

ELDER BRIGHAM H. ROBERTS.

A Book of Mormon prophecy—Its striking fulfilment—Periods of rest from persecution advantageous—Future opposition predicted—People should be fed with the bread of life.

Brethren and sisters, I have opened the Book of Mormon, with the intention of reading to you a prophecy contained in that book, which the statement of the numerical strength of the Church brought to my recollection. The Prophet Nephi, having been blessed with a vision as to what should transpire in the earth when this record of the Nephites should come forth, said:

“And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken [having reference to this Nephite record] shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.”

It occurred to me, since one of the features of this conference has been a contemplation of our growth as shown by our numerical strength, that it might be well to call the attention of the Saints, and especially of our young people, to the fact that these figures that now may be quoted as showing the largeness of this people who believed the Book of Mormon—constitute a fact which proves the inspiration of the prophecy that is contained upon the pages of this Book of Mormon. Even if the theory of the world concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon be allowed for a moment—viz, that it had its origin either with Joseph Smith or with Sidney Rigdon here, at least, is a prediction made and recorded and in existence when the Prophet Joseph Smith stood practically alone, hunted and persecuted, compelled to leave his father's house and go almost among strangers, where he might in a little peace prosecute the work of translating the Book of Mormon—alone and unfriended, he dared record this prediction that many would yet believe the words of this book. The fact that in the missions of the Church, and in the Stakes of Zion we can say there are now 310,000 persons living who believe

this record, is a fulfillment of that prophecy that must be exceedingly perplexing to those who refuse to accept the Book of Mormon as a divine record, and have to account for the fulfillment of this prediction on other grounds.

But this number of 310,000 does not begin to tell the story. You must add to this number now living all the faithful who have died. I know not how many that may be, but certainly tens of thousands have died in absolute faith of the divinity of the Book of Mormon and the work of God that has grown out of it. You must add, too, the number of those who have accepted it and have turned away from the Church; and to them you must add those who believe the Book of Mormon, but who, in consequence of a fear that they would lose their good name and standing among men did they receive the message it bears, have not had the courage to voice the belief that is in them of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. And now, if to the present membership of the Church, you add the number of those that are dead; and those that have walked with us for a season and then turned back to the beggarly elements of the world; and those who believe the work, but are afraid of men and would not make the sacrifice necessary to become members of the Church; if you add all these together truly this prophecy that “many” would believe this record, the Book of Mormon, is abundantly fulfilled before you this day. But it is scarcely proper to say that all those who have at different times turned away from the Church have become absolutely apostate in their spirits. You must make some allowance for the weakness of men. All men are not able to endure to the end, and yet belief in the divinity of this work has not altogether left them. I remember certain facts which came under my own observation that led me to feel somewhat charitable towards those who were not always strong enough to endure the particular trials that came to them. Some years ago we emigrated a great many people from the Southern States. We brought them out of those warm climates and lowlands, and put them into an exceeding high valley, where everything

was contrary to their customs, and where they were unable to adapt themselves to the conditions into which they were plunged. Their faith was not quite equal to the task of enduring the change of climate and of industrial methods, and the result of it was that many of them returned to the South; but all who thus fell by the wayside, because they were not able to endure those conditions, still kept something of the spark of faith in their hearts, and by a little care, and nourishing, and patience, in some instances we were able to lead them back again into the fold of Christ. And as it was in their case so, I take it, it has been in other cases. When the Saints were expelled from Jackson county, Missouri, some of them did not go with the body of the Saints, but scattered out among the people. They were not equal to that trial. When the exodus from the state of Missouri was enforced upon the Church, all were not equal to the sacrifices then required, and they lingered behind. When the exodus from Nauvoo took place, there were some hundreds, perhaps thousands, that were not able to face the wilderness march and take their chances with the people of God. They were weak in the faith—you have to say that of them; and doubtless they will not be numbered among those who will be accounted valiant for the testimony of Jesus. But the spirit of wicked apostasy did not enter into the hearts of all those who thus, in these various trials, lacked the strength to keep up with the vanguard of the Church in all its movements. From time to time weakness has taken hold of those who have put their hand to the plow, and some have looked back; but I think it hardly accurate to count all those who have thus fallen by the wayside as apostates to the Church of God; because you will find some of the light of the Spirit of God still burning in their hearts, some love for the work, and we should have a word of kindness and encouragement for those who may be in these circumstances.

