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HISTORICITY OF THE BIBLE

- by Dr. Hugh Nibley

Eschatology -
branch of theology
dealing w/ death
resurrection, judgment
immortality, etc.

The problem of the historicity of the Bible is exactly the same today as it has been since the days of the first Apologists. One reads the Bible and decides for himself what is history in it and what is allegory, and what is myth, and what is legend, and what is interpolation.

There are two main schools of thought on the subject. There is the Fundamentalist, which believes that everything put forth in the Bible as history actually happened as they find it stated; and there is the Liberal, which about the year 1925 (according to the study of Ed Koenig) reached the general consensus that the historical value of the Bible is nil. The L.D.S. people have always stood between these two extremes.

Thirty years ago there was such a solid consensus of learned opinion about the real nature of the Bible and of the ancient Hebrew and Christian religions in both camps, both Fundamentalist and Liberal, that a student needed only to consult any handbook to put him in harmony with the "scholars" on all major issues. That is no longer the case: today all is doubt and confusion.

The principal cause of this confusion has been what one scholar calls "the breakthrough of the eschatological interpretation," which he compares to a strategic military breakthrough that throws a whole army into panic and disorder. (Before we describe the breakthrough, it is important to know what eschatology is.)

The eschatological viewpoint is that which sees and judges every thing in terms of a great eternal plan. Whether we like it or not, we belong to the eternities: we cannot escape the universe. All our thoughts and deeds must be viewed against an infinite background and against no other. "Eschatos" means ultimate and refers to that which lies beyond all local and limited goals and interests. Limited objectives are very well in their way but only as contributing to something eternal. Extreme as this doctrine may seem, the only alternative, as the philosophers of old repeatedly observed, is a trip to nowhere, a few seconds of pleasure in an hour of pain, and after that only "the depth of emptiness." But the eschatological view of life is more than a philosophy; it is a specific religious tradition, teaching men that there actually was a great plan agreed upon at the foundation of the world, and that all that has transpired on earth since the beginning or shall take place hereafter is to be understood as showing forth the operation or attempted frustration of that plan. (An interesting corollary to that is that all things are party to this plan, so that when man sins he puts himself at cross purposes with all nature which becomes his enemy and crosses and checks him with all kinds of diseases and allergies. These are simply forms of frustration the Babbis believe resulted from the fact that we are trying to go one way while the Universe insists on going another way. We do not belong any more.) Everything is in terms of this plan.

Now the "eschatological breakthrough" was the realization, climaxing a generation of cumulative study and discovery, that the eschatological view of man's life on earth, though highly distasteful to the doctors and teachers of conventional Christianity and Judaism, was none the less the very heart of the original Christian faith and was firmly held by important groups of Jews in ancient times. Accordingly, "since the breakthrough of the eschatological interpretation of the concept of the Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus, the question of the content and meaning of Jesus' message has never been satisfactorily settled." Conventional and long established views of the nature of the Christian religion, whether liberal or fundamentalist, are so completely out of line with the new discoveries that there is now afoot an extremely widespread movement to put the whole Christian faith on a new "existentialist" footing that will ignore history altogether. An eminent Christian scholar, S. Brandon, commenting on this movement, observes that:

It is eloquent witness to the increasing embarrassment felt by Christian thinkers about the assumed historicity of their faith. Such a suggestion of embarrassment in this connection may possibly cause surprise and provoke an instant denial that such a situation exists in any significant academic circle. However . . . the historical character of Christianity, which was once proclaimed apologetically as the greatest argument for the validity of that faith, has gradually been found to be a source of great perplexity if not of weakness.

Until now, according to this authority, Christian scholars have willingly accepted

the claim that, if Christianity derives its authority from certain events which took place at a specific place and time, then that claim must be investigated by the most austere standards of historical judgment. For many decades under the aegis of the liberal tradition of scholarship, this task was undertaken with fervent conviction, and great was the knowledge amassed by such methods of research about Primitive Christianity. But in time this process of investigation into Christian Origins has gradually revealed itself to be a journey ever deeper into a morass of conjecture about the imponderable which lie behind or beyond the extant literary documents.

