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INSIGHTS

AN ANCIENT WINDOW

"...by study and also by faith." D&C 88:118

BENJAMIN'S SPEECH AS AN EARLY JEWISH FESTIVAL

Twelve researchers have collaborated over the past year to examine King Benjamin's Speech in light of Jewish festivals. Their results are now available in a lengthy report, compiled by John W. Welch.

"The results are very impressive," observes Stephen Ricks, professor of Hebrew at BYU, "definitely something people should be aware of."

"We know the Nephites lived the law of Moses and that the observance of festivals was a part of the law," says Welch. From pre-Exilic Israelite materials, it is not clear exactly what those festivals were like, but many scholars believe that the ancient Israelites celebrated a single New Year festival around the month of September. In later Judaism, the more specific fall festivals of *Rosh Hashana* (New Year), *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), and *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) would then have developed out of this earlier single festival.

The earlier Israelite festival complex is precisely what we find in the Book of Mormon—not three separate festivals, but one. Benjamin's Speech weaves together the characteristic strands of these three Jewish festivals in a way that appears astonishingly similar to what scholars know about the festivals of ancient Israel. The Jewish New Year, for example, was a day of judgment, of falling down before God, and of remembering and celebrating the kingship of God—all prominent aspects of Benjamin's Speech. On the Day of Atonement one finds concerns about atonement, particularly for sins of inadvertence and of rebelliousness, and admonitions about confession and giving to the poor—again distinctive teachings of Benjamin. At the Feast of Tabernacles, as at Benjamin's celebration, one finds the people dwelling in tents, each man with his family, to listen to the king deliver the "Paragraph of the King" and give an accounting of his stewardship as king-but-still-mere-mortal. The parallels are far more extensive and precise than anyone could have guessed.

Most of our information about Jewish festivals comes from the post-Exilic and Rabbinic periods of Jewish history, which limits our ability to speak conclusively about the characteristics of Israelite festivals in Lehi's day. Nevertheless, festivals are among the most persistent of cultural institutions, and the strong similarities between our Book of Mormon texts and Jewish expositions and oral law dating back two to eight centuries after Lehi are extremely significant—both in light of the antiquity and the meaning of Benjamin's text.

King Benjamin's Speech is one of the great masterpieces of the Book of Mormon, if not of all religious literature. No one interested in understanding and appreciating it should miss this study.

THE B. H. ROBERTS STORY

The Lord obviously did not intend the Book of Mormon to be an open-and-shut case intellectually, either pro or con. No miracle and no matter of faith is.

No one has ever sensed this fact more keenly than B. H. Roberts, who for many years was the "lightning rod" among the General Authorities, as he was called upon to take the strikes against and questions about the Book of Mormon and to supply answers wherever he could. Often he had good replies, but sometimes he had none. Today we still do not have all the answers, and we should not expect to have. But we have made considerable progress since B. H. Roberts' day.

The book *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (edited by Brigham D. Madsen, with a biographical essay by Sterling McMurrin: University of Illinois Press, 1985) publishes three Roberts papers in which he bluntly lists many Book of Mormon "problems" for which he sees no answer. The book has raised two main questions. They are dealt with by John W. Welch and Truman G. Madsen in two lengthy reports available on the attached order form. The first question, to which Welch responds, is to what extent are Roberts' "problems" still problems today? Madsen and Welch then deal with the second question: are the editors telling the whole story when they imply that Roberts abandoned ship?

The first report shows that Brigham D. Madsen should have brought the modern reader of the Roberts papers up to date on supportive Book of Mormon research since Roberts' day. "In their own words," says Welch, "they recognize the need for this, but then they make little effort to do it." The Welch report then offers an analytic guide to the up-to-date literature, summarizing where a person can go to find answers to most of Roberts' problems. Roberts' main concerns center around these issues:

Indian Origins. Roberts found that most people in his day believed something different than he did about the origins of the American Indians. Most of those opinions,

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on both sides, are now seen as oversimplifications. While Roberts could not reconcile these opinions, there are now logical and plausible explanations for Roberts' questions. See, for example, the recent work of John Sorenson, which the editors of the Roberts papers simply ignore.

