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Internal Evidences—The Book of Mormon Forms of Government Consistent With The Times and Circumstances Under Which They Existed

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES—THE BOOK OF MORMON FORMS OF GOVERNMENT CONSISTENT WITH THE TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THEY EXISTED.

In the Book of Mormon three forms of government are said to have existed among the various peoples inhabiting the western world. These are, first, a Monarchical form; second, a sort of Republic or rule of Judges; third, an Ecclesiastical government, or rule of priests, ending finally in the rule of military chieftains. The Book of Mormon giving as it does, though only in an incidental way, a description of these several forms of government, presents a crucial test of its claims to being a translation of an ancient record. For if in describing any one of these forms of government it should be out of harmony with well known facts concerning ancient forms of government, or if it ascribes to them qualities or powers out of harmony with the times or circumstances under which they existed, then doubt is thrown upon the claims of the book to being a translation of an ancient record. To illustrate the proposition now laid down: It is well known that to the ancients the only form of monarchy was what we call a "simple" or "absolute" monarchy; that is, a form of government in which all powers of government are centered in one person. Such a thing as a division of the powers of government into co-ordinate branches, relegating several functions to distinct persons or groups of persons, was unknown to the ancients. The ideas prevailing in modern times which have brought into existence our "mixed" or "constitutional monarchies" had not as yet been discovered by the ancients; hence if such modern ideas concerning monarchy should be found in the

Book of Mormon governments, involving the existence of cabinets, parliaments or distinct judiciary departments it would at least be very prejudicial to the claims of the book to being an ancient record.

Again in respect of democratic forms of government: the only form known to the ancient was "simple" democracy. The form of government by which the people acted directly upon governmental affairs. The principle of representation in democracies was not as yet discovered in times contemporary with the Book of Mormon republic, therefore if in the Nephite republic, or the "reign of the Judges," as that form of government is sometimes called in the Book of Mormon, there should be found the representative principle, which is really a modern refinement in government, that fact too would be prejudicial to its claims being an ancient record. Per contra, if these modern ideas respecting monarchial and democratic forms of government are absent from the kingdoms and republics described in the book, then it would be at least presumptive evidence of the genuineness of its claims; for if the Book of Mormon had been the product of a modern author, or authors, there would very likely be found in it some of the modern ideas of government, both in its monarchies and in its republics, and especially would this be probable if its authors were illiterate men and not acquainted with these facts concerning government among ancient peoples. Under those circumstances the ancient and modern forms would inevitably be confounded because modern illiterate authors would not possess sufficient discretion to keep them separated.

Monarchies.

I am aware that the Book of Mormon account of the Jaredite monarchy is so very limited that we can form but

little idea as to its nature; but the little there is said of it is strictly in harmony with the ancient forms of monarchy. That is, the kings were absolute, the source of all law and the center of all political power. They were inducted into their office by formal anointing, according to ancient custom.^a They are sometimes associated with them on the throne the son who had been selected to succeed in the kingly authority, which is also in accordance with ancient custom.^b

Respecting the nature of the Nephite kingdom also but little can be learned from the Book of Mormon because matters concerning government are only mentioned in an incidental way, but from what little is said we are justified in forming the same conclusions regarding it as in regard to the Jaredite Monarchy. That is, it was "simple" or "absolute" monarchy. The remarks of Mosiah II in relation to the power of a king for good or evil leads to the conclusion that the power of a Nephite king was most absolute; and that with the Nephite monarch as with the Jaredite, the king was the source of all laws and the center of all political authority. The remarks referred to are as follows:

And behold, now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king, save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood. For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God; and he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people; yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever does not obey his laws, he causeth to be destroyed;

^aEther vi: 27. Ibid. ix: 15-22. Ibid. x: 10 et. seq.

^bEther ix: 14, 15, 21, 22. Ibid. x: 13.

and whosoever doth rebel against him, he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.^c

This certainly is a description of arbitrary powers vested in the king. And what is true of the Nephite monarchy is equally true of the Lamanite kingdoms—judging from those rare and brief glimpses one gets of Lamanite governments in the Book of Mormon. Among all three peoples—Jaredites, Nephites, Lamanites—wherever kingly government is described it is the same—it is “simple,” “absolute,” “ancient” monarchy.^d There is no indication anywhere of the existence of cabinets or parliaments; or of the division of political authority into executive, legislative or judicial co-ordinate branches. Nor is there any indication that there was ever an attempt to blend the various primary forms of government—monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—into a mixed government, a government embracing elements from all three of these recognized primary forms. Such mixed governments are modern creations; refinements in the science of government unattempted by the ancients. The ancients, in fact, held them to be impossible, mere visionary whims, solecisms. Even a man of the excel-

^cMosiah xxix: 21-23. See also remarks, chapters x, and xiii.

