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Additional Internal Evidence of the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon II

Author(s): Isaac B. Ball

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Abstract: This series defends the reality of the natural catastrophes described in 3 Nephi 8-10. Quotes descriptions of more recent hurricanes and earthquakes to show how similar the details are and how accurate the Book of Mormon account is. The account in 3 Nephi 8-10 is so accurate that neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery could have had sufficient knowledge of the facts of natural disasters to have invented this description. The second part covers earthquakes.

Additional Internal Evidence of the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon

By
I. B. BALL

II

IT will be necessary now to turn to a consideration of earthquakes, in order that we may compare these phenomena with Book of Mormon references thereto, to note if our parallelism holds here also.

Professor E. J. Houston has a chapter entitled, "Some of the Phenomena of Earthquakes."¹ He describes six phenomena, to wit: 1. Violent shaking of the earth's crust. 2. A great variety of sounds and noises. 3. Fire and smoke from fissures that have been rent in the ground. 4. Tidal waves on the coast. 5. Great loss of life. 6. Great changes in the earth's surface.

The Book of Mormon account of the fateful calamities, recorded in III Nephi, remarkably parallels these specific characteristics of earthquakes as here set down by a careful student of earth science. If the parallel is striking when one reads merely the above list, the fuller description by professor Houston cannot fail to be truly impressive.

DISCUSSING these phenomena of earthquakes in the same order as mentioned above and omitting his reference to violent

shaking of the earth's crust, since that is well enough known by readers everywhere, he writes as follows:

"After the actual quaking of the earth the most wonderful and impressive thing is the great variety of sounds and noises. These occur not only while the earth waves are passing through the crust at any place, but also long before the principal shocks reach the place as well as long after they have passed.

"Among some of the more interesting phenomena are the fire and smoke that are seen to come out of fissures that have been rent in the ground. It is possible that in many cases these flashes of fire are in reality produced by the elec-

tric discharges that momentarily light the clouds of dust thrown up out of the fissure. But sometimes true flames are seen escaping from the fissure. This was the case during the earthquake of Lisbon, 1755, when fire burst through fissures at several places; burning with a lambent flame for some hours.

"Mallet asserts that in many cases the clouds of smoke observed do not consist of true smoke like that produced when wood and vegetable matters are incompletely burned, but is only ordinary air mixed with sulphurous acid gas and various other gases.

"Tidal waves as at Callao, Peru, 1687, Lisbon, 1755, Japan, 1854.

"Great loss of life. As a rule great earthquake shocks cause a very large loss of life, as for instance:

"Lisbon 60,000,
Morocco 40,000,
Calabria 50,000,
Syria (A. D. 19 and 526) 120,000,
Syria (later) 50,000,
Antioch, 602 A. D., 60,000,
Antioch, 526 A. D., 250,000,
Alexandria, 365 A. D., 60,000,
Messina, 1692, 74,000,
Messina, 1908, 100,000,
Japan, 1731, 100,000,
Japan, 1923, 200,000,
Quito, 1797, 40,000,
India, 893, 180,000,
India, 1737, 300,000,
Assam, India, 1897, 150,000, etc.



A part of the city of Uncas, Machu Picchu, perched a-top of the Andes mountains.

¹E. J. Houston, "The Atmosphere," chapter 24.

IN commenting on the loss of life by earthquakes, Mallet says: 'Such are the numbers to be met with in the narratives, and if we suppose that there occurs one great earthquake in every three years over the whole earth, and that this involves the entombment of only ten thousand human beings, and that such has been the economy of our system for the last four thousand years we shall have a number representing above thirteen millions of people thus suddenly swallowed up, with countless other bodies of animals of every lower order.'

"Great changes in the earth's surface features. Necessarily the progress of a great earthquake wave will produce great changes in the earth's surface features: for example landslides, where immense layers of clay or other material slip or slide to a lower level and are thrown across the course of a river, causing its waters to be dammed up and then by spreading to form a great lake.

"Permanent changes of level are frequently caused by earthquakes as for example the coast of Chile during the earthquake of 1822, when the coast for many miles was raised from three to four feet above its former level.

