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Study of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: An address encouraging Book of Mormon study. Tells of the finding of Egyptian characters by Augustus LePlongeon among the Mayans and traditions of Christ's ministration among the American Indians.

ourselves reasonably familiar with the works of the great men of the world, then and only then, may we hope to preach connected and interesting discourses. Having filled the storehouse, God will draw from its treasures, and even add to its abundance as the occasion requires. But the slothful servant deserving nothing will receive nothing, for God is just. When we fully appreciate our duties as public teachers in these respects, we may expect to cease preaching rambling, uninteresting and valueless sermons. If our readers will pause for a moment and run over in their minds those Elders whom they regard as the best speakers of their acquaintance, they will, upon further reflection, conclude that they are interesting because they are instructive, and that their public addresses show every evidence of hard study and laborious thought. It is a lamentable fact that most of the preaching among the Latter-day Saints falls short, far short, of what is required by the nature of our message. God will add to our

store only when we have mastered and put into practice what he has already given us. We alone stand between ourselves and a perfect knowledge of God. Let us then awaken to our duties and privileges and acquaint ourselves with the laws of the Eternal One.

We are able to publish a number of the lectures delivered on the occasion of the late annual conference in this the May number, on account of the delay in its issue.

Scribner's Magazine is rapidly assuming an enviable position among the American "Monthlies." A series of articles "About Railways," in addition to other interesting matter, will shortly appear in this valuable magazine, among which will be The Building of a Railway, Railway Engineering Feats, Locomotives and Cars, Passenger Travel, and The Railway Employees, Life. The articles will be fully illustrated and promise to be of an interesting nature.

STUDY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

THE Book of Mormon is the most perfect historical work in existence. What the Bible is to the old world, the Book of Mormon is, and more, to this hemisphere. Within its covers are contained descriptions of the peopling of these lands of North and South America, of the rise and fall of nations, of the extermination of races, and of the most sublime method of government ever given to mankind.

The enemies of this book call it the Golden Bible. They mean to be sarcastic; but they are only truthful. It is a golden bible; for truth is precious as gold. In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, "The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our sacred religion."

At this hour, more than ever, it is im-

portant that the young people of Zion should be instructed in the principles of the Gospel which God has revealed by the ministrations of angels, and by His own voice from the heavens. The spirit of infidelity is rushing like a tidal wave upon Christian lands, and some of its effects are felt even here, among the youth of our mountain home. Some of these may be unable to withstand the effects of its shocks, because they are not fortified by an intimate knowledge of the principles revealed in the Book of Mormon, and taught by the Prophets of God. The book should be carefully studied; because, without an intimate knowledge of it, we are ignorant, no matter what else we know. Every man in this Church is, or should be, a minister of salvation unto the world. We would not think much of a sectarian minister who attempted to teach Chris-

*Lecture by Thos. A. Shreeve, read at the Y. M. M. I. A. Conference, June 2, 1888.

tianity who yet was ignorant of the simple things in the New Testament. We would not think much of a professed teacher of mathematics who was ignorant of the rules of multiplication and division. The Mutual Improvement Associations have been formed for the purpose of advancing our young men in intellectual and moral principles; that the youth may be able to receive and discharge the duties of the Priesthood, whenever called to do so by the servants of God. There is no other book in existence which can be compared with the Book of Mormon as an instructor in the ways of the Lord. Its pages contain examples of noble lives, devoted to good and righteous principles—such devotion as can seldom be found in the world's history. The doctrines which it inculcates are of the most sublime character; yet they are so simple that the wayfarer need not err therein. The study of the work, therefore, should be constant, earnest, and prayerful. If we address ourselves to the book, with an eye single to the glory of God, He will enlighten our minds, and give us a marvelous comprehension of hidden things.

I regard the proper study of the Book of Mormon as comprising a very wide range of research. We should not only know the book; but we should become acquainted with all the sacred and profane history bearing upon its subject matter. When men study the Bible they make themselves acquainted with the scores of great works which have been written by men who have delved among the ruins of the past, and have brought to light much information relating to the habits of ancient people. They study Bible dictionaries written by men of great learning, which explain the meaning of the important words in the Bible, give careful descriptions of places, give biographies of men, and shed a world of light upon matters, which, without their aid, would be too dark for the uneducated reader. Men, without the direct knowledge we possess, are willing to give their entire lives to the study and explanation of the Old and New Testaments. Some of us think we are doing

pretty well if, in the course of twenty-five years, we have devoted twenty-five hours to the grandest work ever upon the earth. It is enough to bring the blush of shame upon our faces when we watch with what earnestness the sectarian world pursues its study of the Bible, and then gaze upon the careless fashion with which our own people peruse the Book of Mormon.