^dPerhaps it may be thought that an exception should be made in the matter of Lamanite kingdoms, of which I have spoken (chapter xiii) as constituting at one period of Lamanite history, a sort of confederacy of kingdoms; but this does not affect the statement of the text which is dealing with the form of government. I believe myself justified in saying that whether reference is made to the petty Lamanite kingdoms or the central kingdom to which they were tributary, the principle in government will be found the same—the king is the source of all political power, the monarchy is “simple,” the kingly power absolute.

lent understanding of Tacitus declared that if such a government were formed it could never be lasting or secure.

Reign of the Judges—Republic.

It is however in the matter of the Nephite "reign of the Judges" or the "Nephite Republic" that an illiterate, modern writer would most likely have betrayed himself. Especially an American writer strongly imbued with the excellence, to say nothing of the sanctity, of the American form of government.

That Joseph Smith, as also his early and later associates, were imbued with such opinions concerning the American system of government is notorious. Joseph Smith declared the constitution of the United States to have resulted from the inspiration of God: "And again I say unto you, those who have been scattered by their enemies, it is my will that they should continue to importune for redress, and redemption, by the hands of those who are placed as rulers, and are in authority over you, according to the laws and constitution of the people which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles, that every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto them, that every man be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another. And for this purpose have I established the constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood."^e

^eDoc. & Cov., Sec. ci:76-80.

On another occasion the Prophet said: "Hence we say, that the constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner; it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of its liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land. It is like a great tree under whose branches men from every clime can be shielded from the burning rays of [oppression's] sun."^f

Still more especially would an illiterate modern writer be likely to betray himself if the American system of government was practically the only one of which he had any definite knowledge. If then his description of a "reign of judges," based upon democratic principles, among an ancient people, escape not only some but all modern refinements of democratic government—some of which were unknown until employed in the establishment of the republic of the United States^g—then indeed are we well within the realm of the marvelous. And this we may claim for the Book of Mormon description of the "reign of the judges," viz. that while it outlines a government based upon the central principle of democracy—government by the people^h—yet there is nothing modern in that republic. The principle of representation no where appears; a division of the political power into co-ordinate and independent departments no where appears; there is no indication of a federation even, much less any of those modern refinements which distinguish modern federated republics from more ancient federated republics.

^fLetters of Joseph Smith, from Liberty Prison, under date of March 25, 1839—to the Church of the Latter-day Saints. History of the Church, Vol. III., p. 304.

^gSee De Tocqueville's Constitution of the U. S., Vol. I.

^hSee Chapter xiii.

Of course democratic government existed from very ancient times and there have also been from of old confederated republics, but the government of the United States rests upon some principles that are recognized as entirely modern. The principal differences between the modern republics and the ancient are these: first, the modern republics recognize the principle of representation: that is, masses of the people delegate authority to act for them to selected representatives; second, the powers of government are lodged in three distinct co-ordinate departments, the law making, the law executing, and the law determining departments; third, the federal government has the same division of political power as the respective states, viz., legislative, executive and judicial; and also has conferred upon it power, within the limits prescribed by the constitution, to act directly through its own instrumentalities upon the citizens of the respective states. The last item the French philosopher De Tocqueville, in speaking of the republic of the United States, declared to be a wholly novel theory which he characterizes as a great discovery in modern political science. "In all the confederations which precede the American constitution of 1789," he says, "the allied states, for a common object, agree to obey the injunctions of a federal government; but they [the respective states] reserve to themselves the right of ordaining and enforcing the execution of the laws of the union. The American states which combined in 1789, agreed that the federal government should not only dictate but should execute its own enactments. In both cases the right is the same but the exercise of the right is different; and this difference produced the most momentous consequences. The new word which ought to express this novel thing does not yet exist." (De Tocqueville, U. S. Constitution, Vol. I.)

Ecclesiastical Government.