"In other cases the level of the ground is permanently lowered. This occurred in the Bengal earthquake in 1762, when an area of some sixty square miles suddenly sank.

"In some cases of a change in level of the ground, large areas are raised in one place and lowered in another, rivers take new courses and their old courses are completely obliterated."

GOING back to the very beginning of Professor Houston's remarks, it will be noted that he prominently mentions sounds and noises as among the six common phenomena that accompany earthquakes. And Henri Fabre,² the French naturalist and popular author, asserts:

"Earthquakes are often preceded by subterranean noises announcing the catastrophe to come. First, there is the dull rumble that reminds one of distant thunder, swelling in volume, then diminishing, then swelling, again, as if some storm were beginning to break far beneath the earth's surface. At this sound, so

²Henri Fabre, "This Earth of Ours."

full of mysterious menace, everyone falls silent, mute with fear, and every face turns pale.

"Warned by their instincts the very animals are seized with alarm; dogs howl with terror, and the plow horse appears to brace himself by planting his hoofs farther apart. Meanwhile the noise increases, and one seems to hear a long line of wagons, heavily laden with old iron, rumbling over a hollow roadway of brass, while a whole battery of cannon is discharged. And then the ground trembles, rises and falls, whirls round, opens, and a frightful abyss yawns before the terrified observers. In the presence of such scenes, the stoutest heart is panic-stricken."

Compare all this with the short phrases of the Book of Mormon: "The earth did tremble, and the rocks did * * * rend, and [there were] dreadful groanings * * * and tumultuous noises." The harmony in the two accounts is self-evident. And if "in the presence of such scenes the stoutest heart is panic-stricken," then there is little wonder that we read in the III Nephi's record of "the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people."

REFERRING now to the vapors and smoke mentioned by Professor Houston in the foregoing, I should like to try to reinforce what he has to say and to add some data on darkness sometimes attending earthquakes. This because the darkness is a very prominent part of the record, lasting three days, thus fulfilling the prophecy which especially had mentioned this phenomena. It is referred to as "thick darkness, inasmuch that the inhabitants * * * could feel the vapor of darkness." And again, "the vapor of smoke overpowered" many people, and "the vapor of darkness," was of such a nature that "there could

³"Volcanoes and Earthquakes," by G. Hartwig.

be no light, because of the darkness, neither candle, neither torch, neither could there be kindled any fire with their exceeding fine wood, so that there could not be any light at all."

Here then, in brief, we have described a thick darkness having three peculiar attributes: it could be felt, it overpowered many human beings, and it would not support combustion, that is, nothing would burn in it. Let it be noted carefully, however, that this darkness settled down only after the first three hours of destruction. (III Nephi 8:19.)

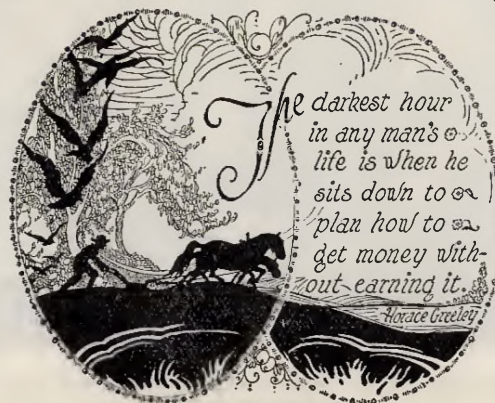
A noted authority, Dr. G. Hartwig,³ discusses gases and vapors that emanate from vents in the surface of the earth. He says that carbonic acid gas and carburetted hydrogen are two gases that often proceed from the earth's crust at various places. The former, he says, comes forth in incredible quantities in certain regions. Now, as is well known, carbonic acid gas will not support combustion, and is hard to breathe. He continues, "A light dipped in carbonic acid gas is immediately extinguished and every animal inhaling it is liable to instant suffocation."

Now since these gases are known to emanate from crevices and hollows in the earth's crust at many places, it naturally follows, of course, that any earthquake may conceivably loose them to spread over the face of the land thereabouts. And it would seem fair, tentatively, to contend that some such thing as this is what happened at the time of the three days of darkness among the Nephites.