It is true, very few books have been written in explanation of "The Golden Bible." One reason is that it does not need an explanation; because, as I have said, though sublime, it is simple, even to the understanding of a child. But there are many external proofs of the truth of this book; many facts of geography, natural history, language, tradition, and ruined cities, with which every young man in Zion should become acquainted. They need not fear that these external proofs do not exist. There is already an abundance, and they are accumulating year by year, so that even now it would take months of the most ardent and persistent study to inform one's self of all the vital facts which scientific men of the world are obtaining for us. We should feel humiliated, because we give so little attention where so much has been done for us, and is being done without effort on our part. With no apparent object in view, scientific men will spend their lives and their fortunes to uncover ruined cities, and bring to light the life of the past. They do not know they are doing this work for us. While we, either through ignorance or selfishness, allow that work to go unheeded. Out of the almost inexhaustible store of material, I have only time to draw two or three illustrations to enforce my meaning and prove my point. When Joseph Smith gave the Book of Mormon to the world, skeptics found much to scoff at. The book claimed that the ancient Egyptian language had been known to the priests who dwelt upon this land. The world said, "How ridiculous! This foolish and ignorant young man disproves his own work in the very beginning, because neither Egyptian nor Hebrew was ever

known on this continent!" Scientific men have found that inscriptions were made, and records kept on this continent in this language. In 1886, fifty-nine years after Joseph Smith was engaged in this translation, a great Central American explorer named Augustus Le Plongeon gave to the world a book called "Sacred Mysteries Among the Mayas," in which he asserts and proves what no man will probably dare contradict, that ancient Egyptian inscriptions were made upon Maya structures ages ago. He gives the alphabet as he found it, and it is a duplicate of the ancient Egyptian alphabet as shown on the Rosetta stone found at one of the mouths of the River Nile nearly a century ago. It is found that among the Chiapanecs, a branch of the Mayas, and one of the most ancient races of Central America, many Hebrew words are used in common speech. The Chiapanec and Hebrew words are almost identical for son, daughter, father, star in zodiac, king, name applied to Adam, afflicted, God, September, more, rich, Seth (son of Adam), to give. These discoveries ought to be convincing to any reasonable man, however skeptical he may have been.

The scoffers were wont to ridicule the Book of Mormon for describing the ministration of Christ upon this continent; yet all the recent discoveries unite to prove that the peoples upon these lands once knew the Savior, and His mission, although they have since fallen into idolatry. In many ruins, which have existed for centuries, the cross has been found, especially as a sacred emblem. Acosta gives a tradition, which is repeated by Claverigo and Dr. McCulloch, which says that at a certain festival in the City of Mexico, it was anciently the custom at certain ceremonies and consecrations to sacrifice an image as they sacrificed their human victims, "and his body was broken into small pieces, which, together with those portions called his flesh and bones were distributed among the people who received the same with tears and reverence. With them it was an admirable thing, saying that they did eat the flesh and bones of

God, wherewith they were grieved. Such as had any sick folks demanded thereof for them, and carried it with great reverence and devotion." This is an extraordinary ceremony, thought so by Catholic priests, who invaded Mexico at an early day. The priests found it existing there, and some of them called it the ministrations of the devil to counterfeit the holy sacrament. They had to explain it in some way, and this seemed the most feasible theory. These are startling proofs, and they are but few out of the countless array. Is it not amazing that the young people of Zion will remain in ignorance of this wonderful book and the principles it contains, while men of the world will spend their fortunes and their lives to search out the smallest detail connected with the ancient life in these lands?

We are now confronted with the question of how we shall study the Book of Mormon to secure the best and speediest results for the young people! In the current volume of the CONTRIBUTOR, commencing with the November number, a programme of exercises is given for the Improvement Associations to follow. Among other things it gives the subjects which are intended for lectures, namely: The Bible, Testament and Book of Mormon. These exercises have been laid out on a very simple but effective plan. These lectures are each to occupy about ten or fifteen minutes. When the associations convene for the winter, classes should be formed to take up these subjects, with these lectures as a basis. This would give a definite plan to work to. As many of the young people as possible should be urged to join the Book of Mormon classes, and it should be pointed out to them that these principles are only to be learned by degrees, and that it will require unceasing labor and systematic work to graduate in this study. The details are so vast in their character that diligent investigation is necessary to become thoroughly acquainted with the internal truths which the book contains. Each member of the class should be encouraged to read it through at home. I care

