Type: Magazine Article

Book of Mormon Controversy

Author(s): B.H. Roberts
Source: *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 50, No. 8 (20 Feb. 1888), pp. 113–117
Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: B.H. Roberts responds to Mr. Bolitho, who attempts to prove the Book of Mormon false by showing that the Book of Mormon dates of Christ's birth and death do not accord with the Bible. Roberts explains the possible differences between Nephite and Jewish calendrical systems, citing scripture and chronologists.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'

MILLENNIAL STAR.

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—ISAIAH viii, 20.

No. 8, Vol. L. Monday, February 20, 1888. Price One Penny.

BOOK OF MORMON CONTROVERSY.

MR. A. D. Bolitho of Wales, it would seem, thought it necessary to make some reply to the article on "Mormonism" written from this Office and published in several Welsh papers, and also in STAR No. 5 of this volume. He therefore wrote a communication to the *Cambria Daily Leader* from which we give the following extract, and the reply thereto by Elder Roberts, which was published in the *Cambria Daily Leader* of the 13th inst.—ED.

BOLITHO'S COMMUNICATION.

Editor Daily Leader.

Sir,—Your Mormon correspondent (Elder B. H. Roberts of Liverpool), having failed to disprove that the "Mormons, in Salt Lake City, are a drunken, licentious and murderous community," I hope he will arrive at a right conclusion of the whole matter. Mr. Roberts, a great procrastinator, has had the presumption to inform an enlightened public that the "Mormon Book," or Bible, does not conflict with the doctrines or historical facts of the New Testament. He says that it confirms them, but this is not true. I will endeavor to prove it, and if it can be proved that the "Book of Mormon" contains internal proof of its fallacy, conflicting both with itself, and with the Bible, the claim of Joseph Smith to be its inspired translator is thereby invalidated, as true inspiration cannot clash with itself. In other words, the claims of Mormonism to divine origin stand or fall with a correct answer to the simple question, was Joseph Smith a true prophet? If he was not a true prophet, the "Book of Mormon" is not true; and if I prove the "Book of Mormon" untrue, I thereby prove Joseph Smith a false prophet. This mode of argument cannot be evaded by the assumption that the Christian Bible contains discrepancies, as these may be attributed to errors in translating or transcribing; but not so in the production of Joseph Smith, as they are given at once in the English language without any chance for errors in translating. Let me now see in what way the "Book of Mormon" conflicts with the Bible. The "Book of Mormon" locates the death of Christ on the wrong day of the

month to agree with the Bible. In the "Book of Helaman," chapter 5, section 4, Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, foretells a sign to be witnessed, indicating the time of the death of Christ, this sign to consist of three days' darkness. And in the "Book of Nephi," chap. 21, sec. 2, we read, "And it came to pass, in the thirty-fourth year, in the first month, in the fourth day of the month. . . Then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. . . And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days." The prophecy of Samuel affirmed that the darkness should begin "in that day that he shall suffer." "Nephi" affirms that it began "in the thirty-fourth year, in the fourth day of the month," so this locates the death of Christ on the "fourth day" of some month. He did not die on the fourth day of the Jewish month. He died at the Passover, which falls on the fourteenth day of the first month. Here the Bible and the "Book of Mormon" are ten days at variance. The "Book of Mormon," also, locates the birth of Christ too late in the world's history to harmonize with the Bible, claiming that Lehi left Jerusalem in the first year of Zedekiah's reign (first book of Nephi, chap. 1), and that Christ's birth was "six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem" (second book of Nephi, chap. 11). But the Bible locates the first advent of Christ chronologically forty-seven years earlier; for with the first year of Zedekiah began the seventy years' captivity, which ended with the first of Cyrus, of whom God said, "He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem thou shalt be built!" Isaiah 44, 28). And Gabriel said to Daniel: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks" (Dan. 9, 25), that is sixty-nine weeks of years, or four hundred and eighty-three years. Thus, counting seventy years from the going forth of the commandment back to the first of Zedekiah, and adding the four hundred and eighty-three years to Messiah, we have just five hundred and fifty-three years from the first of Zedekiah to Messiah, instead of six hundred years, as stated in the "Book of Mormon." So the "Messiah of the Book of Mormon came too late to be the Messiah of the Bible," as well as being "crucified on a different day from the Messiah of the Bible." To claim that the Bible is right, is to condemn the "Book of Mormon" and its reputed inspired translator, Joseph Smith; to claim that the "Book of Mormon" is right, is to condemn the Bible. Which shall fall?