Note here that what is found wanting is not the Bible, but man's interpretations of it; the root of the trouble being that they simply do not have enough evidence to go on one way or the other.

If this is true today, it was ever truer thirty, forty, or fifty years ago--but the scholars did not know it. On both sides they felt convinced that they had the final answer. (The Swede, Olaf Linton, wrote a very good dissertation on that.) They could both speak with perfect confidence because of what I call the gas-Law of Learning, namely, that any amount of information no matter how small will fill any intellectual void no matter how large. A simple and natural misunderstanding lies at the root of almost any Biblical study you can find from around 1900: that was the belief that since the New Testament is, after all, the whole of our evidence on such things as the life of Christ and the Apostolic Church, it must necessarily tell the whole story. This theory that we know all there is to know is a very flattering one, but

during the last twenty years it has been subject to a series of fatal blows.

In the business of scholarship, evidence is far more flexible than opinion. The prevailing view of the past is controlled not by evidence but by opinion. The scholars, like the fundamentalists, have believed what they wanted to believe. The liberals have in the past been more willing than their rivals to change their opinions in the face of overwhelming evidence. But now things have come to an impasse with them: they are in open revolt against history. The findings of the last two decades have been of supreme significance, but they have NOT confirmed the preconceptions of the liberals, who now propose simply to ignore them. The existentialism of Bultmann, Barth, and the Roman Catholic Marcel as a champion of Thomistic theology, is says Brandon "a truly vehement repudiation" of history. They say we must reject all historical study of Christianity as "negating its present relevance by demonstrating its relevance to the environment in which it took its origin." (Bultmann) What is relevant to life and conditions of one age cannot possibly be relevant to another (the Book of Mormon clearly and fully disproves this thesis), which is based on Spengler's Unwiederkehrlichkeit, if a thing happens once it can never happen again. Here we have as the very essence of the Apocalyptic pattern of history the doctrine that things happen in cycles and recur. Both Harnack and Schweitzer laid great emphasis on the claim that virtually nothing is or can be known about a historical Jesus. This freed them to work out a kind of a Jesus that pleased them. "We are thankful," wrote Schweitzer, "that we have handed down to us only gospels, not biographies of Jesus." When new discoveries came out, they received, to say the least, a very cold reception. If the real Jesus walked in on them, they would invite him to leave and depart from them. They had the Jesus they wanted, and they do not want more. The scholars made their own Jesus: Kierkegaard and Dilthey decided that if we must take history we can at least make it into a thing expressive of our own experience: this led to the existentialism of today, in which the individual rejects as myth anything he does not feel inclined to accept. It is the negation of the open mind. Bultmann writes: "It is impossible to make use of electric light and radio, and, in case of illness, to claim the help of modern medical and clinical methods and at the same time believe in the New Testament's spirits and miracles." On the other hand, I have heard General Authorities cite the electric light and radio as proof of possibility of miracles. Bultmann's statement is simply untrue, but it is very significant as demonstrating how scholars control evidence instead of being controlled by it. The case of the radio can be taken as equally convincing evidence for or against miracles, depending on how one WANTS to take it. Bultmann sees in it only evidence against miracles-- it apparently never occurs to him that it might provide an argument for the other side. He believes what he wants to, and frankly admits it when he tells us, if history does not suit our theory of religion, to throw out the history.

In all this, it is not the weakness of the Scriptures but the wilfulness of men that is exposed. It has taken a hundred years of guessing and counter-guessing to convince the learned that they were not solving the problem of "the content and the meaning of Jesus' message," but the discovery instead of teaching them humility, has turned them bitterly against the Scriptures, whose historical claims Bultmann and his school now attack with "truly vehement repudiation." The eminent Jewish scholar Torczyner tells us how the old established ideas about the uniform nature of the Bible have had to be given up:

This uniform picture Biblical criticism has finally been forced to shatter, after the first faint suspicions of certain individuals had gradually grown up to the stature of the communis opinio. Scientific investigation has disclosed the richness and variety of the Biblical literature... revealing as it does both life and individuality, contradiction and differentness."

