

Sunday School Supplement

GENESIS AND A SAMPLING OF THE BEST BOOKS

In the D&C it encourages us to "study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people" (D&C 90:15). With this in mind we have chosen excerpts from some of the "best books" on the Old Testament, with an emphasis on the book of Genesis. This is followed by a select bibliography on aspects of the Old Testament. If you have particular areas of interest or questions we encourage you to write to Sunstone with your requests. We will try to handle these through personal correspondence or in future columns of the Sunday School Supplement.

Science and Genesis

It seems unlikely, for instance, that Adam was the first "flesh" on this planet, created before all other forms of

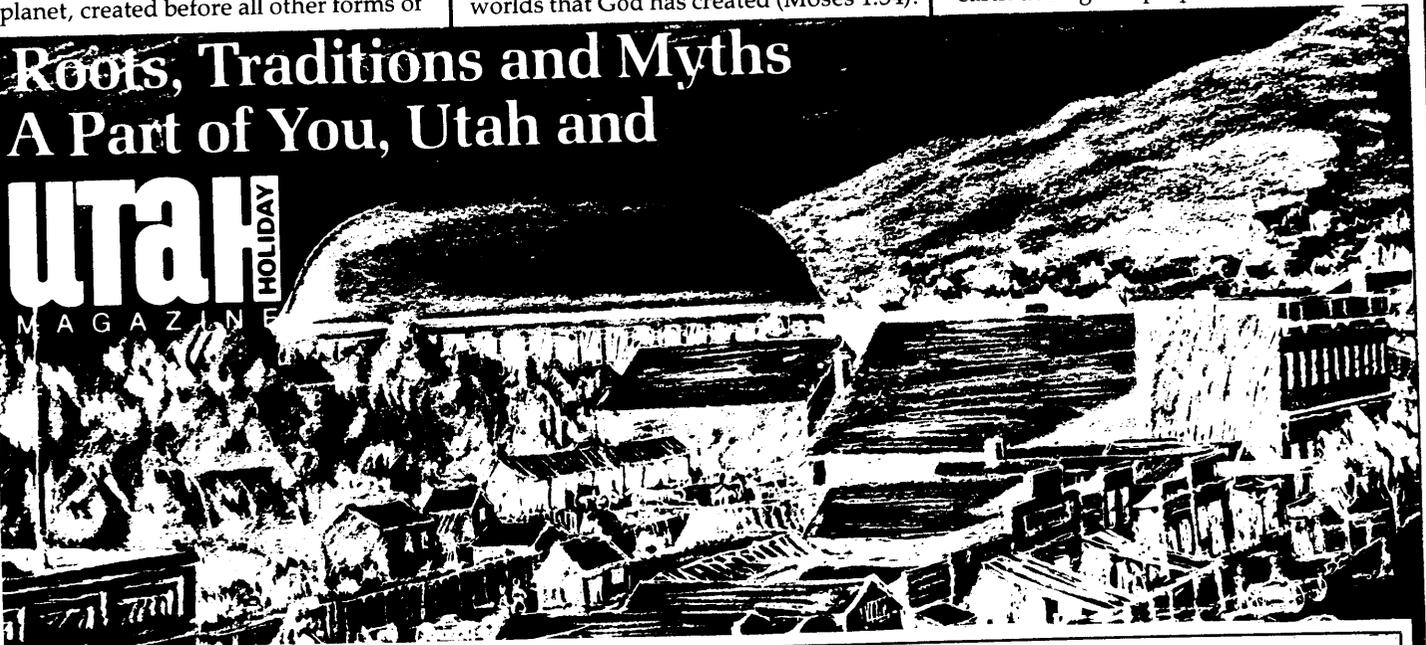
life, as some traditional religious interpretations would insist. It seems also unlikely that Adam was the first bipedal hominid to walk on the earth. Still, we have the scriptural account which clearly states that Adam was the first man on earth. . . . Perhaps what the scripture is really telling us is that Adam was the first to receive knowledge and power from God; perhaps he was the first to receive a spirit that was the offspring of diety; perhaps, as some religionists have suggested, Adam was the first of his particular race, brought here from some other place, though this does not fit easily into the picture that science has of orderly gradual processes on this planet. But whatever the source of his physical body, "Adam" is the name of the person who fills the role referred to in scripture as the "first man"—a role duplicated on all the worlds that God has created (Moses 1:34).

