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The Newsletter of  
the Foundation for  
Ancient Research  
and Mormon Studies

# INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

June 1999

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

## **Review Looks at Recent Books on Ancient America, Benjamin's Speech, Temple Symbolism**

The latest issue of the *FARMS Review of Books* (volume 11, number 1) commends recent studies on ancient America, Benjamin's speech, and temple symbolism. It also features two extended articles that are notable contributions in their own right—one complementing the work of Hugh Nibley, the other countering anti-Mormon criticisms.

Richard Dilworth Rust evaluates Walter Krajewski's master's thesis, "Voice from the Dust: A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon," and H. Clay Gorton's *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon*. Rust considers it remarkable that Krajewski was able to write his thesis for Concordia University's religion depart-

ment "without apology for his belief in the Book of Mormon as an ancient sacred text with an inspired origin." Rust identifies a few factual errors that "slightly mar" the work but do not materially detract from Krajewski's presentation of types and themes in the Book of Mormon. In contrast, Rust indicates that "large strategic errors" impair Gorton's *A New Witness for Christ*. For example, Rust demonstrates that Gorton's percentages for the "chiasticity" of the Book of Mormon and its authors are questionable because in some instances Gorton overlooks chiasms and forces others.

Another weakness in the book is that Gorton does

*continued on page 3*

## **Evangelical Scholars Recognize LDS Scholarship**

A recent article by two evangelical scholars will be of interest to FARMS subscribers. "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" evaluates contemporary Latter-day Saint scholarship and finds it erudite, sophisticated, and rigorous, providing a robust defense of the Mormon faith—and thus meriting serious attention from the evangelical community.

In a fair-minded effort to assess the aims and achievements of LDS scholarship, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen surveyed LDS publications on biblical studies, Christian church history, and the Book of Mormon. They published their findings in the fall 1998 issue of the major evangelical publication *Trinity Journal*. LDS readers will find the article refreshingly well-informed in its appraisal of

Mormon scholarship that defends LDS beliefs as well as contributes to biblical studies in general, such as the notable work of Latter-day Saints on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In debunking four myths about LDS scholarship, the authors deny, for example, that Latter-day Saints trained in areas like theology and biblical languages invariably discard their beliefs in the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the prophetic stature of Joseph Smith. Such myths are "based upon ignorance and selective reading," the authors assert. "Evangelicals who wish to be responsible must abandon them." They argue further that LDS scholars have effectively responded to criticism of their beliefs, that "no books from an evangelical perspective . . . responsibly interact

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The Foundation for  
Ancient Research  
and Mormon Studies

# FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 127

## The Psalm of Nephi as a Post-Lehi Document

Building on ideas presented in the last three FARMS newsletters, this update considers one example of how Nephi's small plates account reflects the time and circumstances in which it was written. Nephi's masterful meditation in 2 Nephi 4:16–35 becomes even more poignant and vivid if we recognize that this psalm was written while Nephi was feeling painfully vulnerable after losing his father.

Shortly after blessing his posterity, Lehi died in the land of first inheritance (2 Nephi 4:12). "Not many days" later, Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael became extremely angry with Nephi (2 Nephi 4:13; 5:1–2). Nephi's lament that he was "angry because of mine enemy" (2 Nephi 4:27, 29) refers most directly to his rebellious brothers, his only known "enemies," who, as the psalm recalls, had once been "confounded" and made "to quake before" Nephi (2 Nephi 4:22; see 1 Nephi 17:52–54). As tensions between the brothers mounted again at this time, Nephi hoped for deliverance once more.

In his psalm, Nephi rejoiced that God had preserved him "upon the waters of the great deep" (2 Nephi 4:20). These words recall the group's safe voyage as well as Nephi's personal deliverance from his broth-

ers' evil designs toward him. In previous conflicts with his brothers, Nephi could count on Lehi's emotional support; but after Lehi's death, Nephi had to muster courage on his own, and thus his psalm speaks strongly in the first person: "My God hath been *my* support; he hath led *me*. . . . He hath heard *my* cry by day, and he hath given *me* knowledge by visions in the nighttime" (2 Nephi 4:20, 23).

With Lehi dead, every report in the small plates account that likens Nephi to Lehi (e.g., 1 Nephi 14:29; 17:44) takes on new significance. Every prophecy that Nephi would become a ruler over his brothers, every comment about his brothers' wickedness, and every prediction of the downfall of his brothers' posterity helps position Nephi as Lehi's rightful and righteous successor. Accordingly, Nephi's psalm reinforces several links between Nephi and his deceased father. Just as Lehi had seen visions, so had Nephi (1 Nephi 1:8; 2 Nephi 4:23). Just as angels had appeared to Lehi, so they had ministered to Nephi (1 Nephi 1:11; 2 Nephi 4:24). And just as Lehi had praised God's mercy, so had Nephi (1 Nephi 1:14; 2 Nephi 4:26).