Torczyner's own reaction to this recognition of a fact familiar to all Latter-day Saints since the founding of the Church, has been to turn him violently against the Bible as history, declaring it to be a "total misconception--or even falsification--of the real state of things."

"It is a heavy loss," writes another Hebrew scholar, "that the old historical works no longer survive intact and independent, but only as worked-over material inserted into the structure of a late compilation and buried under the rubble of many re-editings. The only hope lies in textual analysis, but in the end even that can give us no more than a lot of fragments, whose connection with each other is largely damaged or totally destroyed." Over one-hundred years ago, the Prophet Joseph Smith shocked the world by announcing that the very first verse of the Bible has been altered and corrupted by "some old Jew without any authority." If he offended the fundamentalists as much as the liberals, the new discoveries have been equally damaging to both.

To the hopeless inadequacy of man's knowledge may be attributed what now goes by the name of "the Modern Predicament," which is, "that man seems to be faced with an unbridgible gulf between... knowledge and faith... Religion was born in a world different from ours--a tiny, comfortable world... That ancient world has been nibbled away by science and the question arises whether against a new and scientific background religion in any form will find it possible to survive." (Paton) It was just that "tiny, comfortable world" of conventional Christianity that was so mortally offended by the coming forth of latter-day prophecy; the mighty revelations of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price were an unpardonable affront to the established barriers of time, place, and custom. The Christian world is now for the first time learning how wrong it was, and the experience is not a pleasant one. In all the journals, Catholic, and Protestant, a cry of distress goes up: "What is left to us," they ask, "if the things we have always been taught are not so?"

It is hard to believe that men would search for "a religion without faith," yet that is the title of a book designed to guide modern religious thinking. The author begins with a quotation from David Strauss: "The religious area of the human soul is like the region of the Redskins in America, which becoming inexorably smaller from year to year." This leads to the question: "What remains for the man who does not believe? What can we salvage of religion and its benign influence for the confined agnostic who is convinced that we can know nothing of another world?" Incidentally, since we cannot prove a negative, being convinced of one is a pure act of faith. In other words, how can we enjoy the fruits of faith without any faith at all. "Modern humanity," says a contemporary theologian with a nod of approval, is for the most part of the same opinion as Pliny... that belief in a rebirth or life after death is simply a sop for children." Since Pliny was an ancient dilettante and not a modern

scientist, we cannot lay this state of mind to the charge of science: in their ways of disbelief the clergy have led the field. This can be seen in Marneck's final definition of a "Religion without Faith," for in the end he recommends "to the non-believing person access to religious feeling through the substitution (Auslosing) of religious feeling by like feelings of a non-religious nature." These "non-religious" feelings which are accessible to complete "non-believer" are found in social good-words, aesthetic experience, brotherly love, the psychological search for the deeper self, and the Ethical Gospel. But these are the very things which for many years have made up the substance of religion as taught in liberal theological seminaries everywhere: truly a "Religion without Faith." "Never before," says a leading Egyptologist, viewing our times against a sweeping background of world history, "was the human race . . . farther from the divine than it is today. It has in this respect sunk to the lowest abyss."

It is not only in the field of religion but in all ancient studies that preconceived ideas are being uprooted on all sides. The religious take it harder than others because they are committed to a "party line,"-- usually so deeply committed that a major readjustment produces disillusionment and even disaffection. Yet the discoveries that have proven so upsetting should have been received not with hostility but joy, for if they have a way of shattering the forms in which the labors of Scholarship have molded the past, they bring a new substance and reality to things which the learned of another age had never thought possible. The same discoveries which to their dismay are rebuking the favorite theories of the doctors are at the same time vindicating that Bible world which they had consigned to the realm of myth. Years ago the celebrated Niebuhr observed that ancient history is always treated "as if it had never really happened"--it is a thesis, a demonstration, an intellectual exercise, but not a real account of real people. "Ingrained in our subconscious," says a recent study of ancient Egypt, "is a disbelief in the actual existence of those times and persons, which haunts us through the schools and in the theaters and libraries and impregnates the whole concept of 'Antiquity'." In a word, artificiality is to this day the very substance of ancient history.

