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Why Did Joseph Smith, the Prophet, Need the Help of the Urim and Thummim?

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Abstract: This article describes how the Urim and Thummim were used in connection with priestly functions of the Old Testament and later were important in the translation process of the Book of Mormon. Historically they served to facilitate communication with the Lord.

EVIDENCES AND RECONCILIATIONS

xx. *Why did Joseph Smith, the Prophet, need the help of the Urim and Thummim?*

THE Urim and Thummim are mentioned in the Bible in connection with priestly functions. They were to be used in making the will of the Lord clear and comprehensible to the priest. Aaron was instructed to wear the Urim and Thummim "upon his heart," when he went to secure "judgment" from the Lord, and his successors were instructed to use the Urim and Thummim when they asked "counsel" from the Lord. Even with their use, Saul was unable to secure answer. Clearly, the Urim and Thummim were used in official communication with the Lord. Beyond that, little is known of them. (See Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; I Samuel 28:6; and Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.)

In modern times the Urim and Thummim reappear. The Prophet Joseph Smith records that the angel Moroni said that "there was a book deposited, written on gold plates . . . also, that there were two stones in silver bows . . . and these stones fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim . . . deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted 'Seers' in ancient or former times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 12.)

When the actual work of translation began, the Urim and Thummim were found to be indispensable. In various places the statement is made that the translation was made "by means of the Urim and Thummim." (*Doctrine and Covenants* 10:1.) On one occasion, when the Prophet, through the defection of Martin Harris, lost a portion of the manuscript translation, the Urim and Thummim were taken from him, and the power of translation ceased. Upon the return of the sacred instruments, the work was resumed. (*History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 23.) While the Prophet was undoubtedly required to place himself in the proper spiritual and mental attitude, before he could use the Urim and Thummim successfully, yet it must also be concluded that the stones were essential to the work of translation.

Most of the early revelations to Joseph Smith were obtained by the use of the Urim and Thummim. Speaking of those early days the Prophet usually says, "I enquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim, and obtained the following." (*History of the Church*, Vol. I, pp. 33, 36, 45, 49 and 53.) The "stones in silver bows" seemed therefore, to have possessed the general power of making spiritual manifestations understandable to Joseph Smith.

The Prophet did not always receive revelations by the aid of the Urim and Thummim. As he grew in spiritual power, he learned to bring his spirit into such harmony with divinity that it became, as it were, a Urim and Thummim to him, and God's will was revealed without the intervention of external aids. This method is clearly, though briefly, expressed in one of the early revelations.

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given from me. (See *Doctrine and Covenants*, 9:7-9.)

Similarly, the Book of Mormon sets forth the conditions which enable a person to receive divine communications without special outside means.

And when you shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (*Moroni* 10:4, 5.)

That is, truth may become known, when one places himself in harmony or tune with the requirements of the subject in hand.

The possession of the Urim and Thummim, with their purpose and use, really becomes a strong evidence of the truth of Joseph Smith's message. It is a commonplace of science that the senses of man are so poor as to make them inadequate to discover more than a small fraction of universal truth. Indeed, with unaided senses, man stands helpless before the many phenomena of nature. It is an equally elementary fact that aids to the senses of man, when found, open up larger and new vistas of knowledge. Every aid to human sense becomes, in fact, a door to a new field of scientific exploration.

The history of science is largely the story of the accumulation of aids to man's senses. By the use of a glass prism, ordinary sunlight is broken into the many prismatic colors; a sensitive thermometer reveals heat rays above the red end of the spectrum; a photographic plate reveals the existence of different rays at the violet end of the spectrum; uranium glass changes the invisible rays at the violet end of the spectrum into light rays; a magnetic needle makes known the presence of a low tension electric current in a wire; the magnetic currents over the earth are indicated by the compass; by X-rays the bones of the body are made visible; a great telescope is now being built which will enable the human eye to see light, of the intensity of a small candle, 40,000 miles away. Such examples might be greatly multiplied.

Joseph Smith was but a humble, inexperienced lad. He was assigned a tremendous task. His need of help such as the Urim and Thummim, until by mighty prayer and effort his body and spirit became spiritually "tuned," seems both logical and scientific.

