



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

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## Scholars Focus Conference on Third Nephi

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# INSIGHTS

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

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## Scholars Focus Conference on Third Nephi

The Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies hosted a two-day conference on 3 Nephi at the end of September 2008. Entitled "Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture," the conference consisted of a plenary session with an introductory address by John W. Welch, subsequent presentations by 21 distinguished scholars covering six themes, and a concluding session featuring a panel discussion.

Opening the conference, John W. Welch, the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School, spoke on the topic, "New Insights into the Temple Setting of the Sermon on the Mount in Reference to the Sermon at the Temple." According to Welch, 3 Nephi is the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon—its Holy of Holies. It "documents one of the most gloriously crowning moments in all of history." In January 1988, Welch was struck by the significance of the temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount recorded in 3 Nephi. Twenty years of research has continued to enrich this insight for him. Welch coined the name "Sermon at the Temple," and pointed out that the Sermon on "the mount" recalls that the temple in Israel was equated with "the mountain of the Lord." He said we need to look for temple themes in our scripture reading whenever we come across heavy concentrations of words such as light, salt, rain, rock, washing, anointing, the name of God, throne, sonship, garments, bread, forgiveness, commandments, covenants, oaths,

treasures, wisdom, judgment, seeing God, eternity, and peacemaking.

Welch noted that the Sermon at the Temple is presented as a covenant-making text, explicitly connected with baptism, commandments, and covenantal promises of rewards or consequences. He catalogued the significant number of Greek words and phrases in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount that come from the ancient Greek version of the Psalms because the temple is the dominant factor in the Psalms, which were used as hymns in the temple. Each allusion to the Psalms in the Sermon on the Mount adds to its temple genre and supports its temple setting in 3 Nephi. Welch said that of the 383 words in the total vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount, one-third of them "cast a long temple shadow."

Critics have long thought of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi as the Book of Mormon's Achilles' heel, but we now know otherwise. Welch said when he told Elder Maxwell about the Sermon at the Temple, Elder Maxwell replied in so many words, with Ether 12:27 clearly in mind, "Isn't it interesting how the Lord can turn what people have seen as the Book of Mormon's greatest weakness into one of its greatest strengths."

### Preparing the Way of the Lord's Coming

The concurrent sessions of the remainder of the conference featured clusters of themed presentations. Addressing "Preparing the Way of the Lord's Coming," Daniel Belnap, assistant professor of ancient scripture at BYU, entitled his remarks, "'There Arose a Mist of Darkness': The Narrative of Lehi's Dream in Christ's Theophany." He noted

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The Neal A. Maxwell  
Institute for  
Religious Scholarship  
200 WAIH, BYU  
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*Professor Richard L. Anderson*

Friday, March 20, 2009, 7:00 PM  
Harold B. Lee Library Auditorium  
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that cultural narratives like the Exodus in the Hebrew Bible are not merely historical milestones but a main event, an archetype that can help form and preserve cultural identity. The Nephites, unlike Israel, never had the promise of returning to their homeland. Their narrative became Lehi's dream. Belnap divided the dream into three scenes—journey through darkness, obtaining the tree, and partaking of the fruit—and related them to major components of 3 Nephi.

Dana M. Pike, professor of ancient scripture, BYU, explained that the requirement in 3 Nephi 9:19–20 for Jesus's disciples to offer a broken heart and contrite spirit—given in conjunction with the instruction to cease animal sacrifices—is often misinterpreted as something new at that time. Pike's address, entitled "Third Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart," discussed Psalm 51:16–17 and 2 Nephi 4:32—passages that chronologically precede 3 Nephi 9 by hundreds of years—indicating that the need for disciples to offer a broken heart existed from the beginning. He emphasized that 3 Nephi 9:19–20 refers not to a new sacrifice of a broken heart, but to a renewed emphasis on the need for disciples to break or smash their sin-hardened hearts. This allows the Lord to replace our now broken, irretrievable heart with a new, soft heart so the Holy Ghost can transform and sanctify us.

"The Savior's Coronation in Third Nephi," by LeGrand L. Baker, who is retired from his career in library science at BYU, presented highlights from *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?* a book he co-authored with Stephen D. Ricks, professor of Hebrew and cognate learning, BYU, that will be published in spring 2009. Baker said that the biblical psalms were the liturgy of the ancient Israelite New Year festival temple drama and that the prophets in the Book of Mormon frequently used the drama's sequence and principles in their sermons and teachings. He focused on the coronation rites of the drama and showed that the sequence of the events of the Savior's coming to America, as reported in 3 Nephi, matches perfectly the sequence of the rites of the coronation ceremony in the Old Testament temple drama, demonstrating that the Nephite religion and the preexilic Israelite religion were the same.

Addressing the topic, "How Oft Would I Have Gathered You as a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens? The Power of the Hen Metaphor in Third Nephi

10:4–7," Jane Allis-Pike, part-time faculty in ancient scripture, BYU, analyzed the elements of the hen metaphor found in 3 Nephi 10:4–7 and suggested that it represented Christ's (hen) covenant relationship to the people of the house of Israel (chicks). A close literary reading of the metaphor revealed the connection between agency and the atonement, meaning that the chicks or people of the house of Israel were free to choose to run to Christ (hen) and the protective power or away from him, thus rejecting his protection—he would not subvert their agency. Embedded in the metaphor is a covenant lawsuit wherein the Savior acting as prosecutor, and the survivors of the destruction as witnesses condemn the acts of the "unnatural chicks" or house of Israel who have been destroyed. Allis-Pike noted that this highlights the relationship between the agency, atonement, and judgment of those who are under covenant with the Lord.