not how fast for the first time, so long as he is able to get a general idea of the historical thread; to know what the book is about; who wrote it; why it was written; and how it came into our possession. To secure the best results the young men need a guide and helper. Therefore, I think a teacher should be appointed to take charge of the class. He should be a man of faith, with a thorough understanding of the subject, having the Spirit of the Lord with him; a man having tact and intelligence to rear young and guide untrained minds. The more he knows, the better, because his class will recognize his ability and will respect him the more. He ought to give a great deal of time to the preparation of these lectures. He should have a great willingness for work and enough courage, so that he would not grow despondent if he did not make much headway at first. If he will seek earnestly to maintain an interest, he will find that in a few weeks his efforts are beginning to bear fruit. He should say very little; but that little should be to the point. Such a man, with the Spirit of the Lord to assist him, will do more good in six months at home, in such a class, than he could possibly accomplish in twelve months abroad—that is, if he will work at home with as much attention as he would in the missionary field. At the first meeting of this class the teacher should give a sketch of the book and a general idea of its contents. He should appoint one of the members of the class to give the first lecture at the second meeting. The student should receive from the teacher all necessary information as to how long a time he should occupy, and how he is to present the subject; with a little instruction as to the strongest points to be made. The first lecture subject given in the CONTRIBUTOR plan is "Zedekiah, King of Judea," "Lehi's Vision and Nephi's Return to Jerusalem." So much is comprised in these titles, that the matter would have to be very carefully arranged to bring it within the prescribed time. This could be the first lecture in the class, and the plan outlined in the CONTRIBUTOR ought

to be followed from that time on. The teacher should request all the members to read up the subject of the lecture, so that when the speaker is delivering his address they can follow him. When he has finished, ten minutes should be allowed for a discussion of the subject, making the time occupied by this class in the programme about twenty-five minutes. Where a speaker has not made it plain, the teacher ought to make the necessary explanations or call upon some one of the students to make them. He should encourage the class to ask questions whenever a doubt arises, and no question should be passed by till every member of the class thoroughly understands it in all its bearings, so that no wrong impressions may be left. He should instruct his students to read the book attentively at home, and to keep by them a little note book in which to enter questions on the subjects in hand. In every chapter of the work there are many things which young readers may not readily understand, relating to the history of the people, their habits and mode of life, geography, architecture and animals, which also suggest many doctrinal points. And, while I am upon this point, I will suggest such a plan to all readers of the book. Everyone who peruses the Book of Mormon for close study should keep by his side a little book in which to enter inquiries. He should never allow anything to pass by without thoroughly understanding it. By a careful search he may be able to understand many of these things himself; but where he cannot do so he should communicate with some one who knows more about the matter than he does.

At the commencement of the session, the teacher should announce how much of the book the class is expected to cover in the season. By this means the members will spend their reading hours on this portion of the book. I think this study will be very interesting and profitable if the presiding officer will only endeavor to make it so.

When a member of the class is absent, the teacher should look after him and

ascertain the cause of his absence. If one is a little backward he should be encouraged and assisted in his labors.

Giving to each member of the class an opportunity to speak from his own study and observation of the subject in hand will result in making him thoughtful; and, as his remarks will be subject to review in the class, he will learn to be precise and careful in his utterances.

About every three months the teachers should have a class review from the list of questions which he has preserved from the lectures during that period. By this means he will be able to show the progress of the class and its individual members.

The question will be asked, Where shall we get our teachers for these classes? It is an important inquiry. We would not send our children to a day school where the teacher was incompetent to impart the rudiments of education to fit them for the commonest duties of life. But in these Associations where our future missionaries, Bishops and Apostles are to be taught the principles which are of the utmost importance for time and all eternity, the sacred things of everlasting life, we often take it for granted that anyone will do to preside. Many of those who are chosen for presidents are no better qualified than are the persons they are called to teach. Wherever possible, the president should be a man fit to take charge of a class such as the one I have described. He should be one who takes pride in preparing himself to fill this high office among the young of Zion. But if the officers of the Associations cannot take charge of these classes, the best qualified Elders in the Ward ought to be invited to perform that important duty, and consider it in the light of a mission. It is especially important that a competent teacher should be found for the Book of Mormon class. The Prophet called this work the keystone of our religion; and it is of vital importance that the young men should obtain a thorough understanding of the work, so that they will not fall into any error concerning its history, through a failure

on the part of their teacher to properly understand his subject. The teacher should be one who not only studies the Book of Mormon, but who is sufficiently interested to push his inquiries into the field of recent exploration and discovery bearing on the subject. Some recent sketches in the *Juvenile Instructor* may possibly impart some ideas to the young men upon this branch of the subject; and if the purpose of issuing a book on the external evidence of the sacredness of the history, should be fulfilled, the teachers and students will have already means of reference. In the meantime, however, every young man has it in his power to become, in one sense, an original discoverer. A vast amount of truth reposes in the many books which are constantly being issued in this country and abroad, concerning ancient life, peoples and cities; and by an attentive perusal of such works, the young man may extract the golden metal.