(Concluded on page 37)

Homing

THE COOK'S CORNER

By Barbara Badger Burnett

Filled Baked Potatoes

Bake medium-sliced potatoes. Cut slice from top, scoop out potato, mash and season with salt, Clover Leaf Butter, and Clover Leaf Milk. Fill potato shells half full of Deviled Crab. Pile potato mixture on top and brown in a hot oven.

Deviled Crab

- 1 cup Three Diamonds Brand Crabmeat
- 1/4 cup mushrooms, chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons Clover Leaf Butter
- 2 tablespoons Globe A1 Flour
- 1 cup Clover Leaf Milk
- 2 Milk White egg yolks
- salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped parsley

Make a sauce of the butter, flour, and milk. Add the beaten egg yolks, seasoning, crabmeat, and mushrooms. Cook three minutes and add the parsley. Put in potato shells or ramkins, and bake in a hot oven for ten minutes.

Noodle Delight

- 1 package Globe A1 Noodles
- 1 pound round steak ground
- 1/2 pound pork steak ground
- 1 onion chopped
- 1 can corn
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- American cheese

Brown the onion in a frying pan, add meat, and fry until brown. Add corn and tomato sauce and simmer for two minutes. Cook noodles in boiling salted water until tender, drain. Put alternate layers of noodles and meat in a casserole, sprinkle each layer with cheese, saving some for top. Bake in a moderate oven for thirty minutes.

Tomato Jelly Ring

- 2 cups tomato juice
- 1 small bay leaf
- 3 or 4 cloves
- 2 slices onion
- salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 package Royal Lemon Gelatin
- 1 cup finely cut celery
- 1 cup shredded cabbage
- salad dressing

Simmer tomato juice, bay leaf, cloves, and onion for fifteen minutes. Strain, add seasoning and lemon juice. Measure liquid and add enough hot tomato juice to make 1 cup. Pour over gelatin and stir until dissolved. Chill until partially set. Add celery and turn into a 7-inch ring mold. Chill until firm. Turn onto a service plate. Fill the center with shredded cabbage and garnish with lettuce and stuffed olives. Serve with Nalley's Tang Dressing.

Caramello

- 1 package Carmel Kre-Mel
- 1/2 cup cold Clover Leaf Milk
- 1 1/2 cups hot Clover Leaf Milk
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup Clover Leaf Whipping Cream.

Dissolve the Kre-Mel in cold milk, add hot milk, and stir until it comes to a boil. Add brown sugar. When cold, add whipped cream and mix well. Pour into glasses and chill. Serve with whipped cream and chopped nuts.

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 - 1 cup Utah Beet Sugar
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1 cup hot mashed potatoes
 - 1/2 cup potato water
 - 1/2 cup Clover Leaf Milk
 - 4 Milk White Eggs
 - Globe A1 Flour to make a stiff dough
- Dissolve the yeast in lukewarm water.

Combine the butter, sugar, salt, potatoes, potato water, and milk. When cool, add yeast and beaten eggs. Stir in enough flour to make a stiff dough. Knead thoroughly. Cover and place in refrigerator until ready to use. Let dough rise for 1 hour before using. Roll 1/4 inch thick. Brush with melted butter. Sprinkle with sugar, cinnamon and raisins. Roll up and slice in inch thick slices. Let rise until double in bulk and bake in a moderate oven. Frost while warm.

It Happened In Mexico

(Concluded from page 22)

were placed in that tomb after Cortez came?"

"No. Many, many years before."

"Perhaps one thousand years?"

"Possibly."

"For all you know they might have been there two thousand years, or even longer?"

"Yes. No one seems to know nor care. You are the first man that ever doubted the first statement I made. Why do you ask?"

That question will not be answered here. However, a study of the Book of Mormon might make the story of these things read like an open book.

Evidences and Reconciliations

(Concluded from page 33)

It should be noted also that the Prophet does not enter into any argument to prove the necessity of the use of the Urim and Thummim. His simple mention of them argues strongly for his veracity. An impostor would probably have attempted an explanation of the "seer stones."

The Urim and Thummim were aids to Joseph's spiritual senses. How they operated is not known. For that matter, the methods of operation of most of the aids of man's physical senses are not understood. Joseph's claim to the need of such aids becomes an evidence for the truth of his life's labor.

—J. A. W.