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Additional Internal Evidence for the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon I

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Abstract: This series defends the reality of the natural catastrophes described in 3 Nephi 8-10. It 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 first part covers hurricanes.

Additional Internal Evidence for the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon

THE sublimely beautiful account of the ministry of Christ among the Nephites stands in illumined loveliness against a sad background of three days of destruction and darkness. And in that darkness what dreadful groanings and tumultuous noises! What rumbling, trembling and rending! What howling, lamenting, weeping and wailing!

Yet, it must be admitted, the record of those fearful three days has sometimes seemed a bit unreal, perhaps, to many readers—not that one questions the truth of the record—but that the happenings seem, in character, so extremely unusual, not to say unheard-of.

But if a touch of realism is desired for this recital of the fell power of tempests, lightnings and earthquakes, the means are ready at hand. Easily accessible are abundant and vivid descriptions by eye-witnesses of similar, but more recent, devastations by these elemental angels of ruin. This original source material is extremely interesting and holds the reader almost spell-bound, if only for the utter awesomeness of it. And to many it will, doubtless, prove to be practically a virgin field of research.

A GREAT number of these documents need not be consulted before one becomes aware of two arresting facts. First, that definite and specific characteristics mark these death-dealing furies of nature—I mean hurricanes and earthquakes, and second, that never before in an average general reading has one been made aware of many of these more definite and specific characteristics. And when others are consulted as to their knowledge of the more exact nature of hurricanes and earthquakes, they quite freely report themselves little or no better informed in this regard.

By ISAAC B. BALL
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And then it is that a third fact serenely sails into consciousness, namely, that somehow the account in the Book of Mormon (III Nephi) does contain briefly, but accurately, just those specific attributes and no others, which are spoken of only (and *can* be spoken of only) by eye-witnesses or by students of earth sciences, and are not known to average readers, or to college-bred people, in general, for that matter.

And so, of course, there can be but one conclusion, clear and convincing: the account in III Nephi must have been written by eye-witnesses, and could not have been composed by Joseph Smith. His reading and experience of these natural phenomena were necessarily limited in the extreme, even more limited than the average man's today.

HERE then is solid internal evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. No doubt



THE AUTHOR

the great strength of this evidence will become clearer to the reader as the records from the Book of Mormon are quoted and along side of them are placed accounts of some recent eye-witness and of recognized scholars in this field.

However, before setting forth these accounts, please consider scholarly examples of a very similar line of reasoning in support of the authenticity of a Bible narrative. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by the Lord on account of their shocking wickedness. I quote from Professor E. J. Houston's excellent popular treatise on volcanoes and earthquakes:¹

Let us now examine briefly the description Moses gives of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities of the plains. This destruction occurred during the life of Abraham and his nephew Lot. The record says that God told Abraham that he intended to destroy them because of their wickedness. Then follows in the 18th chapter of Genesis the eloquent pleading of Abraham for one of the doomed cities. At Abraham's earnest plea God promises to spare Sodom if fifty righteous men can be found therein.

Obtaining this respite, Abraham repeatedly asks further mercy for the city, and at last receives the sacred promise that the city shall not be destroyed, if but ten righteous people can be found therein. An evidence of the great wickedness of the city is seen in the fact that not even ten could be found. Whereupon the Lord gives notice to Lot that the cities are doomed and commands Lot to leave at once with his family.

"Escape for thy life! look not behind thee, neither stay thee in all the plain; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed." Moses described what happened as follows:

"The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

"Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;

"And he overthrew those cities and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

"And his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

¹E. J. Houston, *Wonder Book of Volcanoes and Earthquakes*, chapter 30.