If the course suggested shall be pursued for a few years, the young men of this Territory who go abroad as missionaries, will take pride in talking of the Book of Mormon. Heretofore, it has been the case, I fear, that our missionaries have avoided quoting from the book, because they did not thoroughly understand the work and its origin and could not defend it against the people of the world. But armed with an array of proofs of the origin of the sacred history and all the external evidences of its authenticity, a young man may quote from the Book of Mormon to the most learned with absolute confidence that he can defend himself and the work against all opponents. I do not believe that any man of average sense can read this book carefully, examine the internal evidences, and then study the external proofs, without being convinced of the absolute truth of the work, and of Joseph Smith's mission. I do not know of any other method which would prove so effective in checking the spread of doubt and infidelity in these valleys. I do not know of any other study which will purify the souls of our young men so quickly. I do not know of any other study which

will render them more obedient to their parents and to the Priesthood of the living God. It is the grandest work ever placed in the hands of man. When we neglect it to search after other things, we are as one who turns from the light of the sun, and goes into the darkness to follow a glow worm. I wish the par-

ents in Zion could realize how much it is their duty to their sons and daughters to lead them into an earnest and prayerful study of this book. For any young man who will faithfully pursue the study of the "Golden Bible," will obtain a testimony that it is a revelation of God's Eternal Truth to man.

ASSOCIATION INTELLIGENCE.

BIBLE.

Lecture XIX.—Commission of Moses. Time, 1491 B. C. Subdivisions: The burning bush on Mount Horeb; the message of the Great I Am; Moses' meekness; the rod of power; Moses' journey to Egypt; Moses and Aaron. Reference, Exodus iii, iv.

Lecture XX.—Preparation for Israel's release from bondage. Time, 1491 B. C. Subdivisions: The Elders' conference; the official message to Pharaoh; the increased tasks; the crushed spirit of the Israelites; Jehovah's renewed covenants respecting Israel; Moses' unheeded counsels. Reference, Exodus iv, v, vi.

Lecture XXI.—The ten plagues. Subdivisions: The superiority of God's power over that of the sorcerers; the waters changed to blood; the plague of frogs and lice baffling the enchanters; the fly plague favoring Goshen; the cattle disease; the boil affliction disabling the magicians; the hail storm with great electric phenomenon; the locusts; the smiting of the first-born of Egypt (a sacrifice to willfulness.) Reference, Exodus ix, xii.

TESTAMENT.

Lecture XIX.—The resurrection of our Savior. Subdivisions: The Christian Sabbath dawn; the angel of life awful to the guards but comforting to the friends of Jesus; His refusal to be touched before ascending to His Father; the bribing of the guards by the high priests. Reference, Matt. xxvii; Mark xvi; Luke xxiv; John xx; Acts i.

Lecture XX.—From the resurrection to the ascension. Time, 33 A. D. Subdivisions: His appearance to Mary; His

walk and talk with two of the disciples unrecognized; His appearance to the eleven; His last will and testament. Reference, Matt. xxviii; Mark xvi; Luke xxiv.

Lecture XXI.—The ascension. Subdivisions: Christ's sudden disappearance from the eleven disciples; the wonderment of the men of Galilee who witnessed the ascension; the testimony of the two heavenly escorts as to His return to the earth. Reference, Mark xvi; Luke xiv; Acts i.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Lecture XIX.—Administration of King Mosiah, son of Benjamin. Time, 124 B. C. Subdivisions: The farmer king; the Lehi-Nephi searching party; meeting of King Limhi the Zarahemlaite; Ammon's historical address; the twenty-four gold plates and ancient armor. Reference, Mosiah i, chap. vi to viii.

Lecture XX.—Administration of King Mosiah continued. Subdivisions: Zeniff's record; Noah the king and Abinadi the prophet; Alma and the waters of Mormon; Gideon and Limhi; Ammon the leader out of bondage. Reference, Mosiah ix to xxii.

Lecture XXI.—Administration of King Mosiah continued. Subdivisions: Alma and his people; the flight of Helam; the captivity; popular education among the Lamanites; Amulon the petty tyrant; the miraculous easing of burdens and deliverance of the people of Alma; the union with the people of Mosiah. Reference, Mosiah xxiii and xxiv.

What makes great men? Wealth.

What makes men great? Goodness.