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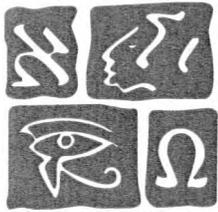
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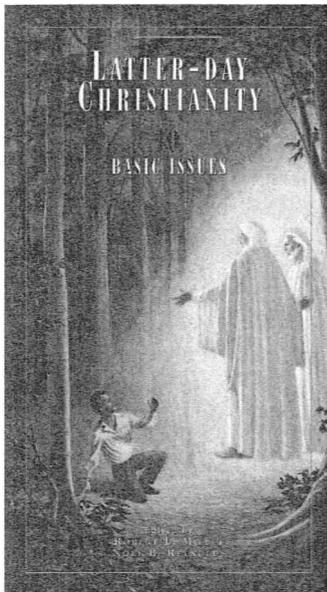
The Newsletter of  
the Foundation for  
Ancient Research &  
Mormon Studies

# INSIGHTS

## AN ANCIENT WINDOW

October 1998

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



## New Booklet Explains Basic LDS Beliefs

FARMS and the BYU Religious Studies Center have jointly published a booklet that discusses some of the beliefs of members of the LDS Church. The contributors to *Latter-day Christianity: Ten Basic Issues* hope these discussions will, first, help Latter-day Saints who want to explain their beliefs to their friends of other faiths

Christianity who live admirable lives devoted to the truths they understand.

The contributors to *Latter-day Christianity* hope that addressing a few of the questions most frequently asked about LDS beliefs and practices will contribute to understanding between Latter-day Saints and their friends of other faiths. The ten specific questions considered in the booklet get at the heart of the LDS faith and way of life:

- Are Latter-day Saints Christian?
- What do Latter-day Saints believe about God?
- Do Latter-day Saints believe in the Bible and biblical Christianity?

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and, second, be useful to people outside the LDS Church who want a simple and clear statement of those beliefs from informed insiders.

With the rapid and visible growth of the LDS Church, it is inevitable that doctrinal differences will arise between Latter-day Saints and people of other faiths. Latter-day Saints profess to be Christians. They believe that God called Joseph Smith in 1820 to restore saving truths and divine powers and to establish a church that is the restoration of the original Church of Jesus Christ. They believe that the restored church contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and is led by divinely called modern apostles and prophets.

In spreading this message of the restoration to the world, Latter-day Saints do not wish to offend people of other faiths. There clearly are people of every Christian denomination who have devoted their lives to following the Lord, to serving others, and to spreading the message of redemption in Christ to the world. And there are people outside

## Progress on the Maya Murals of Bonampak

The February 1996 issue of *INSIGHTS* reported that FARMS was assisting Yale University and the National Geographic Society in photographing the deteriorating Maya murals at the Bonampak site in Chiapas, Mexico. Using a multispectral filter provided by FARMS, the Bonampak team captured on film vivid details of the mural scenes otherwise obscured by centuries of decay and incrustation.

Yale art history professor Mary Miller, director of the Bonampak Documentation Project, reports that CD-ROMs containing glyphs from the murals are nearly ready to distribute to the scholars who are participating in the project, so that they can begin their analysis of the murals. Miller is optimistic that the final technical difficulties in electronically stitching the many digitized images of the murals

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The Foundation for  
Ancient Research  
and Mormon Studies

# FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 120

## Cursing a Litigant with Speechlessness

Alma's curse on Korihor, "In the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance" (Alma 30:49), resembles an ancient Greek practice of cursing a litigant with speechlessness. When the curse materialized, divine disapproval was so clear that Korihor was compelled to yield the case.

Such curses were common in the ancient Mediterranean world, especially in the legal sphere. In recent decades, over a hundred Greek and Roman binding spells—curses inscribed on small lead sheets that were folded up and pierced with a nail—have been recovered from tombs, temples, and especially wells near the law courts, where they were placed in hopes that a deity from the underworld would receive and act upon them. These spells are known as *defixiones* because their words and powers were intended to "defix" (restrain or hinder) an opponent. In ancient Greece, those targeted by these spells could be commercial, athletic, or romantic rivals, or adversaries in litigation.<sup>1</sup>

The largest body of Greek binding spells deals with litigation, with sixty-seven different *defixiones* invoking curses on legal opponents. The earliest of these date to the fifth century B.C. Eleven of them ask the gods to

bind the tongue of a legal opponent so he would lose the lawsuit.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence suggests that occasionally these curses were apparently fulfilled. For example, a third-century-B.C. stela (an inscribed stone slab) from the Greek island of Delos expresses the gratitude of a victorious litigant who believed he had been helped in court by a god: "For you bound the sinful men who had prepared the lawsuit, secretly making the tongue silent in the mouth, from which [tongue] no one heard a word or an accusation, which is the helpmate in a trial. But as it turned out by divine providence, they confessed themselves to be like god-stricken statues or stones."<sup>3</sup>

The speechlessness of Korihor, and to an extent the stunning of Sherem, was precisely the kind of sign or restraint that people in the ancient Mediterranean world expected a god to manifest in a judicial setting when false accusations or unfair ploys placed an opponent at a distinct disadvantage.