From this mood of precious academic make-believe, the learned are now rudely aroused to face another world entirely. We live in a time of the re-examination and re-evaluation of all ancient documents. They are being completely gone over from beginning to end. They are not as we thought they were at all. This may seem a late date to ask, for example, "What is the Book of Mormon?" It should seem far stranger to ask "What is the Iliad?" "What is the Apocrypha?" "What is the Book of the Dead?" or "What is the Bible?" Yet those questions are being more seriously considered today than at any other time. Up until the present scholars have thought they had a pretty good idea of what the historical, literary, philosophical or religious writings of the past were all about. Not so today! The whole question of ancient records is now undergoing a thorough reinvestigation.

How this state of things has come about may best be illustrated by considering the case of the famous Eduard Meyer. In 1884 the first volume of his great History of the Ancient World (Geschichte des Altertums) appeared, presenting to the world "for the first time a history of the Ancient East in a scientifically satisfying form, a work which at the time produced a veritable sensation." Before many years, however, the

author was hard at work revising the whole thing, for the history of the ancient world must be constantly rewritten. By considering a few of the things that happened between Meyer's two editions of his own work, one may gain some idea of the tempo of discovery in our times. As Walter Otto summarizes the developments:

"...the History of the Ancient East had taken on a totally different aspect... Times and areas which formerly had been almost or completely unknown were brought to light; we have become acquainted with completely new languages and learned to use them as sources; peoples known formerly only by name now stand before us as concrete realities; the Indogermanic element, which serious scholarship had long concluded was of no significance for the Ancient East . . . now shows more clearly every day as an important historical element even in the more ancient periods; empires, such as the Mitanni and especially the Hittite, of whose history and structure not long ago only a few scattered details were known, have recently emerged as worthy rivals of the great traditional empires of the east, who actually recognized the Hittites as their equal. . .

In the two decades since those words were written, things have gone faster than ever. To mention only a few of the developments, there is afoot today a general re-evaluation of the oldest Egyptian texts and a far-reaching reinterpretation of the very essentials of Egyptian religion; the origin and background of Sumero-Babylonian civilization is being re-considered completely in the light of excavations made along the periphery of that area and of epic texts whose real significance has just begun to dawn on the experts; the unearthing of the oldest known villages gives us a new and unexpected picture of a civilization that "seems to have come into being with relative (even revolutionary) suddenness," instead of with that evolutionary gradualness with which all such things were once supposed to have happened; the involvement of the Hebrew Patriarchs, especially Abraham, with our own Indoeuropean relatives has called for a wholly new picture of Old Testament times and peoples; the application of new methods of dating has cut down the conventional time scale, especially for the earlier periods (e. g. as at Jericho) abruptly and drastically; the discovery of a new date for Hammurabi has called for a thoroughgoing revamping of ancient chronology; "the Hurrians have emerged from total obscurity and have come to occupy a stellar role... A new planet has appeared on the historical horizon and an area that was formerly dark has been flooded with a new and strange light." Within the last five years with the discovery of a single inscription a whole world of Greek myth and legend has been transmuted into the category of flesh and blood reality; within the same short period the decipherment of the Minoan Script B has with a single sweep rubbed out two hundred years of laborious speculation and acid controversy on major aspects of the Homeric problem, and shown us the Greeks writing good Greek a thousand years before anyone had credited them with literacy; at the same time the mystery of Etruscan has been solved, and the true nature of the mysterious Runic writing of our Norse ancestors explained; today nearly all scholars accept the original identity of the Hamitic, Semitic, and Indoeuropean languages--a thing that the less informed and more opinionated gentlemen of the few years ago laughed to scorn as a Fundamentalist pipe-dream.

