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The Book of Mormon in the Light of Recent Jewish Archaeological Research

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Abstract: Based on the findings of a Jewish archaeologist, Isadore Lhevinne, who affirms that Jews discovered America, this article claims that evidence shows that Jews reached Mexican shores on more than one occasion hundreds of years before Columbus.

The Book of Mormon in the Light of Recent Jewish Archaeological Research

By J. R. SMITH

Author of "The Message of
the New Testament"

DID the Jews Discover America?" is the title of a recent article which appeared in the November issue of the *Jewish National Magazine*. The article was written by Dr. Isadore Lhevinne, a Jewish archæologist, who is doing research work in Mexico. He answers the question affirmatively.

Such a claim may come as a surprise to many. Of course it has been thought very probable that seafaring Norsemen came to the shores of America during the very early centuries, yet we have generally felt that the honor of discovering this continent should go to Columbus. Now a new claimant enters the field. It is no other than the Jew.

Ever since 1830 when Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon, the Latter-day Saints have championed the idea that the Americas were settled long before the beginning of the Christian era by Israelites. Some six hundred years before Christ, according to the Book of Mormon, Lehi, a prophet who dwelt in Jerusalem, was warned to take his family and flee, for destruction awaited that city.

"For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah (see II Kings 24:7-20), King of Judah, (my father Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem all his days;) and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they



must repent, or the great city of Jerusalem must be destroyed." (I Nephi 1:4)

"Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard." (I Nephi 1:18.)

"And when the Jews heard these things, they were angry with him: yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away." (I Nephi 1:20.)

"And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness." (I Nephi 2:2.)

"And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. * * *" (I Nephi 2:4.)

IT was necessary that other people should go with Lehi and his family in order that his sons should find wives and his daughters husbands.

"And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household (consisting of at least five daughters and two sons) insomuch that they took their journey with us down into

the wilderness to the tents of our father." (I Nephi 7:5.)

"And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father that we should arise and go down into the ship."

"And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruit and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship, with all our loading and our seeds, and whatsoever

thing we had brought with us, every one according to his age, wherefore, we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children.

"And it came to pass after we had gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea, and were driven forth before the wind towards the promised land." (I Nephi 18:5-8.)

"And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days, we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land." (I Nephi 18:23.)

IN his "New Witness for God," B. H. Roberts remarks, "From the Book of Mormon and from the words of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith it is learned that Lehi's colony traveled from Jerusalem, nearly a southeast direction, until they came to the nineteenth degree north latitude; thence nearly east to the sea of Arabia. Here the colony built a ship in which to cross the great waters, which separated them from the land of promise. They sailed in a southeasterly direction, and

landed on the continent of South America, in about the thirtieth degree south latitude." (pp. 157-158.)

Again in discussing Mulek's colony Elder Roberts says, "But among the king's (Zedekiah's) friends who escaped were a number who carried with them one of Zedekiah's sons, named Mulek; and according to the Book of Mormon this company 'journeyed in the wilderness and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters' into the western hemisphere. It is learned by an incidental remark in the Book of Mormon that the colony of Mulek landed somewhere in the north continent of the western hemisphere. * * * But it is quite evident that they landed in the north continent of the western world, most likely in the southern part of that continent, say in the region of what is known in modern times as Central America." ("New Witness for God," p. 164.)

In recording the history of the people of Lehi who probably landed somewhere on the west coast of Chili, Nephi says, "Yea, I make record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians." (1 Nephi 1:2.)

It is clear, therefore, that the Book of Mormon demands an Israelitish origin for the second race which inhabited America, the ancient progenitors of the American Indian. The material which now comes to us through the article of Dr. Isadore Lhevinne, "Did the Jews Discover America," is most interesting and highly corroborative of the claims made by the Book of Mormon, a sacred record of this people and translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith from the gold plates which were delivered to him by the Angel Moroni, the last of the Nephite race.

NOW let us briefly consider Dr. Isadore Lhevinne's interesting article. In his discussion he calls attention to the fact that Israel for many centuries before the coming of Christ had been a persecuted people. Also very early in their history his people became both a commercial and a seafaring race. Under the influences of these three factors the Jews were scattered and

forced to emigrate throughout the world.