Most of all, Nephi's heartfelt psalm reflects the deep sorrow he felt at the time he composed it

(2 Nephi 4:17, 19). While he redirected this grief by speaking of his own "iniquities" (2 Nephi 4:17), it would have been the death of his father that would have made him feel his own mortality and inadequacies so keenly.

Knowing that Lehi's soul slumbered, Nephi included several powerful couplets emphasizing the reawakening atonement of the Lord. He exclaims, "Awake, my soul!" (2 Nephi 4:28). He praises God, "the rock of my salvation," and pleads, "O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul?" (2 Nephi 4:30, 31).

Nephi ended his psalm with strong assurances that God would also deliver him from his enemies (2 Nephi 4:31, 33). After his father's death, Nephi knew he would have to rely on God alone as he confronted the challenges of securing peace and prosperity for his people (2 Nephi 4:34).

It is a great tribute to the spirituality of Nephi that he could deal with such hardships by marshaling increased faith in God. The small plates were written to fill many needs that arose after Lehi's death. Nephi's psalm is particularly at home in that post-Lehi context.

By John W. Welch

## Corroborations

## John the Baptist and the Keys of Baptism

The Latter-day Saint concept of priesthood keys is not well documented in the Bible. A single passage has Jesus Christ promising to give Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19), while the book of Revelation indicates that Christ held “the keys of hell and of death” and “the key of David” (Revelation 1:18; 3:7; see Isaiah 22:22). There is no mention of keys in connection with John the Baptist.

Nevertheless, when John came to ordain Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic Priesthood on 15 May 1829, he indicated that this priesthood “holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel

of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins” (D&C 13:1). A Christian document from Ethiopia, thought to date to the fifteenth century but containing older concepts, speaks of “John the Baptist unto whom was given the key of baptism.”<sup>1</sup>

Another document of related interest comes from the Mandaeans, who claim to be descendants of the disciples of John the Baptist, whom they call by his Arabic name Yahya. Called *Haran Gawaitha*, the text says of John that “when he was seven years old, [the angel] Anush ‘Uthra came and wrote the ABC (*a ba ga*) for him, until when he was twenty-two years old, he

had learnt all the priestly-craft (*naširutha*).”<sup>2</sup> The idea that at a young age John the Baptist was visited by an angel who delivered priesthood training is in general agreement with D&C 84:28, where we read that John “was baptized while he was yet in his childhood, and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old.”  
—Contributed by John A. Tvedtnes

## Notes

1. Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth and Other Works of Bakhayla Mika'el (Zosimas)* (Oxford, 1935), 105.
2. Elisabeth S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 4.

## Review (continued from page 1)

not attempt to illuminate the purposes standing behind the chiasms. Although Rust concludes that a large part of his dissatisfaction with the book is “a matter of purpose and layout,” he acknowledges that “Gorton has put an enormous amount of work into his book” and that “the overall impression one gets . . . is that the Book of Mormon is extensively chiastic.”

In his review of Robert H. Moss’s *A Reader’s Book of Mormon Digest*, Gary F. Novak describes this condensed version of the Book of Mormon as well-intended but flawed. Designed to be read in a single month, the 162-page book preserves only the portions that Moss considers

doctrinally vital, ignoring what Novak believes to be “the larger message of the book.” Novak notes that helpful “connective tissue” has been excised, impairing narrative flow, plot development, characterization, and even meaning. He concurs with Moss’s recommendation that people should read the Book of Mormon in its entirety.

Diane E. Wirth reviews John L. Sorenson’s *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, considering its “demeanor, format, and fine presentation . . . impressive, making a real contribution” for Latter-day Saints interested in Mesoamerica as it relates to the Book of Mormon. After praising the book

for its informative text and high-quality photographs, she recommends that a few points regarding Mesoamerican iconography be clarified in future printings. For instance, she notes that the caption to an image of a Maya slate mirror back begins, “A Maya father exhorts a son . . .,” while a more recent interpretation identifies the figures as a king and a younger brother who is a “keeper of the books.” Although she points out similar questions of interpretation in other photo captions, Wirth acknowledges that she may be simply nit-picking and that the main text of the book is superior.

