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John L. Sorenson, professor emeritus of anthropology at BYU, will present the Laura F. Willes Book of Mormon Lecture on September 8, 2011, at 7 PM in the Hinckley Center Assembly Hall. His lecture is entitled "Mormon's Sources." Since his retirement in 1986, he has researched and published extensively on Mesoamerican anthropology. The public is invited to attend this free special event.

New Book Features Scholarship on Tree of Life

The tree of life, an ancient and richly evocative symbol found in sacred art, architecture, and literature throughout the world, is the intriguing subject of a new book published by the Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book: *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*, edited by BYU professors John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry.

In surveying the religious, cultural, scriptural, and artistic aspects of the tree of life, the book explores the development of this ubiquitous symbol in the Old Testament and Jewish thought, the New Testament and Christian tradition, the Book of Mormon, Maya theology, the Catholic religious imagination, the Qur'an, Asian art and temple traditions, and Mormon art.

It is difficult to conceive of a more vibrant, enduring, multifaceted, and universally meaningful religious symbol. Latter-day Saints have a great affinity for the tree of life, encountering it in the Bible, the Pearl of Great Price, and most vividly in the visions of Lehi and Nephi in the Book of Mormon.

The book contains eleven essays by leading scholars such as Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, Andrew C. Skinner, John W. Welch, and Margaret Barker. Originally given at BYU's Tree of Life Symposium in the fall of 2006, these studies have been updated and enhanced with illustrations (including sixteen color plates).

The book's accessibility and utility as a resource tool are enhanced by a bibliography of LDS and non-LDS sources as well as citation and subject indexes. *The Tree of Life* is available at www.byubookstore.com. ♦



New JST Electronic Library Offers Added Features

Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library brings together a wealth of information and recent scholarship on Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. The electronic library, produced by the Religious Studies Center and the Maxwell Institute, also includes high-resolution images of every page of the original manuscripts, images and transcriptions of the earliest copies made from those manuscripts, and a collection of recently published studies based on the manuscripts. A short introductory essay precedes each manuscript. This collection also includes the entire 851-page book *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*,

edited by Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews.

A powerful electronic tool—WordCruncher, developed at BYU by the Maxwell Institute's Research Technology Group—enables users of the electronic library to view the transcriptions, images, and printed texts either individually or side by side in any order, with full capacity to search each text.

"The electronic library further enables Latter-day Saints to get to know Joseph Smith's Bible translation," noted Jackson. "With the WordCruncher program, users can research the original documents as never before."

The library can be viewed on Windows 2000, XP, or higher and is available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com. ♦

Dysphemisms

All of us are familiar with puns, wordplays, and the fun such word games provide. Euphemisms, where an objectionable word is replaced by a less objectionable one, are a practical and sometimes amusing aspect of these word games. For example, in the nineteenth century and extending into the twentieth century, the word *pregnant* seems not to have been common in polite conversation. Instead, euphemisms such as “with child” or “in a family way” were used. I can remember my mother, in hushed conversations, rather than saying “pregnant,” would quietly declare, “She is PG.” This may explain why the large, white block letter on the mountain (a common occurrence in intermountain western states) above the city of Pleasant Grove, Utah, is simply “G” and not “PG.”

Word games are not a modern, or even a classical, invention. Old Testament Hebrew writers had a penchant for puns, wordplays, and paronomasia. Given the number and range of examples in the Hebrew Bible, it must be admitted that the Hebrew authors enjoyed themselves at times. They were able to play with the text and the words in ways that are scarcely imagined today, unless Hebrew is your first or second language.

Used even less than euphemisms, dysphemisms take a perfectly good word and make something disreputable out of it. Dysphemisms are not common in English, except perhaps in political rhetoric. Even Latter-day Saints might indulge in a dysphemism or two when not overcome by our typical Latter-day Saint niceness. But the writers of the Old Testament were not handicapped by fits of niceness and therefore indulged themselves in dysphemisms and other forms of maculate wordplays.

For example, Abigail’s first (as far as we know) husband was named *Nabal*. That was probably not his real name;¹ no parents would have named their son *Nabal*. His name, as used in 1 Samuel 25, must be a dysphemism, which I will explain as soon as I have set the stage. To begin with, when Abigail and her husband are first introduced in 1 Samuel 25:3, Nabal is contrasted with his wife. He is described as “churlish and evil in his doings”; she on the other hand was “a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful coun-

tenance.” Even his clan affiliation, “the house of Caleb,” is a play on words in Hebrew. *Caleb* is the legitimate name of a Judahite clan of non-Israelite origin (see Genesis 15:19 and Numbers 32:12). But *Caleb* is also the normal Hebrew word for *dog*. Already the Hebrew reader is laughing at the dysphemism on the name *Nabal* and double entendre of the house of Caleb.

