

CHAPTER 17

THE DIVINE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON CORROBORATED BY MODERN INVESTIGATION AND DISCOVERY

More than one hundred years have elapsed since the publication of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. At that time little was known regarding the origin of the American Indians. The report of the exhaustive study by Lord Kingsborough was not published until 1831.

The works of Stephens and Catherwood, who had made a survey of the ruins of Yucatan and Central America were published in 1841-1843.

We have no evidence that Joseph Smith or any of those associated with him had access to either of these publications, or any other book treating the subjects referred to by the authors.

The Book of Mormon is not essentially a secular history of the people to whom it refers. While of necessity there must be some reference to secular affairs in the record kept by Nephi, the first to write upon the plates which had been prepared, the record deals more in detail with the religious activities of the Nephite people and the hand-dealing of the Lord with them. Nephi says:

“Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people.

"Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people."

As heretofore stated, these people brought with them to America certain brass plates upon which were engraven: "the first five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents; and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah.

Having this record in their possession the people would be familiar with the Bible story of the creation, the deluge, the tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues, events which would be long remembered.

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and am known of mine.

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:14-16.)

The appearance of our Lord and his ministry among them was an event never to be forgotten by the Nephite people or their descendants. It was after his crucifixion and glorious resurrection that the Redeemer appeared to the people of this, the American continent, the account of which is given as follows:

"And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

"Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

"And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

"And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

"And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

"And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven." (III Nephi 11:6-12.)

While we have nothing to justify the statement that at the time of the landing of Columbus the American Indians possessed an intelligent alphabet by which thoughts could be reduced to words, it is a well known fact that a system prevailed by which the history of a particular tribe or family could be transmitted from father to son and thus be perpetuated. Among the Navajos the history of their people is intrusted to a council of twelve men. When a member of the council dies a boy of superior intelligence is selected from the tribe, who is instructed by the old men in the story of the origin and end of things as understood by these

people. By this means the story is little changed as it passes from one generation to another.

If the ancient inhabitants of America were visited and ministered to by the Redeemer, this would be another epochal event which would not be entirely forgotten. Let us examine and see.

THE CREATION

Bancroft says:

"Of all the American people the Quiches of Guatamala have left us the richest mythological legacy. Their description of the creation, as given in the Popol Vuh, is in its strange rude eloquence and poetic originality one of the rarest relics of aboriginal thought."

The Popol Vuh is one of the rare manuscripts written in the Quiche language and translated into the Spanish by Francisco Jimenez, a Dominican father of great repute, who lived among the Indians of Guatemala, at the town of Chichi-cas-te-nan-go. From this translation we reduce the following:

"The heaven was formed, and all the signs thereof set in their alignment and angle, and their boundaries fixed toward the four winds, by the creator and former, and Mother and Father of life and existence. He by whom all move and breathe, the Father and cherisher of the peace of nations.

"There was yet no man, nor animal, nor bird, nothing was but the firmament. There was nothing yet joined together, nothing that clung to anything else, there was nothing that stood up, nothing but the quiet water, but the sea calm and alone in its boundaries. Nothing existed, nothing but immobility and silence, in the darkness, in the night.

"Lo, now how the heavens exist, how exists also the heart of heaven, such is the name of God, it is thus that he is called. And they spake, they mingled their words and their opinion and

the creation was verily after this wise: Earth, they said, and on the instant it was formed, like a cloud or fog, was its beginning.

"Then the mountains rose over the water like great lobsters; in an instant the mountains and plain were visible, and the cyprus and the pine appeared. The earth and its vegetation having thus appeared, it was peopled with the various forms of life. Again the gods took counsel together, they determined to make man. So they made a man of clay, and when they had made him they saw that it was not good. He was without cohesion, without consistence, he could not move his head, his face looked but one way, he could not look behind him, he had been endowed with language, but he had no intelligence, so he was consumed with water.

"Once more the Gods were in council, again they created man, and this time not by the ordinary agents in the work of creation, but by special intervention by him who is pre-eminently the Creator, by a miracle extraordinary. Men were now found who were worthy of their origin and destiny. At last the Gods looked upon men who could see with their eyes, handle with their hands, and understand with their hearts.

"The Gods were not pleased with what they had done, they had overshot the mark. This man was too perfect, he saw and knew too much, he was one of them. Therefore there was again counsel in heaven. 'What shall we do with man now? It is not good, this thing that we see, these men are as gods, they would make themselves equal with us, lo, they know all things, great and small.'

"Therefore the Heart of Heaven breathed a cloud over the pupil of the eye of man as when one breathes on the face of a mirror, thus was the eye darkened, and after that man saw not the things which were afar off, but only that which was near by." (Compare Genesis 3:22.)

While the man slept the woman was then created to be his companion.

According to the Chimalpapoca manuscript, one of the few native records preserved at the time of the conquest of Mexico, the Creator made the earth in successive periods. After the earth had been created

and the vegetation covered it the animals were created, man was made and animated from dust.

The Papago Indians say that the Great Spirit made the earth, and all living things before he created man. He then descended from heaven and digging in the earth found clay such as the potters use, and from it made man.

