



Type: Magazine Article

A Sacred History: External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon, Chapter X

Author(s): Thomas A. Shreeve

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 22, No. 15 (1 August 1887), pp. 237-238

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

Abstract: Uses historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence to prove the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Basing his facts on research done by noted linguists and archaeologists of the time, the author writes concerning the god Quetzalcoatl, religious customs and ruins of advanced civilizations, comparisons between the Hebrew and Mayan languages, and the Egyptian hieroglyphic writings. Shreeve also tells of similarities in biblical beliefs between early people of both the western and eastern hemispheres and explains why Joseph Smith was incapable of writing the Book of Mormon without divine aid.

forgive them for they know not what they do." Then will the ensign be a perfect example.

A SACRED HISTORY.

External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS A. SHREEVE.

Chapter X., Concluded.

SPEAKING of the ruins at Mitla, Baldwin says that their general character of architecture and masonry is much like that in the structures at Palenque, but the finish of the workmanship appears to have been more artistic and admirable. These ruins are remarkable among those of the country where they are found. All who have seen them speak much as Dupaix speaks of the perfection of the masonry, the admirable design and finish of the work, and the beauty of the decorations. Their beauty, says M. Charney, can be matched only by the monuments of Greece and Rome in their best days. One fact presented by some of the edifices at Mitla has a certain degree of historical significance. There appears to be evidence that they were occupied at some period by people less advanced in civilization than their builders. M. Charney, describing one of them, points out this fact. He says of the structure:

It is a bewildering maze of courts and buildings, with facings ornamented with mosaics in relief of the purest design; but under the projections are found traces of paintings wholly primitive in style, in which the right line is not even respected. These are rude figures of idols, and meandering lines that have no significance. Similar paintings appear, with the same imperfection, on every great edifice, in places which have allowed them shelter against the ravages of time. These rude designs, associated with palaces so correct in architecture, and so ornamented with panels of Mosaic of such marvelous workmanship, put strange thoughts into the mind. To find the explanation of this phenomenon, must we not suppose these palaces were occupied by a race less advanced in civilization than their first builders?

Upon the subject of the antiquity of the ruins, Baldwin remarks:

In 1520, three hundred and fifty years ago, the forest which so largely covers Yucatan, Guatemala, and Chiapa was growing as it grows now; yes, four hundred and fifty years ago, for it was there a century previous to this date, when, the Maya kingdom being broken up, one of its princes fled into this forest with a portion of his people, the Itzas, and settled at Lake Peten. It was the same then as now. How many additional centuries it had existed no one can tell. If its age could be told, it would still be necessary to consider that the ruins hidden in it are much older than the forest, and that the period of civilization they represent closed long before it was established.

In the ages previous to the beginning of this immense forest, the region it covers was the seat of a civilization which grew up to a high degree of development, flourished a long time, and finally declined, until its cities were deserted, and its cultivated fields left to the wild influences of nature. It may be safely assumed that both the forest-covered ruins and the forest itself are far older than the Aztec period; but who can tell how much older? Copan, first discovered and described three hundred years ago, was then as strange to the natives dwelling near it as the old Chaldean ruins are to the Arabs who wander over the wasted plains of Lower Mesopotamia. Native tradition had forgotten its history and become silent in regard to it. How long had ruined Copan been in this condition? No one can tell. Manifestly it was forgotten,

left buried in the forest without recollection of its history, long before Montezuma's people, the Aztecs, rose to power; and it is easily understood that this old city had an important history previous to that unknown time in the past when war, revolution, or some other agency of destruction put an end to its career and left it to become what it is now.

Moreover, these old ruins, in all cases, show us only the cities last occupied in the periods to which they belong. Doubtless others still older preceded them; and, besides, it can be seen that some of the ruined cities which can now be traced were several times renewed by reconstructionists. We must consider, also, that building magnificent cities is not the work of an original civilization. The development was necessarily gradual. Its first period was more or less rude. The art of building and ornamenting such edifices arose slowly. Many ages must have been required to develop such admirable skill in masonry and ornamentation. Therefore the period between the beginning of this mysterious development of civilized life and the first builders who used cut stone laid in mortar and cement, and covered their work with beautifully sculptured ornaments and inscriptions, must have been very long.