"And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

"And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

This is clearly the description of a volcanic eruption, for throughout the Bible things are described as they appear to be. When Moses speaks of the brimstone and fire being rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah out of heaven, he is describing the phenomena as it would appear to one looking at it. Of course we know that in volcanic eruptions such things come to the earth through the crater of the volcano. The lava is thrown high into the air, and the hardening, (though still red hot) ashes rain down from the ash cloud that forms over the mountains. But, looked at from a distance, they appear to fall or to be rained down from the skies. In exactly the same way, Livy, the Roman historian, tells about showers of stone that fell from heaven in Mt. Albano, near Rome, for two whole days during the second Punic war. So, too, even Pliny, who had some pretensions to be considered a naturalist, in describing the appearance of Mt. Vesuvius during the terrible eruption of A. D. 79 when Herculaneum and Pompeii were destroyed, speaks of the red hot stones and ashes as falling from above. So, in reality, they did, although, as in the case of the plain, the material forming the cloud came from the crater of the volcano below.

As to brimstone falling from the sky, this is by no means an unknown or unusual occurrence during many volcanic eruptions, since sulphur is a common material, often thrown out of the craters of some volcanoes.

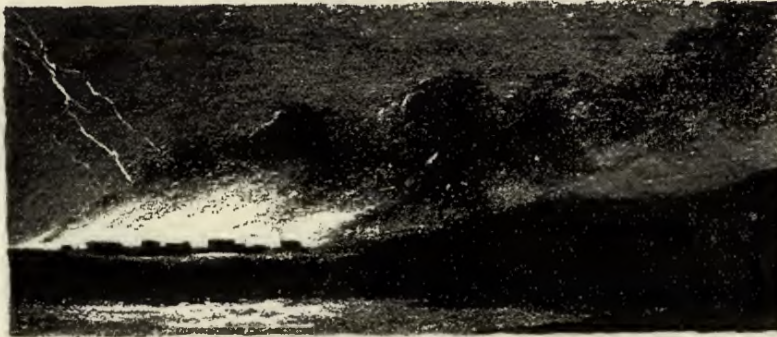
Note also the statement that when Abraham rose early in the morn and looked toward the place where Sodom and Gomorrah stood, he saw the smoke of the country go up like the smoke of a furnace. This was probably the smoke caused by the burning of the city, or even by the destruction of the crops in the fields, when ignited by the falling red ashes. It might also have been partly due to the burning of asphalt thrown out from the fissures in the ground, or to the shower of volcanic ashes that fell from the cloud that formed during the eruption.

That the cities were destroyed by a volcano far in the past appears from things outside the Bible proper, for Strabo, the Greek geographer, refers to Jewish tradition that thirteen flourishing cities were swallowed up by a volcano, and this finds fair corroboration in the ruins along the western borders of the Dead Sea.

ONE can hardly deny that such explanations add a needed

touch of realism to Bible narratives that have been so ruthlessly assailed by a criticism calling itself "higher."

In manner somewhat like this an argument may be presented in regard to the account in III Nephi, chapters eight, nine and ten. And



the touch of realism thus gained may not be unwelcome in this case also.

These three chapters in the Book of Mormon contain an abridged account of an unparalleled combination of tempest, whirlwinds, thunder, lightnings and earthquakes. These natural furies, acting in unwonted unity, effected the total destruction of at least sixteen cities and of almost the entire population of the Nephite nation. The records of these calamities are purported to be taken from original accounts of eye-witnesses, and to be abridgments by Mormon of the original plates. In fact it is stated that he was not able to record a hundredth part of the full accounts.

Mormon begins by stating that the man who kept the records was a just man and hence he is certain the record is true. According to this man's record thirty-three years had passed away since the sign was

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given of the Savior's birth, and therefore the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign that had been foretold by the prophet Samuel the Lamanite, namely the three days of darkness over the face of the land, which would be a sign of the Savior's crucifixion. There began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people, as well there might.

And then it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, 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, insomuch 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. And the city of 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 Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain. * * *

And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places made rough. And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken 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 they were carried away. And 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, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams, and in cracks, upon all the face of the land. 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 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.

