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Book of Mormon Evidences

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Abstract: Vast amounts of marvelous evidences for the Book of Mormon have accumulated. Archaeological evidences include the many discoveries in the Americas—La Venta, Izapa stone, Quetzalcoatl, bearded-men statues, Egyptian type burials, arts, metals, and textiles. The writings of sixteenth-century Native American historians, such as the *Totonacapan*, *Popol Vuh*, *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, and the *Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, and the writings of the sixteenth-century Catholic priests Bernardino de Sahagun, Bishop Bartholome de Las Casas, Diego de Landa, and Juan de Torquemad present correlations and correspondences to the Book of Mormon.

Scout organizations, I think righteously enough, a pattern of prayer which is used throughout scouting, and which, while all right for the boys of other faiths, does not belong in our groups. I can repeat it in about ten words; it is very short. I say it with all reverence both toward the Lord and respect toward the men who think it is a good prayer: "May the great Scoutmaster of all good Scouts be with us until we meet again," they say, and then they dismiss the boys to go to bed.



My fellow Scout leaders, at your campfires and in your dismissals, teach your boys that the Lord is not a great Scoutmaster. He is our God. When you pray to him and when they pray to him, address him as he suggested himself. Let them say, "Our Father, which art in heaven," asking for the favors of the night, for the protecting care, for love and peace at home, and for all things concerning which they should inquire. Then let them always close it by saying, "In the name of Jesus

Christ," thus bearing their witness that they believe in his holy name. That is the kind of prayer we ought to have our Latter-day Saint Scouts say. For its kind, I have no objection to the other, but we have our kind which is better. It makes boys vocally free and can be given inspirationally to fit many occasions.

My testimony is that God lives, and that he who sits on this stand, presiding, is his prophet and his servant. I would that all the boys in our care will develop the same testimony with the help of their leaders, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

BOOK OF MORMON EVIDENCES

by Milton R. Hunter

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

SINCE the day that the Angel Moroni gave the gold plates to the Prophet Joseph Smith from which he translated and published the Book of Mormon, vast amounts of marvelous evidences have accumulated. These evidences sustain the divine authenticity and truthfulness of that holy ancient record.

Also, during the same period of time, enemies of truth and light have done everything within their power to oppose the Book of Mormon, trying to prove that its claims are false. Some of these men, no doubt, were merely misled; but the majority of them did what they did with evil intent. The result has been that all of their works have come to naught. The evil results of their efforts have vanished as the dew on earth's verdure vanishes in the presence of the rising sun. Thus, the Book of Mormon stands today in higher repute than ever before in the history of the Church. None of its claims have been proven to be false. On the other hand, a vast accumulation of evidences—some of which speak as it were from the dust and others from the ancient past—continue to bear witness to the divinity of this sacred book and to its truthfulness.

Beyond a shadow of doubt, the Book of Mormon is the word of God, a divine and sacred book, preserved by the Lord and his holy angels to come forth in the latter days as a new witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel which he proclaimed.

I shall point out some of the astounding Book of Mormon evidences, listing them under three major headings: first—archaeological evidences; second—testimonies of sixteenth century Indian his-

torians; and third—writings of Catholic padres of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which writers secured their information firsthand from the Indians.

American archaeology had its birth shortly before the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. John Lloyd Stephens had visited Guatemala, Honduras, and Yucatan, had come back to the United States, and had written a glowing report of the beautiful temples, pyramids, and other archaeological remains which dotted the jungles of Central America and Mexico.¹ From the time of the publishing of Stephens' books forward, the governments of Mexico, Central America, and portions of South America, as well as archaeological organizations from the United States and her neighbors to the south, have spent vast amounts of money, and have exerted an untold amount of effort at numerous of these archaeological sites. Also, considerable work has been done in reconstructing the ancient buildings. In reconstructing these marvelous pyramids, temples, and other archaeological ruins, the archaeologists and their helpers have placed the stones as far as possible back as they were when the ancient Americans first erected the buildings. The result is that today the country from north of Mexico City southward to Chile is literally dotted with numerous archaeological sites, many of which have been excavated by archaeologists.