We have no measure of the time, no clew to the old dates, nothing whatever, beyond such considerations as I have stated, to warrant even a vague hypothesis. It can be seen clearly that the beginning of this old civilization was much older than the earliest great cities, and, also, that these were much more ancient than the time when any of the later built or reconstructed cities whose relics still exist, were left to decay. If we suppose Palenque to have been deserted some six hundred years previous to the Spanish conquest, this date will carry us back only to the last days of its history as an inhabited city. Beyond it, in the distant past, is a vast period, in which the civilization represented by Palenque was developed, made capable of building such cities, and then carried on through the many ages during which cities became numerous, flourished, grew old, and gave place to others, until the long history of Palenque itself began.

Baldwin claims that distinct eras can be traced, and upon this point says:

The evidence of repeated reconstructions in some of the cities before they were deserted has been pointed out by explorers. I have quoted what Charney says of it in his description of Mitla. At Palenque, as at Mitla, the oldest work is the most artistic and admirable. Over this feature of the monuments, and the manifest signs of their difference in age, the attention of investigators has lingered in speculation. They find in them a significance which is stated as follows by Brasseur de Bourbourg: "Among the edifices forgotten by time in the forests of Mexico and Central America, we find architectural characteristics so different from each other, that it is as impossible to attribute them all to the same people as to believe they were all built at the same epoch." In his view, "The substructions at Mayapan, some of those at Tulha, and a great part of those at Palenque," are among the older remains. These are not the oldest cities whose remains are still visible, but they may have been built, in part, upon the foundations of cities much more ancient.

Baldwin was not disposed, though he affirmed the antiquity of these ruins, to go to the extreme position occupied by some writers. In fact, he criticises the idea of one writer who says that the ruins must have existed for thousands of years when the Spaniards arrived. Baldwin adds:

If he had maintained that civilized communities were there "thousands of years" previous to that time, developing the skill in architecture, decoration, and writing, to which the monuments bear witness, it might be possible to agree with him. Some of us, however, would probably stipulate that he should not count too many "thousands," nor claim a similar antiquity for the ruins now visible. It is not easy to suppose that any of these old monuments, with their well-preserved sculptures and inscriptions, represent the first period of the ancient history they suggest, nor that they have existed as ruins many "thousands of years," for the climate of Mexico and Central America does not preserve such remains like that of Egypt. * * * * Take Copan, for instance. This city may have become a ruin during the time of the Toltecs, which

began long before the Christian era, and ended some five or six centuries probably before the country was invaded by Cortez. It was built before their time, and many features of the architecture and ornamentation show the work of their predecessors, judging by the historical intimations found in the old books and traditions. We may suppose it to have been an old city at the time of the Toltec invasion, although not one of the first cities built by that more ancient and more cultivated people by whom this old American civilization was originated. The present condition of the monuments at Quirigua is still more suggestive of great age.

ISRAEL PUTNAM.

AROUND this Revolutionary hero clings a halo of romance, so that almost every school-boy has heard some anecdote of Putnam; yet it will not be uninteresting, we hope, to glance along the history of his life and exploits.

He was born at Salem village, now Danvers, in Massachusetts, on the 17th of January, 1718. His parents were in plain but comfortable circumstances, and he received the common school education afforded by the ordinary New England town of to-day. He was a sturdy, hearty, independent boy, possessed of a generous, impulsive courage that was prompt to respond to the cry of the defenseless. It is related of him that visiting Boston in his boyhood, he was so scoffed at and ridiculed for his awkwardness by a boy nearly double his size, that, at last, his patience yielded to anger, and he administered a flagellation upon the impudent youth that he remembered for the rest of his life.

Before he attained his majority he married a Miss Pope, of Salem. She bore him ten children, and died just as the Colonial troubles were beginning. Soon after his marriage he removed to Pomfret, in Connecticut, and settled upon a tract of wild land which he had purchased. He toiled manfully to subdue the original curse of brush and bramble which enumbered his property, and the rough landscape conquered by his persevering hand soon blossomed with the fruitful harvest. He was energetic and of good judgment, and in a short time he was in a prosperous condition.

