

True Christmas and New Year.

A DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, Delivered in the 13th Ward Assembly Rooms, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, Dec. 29, 1872.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

We are, this afternoon, commemorating according to our usual custom, one of the most important events that has ever transpired in our world, and one which most concerns the whole human family, namely the death and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ for the redemption of the human family. No other event can be compared with this in its importance, and in its bearings upon the human family. Everything else is but of a secondary consideration, when compared with the atonement that has been wrought out in behalf of man by the great Redeemer, yet, strange to say, there are those in the Christian world, so called, who profess to believe in Christianity and yet deny the efficacy of the atoning blood that was shed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. More especially has this been the case for a few years past. I suppose there are many thousands who deny this now, where there were but few at the time of the rise of this church. This has arisen, probably, from the multiplication of spiritual influences, which now prevail to a very great extent in the Christian world—influences that are evil, revelations, false visions, spirit rappings and mediums. Almost without exception these false spirits have taught those who have listened to them, that there is no efficacy in the Atonement.

There is no subject more fully developed and made manifest to the children of men in modern revelation than that of the atonement. Much is said in relation to other doctrines, all of which have a bearing on the atonement, that lying at the foundation of the whole. If the evil one can prevail over the human family so as to get them to deny this fundamental doctrine, he knows that they are safe, so far as serving him and failing of their salvation are concerned. If they can only be wrought upon and deluded so as to disbelieve in the doctrine of the atonement, it does not matter to Satan what else they may believe. It is not my intention, however, this afternoon, unless so led by the Spirit of the Lord, to dwell much on this subject. It is one that has been so thoroughly taught to the Latter-day Saints, that I esteem it almost unnecessary to repeat that with which they are so familiar. By partaking of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper every Sabbath day, we commemorate that great event. If we do not preach so much about it by word of mouth we certainly fulfil the commandment which God has given requiring us to remember unto the Father the crucified body and shed blood of his Son, without which there would have been no remission of sin, and no redemption, and mankind would have remained in their fallen state. No light could have penetrated the hearts of the children of men, and there would have been no resurrection, no exaltation in the kingdom of God without the atonement. When we speak of total depravity, it has reference to certain conditions. Man is not totally depraved now, and the reason is, there has been an atonement; but do away that, as many do, and total depravity would reign, and men would live and die totally degraded beings. All the light that has come into the world, and that lights every man that comes into the world, has come by reason of the atonement. It is an event that all Christian societies commemorate more or less, or at least they did in former times. They are getting more lax now since the devil and his angels have given so many revelations against the atonement.

The Roman Catholics, about 532 years after Christ, set apart a day called Christmas, which they no doubt believed at that time was the day of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The reason why they set apart Christmas and have kept up its commemoration from that day until the present time, was because a certain monk, a member of their church, named Dionysius commenced a calculation to ascertain, if possible, the period of time from the birth of Christ to the time the calculation was made; and from all the information that he could glean he set it down at 532 years. They had not printed works in those days as we have now; they had not access to the abundance of historical and chronological information then that we have; but from all the information that Dionysius could glean, and making a calculation thereon, he came to the above result.

He also made a calculation in regard to the day on which he supposed the Savior to have been born, and that was set down as a day to be celebrated by the Roman Catholic church. They have certain ordinances in regard to that day, which you may see observed in their church in this city. People, prior to this time, did not date their documents from the birth of Christ. If they were writing a letter they did not say, in the year of our Lord 520, in the year of our Lord 416, and so on; this was never done until the calculation of Dionysius was made, then it was adopted

by the Roman Catholics and by all nations among whom they had power and influence. By and by other chronologists made calculations as to the time of Christ's birth, and from the information they could gather together, they discovered that Dionysius had made a mistake, and that Christ was born about one year before the time set by him. But by this time there were great numbers of important State and other documents and papers in existence, all dated according to the incorrect calculation of this Romish monk. How to remedy this the people did not know, for it would not do to alter all these dates.