TWO further references to the presence of darkness as a concomitant of earthquakes may be cited. They are from Hobb's interesting book, "Some Great Earthquakes Described."

Of the Lisbon catastrophe he says, "The day was almost immediately turned into night, owing to the thickness of the dust from the shaken city.

And in chapter ten, Hobbs, in speaking of the American quake, states: "The earthquake shocks which in the winter of 1811-12 in the United States produced the 'sunk country,' along the lower Mississippi river, were felt through the



eastern portion of the U. S. and as far west as exploration had gone. * * * And it was especially worthy of note because of the sulphurous gases emitted. About two o'clock in the night of December 16, 1811, there came a severe earth shock accompanied by a noise that resembled loud and near thunder * * * and this was followed in a moment by saturation of the atmosphere with sulphurous vapor. The vapor has been described in connection with subsequent shocks as of a purplish hue and resembling smoke. * * * Between December 16, 1811, and March 16, 1812, no less than 1874 shocks were recorded. * * * At about four o'clock in the afternoon of February seventh * * * [the shock] was accompanied by a charge of sulphurous vapor in the atmosphere and an unusual darkness which greatly added to the terror of the people. * * * The emission of sulphurous vapors has often been mentioned in connection with earthquakes and doubtless usually results from the liberation of sulphuretted hydrogen. * * * The importance which such vapors acquire in connection with the New Madrid earthquake (New Madrid was the name then given to this part of the country) appears to be much greater than usual, but the abundance and agreement of testimony concerning the atmosphere after the hard shocks is convincing."

And a believer in the accuracy of the Book of Mormon would like to add that the abundance and agreement of the testimony concerning the atmosphere after the extremely hard shocks in 34 A. D. in Central and northern South America is also convincing. The emission of sulphurous vapors which have often been mentioned in connection with earthquakes, causing darkness and the appearance of smoke, and the emanation of carbonic acid gas that is known to proceed in incredible quantities from vents in the surface of the earth and that will extinguish any light that is dipped into it and may suffocate animal life—these, or comparable gases, were simply present in unwonted abundance at that time. Thus may all the phenomena of the

darkness during these three days be satisfactorily explained in terms of well-known and verified events.

There are several authentic accounts of the opening of abysses and the swallowing up of towns and parts of cities therein. It will be well to present these now. First recall the words of the Book of Mormon, "Many great and notable cities were sunk." Mention is also made of the nine cities that were destroyed by sinking at this time.

AND now in this connection, attend to a description of the earthquake at Lisbon, Portugal, November 1, 1755. Henri Fabre⁴ says: "The populous capital of Portugal, which no longer seemed to threaten, was engaged in its business and other concerns, when suddenly on November 1, 1755, there was heard underground a mighty noise like the continuous rolling of thunder; then the ground, violently shaken, seemed to whirl round, rise, and fall, and in a moment the city was nothing but a heap of ruins, and dead bodies. The population, still remaining, had sought a refuge from the fall of shattered buildings by huddling together on a broad quay running along the water front. All at once the quay was swallowed up by the waves, taking with it the terrified throng, together with the boats, and ships moored there. Not a single victim, not a scrap of wreckage, rose to the surface. An abyss had opened that had swallowed up the waters themselves, the quay, and the people; and then it had closed keeping them forever.

⁵III Nephi, 10.



"At the same time the sea, which had at first receded from the shore, returned, and piled up its waters to a depth of forty-eight feet above the usual level, hurling its furious waves over the town.

"To the conflagration that had started was added this tumultuous flood, and the greater part of what was not already destroyed disappeared. In sixty minutes sixty thousand people had perished.

"While this was taking place at Lisbon, and while the lofty mountains of Portugal were shaken to their foundations, so that they split open, and their summits broke off, the same frightful disturbance was making itself felt in northern Africa. Morocco, Fez, and Mequinez were overthrown, and a town of ten thousand inhabitants was swallowed up in an abyss that suddenly opened and as suddenly closed."