Before proceeding further, I desire to point out, definitely, that the majority of the archaeological ruins that have been excavated postdate Book of Mor-

mon times, and some of them were originally erected several hundred years following the close of Nephite history. Then you may ask, "What evidence do these ancient ruins give to sustain the Book of Mormon?"

I shall answer as follows: The Book of Mormon claims that great civilizations lived in ancient America. In fact, that sacred record points out that three separate peoples came to America in ancient times and established their civilizations. These peoples were known as Jaredites, Nephites, and Mulekites. The best archaeologists at the present time claim that many of the archaeological remains that have been excavated were built over earlier temples, pyramids, and other buildings, connoting earlier civilizations; and in many respects these earlier peoples were more highly developed, or more civilized, than were the people who erected the buildings of the archaeological remains that are now extant; for example, Miguel Covarrubias, speaking the views of the Mexican archaeologists, places the La Venta site within the period of 200 B. C. to 300 A. D. To quote from this writer:

Everywhere there are archaeological treasures that lie hidden in the jungles and under the rich soil of southern Vera Cruz, burial mounds and pyramids, masterfully carved colossal monuments of basalt, splendid statuettes of precious jade, and sensitively modeled figurines of clay, all of an unprecedented, high artistic quality. The tantalizing presence of a great and remote past in what is now uninhabited, impenetrable jungle is all the more puzzling because archaeologists now agree that many of these artistic masterpieces date back to the beginnings of the Christian era. Appearing suddenly out of nowhere in a state of full development, they constitute a cul-

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¹John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841); *Incidents of travel in Yucatan* (1843).

ture that seems to have been the root, the mother culture, from which the latter and better-known (Maya, Totonac, Zapotec, etc.) cultures sprang.

This oldest of native American high cultures is also the newest, since it was "discovered" only a few years ago and still awaits exhaustive scientific study.²

Latter-day Saints know that the three oldest "native American high cultures" were the Jaredite, Nephite, and Mulekite cultures, the latter two fitting well within the La Venta period.

The La Venta archaeological site, located near the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, was excavated by Dr. Matthew W. Stirling in 1939-1940. He is credited with dating this culture from 450 B.C. to 600 A. D.³ He made an archaeological find there of great importance, a carving of a statue of a man which reminds one of the usual portrayal of "Uncle Sam."⁴ This figure had a full flowing beard and an aquiline nose, constituting a good representation of a Hebrew priest. Covarrubias described the figure as one representing a person having "... surprising pronounced Semitic features."⁵ Stirling points out that the figure is depicted as wearing "... shoes with odd, pointed, upturned toes."⁶ Neither the shoes nor the face and flowing beard of "Uncle Sam" could have been a representation of a red-skinned Indian;⁷ but, as stated, it strongly resembles a Jewish priest of pre-Christian times.

Dr. Stirling also found in southwestern Mexico at Izapa a stone covered with carvings which have been interpreted by Dr. M. Wells Jakeman of Brigham Young University as a representation of Lehi's dream of the "Tree of Life," recorded in 1 Nephi 8:1-38. To quote Dr. Jakeman:

... the resemblance of this sculpture to the Book of Mormon account cannot be accidental. . . . It practically establishes . . . an historical connection . . . between the ancient Central American priests responsible for the sculpture and the Lehi people of the Book of Mormon! Indeed, the accurate and detailed knowledge of Lehi's vision . . . displayed by these priests in this sculpture, can be explained only by their identification as an actual group of the Lehi people.⁸

Of special interest to Latter-day Saints is the temple of Quetzalcoatl, located at Teotihuacán, north of Mexico City. This temple is decorated with serpents' heads, surrounded with *quetzal* feathers. *Quetzal* is the name of a beautiful bird with resplendent long, green feathers, found mainly in Guatemala and Hon-

duras.⁹ *Coatl* is the ancient Mexican word for serpent.¹⁰

The Book of Mormon gives a beautiful account of Christ's appearance to the Nephites following his crucifixion and resurrection.¹¹ To them he gave the true gospel plan of salvation, and the people lived in almost perfect righteousness for over two hundred years. Certainly Christ's visit constituted one of the greatest events, if not the greatest, that transpired in ancient America.