ELDER ROBERTS' REPLY.

Editor Cambria Daily Leader.

Sir,—I see that Mr. A. D. Bolitho has thought proper in your issue of the 30th ult. to pass some criticisms upon the article on "Mormonism" I sent you some time ago. Mr. B. opens his communication by saying that Elder Roberts "having failed to disprove that the Mormons in Salt Lake City are a drunken, licentious, and murderous community, I hope he will arrive at a right conclusion of the whole matter." I suppose Mr. B. in this sentence alludes to a former controversy I had with him respecting the character of the Mormon people, in which, it would appear, he claims for himself the victory. In justice to myself, and for the information of Mr. B., I think it proper here to state that I wrote a reply to his last letter on that subject, which was duly received at the *Herald* office and placed in the hands of the proprietor, but the manuscript was lost before it had been set up in type, and unfortunately I had preserved no copy of it. Hence Mr. B. must attribute the fact of there being no answer to his last letter on "Mormon" character to the misfortune named above. At least let him not lay the flattering unction to his soul that his wild assertions drawn from unreliable sources were irrefutable.

In his article in your issue of the 30th ult., Mr. B. undertakes to meet "Mormonism" on what, to him, must be new ground. He proposes to demolish it by showing that Joseph Smith was not a true prophet, and to

demonstrate that he undertakes to prove that the Book of Mormon conflicts both with itself and with the Bible. Mr. B. tells us that "If he (Joseph Smith) was not a true prophet, the Book of Mormon is not true; and if I prove the Book of Mormon untrue, I thereby prove Joseph Smith a false prophet." We grant those premises, but cannot agree with all he says in the next sentence, viz., "This mode of argument cannot be evaded by the assumption that the Christian Bible contains discrepancies, as these may be attributed to errors in translating or transcribing; but not so in the production of Joseph Smith, as they are given at once in the English language without any chance for errors in translating." Mr. B. has mixed matters up here not a little. If he was contending that the agreement between the original records and what we claim is Joseph Smith's inspired translation of them must be perfect, then we could see some reason for his reference to an effort to evade his argument by pointing to the discrepancies in the Bible. But that, of course, is not the question at issue. What does Mr. B. propose to do? Why, to prove the Book of Mormon untrue by proving that it conflicts with the Bible. Yet he admits there are discrepancies in the Bible. It matters not how they came there. It does not destroy their existence to say they are the results of errors in translating. And now suppose statements in the Book of Mormon conflict with those things in the Bible concerning which there are discrepancies, could he condemn the Book of Mormon for that? He certainly will not insist that the Book of Mormon ought to agree with all the discrepancies of the Bible. Mr. B.'s position is analogous to a man who proposes to square an object with what he admits is an instrument with imperfect angles.