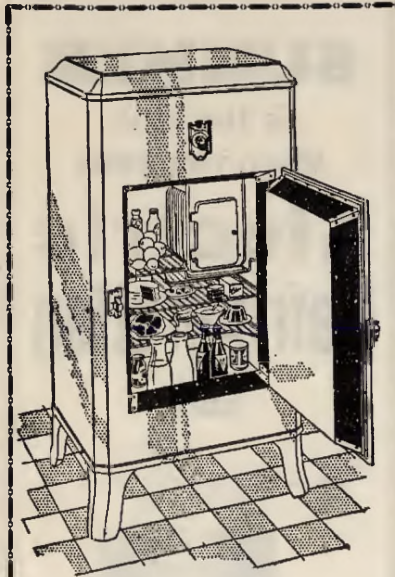
IN reading of this fearful destruction please especially keep in mind the disastrous sinking of the quay at Lisbon, and also the account of the town of ten thousand people in north Africa, that was "swallowed up in an abyss that suddenly opened and as suddenly closed." And with this narrative before you, read, if you will, the full account in III Nephi⁵ and see for yourself the incidents therein that parallel the sinking of the quay at Lisbon and of the town of ten thousand. As we have mentioned before, it speaks of the "many great and notable cities that were sunk" and mentions by name the nine cities that were destroyed by sinking at this time.

The writer confesses to be one who has read these sacred accounts of the many cities that were sunk, and has often felt a disturbing sense of vague unreality in the laconic statements, though, of course, not doubting the records. But after the realistic narrative by Fabre just set before you, a sense of relieving reality can not be denied. The sacred records are found to be wondrously true to facts now well known to accurate observers and to students of this earth of ours and its sad cataclysmic history.

THERE is still another passage that may perhaps be illumined, namely the passage refer-

[Continued on page 494]

⁴Henri Fabre, "This Earth of Ours."



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[Continued from page 459]

ring to the very large area covered by the Nephite destructions. As quoted above it says, "the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempests, and the exceeding great quaking of the whole earth." How large the affected region was we are not told. But that it was very great we can not doubt, since it seems to have included the whole land of the Nephites who had been multiplying in the land for some six hundred years.

Are there any modern parallels to this; that is, are there records of very large areas being affected seriously by quakes? In answer we have only to refer to the great quake at Assam, India, in 1897. We read in the Encyclopedia Britannica, "It was remarkable for the vast extent of the meizoseismal area and the distortions of the crust within it. The shock itself was felt over about one and three-quarter millions of square miles or nearly half the size of Europe. Serious damage to buildings occurred in a district containing about one hundred sixty thousand square miles or more than twice the size of Great Britain."

Thus it is seen that the sacred record of the calamities that in three hours practically wiped out a wicked nation is not at all beyond the now-known powers of hurricanes and earthquakes.

Let there now be brought together in brief tabular form the characteristics of great quakings of the earth as noted by modern authorities on earth science, and also let there be set opposite them the actual accounts from the Book of Mormon. Perhaps then the striking parallelism may be all the more apparent.

Characteristics of Earthquakes as Mentioned by Prof. E. J. Houston, Henri Fabre and Others

1. Violent quaking of the earth's crust.
2. Great variety of sounds and noises.
3. Fire and smoke from fissures in the earth.
4. Gases from the earth's crust that will not support combustion.
5. Darkness is sometimes produced by the vapors of smoke and gases.
6. Very large loss of life, especially in cities.
7. Great changes in the earth's crust.

8. Abysses sometimes open in the earth's crust, and close again, swallowing whole towns.

9. Stoutest hearts are panic stricken.

Phenomena Attending the Quakings of the Earth as Mentioned in III Nephi, in the Book of Mormon

1. "Exceeding great quaking of the whole earth."
2. "Rocks did rend," "dreadful groanings," and "tumultuous noises."
3. "Vapors of smoke."
4. "And there could not be any light at all."
5. "Thick darkness," that could be felt.
6. Sixteen cities wiped out of existence, besides great loss of life in other cities.
7. "Whole face of the land changes;" highways broken-up; level roads spoiled; smooth places made rough.
8. Nine cities were destroyed by sinking.
9. "Great mourning and weeping and wailing of the people."

