

# THE DESERET NEWS.

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TRUTH AND LIBERTY.

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GEORGE Q. CANNON,  
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Editors and Publishers.

## DISCOURSE

PREACHED BY

## ELDER ORSON PRATT

In the 12th Ward Meeting house,  
on Sunday Afternoon,  
Dec. 9th, 1877.

REPORTED BY GEORGE F. GIBBS.

Since coming to this stand I have been reminded of a certain passage contained in the Book of Mormon (commencing on page 161), which I will read.

"Now, as soon as Ammon had read the record, the king inquired of him to know if he could interpret languages, and Ammon told him that he could not. And the king said unto him, being grieved for the afflictions of my people, I caused that forty and three of my people should take a journey into the wilderness, that thereby they might find the land of Zarahemla, that we might appeal unto our brethren to deliver us out of bondage; and they were lost in the wilderness many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla, but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters; having discovered a land which was covered with the bones of men, and of beasts, &c., and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind; having discovered a land which had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel. And for a testimony that the things that they have said are true, they have brought twenty-four plates, which are filled with engravings, and they are of pure gold. And, behold, also, they have brought breast plates, which are large, and they are of brass and of copper, and are perfectly sound. And again, they have brought swords, the hilts thereof have perished, and the blades thereof were cankered with rust; and there is no one in the land that is able to interpret the language, or the engravings that are on the plates. Therefore I said unto thee, canst thou translate? And I say unto thee again, knowest thou of any one that can translate? For I am desirous that these records should be translated into our language; for, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of the remnant of the people, who have been destroyed, from whence these records came; or, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of this very people who have been destroyed; and I am desirous to know the cause of their destruction.

"Now Ammon said unto him, I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith he can look and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters and no man can look in them, except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not, and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer. And behold, the king of the people who is in the land of Zarahemla, is the man who is commanded to do these things, and who has the high gift from God. And the king said that a seer is greater than a prophet. And Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God. But a seer can know of things which have

passed, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them; and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known. Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh of great benefit to his fellow-beings.

"And now, when Ammon had made an end of speaking these words, the king rejoiced exceedingly, and gave thanks to God, saying, doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates, and these interpreters are doubtless prepared for unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men. O how marvellous are the works of the Lord, and how long doth he suffer with his people; yea, and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men, for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that they should rule over them. Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherds, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest."

The instructions that are imparted here, which I have just read, are of importance to the children of men. We are here taught about a very great, and precious, and high gift that comes from God—the gift of being a seer, a revelator, a prophet, and inspired man. Not only to receive revelation from God, but to interpret revelations given to other prophets who lived in times before, bringing to light knowledge, and intelligence, and wisdom, and the dealings of God with the human family, among more ancient people. This gift is more fully explained in the Book of Mormon than in the Jewish record. We have in the Jewish record, the Bible, some information in relation to the instrument here called interpreter, but which is called in that record by another name, namely, Urim and Thummim.

It was a gift that was exercised in the days of Moses, among the house of Israel; it was a gift especially given to Aaron, the brother of Moses, who was appointed the chief priest over all the tribes of Israel. The Lord saw proper to give him instructions in relation to the duties of his office and calling, how he should be clad—what kind of priestly garments he should wear, what he should perform in administering certain ordinances and how he should perform them; and also gave unto him some instruction in regard to the breast-plate, that was called the breast-plate of judgment. The reason of this was, that Aaron was appointed to be a judge among the children of Israel, occupying a similar place among that people that the president of the bishopric occupies in this church. But he was blessed above those who have been ordained to the same calling in this dispensation, for he was in possession of the Urim and Thummim, and by virtue of this instrument he could inquire of the Lord in relation to every case that should be brought before him for adjudication. The judgment of man is naturally very weak and imperfect, and inasmuch as Aaron was required to judge the people of God, it was of the utmost importance that all his decisions should be given in righteousness, that there should be no imperfections connected with them, and for that reason the Lord gave express instructions to Aaron, through his brother Moses, to have a breast-plate. In this breast-plate were twelve stones, representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and in the centre of these rows of stones the Urim and Thummim was placed, and when he was required to render judgment upon any matter, he inquired of the Lord through it, and was enabled to give decisions according to the word of the Lord.

We have other accounts given in the Bible concerning the exercise of this same gift. David was blessed with this gift, and when Saul was pursuing him from place to place, seeking his life, he would inquire of the Lord, by means of a similar instrument, and receive

revelations. The nature of his inquiries was—Would Saul go to such a city seeking him? Would the people of such a city deliver him into hands? and the Lord would answer him, and he of course would govern himself accordingly. This gift seems to have been of frequent occurrence among the Israelites in their several generations, down to a few centuries before the coming of Christ. Then it seems that Israel so far transgressed the law of heaven, and so far strayed from the Lord that the Urim and Thummim was taken from their midst, as you will find mentioned by one of the prophets in the Jewish Bible; it was taken from them, and they were to abide many days without this instrument, also without a king and without sacrifices, and eventually the ordinances of God were to be taken from them. In other words they were to be left without revelators, without prophets, without an inspired king to rule over them; all of which has been fulfilled for many centuries in the dispersion of the descendants of Jacob from their land of promise among the nations whithersoever they are driven, without having any king; they do not offer sacrifices as anciently; they have no priest with the breast-plate of judgment, and Urim and Thummim to inquire of the Lord.