Following the apostasy of the Nephites and the Lamanites from the true religion of the Master and the extermination of the Nephite civilization (about 400 A. D.), the Lamanites or Indians retained in their traditions a memory of the appearance of the resurrected Savior to their forefathers. This white-bearded God, according to one tradition, came to the people through the air, and as he descended to earth the sunrays sparkled on his beautiful white body and clothing. The *quetzal* bird as it flew through the air reminded the people of the glorious beauty and radiant splendor of the white-bearded God who had appeared to their ancestors; and so they added a pagan touch to that memorable event by selecting the most beautiful and highly prized bird of the New World, the *quetzal*, as a symbol of the white God, or Jesus Christ. Also, *coatl*, or serpent, was an ancient symbol of Israel's Anointed One. Thus, the Indians commemorated their white-bearded God with the symbol of "Quetzal-bird serpent" or Quetzalcoatl.¹²

Traditions existed among practically every American Indian tribe, especially the more civilized peoples of Peru, Central America, Guatemala, Yucatan, and Mexico, to the effect that their ancestors were visited by a white-bearded God, who gave them their culture, their civilization, and their religion, and who promised that someday he would return to their descendants. These traditions account for the easy conquest of Mexico and Peru; but, more important, they all bear witness to Christ's appearance to the ancient Americans, as accounted in the Book of Mormon.

Also, of special interest to members of the Church of Jesus Christ are the beautiful and famous archaeological ruins in Yucatan, especially those at Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Kabah. The massive pyramids, temples, and other important structures were erected during the tenth century A.D., constituting the workmanship of the New Mayan Empire. Those Mayas of Yucatan, as had the Toltecs of Teotihuacán, worshiped the white-bearded God, whom they called Kukulcan. They carved motifs to Kukulcan on their buildings similar to those at Teotihuacán and at other Mexican sites, i.e., the plumed serpent.¹³ In fact, the plumed serpent

is extensively used in decorating all of their buildings.

Also, the Mayas decorated their buildings with another motif or symbol—that of a bearded white man wearing quetzal feathers. The latter carvings represented priests of Kukulcan (Quetzalcoatl), or probably Kukulcan himself. They are definitely not of Indian type but are of Hebraic type. To quote Theodore Arthur Willard:

An interesting sidelight . . . is the distinctly Semitic cast of countenance of some of the ancient sculptures and murals found at Chichen Itza and in other old Maya cities. The dignity of face and serene poise of those carved or painted likenesses is strikingly Hebraic.¹⁴

The marvelous archaeological finds at Palenque in the Usumacinta Valley—especially the cross and the Egyptian-type burials, the famous ruins of the Old Mayan Empire in Honduras and Guatemala—especially those at Copan, Uaxactún, and Quiriguá, all bear testimony to the Book of Mormon's claims that high civilizations lived in ancient America. The late Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley maintained that the Maya history had its beginning as early as 300 B. C.¹⁵ and that pre-Maya history extends back to about 3000 B.C.¹⁶ The former date would reach in the earlier part of Nephite history, and the latter would extend to the beginnings of Jaredite history.

When one considers all of the wonderful archaeological remains in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Central America, and those of South America, one comes to the conclusion that those of the northern hemisphere do not surpass the marvelous archaeological ruins found in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia. Numerous buildings have been excavated and some of them reconstructed. Thousands of graves have been opened and from them have been taken the most beautiful and artistic workings in gold, silver, copper, and precious stones of various kinds.¹⁷ Also, from those graves have been taken the most finely woven, beautiful laces, the most gorgeous wool and cotton cloths, and "fine-twined linen." In fact, various archaeologists maintain that the world has known no races of people who surpassed the predecessors of the Inca civilization in these various handicrafts. Some of them maintain that the earliest South American civilization dates as far back as 3000 B.C.¹⁸ for example, A. Hyatt Verrill states:

Despite the high attainment in art, engineering, astronomy and government which were reached by the Aztecs, the Incas, the Mayas and others, in a way these unknown, forgotten races of South America were more remarkable, and were unquestionably far more ancient. From the Chibcha district in Colombia to northern Chile, numerous races rose to a civilized state, vanished and were

(Continued on following page)

²Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South—The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (1946), pp. 79-80.

