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Alan Ashton Delivers Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture

Testifying of the purifying power of Christ in an address entitled “Oh How Surely Christ Sanctifies His Own,” Alan C. Ashton, cofounder of WordPerfect Corporation and Thanksgiving Point, gave the seventh annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture on April 12, 2012.

Among those in attendance at the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni Center were Sister Colleen Maxwell (widow of Elder Maxwell); BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson and his wife, Sharon; and university officials, faculty, and students.

Ashton opened his remarks by explaining what it means to be “owned” by Christ. He cited the experience of King Benjamin’s people entering into a covenant with God to be continually obedient. That mark of discipleship enables them to become the “children of Christ” (Mosiah 5:7), members of “the Savior’s owned family,” Ashton said.

Personally acquainted with Elder Maxwell, Ashton shared stories highlighting the apostle’s exemplary discipleship. “When we surrender our



own will to our Savior, he owns us, we become his children, and he sanctifies us,” Ashton said.

In true chiasmic form, Ashton’s key message—“the atonement of Jesus Christ is at the center of the lives of all those who belong to him”—came precisely at the midpoint of his remarks. (Striking examples of chiasmus, an ancient literary device in which emphasis is achieved via inverted parallelism, appear in Alma 36 and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon.)

Ashton went on to discuss how the number seven is “especially sacred in the scriptures” and is clearly associated with “sanctification, purification, and cleansing,” as many passages attest.

Christ is so central in the sanctifying process, Ashton said, that many of the names and descriptive phrases associated with Christ in the scriptures reflect his sanctifying power. These include

Sanctification, Tower of Life, and Mediator of Life. Ashton’s addendum to the printed lecture lists more than a thousand names representative of Christ, his attributes, and his mission.

The lecture will be available for free in booklet form at the Maxwell Institute offices and will be posted online at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu. ♦

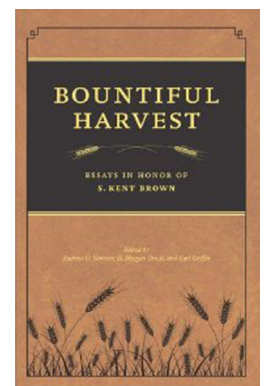
Volume Honors Professor’s Legacy of Scholarship, Faith

Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown compiles recent studies by two dozen scholars who respect Professor Brown and his scholarship and whose own research in this Festschrift is worthy of its honoree. A recognized expert on early Christian literature and history and a past director of Ancient Studies at BYU, Brown has devoted his career not only to expanding the scholarly literature in his field but also to building the faith of believers through more popular works

such as his literary/historical study of the Book of Mormon entitled *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla* and the seven-part TV documentary *Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God*.

A sampling of articles from this volume shows the breadth of research that has gone into its production. The article “Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of the New Testament Parables of the

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What's in a Name? Mormon—Part 1

Despite sporadic attempts to sideline the name *Mormon* in favor of “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” it continues to be used as the most ubiquitous moniker for the Church. Members of the Church are known as “Mormons.” It appears in the title of the keystone publication of the Restoration, *The Book of Mormon*. Within the book bearing this name, *Mormon* is, first of all, the name of the waters in the forest of Mormon (Mosiah 18:8; Alma 5:3) in the land of Mormon (Mosiah 18:30). Of course, *Mormon* is also the name of the military leader who abridged the Nephite records (Words of Mormon 1:1, 3; Mormon 1:1; 2:1).

Any serious discussion of the meaning of the name *Mormon* must begin by dealing with a passage in a letter attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith and published in 1843 in the Latter-day Saint newspaper *Times and Seasons*. But first a probable explanation of why the letter was written in the first place is in order. In E. D. Howe's 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled*, it is claimed that “the word *Mormon*, the name given to his [Joseph Smith's] book, is the English termination of the Greek word ‘*Mormoo*,’ which we find defined in an old, obsolete Dictionary, to mean ‘*bug-bear, hob-goblin, raw head, and bloody bones.*’”¹ Almost any knowledgeable reader, even in 1834, would have recognized that this definition is not only fabricated but downright silly. Closer in time to the letter in question is this passage from a local Illinois newspaper in 1841: “I will here give you the signification of the word Mormon, and also, book of Mormon, which every person that has read a dictionary of the reformed Egyptian tongue knows to be correct. *Mormon*—A writer of wicked, absurd, fictitious nonsense, for evil purposes, to make sorcerers. *Book of Mormon*—A book of gross, fictitious nonsense, wrote by Mormon, for Gazelom's diabolical purposes. *Mormons*—Anciently in Egypt—a set of black-legs, thieves, robbers, and murderers.”² This satirical attempt to define *Mormon* is even more fanciful and absurd than E. D. Howe's. Such doggerel regarding *Mormon* became the standard fare in the yellow journalism of the times. But no matter how outdated and fetid the nonsense, a reply seems to

