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The Learning of the Peoples of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: The Book of Mormon peoples had access to the early teachings of the Bible. They had great opportunities of learning and built complex and important civilizations. The tedious task of record keeping on plates of metal seriously hampered their ability to pass on their learning.

Guide Lessons.

LESSON I.

THEOLOGY AND TESTIMONY

FIRST WEEK IN OCTOBER.

THE LEARNING OF THE PEOPLES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

In the first chapter and first paragraph of the Book of Mormon, Nephi tells us that he was taught somewhat in all the learning of his father. This is a very significant comment, for other passages, coupled with the fact that Lehi appeared to have adopted the writing forms of the Egyptian language, lead us to infer that Lehi, like Moses before him, was versed in the learning of the Egyptians, those descendants of Ham and Japhet who had focused their creative genius in mental pursuits. Moreover, Moroni tells us, in ch. 9, ver. 32, 33, that the records have been engraved down to his own day in what he called reformed Egyptian. Apostle Orson Pratt's footnote adds that "1000 years made great changes in language not printed or preserved by books." We might add that even printed languages are also vitally altered in a thousand years.

Let us examine for a moment just what that meant. To begin with, Egypt was the recognized seat of learning of the ancient world. It meant precisely what it meant in the days of Shakespeare for English students to leave England and go to Padua to study law, or Pisa to study medicine. In the middle ages Italy was the place of last resort for those who would obtain the learning of that period. In modern times Europe has been the world's University. From every corner of the earth students have flocked to Europe to perfect their knowledge of science, letters, music and art. Now, just what Italy was to the middle ages, and Europe has been to the modern world, Egypt was to the ancients.

Fortunate indeed were these early people, of the new world, that they had not to grope about in the dark for many years, to become acquainted with many things; but they found in their great leaders much learning coupled with the inspiration of Almighty God. Their beginning was the most advanced possible, because of the learning and vast experience of Lehi, connected as it was with both worldly Egypt and devout Palestine.

But what was of vastly greater importance than any knowledge one man could possess, was the Jewish Scripture which they had obtained and brought with them. "Heirs of the Ages," they surely were, to borrow a phrase of Tennyson's; for no greater heritage of learning can possibly come to any people than that they shall be possessors of the book of books, the Bible.

The year 1911, the tercentenary celebration of the publication of the King James' translation of the Bible, was celebrated in every English-speaking nation. The ablest men of Great Britain and America vied with one another to try to impress people with the matchless value of the Bible. This book, that after all the centuries is incomparable with any other book, was possessed—that is, most of the Old Testament was—by the peoples of the Western continent. But their text was superior to ours; their history more perfect and more complete. They possessed with writings of a group of prophets and inspired men unknown to us. We seek in vain in the lids of our Bible for Zenos, Zenoch, Zeum, Ezras. That much else is also lost to us by the omission of the writings of these holy men cannot be doubted. The marvelous parable of the wild and tame olive tree, so important in its lesson, so beautiful in its literary quality, is from the book of Zenos.

We feel that we can best get at the intellectual status and learning of Book of Mormon peoples by analogy. Never at any time have peoples with the blood of Israel flowing in their veins heeded the words of God that they have not become a marvel and a wonder to the nations. Take for example the astonishing achievements of the Jews, whom God is surely turning towards in these latter days.

We quote from an article of Israel Zangwill, published in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, August, 1915. In reviewing the war record of this people let us keep two things in mind: first, that there are only thirteen million Jews in the entire world; secondly, that this is only a partial record of their first year's achievements.

Mr. Zangwill says: "In England the late Lord Rothschild presided over the Red Cross fund, and the Lord Chief Justice is understood to have saved the financial situation, not only in England, but for all her allies. In Germany Herr Ballin, the Jew, the creator of the mercantile marine, and now the organizer of the national food supply, stands as the Kaiser's friend; in France, General Heymann commands an army corps. Italy has joined the Allies through the influence of Baron Sounino, the son of a Jew. The military hospitals of Turkey are all under the direction of the Austrian Jew, Hecker.

"The Jewish bravery astonished us all," said the vice-governor of Koono, "and indeed the heroism of the Russian Jew has

become an household word. More than 300 privates—they cannot be officers—have been accorded the order of St. George. One Jew, who brought down a German aeroplane, was awarded all four degrees of the order at once.”

We have used the war as an illustration, because it is the all-absorbing topic of our times ; but had we chosen to cite achievements in statesmanship, literature, music, painting, etc., the result would have been no less remarkable.

Ephraim's record is equally wonderful, when we think how numerically small he is. Consequently, reasoning by analogy, it is perfectly logical to think of the peoples of the Book of Mormon, at such times as they were seeking to serve the Lord, as peoples of great intelligence, great talent and great achievement. Their own records, the findings of the archæologists, and the marked talent of many Indians, found from Canada to Chili, all substantiate such conclusions. Consequently, we feel that it is no matter of supposition or conjecture, to say that these people produced great statesmen, great financiers, great captains of industry, great orators, poets, painters, in a word, that they had many great artists and great artisans.