In all this fever and ferment of discovery and re-evaluation, no documents have been more conspicuously involved than those relating to Israel's past and that of the earliest Christian Church. Since World War II the greatest discoveries ever made in these fields have come to light. In the great days of "scientific" scholarship, when the only safe and respectable position for any man of stature to take was to say a flat "no" to any suggestion that the Bible might contain real history, not the least sensational of Eduard Meyer's many ingenious pronouncements was the startling declaration that the Old Testament was not only history but very good history--by far the most accurate, reliable, and complete history ever produced by an ancient people, with the possible exception of the Greeks, who came much, much later. Time and research have strikingly vindicated this claim.

Eduard Koenig (Ist die jetzt herrschende Einschätzung der hebraischen Geschichtsquellen berechtigt?" Historische Zeitschrift 132 (1925), 289-302,) treats the subject in a study that deserves to be summarized here. He tells how all the scholars brushed aside the account in Gen. 23 of Abraham's dealings with the Hittites as a fabrication or a mistake--until the Amarna discoveries proved that the Bible was right and they were wrong. The account of Judah's seal-ring in Gen. 38-18 was treated as a clumsy anachronism until around 1913 the use of seals in early Palestine was proven by excavation. The favorite creed that the early history of Israel rested entirely on oral tradition was blasted by discoveries proving widespread literacy in the earliest days of Israel. The universal belief that Israel had no interest in real history is disproven by the care with which memorial stone, trees, etc., were designated, and by the fullness and detail of early accounts. It was taken for granted that the early histories of Israel did not reflect the ancient times they purported to describe, but depicted actually the much later periods in which they were written; yet archeological, ethnological, and philological findings in and around Israel show that these texts do not depict the Aramaic times but give an authentic picture of a much earlier world. Naturally it was assumed that the early historians of Israel knew nothing about the correct use of sources and evidence; yet they are careful to cite their sources (often now lost), have keen eyes for historical changes and often include comments and sidelights from various related sources. The prevailing conviction that Israelite history was a "harmonizing and rationalizing" piece of free composition is disproven by the very scholars who make the charge when they claim they are able to detect a great variety of styles and levels of composition--i. e. that the texts have not harmonized. The very common claim that the history of Israel was all pointed over and prettied up so as to quite conceal the original runs contrary to the many unsavory and uncomplimentary things said about Israel and her founders throughout these writings; the weaknesses of Israel's heroes are not concealed, as such things are in other ancient histories, and the actions of the nation are certainly not "bathed in a golden light," as the scholars claimed.

It is hard now to realize that as recently as 1908 Eduard Meyer could announce to the Berlin academy: "Twenty-five years ago there existed not a single historical document" to confirm the early history of Israel as given in the Bible. It was quite suddenly in the 1880's that such documents began to appear, and then it was like the coming of our spring floods, with great collections of stuff--no mere trickle--pouring out year after year in a breath-taking sequence that appears not yet to have reached its crest.

The present decade has seen epoch-making departure in the direction of new and daring comparative studies. Enough documentary material is now available to justify bold attempts at generalization which would have been out of the question less than a generation ago. As late as 1930 a leading Egyptologist, T. E. Peet, while marvelling at the amazing parallels between them, could stoutly affirm that the literature of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, and Greeks were each the result of separate and independent evolutions, and even as he was writing the Ras Shamra records were being unearthed to establish beyond a doubt the interdependence of these "independent" cultures. The ancient world is now all one. It was a favorite thesis of Eduard Meyer that Greece and Israel produced parallel historical literature in complete ignorance of each other. What would he say today to serious studies of such themes as "Homeric Epics in the Ancient East," or "Linguistic Relationships between the Ancient Orient and the British Isles?" These are no mere crackpot aberrations.

The greatest linguist of our day (Hrozný) could write not long ago: "Accepted today beyond all possible doubt is the close affinity of the Hamitic with the Semitic races and languages. . . and of the Indoeuropean with them!" and go on to explain this phenomenon in terms exactly corresponding to those of the Tower of Babel story. Yet such a thesis is far less radical than those which now emphasize the extreme suddenness of the emergence languages, whole linguistic families appearing full-fledged and completely made within a decade! The vast and maze range of these comparative studies, most of which, of course, are still highly conjectural, we cannot examine here. We bring them up only to show what is going on and to make it clear that the picture of man's life and thought and action in the past is by no means the one we were taught to accept in our childhood.