Stricken litigants often erected confession stelae. The inscriptions apparently were "a confession of guilt, to which the author has been forced by the punishing intervention of the deity, often manifested by illness or accident."<sup>4</sup> In hopes of appeasing the offended god, a punished litigant

would inscribe on the stela a clear profession of his newly admitted faith in the deity and would warn others not to disdain the gods.

The trials of Sherem and Korihor show these same trends of confession. Sherem recanted his public teachings, confessed the truth of the god who had intervened against him, admitted his error, and expressed concern that he would never be able to appease that god (see Jacob 7:17–19). Korihor's confession acknowledged the power of God, probably to assure those concerned in Zarahemla that the curse would not afflict any others, as well as to terminate the dispute (see Alma 30:51). Such reactions are similar to the responses of others in the ancient world whose judicial perfidy had been exposed and quashed by the intervention of a god responding to the restraining curse of a beleaguered litigant.

### NOTES

1. See Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (1991), 11.

2. See A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (1904), nos. 22–24, 26–29, 31, 33–34, 37.

3. In Faraone, "Early Greek Binding Spells," 19.

4. H. S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers," in *Magika Hiera*, 75.

Based on research by John W. Welch

*Scripture insight***Biblical Editing: Clues in the Seams**

*As LDS readers focus on the Bible this year and next, the following excerpt may give students ideas to think about.*

Many readers of the Bible recognize that its constituent books were transmitted from ancient times to the modern world through the anonymous work of countless editors, scribes, and translators. What is sometimes not clear, however, is the process by which some biblical books were recorded and passed down. Careful analysis of the biblical text reveals that certain passages were drawn from multiple sources and shaped by the hand of editors many centuries ago. Such textual studies can illuminate the origins of the Bible as well as increase our understanding of its teachings.

By reading carefully and observing contexts, repetitions, sudden shifts in style and ideology, and passages where things do not fit together smoothly, scholars can make educated guesses about the original sources biblical editors may have used. In short, scholars look for rough spots in the text, or "seams" between parts that do not quite fit together. Some examples will help make this clear.

The original Greek in Philippians 2:5–11 is quite poetic, but the surrounding material is not. Most scholars are convinced that Paul was there quoting an early Christian hymn. In John 14:31, after two chapters of farewell discourse, Jesus said to his disciples, "Arise, let us go hence." But instead of leaving, he continued speaking for two

more chapters. This seam may indicate that John combined two separate accounts of Jesus' last discourse.

In the story of David and Goliath, David was introduced as a "stripling" or a "youth" (1 Samuel 17:33, 56) whom his father had sent to the battlefield with provisions for his three older brothers. He was outfitted with Saul's armor but instead chose to face Goliath with only his sling (see 17:17–20, 38–40). Yet earlier in 1 Samuel another version of the situation seems to exist. There David was first described to Saul as "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war" (1 Samuel 16:18), whom Saul summoned and made his armor-bearer (16:19–21). This was presumably why David was at the battlefield. (Notice that the story seems to start all over again at 17:12.)

In 17:15 it appears that someone tried to harmonize the two accounts by having David return home after serving Saul. But this runs counter to Saul's request in 16:22, which implies a more permanent arrangement. In addition, this explanation does not establish why in 17:55–58 Saul had no idea who David was when he saw him go against Goliath. One simple explanation of these discrepancies is that the author-editor combined at least two different accounts. The story reads fairly smoothly if we take out 17:12–31, 41, 50, and 55–58. In fact, the Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament into Greek made about 200 B.C., omits these

very verses, and there is evidence that they may have been added later.

In some cases when we suspect an editor used multiple sources, we can compare the edited version with an original source and look for patterns that reveal the purposes behind his choices. The New Testament is suited to this type of analysis because it often contains multiple accounts of the same event, as in the Gospels. Similarities in the original Greek wording and in the sequence of events make it virtually certain that at least some of the Gospel writers knew the work of others. The most accepted hypothesis is that Luke and Matthew both had read Mark and Q, a collection of Jesus' sayings that is now lost.

We see how this works in the story of Jesus walking on the water. Mark's account parallels Matthew's to the point where Jesus reassures his frightened disciples, saying, "It is I; be not afraid" (Mark 6:50; Matthew 14:27).

At this point Matthew added the episode of Peter walking on the water and changed the ending to downplay the disciples' apparent amazement and troubled hearts (see Mark 6:51–52): "Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).