Keith H. Lane, in reviewing *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye*  
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## Review (continued from page 3)

*May Learn Wisdom*, a book edited by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, describes this volume as “a very important work,” one that “students of the Book of Mormon will want to have . . . on their shelves and use.” In contributing to a deeper understanding of King Benjamin’s speech, the book “opens up other fields to be plowed,” Lane says. For example, John Welch’s insightful chapter on King Benjamin’s speech as great oratory can serve as a springboard to related studies dealing with the speech’s rhetorical aspects and the “oratorical impact of angelic words.”

Daniel B. McKinlay reviews Matthew B. Brown and Paul T. Smith’s *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism on the Early Temples of the Restoration*. He commends the authors for their well-researched and informative work on symbols found in the exterior and interior designs of the Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake Temples, among others. The book assigns “rich meanings” to an array of temple symbols by blending historical and doctrinal insights with “inspiring accounts of visions and other manifestations to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and [others] that enhance the meaning of the symbols.” McKinlay is impressed with the “fascinating information” in the chapter on the future temple in Independence, Missouri, and he finds the copious endnotes to be “as engaging as the script itself.” He notes that the authors could improve their commentary by giving more information on the ancient meanings of the various temple symbols, and he praises them for achieving “an impressive balance between manifesting discreet respect for sacred matters while at the same time providing genuine insight.”

Louis Midgley views the 10 essays in Hugh W. Nibley’s *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* as not only scholarly treatises but also apologetic “Mormon essays” that are “part of Nibley’s larger effort to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ against its critics.” Midgley focuses his review on two 1963 essays in which Nibley addresses the age-old struggle between mankind’s quest for wisdom through reason alone (the “sophic” attitude) and the longing for wisdom through revelation (the “mantic” attitude). Midgley elaborates on Nibley’s discussion by relating the sophic-mantic dialectic to Paul’s elevation of “the wisdom of God” over pagan philosophy—a conflict symbolized by

Tertullian’s famous line “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

Pursuing this theme, Midgley evaluates the work of late Jewish philosopher Leo Strauss in light of Nibley’s early essays on the sophic and mantic traditions and observes that both scholars contend that “our current way of seeing things [in terms of simplistic science/religion, reason/revelation, or fact/faith dichotomies] is a confused outgrowth of old, and now half-forgotten, quarrels.” Midgley’s engaging remarks consider possible accommodation between philosophy and the Bible and effectively relate many issues to present-day LDS concerns.

In his review of Mark A. Smith’s *The Power of God*, Robert C. Freeman describes the book as generally instructive and enlightening and finds the discussion of the principle of agency “especially insightful.” He also notes that the book “lacks a thoroughness of discussion” and that parts of the book “appear to be little more than a compilation of quotations,” most from Elder Bruce R. McConkie and few from “very recent general leadership of the church.” Moreover, “the author is guilty in some cases of hanging his doctrinal position on a single quotation” and in other cases of relying too much on more obscure sources without balancing them with modern-day quotations. Such weaknesses notwithstanding, Freeman says that overall the book makes a helpful contribution to the study of faith.

Russell C. McGregor and Kerry A. Shirts respond to James R. White’s anti-Mormon book *Letters to a Mormon Elder: Eye-Opening Information for Mormons and the Christians Who Talk with Them* with a series of letters addressed to White himself. In a clever parody of White’s book, these letters cogently set the record straight by answering the original 18 letters through White’s imaginary Elder Hahn, portrayed in better light by McGregor and Shirts as “a good missionary who follows the rules, does the work, keeps his leaders informed, and answers White’s letters according to his own timetable and priorities, and not White’s.” McGregor and Shirts’ “Letters to an Anti-Mormon” is well worth its length of 209 pages. Covering a wide range of topics from the nature of the Godhead to Facsimile 3 in the Book of Abraham, it dispels many common

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## Review (continued from page 4)

anti-Mormon criticisms in an entertaining, easy-to-read fashion.

After reviewing two similar software products—*Collector's Library '98*, by Infobases, and *GospelLink*, by Deseret Book—William Raventos felt hard-pressed to choose the best product and advises that his comparison “should be used as a starting point to explore both products, confirming (or refuting) the observations and conclusions” he makes. He likes the *Collector's Library* because it is easier to install and easier to search but notes that it lacks a powerful comparative viewing tool. On

the other hand, *GospelLink* has the best comparative viewing tool, a good highlighter, and the best graphics, but it too has some drawbacks: it is considerably slower than the *Collector's Library*, is harder to install, and lacks a hits counter on its search engine. Raventos concludes that both products have seemingly equal advantages and disadvantages. He notes that Deseret Book's recent acquisition of Bookcraft (owner of Infobases) may lead to a single, consolidated version of the two software programs.

