himself acknowledges his acceptance of it.‡ Adair, in his *History of the North American Indians*, and Lord Kingsborough in his magnificent work on *Mexican Antiquities* give the most convincing proofs. Then there is the story of a Welsh settlement, reported to have been founded by Prince Madoc, in 1170, and of many other immigrants, some from Kamchatka and China.

Even Mr. Fiske acknowledges that these traditions have never been disproved, but they have, nevertheless, as he puts it, “all been superseded and laid on the shelf.§ This is, clearly, no argument. Facts cannot be “laid on the shelf” whenever such procedure seems to be convenient for the sake of making room for a pet theory.

According to the Book of Mormon, Lehi, and his company

**Discovery of America*, Vol. 1, p. 15.

†*Myths of the New World*, p. 14.

‡“The idea that our Indians were the descendants of the Jews, I always considered merely as a poetic one, and fit only for works of fiction. But in spite of my prejudices to the contrary, parts have developed themselves, and shown a resemblance between the Hebrew and Indian languages in general which I cannot find between the Indian and any other language. I have no inferences, but let the facts speak for themselves.” (Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes of the United States*, Vol. 5, p. 387.)

§*Discovery of America*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

came to this side of the world from Palestine, about 600 B. C. They and their descendants founded kingdoms, made war, dispersed, built cities and sanctuaries, and, finally, after a thousand years of varied experiences, ceased to exist as nations. According to the same sacred record, another Hebrew colony was founded in this hemisphere, about 600 B. C., known as the Mulekites (Helaman 6:10).

Are there in this country any Indians that are not descendants of these first Hebrew settlers? That is a question for the scientists to answer*

The Book of Mormon gives no direct information on that subject. It confines itself strictly to the history of the descendants of Lehi and Mulek. If science, after a careful investigation of the physical characteristics of the present-day Indians; their languages, their religious ideas, their myths and traditions, and their social institutions, should declare that there are evidences of other influences as well as Semitic, that would not affect the authenticity of the Book of Mormon in the least, for the proofs of the truth of its historical records, fragmentary though they may be, are decisive to every unprejudiced mind, and they are accumulating rapidly.

The authorities on American archaeology at present recognize that in Chile and Peru, in Central America and Mexico,

*Jousset affirms that primeval American civilization was imported from Asia. P. de Roo says not a few writers defend the opinion that the Egyptians who sailed around Africa and far into the Atlantic left vestiges of their presence in America of their architecture and language. The Phoenicians are also mentioned as having landed in America, and Horne expresses the opinion that the Indian races of Yucatan, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and Patagonia are of Phoenician descent.

W. H. Holmes, chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology, in a paper on "The Peopling of America," read before the first Pan-American Scientific Congress held at Santiago, Chile, Oct. 29, 1908, discussed thoroughly the problem of the origin of the American aborigines. Some of his conclusions, as stated in the 30th Annual Report of the Bureau, published 1915, pp. 13 and 14, are as follows:

"(7) That the pioneers of the present American race belonged to the well-differentiated Asiatic subrace and that they reached America by way of Bering Strait.

"(8) That the early migrations included few individuals and occurred at widely separated periods; that the movements were slow and by means of the ice bridge in winter or by skin boats in summer.

"(10) That successive migrations involved numerous distinct groups or tribes so that the American race is a composite of diversified Asiatic elements more or less completely amalgamated.

"(14) That in the present period prior to the Columbian discovery occasional voyagers from southern Asiatic culture centers or from Japan or China may have reached American shores and left an impress on the culture of middle America.

"(16) That much of the recorded geological evidence of great human antiquity in America is unreliable and requires critical revision."

and in North America two cultural epochs at least, one older and one more recent, have left evidences of their existence.

In Peru a list of Incas goes back to Manco Capac, who flourished about 1250 of our era. But this dynasty was preceded by the Pirua kings who began their rule in the fifth century B. C.* And between the two there was an interval of 400 years of chaos and anarchy. In Yucatan the last great epoch of the Mayas began with the founding of the famous cities of Bakhalal, Chichen Itza, and Chakanputun and developed the subsequent federation, in the 11th century of our era, of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and Mayapan. But this was preceded by one much older, which has been called "the golden age of the Maya." All the great cities, Palenque and Yaxchilan in what is now southern Mexico; Piedras Negras, Seibal, Tikal, Naranjó, and Quirigua in the present Guatemala; and Copan in Honduras, rose to greatness and sank into insignificance before the second and much more recent period began. It has been supposed that the Mayas south of Yucatan were driven from their homes and dispersed by a stronger race. How far back the "golden" age of the Mayas dates is not known from any secular sources. The oldest dated artifact found from that period is a statuette of jade discovered at Tuxtla, Vera Cruz, and that bears a date that has been interpreted to correspond to our 100 B. C.† In Mexico the Toltec federation was broken up by the Aztecs, supposedly in the middle of the 10th century of our era. According to one tradition the Toltecs came into Mexico from the north, after a terrible conflict that lasted 13 years, and that they founded the city of Tollan. According to Dr. Wilson the Toltec wanderers came to a country called Huehue Tlapallan in the year 387 A. D., and Foster identifies them with the mound builders in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. The Aztecs, it is supposed, came into Mexico about 300 years before the Spaniards. They founded the city of Tenochtitlan in the year 1326 of our era.

There is no conflict, in these dates and traditions, with the history of the Book of Mormon. The inspired record ends with the sanguinary battle between Lamanites and Nephites at Cumorah, about 400 A. D. The history of the country after that time must be gathered from other sources. As far as the facts are known recent archeological research accords wonderfully with the historical part of the Book of Mormon. There is a gap of about one thousand years between the point where the Book of Mormon history ends and the Spanish conquest; but the more we learn of the institutions and conditions of the Indians as the conquerors found them, the more clearly it ap-

*John Fiske, *Discovery of America*, Vol. 2, p. 303.

†Morley, *Introduction to the Study of Maya Hieroglyphics*, p. 195.

pears that those institutions and cultures were exactly what we might expect them to be after ten centuries of political and religious chaos of a people such as that depicted in the Book of Mormon. If we reject that record, there is no rational way of accounting for the Indians in the 15th and 16th centuries. To say that they and their civilization were "autochthonous"* is but to repeat in mystifying language the famous theory of Topsy concerning her own origin. But full justice to this subject is not to be expected in a necessarily brief paper, even if it were written by an abler pen than I can ever hope to have at my command.

The Pasture Ghost

Late one eve within the pasture,
 In the half-moon's fainter glow,
 To the milking place I ventured
 Boy-like, half afraid to go.
 I had dilly-dallied, hunting,
 Past the usual milking time,
 Till from way off in the clearing
 Came the cowbell's tinkling chime.

Through the stumps and brush there flickered
 Many a startled bird and bat,
 Then appeared there right before me,
 Sure, a ghost in shroud and hat!
 And an arm at me a pointing,
 Plain as anything could be,
 In the half-moon's light a swaying
 Plainly as my eyes could see.

Startled by the apparition,
 Every hair upon my head
 Bristled in affright, as o'er me
 Shivers ran of fear and dread.
 Then I whistled up my courage,
 Grabbed a limb, and with a blow
 Whacked that ghost, to find it nothing
 But a big white stub aglow.

Oft since then by things I'm startled,
 Oft the creepy chills of fear
 Worry till my judgment falters
 Viewing things as they appear.
 But that ghost in our old pasture
 Shows me what I fear the most,
 When assailed with proper courage,
 Vanishes as did the ghost.

Albuquerque, N. M.

Joseph Longking Townsend

*Supposed to have risen or sprung from the ground they inhabited.