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The Book of Mormon and the Ancient Ruins

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Abstract: Many archaeological excavations reveal the ancient existence of brilliant civilizations that pre-date the Aztec and Inca periods. The ruins verify descriptions found in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon and Ancient Ruins

BY ANDREW JENSON, ASSISTANT CHURCH HISTORIAN

WHEN the Book of Mormon was first published in 1830, the Anglo-Saxon world knew but very little of the ruins and remnants of ancient civilizations in Mexico, Central America and South America. Although several works, giving the history of the conquest of America by the Spaniards, incidentally referring to remnants of temples and fortified cities in Peru and Bolivia, (South America), as well as in Mexico and Central America, had been published in the Spanish language, these works, up to the time the Book of Mormon came forth, had not been translated into English; nor had any books of much importance been written in English which dealt with ancient civilization in America, in a way that could make any deep impression upon the English-speaking people. Not until 1841, when John L. Stephens published his valuable work entitled *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, did the Anglo-Saxon world awaken to the realization of the fact that the American continent could perhaps boast of antiquities which might almost put the pyramids, and temple ruins of Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria into the shade. Up to that time certain critics of the Book of Mormon had repeatedly asserted that the historical narratives in that Book were untrue, because nothing had been found in America to justify anybody in believing that an ancient, highly civilized people had ever dwelt on the American continent. They contended that if the story of the Jaredites and Nephites, as contained in the Book of Mormon, was true, there certainly would have been something found in the shape of ruins or other indications to prove it.

All these things, however, have since been changed. Archaeologists and historians have traversed the American continents from the extreme north to the extreme south and have found almost conclusive proofs and evidences to the effect that peoples, who possessed a high standard of civilization, and who were well posted in the sciences and arts, once flourished in America, and that there are unmistakable traces of their handiwork in all parts of the country, though perhaps, mostly in the south.

Having been a student of the Book of Mormon since my early boyhood, and always possessing a desire to see and hear for myself of things which, in many instances, others had seen and heard before

me, I was much pleased with the opportunity I had in 1921 to visit the more central provinces of Old Mexico, and in visiting the republics of Peru and Bolivia in South America in 1923. And after seeing what I witnessed during my travels in these countries, and connecting my own experiences with what I had read, and am still reading, I have concluded that instead of there being a lack of evidence that such peoples as the Book of Mormon describes inhabited the western world in ancient days, there is almost too much proof, or, in other words, there are so many ruins of temples, fortified cities, great canal systems, fine roads, etc., that the student is mystified, or, in other words, we begin to wonder if the Jaredites and Nephites lived long enough, and were numerous enough in America to erect such cities and monumental buildings which are evidenced by the very interesting ruins found in different parts of the country today. The archaeologists who have studied the Aztec civilization of Old Mexico are almost unanimous in saying that a people possessed of a higher civilization than the Aztec once dwelt in Mexico, and when they call this "pre-historic" people Toltecs, we Book of Mormon students at once conclude that the Toltecs were either Nephites or Jaredites, or perhaps both. The same condition exists in Peru and Bolivia, (South America), and while the students of archaeology agree that the Inca nation possessed great ability in building temples, cities, canals, roads, etc., there are some things so artistic and superior in the ruins of Cuzco, the ancient capital of Peru, that it points back to a civilization of a higher type and of a more ancient date than the Inca period, and thus again the thoughts of the Book of Mormon student revert back to that people of very ancient date who attempted to build the Tower of Babel in the great valley of the Euphrates, and they can readily believe that a part of these great builders in Asia, after migrating to the western continent, led by the brother of Jared, and others, could, and naturally would, apply their skill as builders by erecting temples, and building walled cities in their new home. Suffice it to say, that, by my travels in South America, I became more convinced than ever that the Book of Mormon is true; and while I was disappointed in not becoming better established on a geographical basis regarding the Jaredite and Nephite countries, I was fully satisfied with what I saw in the elevated valleys of Peru and Bolivia, and elsewhere, that such peoples as those of which the Book of Mormon gives record once dwelt in that land, and that the civilization which was superior to that attributed to the Incas, when the Spaniards first found them, must be credited to what the archaeologists call the pre-Inca races.