Archaeology. Roberts was often asked to respond to questions about pre-Columbian archaeology; however, he did not have many answers at his disposal. Today, though, there is strong evidence answering most of the questions he faced, and valuable and interesting evidence relating to the rest. For example, Roberts could find no evidence of barley in America before Columbus; such samples have since been found.

Absurdities. Roberts found some passages in the Book of Mormon that seemed absurd or erroneous. On closer examination, few of these oddities are problematic. In fact, many end up strengthening the credibility of the Book of Mormon. For example, Roberts did not see how Captain Moroni could wave a "rent" (Alma 46:19, 1st ed.) in the air, but in Hebrew that expression is perfectly acceptable.

A Parallel? Lastly, Roberts displays many purported similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Ethan Smith's 1823 *View of the Hebrews* (VH), which argues that the American Indians were descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes, a common theory widely believed for centuries. Most of the suggested similarities between VH and the Book of Mormon, however, are not so precise or significant as they might appear at first glance. "We have gone back and looked at VH anew," says Welch. "It turns out that the Book of Mormon differs from and even contradicts VH far more than it resembles it. This makes it very hard to believe that Joseph Smith relied on VH to any significant extent." Since many people have pointed to "parallels" between the Book of Mormon and VH, Welch offers 84 "unparallels," such as the following:

VH lists many prophecies about the restoration of Israel, including Deuteronomy 30; Isaiah 11, 18, 60, 65; Jeremiah 16, 23, 30-31, 35-37; Zephaniah 3; Amos 9; Hosea and Joel. These scriptures are essential to the logic and fabric of VH; yet, with the sole exception of Isaiah 11, none of them appear in the Book of Mormon.

VH produces numerous "distinguished Hebraisms" as "proof" that the American Indians are Israelites; however, hardly any of these points are found in the Book of Mormon. For example, VH reports that the Indians are Israelites because they use the word *Hallelujah*. Here is one of VH's favorite proofs, a dead giveaway that the Indians are Israelites. Yet the word is never used in the Book of Mormon. Nor are 34 other Indian words listed in VH with supposed Hebrew equivalents.

VH says the Indians are Israelites because they carry small boxes with them into battle to protect themselves against injury. This, the

book asserts, is a sure sign that the Indians' ancestors knew of the Ark of the Covenant! How could Joseph Smith pass up such a "distinguished and oft-tested" Hebraism as this?! Yet in all the Book of Mormon battle scenes, there is not one hint of any such ark, box or bag serving as a military fetish.

VH produces "great authority" that the Indians migrated from north to south (an important matter for VH, since it claims that this squares with biblical prophecies). But in the Book of Mormon, all migrations are from the south to the north.

VH argues that the Indians are Israelites because they knew the legends of Quetzalcoatl. But the surprise here is that VH proves beyond doubt that Quetzalcoatl was none other than—not Jesus, but Moses! He was white, gave laws, required penance (strict obedience), had a serpent with green plumage (brazen, fiery flying serpent in the wilderness), pierced ears (like certain slaves under the Law of Moses), appeased God's wrath (by sacrifices), was associated with a great famine (in Egypt), spoke from a volcano (Sinai), walked barefoot (removed his shoes), etc. If VH provided the inspiration for the Book of Mormon, it did not provide much: None of these hallmark-details associated with Quetzalcoatl/Moses are incorporated into the account of Christ's visit to Bountiful in 3 Nephi.

In the face of these differences, the few similarities pale. "Would Joseph have contradicted or ignored VH at virtually every turn if indeed he gave it basic credence as his source?" asks Welch's report.

In the second report, Truman Madsen and John Welch address this question: *What did Roberts believe?* Roberts was relentless in his statement of the problems mentioned above. In his Study, he stated the case against the Book of Mormon as potently and pugnaciously as possible, usually not offering any proposals for easy ways out. Why was he so tough?

