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Since Cumorah - New Voices from the Dust: Part II. Hidden Treasures, The Search for the Original Scriptures

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SINCE CUMORAH

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PART II.
HIDDEN
TREASURES

The Search for the Original Scriptures

● A conspicuous aspect of most of the recently discovered Christian writings, as well as of the early Apocrypha in general, is the frequent insistence in them on secrecy. At present anthropologists are becoming increasingly aware that the deliberate suppression of information by the native peoples among whom they work is far more general, far-reaching, and significant than they hitherto have been willing to admit. As a recent study points out, there are two main kinds of reticence: “. . . a whole body of material was secret in the sense that it was to be kept from the outsider . . . the non-Aborigine. There was also secret information which

an extensive daily dissembling to keep unqualified outsiders from meddling with things they would not understand or appreciate. Both types of reticence are conspicuous in the early Jewish and Christian literature. In the Dead Sea Scrolls the people of the community are instructed not to discuss their doctrines and doings with “the people of the pit,” i.e., the outside world;² but aside from that they are put under specific oaths of secrecy regarding certain specific things.³

When Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John to tell no man of what they had seen on the Mount of the Transfiguration, he was withholding sacred things from the

“Go forth by the hand of the twelve

was to be kept from the uninitiated. . . . I refer to the former as dissembled culture.”¹

Latter-day Saint missionaries laboring among native peoples have long noted the existence among them of both genuine secrets, that is, things too sacred to be mentioned to anybody outside of a particular time, place, and religious occasion, and on the other hand of

uninitiated;⁴ when on the other hand he parried tricky questions of the Pharisees by asking them counter questions and then telling them that if they could not answer him he would not answer them, he was simply evading them.⁵ In the *Clementine Recognitions*, when Peter refuses to tell Clement about salvation for the dead until Clement himself has received certain ordi-

nances, he is withholding secret teachings,⁶ but when he refuses to discuss the nature of the Godhead with Simon Magus, he explains that he is deliberately evading the man because he has no real desire to learn about the Godhead and only wants to cause trouble.⁷

Recently Professor Goodenough of Yale, after long years of searching among the earliest archaeological remains of Judaism, has been able to show that there has existed through the centuries not one but two distinct types of Judaism, the one following what he calls "the horizontal path," the other "the vertical path."⁸ The former type, variously designated as rabbinic, halachic, normative, or Talmudic Judaism, is the only Judaism known to our histories today. This is because its representatives have, by years of determined struggle, either stamped its rival out entirely where they could, or forced it underground. "The final victory of rabbinic Judaism over its ancient mystic rival," writes Goodenough, "makes it hard to convince modern Jews of the reality of Jewish mystical tradition."⁹

The old submerged Judaism has been called Hasidic, cabbalistic, *ma'asimic*, and Karaitic, but none of these terms is very satisfactory since each designates only some particular underground movement

of triumph, blessed meals with the Messiah. . . ." ¹⁰ This preliminary glimpse should suffice to indicate that what all "vertical" Jews had in common was secrecy and emphasis on Messianic and prophetic teachings—teachings which the doctors of the schools (the "horizontal" tradition) disliked intensely and opposed with all their might.

Just as Goodenough distinguishes between two conflicting traditions of Judaism on the basis of recent archaeological findings, so H. J. Schoeps, on the basis of new manuscript discoveries, distinguishes between two like levels of Christianity and even goes so far as to suggest that the old original Christianity was actually stamped out by the latter type,¹¹ which was intellectually orientated and strongly opposed to the old Messianic-millennialist tradition.¹² The resemblance between the corresponding schools of Jewish and Christian thought is not accidental.

The Christian doctors got their doctrine and philosophy from the same Alexandrian fount from which the Jewish doctors got theirs, both being dedicated to the allegorical interpretation of the scriptures and the basic proposition that revelation and prophecy had forever ceased. Students have long been aware that primitive Christianity was a carrying forward of

wholly bereft of the apocalyptic wing which had passed over into Christianity."¹⁴ It was because it represented that other tradition, as Professor Torrey has shown, that early Christianity was so intensely unpopular with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees; everything in the Christian teaching suggested to their minds the old vertical Messianic Judaism—Justin Martyr insists on bringing the identity of the two to the attention of the resentful Jew Trypho again and again.

"If we had only the traditions of the Jews themselves," Goodenough assures us, "we should hardly have suspected the existence of the whole body of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, for these, I repeat, have survived thanks only to Christian copyists."¹⁵ But these writings which the Jewish doctors had rejected and the early Christians accepted were in time rejected by the Christian doctors also,¹⁶ and so were lost both to the Jewish and the Christian worlds, their very existence denied by "official" Judaism and Christianity, and sank out of sight until their rediscovery in our own day.