There is another idea that came to my mind while listening to the brethren that I thought I would express if called upon in this conference to make any

remarks at all, and that is this: The Lord gives unto His people periods of rest from outside pressure. I believe that these periods of rest from persecution, while they are full of danger, may also be made very profitable unto the people. It gives us an opportunity to drive the roots of our faith still deeper into the soil of the soul, so that when the storms shall again assail us we shall be more firmly rooted and less liable to be shaken than before our faith took its deeper rooting. And the outside storms will come. We have not passed through all the winds that will beat upon our house, nor through all the floods that will assail us. Pretexts will be found by our enemies for assaulting the Church of Christ. The Church, though having grown to the proportions named in this conference, is still the Church militant, and not yet the Church triumphant. Nor can we expect it to be altogether triumphant until our King shall come and the Kingdom of our God shall be established in the earth, and He reigns whose right it is to reign. Not until the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, can we hope to have that rest which is promised unto the people of God. So, however peaceful things are with us now, I take you to witness this day that there will be renewal of storms, and the adversary of this work will not lack pretexts for assailing the people of God. But just now we are at rest, and have an abounding prosperity. Let us, therefore, take advantage of this period of rest, and see to it that we strengthen the faith of the youth growing up in our midst; so that when the storms that they must meet shall come, they will be rooted and grounded in the faith and be able to follow in the footsteps of their faithful fathers and mothers in Israel. That is what I desire to see done. I thought perhaps a word might be said to some advantage to the home ministry—to the Elders in Israel who are called upon to address the Saints and teach them from Sabbath to Sabbath. And I will say a word to the Seventies, at least, who, in many of the Stakes of Zion, are called upon by the Presidency of the stake to do very much of the home

missionary labor. To the Seventies then, who are thus called to labor in the Church, and to whom I think in connection with my fellow Presidents, I have a special right to direct a word of counsel and advice—to them I say: Call to mind the admonition that the Lord Jesus Christ gave unto His servant Peter. When about to leave the Twelve, and having rolled the responsibility upon their shoulders, of extending a knowledge of the Gospel to the nations of the earth, He said to Peter:

“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

“He saith unto him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

So say I unto the Seventies engaged as home missionaries. If you love the work, if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, then feed those to whom you are called to minister. Feed them the bread of life. I rather rejoice in the thought of being somewhat in close touch with the young people of the Church, and I want to tell you one of the complaints that they make against us—one of the things they find fault with when they are urged to attend Sabbath meetings—they plead the dryness, the huskiness, the unfruitfulness, the lack of spiritual or intellectual food that they receive when they go to the house of the Lord. And if it is necessary to admonish the people to attend upon the service of the Lord, it is also necessary to admonish the ministry of the Church that when the people do come together they should be fed with the bread of life. It is a good thing to take a little time from worldly affairs and consider the things of God, and have food in His house when His people shall assemble together.

Now, having said so much to the Seventies, and not taking it upon myself to address that council to anybody

else, let me give a word of advice also to the people of God; for there are two sides to this subject. No matter how dull or dry the speaking from the pulpit may be, there are still purposes to be subserved in the assembling of the people together that should call the faithful Latter-day Saints to worship. It is true we attend divine service to receive admonition; it is true that we go to receive instruction, and to be built up by the word that shall be preached; but we go also for other and even higher purposes than these. It should be remembered in our hearts that we go to the house of the Lord for the purpose, primarily, of honoring and worshipping the Lord, whether men can preach intellectual sermons or deliver soul-stirring admonitions or not. We go to worship the Lord, to honor Him, and to obtain spiritual life by partaking of the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then if admonition and instruction come, so much the better. But even if there should be an entire absence of appropriate instruction, (which, of course, there it not,) it should nevertheless be regarded as our part to assemble together and honor the Lord. Remember this, too, that all preachers have something good; and if it should chance to be that some now and then lack sense, then God takes a text and preaches patience to you. And now if there can be a drawing together here; if on the one hand the ministry can be more fruitful, can furnish the people a richer supply of spiritual food; and on the other hand if the Saints will remember that the primary purpose of going to the house of the Lord is pure and holy worship—there will be as a result more satisfaction in our public religious meetings. The Lord bless you. Amen.

The choir sang:

Hail to the Brightness of Zion's glad morning;
Joy to the lands that in darkness have lain.

ELDER GEORGE TEASDALE.

How Church membership is obtained—The Gospel to the dead—Church organization—Restoration of the Gospel—About profanity—Redemption the result of keeping God's commandments.

I am deeply grateful to have the privilege of attending this conference