And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither

candles, neither torches, neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceeding dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all. * * *

And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping



among all the people continually; yea great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness, and the great destruction which had come upon them.²

THIS from the eighth chapter of III Nephi. Chapter nine records the words of the voice that was heard upon all the face of the land after the noises and the destruction had ceased. The Lord recites the names of sixteen cities which had been totally destroyed. For the sake of brevity let us, omitting the names of the cities, here group them according to the direct natural phenomena involved:

One city destroyed by being "covered by earth."

One city destroyed by being "sunk in the depths of the sea."

Four cities destroyed by being "sunk and buried in the depths of the earth and waters came up in the stead thereof."

Four cities destroyed by being "sunk and hills and valleys * * * came in the place thereof."

Six cities destroyed by "burning with fire," the phrase being used, "and I did send down fire and destroyed them."

And turning briefly to the tenth chapter we shall quote a few short but extremely vivid phrases, that let us know what the people had been through during the three days of darkness:

And 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, and the dreadful groanings did

cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away. And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning and the weeping and the wailing of the people who were spared did cease. * * *

Then, speaking of those who were still alive, it says:

And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire; neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and darkness.

IN all these succinct phrases set down by Mormon as he read and abbreviated the fuller first-hand record inscribed by the III Nephi himself, we clearly perceive descriptions of three major natural phenomena. First, there is the hurricane, the great "storm," the "great and terrible tempest!" then the accompanying thunder and lightning; and finally the earthquakes, the "exceeding great quaking of the whole earth."

As shall be clearly shown presently, hurricanes are capable of destroying whole cities and their inhabitants, besides laying waste the country-side; and lightning which usually accompanies the hurricane is able to set fire to cities and strike down in death men and animals alike; while earthquakes crown all other calamities with their gigantic power of fell destruction. Now then, if hurricanes or lightnings or earthquakes acting singly are able to destroy a people, what shall we say of the sad plight that awaits any land where these three furies join hands in the service of an angry God?

TAKING up the definite characteristics of hurricanes or great windstorms, consider first an extract from the writings of the French savant, Camille Flammarion:³

"The large perturbations of the air are perhaps, next to great volcanic eruptions, the most fearful phenomena that take place upon the globe. * * * In Hindoo mythology, Rudia, the chief god of winds and storms, has become known also as the god of destruction and death.

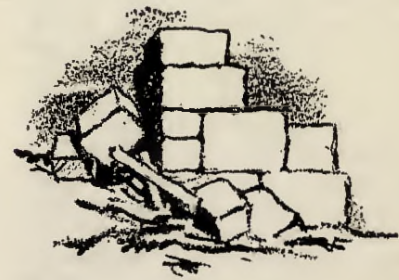
"In the early part of the cyclone, a strange dull sound is sometimes heard like that of wind in very old houses during winter nights. The gusts which rend the air during the time the cyclone continues are said to create a

noise like that of the roaring of wild beasts, a tumult of countless voices, and cries of terror. At the point where the center of the storm passes, a formidable sound like the discharge of artillery, an incessant rolling of thunder, (the voice of the hurricane as it is in fact) is heard above all others.

The progress of the wind meets with resistance upon the land, but the destruction is none the less terrible. Buildings which lie in its path are overturned; the waters of streams are driven back towards their source, isolated trees are torn up by their roots; forests are bent down as if they formed one compact mass, and their branches and leaves are scattered; even the grass is swept off the ground. In the path of the hurricane fly countless debris, like the flotsam carried along by a stream. Generally speaking, the action of electricity is super-added to the action of the air in motion and helps to augment the ravages of the storm. Sometimes flashes of lightning are so rapid that they descend like a sheet of flame; the clouds, and even drops of rain emit light; the electric tension is so great that sparks have been seen to fly from the body of man. A whole forest on the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies was killed by lightning without the trunks of a single tree being blown down.