In our view, the questions concerning what happened on this earth before Adam came, the source of Adam's physical body, and the physical relationship of all of Adam's contemporaries to one another are matters which need not upset religious beliefs no matter how they are resolved, any more than the idea that the earth revolves around the sun should have upset the religious beliefs of the people in the time of Copernicus. In our view, the scriptures *symbolize* the Creation and the relationship between God and the connubial pair called Adam and Eve. We know that a spirit son of God called Michael participated in the creation of the earth and later took up the mortal role of Adam, the "first man", and with his wife Eve became the progenitors of those in whom God had a special interest. More than this, the scriptures do not plainly tell us about the identity of Adam and Eve.

It is obvious from our studies that the earth's crust required long preparation before it could provide an adequate supply of minerals, fossil fuels, and soils to support modern life. It is also obvious that man could not have survived on earth during this preparation time. He

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could not for instance, have endured the intensely swampy conditions necessary for the huge dinosaurs that dominated the earth during much of prehistoric times and that are one basis for the fuel that runs our modern machinery. Man had to come in his turn, following the proper development of earth and of life.

The scriptures, having been written as spiritual guides to the posterity of Adam and Eve, are predictably silent about the long preparation period of prehistory and about the manlike inhabitants of the ancient earth. But in fact, none of the writings of mankind were concerned with ancient hominids until their remains were discovered in the earth in modern time. Now the evidence for their existence over very long periods of prehistoric time is undeniable. That these ancient creatures existed is certain. Who they were in an eternal sense and the nature of their relationship to Adam's living posterity is not certain.

There are many unanswered questions to challenge the ingenuity of scientists. As religious scientists who believe in the literal historical existence of two people named Adam and Eve, who believe in the fall of man from the presence of God into mortality, who believe in the atonement of Jesus Christ, who believe in our own kinship with God, we must not be afraid to wonder about the unanswered questions of life. We need not accept the speculations of our colleagues if they insist on denying what we know from modern revelation. But neither can we ignore these speculations or the evidence that leads to them. Ignoring the evidence does not make it go away; ignoring the interpretations made of this evidence does not make our colleagues abandon their interpretations nor does it weaken the impressions these interpretations make on the scientific and lay communities. To have an influence on the outcome, we must stay in the game with our eyes open, playing hard.

So we do not retire to the corner and close our eyes. We accept the challenges of our existence, as we accept its splendors. Assured of God's interest in us and in the earth he created to be our home, we continue to probe in order to understand both the earth and ourselves. Assured of the divine purpose in our own lives, we continue to observe and to synthesize parts of the grand truths of the universe from our limited observations. We have confidence that when the time is right, the limitations to our perceptions will be removed. We believe that if our lives are acceptable to our Father and if our minds are adequately prepared, one day we

will receive and comprehend the truth of all things. We have that promise from God himself.

Ray T. Mathene, "Man's Tie to the Earth: A View From An Anthropologist" in *Science & Religion: Toward A More Useful Dialogue*, Vol. 2, edited by Wilford M. Hess, Raymond T. Mathene, and Donlu D. Thayer (Geneva, Ill.: Paladin House, Publishers, 1979), p. 234-35.

Creation Records

Without actual revelation, we shall probably never fully comprehend the relationship of early man to the scriptural account of man beginning with Adam's family. And since this information is not presently critical to our exaltation, we may never receive revelation on the subject in this life. However, realizing that our Father in Heaven expects us to seek and understand all truth, we have a responsibility to seek as much understanding as we can concerning the presence of the "pre-Adamic man." His presence in an age long before Adam is becoming well established fact. His technological and physical development in time present a remarkable parallel.

There are two records of the creation story, one in the scriptures, and one in the crust of the earth. We know the scriptural account reveals to us why, but not how the creation occurred. Perhaps the crust of the earth is revealing how it occurred. We can be sure of one thing—in the end both accounts, when fully understood, will come together into perfect harmony, for there cannot be two contradicting truths about the creation of the world.

Another thing is also sure—each year more and more information is being brought to light on these problems. While we are waiting for the day when the whole story will be clear, we cannot ignore seemingly contradictory facts.

Bernhart E. Johnson, "Primitive Technology and the Advent of Man and Civilization: A Developmental Parallelism," *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Patriarchal Traditions

The Patriarchal traditions are essentially historical in nature, although there is an admixture of the legendary and mythical, and furthermore these cannot always be disentangled.

David Noel Freedman, "The Real Story of the Ebla Tablets, Ebla, and the Cities of the Plain," *Biblical Archeologist* 41 (December 1978):145. An address delivered at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

At the least, we can say two things about the composers, compilers, and editors of the Book of Genesis: (1) They were seriously concerned to get the story

straight. Like good reporters they were careful about details and preserved the names of persons and places accurately. (2) They had access to authentic historical records, either written or oral or both, but in any case reliable, although minor mistakes, mis-attributions, and the like are to be expected. (*Ibid.*, p. 155.)

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