## Evangelical Scholars (continued from page 1)

with . . . LDS scholarly and apologetic writings,” and that the “sophistication and erudition of LDS apologetics has risen considerably while evangelical responses have not.”

Discussing Hugh Nibley's pioneering work in LDS scholarship, the authors describe him as a “scholar of high caliber” and note that his writings have gone unchallenged by evangelicals because they presently lack the academic training and tools needed to enter that arena. The significant work of other LDS scholars in identifying textual elements in the Book of Mormon that reveal its ancient Near Eastern background is highlighted as well.

In citing Wilfred Griggs's “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book” as an example of a notable scholarly defense of the Book of Mormon “worth considering,” the authors seem impressed with his numerous examples of religious texts written on gold, silver, or bronze tablets, such as the fifth-century-B.C. Orphic gold plates, which, to quote Griggs, “appear to have an Egyptian origin which agrees in time and content with the Egyptian associations of the Book of Mormon.”

The authors list other notable contributions to LDS scholarship, including John W. Welch's work on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, Donald W. Parry's work on Hebrew poetic structures in the Book of Mormon, Roger R. Keller's study demonstrating that the Book of Mormon is the product of several ancient writers, John Tvedtnes's work on Hebraic elements and Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon, and Stephen D. Ricks's identification of ancient Near Eastern ritual elements in Mosiah 1–6.

Mosser and Owen conclude that “LDS academicians are producing serious research which desperately needs to be critically examined from an informed evangelical perspective.”

Mosser and Owen also discuss the role of LDS scholars in advancing understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigrapha, and the Pearl of Great Price. For example, they point out that the international team of scroll editors includes four LDS scholars and that FARMS and BYU have sponsored international conferences on the scrolls. LDS research on the scrolls “is readily accepted by the larger academic community,” the authors note, “and Mormons are increasingly asked to collaborate on, contribute to, or edit books with non-LDS scholars.”

After citing several LDS studies that demonstrate proficiency in biblical scholarship and buttress points of Mormon doctrine, the authors conclude their report by calling for a higher level of professionalism among evangelical writers.

Although the purpose of Mosser and Owen's praise of LDS scholarship is to encourage evangelical scholars to do a better job of countering LDS claims and thereby clarify and strengthen their own doctrinal position (the authors say “both Mormonism and evangelicalism claim to be the church which Christ founded,” but “both cannot be correct”), the article provides an interesting perspective on the work of FARMS and the status of LDS scholarship in general. It can be ordered using the enclosed order form.

### Forthcoming publications

*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1. The next issue of the reformatted journal will feature articles by Louis Midgley on "The Maori View of the Book of Mormon," by Stewart W. Brewer on the history of interpretations of Izapa Stela 5, by John Clark on a definitive new drawing of Stela 5, by Matthew Roper on "Swords and 'Cimeters' in the Book of Mormon," by Bruce H. Yerman on "Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms," by Marilyn Arnold on "Unlocking the Sacred Text," and by George D. Potter on "A New Candidate in Arabia for the 'Valley of Lemuel'"—all accompanied by beautiful illustrations. News items and other departments round out the content of this issue. To be featured in the July *INSIGHTS*.

*Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon*, by Elder Hugh W. Pinnock. Elder Pinnock shares his personal explorations into the Book of Mormon's use of ancient literary forms. Having spent years learning more about these forms and scouring the Book of Mormon in search of examples, he offers his own discoveries in the hope that they will stimulate others to search for these forms in the scriptures and increase their own understanding and testimonies. The book includes a helpful introduction to the subject and chapters on repetition, parallelism, and miscellaneous literary forms discoverable in the Book of Mormon. To be featured in the July *INSIGHTS*.

*Charting the Book of Mormon*, first bound edition, compiled by John W. and J. Gregory Welch. Since the release of some of these teaching and study aids in loose-leaf form, many students of the scriptures have found them invaluable for illustrating important aspects of the Book of Mormon. This new edition improves the charts and graphs visually, more than doubles their number, and adds explanations of them. This collection of more than 175 visual aids includes maps, diagrams, chronologies, flowcharts, tables, bar graphs, pie charts, and many other effective schematics on Book of Mormon topics such as the history and structure of the record, Jesus Christ, religion, law, culture, war, and geography. Available late summer.

Because of a publisher's discount, we are offering *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*, by Richard Dilworth Rust, and *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars*, edited by Susan Easton Black, at more than 50 percent below retail price. See the order form.

# INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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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.