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Concerning the Urim and Thummim

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Abstract: This article argues that the Urim and Thummim used by Joseph Smith was the same employed by the Israelites as mentioned in the Bible. The Mulekites brought it to the American continent and it was handed down through the generations and finally buried with the plates that Moroni gave to Joseph Smith.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 1914.

EDITORIAL.

CONCERNING THE URIM AND THUMMIM.

THE Urim and Thummim were instruments that were anciently provided as part of the furnishings for the use of the priesthood who ministered in the tabernacle and temple service under the Mosaic dispensation. Their history and use are confined to that period of time, according to the Biblical record. No description of them is therein given, and so nothing can be learned from that source respecting their size, shape, substance and general appearance. It may, however, be inferred from the fact that they were to form part of the ornamentation of the "breastplate of judgment"—an appurtenance belonging to the Aaronic Priesthood—that they were not large, but must have been of exquisite workmanship. Fastened to this, they were always to be worn by the priest when he went before the Lord in his official capacity, as we learn from the following scripture: "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually. And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually" (Ex. 28: 29, 30).

The Hebrew meaning of the words "Urim" and "Thummim," is "Lights" and "Perfections," which, in the Septuagint—an early Greek version of the Hebrew—is rendered by terms that signify "Manifestations" and "Truth." The names of these instruments, then, are suggestive of the use for which they were designed by the Almighty, namely: to make known truth without any admixture of error. But notwithstanding the universal service for which their names imply an adaptation, it appears from the sacred record that their use was restricted to making known the will of God concerning the more difficult matters of a material or temporal nature that demanded the attention of His people. The view that they were to be employed in solving problems of this nature only, is founded upon what is said in Numbers 27: 18-21, and in other texts, in none of which is any reference made to things that are essentially spiritual. Thus in the passages just cited, we read: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and

set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation" (Num. 27: 18-21).

In what manner the will of the Lord was made known by means of the Urim and Thummim, can be conjectured only. A number of different opinions have been proposed; but as none of them can be considered as of more value than mere surmises, no time will now be occupied with their consideration. It is worthy of notice, however, that apparently only those whose righteousness made them acceptable to God, were granted manifestations of His will by their means, even in temporal concerns. An instance in point occurred in the life of Saul, as recorded in I. Sam. 28: 4-6 in these words: "And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." These quotations contain about all the information, we believe, that the Biblical record gives concerning the history, use, etc., of these sacred instruments, and with the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians all definite trace of them is lost, so far as Israelitish history or tradition is known. The Jews of times after the captivity say that several things, which made that temple so glorious in their sight, were not in the temple of Zerubbabel, nor in that of Herod, with all its grandeur; and among the things lost were the Urim and Thummim—the others being the Shechina, the tables of the law written by the finger of God Himself, and Aaron's rod that budded. What became of them is a question, we believe, that none of the ancients attempt to answer.

It is claimed, however, by some of the membership of this Church that the Urim and Thummim spoken of in the Bible are the identical "seer stones" used by Joseph Smith in translating the originals of the Book of Mormon records. This opinion is regarded as absurd by our enemies; but one purpose of these remarks shall be to show that there is quite a degree of probability to sustain it. But before coming directly to this point, some other relative matters shall be considered, and among them is a statement made in the Book of Mormon concerning the time when the Lord first provided the Urim and Thummim, or instruments of their class, for the use of His saints.

It appears from the work just named that a number of Nephites, who formed part of a community which may be known as the people