"In 875 A. D. Soliman of Andalusia found strong Jewish communities in all the large cities of China." The great Marco Polo mentioned the fact that Jews were numerous and commercially powerful in his time, and that some lived in Cambuluc (Peking) in 1286. Professor Godbey says, "The immemorial trade routes have much to do with the presence of Judaism in Turkestan, China, Mongolia, and India." There is no longer any question of the wide distribution of Jews in Europe, Africa, and Asia in very early times. But how about the settlement of America by the Jews? We have seen that the Book of Mormon claims that Jews under the leadership of Lehi came to America about six hundred years before Christ. Now Dr. Isadore Lhevinne brings some interesting facts from the field of archæology to support the claim of the Latter-day Saints.

"The Jewish archæologists," says Dr. Lhevinne, "are now turning to Mexico where for the past three years important excavations yielded sufficient material to rest the theory of pre-Columbus Jewish settlers in the New World with more than plausibility." He further calls attention to the fact that thirty years ago the priest Planarte and Dr. Nicolas Leon advanced the view, "that the Jews on more than one occasion had reached Mexican shores along the Pacific, hundreds of years before Columbus."

IN the days of Montezuma and Cortez the palace and the temple at Mitla, in the State of Oaxaca, were already in a state of ruin.

These afford mute evidences of a civilization preceding the Indians. In commenting on these ruins Dr. Lhevinne says, "I must say, however, that I have examined the ruins at Mitla. The ornaments and frescoes especially were of a distinct Egyptian character."

This is an interesting comment in the light of what Nephi said in 1 Nephi 1:2, where he declared that he recorded their history in the language of his father which consisted "in the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians." A similar statement is found in the Book of Mosiah, chapter 1:4. Mosiah lived in the days when his people had migrated northward into the land of Zarahemla, a district which we think was located in the northern part of South America.

"For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates: for he having been taught the language of the Egyptians, therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their own children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God even down to this present time." (Mos. 1:4.)

It thus appears that their language and their writings from generation to generation were founded basically upon the Egyptian language. We should expect, therefore, that their records carved in the great stones of their temples would be Egyptian in character. Thus Dr. Lhevinne's statement that the records carved on the ruins of Mitla were "of a distinct Egyptian character" is highly corroborative evidence of the truthfulness of the records found in the Book of Mormon.

THE most important recent discovery bearing upon the idea that America was settled by the Jews in very early times, has come from Guerrero bordering the Pacific Ocean. "In 1927," quoting Dr. Lhevinne, "in the pueblo of Ometpec, not far from the coast, one of the natives while tilling the ground hit upon a veritable archeological trove, among the objects being the famous 'vaso-udio,' arms, and ritual objects of a nature totally alien to those used by the aborigines. The vase baptized 'vaso-judio' (Jew-Vase) is

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of a cylindrical form, of a thick half-baked clay with a well sculptured head of a most perfect Jewish-Hittite type. It is now preserved in the Museo Nacional in Mexico City." It is interesting to note that there was a rather close connection between the Israelites and the Hittites even as far back as the time of Abraham. We read in Gen. 23, that Abraham purchased from the Hittites the field of Ephron for a burial ground for his family. Here he buried his wife Sarah. Later he was buried there. Still later Joseph who was sold into Egypt took his father Jacob and buried him in the same field. To promote this idea still further we quote from the Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, p. 426:

"The relations between the Israelites on the one hand, and the Hittites and the rest of the conquered peoples on the other, had long been friendly, for the Hebrews had not only adopted some portions of the Hittites' religious cult soon after the invasion of Palestine, but had intermarried with them."

THE Old Testament gives many instances where the Israelites inter-married with the Hittites. "And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites and Hivites. And they took their daughters to be their wives and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods." (Judges 3:5, 6.) Again, "Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beer, the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite." (Gen. 26:34.) Furthermore we read in II Samuel, Chapter twelve that David married the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, and also Bath-sheba her daughter. The latter became the mother of Solomon. (II Sam. 12:24.) The above references give proof that through inter-marriage there was developed in Palestine an Israelitish-Hittite type of people. It is now Dr. Lhevinne's claim that the relics and other archaeological evidences recently discovered in Mexico furnish reason for believing that this same type

existed in America long before the days of Columbus. He does not stand alone in this belief. Years ago Clarke made the claim that the Hittites were akin to the Peruvian Kechua, and Campbell found Hittite names in France, Japan, and in ancient Mexico. (See Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, p. 428).

