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Is There a Contradiction between Alma 7:10 and Matthew 2:5-6?

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Abstract: In answer to the title, this article states that there is no contradiction, arguing that Joseph Smith and all of his associates knew perfectly well that Bethlehem was where Jesus was born. The expression used in Alma 7:10 was not that Jesus was born in Jerusalem, but at Jerusalem. This is a Hebrew expression and simply refers to a geographical area—Jerusalem and environs, including Bethlehem.

Your Question

IS THERE A CONTRADICTION BETWEEN ALMA 7:10 AND MATTHEW 2:5-6?

by Joseph Fielding Smith

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

Question:

"Will you kindly explain the contradiction between Alma 7:10 and Matthew 2:5-6?"

Answer:

There is no contradiction!

Alma 7:10, is as follows: "And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God."

Matthew 2:5-6 is, "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

"And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

This question has in recent weeks come from several sources. It is from the promptings of enemies of the Church who spend their time in a futile endeavor to discredit the Book of Mormon, attempting to make it the product of the mind of Joseph Smith the Prophet or some other person in collusion with him. These religious persons who sponsor this question may well be compared to the scribes and Pharisees of old, and the Savior's description of them, as recorded in Matthew, Chapter 23, fits these modern Pharisees and scribes admirably. They attempt to show that the Book of Mormon is of modern authorship, and this attempt has been going on for one hundred and twenty-five years and is farther away from effectiveness than in the beginning. It has utterly failed.

Joseph Smith and those associated with him when the Book of Mormon was translated knew perfectly well that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. If the Book of Mormon had been the production of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, or anyone else connected with this restoration, it would have stated plainly that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, for they were well aware of this fact. There has been an effort to make it appear that the Prophet was a very ignorant man who did not know where Jesus was born. In this they display their bitterness and hate and add to their confusion, for an ignorant man unacquainted with the fact of the birth of Jesus Christ could not have written the Book of Mormon. The fact that it is written in Alma as it is, indicates plainly that it is an expression coming from the Hebrew; for this is purely a Hebrew expression, in full accord with their manner of speech.

Our members, instead of being influenced by these modern Pharisees and scribes, should understand that they fail to see in the Book of Mormon the clear exposition of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; its incomparable clearness of the teaching of virtue; faith in

Jesus Christ; admonitions of righteous living, condemnation of all evil; and the solemn testimonies of the writers that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God. They treat with contempt the sacred testimonies of the witnesses, both those whose writings are within the book and those of this last dispensation. After all these years that the Book of Mormon has been before the public, all these critics can discover are a few manufactured contradictions that really do not exist.

There is no conflict or contradiction in the Book of Mormon with any truth recorded in the Bible. A careful reading of what Alma said will show that he had no intention of declaring that Jesus would be born in Jerusalem. Alma knew better. So did Joseph Smith and those who were associated with him in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. Had Alma said, "born in Jerusalem, the city of our fathers," it would have made all the difference in the world. Then we would have said he made an error. Alma made no mistake, and what he said is true.

If the same tactics used by these modern Pharisees, "blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow camels," were leveled at the Bible—and by some it has been done—far more serious problems would be presented for reconciliation. For one example we present Matthew 8:28-33 and Mark 5:1-16, the question whether it was the healing of one or two possessed with devils, in the land of the Gergesenes [Gadarenes]. Both Matthew and Mark are speaking of the same event. This discrepancy does not cause anyone who believes to discard his Bible.

Well, let us go back to the words of Alma. He did not say that the Lord would be born in Jerusalem. The preposition "at" has several meanings. The *Standard Dictionary* lists the following: "Of a point in space; on; upon; close to; by; near; within. * * * When we think merely of the local or geographical point, we use at; when we think of inclusive space, we employ in."

Alma was thinking of a geographical point, therefore he spoke properly according to the usage of language even in our own day when he said, "at Jerusalem, the land of our forefathers," Jerusalem being the central point of the land of their fathers. In the Book of Acts (20:15) it is written: "And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus." It seems perfectly clear in this passage that when they arrived at Trogyllium they were not in the city, but remained in the boat. Since the men on the boat, including Paul, were prisoners, it would have been folly to have taken them off the boat and in the city.