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The Witness of the Western Hemisphere

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

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CHAPTER II.

THE WITNESS OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.

One thing with reference to modern discoveries of confirmatory evidences of the Bible is singular. That one thing is the fact that all these modern discoveries of evidences are confined to the eastern half of the world, to Asia and Africa. Can it be that God left no witnesses for himself in the western half of the world? Did he ignore and leave to perish without spiritual enlightenment, or knowledge of any means of salvation, all those tribes of men, those nations and empires, that inhabited the western hemisphere through so many ages? It should be remembered while considering these questions that the scriptures teach that

God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his off-spring.^a

From this it appears that all races of men have a common origin. They are all made "of one blood," and have one common Father—God. Yet if one judge the spirit of orthodox believers in the Bible, he would conclude that this Father's anxiety had all been expended in the enlightenment of those races and nations inhabiting the eastern hemisphere. That he had made ample provision for their instruction in

^aActs, xvii: 26-38.

the ways of God, and revealed to them, through his Son, the means of their salvation; but left the untold millions of His children in the western hemisphere to perish in ignorance. No prophets instructed them; no Son of God came to announce to them the means of salvation, or proclaim by his own resurrection the reality of the future life and immortality of man. And hence no one has unearthed the half-buried cities, or examined the ruined temples, or the fallen palaces—the extent and greatness of which proclaim the grandeur of ancient America’s civilization—for confirmatory evidence of the Bible. The inscriptions upon their temple walls and monuments have not been deciphered for that purpose, nor their history and traditions investigated with that end in view, except in a few instances where men have been imbued with the idea that the aborigines of America might be the descendants of the “Lost Tribes of Israel.” These, with a few others prompted by a desire to solve the mystery of America’s ancient civilization, have explored the ruined cities, described the crumbling pyramids and temples, and remains of splendid aqueducts. They have collected and detailed their mythologies, traditions, and history; some circumstances of which bear strong evidence to the fact that the ancient inhabitants of the western hemisphere, in some way, had been made acquainted with some of the chief events of Bible history, including some knowledge of the atonement and other doctrines of Messiah. But such evidences of these facts as have been collected are not received into the almost sacred collection of modern evidences for the truth of the Bible. I do not know of a single book in which they are so received. From the profound silence enforced upon American monuments and inscriptions one would be left to suppose that they are as silent in testimony for the revealed truth of God as the birds of the South con-

continent, however resplendent in gaudy plumage, are silent as to song. It is just here, however, where the importance of the Book of Mormon is best exhibited. It is here where it can be proclaimed as the voice of the western hemisphere proclaiming the sublime truth that God did not leave himself without witness among the races and nations of men that inhabited the western world. It is here that its importance is felt as the voice of sleeping nations speaking as out of the dust to the whole world, not only vindicating the quality of justice in God, in that he did not leave the inhabitants of the western hemisphere to perish in ignorance of himself and the plan of life and salvation which had been ordained for the redemption of mankind; but also in that it bears witness to the world that the collection of books known as the Bible is the word of God, authentic, credible, and binding upon the consciences of men. It is a Witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of the truth of the Bible, which in value far surpasses all the evidences discovered in Egypt the valley of the Euphrates, the Sinaitic Peninsula, and the land of Palestine throughout the nineteenth century. Let us here consider it.

First in chronological order if not in importance, is the book of Ether within the Book of Mormon. This book of Ether is an abridgment of a very ancient American record that was engraven upon twenty-four gold plates, by a prophet named Ether, hence the name of the book. He wrote his record most likely in the early part of the sixth century B. C. The plates were discovered by a branch of the Nephite nation about 120 years B. C., and were preserved by the Nephites with other sacred records, which finally were placed in the keeping of a prophet named Moroni, about the close of the fourth century A. D. This Moroni is the one who translated the record engraven upon the plates of

Ether, an abridgment of which he placed with the Book of Mormon. The book of Ether contained an account of the most ancient events from the creation of Adam to the confusion of languages; but as Moroni supposed the information of this part of the book of Ether would be in the possession of the Jews, he did not transcribe that part of it, but began his abridgment from the confounding of the languages at Babel. The book of Ether speaks of one Jared and his brother, the latter a most remarkable prophet, living at Babel previous to the confusion of languages, and to whom the Lord revealed His intention of confounding the language of the people. At the solicitation of Jared, to whom he had imparted the knowledge of the coming calamity, this prophet besought the Lord that the language of Jared, himself, and their families might not be confounded, and the Lord had respect unto his prayer and confounded not their language; but directed the formation of a colony consisting of Jared, his brother, and their families and friends which the Lord led forth from Babylon and finally brought to the north continent of the western hemisphere. The colony grew into a great nation, occupying at least the greater part of North America, and were known to the Nephites as the people of Jared.