³A. Hyatt Verrill, *Americas' Ancient Civilizations* (1953), p. 100.

⁴Matthew W. Stirling, *National Geographic Magazine* (Sept., 1940), p. 327; Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*, pp. 133-135, 173.

⁵Covarrubias, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶Stirling, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

⁷Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya*, p. 21, states: "The Maya are not a hairy people. The men either have no beards and moustaches at all, or only very meager, sparse ones, while other parts of their body have less hair than is the case of American whites." The same facts hold true with the majority of Indians.

⁸M. Wells Jakeman, "An Unusual Tree of Life Sculpture from Ancient Central America," *Bulletin of University Archaeological Society* (March, 1953), pp. 26-49.

⁹Hunter and Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 195-222.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 199; Verrill, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-111.

¹¹1 Nephi, chapters 11 to 28, pp. 420-453.

¹²George C. Vaillant, *Aztecs of Mexico*, p. 52; Bancroft, *Native Races*, vol. 2, p. 511 ff.; Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14-15; Maurice H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism*, p. 25; Hunter and Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-222; Verrill, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 101 ff.

¹⁴Theodore Arthur Willard, *The City of the Sacred Well*, p. 36.

¹⁵Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 38, 44.

¹⁷Verrill, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-195.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 174-175, 183, 210.

forgotten centuries before the first Montezuma or the first Inca saw the light of day.¹⁹

As a general rule, when we find a race excelling in some one art or occupation we find the people deficient in some other art or industry, but the Chimus appear to have been masters of all trades. Their textiles, especially their laces, were marvelous examples of weaving, and their mosaic and mother-of-pearl work was exquisite. Many specimens of these are truly wonderful examples of this highly developed art. There are vases, cups, ceremonial utensils, ear plugs, breastplates, wooden utensils, objects made of clay and of bone that are highly and most artistically embellished with mosaic inlay of mother-of-pearl, the red Spondylus shell, colored stone and precious metals. Many of their robes and ponchos of magnificent textiles are completely covered with ornaments of gold, silver, mother-of-pearl and sections of bright colored sea shells arranged in charming patterns so as to give the effect of a mosaic cloth.

They were also highly skilled wood carvers and there is scarcely a wooden object that is not handsomely carved. . . . They had developed a unique method of weaving feathers into cloth thus producing feather robes, tunics, head coverings, etc., that are gorgeous in color and design. . . .

Even in their ordinary metal work the Chimus exhibited the greatest skill and a most artistic taste. Metals were cast, embossed, etched, engraved, pressed, hammered, spun or built up into innumerable forms by welding and soldering. In fact every means of working metals known to modern artisans was employed by the Chimus.²⁰

It is to be recalled that the Book of Mormon history is confined to the period between the building of the Tower of Babel and 421 A. D., the period during which the ancient Americans made their greatest achievements in the various handicrafts as described by Mr. Verrill. Also, we should recall that the Book of Mormon made such claims as follows:

[The Jaredites had] . . . all manner of fruit, and of grain, and of silks, and of fine linen, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things.²¹

[The Nephites and Mulekites also had an abundance] . . . of all things whatsoever they stood in need—and abundance . . . of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.²²

Again we read:

And behold, there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind; and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become rich.

Behold their women did toil and spin, and did make all manner of cloth, of fine-twined linen and cloth of every kind, to clothe their nakedness.²³

Certainly all of these archaeological remains fit well with the Book of Mormon claims regarding the Jaredite, Nephite, and Mulekite civilizations;

thus archaeology speaks as it were from the dust, verifying the Book of Mormon to be true—to be the word of God.