LEAVING this study of parallelism and harmony between the sacred records and the accounts of first-hand observers of these phenomena, let us now note that the geography of terrestrial seismic disturbances has also its bit of evidence to contribute to the credibility of the Book of Mormon narrative in III Nephi. Be reminded that a similar contribution is made by a consideration of the geography of hurricanes, as was pointed out in earlier passages in this paper.

As proof of this last statement I quote from an authoritative work by Major Clarence E. Dutton⁸ wherein he says: "Throughout this fifteen hundred miles of volcanic coast line, from Panama to Oaxaca, Mexico, earthquakes have always been abundant, and often highly destructive. From the scanty records preserved, De Montessus has succeeded in bringing to light 772, and most of these are of a degree of energy sufficient to cause a memorable amount of destruction, or to leave a deep impression upon the public mind. * * * Entering South America at Panama, two seismic regions are before us, both of them, however, at a great distance; one in Venezuela far to the eastward, the other in Ecuador, far to the southward." Needless

⁸Clarence E. Dutton, "Earthquakes," 1904, p. 263.

to say this description covers the generally accepted location of the lands of the Nephites to a nicety.

Therefore, if we may judge the past by the present, we may reasonably infer that the Nephites were not unacquainted with destructive earthquakes for they resided in a region unusually subject to them. In A. D. 34 the greatest quake joined with the greatest tempest and the nation was all but wiped out. And now, a closing word, on the worth of the internal evidence here submitted for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

ACCORDING to the point of view of those who scoff at the sacred origin of the western volume of Scripture, one must seemingly imagine Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery pressing onward in their concoction of the book—which for no imaginable gain to themselves except persecution, poverty, and pain, they were to palm off on the world as angel-inspired. And as they came to the period of the Savior's death and three-day burial, the bright idea struck them to insert a simultaneous three-day period of destruction on this continent. And of all the possible means to this judgment upon a rebellious nation, these two youths—one almost totally unschooled and the other but meagerly so—chancing to determine upon natural calamities, were lucky enough to choose just those particular forms of elemental violence which we now learn are peculiar to the exact terrain upon which they had, oddly enough, settled their people. Then further, having chanced upon these wondrously appropriate phenomena, these same lucky novices fortunately (or by some genius beyond the wildest flights of the imagination) wrote into their narrative ample details and particulars, in concise but accurate clarity, which no one who had not been an eyewitness, or who had not had access to all-embracing accounts of eye-witnesses, could then, or can now, equal. And furthermore, they just happened, also, to go not one iota farther in inserting specific phenomena than scientists have today found warranted by a strict search of first-hand accounts.

AS against such a travesty on logic and argument as this, let

reason and justice behold with becoming gratitude two choice young men, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, dedicating their efforts, their prayers, and their unmatched spiritual gifts for the enlightenment of the world. Guided by angels from heaven, Joseph receives, and they translate a western Scripture replete with beauty of teaching, and grandeur of spirit.

But such a record quite naturally and quite unavoidably, of course, includes many details as to natural surroundings of the people whose history it tells, their customs, their language, their migrations, their vicissitudes and eventually the terrible tempests and quakes that beset the region. And, of course, many of these details serve as valid tests of the authenticity of the record. And just here, Joseph Smith, had he been an impostor, and the Book of Mormon a fraud, would have hanged himself high as Haman on his own gallows, and the cynical world could now be celebrating its days of Purim "with joy and gladness."

But there has been no such hanging. The sacred record meets all valid tests as only accurate and straight-forward history can meet such tests. One needs but to refer to the masterful writings of B. H. Roberts,⁷ and the faithful researches of J. M. Sjodahl⁸ and many others, to realize how abundant and mighty is such evidence, internal and external, of the authenticity of this sacred book. The present argument herewith submitted trusts itself to bear, humbly, a testimony similar to these others to the effect that, "We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."

⁷B. H. Roberts, "New Witness for God," Volume II, "The Book of Mormon," 1909.

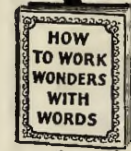
⁸J. M. Sjodahl, "An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon," 1927.

A MOCKING BIRD

In the stillness of the night,
When the moonbeams shone,
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