Quoting Dr. Lhevinne further, "Aside from archaeological evidence the Jewish type is extremely common on the entire Pacific coast of Mexico, a fact already noticed by the priest Plancarte and Dr. Leon, who upon examining a collection of vases of the Tarasco tribe, (these live in the State of Michoacan, near Oaxaca) in 1893, found a tablet with Hebrew inscription."

NOW a word concerning the whereabouts of the landing of the early American Jewish settlers. Toward the beginning of this paper, we cited the Book of Mormon and also the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith to the effect that the colony of Lehi landed on the west coast of South America; and that the colony of Mulek most likely landed in Central America. "According to Mena, (a prominent Mexican archaeologist) the Jews arrived in Mexico via the Pacific." Mena thought that the migration was caused by cruel persecution of the Egyptians. It is interesting to recall that Lehi's party came over the Pacific. They left Jerusalem because of the pending bitter persecution, not, however, by the Egyptians but by the Assyrians. It is the further belief of Dr. Lhevinne that seafaring Jews might have drifted over the Atlantic to Brazil, Guianas, or Panama. "Be that as it may," says he, "the fact remains that in French Guiana the native tongue 'gabibi' is rich and developed and abounds in Hebrew stems." This statement agrees remarkably with the claim long maintained by the "Mormons" that one of the Jewish colonies, Mulek's, came over the Atlantic and in all likelihood landed somewhere on the east coast of Central America.

An Invitation

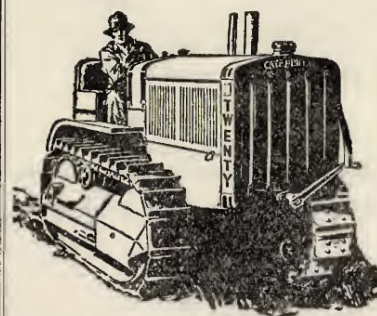
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We realize that the above facts and discoveries do not afford external evidence sufficient to prove the claims made by the Book of Mormon. But to the Latter-day Saint these evidences are very interesting and at least highly corroborative of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon records. We shall await with continued interest for further knowledge of the archaeological research of the Jews in Mexico and Central America. Furthermore it is very encouraging to note that of late years the concerted

efforts of many scientists have made possible rapid progress in solving some of the mysteries of these lost civilizations. It is quite probable that the ruins in Mexico and in Central America will soon command even greater attention than have those in Egypt and in the valley of the Euphrates. We shall watch for further Jewish archaeological discoveries to see if they substantiate Dr. Lhevinne's affirmative belief that the Jews discovered America.

A Splendid Tribute

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to the flat plains of the Platte River Valley.

It must have been a heroic scene, and interpreting the picture to some friends one day, I told them that they could read anything into it they might choose or could conceivably imagine in the way of romance, tragedy, and suffering and it would still be true.

Men and Women of Great Faith

ON this long trek of more than a thousand miles from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake basin they made their way through a trackless wilderness inhabited by savages and wild beasts. Unlike the fur traders, who were untrammelled and free to go and come as they pleased, this great migrating band of Christian people carried with them their old and young, the lame and the halt, the sick and incompetent. In fact they carried with them all their worldly possessions and all of their loved ones, prepared to live or die with them as the emergency might arise.

It was the greatest migration of people of which we have any record and was undoubtedly one requiring the greatest sacrifices, the greatest faith, and the greatest courage because of the magnitude of the journey through an untamed land. It was a marvelous event and a great trek, my friends, and the people who were able to encompass that great distance from the Missouri River to the Salt Lake

basin and found there a great empire at that day and time must have been and are a mighty people.

A Tribute

ONE day as I recounted the striking facts of this great migration to some friends of mine, as we gazed upon the picture, one lady asked, "How could they ever do it?" I replied, "Madam, do you see those outriders accompanying the caravan with the guns across the pommels of their saddles scanning the horizon for enemies? Do you see the stern countenances of these men? Do you see the general attitude of faith and determination that marks the aspect of the entire caravan as it moves forward? They were men and women of a great and profound faith, and they verily believed that God was riding at their right hand every foot of the way of that terrible, tragic journey through the wilderness or they never could have accomplished it." (Applause).

So much for this sentimental side of my theme, but one I think well worth while, because I love to pay tribute to the men who have done great things in history, and certainly the "Mormon" people who settled this empire accomplished something that can always be held up to men and women of every creed and every faith as a most heroic and self-sacrificing record—one that contributed tremendously to the settlement and moral uplift of this country.