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A Study of Book of Mormon Texts I (cont.)

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Abstract: In this series, internal evidences of the Book of Mormon's authenticity are argued using analysis of words and names used in the book that reflect ancient Hebrew customs, and parallels between the Book of Mormon and American Indian languages. The continuation of the first part covers "oppressive taxation," "corpses thrown into the river," "drinking blood," and the Bible.

A Study of Book of Mormon Texts

By J. M. Sjodahl

I. Notes on Significant Words and Phrases. (Continued)

Oppressive Taxation. Mosiah records the fact that the people of Limhi were in bondage to the Lamanites (Mos. 7:15), and that this bondage had taken the form of an exceedingly burdensome taxation. It seems (v. 22) that they were made to pay one half of all the grain they raised and one half of the increase of their flocks and herds, as well as one half of everything else they came in possession of. The penalty for refusal to render this unjust tribute was death. King Limhi told Ammon that the people would prefer slavery under Nephite rule to their present form of servitude.

This condition was very much like that found by the Spaniards at the time of their ruthless conquest of Mexico. A kind of confederacy between three of the largest Aztec cities, with headquarters at Tenochtitlan, had been formed for the purpose of levying tribute on the other cities, which were scattered over an area of about the same size as the state of Massachusetts. Towns that refused to pay were savagely punished, unless they were strong enough to defend themselves, in which case sanguinary battles were fought and the war prisoners were slain on the altars of the gods. The city of Tlascala had successfully resisted an attack of the second Montezuma shortly before the arrival on the scene of Cortez. This shrewd Spaniard soon learned that there was deadly enmity between the tributary towns and the Aztec confederacy, and he profited by the situation. The Tlascalans, after an unsuccessful attempt at resistance, joined the Spaniards against the oppressors.

From the history of the conquest it is evident that the policy of the Lamanites of making their weaker neighbors tributary slaves was practiced by the Aztecs in the 16th century, and that it was the main cause of their downfall at that time.

The Book of Mormon gives us a striking sketch of political conditions in Nephite lands which still obtained in some parts of the "new world" at the time of its discovery only four centuries ago.

Are scholars in possession of any stronger evidence for the authenticity of the Old Testament writings?

Corpses thrown into the river. In Alma 3:3 it is stated that, "As many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been

slain upon the banks of the river Sidon, were cast into the waters of Sidon." See also Alma 44:22.

This custom of consigning the bodies of the dead, after a great battle, to the water, seems to have survived among the aborigines of America to more recent times. Speaking of the conquests of the Peruvians, Mr. Fiske says:

"In an obstinate battle near Quito the rebels were defeated with great slaughter. Many hundreds of prisoners were taken. Very few were able to hide themselves. Near the banks of the lake the Inca ordered them all to be beheaded in his presence, and their bodies to be thrown into the water. The blood of those that were killed was in such quantity that the water lost its color, and nothing could be seen but a thick mass of blood—. The lake received the name it still bears, which is *Yahuarcocha* or the Lake of blood," (*Discovery of America* Vol. II pp. 324-5).

Drinking blood. According to Alma 49:27, Amalickiah in his wrath swore that he would "drink the blood of Moroni." See also Alma 51:9.

Whether this haughty traitor meant his threat to be understood literally or only as a figure of speech, it is evident that some of the people inhabiting these continents anciently had the savage habit of drinking the life fluid of their conquered adversaries. Otherwise his boast would have had no meaning. But words always mean something. We still have in most of our modern languages the word "blood-thirsty" for "cruel," "murderous," as a relic of a time when the consumption of blood was a more or less common manifestation of cruelty.

That some of the aborigines of America at times drank the blood of human victims is attested by history. When Brebeuf, a jesuit missionary, had been tormented to death, an Iroquois chief, who admired the fortitude with which he had met his cruel fate, tore out his heart and devoured it. It is said that Cortez and his followers, at a city called Xocotlan were offered cakes dipped in human blood, as choice morsels to eat (Bancroft's *Mexico*). It was a common custom, it seems, among the Aztecs to smear the lips of their idols with human blood and to sprinkle it on the walls and floors of their temples.

Nadaillac (*Prehistoric America*, p. 62) says cannibalism was practiced in Algonquins, Iroquis, Kickapoos and many other tribes, and that the warriors drank the still smoking blood of the victims, in order to inoculate themselves with their courage.

The Bible. In I Nephi 13:20-26 the prophet records his

remarkable vision of the Bible. He saw a book, "And it was carried forth among them" (the Gentiles) (v. 20). Concerning this book the angel tells Nephi:

(1) It is a record of the Jews, and, "It proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew." The words quoted are repeated (v. 23, 24).

(2) It contains "the covenants of the Lord which he hath made unto the house of Israel" and "many prophecies." (v. 23.)

(3) As the book comes "from the mouth of a Jew" it is plain, *i. e.*, it is easy to understand. It contains the *plainness* of the gospel, or the gospel, as far as revealed, set forth plainly.

(4) The book also contains the record of the twelve apostles: "and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God." (v. 24.)

