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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 21 | 2001

Number 6

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New Isaiah Study Aid Combines Four Readings


The BYU Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts will soon publish a new study of the book of Isaiah. *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources*, by Donald W. Parry, contains a unique translation that combines readings from four different witnesses of Isaiah: (1) the Great Isaiah Scroll, one of the most complete of the Dead Sea Scrolls; (2) the Hebrew Masoretic Text that underlies the King James Version of the Bible; (3) the passages from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon; and (4) the Joseph Smith Translation of Isaiah. By using variant readings from these sources, Parry hopes to provide a useful study aid for students and teachers of the book of Isaiah.

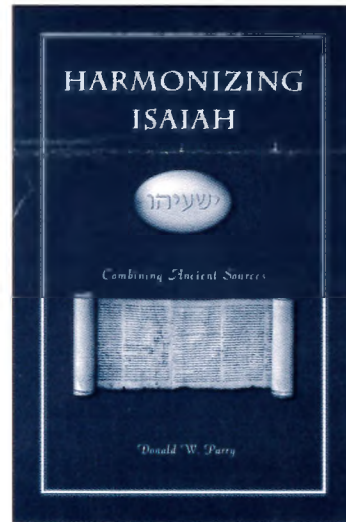
In addition to combining the readings of different versions of Isaiah, Parry has rendered his translation in modern English and formatted the text into parallel lines of poetry. This clarifies the meaning of the words of Isaiah while retaining the beautiful poetic structure of the book. Parry also includes an introduction in which he gives a brief history of the Great Isaiah Scroll, explains his reasons and methods

for his new translation, reviews the different forms of poetic parallelism, and provides sources for further study. In the two appendices, Parry includes lists of archaic words and chiasmic structures found in the book of Isaiah.

Parry, a member of the international team of Dead Sea Scrolls editors, has published widely on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the book of Isaiah. Books for which he has made major contributions include *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, *LDS Perspectives on the Dead*

Sea Scrolls, *Dead Sea Scrolls: Questions and Answers for Latter-day Saints*, *The Great Isaiah Scroll: A New Edition*, and *Understanding Isaiah*.

To obtain a copy of *Harmonizing Isaiah*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 



Scholar's Research on Oliver Cowdery Earns Award

Scott H. Faulring, formerly a research associate at FARMS and now a research historian at BYU's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, was honored at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association on 18 May for his research on Oliver Cowdery. "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," a study that appeared in the recent FARMS volume *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day*

Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson, earned Faulring the T. Edgar Lyon Award of Excellence.

Faulring's paper traces Oliver's excommunication from the church in 1838, his 10-year absence, and his reconciliation with church leaders and rebaptism shortly before his death in 1850. In order to present this history from Oliver's point of view, Faulring relied on letters Oliver wrote during his absence. "That's the best defense—to let a person speak for himself," Faulring explains.

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Doubled, Sealed, and Witnessed Documents

A distinctive legal practice in Israel around 600 B.C. was the use of doubled, sealed, and witnessed documents. These documents had two parts: one was left open for ready access while the other was sealed up for later consultation by the parties or for the conclusive use of a judge in court. As recent research has shown, the parallel to the Book of Mormon is apparent.¹

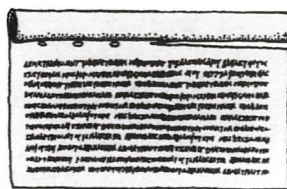
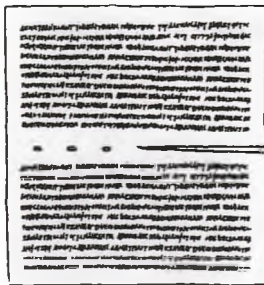
In an intriguing but only recently understood Old Testament passage, the prophet Jeremiah tells how he bought a field about 590 B.C. from his cousin. In order to memorialize his purchase as permanently as possible, Jeremiah drafted and executed a two-part deed. One part of its text “was sealed according to the law [*mitzvah*] and custom [*huqqim*],” and the other part of the document “was open” (Jeremiah 32:11; compare v. 14). Jeremiah signed this double document and

sealed it, as did several others who witnessed the transaction (see vv. 10, 12). Moreover, Jeremiah took his doubled, sealed document and, in the presence of his witnesses, securely deposited it with both of its parts in a clay jar, “that they may continue many days” (v. 14). Jeremiah’s detailed account reflects many interesting legal technicalities that were evidently customary in his day.