You have heard of his attacking the she-wolf in her cave, from which daring conflict he returned victorious, and immediately and deservedly became the hero of the community.

When the New England Colonies became engaged in the French war, he was one of the first to volunteer his services in the army. He was given a captain's commission, with orders to raise a company. He was soon on his way to Fort Edward with a company of men—the flower of the country—around him. In this position Putnam performed many a daring and dangerous exploit, several times narrowly escaping with his life. After this trouble had died out he returned to Pomfret.

On one occasion it is told of him, while he was attached to Abercrombie's army, he, with a single companion found himself in the darkness quite within the French lines. The sentinels fired upon them and a bullet cut a hole in Putnam's cauteen, and fourteen passed through the blanket he wore strapped to his back, while his companion escaped with only a slight wound. It was one morning in February, 1758, a fire broke out in Fort Edward and made considerable progress ere it was discovered. The garrison endeavored to check the flames without success. Putnam and a detachment of his men crossed the river on the ice as soon as they saw the fire, and reached the fort just as the flames were nearing the magazine. The water-gate was thrown open, and the men formed a line

to pass the buckets of water from the river. Putnam mounted to the roof, and as the buckets came up to him, he dashed the water upon the flames. This position of imminent danger he held until ordered down by the commander of the fort. He leaped to the ground just as the roof came crashing in. The fire was now within a few feet of the magazine and an explosion was to be momentarily apprehended. Then the hero dashed between the flames and the magazine, which was already charring with the heat, and poured pailful after pailful upon the smoking lumber, with only the heroic remark, "If we must be blown up, we will all go together." His noble example inspired like courage in those around him, and the fort was saved; but so severely was Putnam burned that he was obliged to remain a month in the hospital.

At another time he was about crossing the Hudson, nine miles below Fort Edward, and when his batteau was about to land he found himself almost precipitated into an Indian ambushade. There was no chance to save himself but to trust to the mercy of the rapids which were roaring over the rocks below. He unhesitatingly headed his boat in that direction, safely shot down over the seething flood and landed below, causing the Indians to believe that the Great Spirit had him under especial protection and they abandoned all thoughts of capturing him.

Again and again, fearful perils environed him, but he miraculously escaped. After the surrender of Montreal Putnam returned home; but in 1762, Great Britain having declared war with Spain, he, as lieutenant-colonel, accompanied this expedition. He bore himself gallantly through this campaign and returned home with well-earned laurels.

Then came the threatened troubles between the Colonies and England. British officers were much surprised that, knowing the forces of England's trained armies so well, he should side with the colonists.

"We will resist," said the hero, "and have the honor of ridding our country of the yoke of tyranny. Our fore-fathers would not bear this yoke, neither will we."

At this time he was residing at Brooklyn, on the eastern border of Connecticut. On the morning of the 20th of April, 1775, he was plowing in the field preparatory to his planting his wheat and corn. Near noon a smoking-hot steed dashed up, while a panting courier informed him of the previous conflicts at Lexington and Concord. Not a moment's hesitation followed. He unyoked his cattle from the plough, and calling to the lad who had been driving them to run for his coat, Putnam dashed for his stable and saddled his fleetest horse. Catching his coat from the boy, he leaped upon his steed's back, and thundered away towards Cambridge. There, late at night, he reported himself to General Ward. Fierce eloquence and fiery counsel was followed by rapid action in those trying times. It would fill many a page to narrate his deeds of valor.

When the Colonists were first driven from Bunker Hill he was beside himself with rage. He tried to rally the men. Seizing the Connecticut flag in one hand, he brandished his sword with the other, and hoarsely shouted to them to rally. "Make a stand! make a stand. One more shot: in God's name, give them one more!" he pleaded; but the panic-stricken men continued their flight, only he rallied a few, and with them fortified Prospect Hill. Two days after that battle, Putnam was appointed one of the four major-generals of the Continental army.

Many a disaster to the undisciplined troops was prevented by the invincible energy of this flinty hero. In forced