It seems that the Lord manifested himself to the people of this great Western continent in a similar manner. Here he raised up prophets, and here they were in possession of an instrument, although not called strictly by the same name, yet an instrument evidently designed by the Almighty as a medium of communication to his people. King Mosiah who lived some time after the Israelites came to the American continent, some few centuries before the first coming of Christ, he had this great gift. Ammon, a servant of God, who explained this gift to King Limhi, tells us the nature of the gift. He informs us that Mosiah had where-with he could look and interpret writing and engraving of ancient date. It seems that forty-three of the people of King Limhi had been sent from the kingdom where they resided, which was down at, or near Equador, in South America, to search the land which they had left some two or three generations before; and they lost their way in the wilderness; and failed to find Zarahemla the land they were seeking, which was in the northern part of South America. They passed by the land through a wilderness country, and it appears that they went into North America. They found all the land which they explored, covered with ruins of buildings and cities; and they found the bones of men and animals, and among other things they found 24 plates which were of pure gold, on which were engravings, which they brought, among other things, to King Limhi. He at that time, was a righteous man, as well as most of his people, and they were exceedingly anxious to know the interpretations of the engravings, believing that they would give some account of the people who had occupied the country where they were found. They wanted to know what had become of so great a people, for evidently it appeared to them they had been very numerous. And it was for this purpose that Ammon was questioned. Ammon was a man that had been sent up in the meantime from the northern portions of South America, called Zarahemla; and he informed King Limhi that the king of Zarahemla had this high gift from God, that he was a seer, and could by using the interpreters interpret ancient languages. Hence the rejoicing of the king, because there was a man who could give them the information they were so anxious to find out.

Afterwards we have a history in the Book of Mormon, of the people of King Limhi having been driven out by some of the wicked portions of the people. He came to the land of Zarahemla, taking with his colony, these twenty-four plates and asking King Mosiah to translate them into the Nephite language. He did so; and who gave an account of a people they

came from the tower of Babel, at the time of the confusion of tongues; that they landed upon this north country, called North America, and they dwelt here some sixteen or seventeen centuries, and they were part of the time a righteous people, and a part of the time wicked. And many prophets existed among this ancient colony, and they kept their records, some upon metallic plates and others upon other materials. There was a prophet at the time of the destruction of this first colony whose name was Ether. He wrote an abridgment of the Jaredites, also an account of their coming to this land from the Tower of Babel; he wrote also concerning the creation of the world, and the doings of the Lord from the beginning down to the building of the great tower, this short account was given on these twenty-four plates. And there is also given in the Book of Mormon, by Moroni, the man who hid up the plates from which the book was translated, a very short sketch of the history of this first colony that came from the tower, under the name of the Book of Ether. And in this Book of Ether we find that they had some thirty kings from the time they left Babel, and that they were finally destroyed because of great wickedness, to fulfill a prophecy and decree which the Lord made when he was bringing them forth to this land. The decree was that if they or their descendants should fall into wickedness and become fully ripened in iniquity that the Lord would utterly destroy them, and bring forth another people to possess the land in their stead. Accordingly these twenty-four plates mentions their overthrow, how they were destroyed; also some mention is made of their most eminent prophets, and much instruction is given in regard to the coming to this land of this first colony, how they were brought here by the Lord from the tower, and how, in passing through the valley called Nimrod, the Lord himself went before their camp in a cloud, teaching them and instructing, and leading them, the same as he afterwards led the children of Israel. And he brought them to great waters, where they were commanded of him to build vessels, which they did, eight in number, by which, under the particular care of the Almighty, they were brought across the great Pacific, as we now term it, taking them three hundred and forty-four days, and finally they landed upon the western coast of North America, as near as we can determine from this book, in Mexico, south of the Gulf of California. And that when the brother of Jared was coming to this land the Lord gave him some very remarkable visions, and, among other things he gave him the Urim and Thummim, prepared two crystal stones in two rims of a bow, and sanctified them, and showed to the brother of Jared many marvellous things, some of which I will read, for the instruction of those who have not, perhaps, given their attention to these matters.

I will read first how the Lord lighted up the eight vessels in which the colony from the tower came.

"Howbeit, ye cannot cross this great deep, save I prepare you against the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come. Therefore, what will ye that I shall prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?"

Their barges were so constructed that they could dive under the waves and be brought up again, and thus they were driven by the force of the winds for 344 days.

"And it came to pass that the brother of Jared, (now the number of the vessels which had been prepared was eight,) went forth unto the mount which they called the mount Shellm, because of its exceeding height, and did molten out of a rock sixteen small spheres; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass; and he did convey them in his hands up, on the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord saying, O Lord thou hast said that we must be en-