The recognition of the "underground" nature of vertical Judaism and Jewish Christianity supplies the student with valuable clues to understanding the real background of the Bible, of which one begins

apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles"

1 NEPHI 13-26

in Judaism. Seeking an over-all term, Goodenough refers to the "vertical" tradition (i.e., seeking direct as against historical contact with heaven), and cautiously uses the word "mystic" to describe it. It is not surprising that, in order to survive, "later teachers of this tradition developed a 'secret teaching' (I dare not say Mystery) . . . characterized by a succession of heavens, thrones

the old "vertical" Jewish tradition, from which it inherited the apocryphal writings which were so despised by the Jewish and Christian doctors alike.¹³ "Legalistic Pharisaism," wrote R. H. Charles many years ago, "in time drove out almost wholly the apocalyptic, i. e., prophetic, element . . . and became the parent of Talmudic Judaism," whereupon Judaism became "almost

to think now more than ever in terms of hidden treasures. Only consider the illusive nature of the Bible through the ages: why has it ever been a subject of the widest disagreement, as St. Augustine notes with sorrow, among even the most pious, devout, and learned men? If such men cannot agree, Origen pointed out in the third century, lesser men such as our-

selves can never be perfectly sure of what the Bible means.¹⁷ If we are to approach certainty at all, the first step must be to ask what in our day has become the all-engrossing question of biblical scholarship, namely: What was the original form in which the message was conveyed? What did the original Testaments look like?

In Joseph Smith's day it was generally assumed that the Old Testament had always been a single book, written without error by the very finger of God. A hundred years later, in the heyday of higher criticism, it had become a thing of shreds and patches; but in our own time the essential unity of the writings is again being recognized, though the broad picture of the original state of the record is just beginning to take outline. The picture that is beginning to emerge is remarkably like that which confronts us in the pages of the Book of Mormon. There Nephi, looking far into the future, is shown a vision of the gentiles bringing "a book" to the remote descendants of his father in the New World and is told, "The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and . . . also . . . many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; . . ." (1 Nephi 13:23.)

The only scriptures Nephi knew were a collection of writings, more extensive indeed than what is contained in our Old Testament, but not conflicting with it.

When Lehi eagerly examined the plates which his sons had brought down from Jerusalem, he discovered that they contained (1) ". . . the five books of Moses, . . ." (2) ". . . the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; . . ." (3) "And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, . . ." including a genealogy of the whole line of Joseph, embracing Lehi's own forefathers. (*Ibid.*, 5:11-14.) These writings are designated in modern Jewish terminology as the Tanach, i.e., the Torah, the Prophets, and the Historic and other writings.

These are the elements of Nephi's Bible, and of ours, which, he assures us, contains an authentic record as far as it goes, and "many of the prophecies of the holy prophets," but by no means all. As we have seen, Jewish scholars today emphatically insist that the early Jews made no distinction between a canon and noncanonical writings, that is, the scriptures of Nephi's day did indeed embrace far more material than is recognized as canonical today and included in our Old Testament. To make up for the

Bible and in the Qumran manuscript, a thousand years older."¹⁹ So Nephi is right on both scores: the record is indeed true and "of great worth," though it is far from complete.

Towards the close of his book, Nephi quotes two chapters of Isaiah (48 and 49) in full. This would indeed be a daring thing for a forger to do—to include whole pages of the Bible in a work designed to fool the Bible-reading public. Still worse, the language is, without any attempt at disguise, that of the King James version. If the author of the Book of Mormon were an impostor, his attempts to deceive are prodigiously artless. Isn't the Book of Mormon supposed to be an original translation? Why does it simply copy the King James? For the very good reason, as we have shown elsewhere,²⁰ that it has always been the practice for inspired prophets to quote early scriptures not in some lost archaic version but always in the Bible language current with their hearers.

When the Apostles, the Angel Gabriel, and the Lord himself quote the ancient prophets in the New Testament, it is usually the text of the Septuagint that they quote. Why? Because that was the original language of the prophets or the angels? No, but because it was the official scripture of the persons

"because of these things which are taken away out of the

This is our Old Testament, but such a book was quite strange to Nephi, and the angel explains that ". . . it is a record *like unto* the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord . . . unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles." (*Idem.* Italics added.)

disturbing awareness of losses from the Old Testament, we have the comforting assurance of the Dead Sea Scrolls that our Old Testament texts are older and more valuable than anyone had heretofore dared hope, that, for example, "the text of Isaiah preserved in the Masora (our Old Testament) was based on an extremely early textual type, which is almost identical in our

being addressed. The Lord speaks to all people not in the language of heaven or proto-Hebraic or Adamic, but ". . . after the manner of *their* language, that they might come to understanding." (D&C 1:24. Italics added.) The English Book of Mormon when it quotes the Bible follows the English of the King James version wherever possible, because that happened to be

the one official version of the scriptures known to the people for whom the Book of Mormon was translated. In short, today, as in ancient times, people are always preached to *from their own Bible*.

But the Book of Mormon follows the language of the King James Bible only as far as the latter conveys the correct meaning of the original. So far is Nephi's translation of Isaiah from being a slavish repetition of our Bible that there is hardly a single verse that is identical in the two translations! Granting that Nephi was reading a text of Isaiah barely a hundred years old, one would naturally expect some discrepancies between it and the manuscripts available to us. But how would they differ? Here a forger would be on dangerous ground indeed, and one approaches the Book of Mormon demonstration with considerable interest.