The next verse introduces David into the mix by explaining how David, who at this point in his career was not yet the king, attempted to secure provisions for his collection of outcasts. When he approached Nabal for a “contribution,” Nabal unceremoniously turned David down.² Nabal’s servants, who described their master as “a son of Belial” (1 Samuel 25:17), a term that means approximately “good for nothing” or “idiot,” hastened to let Abigail know that their master had dismissed David. Being wise, Abigail quickly went out to assuage David and his men.

After this setup, I can introduce the dysphemism. *Nabal* in Hebrew means “fool, folly, good-for-nothing.”³ This meaning is confirmed in verse 25, where he is again called a “man of Belial [good-for-nothing], even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name and folly is with him.” There is no chance that his parents named their son “stupid” or “folly,” even if they called him that on occasion. Therefore, whether *Nabal* was his real name or not, 1 Samuel 25 used *Nabal* as a dysphemism.

The play on words does not end with the dysphemism on Nabal’s name. This passage also plays with his name in a different way.⁴ One name for a wineskin (“bottle” in King James English, 1 Samuel 25:18) in Hebrew is *nbl*. Verse 36 states that Nabal was “very drunk,” that is, full of wine. But the next morning, “when the wine was gone out of Nabal,” that is, when the wine was gone out of the wineskin, Abigail related how she had saved his life by catering to David. With no wine in the wineskin, Folly’s “heart died within him” (verse 37).

Another example of a Hebrew dysphemism comes from progeny of Saul. One of his sons is called *Ish-bosheth*. (See the first occurrence of this name in 2 Samuel 2:8.) The name means “man of shame,” hardly a name that loving parents would give to their son. First Chronicles 8:33,

however, preserves his real name, *Esh-baal*. The Hebrew word *baal*, often used as the name of the Canaanite god in the Old Testament, means simply “lord” or “master.”⁵ It is an honorific title that is even used for Jehovah in earlier parts of the Hebrew Bible (see 2 Samuel 5:20). Therefore, *Esh-baal* means “Man of the Lord.” At some point in the transmission of the Bible, his original, perfectly good name must have fallen out of favor, probably because it contained the title *baal*, which some people would have confused with the common name/title for the Canaanite deity Baal. Therefore, someone decided to change his real name, which had become anathema, to the dysphemism *Ish-bosheth*.

In my view, one of the more interesting dysphemisms in the Old Testament is not even a Hebrew dysphemism but, rather, was borrowed by the Hebrews from Mesopotamia.⁶ In many verses of the Bible, the king of Babylon is called *Nebuchadnezzar*. But his real name was *Nebuchadrezzar*, which is preserved mostly in Jeremiah. We know from the Babylonian form of his name, *Nabu-kudurru-ušur*, that his name means “Nabu protect the heir,” a reference to the patronage of the Babylonian national god Nabu in watching over the crown prince. Apparently, he was not universally liked in Babylon because the other spelling of his name, *Nebuchadnezzar* (*Nabu-kudannu-ušur*), the dysphemism, means “Nabu protect the mule.”⁷ Given that this second spelling is much more prevalent in the Hebrew Bible than his real name, it might be easy to guess how the biblical writers felt about the man who destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC.

Not to belabor the dysphemisms in the Old Testament, because there are others, I will mention last of all a dysphemism that is singled out for inclusion in the King James Version of the New Testament. In 2 Kings 1:2, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahaziah, had been injured and wondered if he would recover. So he sent to “enquire” of the Philistine deity “Baal-zebub.” The Hebrew here clearly means “Lord of the flies.”⁸ However, the Hebrew word *zebub*, meaning collectively “flies,” is no doubt a dysphemism for *zēbūl*, meaning “prince, glory, dominion.” The correct meaning of *zēbūl* appears in 1 Kings 8:13, which should be translated “I have surely built you a

house of glory.” *Baal-zēbūl*, the title that was dysphemized in 2 Kings 1:2, would originally have meant “Lord of glory” or “Lord Prince.”