Why would Matthew make these changes? We can surmise that he might have felt that Mark's account omitted some important features and that it

## Corroborations

# A Modern Example of a Night without Darkness

A remarkable event recorded in the Book of Mormon was the night of Christ's birth, at which time light remained even after sundown (see Helaman 14:3-4; 3 Nephi 1:8, 15). To some this seems impossible, totally unexplainable in scientific terms despite the fact that the Bible describes similar phenomena for the Israelite exodus from Egypt (see, for example, Exodus 14:19-20; Nehemiah 9:19; Psalm 78:14) and for the millennial era (see Zechariah 14:6-7; Revelation 21:10-11; 22:5). Even the believer, while satisfied that the Lord can perform miracles beyond our comprehension, is fascinated by the night without darkness that heralded the Savior's birth. So it is with great interest that we learn of a similar event that occurred in our own century.

On 30 June 1908 a gigantic explosion took place over a remote part of the Siberian forest in the Tunguska region. Scientists have speculated that it was caused by a gigantic meteorite, a comet, or even a black hole striking the earth. Whatever the cause, the effect was startling. For months afterward, there were spectacular sunrises and sunsets throughout the world, caused by the vast amount of dust thrown up into the atmosphere.

Most surprising of all was the fact that, throughout most of Europe and in parts of Asia and North America, the nights passed without darkness for about two months. The night sky glowed with red and yellow hues, even when overcast. In the British isles the northeastern sky was

tinted red. People in Scotland reported that, in rooms facing north, objects cast shadows at night. In London it was possible to read the small print in the London *Times* at midnight. Photos of Stockholm were taken at 1:00 A.M. by natural light, and a midnight photo of the Russian town of Navrochat looks like a bright summer afternoon. Photos of the glowing night sky were also taken in Orlov province, Russia, on the nights of June 30 and July 1. One Russian reported that the brightness woke him at 1:15 A.M. and that he then read for half an hour by natural light.

At the time, no one knew what had caused the strange glow. It was not until 1930 that a British meteorologist tied it to the Tunguska explosion, which, being in a remote area, had received little attention. But in 1908 some European observers were already comparing the bright night to the appearance of the sky following the explosions of the volcanic island of Krakatoa in 1883, when dust ejected into the atmosphere refracted the sun's rays, producing fiery sunsets and a night afterglow seen from New Zealand to Iceland. In some parts of the globe, the unusual night glow continued for three years.

This parallel with the Book of Mormon account of the night of Christ's birth is impressive, even if the Lord used other means than an atmospheric explosion to produce the phenomenon observed by the Nephites. —*Contributed by John A. Tvedtnes*

## Biblical Editing (continued from page 3)

put the apostles in a bad light. Thus Matthew concluded his version with the apostles' recognition of Jesus' divinity rather than with their lack of understanding. This type of editorial change occurs throughout Matthew's gospel. He consistently changed verses where Mark had left the apostles misunderstanding or doubting to show that the apostles really did have faith (compare Mark 8:17-21 with Matthew 16:8-12; and Mark 9:30-32 with Matthew 17:22-23). This editorial pattern is an important clue to understanding the purpose of

Matthew's gospel. It may even be evidence that he wrote his book at a time when the apostles' authority was being questioned.

This approach to reading scripture—looking for contradictions and passages that do not fit together smoothly—may be unfamiliar even to longtime readers of the Bible, many of whom naturally prefer to focus on its inspirational teachings. Yet a close textual analysis is important if we wish to know the relationship between the text and the events it relates and the men who wrote and edited it. Moreover, understanding their purposes in editing may be as important as understanding the

*continued on page 5*

*New FARMS reprint*

## Reprint Rebutts Critics' Claims, Reveals Tactics

FARMS is pleased to offer a reprint of *Offenders for a Word*, by Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks. This book explains the tactics many anti-Mormons employ in attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It also answers critics' objections to Latter-day Saint beliefs in the Godhead, polygamy, salvation by grace and works, eternal progression, the idea of a premortal existence, the role of Joseph Smith, the nature of the Holy Ghost, and much more.

Supported by exhaustive references, *Offenders for a Word* also reveals the private (or not-so-private) agendas of various critics in light of their works.

The title of the book comes from Isaiah 29, a chapter that is replete not only with prophecies of the restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, but also with predictions of the kind of opposition that would greet the latter-day work. Much of this opposition, as the authors attempt to show, takes the form of criticisms that "rest upon the manipulation of language [and] upon illegitimate semantic games that truly make innocent people 'offenders for a word.'"

