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New Book Examines Trials in the Book of Mormon

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INSIGHTS

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

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New Book Examines Trials in the Book of Mormon

John W. Welch has studied two main topics throughout his career: the law and the Book of Mormon. Welch, a professor of law at Brigham Young University and the founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, has now prepared the culminating volume of decades of research into the trials and other legal procedures in the Book of Mormon. The Maxwell Institute is pleased to announce its publication as *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*.

The close readings in this book, published by the Maxwell Institute and BYU Press, bring many new details to light, making the legal cases in the Book of Mormon clear to ordinary readers, convincing to attorneys, and respectable to scholars of all types, whether Latter-day Saints or not. All readers can identify with these compelling legal narratives, for they address pressing problems of ordinary people.

These texts deserve repeated attention and repay careful analysis. Appreciating both the subtle jurisprudential details and the persistent patterns in these legal dramas adds thought-provoking spiritual insights and practical perspectives to these significant proceedings.


The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon begins with a discussion of important background information, including legal practices in the ancient Near

East, the ideal of righteous judgment, and the legal cases recorded in the Bible. Welch then devotes a chapter to each of the legal cases in the Book of Mormon—from the formative cases of Sherem and Abinadi to the landmark trials of Nehor and Korihor, the wrenching prosecution of Alma and Amulek, and the politicized proceedings of Paanchi and Seantum.

Because the Nephites strictly observed the law of Moses until the coming of Christ, this book examines the laws, arguments, verdicts, and punishments of these cases in the light of biblical law. By reading these texts with legal principles and procedures in mind, this study sets out to do for the Book of Mormon what biblical scholars have done for the Bible. This provides a point of entry into these key episodes in Nephite history.

As Terryl Givens comments, and as this book shows, “The Book of Mormon is coming to be studied as an important text in its own right, one with literary richness, structural complexity, and a coherent worldview and narrative voice.”

The legal principles explained in this book add life to the messages of the scriptures, particularly the ideal of righteous judgment. The ancient scriptures extend a poignant invitation to the modern world to “judge righteously” (Deuteronomy 1:16) and to “do good continually” (Alma 41:14).

The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon is available at the BYU Bookstore. 

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From Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Diluted Christianity is not Christianity, it is a feeble attempt to have Christianity without Christ, for it denies the central service of Jesus’ life—the Atonement. Those who call themselves Christians but deny the divinity of Jesus cannot seem to tolerate those of us who accept and proclaim the divinity of Christ.

No one, brothers and sisters, would pay us much heed if we were merely nonsmoking, nondrinking humanists. Without acknowledging the reality of the Resurrection and the Atonement, believing in the ministry of Jesus would mean slumping into the very Sadduceeism which Jesus himself denounced. (“All Hell Is Moved,” in *1977 Devotional Speeches of the Year* [Provo, UT: BYU, 1978], 177, as quoted in *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], 23.)