The government which obtained in the era following the advent of Messiah in the western world was also in harmony with the conditions prevailing in those days. That is, the ecclesiastical government supplied by the Church founded by Messiah appears to have superseded all other governments. There is no allusion at least to any other form of government through the two hundred years which succeeded that event; nor, indeed, up to the close of the Book of Mormon period, 420 A. D., except here and there a reference made to "kings" among that division of the people who styled themselves Lamanites; but I take it that even these "kings" among the Lamanites more nearly resembled military chieftains than monarchs at the head of settled governments. In the division of the people called Nephites there is no reference either to a reign of judges or of kings or other form of government than this Church or Ecclesiastical government, so that what I have previously said upon this subjectⁱ will be found correct, viz., the people after the establishment of the Church of Christ among them found its institutions and authority sufficient, as well in secular as in spiritual affairs. That such a government as this should take the place of governments formerly existing, I repeat, was in harmony with conditions that obtained after the advent of Messiah. I have already called attention to the fact that government becomes necessary because of the vices and injustice of men. That its chief function is to restrain men from injuring one another and thus give security to society. When all the people are righteous government becomes well nigh unnecessary, or operates at least in a

ⁱAnte pp. 216-7.

very limited sphere, and the form of government becomes a matter of more or less indifference. Now it will be remembered that in the awful judgments of God which had swept over the western world at Messiah's crucifixion the more ungodly part of the people were destroyed, and those who survived were afterwards thoroughly converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ by his advent and the ministry of his servants, so that there was inaugurated an era of peace and perfect righteousness. For two centuries at least there was a veritable golden age in the American continents, during which time the simple laws of righteousness promulgated by the gospel were all sufficient as a rule of conduct, and men practically forgot the reign of kings and the reign of judges. When wickedness once more began to stalk through the land it may be that the hitherto prevailing ecclesiastical governments gave way to the rule of military chieftains, both among the Nephites and Lamanites, though among the latter such chieftains were sometimes called "kings."

That the monarchical and republican forms of government described in the Book of Mormon should be in harmony with the principles of those ancient political systems, and that the kind of government which obtained after the advent of Messiah among the Nephites should be in such perfect harmony with the conditions that obtained in that period, is internal evidence of marked significance in support of the claims of the Book of Mormon. To see it in its full strength one should ask himself what would be the state of the case if the descriptions of monarchical and democratic government were not in harmony with the restricted ideas of ancient governments, but were full of modern ideas and refinements of government; and if the facts existing after the advent of Messiah and the introduction of the

Nephite golden age were utterly at variance with the kind of government that we are ready to believe then obtained. It should be remembered that if inconsistencies in the Book of Mormon forms of government would be so damaging against its claims to being an ancient record, then consistency in its forms of government should be allowed equal weight in support of its claims to being an ancient record.

The Events to which Importance is Given in the Book of Mormon are in Harmony with the Character of the Writers.

In considering this subject we must bear in mind the purposes for which the Book of Mormon was written. The purposes are set forth in detail in chapter III.

Here it will be sufficient to say that the main purpose of the Book of Mormon is to be a witness for Jesus, the Christ; for the truth of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation.

Notwithstanding these purposes are adhered to throughout the work it is very noticeable, and indeed one cause of complaint against the book, that it gives great prominence, at least in the parts made up of Mormon and Moroni's abridgments, to wars; to minute descriptions of battles, the construction of fortifications, and the affairs of war in general. This doubtless arises from the fact that Mormon and Moroni were both military chieftains, and notwithstanding their general purpose was to make prominent the religious events which happened among the Nephites and Jaredites, and the hand-dealings of God with those peoples, yet when these writers came to give an account of wars, it is but to be expected, by the very nature of things, that they could not refrain from recording those events which would have such a power-

ful attraction for them. Involuntarily they were drawn into a description of those events, and unconsciously gave them prominence in their narratives. So I say the events to which importance is given in the Book of Mormon are in harmony with the character of the writers, a fact which is still further emphasized by the nature of the first part of the volume. We have seen that 149 of the 157 pages constituting that first part is written by the first Nephi and his brother Jacob, prophets and priests of God. In their writings wars are mentioned only in the most incidental way, but there is an abundance of religious teaching, and prominence is given to visions, dreams and revelations, and that because those writers were, in the main, prophets and priests of God. It should also be noted, of course, that the time in which these earlier writers lived was not so much a period of warfare as subsequent centuries among the Nephites. It is to be observed, then, in conclusion upon this point, that the very prominence given to wars and battle-movements in Mormon's and Moroni's part of the volume is but in keeping with the nature of things—an additional evidence of consistency in the work—the events to which importance is given are in harmony with the character of the writers.

III.

Complexity in the Structure of the Book of Mormon in Harmony with the Theory of its Origin.

I hesitated some time before adopting the above as a heading for this division of the subject, because I was aware, and am still aware of the fact that it scarcely presents the thought I would have considered; and I know how easily, by a slight variation, it could be made subject to the smart retort that the complexity of the structure of the Book of

Mormon is in harmony with the theory of its merely human origin since it is simplicity, not complexity, which is the sign manual of things divine. Still, for all that, I have concluded to make use of this faulty title, for want of a better, confident that when my whole thought under it is developed it will result in producing evidence for the truth of the claims of the book.

