

What I Believe About the Book of Mormon

That Its Coming Was Prefigured in Scripture.

By Arthur Oakman

The prophets of Israel taught that God regarded man impersonally. Every man was, equally with his fellows, the object of Jehovah's affection; and whenever God spoke it was for the purpose of instructing all men everywhere in his ways. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth." "Shall not the judge of the whole earth do right?" Even King Cyrus was girded by God. Even if the lawyers who were contemporaries of Jesus tried to teach that the action of God was limited to the redemption of Judah from Roman



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bondage, and thus confined to their race, it is certain that the inspired prophets of earlier times did not hold this view. The earliest patriarchs of Israel prophesied that Jehovah would bless men "to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills." (Genesis 49: 22-26.) Isaiah held that all nations are objects of God's affection. He visions Egypt and Assyria linked together in one faith.

In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of mine hands, and Israel mine inheritance.—*Isaiah* 19: 24, 25.

Malachi discerns that:

In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, . . . for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Malachi* 1: 11.

Jesus recognized this conception of God, inherent in the religion of the prophets, confirming it when he told the doctors of the

law that the kingdom was to be taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. While his work was to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," he told his followers that he had other sheep that were "not of this fold," (Judah) who were to be the objects of his consideration and teaching. (John 10: 14-16.)

The Apostles recognized that their commission to preach the gospel to "all nations" would mean that the power of God would reach outside of Judah. Thus Peter,

after due discipline, comes to recognize that God "is no respecter of persons," but that "in every nation he that worketh righteousness is accepted with God." Paul declares that the purpose for national existence is that men shall "feel after God, and find him." (Acts 10: 34, 35; 17: 26, 27.)

Recognizing, therefore, this implicit teaching of the prophets and apostles, there is no reason to limit the *expectancy* of sacred literature to any nation or people. In fact, the study of comparative religions has helped us recognize that there is some degree of inspiration in the literature of the religions of the Far East. If Paul's statement regarding the purpose of national existence be true, the recognition of this Eastern inspiration would point to the working of a Universal Spirit, preparing the ground for a fuller revelation of God.

Moreover there is outlined in the *Bible* the
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intimation that there would be produced such literature, inspired writing, purposely to further the work of God in the final redemption of all men. It must be remembered that the "house of Israel" does not refer strictly to the Jews, only as they are part of it. All Jews are members of the "house of Israel," but certainly the house of Israel is not confined to Judah. Judah was one of twelve sons. Israel was their father. Those who were scattered among all nations are, equally with the Jews, members of the house of Israel, and "lost sheep" to whom Jesus was sent. Prophetic vision indicates that God will redeem Israel as a nation, and that the history of all men will move toward a finality when "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3.) Ezekiel visions this restoration of Israel, which is to be accompanied by a resurrection from the dead, and the infusion of the Spirit of God into national life. This gathering is to be furthered by the action of God in taking the "stick of Joseph" and putting it with the "stick of Judah."

The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick and write upon it, For Judah and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions. And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be one in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.—*Ezekiel* 37:15-22.

Ezekiel here indicates that there would come forth a stick (record) of Joseph, which

was, with the stick (record) of the Jews, to further the purpose in gathering the children of Israel. He was told to dramatize the coming of this record before the eyes of the people. This was a common practice among the prophets. There was to be no mistake that such a record would be disclosed, and that it would be disclosed by God.

What was this "stick of Joseph"? Evidently, as it was to be used with the "stick of Judah," it is a similar work—supplementary. The stick of Judah here referred to is undoubtedly the Scriptures referred to by Jesus. Sacred literature then, would come from Joseph, another of Jacob's sons. As "Judah" had written, so also would "Joseph" write; and the two works would be joined together in the hands of a prophet who would teach people about the purposes of God.

Both Jacob and the later Moses foretell the destiny of Joseph:

And he [Israel, Jacob], blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk. . . . bless the lads; . . . and let them grow into a multitude in the *midst of the earth*.—*Genesis* 48:15, 16.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; . . . who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under . . . unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.—*Genesis* 49:22-26.

This latter blessing is confirmed in almost identical words by Moses, just prior to his death. (Deuteronomy 33:13-16.) It was from this people, who were to grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth, that the record was to come. They were the seed of Joseph. Their blessing was above the blessing of the fathers of Jacob. Israel received Palestine as his inheritance, but Joseph's bough was to run over the wall; it could not be contained within the confines of the garden. The *Book of Mormon* teaches that the children of Joseph came to America, and grew into a multitude, "in the midst of the earth."

Isaiah sees the time when an ensign is to be lifted up, from "the land shadowing with wings." This was to occur at a time when,

just before the "harvest," God was to prepare all nations for his coming. (Isaiah 18.) He sees a time of spiritual confusion and darkness, when the national sense of Israel has become warped, and the vision of the prophets dimmed, and Palestine a barren waste. But he is not without hope. "The deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity." This spiritual quickening was to be the direct result of the miraculous action of God in producing sacred literature.

The vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this I pray thee: and he saith I can not for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said, For as much as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips to honor me, . . . and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.—*Isaiah* 29: 11-14.