I now come to his first alleged disagreement between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. According to the Book of Mormon, some six or seven years B.C., a prophet named Samuel told the people of the Western Continent that a sign in the heavens should be given indicating the birth of the Messiah, and also one at the time of His death, the latter to consist of three days' darkness over that land. The first event—the sign of His birth—occurred, according to the Book of Mormon Chronology, 600 years after one Lehi left Jerusalem, placing that event in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah. A few years after the sign of Messiah's birth, the people of the Western Continent began to count their years from that event; and, according to the Book of Mormon, the sign of Messiah's death foretold by Samuel the prophet, occurred in the thirty-fourth year, in the first month, and *on the fourth day of the month*, from the time that the sign of His birth was given. "This locates the death of Christ," says Mr. B., "on the 'fourth day' of some month. He did not die on the fourth day of the Jewish month. He died at the Passover, which falls on the fourteenth day of the first month," and then triumphantly exclaims—"Here the Book of Mormon and Bible are ten days at variance." But not so fast. The Book of Mormon does not state that Jesus died on the fourth day of the *Jewish* month, but on the fourth day of the first Nephite month. To make his "variance" good, Mr. B. would have to prove that the Jewish and Nephite months were identical, which he cannot do; and even if he could he would find other considerations to destroy his first "variance." Suppose last year a Hebrew had been asked what time of the year was the anniversary of the supposed crucifixion. He would reply, "At the same day as our Passover, 14th of the sacred month, or Nisan." Ask an Englishman, and he would reply—"On the eighth day of the fourth month, or April." Is there any variance here as to the *fact* concerning when the Messiah was crucified? No; the seeming variance disappears when it is known that the 14th of the Hebrew month, Nisan, corresponded with the 8th of the English month, April. So with this "variance" Mr. B. imagined he had discovered between the Book of Mormon and Bible. The fourth day of the first Nephite month would correspond with the 14th of the Jewish month, Nisan.

Mr. B. also claims that the Book of Mormon locates the birth of Messiah too late in the world's history by 47 years, to agree with the Bible. To make this appear, however, he adopts a method of arranging chronology that would make Ussher or Niehbur stand aghast. The Book of Mormon places the birth of Christ 600 years after Lehi left Jerusalem, and he left Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, hence Zedekiah first year's reign was 600 years B. C. To bring about his supposed discrepancy between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, as a basis for his calculations, Mr. B. takes the words of Gabriel to Daniel: "Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks and three score and two weeks." "That is," says Mr. B., "69 weeks of years or 483 years." Mr. B. assumes that the weeks mentioned by Gabriel are to be reduced to years by considering each week to contain seven days, and each day represent a year, giving him 483 years. "Thus," he continues, "counting 70 years from the going forth of the Commandment back to the first of Zedekiah, and adding 483 years, we have just 553 years from the first of Zedekiah to Messiah instead of 600 as given by the Book of Mormon." Hence Mr. B's conclusion that there is a difference between the Book o Mormon and the Bible of 47 years regarding the birth of Messiah. Mr. B. smilingly asks which is wrong, the Bible or the Book of Mormon. We would modestly suggest that it is just possible that Mr. B's arrangement of chronology is wrong, and at variance, not only with the Book of Mormon, but also with the accepted chronology of the Bible. To prove this, I really have only to call attention to the fact that our popular English Bible chronology follows the Hebrew arranged by Ussher, and has been placed in the margin of our Bibles by Bishop Lloyd. Your readers having Bibles with marginal references, by turning to ii. Kings, xxiv, will see that these learned chronologists fix the first year in Zedekiah's reign at 599 B.C., instead of Mr. B's 553 B.C., and 599 B.C. is so near that of Lehi's 600 B.C., that taking into consideration the possibility of slight errors in the Hebrew chronology, it is scarcely worth while questioning the difference.