Several archaeological discoveries made in the 20th century shed considerable light on this interesting form of ancient legal documentation. These documents, when recorded on parchment or papyrus, were written on a single sheet, with one iteration of the text at the top and another at the bottom. Sometimes the two texts were identical; other times one was an abridgment of the other. Two bronze tablets of the Roman

emperor Trajan illustrate how this procedure could be used on plates as well. In that case the full text was written on the open side of the first plate, and then it was repeated in spread-out lettering on the inside faces of the two plates, which were then sealed together.² Two wooden tablets in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, show that the same practice also could be implemented in other media.

Sealing such documents was essential, and the manner of sealing was relatively standard. Typically, parchment documents have a horizontal slit from one edge to the middle, between the two texts. The top half was rolled to the middle and folded in at the slit. Three holes were punched from the end of the slit to the other side, and strings were threaded through these holes and wrapped around the rolled-up and folded-over upper portion; on these bands the seals (wax or clay impressions) of the participants were affixed. The manner of sealing metal or wooden documents was functionally the same.




The process of preparing ancient legal documents involved writing the text in two parts and then sealing one part for future reference. Illustration by Michael Lyon.

Witnesses were necessary, and their number could vary. In one Assyrian agreement on a clay tablet from 651 B.C. that documented the sale of a property, 12 witnesses are listed. In Jewish law the Talmud stipulated that “at least three witnesses were required by law.”³

When and by whom could these seals be opened? It appears that only a judge or another authorized official could break the seals and open the document. If a dispute arose concerning the correct wording of the open portion of such a contract, a judge could break the seals and compare the sealed portion with the open portion. John the Revelator “wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and read the book” that he beheld, until “the Lion of the tribe of Juda . . . prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (Revelation 5:4, 5; compare Isaiah 29:11).

Similarly, Nephi envisioned the final Nephite record as having two parts, one sealed and the other not sealed (2 Nephi 27:8, 15). Furthermore, witnesses were promised; in particular, at least three witnesses were stipulated, while other witnesses could be added to “testify to the truth of the book and the things therein” (v. 12). From this, one may well conclude that Nephi was familiar with the ancient use of double documents and that he expected his posterity to construct the Nephite record in a fashion that would conform with that practice. Indeed, its words will serve legal purposes at the final judgment, just as King Benjamin’s recorded words “shall stand as a bright testimony against [his] people, at the judgment day; whereof they shall be judged” (Mosiah 3:24). Moroni himself concluded, “Ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not de-

clare my words unto you? . . . And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true” (Moroni 10:27, 29). Perhaps one role of the sealed portion of the Nephite record will be to validate the truth of the open portion that the world now has. 

Notes

1. For an extended discussion of this topic, see John W. Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 391–444.
2. See Alfred v. Domaszewski, “Ein neues Militärdiplom,” in *Die Altertümer unsere heidnischen Vorzeit* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 1911), 5:181.
3. Elisabeth Koffmahn, *Die Doppelurkunden aus der Wüste Juda* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 12, citing Mishnah Tosephta *Baba Bathra* 10:12.


By John W. Welch

Nibley Audiotapes on Genesis Themes

Two new audiotape collections of Hugh W. Nibley’s writings and lectures on Genesis themes are now available. *Beginnings: The Creation to Abraham* features four essays read by Lloyd D. Newell, voice of the “Music and the Spoken Word” broadcast: “Treasures in the Heavens,” “Before Adam,” “Patriarchy and Matriarchy,” and “Setting the Stage—the World of Abraham.” Concerning “Before Adam,” Nibley says: “The Latter-day Saints are the only Bible-oriented people who have always been

taught that things were happening long, long before Adam appeared on the scene. They have never appreciated just how revolutionary that idea is.”

The second collection, titled *Beginnings: Adam to Moses*, contains four lectures from Nibley’s 1986 Pearl of Great Price class at BYU: “The Combat” (featuring remarks on Moses 1), “Adam and Eve” and the “Heritage of Cain” (both focusing on Moses 5), and “Enoch” (covering Moses 6–7). Those who know and enjoy Nibley’s unique style of teaching will be pleased that these tapes have been digitally remastered to improve their audio quality.