The second evidences verifying the Book of Mormon which I shall discuss are the writings of the sixteenth century Indian historians. When the Spanish conquistadores and the Catholic padres were conquering Mexico and Yucatan, they found that the Indians had many books—large libraries. Many of the Indians knew how to read and write and were more civilized than were their conquerors from Europe. In order to destroy as far as possible the natives' civilization and do away with what the Catholic fathers termed "the Indians' wicked paganism," the Catholic padres burned all of the books that they could find, completely destroying the libraries. This terrible act of vandalism resulted in a terrific loss to our understanding of the history of the Indians and their ancestors.

It was fortunate, however, that three or four excellent manuscripts written by Indian historians during the first century of their contact with the Spaniards escaped the ruthless destruction. These writings have been translated into English during the past several years.

One of these important writings was produced in 1554, in the Quiché-Maya Indian language of Guatemala, and ". . . signed by the kings and dignitaries of the Quiché court."²⁴ It is known as the *Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*. At the request of the Quiché Indians, Dionisio José Chonay, a Catholic priest, translated the document from the Quiché language into Spanish in 1834. It was first translated into English by Delia Goetz and published in 1953. However, Dr. M. Wells Jakeman published in English extracts from the Spanish version in 1945, this being the first time that any of this work had appeared in English. The *Totonicapán* claims that the ancestors of the Quiché-Mayas

. . . came from the other part of the ocean, from where the sun rises, a place called *Pa Tulán, Pa Cíván* [meaning Bountiful] . . . and they came from where the sun rises, descendants of Israel, of the same language and the same customs . . . they were sons of Abraham and Jacob.²⁵

And then the authors of Totonicapán close their account as follows:

Now on the twenty-eighth of September of 1554 we sign this attestation in which we have written that which by tradition our ancestors told us, who came from the other part of the sea, from Civan-Tulan, bordering on Babylonia.²⁶

These statements are all in perfect agreement with the claims made in the Book of Mormon.²⁷ We should recall that Nephi and his brethren built their ship at a place which they named Boun-

tiful which was located on the south-eastern shores of Arabia or "bordering on Babylonia"; and from that place they set sail for America.²⁸

The *Totonicapán* also claims that God gave to their original prophet-leader a peculiar instrument, called *Giron-Gagal*, through the power of which the people were guided to their now home.²⁹ One is reminded of the Liahona which was given by the Lord to Father Lehi.³⁰

Another Quiché-Maya book, the *Popol Vuh*, much more detailed than *Totonicapán*, was written between 1554 and 1558 A. D. In its present printed form, it is a book containing over two hundred pages. It might be termed the Lamanite account of their history and religion, as the Book of Mormon is the Nephite account. Regarding this book, Brasseur de Bourbourg wrote:

The *Popol Vuh* appears to have been written, in part, from memory, following ancient originals, and in part, copied from the sacred books of the Quiches, . . . This manuscript . . . is written in a Quiché of great elegance, and the author must have been one of the princes of the royal family, who composed it a few years after the arrival of the Spaniards, when all of their ancient books were disappearing.³¹

The *Popol Vuh* was first translated into English by Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley and published in 1950.

In this book the Quiché-Maya Indians of Guatemala give an account of the creation of the world,³² of the origin of man,³³ of the flood,³⁴ of the confusion of tongues,³⁵ and of the coming of their ancestors across the sea from the East.³⁶ It also mentions the fact that the colonizers were guided to their new home by a peculiar instrument, called *Pizom-Gagal*³⁷ (the Liahona). Thus the *Popol Vuh* in many items sustains the teachings of the more beautiful and complete account found in the Book of Mormon.

A third book written by the Indians of Guatemala, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, also bears witness to the teachings of the Book of Mormon. The writers, the Cakchiquel Indians, were a branch of the Quiché-Mayas. I shall quote from this writing:

I shall write the stories of our first fathers and grandfathers, . . . that from the other side of the sea we came to the place called Tulan [Bountiful], . . .

Thus, then we were four families who arrived at Tulan, we the Cakchiquel people, oh, our sons! so they told us.³⁸

The greatest book of the Indian writings of the sixteenth century is the *Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, written about 1600 A. D. by an Aztec prince named Ixtlilxochitl who lived near the City of Mexico.³⁹ This Indian writer claimed

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¹⁹*Ibid.*, 17:5-7.

²⁰*Totonicapán*, op. cit., p. 170.