Peterson and Ricks rebut the common assertion that Latter-day Saints are not Christian, noting that if the anti-Mormon case for expelling Mormons from Christendom is thought to rest on standards derived from the New Testament or from immediately postapostolic Christianity, it is without substance. Earliest Christians liked to describe their fellowship and their community in ethical terms—terms with which the Latter-day Saints, given their emphasis on good works, can certainly feel comfortable. The authors also show how the writings of the Bible, the Apostolic Fathers, and the ecumenical councils, as well as the classical creeds of post-

apostolic Christianity, cannot be used to define the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints outside the realm of Christianity. The authors go on to give direct responses to various claims that Mormons are not Christian.

In the second section of their book, Peterson and Ricks address another common allegation—that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a cult. They show how the word *cult* is a highly subjective term, noting that in effect the only popular meaning of the word is "a religious group that someone else doesn't like."

Ultimately, *Offenders for a Word* reaffirms the gospel of Jesus Christ as believed and practiced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In clear, straightforward terms, the book explains the true beliefs of the church and how to see through the word games that critics use to attack it. The book is available through the enclosed order form.

## Scholars Share Research on the Book of Abraham

On 19 September FARMS convened a working group on the book of Abraham at Brigham Young University. Scholars and researchers from across the United States gathered to exchange research on the book of Abraham, while international researchers participated via mail and e-mail. Topics covered historical, geographic, doctrinal, cultural, and scientific issues related to the book of Abraham. This research is coordinated by BYU history professor William J. Hamblin and John Gee, assistant research professor at FARMS. At the half-day meeting, participants discussed such topics as the location of the Chaldees and the nature of Abrahamic astronomy.

Participants will incorporate suggestions from the working group into their papers and submit final drafts to be reviewed by peers in their respective fields. Eventually these papers (and perhaps others) will be presented either at a technical conference narrowly focused for scholars working in that field of study or at a broader conference for the general public, or both. Watch for details in future issues of *INSIGHTS*.

## Biblical Editing (continued from page 4)

events they described and the teachings they recorded. —Excerpted from Grant R. Hardy, "Mormon as Editor," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. Sorenson and Thorne (1991), which applies the same kind of analysis to Mormon's efforts as an editor.

## Booklet Explains Beliefs (continued from page 1)

- Does God speak to his children in ways other than through the Bible?
- Do Latter-day Saints believe that men and women can become gods?
- What do Latter-day Saints mean when they say that God was once a man?
- What do Latter-day Saints believe a person must do to be saved?
- Do the doctrines and practices of the LDS Church change?
- How do Latter-day Saints believe they should live their lives?
- Why do Latter-day Saints try to convert others?

The contributors to this booklet are all members of the faculty of Brigham Young University: Larry E. Dahl is professor of Church History and Doctrine, Robert L. Millet is dean of Religious Education and professor of Ancient Scripture, Daniel C. Peterson is associate professor of Asian and Near Eastern Languages, Noel B. Reynolds is associate academic vice president and professor of Political Science, Stephen E. Robinson is professor of Ancient Scripture, Brent L. Top is associate dean of Religious Education and professor of Church History and Doctrine, and John W. Welch is Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law.

While *Latter-day Christianity* is not an official publication of the LDS Church, the contributors have sought in their expressions to be in harmony with scripture and the teachings of modern church leaders. Each of the contributors has worked for many years in the church's educational system and has taught and written a great deal on the topics discussed in this work. While much more could be said on these topics, they hope that this brief treatment is an appropriate response to questions that continue to arise.

You may order copies of this full-color, illustrated booklet using the order form enclosed in this issue of *INSIGHTS*.

## Maya Murals (continued from page 1)

into a seamless mosaic without distortion will soon be overcome.

The murals, which date to the Late Classic period (A.D. 550–900) and cover the walls of three chambers of a temple in a small ruined city, depict hundreds of Maya figures such as dancers, musicians, and nobles—as well as warriors in full combat. The war scenes brought to life at Bonampak with modern imaging technology may help to challenge the prevailing scholarly view that the Maya were a peace-loving people who did not engage in warfare.

Once the project is completed, scholars will have a valuable tool for studying the artwork and glyphic text of the exquisite murals in a manner never before possible. *INSIGHTS* will report on the translation and interpretation of the glyphs and on other developments in the Bonampak project as that information becomes available.

# INSIGHTS

## AN ANCIENT WINDOW

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### The Purpose of FARMS

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) encourages and supports research about the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ and other ancient scriptures. It also works to preserve ancient religious documents.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation affiliated with Brigham Young University. Its main research interests include ancient history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to the scriptures. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of the scriptures, solid research and academic perspectives alone can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about the scriptures.

The Foundation works to make interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these publications, including most royalties, are used to support further research and publications on the scriptures. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

It is hoped that this information will help all interested people to “come unto Christ” (Jacob 1:7) and to understand and take more seriously these ancient witnesses of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.