For purchasing information, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

Book of Mormon Word Usage: To Cross Oneself


Occasionally the Book of Mormon uses an unusual expression for English that calls for greater attention. One example is found in Alma 39:9, where Alma exhorts his son Corianton to “repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but *cross yourself* in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and *cross yourself* in these things.”

The reflexive use of the verb *to cross* is unusual and awkward in modern English. The usage is also unique in the Book of Mormon, where the word is often used as a transitive verb taking as its object a body of water (1 Nephi colophon; 17:17; Alma 2:34; 16:6; 43:35, 40; 56:25; Ether 2:6, 22, 25; 3:4; 6:3).

Three times the Book of Mormon uses the verb *to cross* in an entirely different sense. The first is when King Noah’s priests interrogate Abinadi: “They began to question him, that they might *cross him*, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him” (Mosiah 12:19). The second use is when the lawyers of Ammonihah interrogate Amulek: “They began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him *cross his words*, or contradict the words which he should speak” (Alma 10:16). The third use is when Nephi, son of Helaman, is accused by the judges of the people of Zarahemla: “They caused that Nephi should be taken and bound and brought before the multitude, and they began to question him in divers ways that they

might *cross him*, that they might accuse him to death” (Helaman 9:19).

In these passages, the verb *to cross* is used as a synonym for *to contradict*, a point made explicit in Alma 10:16. All of these passages are in the context of legal interrogation. Alma, having been a judge himself for eight years (Mosiah 29:42–44; Alma 1:10–14; 4:15–20), uses a legal metaphor with his wayward son. He talks about how Corianton had “been guilty of so great a crime” and that his crimes “will stand as a testimony against [him] at the last day.” By repenting and forsaking his sins, Corianton can cross—contradict—the testimony of his crimes. Alma then urges his son “to counsel with [his] elder brothers” and to “give heed to their counsel,” thus using his brothers the way a defendant uses a legal counsel (Alma 39:7–10).

It is interesting to note that although in Joseph Smith’s day one sense of the verb *to cross* was “to contradict,”¹ that usage had been outmoded for more than a century,² and yet the unfamiliar term is particularly apt in its context. This is an instructive example of how seemingly awkward wording in the Book of Mormon can, upon closer examination of the text itself, prove to be not only correct but also effective and even poetic. 

Notes

1. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Converse, 1828), s.v. “cross.”
2. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. “cross”) gives “to contradict” as definition 14c and lists that meaning as obsolete since 1702.

By John Gee

BROWN BAG REPORT

Joseph Smith Papyri Project

On 7 February Michael D. Rhodes, associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU, reported on his work on the Joseph Smith Papyri project. This effort to provide translations of all surviving papyrus fragments once in Joseph Smith’s possession is expected to result in three volumes. The first, which deals with the Egyptian Book of Breathings and will be published this year, features a translation and commentary and includes a description of the

text, color digital images, a glossary, and texts of related Egyptian papyri. Rhodes’s second volume, to be published next year, will be a similar treatment of the remaining papyrus fragments, which include portions of the Tshemmin Book of the Dead. A proposed third volume by Rhodes and Egyptologist John Gee would be a comprehensive reference to the Joseph Smith Papyri that would look at the papyri and the Book of Abraham from an LDS perspective.

Rhodes also spoke about the modern history and content of the papyri, which date to the second or third century B.C. More than a decade after Joseph Smith's martyrdom, some of the papyri were sold to a Chicago museum; they were probably destroyed when the building burned down in 1871. However, in 1967 a few fragments that had been sold separately turned up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and were given to the church. These fragments, constituting about 10 or 15 percent of the original scrolls, are portions of the scroll of Tshemmin (preserving about one-fourth of the Egyptian Book of the Dead), a portion of the scroll of Neferirnub (preserving part of the illustrated judgment scene from the Book of the Dead), and portions of the scroll of Hor (preserving about two-thirds of the Book of Breathings). Nothing remains of the papyrus of Amenhotep or of the hypocephalus of Sheshonq (Facsimile 2 in the Book of Abraham), though copies of both exist from the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Nor do the extant fragments contain any portion of the Book of Abraham or of the writings of Joseph of Egypt.