But these people suffered from tremendous limitations in trying to reveal themselves. The ancient people of the eastern world used both papyrus and parchment in their writings. All of the writings of the Nephites come to us on metal plates of gold or brass. The mechanical difficulties of engraving one's history on plates of brass and gold can hardly be estimated. The necessity for careful discrimination in material and the necessity of brevity would be an ever-present thought. Then, too, we have, in the main, only an abridgment ; which means that many, many things which would throw great light on the advancement of these people has of necessity been stricken out.

But all the difficulties have not been taken into consideration when we think of engraving on metal plates ; the Egyptian language of hieroglyphics would be easier to engrave than the written language of modern times, yet even then it would be a long and tedious task.

Yet, handicapped as they were, think what a glorious record they give us of Christ's ministry on this continent. They tell us that it is beyond the power of man to make a record of what He said, and of His manner of speech, and yet they have transmitted enough, that we know first, how terrible were the cataclysms, and secondly, how marvelous was His ministry.

Elder George Reynolds, in discussing the knowledge these people had of history and geography, thinks there is evidence that the Lord revealed a great deal to them that was quite in advance of the knowledge of the world in general. In support of

this belief he cites the following: Nephi told his brethren that they were upon an isle of the sea. "Now, says Elder Reynolds, "this knowledge they could not possibly have had save through the inspiration of God, for this fact was not authenticated by surveys and explorations until 1847. It was as late as 1854 that these surveys were put to the test. During that year Captain McClure sailed from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean through the Arctic Ocean."

It is known through the Book of Abraham, that Abraham's knowledge of astronomy was far in advance of the knowledge of this time; the peoples of the Book of Mormon appear to have had astronomical knowledge far in advance of that of the European world. Alma, in speaking to Korihor, said, "All the planets which move in their regular form doth witness that there is a supreme Creator." Another of the Book of Mormon writers tells us, "It is the earth that moveth and not the sun." It was many centuries after the destruction of the Nephites that the peoples of Europe accepted the movement of the earth as a fact.

Elder Reynolds thinks it is not at all improbable that the Nephites were acquainted with the Book of Abraham. Says he, "They undoubtedly had the writings of Joseph, the son of Jacob, as these are quoted in the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph found the writings of Abraham and Joseph together with the Egyptian mummies."

QUESTIONS.

1. What reference does Nephi make to his father's learning, in the first paragraph of the Book of Mormon?
2. Why is this a significant comment?
3. What written language had Lehi apparently adopted?
4. Why was it fortunate for the people of Lehi that he added the culture and learning of Egypt to that of Palestine?
5. Why is the Bible the greatest treasure of learning that any people can possess?
6. When the Lord commanded Nephi to slay Laban, that the plates containing the Scripture might be obtained, what did He say would happen to a nation that did not possess the Scriptures? (I Nephi 3:19, 20; 4:13, 15; Omni ver. 17).
7. In what respects was the Bible of the Nephites superior to our Hebrew Bible?
8. Reasoning by analogy, what conclusions might we come to relative to the learning of the peoples of the Book of Mormon at such times as they were serving God?
9. Give any illustrations, or cite any knowledge you may have of the talent of the American Indian. Of the Jewish people of modern times.

10. Why is Elder Reynolds justified in the belief that God revealed to the Book of Mormon peoples matters of geography and astronomy in advance of their times?

11. Cite instances in the building up of our mountain home that go to show that God has revealed to our modern prophets matters in advance of the time.

LESSON II.

Work and Business.

SECOND WEEK IN OCTOBER.

LESSON III.

Genealogy.

PERSONAL NAMES.

(See Chapter 8, *Surname Book*).

Words are symbols of thought. Words are bodies or tabernacles of thought and emotion.

(a) Concepts or thoughts useless unless expressed in words or actions.

(b) The power of symbols—thought-words. Family life impracticable without personal names.

(c) Sign words made by children and primitive peoples.

(a) The Lord named our first parents.

(b) He taught Adam language, and Adam named beasts and birds. Ancient people chose personal names carefully and reverently.

(a) Hebrews were reverent.

(b) Pagans were superstitious.

(c) Impressive ceremonies accompanied christening in olden days.

Think how impossible it would be to tell anyone what was in our minds if we had no words with which to communicate with each other. A word is a symbol. Each of the four letters, w-o-r-d, is itself a symbol of another symbol, for words themselves are like the tabernacles of the spirit, they are the bodies which clothe our thoughts and our emotions.

It would be unnecessary for us to have thoughts if we had no way of expressing them and no way to put those thoughts into action. Just imagine what we would be like if we were all speechless. We would have to use a sign language as did the ancient savages.