/ The book of Ether confirms the special particulars of the Bible concerning there being in existence a record of the creation; the existence of Adam; the erection of the tower of Babel; the confounding of languages; and the scattering of the people into all the lands of the earth.

. Second: Six hundred years before Christ, a prophet of the Lord named Lehi, being warned of the destruction of Jerusalem, departed with his family into the wilderness, traveling southward from the Holy City until he reached the borders of the Red Sea; and while camped on its shores

he received direction from the Lord that his sons should return to Jerusalem and obtain a certain record in the hands of one Laban, containing a record of the Jews and also the genealogy of Lehi's forefathers engraven upon plates of brass. Agreeable to the heavenly commandment the sons returned and after overcoming some difficulties finally succeeded in securing the records and returning with them to the encampment of Lehi. Finally, when Lehi's colony embarked for America, they brought those records with them. These records are thus described by Nephi, son of Lehi, who engraved the description in his record, at least as early as the first quarter of the sixth century B. C.:

And after they [Lehi's colony] had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass and he did search them from beginning and he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents; and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; and also the prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah. And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass, a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing from famine. And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them. And thus my father, Lehi, did not discover the genealogy of his fathers. (I Nephi (v: 10-16).)

What a testimony we have here for the truth of the Bible! What a number of its incidents are here confirmed! The Higher Criticism questions the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, but here is an entry made in an ancient record

in America at least 575 years B. C., attributing the authorship of five books to Moses, specifying that they gave an account of the creation of the world and also of Adam and Eve, "who were our first parents;" so that there can be no question as to this record brought by Lehi's colony from Jerusalem to America being identical with the Pentateuch of our Bible. In addition to the incident of the creation, and Adam and Eve, this entry upon the Nephite records also confirms the Bible narrative concerning Jacob and also of Joseph his son who was sold into captivity and taken to Egypt. Reference is made also to the subsequent exodus of Israel from the land of Egypt. Mention also is made of the prophets and their prophecies in this record, making special mention of the name of Jeremiah. Some of the writings of Jeremiah were also included in this record. The first Nephi also makes special mention of Isaiah by name, and describes in what manner he read from his writings upon the plates of brass, to his brethren.^b And what is better yet he quotes, in his record, many passages from the prophet Isaiah. At this point it is well to call attention to the fact that the Higher Criticism holds that the book of Isaiah in our Old Testament is composite, that is, it claims that it is composed by at least two, and perhaps by seven different authors; that the last twenty-seven chapters certainly were not written by Isaiah. The best answer that can be made to these claims on the part of those disposed to defend the Isaiah authorship of the book of prophecies which bears that prophet's name is to say that from two hundred years B. C. the authorship of the prophecies as they now stand in the Bible have been attributed to Isaiah. But here is testimony, in this first book of Nephi, which shows that as early

^bI. Nephi, xix: 22-24.

as 550 years B. C., a certain collection of prophecies in a record taken from Jerusalem, are attributed to Isaiah; and what is best of all a transcription is made from these prophecies into the Nephite record which corresponds to chapters xlvii, xlix, l, li, and lix, and also fragments of chapter xxix;^c being a very large amount of the very part of Isaiah's prophecies of which the authenticity is questioned. Here are at least five of the twenty-seven chapters in dispute accounted for and fragments of another, while of the first part of the prophecies of Isaiah there is a transcription into the Nephite record corresponding to chapters from two to fourteen;^d so that so far as the authenticity of the book of Isaiah's prophecies is concerned, and the five books of Moses, the Book of Mormon is the most important of all witnesses. ←

Third: Since the Nephites then, in this collection of brass plates, had the five books of Moses and the writings of the prophets down to the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, it is to be expected that in their own record-making frequent reference would be made to the brass plates and their contents, and this is the case. The first Nephi speaks of Israel's passage of the Red Sea, under the leadership of Moses; and the destruction of the Egyptian army.^e Subsequently the same writer refers to the captivity of the children of Israel in Egypt, and the grievousness of their bondage; of their escape from their slavery; their being fed with manna in the wilderness; their being miraculously provided with water from the smitten rock; the visible presence of God in the cloud by day and the pillar of light by night; the blind and rebellious spirit of the people; the judgment of

^cII. Nephi, Chapters vi, vii, viii. Mosiah, xiv. III. Nephi, xxii.