²¹1 Nephi 16:10; Alma 37:38-41.

²²Brasseur de Bourbourg, cited in *Popol Vuh*, p. 21.

²³*Popol Vuh*, pp. 81-90.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 86-89.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 18, 79-80.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 205.

²⁹*The Annals of the Cakchiquels* (tr. from Cakchiquel-Maya into Eng. by Adrian Recinos and Delia Goetz, 1953), pp. 43-44.

³⁰Hunter and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 1-450.

²⁴*Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*, p. 164.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 194; Hunter and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 8, 56-64, 70, 80-84, 250.

²⁷1 Nephi 17:40.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 154-157.

²¹Ether 9:17.

²²Alma 1:29; see 4:6.

²³Helaman 6:11, 13; see Mosiah 10:5.

that ancient America was settled by three distinctive groups of people. The first settlers, termed the Ancient Ones, the Giants, or the First Tultecs, he claimed came from the Tower of Babel at the time of the confounding of tongues. They came to this land across the sea from the East. Many details of their history are given by Ixtlilxochitl which correspond closely to the Jaredite history in the Book of Ether.

The second group of settlers Ixtlilxochitl called the Tultecs. His account of these people, although much briefer, corresponds very closely to the account given in the Book of Mormon of the Nephites, event after event agreeing in the principal points. He even tells of the last great wars between the two people with dates almost identical with those recorded in the Book of Mormon.

The third people, whom Ixtlilxochitl called Olmecs and who are identified as the Mulekites, exterminated the last of the first colonizers. This event reminds one of Coriantumr, the last Jaredite, who lived for nine months with the Mulekites before his death. Ixtlilxochitl even tells of the merging together of the Tultecs and Olmecs (Nephites and Mulekites) and of the dominance of the Tultecs' culture, which is in complete agreement with the Book of Mormon account.

Throughout the entire *Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, point after point, both in history and doctrine, are reasonably comparable to the historical events and teachings of the Book of Mormon. Merely for the purpose of illustration, I shall give one quotation from Ixtlilxochitl. He tells of the terrific destruction that took place at the time of Christ's crucifixion, as follows:

It was 166 years since they had adjusted their years and times with the equinox, and 270 since the Ancient Ones had been destroyed, when the sun and the moon eclipsed, and the earth trembled, and the rocks broke, and many other things and signs took place. . . . This happened in the year of *ce Calli*, which, adjusting this count with ours, comes to be at the same time when Christ our Lord suffered, and they say it happened during the first days of the year.⁴⁰

We recall that in 3 Nephi it is written:

And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.⁴¹

And then the Book of Mormon account continues with a description of the terrific destruction that took place while Christ hanged on the cross and the intense darkness which prevailed for three days while the Master's body lay in the tomb. Observe that the Book of Mormon gives the time of this event as the first month of the year and the fourth day of the month and during

the period of Christ's crucifixion while Ixtlilxochitl states ". . . at the same time when Christ our Lord suffered. . . . during the first days of the year." There is no way under heaven whereby this Indian could have known such facts except through direct revelation from the Lord or from records which were in his possession. He claimed the latter.

Some authors are prone to discredit the writings of Ixtlilxochitl and the other Indian historians on the grounds that they could have been influenced by the Spanish Catholic priests. It is a fact of great significance, however, that these Indian writers recorded numerous historical facts, as well as items pertaining to the social and religious teachings and customs of their ancestors, of which the Catholic padres could have had no knowledge save only through possessing the Book of Mormon or comparable records. Such writings of the Catholic priests did not have; but the Indians did possess records and traditions of their ancestors, which resulted in their writings comparing so favorably with the Book of Mormon.

The third item I suggested that I would discuss is the writings of the sixteenth century Catholic missionaries who got their information directly from the Indians.

One of the most important of these writers was Bernardino de Sahagun. He lived in Mexico from 1529 to 1590 A. D. and produced his scholarly work in Aztec in the latter part of the sixteenth century.⁴² It is one of the most reliable and comprehensive reports concerning the ancients of Middle America. It was first published in Spanish in 1829, and since then portions of it have been published in English. Sahagun states:

Concerning the origin of these peoples, the report the old men [of central Mexico] give is that they came by sea . . . in some wooden boats. . . . But it is conjectured by a report found among all these natives that they came from seven caves, and that these seven caves are the seven ships or galleys in which the first settlers of this land came. . . .