Some suggest that he had lost his faith in the Book of Mormon. But those who say this have a hard time accounting for Roberts' almost obsessive and devoted religious use of the Book of Mormon up to his dying day. (See B. H. Roberts, "His Final Decade: Statements About the Book of Mormon," recently expanded and available on the attached order form.)

Nor will it do to claim that he had a private "doubting" position and a public "orthodox" facade, for Roberts was, if he was anything, intellectually honest and outspoken. It is essential in addressing this problem to determine when Roberts wrote "A Book of Mormon Study." Brigham D. Madsen presents the picture of Roberts privately working hard on this Study for many years after 1922. Facts contained in the very typescripts from which the editors worked, but inexcusably buried and ignored by them, however, prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Roberts wrote the Study in 1922 and returned to it again only to make minor

corrections and the outline which he called "A Parallel." After 1922, Roberts served vigorously as mission president in New York, delivered dozens of talks about the Book of Mormon, published the *Comprehensive History of the Church* (1930), all strongly endorsing the Book of Mormon.

Why, then, is he so tough? To understand this, one must understand Roberts. He loved to debate and knew how to argue a case in its rawest form. He also believed deeply that by debate much good would emerge. He saw some unresolved problems, and he wanted to state those problems clearly. He also wanted to get the attention of others so they would know of those difficulties and of their seriousness. To have presented the problems any less clearly and dramatically would have been uncharacteristic of Roberts. At the same time he "most humbly prayed" and "most anxiously" awaited the "further development of knowledge that will make it possible for us to give a reasonable answer to those who question us concerning [these] matters" (*Studies of the Book of Mormon*, p. 175). To a considerable extent, that development has already occurred.

HANDHELD WEAPONS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

The first in a substantial series of studies on warfare in the Book of Mormon has been completed this month. This new Preliminary Report by Arabist William Hamblin, Ph.D. (Michigan), focuses on handheld weapons in the Book of Mormon, in pretechnical military practices of the Near East, and in Mesoamerican archaeology. Dr. Hamblin's work on this subject was funded by a research grant from F.A.R.M.S. He is currently working for the United States Department of Defense.

This paper deals with swords, cimeters, clubs, axes, spears, and daggers. It gives illustrations, for example, of curved "cimeters"—Egyptian, Israelite, and Hittite weapons from before the time of Lehi—to dispel doubts that such curved swords existed before the time of Lehi. A fine example is given of a very precious royal steel-bladed dagger with a richly ornamented gold hilt, which comes from the tomb of King Tutankhamen. This provides a solid image of what the sword of Laban might have been like. It, too, had royal significance, and a hilt "of pure gold and . . . exceeding fine" workmanship, with a blade "of the most precious steel" (1 Nephi 4:9). The paper also shows that handheld weaponry analogues for these weapons mentioned in the Book of Mormon existed in Mesoamerica.

The series that this paper inaugurates will examine in detail Book of Mormon weapons, armor, fortifications, armies, strategies, and many other military practices and attitudes toward war.

STEPHEN RICKS, LES CAMPBELL, TERI BERGSTROM TAKE NEW POSITIONS; JOHN SORENSON RECOVERING

This month, Stephen D. Ricks joined John W. Welch and John L. Sorenson as members of the F.A.R.M.S. Board of Directors. Stephen has been an active, contributing F.A.R.M.S. researcher for several years. His dissertation, "A Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian" (an ancient South Arabian

dialect), earned him his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley in 1982. At Brigham Young University, he teaches Hebrew, Aramaic, Near Eastern mythologies, and a class on texts and temples. He brings great enthusiasm, dedication, and scholarship to this position with F.A.R.M.S., and is greatly appreciated.

Les Campbell, born in Shelley, Idaho, is with F.A.R.M.S. this year on a one-year professional development leave from the Church Educational System. Les is an avid Book of Mormon seminary teacher, father of five, and a bishop. He has long been a serious student of Book of Mormon scholarship. He will be involved with various research projects and presentations, with

building Book of Mormon collections, and with masterminding day-to-day distribution efforts. His devoted work is extremely valuable and will go far to promote understanding and appreciation of the Book of Mormon.