The natives of Southern California tell us that the Great Spirit created the earth, and set it in its proper order. He then created the animals, and last of all created man and woman. They were created from the dust of the earth.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Sahagun, in his history of New Spain, referring to the traditions of the Indians regarding the beginning and end of things, says: "This woman, who was created, became the mother of the entire human family. She was tempted by a serpent, which appeared to her in the terrestrial paradise, who spoke to her, and persuaded her to transgress the commandment of God."

Le Plongeon, referring to inscriptions, sculptures, and mural paintings on the walls at Chichen-Itza and Uxmal, says:

"This tableau is most interesting and significant, since in it we have a natural explanation of the myth of the temptation of the woman by the serpent. Here we have the garden, the woman, the tempter, and the fruit."

Here Le Plongen proceeds with his theory that the story of the creation, as contained in the Bible,

had its origin in America, and was taken from here to the Old World.

CAIN AND ABEL

"Again we read in Genesis that at a very early period in man's history a certain man murdered his brother through jealousy. The victim, we are told, was Abel, his murderer Cain. The recital of this event being identical with that archived in the sculptures and mural paintings still existing on the walls of certain edifices in Chichen-Itza, and with the account of it recorded in the second part of the Troano manuscript would seem to indicate that the report of this fratricide was brought to India by some Maya traveler or missionary." (Le Plongeon.)

As the writer was one day riding with an Indian we crossed a long stretch of desert country. It was a part of the country with many lava flows from extinct craters, deep canyons and dunes of sand.

I said to the Indian: "This is a very poor country through which we are riding."

"Yes," he replied, "but it was not always as it is at present."

Thinking there might be an interesting story back of his remark, I asked: "Why do you say that it was not always as we see it now?" He then proceeded to relate the following story:

"My father told me that his father said that his father told him that there was a time when this was a beautiful country. Trees grew on these mountains, streams of water flowed in the canyons. There were many deer in the timber and fish in the streams. The Indians who lived here were very happy, they did not kill the game which abounded; it was not necessary because the trees bore fruit, and the grass produced grain, there was food in abundance.

"At that time there lived here two men who were brothers,

one of them was a good man, but the other was a very bad man. One day the bad brother became angry with his good brother and killed him. This so enraged the Great Spirit that he caused the rains to cease. When the rains ceased the grass ceased to grow, the trees ceased to produce fruit, and the Indians were obliged to hunt and kill the animals in order that they might have food.

"The bad brother made an axe from a piece of flint, and one day went out hunting with it. A rabbit jumped up and ran toward a pile of rocks, like that over there, and before taking refuge in the rocks, sat up and with his ears erect looked at the man, who threw his flint axe with great force, struck the rabbit behind the ears, and killed it. When the axe struck the rabbit it set the wool behind his ears on fire. If you will look you will see the brown spot where the wool was burned. The fire from the wool ignited the grass, the grass set the trees on fire and burned all of the vegetation off and left the country barren as you see it."

He was silent for a time, and then continued:

"But my father said that his father told him that his father said that it would not always remain in this condition. The Great Spirit will send the rain again, the trees will grow on the mountains, there will be rivers again in the canyons, the trees will bear fruit, and the grass will produce grain, and all of the Indians will return and live here in happiness ever after." (Compare with Genesis.)

THE DELUGE

Without exception the Indians with whom the author has associated have traditions of the Flood.

THE NAVAJO TRADITION

As before stated the Navajos are among the most intelligent of the native tribes that the writer has labored among. While not as far advanced in civilization as the Mexicans were at the time of the conquest, they are fully equal to them in natural intelligence and courage.

When the writer first visited these Indians in 1875, the following was related by them:

"A long time ago a flood of water covered the entire land. One man and his family were saved by going to the top of the San Francisco peak, the highest mountain in their country. With the man went up a pair of all the animals and birds. With the exception of those on the peak all of the people were drowned, and turned into fishes. The turkey gobbler was a very proud bird. As the water neared the top of the mountain he declared that he would go no further. He went down to the edge of the water, spread his tail, strutted and gobbled to hold back the flood. The muddy water covered the end of his tail feathers and held him fast. As he was about to be engulfed the Great Spirit sent a wave which tore him free from the mud and he hurried to the top of the peak to his mate. Had it not been for the intervention of the Great Spirit he would have perished and the wild turkeys which abound in the mountains would have become extinct."

A Navajo will not eat a fish, it is the spirit of his ancestors who perished in the Great Flood. He will not eat the flesh of the turkey because he was a vain and disobedient bird. As the Navajo father tells this story to his children, he says: "My son, avoid pride; remember the turkey—never strut, never gobble. Make few friends, but be true to those you have. Do not reach conclusions hastily, but when your mind is made up act quickly."

When Gil Gonzales effected the conquest of Central America his first effort, as usual, was to convert the king to the religion of the King of Spain. Nicaragua said to him:

"You know so much of the making of the earth and its maker, tell me of the great flood—will there ever be another? Whither goes the spirit of man when it leaves the body? Does

the Pope never die? Is the King of Spain mortal? Why do the Christians so love gold?"