In connection it is especially important to note that that easy, lazy, flattering evolutionary bias that once solved all questions of the past from an armchair, by a simple rule of thumb simple won't work any longer. This can be illustrated by the effect of the Ugaritic texts of Ras Shamra, texts that showed Professor Peet to be wrong in attributing the growth of Hebrew literature to an evolutionary process, led the great orientalist A. H. Sayce to confess that his own conception of the primitive beginnings of the record was a mistaken one: "There is no longer any difficulty," he wrote, "in believing that there were abundant literary documents for compiling the earlier books of the Old Testament. . . . Consequently there is no longer any need of our believing as I formerly did that cuneiform tablets lie behind the text of the earlier Biblical books. . . . In the Mosaic period the Oriental world was as well stocked with books and what we would call public libraries as it was in the Greek epoch." Using the same texts, Dr. Gordon has concluded that the fundamental criteria of the higher critics in their reconstruction of a hypothetical evolution of the Old Testament text are not binding:

It is against the background of Ugaritic that we must evaluate the multiplicity of God's name. . . Elohim and Yahwe need not imply dual authorship in a chapter of the Bible any more than Baal and Hadd do in a Ugaritic myth.

No less questionable than the names of God as a key to the structure of the Bible are variations in style, heretofore believed to indicate with perfect certainty changes of authorship within the various books:

. . . the rediscovery of the lost literatures of the Bible world shows us that most biblical books could be accepted in Israel as single compositions. . . . The magnificent structure of the Old Testament higher criticism is not to be brushed aside; but its individual results can no longer be accepted unless they square with the Hebrew text as we can now understand it in the light of parallel literatures from the pagan forerunners and contemporaries of the Hebrews, in Bible lands.

Haldar, studying priestly and prophetic institutions, reaches a like conclusion regarding accepted principles of the higher criticism: "It follows that the evolutionary view of the Old Testament prophets cannot be accepted; instead. . . heavy stress must be laid on continuity." "The greatly increased knowledge of the world surrounding Israel in the ancient Orient," shows, according to Mowinckel, "That the 'sources' of the Old Testament at any rate might be much more ancient than those held by the prevailing evolutionary view of literary criticism."

The major shift in orientation in Bible study from the old literary to what Mowinckel calls the "traditio-historical method" has been the result of a growing necessity of seeing the Bible in a much broader setting than it has heretofore been placed in. As Gordon said, the results of Bible criticism "can no longer be accepted unless they square with the rediscovered 'lost literatures of the Bible World.'" The Bible World is no longer the world made by the Bible, but the much wider world in which the Bible finds itself along with other books, sacred and profane. Today, we are told, "the Old Testament horizon must be expanded and its history interpreted against this larger background. Here, indeed, we must learn to hold converse with the whole universe." "The Bible strikes root into every ancient Near Eastern culture," writes Albright, "and it cannot be historically understood until we see its relationship to its sources in true perspective." The same may be said of any other ancient text: all fields of study seem to be converging at present on the single theme of the oneness of the ancient world. The interrelationships between ancient writings are being drawn closer all the time; they are already so close, in fact, that Haering can now proclaim that all ancient literature, sacred and profane, Jew and Gentile, may be regarded and must be read as a single great book!

A century and a quarter ago, a young man shocked and angered the world by bringing out a large book which he set up beside the Bible not as a commentary or a Key to the Scriptures, but as original Scriptures--the revealed word of God to men of old--and as genuine history. The book itself declares that it is an authentic product of the Near East; it gives full and circumstantial account of its own origin; it declares that it is but one of many, many such books that have been produced in the course of history and may be hidden in sundry places at this day; it places itself in about the middle of a long list of sacred writings, beginning with the Patriarchs and continuing down to the end of human history; it cites now lost prophetic writings of prime importance, giving the names of their authors; it traces its own cultural roots in all directions, emphasizing the immense breadth and complexity of such connections in the world; it belongs to the same class of literature as the Bible, but along with a sharper and clearer

statement of Biblical teachings contains a formidable mass of historical material unknown to biblical writers but well within the range of modern comparative study, since it insists on deriving its whole cultural tradition, even in details, directly from a specific time and place in the Old World.