have been the reason for writing the letter that was published in 1843 in the *Times and Seasons*. And now the letter, which was printed over the name of the Prophet:

I may safely say that the word Mormon stands independent of the learning and wisdom of this generation.—Before I give a definition, however, to the word, let me say that the Bible in its widest sense, means *good*; for the Savior says according to the gospel of John, “I am the *good* shepherd;” and it will not be beyond the common use of terms, to say that good is among the most important in use, and though known by various names in different languages, still its meaning is the same, and is ever in opposition to *bad*. We say from the Saxon, *good*; the Dane, *god*; the Goth, *goda*; the German, *gut*; the Dutch, *goed*; the Latin, *bonus*; the Greek, *kalos*; the Hebrew, *tob*; and the Egyptian, *mon*. Hence, with the addition of *more*, or the contraction, *mor*, we have the word MORMON; which means, literally, *more good*.³

It is possible that the tone of the letter was meant to ape the flippant anti-Mormon literature of the previous ten years. After all, satire is a tempting retort to satire. And though some of the letter might be an application of *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye), there is a more salient crux that needs to be addressed.

The first issue with this statement is that we are not certain Joseph Smith is responsible for all the content. The Prophet's journal entry for May 20, 1843, reads, “In the office heard Bro Phelps read a deffinition of the Word Mormon—More-Good—corrected and sent to press.”⁴ Unfortunately, not enough information is given to determine which parts of the letter published over Joseph's name stem from W. W. Phelps and which parts Joseph corrected. What is certain is that Joseph was not the original or sole author, that he made changes in the text, and that he gave approval to have it published over his name. This was not the first or last time that Phelps was a ghostwriter for Joseph.⁵

B. H. Roberts, when compiling the *History of the Church*, also “found evidence that the editor of *Times and Seasons*, W. W. Phelps, rather than Joseph Smith, wrote this paragraph and that it

was “based on inaccurate premises and was offensively pedantic.” In saying that the content of the letter was “offensively pedantic,” Elder Roberts seems to have concluded that the tone of the letter was pompous and, like the anti-LDS literature, flippant. He asked for and received permission from the First Presidency to leave the offending paragraph out of the official history he was producing.⁶ In the print version of his history, Roberts introduced the letter with a paraphrase of Joseph’s journal entry, writing rather frankly, “Corrected and sent to the *Times and Seasons* the following.” After leaving out all the words after “the wisdom and learning of this generation,” Roberts summarized the last sentence as “The word Mormon, means literally, more good.”⁷ He seems to have understood that the “inaccurate premises” lacked merit and therefore did not include them in his history. ♦

By Paul Y. Hoskisson

Director, Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies

In the next issue, part 2 will discuss metaphorical and philological aspects of the meaning and derivation of the name Mormon.

Notes

1. E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), 21, emphasis in original.
2. “Communications,” *Warsaw Signal*, August 11, 1841 (anonymous letter to the editor).
3. *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 194.
4. My thanks and appreciation to Andrew Hedges, Church History Library, for calling my attention to this passage. I have quoted the passage from Scott H. Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 378, entry for May 20, 1843. Original spelling preserved.
5. For W. W. Phelps as a ghostwriter for Joseph Smith, see Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34/1 (2008): 26-62. See especially pages 42-43, where Brown discusses this *Times and Seasons* passage; see also page 54. Another piece ghostwritten by Phelps is discussed by Michael Hicks in “Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and the Poetic Paraphrase of ‘The Vision,’” *Journal of Mormon History* 20/2 (1994): 63-84.
6. Truman Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 291-92. Madsen cites no source for his information.
7. *History of the Church*, 5:399-400.