Another set of chronologists made calculations and they discovered that Dionysius had made a mistake of two years in regard to the time of the Savior's birth. Four others, very learned men, sought diligently, and from the information they obtained they found that Jesus was born three years before the time published by Dionysius. Five others made it four years; some few made it five years before, and some seven years before the time specified by this Romish monk. All modern chronologists who have taken up the subject agree that Dionysius was incorrect at least several years. But did the people alter the dates of their documents and manuscripts when his error was fully made manifest? Not at all; they have continued that old, erroneous reckoning down to this present year. But they have attached the name of vulgar era to it, in order to indicate that it is incorrect. Vulgar era! I think the name is inappropriate, for there are thousands of people at the present day, including the youth of our land, and perhaps many who have had a collegiate education, who never knew or inquired into the meaning of vulgar era, or why the term was introduced. Its real meaning, is incorrect era or date. For instance we write a letter to-day, and we call it the 29th day of December, 1872. This is according to the vulgar era or erroneous date, or the reckoning of Dionysius; but this is not the true date. The probability is independent of the Bible or Book of Mormon, from the great mass of testimony that has been accumulated for generations past, that Jesus was born nearly four years prior to the commencement of this vulgar era, so that our present year, 1872, should be 1876. You will find a full account of these matters in the writings of the learned, in encyclopedias, and in various works touching upon chronology, so that you have no need to take my testimony alone on this subject, for you have access to our library here in this city, and you can examine works on chronology and see that I am correct. There may be those here who would like me to cite some works on this subject, I will cite one that I read while I was in England, a Bible dictionary, by a very learned author named Smith. This subject is treated very plainly and fully in that work. I think that Mr. John W. Young of this city has this work in his private library. The reason why I make these remarks is that this is the first Sabbath after Christmas, and the day on which I believe the Roman Catholics in this city are celebrating certain ordinances in their church in commemoration of this event.

Having found out that there is an error in regard to the year of Christ's birth, now let us inquire if the day observed by the Christian world as the day of his birth, the 25th of December, is or is not the real Christmas Day? A great many authors have found out from their researches that it is not. I think that there is scarcely an author at the present day that believes that the 25th day of December was the day that Christ was born on. Still it is observed by certain classes, and we, whether we make any profession or not, are just foolish enough to observe this old Roman Catholic festival. The boys and girls all look forward with great anticipations to Christmas. Many of them, it is true, do not know the meaning of it, or why it is celebrated; but when we come to reflect on the matter, it is all nonsense to celebrate the 25th day of December as the birthday of Jesus. It will do for a holiday, so you might select any other day for that purpose. It is generally believed and conceded by the learned, who have investigated the matter, that Christ was born in April. I have seen several accounts—some of them published in our periodicals—of learned men in different nations, in which it is stated that, according to the best of their judgment from the researches they have made, Christ was crucified on the 6th of April. That is, the day on which this church was organized. But when these learned men go back from the day of his crucifixion to the day of his birth, they are at a loss, having no certain evidence or testimony by which they can determine it. I intend this afternoon to give light on this subject from new revelation, which we, as Latter-day Saints, can depend upon. I will read to you from the Book of Mormon, some things that happened, at the time of the crucifixion, on this great western hemisphere, and I will say we have a date given there in connection with these events, showing how and Jesus was at the time of his crucifixion. It may not be amiss, however, for me to make a few remarks before I commence reading, to inform strangers who may be present, that the inhabitants of ancient America, and those who wrote the Book of Mormon were Israelites; that when they came from the city of Jerusalem, 600 years before Christ, they were a righteous people, and had prophets among them, and that they kept the law of Moses. Now the sacrifices and

burnt offerings of that law were typical of the great offering that was to be made by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The ancient inhabitants of this continent, to whom I have referred, understood the nature of these ordinances, and they looked forward to the coming of the true Messiah, and celebrated it by these ordinances, the same as we look backward and celebrate his death and sufferings by partaking of the symbols of, as we have done this afternoon.

Now if God led a company of Israelites from Palestine to colonize this continent, and taught them to keep the law of Moses with its sacrifices and burnt offerings, typical of the great sacrifice that was to be made at Jerusalem, it would not be at all strange for him to give to them a sign concerning Jesus, when he should be born, and when he should die. He did this by the mouths of prophets. Numerous prophets were raised up on this land, and they prophesied to the inhabitants thereof, and taught them about the coming of Jesus, and what signs should be given at the time he should come. They taught them that the night before Jesus should be born there would be no darkness on this land, but that it would be perfectly light. They would see the sunset in the evening, and that, during the night, until it should rise the next morning, there would be no darkness; that great signs and lights would appear in the heavens, and that they were to be to them indications of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. These signs were given, and by them the people on this continent knew the very day that Jesus was born.

Some years after this, before the crucifixion of Jesus, they fell into great wickedness. They persecuted the prophets, shed their blood, stoned them to death, and cast them out of their midst, and they were full of wrath and indignation and sinned against great light, so that the Lord was under the necessity of sending other prophets to them, telling them that at the time of the crucifixion, if they did not repent, many of their cities should be burned with fire, many destroyed with tempests, and that they should be visited with sore judgments and calamities; and that during the time Jesus should be lifted up on the cross, there should be tremendous earthquakes upon all the face of this continent, and that after that there would be three days and three nights of darkness, and that this darkness should come immediately after the execution of the Savior. Now let us read what the prophet says on page 450 of the Book of Mormon concerning these events, which transpired just as they had been predicted.