^dII. Nephi, Chapters xii-xxiv inclusive.

^eI. Nephi, Chapter iv: 2.

God upon them in the fiery-flying serpents, and the healing provided for them by looking upon the brazen serpent erected by Moses.^f

The prophet Lehi, near the close of his life, when blessing his son Joseph, refers to Joseph, the son of Jacob, of Egyptian fame, and speaks of prophecy uttered by that patriarch concerning the deliverance of the people under the leadership of Moses; and also of a future seer of the same lineage as himself, (i. e. Joseph) who would be mighty in bringing forth the word of God unto the remnant of Lehi's seed.^g In the book of Helaman will be found further reference to many of the same thing.^h Special reference is made also to the prophecy of Moses concerning the future coming of the Messiah, saying, "a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me. Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you, and it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people." Nephi follows this passage with the declaration that this prophet of whom Moses spake is the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah.ⁱ The ten commandments are quoted in the book of Mosiah, substantially as they are found in the book of Exodus.^j And thus throughout the Nephite record frequent references are made to these ancient things of the scriptures, all of which, found as they are in an ancient record, though revealed to the world through the prophet Joseph Smith in modern times, confirm the authenticity and credibility of the Bible.

Fourth: It is the Book of Mormon as a whole, however, in which its greatest value as a witness for the truth

^fI. Nephi, xvii: 23-42.

^gII. Nephi, iii.

^hHelaman, viii.

ⁱI. Nephi, xxii: 20, 21.

^jMosiah, xii-xiii.

of the Bible, and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, most appears. I mean the Book of Mormon considered apart from any reference to an abridgment of the ancient records of the Jaredites; and the transcriptions from the ancient Hebrew scriptures carried by Lehi's colony to the western world. In the Book of Mormon, so considered, we have the record of the hand-dealings of God with the peoples that inhabited the western hemisphere. We have in it the record of those things which occurred in a branch of the house of Israel that God was preparing for the same great event for which he was training the house of Israel in the eastern world, *viz.*, the advent of the Messiah, and the acceptance of the gospel through which all mankind are to be saved. This branch of the house of Israel, broken from the parent tree and planted in the western hemisphere, brought with them the traditions and hopes of Israel; they brought with them, as we have already seen, the Hebrew scriptures, the writings of Moses and of the prophets down to the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; but what is more important than all this, they came to the western world with the favor and blessing of Israel's God upon them, and Israel's peculiar privilege of direct communication with God through inspired dreams, the visitation of angels, and the voice of God. Lehi's colony was led to the western world by prophets, inspired of the Lord, their journey being marked by many and peculiar manifestations of His presence with them. After their arrival in the western world, to them a land of promise, the Lord from time to time raised up prophets among them, who instructed them in the ways of the Lord; who reproved them when overtaken in transgression; who pronounced judgments against them when persuasion was of no avail for their correction; who warned them by the spirit of prophecy of approaching disasters; and who held contin-

ually before them the hope of Israel, the advent of the Messiah, who, by his suffering and death on the cross, would redeem mankind.

It was much in this manner and for the same purpose that God dealt with His people in the eastern world; and the fact that his course with the people on the western hemisphere was substantially the same as that followed with those of the East, establishes at once his justice and mercy towards his children, and bears testimony to the great truths that God indeed is no respecter of persons, and that in every land he raises up for himself witnesses of his power and goodness.^k

Fifth: It is not alone as a witness for the authenticity and credibility of the Bible that the Book of Mormon is valuable. Great as is its value in that particular it is still more valuable as a witness for the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Previous to the coming of Messiah the Nephites^l and Lamanite prophets testified of his coming; predicted the time thereof and the signs that would accompany his advent. The signs of his birth were, first, that on the night of his nativity there would be no darkness upon the lands inhabited by the Nephites; that is, in the western hemisphere. "There shall be one day and a night and a day," said one of the prophets, "as if it were one day, and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign, for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting, therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night. Nevertheless the night shall not be darkened, and it

^kSee reflections on the course of the Lord with reference to giving revelations to all nations and races of men, chapter vii, this work.