Bancroft, in his "Native Races of the Pacific States" says:

"Connected with the great flood of water there is a Mexican tradition analogous to the story of Noah and his ark. The following has been usually accepted as the ordinary version of this myth:

"In Atonatiuh, the age of water, a great flood covered the face of the earth and the inhabitants thereof were turned into fishes. Only one man and one woman escaped, saving themselves in the hollow trunk of a bald cyprus. On the water abating they grounded their ark on the peak of Choluacan, the Ararat of Mexico."

In Michoacan the Indians tell us that a great flood covered the earth, and that Tezpe with his wife and children and a collection of animals and seeds were saved in a spacious vessel which Tezpe constructed. When the waters began to subside, Tezpe sent out a vulture that it might go to and fro on the earth and bring him word when dry land began to appear.

"But the vulture feasted upon the carcasses that were strewn in every part, and did not return. Then Tezpe sent out other birds and the humming bird returned with a green leaf in its beak, and Tezpe knew that dry land had appeared, and landed his ark on the mountain of Choluacan."

The Tlascaltecs, Zapotecs, Mistecs, and the people of Michoacan all have traditions of the Deluge. To quote all the references made by Bancroft to the flood would fill a volume.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

The Choluacans of Mexico say that after the waters of the flood had subsided one of the brothers who

had been saved, who was surnamed the Builder, went to Cholula and began to build an artificial mountain as a monument and memorial to the God who had sheltered him while the people were destroyed by water. When the great structure rose slowly, threatening to reach to heaven the Gods became angry and rained fire upon the builders, many of whom were slain, and the remainder scattered over the face of the earth.

Don Francisco Nunez de la Vega says:

"I have in my possession an ancient manuscript of the primitive Indians of this province which says that the father and founder of this nation was called Teponahuale, which means the God of the hollow wood. That he was present at the construction of a great tower, and saw with his own eyes the confusion of tongues, after which God commanded him to come to this extensive land and divide it among his people."

Attention could be called to many other references which point to the creation, the deluge, and Tower of Babel, but it is not necessary. The references given are sufficient to convince the fair-minded reader that Indians, at the time of the conquest, possessed knowledge of the Creation, the Deluge, and the Tower of Babel.

From what sources did they obtain this knowledge if not from the Brass Plates which they brought with them from Jerusalem, as recorded in the Book of Mormon?

The Book of Mormon brings to us a more rational and convincing contribution, attesting the divine authenticity of the Bible, than any book extant, the Bible alone excepted.

The Bible contains a very brief history of the people of the Old World, and in greater detail of the Abrahamic branch of the human race, and the hand-dealing of the Lord with them.

The Book of Mormon contains a brief historical review of another branch of the same people, who were brought to America under divine leadership, and occupied the continent for a period of one thousand years.

Many of the incidents recorded in the Bible, the real meaning of which is somewhat obscure, are made plain to the understanding of those who read when the two books are read together as Ezekiel the prophet said they should be, more than two thousand years ago:

"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 to 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." (Ezekiel 37:15-19.)

"And 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 cannot, 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, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but

have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

"Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous 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; also Joseph Smith's Own Story—the visit of Martin Harris to Charles Anthon.)

The Book of Mormon declares the divinity of Jesus Christ. Nephi prophesied of his coming six hundred years before his birth. Alma declared his Godship, and called upon the people to believe on his name, that they might participate in the redemption which would be wrought through the atonement that would be made. Many people were converted and worshiped in his name before he manifested himself in the flesh.

After his resurrection Jesus appeared to the Nephite people, established his Church among them and taught the doctrines of his gospel with such plainness and simplicity that there need be no misunderstanding as to its interpretation. (See III Nephi, chapter 11.)

More than fifty years have passed since the writer traveled from Utah through Arizona, New Mexico and northern Mexico, visiting many different tribes of Indians, among whom he did missionary work. Among all these people he found the tradition of a great culture hero who had visited them ages ago. He came from the east, a white man with noble features and bearing, his hair and beard brown and waving, his dress a glowing robe of white. He taught them to abhor war and all violence. They were to desist

from the sacrifice of either persons or animals, but were to make offerings of bread, flowers and perfume, and imitate his virtues and teachings. He went away to the east from whence he came, promising to return to them at a later day. At the time referred to lights had been kept constantly burning to guide him to their homes. To the Mexicans he was "Quetzalcoatl," to the people of Yucatan, "Votan."

While the Aztecs had reverted to an awful condition of idolatry and had erected many temples to their idolatrous gods, there existed at Tezcoco, a short distance from the City of Mexico, a shrine erected to this "Fair God." In it no sacrifice was offered. It was embellished with flowers, emblems of purity to the Aztec people.

It was the belief of the Aztecs in the return of Quetzalcoatl that made the conquest of the Aztec empire easy. When word was brought to Moctezuma that there had arrived on the coasts of his domain white men who came in boats with wings, who brought instruments of destruction with them which discharged thunderbolts, and bolts of lightning which destroyed all in their path, the conclusion was reached that Quetzalcoatl had returned, and to their sorrow the Aztecs welcomed the Spaniards as the Gods who were to return to them. Instead of peace and goodwill, Cortez brought bloodshed, destruction and sorrow.