(5) "These things"—the book that came from "the mouth of the Jew" and the record of the Twelve—go "from the Jews in purity, unto the gentiles" (v. 25).

(6) It remains pure until, eventually, "many parts" are taken away from the gospel, and also "many covenants of the Lord" (v. 25).

This is a brief epitome of the history of the Bible, given in a vision. It deserves the closest study.

Note the accuracy of the language here used. The Old Testament which is "a record of the Jews," is said to have proceeded out of the mouth of a Jew, while the New Testament is referred to as the record of "the Twelve Apostles," and both these collections of sacred writings are said to have gone forth from "the Jews."

The books of the Old Testament were composed by, or under the supervision of the men whose names they bear. It was, therefore, "a record of the Jews." The books of the Law were deposited in the ark of the covenant in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards in the temple of Jerusalem. To the first collection were gradually added the various historical and prophetic writings, from Joshua to Habbakuk, Jonah, Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, and Habbakuk, all lived before the destruction of the temple. What became of the sacred books when the sanctuary was destroyed and the people dispersed, is not known. They may have been hidden in some safe place, but the probability is that there were manuscript copies or parts of copies in the possession of many prominent Jews, that were carefully guarded. At all events, Daniel in Babylon seems to have been familiar with the law of Moses and the prophecies of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2, 11). After the captivity, Ezra made a collection of the sacred writings. Tradition has it that he presided over a body of

learned men, one hundred and twenty in number, known as *The Great Synagogue*, associated for the purpose of collecting and editing sacred books Ezra may therefore well be considered as "the Jew" Nephi saw in his vision, from whom the book came, for to his literary labor we are very largely indebted for the Old Testament as we know it today. And in Nehemiah 8:2-18 it is recorded that Ezra brought the Law before the congregation of Israel and read it in their hearing. On that occasion the book literally "proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew." As he from day to day proclaimed its contents, they were handed down to coming ages; and since then there has been no general reconstruction of the Jewish canon.

The New Testament does not, in the same literal sense, "proceed out of the mouth of a Jew;" in the vision it is called the records of the Twelve Apostles, and they are said to go forth "by the *hand* of the Twelve" (v. 26).

Note also that the book contains, besides many prophecies, the covenant of the Lord with Israel. This, no doubt, refers to the agreement, we may call it, between the Lord and his people at Sinai; for the people unanimously accepted the laws of God as submitted to them through Moses (Ex. 24:3), whereupon the covenant was ratified by solemn sacrifices (Ex. 24:4-8). This covenant in addition to the Decalogue is recorded in Exodus 21 to 23:19, and this section of the books of Moses may, therefore, appropriately be called "The Doctrine and Covenants" of the Mosaic Dispensation.

It is further to be noticed that this book, as it came from "the mouth of a Jew" and "the hands of the Twelve," was *pure* and a depository of divine *truth*. So the angel declares. This is a complete refutation of the claims of those so-called "higher critics" of the Bible, who hold that fundamental documents supposed to have been used by the "redactors" or editors of the sacred volume have been "edited," distorted, and mutilated to such an extent that most of the scriptures, when given to the world in its completed form, was positively spurious. This "criticism," according to the revelation of Nephi, has no foundation in fact.

It is true, as further stated by the angel, that in course of time many of the doctrines taught in the Bible were set aside, and many covenants were abrogated; this, however, was not done by the collectors and editors of the sacred books, of whom Ezra and probably Simon the Just were the last in the Mosaic dispensation, but after the completion of the New Testament, by the great ecclesiastical organization that grew out of and took the place of the pagan imperialism of Rome.

As an illustration of the process of taking away from and

adding to the gospel, the following facts may be considered:

In the fourth century marriage was forbidden, as far as the clergy was concerned, and this decree was confirmed in the eleventh century, by Gregory VII. In the twelfth century the doctrine of seven sacraments was first taught. To the same time belongs the positive affirmation of the saving virtue of penance, and the doctrine of purgatory, which, however, may be traced back to the seventh century. Transubstantiation was first taught in the eighth century. In the eleventh the Lord's Supper was changed by withholding the consecrated cup from the communicants. The ordinance, with its solemn covenants, was thereby virtually abrogated. The covenant of baptism had been done away with long before that time, in so far as the vain ceremony of infant sprinkling had taken its place. In the seventh century (A. D. 607) the claim of the bishop of Rome to universal recognition as the head of the church was confirmed by Emperor Phocas, and the final touch was thereby given to the Babylonian tower of papacy which had been under construction for centuries.

(To be continued.)

The Keynote of Life

To live a life the most complete
The heart must be as clean and sweet,
As aid to those whose wayward feet
Lead them too far astray.

What is this life but one great fight,
Against the wrong and for the right?
To those who have the clearing sight,
We look for noble deeds.

The right ambition is to rise
Above those things that foster sighs,
And blinds the eyes of Paradise,
The aim of those aright.

The primal note must ever be
Attuned to hope's clear melody;
To sue for that on bended knee,
Is but the plan of God.

Then life becomes a song of cheer,
That lightens hearts bowed down with fear,
The smile supplants the ready tear,
And joy it reigns supreme.

Albany, New York.

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