The people first . . . came coasting along the coast disembarking in the port of Panuco, which they called Panco, which means "place where those arrived who crossed the water." This people came in search of the terrestrial paradise, and they had as a family name Tamoanchan, which means "we are looking for our home."⁴³

Recall the Jaredite history which tells that the forefathers crossed the ocean in eight barges in search of ". . . the land of promise, which was choice above all other lands of the earth."⁴⁴ Sahagun's writings give numerous proofs which sustain the teachings and history of the Book of Mormon, but time will not permit giving more of them here.

Bishop Bartholomé de Las Casas, a prominent Catholic missionary, writing

⁴⁰Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia de Las Cosas de Nueva Espana*, cited in Hunter and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²See Ether 1:42; 2:7, 15; 6:5, 12. *

in 1552-1553, said of the Indians of Guatemala that

. . . they had among them information of the flood and of the end of the world, . . . and so they believe that another *Butic* is about to come which is another flood and judgment, not of water, but of fire which they say will be the end of the world. . . .⁴⁵

Las Casas found an abundance of teachings among the Indians which resembled Christian doctrine, and so he concluded that the devil had arrived in America ahead of the Christians and implanted in the minds and hearts of the natives many teachings closely akin to Christianity.⁴⁶ Since the Book of Mormon peoples had a thorough knowledge of the gospel, some of the divine truths would naturally be handed down from age to age, probably in altered forms.

Diego de Landa, a prominent Spanish missionary in Yucatan, writing in about 1556, says that, according to the Mayas, ". . . the world was destroyed by a deluge."⁴⁷ He also stated:

Some of the older people of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors that this land was occupied by a race of people who came from the East and whom God had delivered. . . . If this were true, it necessarily follows that all the inhabitants of the Indies are descendants of the Jews.⁴⁸

Juan de Torquemada, a Spanish missionary in Mexico whose book was first published in Spain in 1613 A. D., declared that ". . . the ancients . . . put [ie., wrote or inscribed] many things in two columns, one of metal, and another of brick or stone."⁴⁹ It should be recalled that the Nephites inscribed their history on metal plates.

Harold Gladwin quotes Torquemada's description of the clothing worn by the Olmecs and then comments that the description of the garb reminds one ". . . of the robes of Biblical times in Palestine."⁵⁰

I have given some strong evidence from archaeology, from Indian historians of the sixteenth century, and from Catholic padres of the sixteenth century, which all corroborates the claims made by the Book of Mormon; however, the greatest testimony we have of the Book of Mormon is the book itself, especially Moroni's testimony and admonition, which reads as follows:

And when ye 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.⁵¹

Thousands of Latter-day Saints have put that exhortation to the test and
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⁴⁵Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologetica Historia de las Indias*, Cap. CCXXXV.

⁴⁶Hunter and Ferguson, op. cit., p. 222.

⁴⁷Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatan* (Eng. tr. by Alfred M. Tozzer, 1941), p. 93.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁹Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, Tomo I, p. 255.

⁵⁰Harold S. Gladwin, *Men out of Asia* (1947), p. 305.

⁵¹Moroni 10:4.

⁴⁰*Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, in Hunter and Ferguson, *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴³3 Nephi 8:5 ff.

know as they know that they are alive that the Book of Mormon is true. When I was a child and first heard the stories of the Book of Mormon, the Holy Ghost touched my heart and bore a sweet witness to it of the divine authenticity of that ancient record. I knew then as I knew that I was alive that the Book of Mormon is true, is divine, is a sacred record of the inhabitants of ancient America. As I grew older, I read the book many times, and each time the same sweet testimony came into my

heart, sometimes coming so forcefully that I was filled with emotion to the extent that tears ran down my cheeks. As I read the Book of Mormon now, the Holy Ghost still bears testimony to me that it is the word of God.