"The most terrible cyclone of modern times is probably that which occurred on October 10, 1780, which has been especially called the 'Great Hurricane,' and which seems to have embodied all the horrible scenes that attend phenomena of that kind. Starting from Barbadoes, where trees and houses were all blown down, it engulfed an English fleet anchored before St. Lucie and then ravaged the whole of that island where six thousand persons were buried beneath the ruins. From thence it traveled to Martinique, overtook a French transport fleet and sunk 40 ships conveying four thousand soldiers, all drowned. * * * Farther south four other islands were also devastated, and most of the vessels that were sailing in the track of the cyclone were lost with all on board.

"This hurricane was quite as destructive on land. Nine thousand persons perished at Martinique, one thousand at St. Pierre, where not a single house was left standing, for the sea rose to a height of twenty-five feet and one hundred and fifty houses that were built



along the shores were engulfed. At Port Royal, the cathedral, seven churches and fourteen hundred houses were blown down, sixteen hundred sick and wounded were buried beneath the ruins of the hospital. At St. Eustache, seven vessels were dashed to pieces against the rocks,

[Continued on page 428]

²III Nephi 8:5-23.

³The Atmosphere by Camille Flammarion, page 335, et seq.



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[Continued from page 389]

and of the nineteen that lifted their anchors and sailed to sea only one returned. At St. Lucie the strongest buildings were torn up from their foundations; a cannon was hurled a distance of more than thirty yards, and men as well as animals were lifted off their feet and carried several yards. Of six hundred houses in Kingstown in the island of St. Vincent fourteen alone remained intact.

"In the Leeward Islands, the inhabitants of the government palace took refuge in the center of the building during the height of the storm, thinking that the immense thickness of the walls (nearly four yards) and their circular shape would preserve them from the fury of the wind. At eleven thirty p. m. they were obliged to repair to the cellar, as the wind had penetrated everywhere and lifted off the roof. However, the water in the cellar rising to the height of more than a yard, they were driven into the battery, and protected themselves behind the cannon, some of which were driven from their places by the force of the wind.

"By the light of dawn the country looked as it does in mid-winter; there was not a single leaf, or even a branch remaining upon the trees."

IN this graphic description of a terrible West Indian whirlwind one learns a number of the specific characteristics that attend hurricanes in general. Note especially "the dull sounds," "noises like that of the roaring of wild beasts, a tumult of countless voices and cries of terror," "a formidable sound like the discharge of artillery, an incessant rolling of thunder." How this parallels such brief phrases in the III Nephi, as "dreadful groanings" and "tumultuous noises!"

Again note the reference by Doctor Flammariion to electrical discharges that are specific concomitants to the West Indian hurricanes: "Generally speaking the action of electricity is superadded to the violence of the air in motion, and helps to augment the ravages of the tempest;" "Flashes of lightning so rapid that they descend like a sheet of flame." And may I add here that the detonations of the deafening thunder may best be imagined.

WITH this fresh in mind, recall now some phrases from the Book of Mormon account referring to thunder and lightning: "and there was terrible thunder, insomuch 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." In chapter nine, "the burning with fire" of four cities is referred to with this phrase, "I did send down fire and (did) destroy them." The rapid lightning could have done just this. As the descending hot ashes of the volcano set fire to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, so the lightning, descending like a sheet of flame, may have set fire to the four Book of Mormon cities.

How wonderfully accurate are these simple statements in the Book of Mormon when compared with Doctor Flammariion's graphic words, "some times the flashes of lightning are so rapid that they descend like a sheet of flame."

OF great interest also is the scientist's reference to the power of these violent windstorms to change the very face of nature: "Buildings which lie in their path are overturned, the waters of streams are driven back toward their source; isolated trees are torn up by their roots, forests are bent down as if they formed but one compact mass, and their branches and leaves are scattered; even the grass is swept off the ground." Contrasted with this the words of the Book of Mormon are few but none the less accurate: "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."