The Book Of Mormon is God's challenge to the world. It was given to the world not as a sign to convert, but as a testimony to convict it. In every dispensation the world must be left without excuse. It is given without reservation or qualification as a true history and the word of God. "A record of a foreign people, and the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also." The bold claims of this book were meant to invite comment and question. If the Book of Mormon is to be the guiding star for a world that has lost its bearings, "proving to the world that the Holy Scriptures are true," it must stand firm and unmoved without any external support. The Bible has been systematically dismantled by men who in the end did not want to believe it. For a hundred years they have been whittling away at it with dogged determination, and now they are all out to "demythologize" and deeschatologize" it for good and all. But the Book of Mormon cannot be so dismantled, even by those most determined to reject it. It is a single monolithic block, given to the world at one time and place. Unlike the Bible, it cannot lead "into a morass of imponderables," due to the obscurity of its sources, for it is not the product of centuries or generations of editing and transmissions. Unlike the Bible, it cannot be partly true, for the Book of Mormon itself closes the door on such a proposition.

Throughout the Middle Ages wild reports circulated through Europe and Asia from time to time that a letter had fallen from heaven. These reports caused an immense sensation among Christians everywhere, and though they always turned out to be false, the world never ceased hoping that some day a letter from heaven or some other tangible thing would fall into the eager hands of a yearning Christendom. We may smile and ask, "is anything as crass and tangible as a letter from heaven to be taken seriously by right-thinking people? Must one hear voices and see visions or otherwise have experiences unfamiliar to everyday experience? Are such things necessary? Whether one likes it or not, Christianity is a very literal-minded religion. The recent attempt to "demythologize" it, that is, to treat as expendable everything in it that smacks of the miraculous, supernatural, or literal, has met with a surprisingly vigorous storm of protest from ministers everywhere who, when confronted with a flat "either, or" have been forced to admit that Christianity with the miraculous, the apocalyptic, and the tangible elements removed would not be Christian at all.

In the Book of Mormon the world finally has, so to speak, its "letter from heaven." Those other epistles were easily tested and found wanting; though sometimes written and presented with considerable skill, they could not fool for long even the unscientific and uncritical ages in which they came forth. There is no reason why the Book of Mormon should not be subjected to every possible test, textual, literary, and historical, for it pleads no special immunity of any kind. It says in II Nephi:

Ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets... the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered... The learned shall not read it, for they have rejected them, and I am able to do

mine own work. . . For behold, I am God, and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith. . . For the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish. . . the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed. . . they that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrines. (II Nephi 27).

In the Book of Mormon the very questions which now oppress the liberal and fundamentalist alike, to the imminent overthrow of their fondest beliefs, are fully and clearly treated; no other book gives such a perfect and exhaustive explanation of the eschatological problem; here we learn how the Christian and Jewish traditions fit into the world picture, and how God's voice has been from the very beginning to all men everywhere; here alone one may find a full setting forth of the exact nature of scripture, and of the vast range and variety of revelation; here you will find anticipated and answered every logical objection that the intelligence of vanity of men even in this sophisticated age has been able to devise against the preaching of the word; and here one may find a description of our own age so vivid and so accurate that none can fail to recognize it. All these things and much more by way of "proving to the world that the Holy Scriptures are true." (D&C 20:9.)

So you see that when Joseph Smith brought forth the Book of Mormon he shocked and angered the world. You remember within a week the announcements started coming out in the papers: "the Book of Mormon-Blasphemy," etc. He shocked and angered the world by setting up beside the Bible another book as original Scripture.

I think we may see it come to pass that the Book of Mormon will prove to the world that the Scriptures are true. There are things in the Bible that are historical and things that are not. The guide to follow is the Book of Mormon.