If we underline in red every word in the Book of Mormon text of Isaiah 48 and 49 that is not found in the King James Bible and vice versa we get a surprising display of color, especially in the Book of Mormon. Most of the differences are quite minor ones, such as an extra "nevertheless," "yea," "but," "behold," etc., but there are four passages that stand out spectacularly in almost solid red. They are

tion is based.²¹ Unfortunately both the Dead Sea (Cave I) text of Isaiah and the Septuagint text happen to be inferior articles, the former "rather an anticlimax" to the hopes of scholars, and the latter "among the poorest [texts] in the Greek Bible."²²

But even if we do not find the clear-cut contrasts that so gratify the student who compares other books of the Old Testament in the Qumran, Septuagint, and Masoretic versions, the case is far from hopeless, for we do find significant variations when we compare chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah in the King James (Masorete) Bible and the Septuagint. Again we compare the red markings, and again just four passages stand out, to wit, 48:1, 14, and 49:1, 13, the same passages in which the Book of Mormon conflicts with the King James! Of course a very sly and thorough operator even a hundred years ago could discover the discrepancies, since both texts were available at that time, and exploit them. But there was no exploitation. Aside from the fact that such a clever person would not run the risk of competing with the Bible in the first place, one must recognize that the coincidence was never pointed out or apparently even noticed by anybody. Moreover, in these four verses the Book of Mor-

and it does. Here is how they compare:

Isaiah 48:1

King James (Masoretic):

Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.

Septuagint:

Hear these things, house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel and who came forth out of Judah, who swear by the name of [the] Lord God of Israel, remembering [him] neither in truth nor in justice.

Book of Mormon:

Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

Isaiah 48:14

King James:

All ye, assemble yourselves, and

gospel of the Lamb, an exceeding great many do stumble"

1 NEPHI 13-29

48:1, 14, and 49:1, 13. Now one of the important results of recent Dead Sea Scrolls investigations is the recognition that the text of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament done in the third century BC opens the door to very old and valuable texts of the Old Testament that differ quite markedly from the Masoretic text on which our King James transla-

tion does not follow either the King James or the Septuagint. This too is significant, since both manuscripts are far removed from the original,²³ their disagreements showing not what the original said, but only that in these particular verses something is seriously wrong.²⁴ If Nephi's version (1 Nephi 20-21) is correct, it should differ from both the King James and the Septuagint

hear; which among them hath declared these things? The Lord hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans.

Septuagint:

And they shall all be gathered together and shall hear. Who announced these things to them? Lov-
(Continued on page 146)

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Since Cumorah

(Continued from page 103)

ing thee I have done what thou desirest concerning Babylon to the taking away of the seed of the Chaldeans.

Book of Mormon:

All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; who among them hath declared these things unto them? The Lord hath loved him; yea, and he will fulfill his word which he hath declared by them; and he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans.

Isaiah 49:1

King James:

Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from afar; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

Septuagint:

Hear ye, islands, and give attention nations [or Gentiles]. 'For a long time shall he stand,' saith the Lord. From the womb of my mother [or since I was born] he called my name.

Book of Mormon:

And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out, because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel. Listen, O isles, unto me, . . . [The rest is like the King James.]

Isaiah 49:13

King James:

Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath

comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

Septuagint:

Rejoice, [O] heavens, and celebrate O earth, let the mountains break [out] in jubilation and the hills in righteousness; because God hath had mercy upon his people and the humble of his people he has forgiven.

Book of Mormon:

Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; for the feet of those who are in the east shall be established; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for they shall be smitten no more; for the Lord hath comforted his people and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

(To be continued)

(A comparison of the variations of these scriptures will appear next month.)

FOOTNOTES

¹R. Hausfeld, in *Manknd*, 6 (November 1963), p. 50.

²IQS (Serekh Scroll), IX, 21-22.

³*Ibid.*, IV, 5-6; VIII, 11-12.

⁴Matt. 17:9; Mark 9:9; Luke 9:36.

⁵Mark 11:33.

⁶*Clementine Recognitions*, I, 52.

⁷*Ibid.*, II, 4.

⁸E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1953), I, 18-19.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹H. J. Schoeps, in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (eds.), *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 123.

¹²H. Nibley, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 50 (1959), pp. 99f.

¹³C. C. Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature* (London: H. Milford, 1945), pp. 14f.

¹⁴R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), I, vii.

¹⁵Goodenough, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁶H. Nibley, in *Church History*, 30 (1961), pp. 12f.

¹⁷Origen, *contra Celsum*, in Migne, *Patrol. Graec.*, XI, 933.

¹⁸Above, note

¹⁹F. M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 132.

²⁰*The Church News*, July 29, 1961, p. 10.

²¹Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-144, discusses the subject at length.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 132.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁴"... the question of which witness is superior is another problem," *Ibid.*, p. 133.



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