



Type: Magazine Article

A Study of Book of Mormon Texts II

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 26, No. 11 (September 1923)

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

Page(s): 1045–1046

Abstract: In this series, internal evidences of the Book of Mormon's authenticity are argued using analysis of words and names used in the book that reflect ancient Hebrew customs, and parallels between the Book of Mormon and American Indian languages. The second part covers Columbus and "the east wind."

A Study of Book of Mormon Texts

By J. M. Sjodahl

Notes on Significant Words and Phrases. (Con.)

Columbus Inspired. Nephi, the prophet, teaches us that Columbus was inspired to undertake his epoch-making voyage of discovery. He says:

“And I looked and beheld a man among the gentiles who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.” (I Nephi 13:12.)

Columbus himself held this view of his mission on earth. His great aim in life was to obtain enough means with which to equip an army and undertake a crusade to the Holy Land, for the purpose of driving the Mohammedans away from the places made sacred by historical association with the life and death of Christ. Before his fourth and last voyage, which he commenced on May 11, 1502, he wrote a letter to Pope Alexander VI, renewing a promise previously made that he would furnish troops for the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre, and the conviction grew upon him, as he devoted a considerable portion of his time to the study of prophecies of the Scriptures, that he was, as Fiske puts it (*The Discovery of America* Vol. 1, pp. 415, 505), “a chosen instrument in the hands of Providence for enlarging the bounds of Christendom . . . and a habit grew upon him of attributing his discoveries to miraculous inspiration rather than the good use to which his poetical and scientific mind had put the data furnished by Marco Polo and the ancient geographers.”

Columbus, evidently, was conscious of the fact that he acted under the influence of a higher power, as represented in the prophetic vision of Nephi, and so he becomes, indirectly, one of many witnesses for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

The East Wind. One of the peculiarities of language is this that words continue to be used long after their first meaning has been lost sight of. We speak, for instance, of a “disastrous” event, although we do not believe that the “stars” have anything to do with it. We have simply inherited the word from a time when people regarded some stars as “lucky” and others as “unlucky,” and attributed misfortunes to the influence of the latter class.

“Starboard,” the nautical term, is another familiar illustra-

tion of the fact stated in the preceding paragraph. The term was originally "steerboard." There was a time when the rudder of a ship was attached to it by means of a piece of wood which projected from the right side of the vessel. The viking ship discovered at Sandefjord, Norway, shows this peculiar arrangement of the steering apparatus. This accounts for the name "starboard" by which the right side of a ship is still known, although the reason for it has long since ceased to exist, as far as the construction of the ship goes.

We still call written or printed records "books" (from "beech"), as did our ancestors who carved their runes on "staves" made of the wood of the beech tree. We use "pens" to write with, though they are no longer made of feathers, or rather quills (pennae). We still speak of "lunacy," although we know that the mental condition designated by that word has nothing to do with the moon (*luna*). Such illustrations could be multiplied indefinitely.

In the Book of Mormon there is an instance of this peculiar use of a word, of more than passing interest. According to Mosiah 7:31, King Limhi told his oppressed people that they were smitten and afflicted, because they had sinned and the Lord had made good his threat: "If my people shall sow filthiness, they shall reap the *east wind*, which bringeth destruction." The people of Limhi were in bondage to the Lamanites (Mos. 7:15). Many of them had been slain (V. 24), and all had suffered affliction (V. 28). And this condition the king refers to, speaking figuratively, as the result of a destructive "east wind." Whence this figure of speech?

In Palestine, the country from which the ancestors of Limhi came, the east wind was very destructive. In the summer time it was dry and scorching, and in the winter it was cold. Sweeping out upon the Mediterranean it generally became dangerous to the ships in its path. "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (Psalm 48:7). It was such a wind, known in the days of Paul as a *euroclydon*, which made a total wreck of the ship in which the apostle was being conveyed to Rome (Acts 27). According to Gen. 41:6, 23, 27, the seven years famine in Egypt was caused by a scorching east wind.

The people of Palestine were familiar with the, to them, disastrous effects often produced by the east wind, and their descendants carried that knowledge with them to this part of the world. Here the term was used as Limhi uses it, and also Abinadi (Mos. 12:6), even when the geographical reason for it no longer existed. But it proves that those who so used it on this side of the "many waters" were familiar with Semitic ideas and expressions.

(To be continued)