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Were the Brass Plates Written in Egyptian? - III

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Abstract: Looking at a variety of cultural and linguistic aspects to support his point of view, the author defends the Latter-day Saint belief that the brass plates were written in Egyptian.

Were the Brass Plates Written in Egyptian?

By T. W. Brookbank.

III.

An additional argument to show that some of the Ancient Israelites, in great probability, did make use of the Egyptian system of writing as well as the Hebraic, remains to be considered, and this shall be done in the briefest manner possible consistent with clearness.

It has been brought to light by investigators that three systems of writing have been practiced by former inhabitants of this land and their descendants who are now called Indians. One of these systems was alphabetical, one hieroglyphical, and one picture writing. With the last named we are not now concerned, and but little need be said respecting the use made by the natives anciently of hieroglyphics proper, since it is so well known that they did employ them largely for writing purposes. It is, however, to be noticed in particular that the districts of this country where the alphabetical and the hieroglyphical systems were used were south of the southern boundary of the United States, as we learn from the *Encyc. Brit. Art., Indians, North American*, which says that, "No real hieroglyphics, much less any system of writings of an alphabetic nature have been discovered north of Mexico." Now, more in particular concerning the use of an alphabetic method of writing by the ancient people of America, or by some of them at least, we find that Diego de Landa, first bishop of Yucatan, wrote a history of the Mayas and their country, and

speaking of this work, Professor Baldwin in his book, *Ancient America*, page 191, says that, "it is one of the most important works on the country, written by a Spaniard, "because it contains a description and explanation of the phonetic alphabet of the Mayas." He further says that by means of Bishop Landa's work Bresseur de Bourbourg has been enabled to decipher some of the ancient American writings, and in acknowledgment of the aid thus rendered him the Bishop says that "the alphabet and signs explained by Landa have been to me a Rosetta stone." The alphabet of the Mayas is further referred to by Professor Baldwin on page 293 of the work already named.

Now, the Book of Mormon claims that the Indians of America are Israelites or Jews, and it further states in Mormon 9:32, 33 that the Nephites who were descendants of one and the same family with the Indians and, consequently, were Israelites also, did make use of two different systems of writing, one Hebraic and one reformed Egyptian, or in other words one alphabetic and the other hieroglyphical, just as we are now reliably informed the Indians of this land in times past, or at least some of the Indians, likewise practiced. So, then, it seems that these two systems of writing are substantially represented by the Book of Mormon, with a little assistance from outside sources, as being practiced among the descendants of one and the same family whether they be

called Nephite or Indian, and a practice of this kind is so far out of the ordinary that one may readily think it is a family heritage, and what seems to confirm this view of the matter is that the Indian representatives of the family, who made use of the two systems, lived right in the regions where the Book of Mormon records show that the Nephites had them both in service for a long period of time. It certainly does look to a layman that the Indians who slaughtered all their Nephite kinsmen, save deserters, and then seized the lands and other property of their victims, also fell heirs to the two Nephite systems of writing. There was no possible way of keeping the victors from acquiring a knowledge of them when Nephite deserters allied themselves with the Indians. It is not necessary to show a close resemblance in form between the Maya alphabetic characters and those of the ancient Hebrew, in order to manifest still further the strong probability that the Maya system of alphabetical writing is simply a continuation of the alphabetical system which was used for a thousand years anciently in this land by their brothers in blood, the Nephites. An alphabet which has seen service for a thousand years at the hands of a highly civilized and progressive people such as the Nephites were, and for about another thousand years has been made use of by semi-civilized peoples, is bound to suffer changes to a greater or less extent. It is sufficient, in the present case, to show that among the descendants of Lehi, whether known as Nephites or as Indians (Lamanites) two different systems of writing—one alphabetical and one hieroglyphical—have been practiced and that too in the same region of country, in order to connect them together in some sort of

a close relationship, which is resolved by the Book of Mormon into that of brothers. And is it not a very simple and logical way of accounting for the remarkable fact that the Indians had two such unlike systems of writing in use, by assuming that they were merely continuing a practice which they must have known their Nephite brother had observed for centuries? Is not this proposition far more logical than it is to suppose that Indians, whose inventive genius, judging from their general progress for centuries in science and art, is now and long has been of a very limited character, made an out and out invention of a phonetic alphabet, and so have put to shame about all the ancient and famous nations of the Old World who had to import theirs, while some of them, though boasting of an ancient civilization, haven't got out of the swaddling clothes of a primitive method of writing yet?

But taking up again Mormon's statement to the effect that there were two systems of writing practiced by the Nephites, Mormon 9:33, 34, and looking backward over the vista of years that then had passed and numbered by about ten centuries, we find there another guidepost in the search for the beginning of the use of two systems of writing among so-called racially distinct (!) nations of the earth. At this point we find some Jews, Lehi and Nephi, who in particular were schooled in the knowledge of their own countrymen, and when about to set out for Joseph and Ephraim's "land of promise," took with them to be their standard in civil and religious life, the whole mass of Israelitish scriptures which up to that date had accumulated. According to the Book of Mormon record these sacred writings were engraved on brass plates, and by the

use of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Among the emigrating colonists there was at least one learned Jew who could read and write the Egyptian, and this knowledge was handed down from father to son, as a rule, until the times in which Mormon and his people lived, and during the intervening centuries whatever additional word the Lord saw fit to communicate to His people—the Nephites—was recorded by the same method, but in a reformed condition, and from what Mormon says in the texts already cited the Hebrew system of writing was also in use. But when Lehi and Nephi obtained the plates they found the scriptures already inscribed on them in Egyptian, and so it appears that there were special custodians of the plates appointed, and whose duty it was to engrave on them the word of the Lord to the whole body of Israelites as it was received from time to time. It is, therefore, evident that we must go still further back in this investigation to find when and by whom the double system of writing was first put into effect among the Israelites. What is said in the body of these remarks shows logically at what time, by whom, and under what circumstances the two systems were commenced side by side. Joseph the mighty Hebrew ruler in Egypt under Pharaoh or his famous sons are one of the responsible parties. The logic of the circumstances in the case manifest the correctness of this conclusion as forcibly as anything of the

kind can do it. Hebrew speaking members of Jacob's family or Moses himself make up the other party.

This double tracked system of writing is a most remarkable thing to occur in the history of a civilized people. It is even more remarkable to find it practiced among the half civilized Indians who occupied this land centuries ago. The Book of Mormon represents the American natives, when of unmixed blood, as descendants of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. If now, in confirmation of the truth of this claim, we think of the two systems of writing as a chain, in a figurative sense, not to speak of it now as one of unusual strength, we find one end of it firmly held in place by Joseph and his immediate family and by other ancient Hebrews, while the other end is securely anchored by the American Indians to the double tracked system of writing which found a place among them, and just where we should so strongly infer from the Book of Mormon history that it would be fastened.

This chain, so easily followed throughout its entire length on account of its distinctive construction, binds Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Laban, Lehi, Nephi, Mormon, and the people they represent into one and the same great family, and, reaching out still further, takes into that family-fold the multitude of nations of so-called Indians who long ago occupied, or who do now inhabit this land of America.

Prayer

By Bertha Roberts.

Prayer—sweet breath from out a joyous heart wafting gratitude to Heaven.

Prayer—a choking sob of anguish from pain-drawn lips in plea for help.

Prayer—a sacred confidence between a fearful soul and God.

Prayer—a holy balm which soothes and heals the scars in a wounded breast.

Prayer—a rod that bars the way between the human soul and sin.

Prayer—an angel's kiss on the longing lips of loneliness.