^lThe Nephites were the followers of the first Nephi, the righteous son of Lehi, who led the colony from Jerusalem six hundred years B. C.; and the Lamanites were the followers of Laman, the oldest and wicked son of the same Lehi.

shall be the night before he is born.”^m Second: A new star was to rise, “such an one as ye never have beheld,” said the prophet to the Nephites; “and this also shall be a sign unto you.”ⁿ Third: “Many signs and wonders were to be seen in heaven,” but the nature of which is not stated by the prophet.^o

Signs of Messiah’s death were predicted. First, on the day he suffered death, the sun would be darkened and refuse to give his light, and also the moon and the stars; and darkness would cover the whole face of the Nephite lands, from the time that he suffered death until his resurrection from the dead. Second; at the time of his dying there would be thundering and lightnings; earthquakes would rend the rocks, lay mountains low, and cast up valleys into mountains; the highways would be broken up and many cities be made desolate. Third, many graves would be opened and yield up their dead, and many Saints would be raised from the dead and appear unto the living, who had not been destroyed in these judgments. These were the signs that were to give evidence to the people of the western world of the birth of the promised Christ, and of his death, and his resurrection; all of which things, in due time, came to pass, even as they were predicted. But what is better still, after the Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and after these terrible judgments had swept over the western land, destroying the more wicked part of the inhabitants, Jesus himself appeared unto the Nephite people, then inhabiting the extreme northern part of South America, and this in fulfillment of his own declaration to his disciples at Jerusalem, when he said:

^mHelaman, Chapter xiv.

ⁿHelaman, Chapter xiv.

^oThis was Samuel, a prophet whom God raised up from among the Lamanites. The above prophecies were uttered about five or six years B. C.

Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.^p

The Christ's appearance to the Nephites was first made to a multitude gathered about the temple in what was called the land Bountiful, a district of country in the north part of South America, where the isthmus joins South with North America, and including most likely part of that isthmus. He descended out of heaven and stood in their midst, announcing himself to be Jesus Christ, whom the prophets had testified would come into the world. "I am the light and the life of the world," said he, "and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father had given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ would show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven." At the commandment of Jesus, the multitude arose and came to him, and beheld the wounds in his side and in his hands. When they had all gone forth and witnessed for themselves that he was indeed the Christ, they cried out with one accord, "Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed be the name of the most high God. And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus and worshiped him."

Thus Jesus continued ministering among them for some time. Just how long he remained or how many times he appeared to them cannot be determined from the Book of Mormon. Neither is that a matter of any great import-

^pJohn, x; 16. For a somewhat extended discussion of this prophecy and its fulfillment see Part III. this work, Chapter, xxxv.

ance, but it is important that He chose twelve disciples and conferred upon them divine authority to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. He proclaimed himself to be, as will be seen from what has been said, the Son of God. He also taught that his Father, himself, and the Holy Ghost constituted one God-head; that men to be saved must believe in God, repent of their sins, receive baptism for the remission of sins, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost in order to establish complete fellowship and oneness between themselves and God and his Christ. The twelve were authorized to call to their assistance subordinate officers and organize those who accept the Gospel into the Holy Church of Christ. In addition to these doctrinal instructions Jesus delivered also the highly moral and spiritual precepts of the Gospel, delivered them, as might be expected, much in the same form as they are found in our New Testament scriptures. What is found in the Book of Mormon of his teaching so nearly conforms to the doctrines and moral precepts of the New Testament, that it becomes a mighty witness for the substantial correctness of what is recorded in the New Testament, so that the Book of Mormon is a witness of the truth not only of the Old Testament but very largely also of the New.

Among other things of importance which Jesus declared to the Nephites was the fact that it was his intention to visit "the lost tribes" of the house of Israel, reveal himself to them, and proclaim the same gospel he had delivered to the Nephites, and spoke of the time when the testimonies of the Nephites and the lost tribes of the house of Israel, with the testimonies of those among whom he had labored in Judea should be brought together in one.

Jesus also administered to the sick, the maimed and the blind among the Nephites, and showed forth the great pow-

er of God in his ministrations, falling behind in nothing, in these respects, to the miraculous powers that were displayed in his ministry in Judea; but on the contrary, in consequence of the greater faith of the Nephite people, and their righteousness, the display of almighty power went beyond the marvelous works wrought in Judea; for the greater part of the wicked among the Nephites had been destroyed by the judgments of God which preceded Messiah's coming, leaving only the more righteous part of the people to meet with him at this his glorious advent among them; and hence they were prepared to receive greater blessings at the hands of God than were the people in Judea.