"And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, in the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as had never been known in all the land." From what period was this date reckoned? We are informed on page 435 of this book that the Nephites began reckoning the beginning of their year from the sign given them at the birth of the Savior—the night without darkness. Previous to that they had reckoned from the time of their leaving Jerusalem, 600 years before Christ, and they continued this some five centuries until they changed the form of their government on this continent, and introduced judges; then they reckoned their time from the beginning of the reign of the judges. This mode of reckoning lasted ninety-one years. Five hundred and nine years having passed away before the reign of the judges commenced, and ninety-one added to that made 600 years from the time that Lehi and the colony came out of Jerusalem. Then they changed their mode of reckoning, and reckoned from the time this great sign was given in the heavens, so that we know what this date means—"In the thirty and fourth year, in the first month and in the fourth day of the month." Now I think this gives us a clue to the age of Jesus when he was crucified, but we will read on, and see about the storm.

"There arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land; and there was also a great and terrible tempest, and there was terrible thunder, inasmuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder; and there were exceeding sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land. And the city of Zarahemla did take fire."

Zarahemla was their great capital city. It was located in the north part of South America, on one branch of that river that we call the river Magdalena, that runs down from the mountains to the northward and empties into the Caribbean sea. On the west side of that river was located the great city Zarahemla. We will now read further:

"And the city Zarahemla did take fire; and the city Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned; and the earth was carried up upon the city of Moroni, and that in the place of the city thereof, there became a great mountain."

Now if our miners, those who go into South America, should happen to dig in a few thousand feet, and should come across old buildings, they need not be astonished, for the Lord made a terrible revolution in the land. There came a great mountain in the place where this city stood; "and there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward"—what we term South America.

"But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward"—North America—"for behold the whole

face of the land was changed because of the tempest, and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the exceeding great quakings of the whole earth; and the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough, and many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shook till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate; and there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceeding great, and there were many in them who were slain; and there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind, and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away; and thus the face of the whole earth became deformed because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth. And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, inasmuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land."

You can see from this, what terrible convulsions have taken place on this continent, even here in these mountains. In the mountains west of this valley, you will find the strata of rock set up almost perpendicular; that was not the way they were first formed. You will also find there as elsewhere, strata dipping at a greater or less angle into the earth. The cause of all this has been the terrible convulsions that our globe has undergone, and more especially at the time of the crucifixion.

"And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours; and then behold there was darkness upon the face of the land."

I might go on reading, if it were necessary, in regard to the weeping, wailing and mourning of the people during these three days of intense darkness—no sun, moon, nor stars were to be seen, and the vapor was so great that the inhabitants of the land could feel it, the same as the darkness was felt in the land of Egypt. It was not, of course, the darkness that was felt, but the vapor that was so thick. There is one thing, however, to which I wish to call your special attention, before I make any further remarks in regard to the date that is here given. When this darkness dispersed, it is said to have been morning. You will find it on page 454. "And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away; and it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend."

You might say that this was not three days and three nights, for Jesus was crucified, and died on the cross at 3 o'clock in the afternoon at Jerusalem, and consequently for it to have been just three days and three nights, you might suppose that the darkness must have dispersed in the afternoon. But this book tells us that when the three days and three nights of darkness had passed away it was morning. Now why this discrepancy—for it seems to be one—between the Bible and the Book of Mormon? Can you account for it and tell why it should have been morning in America? The reason is because of the difference in longitude. The writer of the account in the Book of Mormon resided in the northwestern portion of South America. Now you take a map of the world, and see the difference in longitude between the place where Jesus was crucified, and that where the writer of the Book of Mormon lived, and you will find that it is about seven and a half hours. Now you subtract seven and a half hours from 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and what time would it be when the three hours of quaking and the destruction of cities expired or when the darkness commenced? Would it not be in the morning? Take away seven and a half hours longitude from 3 o'clock—the time that Jesus expired—and would it not be half past seven o'clock in the morning with the inhabitants of this land, while it was afternoon with the inhabitants in Jerusalem?

I presume that Joseph Smith, being an unlearned man, never saw this to the day of his death; that is, he never understood it. I never heard him, or any learned man refer to it until after his death; but reading it over myself, I saw, at first, there was an apparent discrepancy between this book and the New Testament; one placing it in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. When thinking of this seeming discrepancy the difference in longitude occurred to my mind, and that is just what it should be to account for the difference in time given in the two books; and this, though not direct, is incidental, proof that the man who translated this book was inspired of God. I do not think that Joseph Smith, to the day of his death, knew that a difference in time at different places on the earth, was caused by their difference of longitude.

We will now go back to the date, at the commencement of the extract I have been reading—"in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, and on the fourth day of the month"—that would make him thirty-