This work was to be accomplished in direct contravention to the wisdom of men. It was for the purpose of quickening spiritual understanding "they also that erred in spirit, shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." (Verse 24.) "Is it not a little while," says Isaiah, "and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field. . . ." "In that day," he continues, "shall the deaf hear the words of the book." These words were to be the means through which spiritual hearing was to be given to a people who had grown deaf, simply because there was no sound of the word of God. David also makes this observation:

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase.—*Psalms* 85: 10-12.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the Jews were expelled from Palestine, and the country became a barren waste. The Crusades were fought under extreme physical hardships in what was almost a wilderness. Since the appearance of the *Book of Mormon*, how-

ever, Palestine has undergone a marvelous transformation both agriculturally and politically. Organized Zionism contemplates the return of the Jews to Palestine to reinherit their ancient covenant land. These movements all point to the fulfillment of prophecy. Right now, men are beginning to think of the contribution that Israel can make to modern civilization, if it rededicates itself to the spirit of the prophets. William Orton believes that the inspired leadership now so much needed can come from Israel. (*Harpers*, under the caption, "*The Challenge to Israel*," November, 1931.)

We believe that this book which was delivered to him that is not learned is the *Book of Mormon*, which was miraculously translated by Joseph Smith a little over a hundred years ago. It is the "stick of Joseph," referred to by Ezekiel. It is confirming many people in the knowledge that God has "neither slumbered nor slept," but is, even now, working through history towards the finality told of by the prophets of old.

The claims made by the *Book of Mormon* then, are not in disharmony with the prophets of old, but are directly confirmed by them. While it is not explicit in so many words, that the *Book of Mormon* is the sealed book of Isaiah, and the stick of Joseph, it is surely implicit. There is no direct statement that the "Shiloh" of Genesis 49: 10, is Jesus-ben-Joseph, the Nazarene, the carpenter's son; but subsequent history has certainly shown that he is there referred to. By the same reasonable inference did Philip the apostle convince the Ethiopian Prince that the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 was the risen Christ. In the same way do we justly infer that the *Book of Mormon* is the sealed book of Isaiah 29.

The belief that the *Book of Mormon* appeared miraculously is not inharmonious with the normal action of the God of the prophets of Israel. He has always been a God of miracles. Isaiah says that it is to be a "marvelous work and a wonder." It does seem astounding that a young unlearned lad such as Joseph Smith undoubtedly was, should translate "by the power of God," yet

this is the theme of the Prophet Isaiah. "I [God] will take the stick of Joseph . . . and they shall be one in *mine* hand." (Ezekiel.) This was to be the work of God. For over one hundred years this church has claimed this thing. It seems to me that the basic question is belief in God. Belief in the kind of God who can work miracles. For me the question is not, "Was Joseph Smith deceived?"; but, "Did God give the *Book of Mormon* to the world?" We have seen no reason for limiting the production of sacred literature to Palestine. Rather, that the word of God coming from Palestine, points to other work of similar nature from "the land shadowing with wings," (America). The question of the divinity of the *Book of Mormon* rests not upon the testimony of Joseph Smith alone, but upon belief in God.

The question may be raised, "Why is there not more reference to the *Book of Mormon* in the Old and New Testaments?" It must be remembered it was not the sole purpose of prophecy to foretell the future. The

prophets were effected by the political and social conditions of their times, and it is to these conditions that their words are primarily addressed. The purpose of prophecy is to teach men about God, and only in so far as a vision of the future would serve to do just this thing, were the prophets concerned about foretelling future events. Considering this, it is a very significant thing that as much reference is made. Even from the days of Jacob and Moses, both of whom prophesied rich blessings on the seed of Joseph; on through the days of Isaiah and Ezekiel, who foretold of the coming forth of the record of Joseph; even down to the days of Jesus, who said, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold, them also *must I bring*, and they shall hear *my* voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"; inspired men did point to the work of God being accomplished outside of Judah.

Basically, then, belief in the God of the prophets and of Jesus means belief in the *Book of Mormon*.

Our Ancient Liberties

"Our ancient liberties" are not valueless. But they have worth as symbols, not as inviolable rules. They define the scope of liberty. They recall that our forefathers so prized these few simple rights that they imbedded them in their fundamental law. Yet these rights have never lived save as men by their struggles breathed life into them. They have nevertheless for generation after generation set a standard of what freedoms were worth living for—and worth dying for—and they still inspire us to love and defend our own liberty.

Liberty can not be inherited. It must be won and won fresh for each issue in every generation. Our fathers' liberties are little help to us. The old spirit may free us, but never the old words. If we love liberty and fight for it, these guarantees are full of meaning. But if we indolently imagine that liberty descends on us from above, these phrases are vain and deceptive slogans. We have no ancient liberties, only our own! The written

words are but memoranda to keep our liberties in our minds. The defenders of liberty prove generally to have been bitter partisans crying the guarantees as war-cries in the heat of battle. The principle of natural rights has authority only as a reminder that the soul of the individual man has in it something of worth, not created by his society. The courts turn out to be not the omniscient interpreters of impartial justice, but rather the stimulators of new rebellions. That public opinion from which the judge draws his sanctions and to which we have been told to look for the preservation of our ancient liberty too often reveals itself as but the voice of a herd whose will it is to crucify, then sanctify, its saviors.

Yet, if with such frail liberties we have come thus far; if so many men have died for their ideas, and these ideas somehow come true, shall we not cherish what liberties we have and learn to make them greater?—
Leon Whiffle.