of Limhi, discovered certain gold plates upon which were engraven some Jaredite records in an unknown language. They were delivered to king Mosiah and were finally translated by means of some "seer stones," or "interpreters," which were in his possession. Though these instruments were not by the Nephites called Urim and Thummim, yet the use which they were made to serve on that occasion, harmonizes so nicely with the meaning of these names, as already noted, and with the uses to which the quoted scriptures from the Bible show such instruments were put by the ancient Israelites, that it seems almost certain the "interpreters" of the Book of Mormon history and the Urim and Thummim of the Bible records, were identical in character. Speaking of them the Book of Mormon says: "And now he translated them (the Jaredite records) by the means of those two stones, which were fastened into the two rims of a bow. Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages; and they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land, the iniquities and abominations of his people, and whosoever has these things is called seer after the manner of old times" (Mos. 28: 13-16). Here there are mentioned some particular uses for which the seer stones of the Nephites were prepared, but this fact does not restrict their use to them alone, any more than when the Bible states that the Urim should tell the Israelites when the whole congregation should go in or out, limits its service to that single matter. In the quotation from Mosiah we learn that instruments, evidently of the same nature as the Urim and Thummim of ancient Jewish history, were prepared by the Lord "from the beginning."

Referring now, for another point, to the Pearl of Great Price (Book of Abraham), we find, according to it, that Abraham himself was in possession of the Urim and Thummim, a certain passage reading thus: "And I, Abraham had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me, in Ur of the Chaldees; and I saw the stars that they were very great," etc., and a little further on in the same paragraph he says that this knowledge was made known to him through that instrument. Not all the remaining portion of the Book of Abraham was given in the same way, for in the third paragraph succeeding, he says that the Lord talked with him face to face, and put His hand upon his (Abraham's) eyes and by these means taught and showed him many great things. It is worthy of notice in this connection that matters of a temporal or physical nature only are referred to as uses for which the Urim and Thummim were applied in ancient times. This is a consistency of considerable value. One that an impostor, writing an alleged authentic Book of Abraham, might easily fail to take into account.

But, says an objector, if Abraham had them, how is it that no mention is made of them until the time when the Israelites were in the wilderness? and, hence, many are very sure that their first use among men was during the exodus of those people from Egypt. However, it is not difficult to account for the absence of all allusions to them in the Bible as being known previous to the time spoken of. Only a small number of references to them are found in that book, though they were in possession of the Israelites from about 1491 B.C., to the time of the Babylonish captivity—a period of 900 years in round numbers—nor are they mentioned at all from the time of Samuel 1056 B.C., until Ezra (2: 62), and Nehemiah (7: 65), refer to them, about 536 B.C., and so we have here 520 years of absolute silence respecting them. We must also remember that this failure to speak of the Urim and Thummim occurs during the very period when a large part of the Jewish sacred history was being written. That they are not referred to as known during the 500 years just preceding 1491 B.C., is not at all, therefore, surprising. When we consider, further, that there is not a single book of the Bible that was written until the time of the Exodus, the objection we have in hand may be passed as quite insignificant. The only book of a sacred nature which we possess claiming to have been written before that event does mention them.

One additional point remains to be noticed. If we turn to the quotation already given from Exodus, it will be observed that the Urim and Thummim are there spoken of as being already well known to Moses and others of the Israelitish people. A sacred instrument of such great value would not have been put, for the first time, into the hands of any man without some explanation of its purpose, and instructions as to the manner of its use would then be given. It is spoken of as something already familiar to God's servants. These facts have led learned commentators on the Bible to conclude that the Urim and Thummim were in use among the Israelites before they were made part of the breastplate furnishings. It follows, then, that the statement of the Pearl of Great Price that Abraham had the Urim and Thummim can not be successfully controverted; and the Book of Mormon claim that they, or similar instruments, were made in the beginning and handed down from generation to generation, while not proven from Biblical history, nevertheless, obtains from that source a good degree of probability in its favor.

Now, can it be shown that the Urim and Thummim of the Israelites ever got or could get to America, and so be in possession of the Nephites, and finally be lodged in the hands of Joseph Smith for his use. With our present light on this question no conclusive answer in the affirmative can be given; yet there are facts of Israelitish and Book of Mormon history which together show that it could have been done, and no point in the argument need be strained in the least.