In the New Testament, when Jesus is accused of working miracles by the power of “Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matthew 12:24), the text reference is obviously a dysphemism derived from the 2 Kings 1, the only place in the Old Testament where *baal-zebub* occurs. The interesting note about the New Testament use of this Old Testament dysphemism is that the Greek texts of Matthew 12 do not include it. On the contrary, most Greek texts use the real name of the Philistine god, namely, *beelzebul* (Βεελζεβούλ). Somehow, the tradition of the original *baal-zēbūl* seems to have remained alive into New Testament times, despite the fact that in the Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Syriac versions of the Old Testament it is consistently rendered as “Lord of the Flies.”

In conclusion, what is to be made of dysphemisms in the scriptures? Probably nothing more than that the ancients enjoyed wordplays as much as we do, and were not averse to using them, even in their sacred texts.

By Paul Y. Hoskisson

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

Notes

1. Some have argued that Nabal was his real name and have suggested various Semitic etymologic possibilities. At the very least, even if the name is authentic, the text here plays off the rather transparent dysphemism. See below when 1 Samuel 25:25 is mentioned.

2. David, who was not encumbered by English prudence (and neither were the King James translators), responded, “So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave off all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall” (1 Samuel 25:22). For the modern counterpart of this expression, adjusted to our language and understanding, see Doctrine and Covenants 121:15.

3. See *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. נבל.

4. I thank Matthew Bowen for calling my attention to this play on words in 1 Samuel 25:25.

5. The modern Hebrew word for “husband” is *baal*.

6. The vocabulary that allows for this dysphemism does not exist in Hebrew, but it does work in Babylonian.

7. For a short discussion of Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar, see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, Anchor Bible 21B (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 100.

8. Thus also the Septuagint, the Aramaic, the Syriac, and the Vulgate.

Nibley Fellowship Program Assists Rising Scholars

The Maxwell Institute sponsors a graduate fellowship program that gives financial aid to students pursuing advanced degrees in fields of special interest to the Institute. Named in honor of the late eminent Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh W. Nibley, this program fosters the next generation of faithful scholars by providing financial aid to students enrolled in accredited PhD programs in areas of study directly related to the work and mission of the Maxwell Institute. Of particular interest is work done on the Bible, the Book of Mormon and other restoration scriptures, early Christianity, and ancient temples.

Applicants cannot be employed at the Maxwell Institute or be related to an Institute employee. Those interested in applying for the first time or who wish to renew their fellowships for the 2011-2012 academic year should submit a completed application form and all supporting documentation by **August 31, 2011**. The Nibley Fellowship guidelines and an application form are available at mi.byu.edu/nibleyfellowships or by e-mailing nibleyfellowships@byu.edu.

The Maxwell Institute awarded Nibley Fellowships to the following graduate students for the 2010-2011 academic year:

Continuing Nibley Fellows are **Matthew L. Bowen**, biblical studies, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of America; **Jason Combs**, New Testament and Early Christianity, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; **Ian Fowles**, history of Christianity and religions of North America, School of Religion, Claremont Graduate University; **Seth Kohrman**, biblical studies, Divinity School, Vanderbilt University; **David Joseph Larsen**, temple themes in Bible and intertestamental literature, School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews; **Daniel O. McClellan**, Dead Sea Scrolls and monotheism, Trinity Western University; **Dave Nielsen**, biblical studies, Duke University; **Jacob Rennaker**, Hebrew Bible, School of Religion, Claremont Graduate University; **Avram Richard Shannon**, Hebrew Bible, The Ohio State University; **Daniel B. Sharp**, New Testament, School of Religion, Claremont

Graduate University; **Justin Soderquist**, New Testament and Septuagint, Trinity Western University; **Joseph Stair**, Mesoamerican anthropology, University of Kentucky.

First-time Nibley Fellows are **Christopher James Blythe**, American religious history, Florida State University; **Ryan C. Davis**, Hebrew Bible and comparative studies, University of Texas at Austin; **Amy Fisher**, sacred space and Jewish-Christian relations, Cambridge University; **Courtney Jean Innes**, Jewish-Christian relations and archaeology, School of Divinity, Cambridge University; and **Jeremy Talmage**, history of Christianity, Divinity School, Yale University.

With the increased cost of graduate programs nowadays, we would like to be able to increase the amounts we can give to our Nibley Fellows. If you would like to contribute, please contact Ed Snow at 801-422-9047 or ed_snow@byu.edu. ♦

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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