Muhammad and Religious Leadership

On 7 March BYU professor of Arabic Daniel C. Peterson reviewed the life of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and discussed his prophetic qualities and role in light of German philosopher Max Weber's thought on the subject. Peterson began by noting that Islam is not a tradition arising from a vacuum (the conventional view of Islamic scholars) as much as it is a continuation of earlier traditions of possible Canaanite origin.

Muhammad, born in A.D. 570, was an orphan who was raised by relatives and exposed to the Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian influences of the time. Though poor, he had clan prestige and influence through his family's priestly connection to the Ka'ba shrine. As a man of integrity and character, at age 25 he married a wealthy older woman and entered a life of leisure. Peterson explained further that at that time some people were disenchanted with Mecca polytheism and were looking for someone to bring about change, creating an anticipatory atmosphere. According to one account, at age 40 Muhammad was visited by the angel Gabriel, who called him to be a prophet (in


another version he sees God on his throne). Contained in the Koran are more than 100 discrete revelations that Muhammad received until his death, when prophethood and revelation ceased in Islam. In about A.D. 620 Muhammad escaped persecution in Mecca by fleeing to Yathrib, where he served as arbitrator of feuds and made the people recognize him as a prophet. Muhammad later became a statesman in Medina, where he helped create the first central government in Arabia and became the political ruler of all Arabia.

Peterson then compared Muhammad with Weber's distinctions between ethical prophets and exemplary prophets and between prophets and mere reformers and priests. Upsetting Weber's facile paradigm of mutually exclusive religious roles, Peterson described Muhammad as a religious leader who (by Weber's own definitions) was at once an ethical and exemplary prophet, a prophet-reformer, and a prophet-priest.

Reception History of the Book of Mormon

On 21 March Terryl L. Givens, an associate professor of English at the University of Richmond, discussed his forthcoming book, *Out of the Dust: Saints, Scholars, Skeptics, and the Book of Mormon*, which is to be published by Oxford University Press. His 1997 book *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*, also from the prestigious Oxford press, is a critically acclaimed analysis of Mormon "heresy" and vilification in the 19th century.


The new book emphasizes how the Book of Mormon has been received over time both within and outside the LDS faith community. It begins by examining the Book of Mormon as a sacred sign of Joseph Smith's divine calling and of the approaching "end time." As such the Book of Mormon functions much more powerfully by virtue of what it enacts than by what it contains, he said. The book then examines the Book of Mormon as ancient history, as a cultural product, as new theology, and as a Mormon cultural touchstone. By insisting on the literality of his vision, Joseph Smith rejected 19th-century romanticism and placed himself at odds with his culture, Givens said. He went on to explain the centrality in Western religious thought of ineffability and sacred distance and how the

Book of Mormon collapses those notions with its specificity and emphatic literalism, to the outrage of critics. Those same features, he concludes, doom to failure current attempts to negotiate a middle ground in the Book of Mormon wars. 

Oliver Cowdery continued from page 1

Oliver kept a nearly constant correspondence with Phineas H. Young, his brother-in-law and friend who was Brigham Young's brother. As mediator between the Brethren and Oliver, "Phineas is the hero of this story," Faulring avers. "If not for him, perhaps Oliver would not have returned."

Although Cowdery showed a genuine spirit of reconciliation within four years of his separation from the church, he waited several years for his name to be cleared so that his testimony of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the gospel would not be compromised, Faulring says. This view counters the common belief that Oliver strived to obtain a leadership position upon returning to the church. "Cowdery was willing to admit he had faults," Faulring explains, "but he had the desire to come back in the least capacity, with no title or position, but as a common member of the church. This shows his integrity as a person."

Along with Richard Lloyd Anderson, Faulring will coedit a four-volume documentary history of Oliver Cowdery, which is part of a larger publication project on the Book of Mormon witnesses. 

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies on the Ancient Apostasy, by Hugh W. Nibley, reprints Nibley's important essays on the fate of the primitive Christian church and its institutions and beliefs: "The Passing of the Primitive Church," "The Forty-Day Mission of Christ," and "Christian Envy of the Temple." See the order form.

Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham, compiled and edited by John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, is the first volume in the Studies in the Book of Abraham series. It contains over 100 ancient and medieval stories from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources that support distinctive aspects of the Book of Abraham. Available fall 2001.

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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.

FARMS is part of the Brigham Young University Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. 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.

FARMS 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 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.

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