I know that the Book of Mormon is one of the greatest books in the world. It contains the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews and to the Gentiles. It is a new witness to Christ and the great work which he performed. I challenge any honest man or woman in the world

to put Moroni's exhortation to the test; and I promise that if it is done with real intent, having a true desire to receive a testimony, and having faith in Christ, God will reveal through the Holy Ghost a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon to each one.

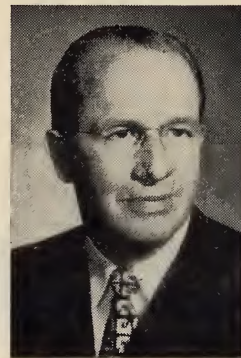
May God bless the honest in heart throughout the entire world that they will study the Book of Mormon and receive a testimony; and may he bless the members of the Church that we will study this sacred book and live in accordance with its teachings, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday Afternoon, October 3, 1954

Our Duty As Citizens

by Ezra Taft Benson

OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE



MY BELOVED brethren and sisters and friends: I deem this a signal honor, a truly great privilege, but a sobering responsibility. I pray for the inspiration of heaven and for an interest in your faith and prayers. My heart is full to overflowing with gratitude for the blessings which we enjoy and which are mine. I thank God that in his infinite wisdom he has seen fit to call these great conferences of the Church. No one, I am sure, has benefited more richly from these conferences than I have. I have literally received a spiritual uplift, for which I am most grateful to my heavenly Father.

In addition to attending the conference, I have had the glorious privilege of spending an hour or so in meditation in the temple of God to the east of us. I humbly acknowledge the sustaining power of my heavenly Father throughout my entire life, for which I am most grateful, and particularly for his sustaining power during the last twenty months.

I am grateful for the faith, the love, and the confidence of my associates in the General Authorities; for the support of my wife and family; for the prayers and the support of the Saints of Zion, as well as the millions of good people outside the Church. I know I shall never be able to express adequately the gratitude I feel for those who have so loyally and so helpfully sustained and supported me with their love, confidence, and prayers.

I am very grateful I have received a witness from the Almighty that at the present time, at least, I am serving where he wishes me to serve. I have never had any doubts of that fact since that early morning hour when I met our great leader, my beloved associate, President David O. McKay, on the parking lot of the Church Office Building, and he made the statement to me, "My mind is clear. I know what the Lord wants you to do."

So, my brethren and sisters, I am happy in the assignment which is mine. My one fear, and my one anxiety is that I may inadvertently sometime do something or say something that will cast an unfavorable light or bring discredit upon the Church and kingdom of God and the people whom I love so dearly, and upon this great nation which we all love. I pray that this may never happen.

I love this nation of which we are a part. To me it is not just another nation, not just a member of a family of nations. It is a great and glorious nation with a divine mission and it has been brought into being under the inspiration of heaven. It is truly a land choice above all others. I thank God for the knowledge which we have regarding the prophetic history and the prophetic future of this great land of America.

When I contemplate the great events that have transpired here, going way back to the days when our first parents

were placed in the Garden of Eden, and recall that this garden was here in America, that it was here also where Adam met with a body of great high priests at Adam-ondi-Ahman shortly before his death and gave them his final blessing, and that to that same spot he is to return again to meet with the leaders of his people, his children—when I contemplate, my brethren and sisters, that here in this land will be established the New Jerusalem, that here in this land will Zion be built—when I contemplate that prophets of God anciently served here in this land, and that the resurrected Christ appeared unto them—and when I contemplate that the greatest of all visions, the coming of God the Father, and the Son to the boy Prophet in our day took place in this land, my heart fills with gratitude that I am privileged to live here, and that I have the honor and pleasure of not only serving in the Church, but also of serving in the government of this great land. I consider it an honor and privilege.

I am grateful for the Founding Fathers of this land and for the freedom they have vouchsafed to us. I am grateful that they recognized, as great leaders of this nation have always recognized, that the freedom which we enjoy did not originate with the Founding Fathers; that this glorious principle, this great boon of freedom and respect for the dignity of man, came as a gift

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THE IMPROVEMENT ERA