That the structure of the Book of Mormon is complex all who read it know. The first part of it is made up of the translation of unabridged records, the small plates of Nephi. The second part is made up of the translation of abridged books (Mormon's abridgment), Mormon, however, retaining for the several parts of his abridgment the title of the respective books he abridged.

I have already pointed out the fact^j that Mormon's condensed narrative from the original Nephite records makes up the body of his work; with occasional direct quotations from the original records, and the whole more or less confused by his running comments, unseparated from the body of his work save by the sense of the text. All this is complex enough surely, but the end is not yet; for within the old Nephite records Mormon had at hand while doing the work of abridgment, there were still other books. That is, books within books; as, for instance, the Book of Zeniff within the Book of Mosiah, which see.^k Also the account of the church founded by the first Alma, likewise within the book of Mosiah. Also the account of the missionary expedition to the Lamanites by the young Nephite princes, sons of King Mosiah II., within the book of Alma, which see.^l Mormon, coming to these books within books, followed that

^jSee Ante Chapter xxxvii.

^kBook of Mosiah, p. 181 (current edition).

^lBook of Mormon, p 283 (current edition).

order also in his abridgment; so that as in the original Nephite records, we have books within books, so within Mormon's abridgment we have abridged records within abridged records. Then, as if to cap the climax of complexity in structure, Mormon writes a book of his own to which he gives his own name. That is, calls it the Book of Mormon; the last two chapters of which, however, are written by Moroni. Then follows what may be called the third part of the Book of Mormon—Moroni's abridgment of the twenty-four plates of Ether, which gives us so much of the history as we have of the Jaredites. By this arrangement the history of the first people to occupy the western hemisphere, (after the flood), comes last in the Book of Mormon; and Moroni's abridgment of the Jaredite record has much of the complexity of his father's abridgment of the Nephite records.

Now, with all this before the mind of the reader—whether he regards Joseph Smith, Solomon Spaulding, or Sidney Rigdon as the author of the Book of Mormon—I submit to him the question: Would either ingenuity or stupidity in a modern author suggest such complexity in the structure of a book as this? Can a parallel case be pointed to in the modern making of books?

If the Book of Mormon were modern in structure and its author or authors had the conception that this western world was peopled by a colony coming from the Euphrates valley, in very ancient times, and subsequently by two other colonies from Judea, one leaving 600 B. C. and the other shortly afterwards, in giving the history of those people, would not the modern author have begun with the most ancient colony and treated the history of the respective peoples in the order of their occupancy of the western continents? Then, again: If the Book of Mormon is mere fiction, the idle coinage of an inventive, modern author, why three mi-

grations? If the object of the modern author was merely to convey an idea how a civilized race in ancient times occupied the western world, why would not the first migration—the Jaredite—have answered all his purposes? Or why not take the second migration—the Nephite—for the accomplishment of such a purpose? Why complicate it by bringing in the migration of Mulek's colony, when the simple treatment of developing the Nephite colony into national proportions would have been sufficient for the purpose of a work of fiction? One other question I would submit relative to the Jaredite record and the strange place it occupies in the Book of Mormon. The plates of Ether were found by an expedition sent out from Zeniff's colony about 123 B. C., and were translated shortly afterwards by Mosiah II., who was a seer; that is, he was able to use Urim and Thummim in the translation of strange languages. Now, why did not Mormon include an abridgment of Mosiah's translation of the plates of Ether in his abridgment of Nephite records, allowing it to stand in his collection of plates as his abridgment of the Book of Zeniff stands within his abridgment of the Book of Mosiah, instead of passing the matter by and leaving it for his son Moroni to make a translation direct from the Book of Ether, thus throwing the history of the first inhabitants of the western world, after the flood, to the very last part of the record? Candidly, does the complex structure of the Book of Mormon appeal to one as at all modern in its arrangement? Are modern books so constructed? And yet, notwithstanding all the complexity in the structure of the book, each part is so in harmony with every other part, and with the whole, that really, after all, it is a very simple book, and one readily understood. It is clear that the very peculiar circumstances under which the Book

of Mormon was compiled by the original Nephite writers, and that neither the ingenuity nor the stupidity of Joseph Smith, nor of any other modern writer, is responsible for this peculiar structure of the book. And, moreover, since the book in its details retains harmonious consistency with the plan of its structure, must not such a fact be conceded to be an incidental evidence in favor of its claims?