Here I might rest my case; but there is more evidence of the date fixed by the Book of Mormon, Ussher, and other reliable chronologists, for the first year of Zedekiah's reign being right. According to Jeremiah xxv, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign corresponds to the 4th of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, and as Jehoiakim reigned 11 years (ii Kings, xxiii, 36), Nebuchadnezzar's first year would be seven years before first of Zedekiah. From ii. Kings, xxiv, 12, we learn that Nebuchadnezzar dethroned Jehoiachin and placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah in the eight year of his (Nebuchadnezzar's) reign. About the commencement of the Christian era Ptolemy, the mathematician, arranged a catalogue in chronological order of the kings of Babylon, commencing with Nabonassar, who reigned, according to this authority, 747 B.C., and ending with Nabonnad, 536 B.C. This chronologist places the first year of Nebuchadnezzar at 144 of the reign of the kings of Babylon, corresponding to our 604 B.C. So that if Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne in the eighth year of his reign, then the first of Zedekiah, on this authority, would be in the year 597 B.C., instead of Mr. B's 553 B.C. It will be observed that Ptolemy's celebrated astronomical canon differs from the Hebrew chronology only two years; and notwithstanding the sychronism is not quite perfect, it has long been considered by leading chronologists—Mr. Bolitho excepted—as the connecting link between sacred and profane annals (*vide* Kitto). And now comes the Book of Mormon, and shows that neither the Hebrew nor the Ptolamic chronology is far from the right.

Mr. B. after accomplishing, at least, what we may term an original chronological feat, with what he intended to be withering scorn, asks which shall fall, the Bible or the Book of Mormon? We should say neither. It stands like this: Mr. Bolitho placed his own

little chronological car on a track of his own construction and put it in motion. Suddenly it ran against a cliff of solid rock; at the first crash he imagined it had shattered the cliff. But if Mr. B. will rouse himself from his dazed state of mind and look up, he will discover the cliff his car ran against is still there unmoved, and that it is his own little, frail chronological car that went to peices in the shock; and he is standing in the midst of the wreck.

Mr. Editor, these two points are all that bear even the semblance of argument against the Book of Mormon in Mr. B's communication. The rest of his objections smack too much of the bib and rattle to call for serious consideration.

Liverpool, February 3, 1888.

HABITS OF ORDER.

—o—

EVERYONE admits the importance of orderly habits, but few realize how widely they influence the welfare of society. It is customary to rank them among what are called the minor moralities of life, and to treat the negligence which disregards them with great indulgence. Many good and great people, it is said, are very disorderly in their habits, and this is supposed to afford, if not a justification, at least an excellent excuse for the fault. It is, indeed, pitiable to see how frequently the only points in which the example of such men is followed is their imperfections, as in the case of the man who anxiously strove to imitate Mr. Emerson as a public speaker, but succeeded in attaining only one point of resemblance, viz., to misplace his notes and pause in his speeches to rearrange them. The habit of order is much more far-reaching than is generally supposed. It governs all arrangements, those of time as well as of place; it influences thought as well as action; character as well as conduct. It is the constant preventer of waste in every direction. No disorderly person can ever be truly economical. He may work hard and spend little, but economy demands the best results that can be obtained from any given source, and these can only be through orderly and systematic arrangements. The man who has acquired orderly habits will so manage his time that it shall be fruitful. He will neither idly procrastinate nor hurriedly scramble through his work; he will neither put off to-day's duty till to-morrow, nor force to-morrow's into to-day. He will provide for leisure as well as for action, for recreation as well as for labor. He will respect the time of others as well as his own, neither breaking engagements nor forcing people to spend time with him against their will. So in the matter of neatness, which is only one form of order, he will recognize its intrinsic fitness. That which is kept in its own place and preserved for its own uses, lasts longer and is of far more value while it lasts, than that which has no settled abiding place. In every manufactory or other large working institution the economy of this kind of order is fully recognized, and it is equally valuable in its proportion wherever any labor is carried on. In the home it has even a deeper significance. Here also it is the foundation of economy, but it is likewise the foundation of beauty and delight. No home that is disorderly can ever be attractive. It may be costly and luxurious, but it can never charm the eye or gladden the heart. A presiding sense of order which provides for the needs of eye and ear, which secures harmony of arrangement and consistency of detail, which ministers to that restfulness of spirit which toil and care so greatly need, is a necessary element in the good home keeper. On that she may build whatever decoration and ornament she can command, sure that each will fit into its appropriate place and fill its appropriate function, while without it they would but add to the general confusion. Also in money matters the orderly habit is invaluable. It not only avoids loss of time and trial of temper, it prevents that