A modern writer, (Mr. Rounsevell, of Lima, Peru), speaking of Cuzco and the Inca ruins says: Cuzco, the scene of the greatest of all national dramas, the rise and fall of the ancient Inca empire, has for nearly three centuries been the center of interest for students of civilization, writers of history, archaeologists and searchers after treasure and adventure—an inland city situated in a most remote and inaccessible valley far up in the Andes, built centuries ago in such a substantial manner that the ruthless attacks of conquerors, revolutionists, invaders and treasure-hunters, have failed to destroy the wonderful handiwork of a civilization that flourished for centuries before Columbus discovered America. * * * The fortress of Sachsahuaman is located immediately back of the city on a hill about seven hundred feet above the town, part of which is in plain view from almost any point in the city. A forty minute walk brings the sightseer to the first of these ancient fortifications. An early morning climb to this point would be immensely worth while, merely for the wonderful view of the city and valley spread out in picturesque beauty as far as the eyes can reach. In the foreground the city itself is seen with its bright, red-tile roofs, glistening in the sun, with here and there bright patches of gaily tinted walls, and just enough trees and shrubbery to make an enchanting color scheme. Across a canyon are the remains of a stone aqueduct, built in culvert form, three rows of arches high. This aqueduct centuries ago was one of the principal sources of water supply for the city, and as an evidence of the progress that has been made, backwards, it is interesting to note that in the Incaic days, when Cuzco was a city of more than 200,000 population, the water was so well conserved and distributed in stone aqueducts and ditches that there was ample to supply all the needs of the city, irrigation included. * * * The fortress itself is properly classed among the wonders of the world. It circumvented the entire hill top with three series of walls, built of great blocks of flint-like stone, some of which are 25 feet high and more than 12 feet thick; all securely and perfectly cut and fitted with exact nicety. Cuzco has more cathedrals, churches, monasteries, nunneries and edifices of a religious type than any city of the new world of its size, nearly all constructed during the colonial period out of *material secured by wrecking the Inca structures*. The stone workmanship of that period is very commonplace as compared with the work which remained of the partially wrecked and ruined structures, and the different periods of construction can be readily identified by the character of architecture and workmanship, the oldest being decidedly the best, and gradually deteriorating; that of the present century being the clumsiest

and flimsiest of all. The "Temple of the Sun," located almost in the heart of the main plaza, stands as a most vivid monument of its builders. The mechanical and architectural perfection of this piece of circular stone work is probably without equal in all the world, and no description or photograph can do justice to the exact nicety of the cutting of each stone. A skillful cabinet maker of this day, working in hardwood, with the best of tools, could not exceed the delicate fineness of the joints between these perfectly cut stones, which even centuries of earthquakes have not disturbed by a hair's breadth, except for one crack which ruptured the slabs of granite in a diagonal course, with scarcely any injury to the intersecting joints, so perfect are the joints broken and the courses bound together. * * * On almost every street in Cuzco are the remains of Inca, or pre-Inca walls, arches and doorways. The city itself was surrounded by one great wall, enough of which remains to make it possible to trace its course from end to end. Many streets are lined on either side by walls of most perfect stone work, now serving no better purpose than to be used as foundations for rude adobe structures, which shelter, in poverty and filth, the descendants of the mighty ones who built them.

Traveling in our journey to South America, from Guaqui, on the banks of the interesting lake, Titicaca, to La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, we saw, on both sides of the road, most interesting ruins, including a very ancient Indian village. At Tiahuanaco we saw, near the track, from our car window, several well preserved monoliths which, according to some authorities, belonged to a pre-Inca civilization. The whole country of these elevated valleys surrounded by the majestic Andes mountains, are so full of ruins and remnants of ancient civilizations, that a traveler interested in antiquities could spend month after month in research work among them. The Book of Mormon student would have no trouble, mentally, to associate all of it with the narratives contained in the sacred volume which Joseph Smith, the great Prophet of the Nineteenth Century, obtained through the administration of the Angel Moroni.

Happiness

Though we cannot all be artists,
 Sculptors, poets, singers sweet,
 And create those things of beauty
 Which cause hearts with joy to beat.
 Yet we all can do much good here,
 Help to make some heart more glad,

We can bring some cheer and sunshine
 To the lonely, sick and sad.
 In the scheme of life and action
 Each one has his part to do:
 Just to find your place and fill it
 Will bring happiness to you.

ETHEL R. LILLYWHITE