Teri Bergstrom, our new bookkeeper and officer coordinator, comes from southern California after serving in the Florida Tallahassee Mission. "I love being involved with a group that is working for the benefit and knowledge of others."

We are sorely missing the steady input of John Sorenson this fall. He is recovering very satisfactorily from a heart attack he suffered in September. We wish him a complete and thorough recovery.

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Also, now is the time to pay your 1985 minimum contribution (\$10.00 per year; \$5.00 for senior citizens, low-income families, students, and missionaries—permanent addresses only, please), if you haven't already done so—or to get going for 1986.

MORE ABOUT MULEK

Another possible clue of the existence and escape of Mulek (see *Insights*, March 1984, and *Update*, February 1984), son of Zedekiah, has been noticed by Benjamin Urrutia. 2 Kings 25:1-10 reports that Nebuchadnezzar and "all his host" scattered "all the men" and "all [the king's] army" and burnt "all the houses of Jerusalem" and with "all the army" destroyed the walls. Ben points out that in the midst of all this, 25:7 omits the word "all" when it reports that "sons" of Zedekiah were killed, refuting, perhaps, the idea that all of those sons were killed, as some critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed.

"Every Latter-day Saint should make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit. Otherwise he is placing his soul in jeopardy and neglecting that which could give spiritual and intellectual unity to his whole life." — Ezra Taft Benson, 1975

OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA VOL. 2 NOW AVAILABLE

Charlesworth's second and final volume of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* has just been released by Doubleday. This long-awaited collection of important early Christian and Jewish writings is the result of more than a decade of work by dozens of scholars, including F.A.R.M.S. correspondent Stephen E. Robinson. Each volume is 1000 pages long, and volume 2 contains a valuable index for both volumes. Act now if you want these books—a price increase has already been announced by Doubleday, effective January 1, 1986.

Readers of the Book of Mormon may find these volumes interesting for several reasons. For example, one recently discovered Syriac document appears in Charlesworth's volume 2 called the "History of the Rechabites." The Greek version, known as the "Narrative of Zosimus," was first published in English in 1890, and compares well with the stories and visions of Lehi and Nephi. For example, the story of Zosimus begins as he dwells in the desert, is led by prayer and faith, wanders through a dark and dreary waste to the bank of a river, over which he passes through a mist of darkness to a tree whose fruit is sweet above all and from which he eats and drinks. There Zosimus is greeted by an escort, who interrogates him as to his desires, shows him a vision of the Son of God, and introduces him to a group of people who fled from the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah and who keep records on tablets. From these people Zosimus learns the true way of righteousness, prayer, chastity, etc. Many interesting similarities to the Book of Mormon are obvious, although one is at a loss to explain exactly why these two separate writings are so similar. "If anyone

wonders whether the Book of Mormon closely resembles any old writings from Palestine, here is a strongly intriguing case," concludes John Welch, director of F.A.R.M.S.

Also found in the pseudepigrapha are several accounts of "throne theophanies and prophetic commissions" that compare in many ways with the vision of Lehi in 1 Nephi 1. In that vision, Lehi saw God sitting on his throne and received his prophetic call. This material is discussed in Blake Ostler's paper, soon to be published in *BYU Studies* and also available on the attached order form. Also, many of Hugh Nibley's papers, especially those about the prophet Enoch, comment extensively on this pseudepigraphic literature as well.

1 Nephi 13:39 prophecies that "other books" will come forth to testify "that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true." No one knows what these "books" are or will be, but ten years ago James Charlesworth, editor of the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, remarked that this Book of Mormon prophecy was "at least 100 years before its time. Mormons don't have to believe this prophecy; they have seen it fulfilled in their own lifetimes," he mused.

Both of the Charlesworth volumes can be ordered on the attached order form at discounts substantially below the retail price. Order *immediately* if you want to receive this book for Christmas or before the already-announced publisher's price increase goes into effect.



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