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For a Wise Purpose

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Abstract: This article states that keeping genealogical records by all branches of the House of Israel is of great import. Bennett outlines the sequence of prophets who prepared the sacred record that we have as the Book of Mormon.

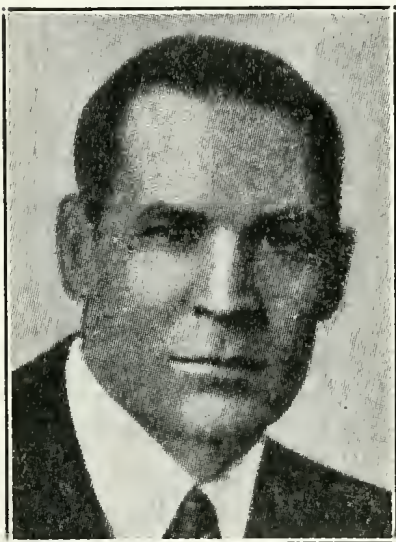
For a Wise Purpose

By ELDER ARCHIBALD F. BENNETT

OUT of a fullness of wisdom gained from a lifetime of close association with the Lord, the Prophet Nephi uttered this significant truth: "The Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth the way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words."

No greater evidence of the correctness of this prophetic pronouncement can be found in all history than in the remarkable story of the keeping of records among all branches of the House of Israel, in all their generations.

When man was first placed upon the earth, the Father gave him instructions in the Gospel. It was the will of the Lord that this Gospel, in its fullness, should remain upon earth from the beginning to the end of time. In his fore-knowledge, however, He saw that through transgression, men would fall away from the truth, would lose the power of the Priesthood, the essential Gospel ordinances would remain unadministered during mortality to a great majority of mankind. Hence provision was made for Gospel truths to be taught the spirits of the dead in the spirit world after they had passed from mortality, and for ordinances to be administered in their behalf, vicariously, in temples of the Lord.



Elder Bennett

In order for these ordinances to be acceptably performed the dead must be adequately identified by name, date and place of birth, of marriage, and of death. Furthermore, that families might be united in the bonds of sealing in that perfect form of family organization which will prevail in the Celestial Kingdom, the parents, husband or wife, and children of each individual must be correctly ascertained.

To accomplish this great purpose, the Lord inspired His children in all ages and countries to keep careful and accurate records of their genealogies. To the average person who may know back to the names of his grandparents but nothing further of his family history, it might appear that very few records of families have been kept. This is decidedly not so. The more we examine the records of the past, the more convinced are we that the Lord, in His wisdom, knowing the end from the beginning, left no essential thing undone in the way of record keeping.

Remarkable as it is, among all the peoples in whose veins courses an admixture of the blood of Israel, records have been kept from earliest times. In the Bible we read that all the

Israelites were reckoned by genealogies, and several excerpts from the genealogies so religiously kept by the children of Israel are preserved in that sacred record. On occasions the Israelites assembled and "declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers." Entering the promised land, after their period of sojourn in the wilderness, they were told, "The land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit." Since the blessings of the birthright, the right of temporal rule, of the Priesthood, and family inheritance, depended upon lineage, it is small wonder the Old Testament contains a wonderful store of genealogy.

When scattered into the four parts of the earth, the children of Israel carried with them the spirit of record keeping.

Genealogist

FROM one actively engaged in genealogical research comes this article showing God's purposes for inspiring His children to keep records and why Latter-day Saints seek after their dead. Elder Bennett was born at Dingle, Idaho, on March 17th, 1896. When he was three years old his parents moved to Canada, residing in Alberta at Magrath and Taber. Here and at Calgary he received his early education and began a career of school teaching. This was interrupted in 1916 when he enlisted in the Canadian Mounted Rifles to serve His Majesty's army in France with the Fort Garry Horse Unit. He returned to Canada in 1919, married Ann Ella Milner in 1921 and to them have been born two sons and three daughters. Moving to Salt Lake City, he attended the University of Utah, where he received a master of arts degree in 1926. He has been secretary of the Genealogical Society of Utah since 1928.

Whenever the desire began to diminish, the prophets reminded them of the imperative nature of this command. A most clear-cut example of this is found in the admonitions of the Prophet Alma who lived among that portion of Israel settled, prior to the Christian era, in the land of America. Alma was not only a prophet, but the custodian of sacred records. As these had been handed down to him, so he passed them on to his son, Helaman, with this impressive injunction:

And now, my son Helaman, I command you that you take the records which have been entrusted with me . . . and keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept . . . Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept even as I have kept them; for it

is for a wise purpose that they are kept. . . Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. . .

And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls. And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved. . .