When Nephi obtained the brass plates from Laban, no mention whatever is made of his having got with them the Urim and Thummim. This is precisely as the case should stand; for Laban, though a keeper of a copy of the Jewish law and history, was evidently occupying his own house and had a private treasury where he kept the records. A little study of the Book of Mormon narrative relative to the case, will lead one quite surely to this conclusion. The Urim and Thummim were sacred treasures of the TEMPLE, and were securely guarded there. There is not a word in the whole narrative which implies that Nephi went to the temple for any purpose whatever; but in fulfillment of his mission to get the plates he went to the HOUSE of Laban, as is stated in substance in I. Nephi 4: 5. This fact should be kept well in mind. Now, only a few years after Lehi and his company had left Jerusalem, and had, through Nephi's efforts, come into possession of the brass plates—the land of promise, or America as it is now called, being only reached—another company of Jewish colonists left that same city, having the same destination in view. Of this second company the king's son was a member, and this circumstance causes one to think that it was in all probability made up of Jewish notables who had free access to the temple—a company worthy to be the companions of the king's son. The king himself was deeply interested in the welfare of those people on account of his son's happiness and prosperity being associated so closely with them. There is nothing of which the mind of man can conceive that would so perfectly serve the purpose of a guide to a colony going into a distant and unknown land, having first to cross wide stretches of uncharted seas, without a mariner's compass, as that ancient Urim and Thummim, one of whose specified purposes was to tell the people about their goings "in and out." Does it not look as if they were bound to get that instrument, or something else equally reliable, before they set sail upon an unknown sea? There was nothing which, on account of its small size, could be carried along so easily, nothing more sacred in the eyes of Israelitish people, and, consequently, nothing that they would more jealously guard against falling into the hands of their Babylonian foes, and this second colony left Jerusalem almost simultaneously with the capture of that unfortunate city by Nebuchadnezzar; and now mark the fact again, that the history of the Urim and Thummim comes to an end among the Jews from that very time. The Babylonians, who carried off the rich treasures of Solomon's temple, make no mention of them, nor of the other things that were the most holy of its furnishings. Is it not probable that the Almighty interfered to preserve them? What did He do with them? Reader, keeping in mind the fact that with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish history of these instruments ceases, and remember that it is with the descendants of that second colony which left that city just at that time and went to America, that

the direct history of an instrument answering the purposes of the ancient Jewish Urim and Thummim again begins, as we learn from Mosiah 8: 13-19), and what stronger circumstantial evidence can be desired to prove that the "interpreters" of the Nephites were identical with the Urim and Thummim of the Israelites? From the period in Nephite history when that chapter of Mosiah was written, until those sacred things were delivered into the hands of Joseph Smith, the record as to how they were guarded and preserved is without a break. There is a consistency in all these matters that is too striking to have been conceived in the brain of an unschooled youth who wrote the Book of Mormon as an alleged imposture, and we commend them to the consideration of those who mock at our claim that Joseph Smith had "seer stones," by calling them "wonderful spectacles," "peep stones," etc. The probability that he had the Israelitish Urim and Thummim can be denied only by a denial of the whole "Mormon" system.

As a basis for a few closing remarks, we find by turning to the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 17: 1, that the breastplate, the sword of Laban and the Urim and Thummim were given to the brother of Jared when the Lord talked to him face to face in the mount. Jared and his brother lived during the days when the tower of Babel was being built. This brother—whose name is not disclosed—was a man of such faith and righteousness that it might be said that he walked with God, and at some period of his life he had the special manifestation of God's favor of which the cited text makes mention. It does not appear that the Urim and Thummim were made on that occasion, and the way in which the reference to them is worded, lends color to the Book of Mormon statement that they were prepared "in the beginning." That they were taken from the ancient Jewish priesthood to be restored in the due time of the Lord, is evident from what is said in Ezra and Nehemiah in the passages already referred to, a portion of them reading that the Jewish priesthood "should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim." It appears, then, that just as certainly as we look for the restoration of the Jews to the full favor of God, when they shall enjoy all their ancient rights and privileges, just so sure is it that the Urim and Thummim shall be again among the furnishings supplied to His priesthood.

T. W. B.

"THE reputation for being truthful is one of the most valuable assets a young man can have," remarks a business expert, "and it can be obtained only by being truthful habitually." The boy who tells the truth from the time he is old enough to know truth from falsehood is the boy whose word is trusted even in a crisis by all around him. The liar is suspected even when he tells the truth.