The Church of Christ thus founded by the Messiah and the twelve disciples he had chosen, reaped a rich harvest in the salvation of souls in the western world. For nearly two centuries the truth of God was almost universally accepted. A reign of righteousness was enjoyed. Peace, prosperity, fraternity and happiness prevailed, and God was worshiped in spirit and in truth:

“But man is frail, and can but ill sustain
A long immunity from grief and pain
And after all the Joys which Plenty leads,
With tip-toe step, Vice silently succeeds.”

And so it was in the experience of the Nephites. Wickedness reared its head among them; pride born of self-love, took possession of the souls of some, and inroads were made in the unity and peace of the Church. These evils continued to spread until at last the spirit of apostasy was rampant, in the western world, as in the eastern; men departed from God and his ways until rebellion, disunion, and anarchy everywhere prevailed; civilization was overwhelmed; and people descended to barbarism, and, at last, for the most part, to

savagery; and in this condition they were discovered by the Europeans, near the close of the fifteenth century. But notwithstanding this decline from the religion of Jesus Christ and a high state of civilization, what had been accomplished through the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the western world was of great importance. As already stated, the harvest of souls in the periods when righteousness prevailed, was very great; and the records which had been written by prophets and holy men, and preserved with great care by the commandment of God, were destined to be of immense importance in future ages. They would proclaim with trumpet tongue the justice and the mercy of God; they would demonstrate that the Lord has in mind the salvation of all races and nations of men; they would stand forth as the most important Witness for the authenticity and general truth of the Jewish scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testaments; they would be the voice of sleeping nations testifying that Moses did write the Pentateuch; they would bear witness that Isaiah is the author of the prophecies ascribed to him; that Jesus is the Christ; that he suffered for the sins of the world, therein glorifying the Father, and accomplishing the purposes of God with reference to the salvation of men; they would bear witness that there is no name given under heaven whereby men can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and finally, those Nephite records in the Book of Mormon, would establish the great and supreme truths that God is a reality—that he lives; that man is the child of God; that he is immortal, and accountable to God for his actions; that he may be saved through acceptance and continued obedience to the gospel.

A writer held much in esteem by the orthodox Christian world—and deservedly so—in a noble work but recently issued from the press, said:

Were a parchment discovered in an Egyptian mound, six inches square, containing fifty words which were certainly spoken by Jesus, this utterance would count more than all the books which have been published since the first century. If a veritable picture of the Lord could be unearthed from a catacomb, and the world could see with its own eyes what like he was, it would not matter that its colors were faded, and that it was roughly drawn, that picture would have at once a solitary place amid the treasures of art.^b

If this be true, and I think no one will or can question it, then how valuable indeed must be this whole volume of scripture, the Book of Mormon! Containing not fifty, but many hundred words spoken by Jesus! Containing also an account of the hand dealings of God with the people inhabiting the western hemisphere, from earliest times to the fourth century after Christ. Wherein also are found his revelations to those peoples; his messages by angels sent directly from his presence to declare his word to them; his instructions, admonitions, reproofs, and warnings to them through men inspired by his Holy Spirit; and last of all, the account of Messiah's appearance and ministry among the people, his very words repeated, and rightly divided for us (as we shall see later), that we may the better understand what of his teaching is general, and what special; what universal and permanent, and what local and transient. How insignificant all the discoveries in Egypt, in ancient Babylon, Palestine, and the Sinaiatic Peninsula are in comparison with this New Witness of the western world! How paltry, valuable though they are in themselves, seem the Rosetta from old Nineveh, in comparison with this Nephite rec-

^aLife of the Master, Prologue. Rev. John Watson, (Ian Maclaren).

ord—this volume of scripture! How feeble the voice of the testimony of those monuments of the East to the authenticity and credibility of the Bible and the truth of the gospel, in comparison with the testimony found in the Book of Mormon—the voice of departed nations and empires of people speaking through their records for the truth of God—for the verity of the gospel of Jesus Christ—a voice sufficient to overwhelm unbelief and forever make sure the foundations of faith! It was mainly for this purpose that the Nephite records were written, preserved, and finally brought forth to the world, as we shall see in the following chapter.