For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers. For he promised unto them that he would reserve these things for a wise purpose in him, that he might show forth his power unto future generations.

Undoubtedly other branches of scattered Israel have had

their prophets who equally impressed upon them the sacred nature of records handed down to them from the past, and the paramount necessity of their keeping records and handing them on to the generations to follow. During periods of transgression and consequent confusion, errors may have been inserted in some of these records; others undoubtedly were lost, at least temporarily. But despite these errors and losses, it is altogether marvellous what a wealth of records is still extant.

All the people who settled in the British Isles—whether Cymry or Britons of Wales, the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland, Saxons and Danes and Normans of England—had coursing through their veins the blood of the covenant people. In reality they were all of kindred stock, branches of the original people who moved northward in their migrations from the vicinity of the Black and Caspian Seas, the identical region where the Bible tells us the tribes of Israel were carried and dispersed in captivity. While known to us in the main as barbarians, these people came bringing with them records of their genealogy. Many of these ancestral accounts were preserved in that early day much as the Hawaiian and Maori people were taught to preserve their genealogy by memorizing painstakingly the names of their forefathers. Each tribe of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England preserved a record of their chieftain's ancestry back to the great warrior king, Woden, and these were written down later and are preserved to our own day.

The Normans came in 1066. William the Conqueror, systematic ruler that he was, desired to acquire an exact knowledge of the possessions of the crown, and ascertain the number of land holders, the military strength of the country, and the best sources for an increase in the royal revenue. Therefore, he ordered that a survey should be made throughout the whole kingdom, and the Domesday Record was made and recorded. It forms one of the most ancient and authentic records of the inhabitants of England at that very early day. This was the first great English record to be published at the cost of the nation, and appeared in two folios, printed with type cast for the purpose. Ten years were required to put it through the press, and the printing was completed in 1783, nearly 700 years after the actual survey was made. Later supplementary records have been published, including a general introduction by Sir Henry Ellis in 1833. This record furnishes a commendable and substantial beginning for most of the genealogies in England.

Upon the death of those who held lands of the king, an enquiry was made before a jury appointed for the purpose, which was called an *Inquisition Post Mortem*. At this inquiry, evidence was brought forward to show exactly what land the deceased held at the time of his death, who was his next heir, and the latter's approximate age. Court records frequently contained genealogical data of families. Pipe rolls, the revenue accounts, gave the names of those paying assessments into the king's treasury. Later, wills of individuals were replete

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with their records of family relationships. Priceless records were kept by religious fathers, many of which are being printed by various record societies in Great Britain.

In 1538 came the first order for parish ministers to keep a register of christenings, marriages, and burials within their parishes. Not all observed this first command, but in 1558 a more explicit ruling was made and enforced. The parish registers are a mine of information, helpful in tracing the rank and file of the people. They are almost the chief source for carrying back the pedigrees of the commoners ranking below the landed gentry, the nobility, and the royal families. Churches other than the established Church of England kept their non-conformist or non-parochial registers. These have been gathered in Somerset House, where they may be searched. The parish registers remain in the custody of the local clergy.

Taking effect July 1st, 1837, almost coincident with the arrival of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Great Britain with their message of the restored Gospel, the British Government issued an order that all births, marriages and deaths occurring in England and Wales should be officially registered. These records are also kept at Somerset House, and are invaluable in genealogical research.

Beginning in 1801, a decennial census was taken of the families residing in England and Wales. It is regrettable that the first four of these covering the years 1801 to 1831 have been destroyed. Those for 1841 and 1851, however, are preserved, and upon consultation yield important genealogical facts. The 1851 census is especially helpful in that it gives the name of the exact parish where the father, the mother, and each of the children listed in the census, were born—indispensable facts in beginning genealogical research.

A wide-spread and growing interest in the preservation, printing, indexing, and making available of these and other records is discernable on every hand. Numerous genealogical, archaeological, and antiquarian societies have been formed which issue, as a rule, annual published volumes.

Latter-day Saints now living in Great Britain should prepare themselves to take advantage of the marvellous preparations the Lord has made. They should learn to use these records of inestimable value. It may require thought and hard study and repeated practice and activity, but surely this is worth while. No greater mission could come to any individual in all the world than to seek out the records of his forefathers, and see that the saving ordinances of the Gospel are administered in their behalf.

This is the Lord's work and He will aid us in achieving full success if we will seek knowledge of our forefathers "by study and also by faith." The Lord does not command us to do anything for which He has not prepared the way that we may accomplish it. For a wise purpose the records of the past have been kept and preserved. For a wise purpose they are available today and will be preserved to the end of time, if we do our part well. Thus shall "the purposes of the Lord roll forth until all the promises of the Lord have been fulfilled."