Writing in Seventh-Century BC Levant

Harold B. Lee Library Auditorium (HBL 1080)

1:30–5:30 pm, 31 August 2012

The Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies invites you to an afternoon of lectures on the topic “Writing in Seventh-Century BC Levant.” The seventh century BC was a pivotal period in the history of the world. Not only did this century span the time between the Assyrian captivity and the impending Babylonian captivity, it was also the century when Isaiah ended his work and Jeremiah started his. This was the period of the Pax Assyriaca; it marked the height of the Assyrian Empire, its demise, and the rise of Babylon. It is the time when Lehi’s family was born and when he himself was the most active.

What was the state of writing in this time period? Four lectures will be given on different aspects of writing in the seventh century. Subscribers to Maxwell Institute publications will recognize the importance of these topics.

Presenters and Topics

- Marvin Sweeney, Claremont Graduate University, “Seventh-Century Judean Historiography”
- K. Lawson Younger Jr., Trinity International University, “The Role of Aramaic in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: Interactions in Writing Systems”
- Christopher Rollston, Emmanuel Christian Seminary, “The State of Literacy in the Levant of the Seventh Century BC”
- Stefan Wimmer, University of Munich, “Palestinian Hieratic”

Visit our website, maxwellinstitute.byu.edu, for the latest updates regarding this event.

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Kingdom,” by Monte S. Nyman, a BYU emeritus professor of ancient scripture (recently deceased), brings together Joseph Smith’s own words as well as his translation of the Bible to interpret eight parables of the Savior. One such parable is of the three measures of meal that rise from only a small amount of leaven. Of this parable, Joseph stated, “It may be understood that the Church of the Latter-day Saints has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses.” Such an interpretation—that this parable is in reference to the three witnesses—corresponds, according to Nyman, with both Old and New Testament teachings and Joseph’s prophetic role as an interpreter of scripture. Other interpretations by Joseph in this article are just as insightful.

The article “Two Crucified Men: Insights into the Death of Jesus of Nazareth,” by BYU professor of ancient scripture Andrew C. Skinner, provides a glimpse into the death and burial of the Savior. One of the main sources from which Skinner draws is the only known archaeological evidence of crucifixion—the remains of a Jew crucified in Jerusalem dating between AD 7 and 70. One striking remnant of this crucified Jew is a right heel bone “with a four-and-one-half-inch crucifixion spike still embedded in the bone.” Combining other fascinating discoveries from these remains with historical and prophetic sources, Skinner helps his readers have a fuller view of what the Savior suffered at Calvary and of his burial in Joseph’s tomb.

In “Rest Assured, Martin Harris Will Be Here in Time,” BYU professors of Church history and doctrine Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter (emeritus) give rare insights into the final decades

of the life of Martin Harris, including his return to the Saints in his eighty-eighth year. Jacob Neusner, an eminent Judaic scholar from Bard College, in “From History to Hermeneutics: The Talmud as a Historical Source,” addresses the questions “How are we to learn the historical lessons set forth by the revealed documents of sacred scripture?” and “What sort of history can we derive?” In “An Egyptian View of Abraham,” John Gee, a BYU Egyptologist, provides a unique Coptic account of an attempted martyrdom of Abraham and his subsequent rescue at the hands of an angel.

Because Brown has had such a far-reaching influence academically and personally, many other scholars have contributed to this volume, including Kevin L. Barney, M. Gerald Bradford, D. Morgan Davis, Ryan Conrad Davis, Paul Y. Hoskisson, William D. Glanzman, Carl Griffin, Kent P. Jackson, Leslie S. B. MacCoull, Robert L. Millet, Daniel C. Peterson, Dana M. Pike, Robert A. Rees, Stephen D. and Shirley S. Ricks, Marian Robertson-Wilson, Gaye Strathearn, and John W. Welch.

Bountiful Harvest serves a dual role by both continuing the serious scholarship of the Maxwell Institute and honoring the life and works of Professor S. Kent Brown. It is available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com. ♦



From Elder Neal A. Maxwell

If we can trust the answers God has already given, why not the answers yet to be given, including patiently awaiting the data from our first estate that will illuminate the imponderables of our second estate? (*Even As I Am*, 1982, 53)

INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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By furthering religious scholarship through the study of scripture and other texts, Brigham Young University’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship seeks to deepen understanding and nurture discipleship among Latter-day Saints while promoting mutual respect and goodwill among people of all faiths.



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