Moreover one should not fail to note the power of these storms to carry away men and animals as well as such ponderous objects as cannons. Our authority says: "Men as well as animals were lifted off their feet and carried several yards." The Book of Mormon statement is that "many were carried away in the whirlwind." And so in this particular as in all the others the sacred record is found to be in accord with the now-known peculiarities of hurricanes.

ICANNOT end reference to tempests without pointing out the fact that the Book of Mormon

lands were situated in regions that have suffered greatly from the ravages of hurricanes since the advent of the Spaniard in the New World, and doubtless also before he came. This is made emphatic in the following observation from the scientists last quoted:

"The astronomer Poey, Director of the Observatory at Havana, Cuba, has ascertained by a laborious research into the hurricanes that have raged in the West Indies since the discovery of America (1493) to the present day, that there have been three hundred sixty-five grand cyclones. He finds that two-thirds have occurred * * * during the period when the heated shores of South America are beginning to attract towards them the colder and denser air of North America."⁴

Note that the geography of the most destructive cyclones of the western hemisphere is thus placed not far from the center of the Nephite civilization as determined by Book of Mormon scholars. The "small neck of land" is supposed to refer to the Isthmus of Panama, and therefore settlements were doubtless to be found in the northern part of South America as well as in Central America. Doubtless, then the Nephites were more or less acquainted with these terrible storms for they resided in a region usually subject to them.

Perhaps that gives an added meaning to the words, "There arose a great storm, such an one as never had been before known in all the land." They had known violent tempests before, but not such a terrible one as this which now arose.

ALTHOUGH only a small fraction of available material has been called upon thus far in discussing the existing parallels between sacred and secular accounts of tempests, hurricanes and lightnings, it will have to suffice for the purpose of the present dissertation. Perhaps at this point, and before passing on to the other half of my topic, namely earthquakes, it will be well to present a summary which may make clearer the remarkable parallelism that actually exists between the Book of Mormon account and more modern scientific statements. The summary will be put in the form of two parallel lists, the numbers from one to nine in one list corresponding in subject matter to the same number in the other list.

Characteristics of Hurricanes as Mentioned by Professor Flammarion:

1. Very violent winds.
2. Powerful enough to carry away men.
3. Terrible noises and sounds.
4. Great numbers perish.
5. The face of nature changed.
6. Hurricanes are usually accompanied by thunder and lightning.
7. The lightning descends like fire and sets fire to cities at times.
8. The thunders are like the discharge of artillery.
9. Most fear-inspiring phenomena known with few exceptions.

Corresponding Phenomena Mentioned in the Book of Mormon as Attending the "Great Tempest":

1. A great and terrible tempest.
2. Many were carried away in the whirlwind.
3. Dreadful groanings and tumultuous noises.
4. A whole nation reduced to a fraction of its population.
5. The whole face of the land was changed.
6. With the tempest came terrible thunder and lightning.
7. Exceeding sharp lightnings * * * and the city of Zarahemla did take fire.
8. Terrible thunder did shake the whole earth.
9. Fears of people voiced in mourning, weeping, groaning, and wailing.

The reader should observe that several of the characteristics above listed are also known to accompany earthquakes, especially items three to six, inclusive. So that in these particulars at least, the hurricane and the quake serve the disastrous ends of re-enforcing one another.

A candid person, when scanning the above mentioned characteristics of hurricanes, will readily agree that few young men at twenty-five have a knowledge of all these facts such as would enable one to fit them properly into a description of The World's Greatest Tempest, as we may call this one in contra-distinction to the Great Hurricane of 1780.

THEREFORE the argument that Joseph Smith at the time he produced the Book of Mormon could hardly have known enough of the detailed characteristics of hurricanes to have inserted in the sacred record all the particulars that careful study now shows were necessary to be included and *no others*, is valid.

And the conclusion that he actually translated the Book of Mormon from first-hand records of eye-witnesses to the events mentioned in them is also valid.

(Concluded in next number)

⁴The Atmosphere, by Camille Flammarion, page 330, et seq.

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