### Experiencing the Lord

Patrick Steffen, associate professor of clinical psychology, BYU, opened the next series of presentations exploring the theme, "Experiencing the Lord." Explaining the title of his address, "Confirmation Bias and Contention," he noted that confirmation bias, a modern psychological principle that involves people only accepting new information if it fits with preexisting beliefs (and rejecting information if it does not), appears to have also existed among the ancient Nephites. In 3 Nephi 11:29 the Lord warns the Nephite disciples not to argue or contend over points of doctrine as they had been doing. Steffen said that the fulfilling of the law of Moses and the coming of Christ to the Americas ushered in significant changes that may have challenged the existing worldviews of the Nephites. Contention among the disciples indicates that the Nephites were having difficulties adjusting their worldviews to the new reality.

Matthew L. Bowen continued the session theme with his presentation, "They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree: Proskynesis in Third Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance." In antiquity, proskynesis (ritual prostration in front of one's superior, often accompanied by a kissing of the feet, the ground, etc.) was the most universal and important gesture observed when approaching Deity. This can be inferred from its prominence among the temple

practices of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and ancient Israel's other neighbors. Bowen, a graduate student at Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, noted that this ritual is also well-attested in the Book of Mormon, beginning with Lehi's vision of the tree of life and in a climactic way at the appearance of Jesus Christ at the temple in Bountiful. There are no better or more appropriate examples of this rite anywhere than those recorded in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10. The great love manifested at the Savior's appearance to the people at the temple in Bountiful (17:9–10) distinguishes it from other scenes of proskynesis in the ancient world. Bowen said that proskynesis of this quality had never been observed before, and perhaps not since, but it will be observed again in a coming day.

"The Effects of the Manifestations of the Power of Godliness through the Ordinances Performed by the Savior and His Apostles," was the topic explored by Ronald E. Bartholomew, CES faculty in ancient scripture, BYU. According to Bartholomew, a parallel pattern emerges for the establishment of Zion coinciding with and subsequent to the Savior's ministry in both the Old and New Worlds. This includes his formal introduction by the Father, the calling of twelve leaders to administer the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the teaching of the principles required for the establishment of Zion, the introduction of temple ordinances that institutionalized those principles, and the subsequent establishment and flourishing of Zion communities on both continents that began with but was sustained after the personal ministration of the Savior. Bartholomew indicated that at least one explanation for the success of these two separate communities was the powers of godliness manifest in the ministration of the priesthood ordinances necessary for salvation, a hypothesis which is sustained by the fact that as the ministration of these ordinances ceased or became perverted, the loss of the manifestations of the powers of godliness can be given as at least one explanation for their decline.

Wrapping up this session, Daniel B. McKinlay, senior resident scholar at the Maxwell Institute, spoke to the theme, "Joy in Third Nephi." He said that the word *joy* shows up frequently in the Book of Mormon. In most cases it is portrayed as blessed euphoria, though occasionally it is depicted in people with a sinister attitude. In 3 Nephi Jesus experiences a "fulness of joy," in contrast to his

being the man "acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3) who interacted with a largely unreceptive group in Palestine. The Lehites to whom he ministers also feel a high level of joy. The elation they experience contrasts with the grief they felt during the cataclysm. McKinlay noted that intense joy tends to be more pronounced in the face of adversity.

### The Lord's Prayers

Robert L. Millet began the second day's presentations on the topic "The Lord's Prayers" with his paper entitled, "The Praying Savior: Insights from the Gospels of Luke and Third Nephi." Millet, a professor of ancient scripture, BYU, noted that Jesus teaches us to pray by modeling the Lord's Prayer. The prayer in 3 Nephi 17 wasn't recorded because it was inexpressible and no words could suffice. Millet said that while Jesus had taught the Nephites to pray to the Father in the name of the Son, the disciples knelt and prayed to Christ because Jesus was now a resurrected, glorified, and immortal Savior, standing in their midst more than ever, as the Word, the expression and representative of the Father. In praying to Christ it was as though they were praying to the Father. Jesus prayed to be an example for us because he loved the Father, he and the Father enjoyed communion, and he revered his Father. Jesus Christ set aside his power and glory to understand mortality in its fullness; so when he needed reassurance, answers, perspective, or the sacred sustaining influence of the Father in his darkest hours, he prayed.

Matthew J. Grey's presentation, "'Jesus Blessed Them . . . and His Countenance Did Shine Upon Them': Understanding Third Nephi 19 in Light of the Priestly Blessing," briefly summarized the ritual actions and theological significance of the priestly blessing performed by Aaronic priests in the Jerusalem temple during the Mosaic dispensation. This ritual included a communal prayer, a priestly prayer of intercession, and the priest raising his hands above his head to bless the congregation. Following this summary, Grey suggested that Jesus's actions in 3 Nephi 19 are best understood in light of this priestly ritual. There the resurrected Jesus appears to a Nephite congregation assembled at the temple, has them kneel in communal prayer, offers his own intercessory prayer to the Father on their behalf, and returns to "bless them," thus allowing the congregation to experience the full spiritual

reality in ritual-communion with God through the intercession of Jesus, the Great High Priest. Grey is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Richard Dilworth Rust, emeritus professor of English, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, concluded this cluster of lectures by discussing the symbolism of whiteness and how the whole of 3 Nephi could be considered a treatise on discipleship. His address, “Nothing Upon Earth So White: Third Nephi 19:25 and Becoming Like Christ,” further explained that when the twelve disciples became “white, even as Jesus” (19:30), there was an example of the celestialization process set forth in the Book of Mormon. The color white is not the essential element in determining righteousness or wickedness; being “white, even as Jesus” is referring primarily to the Holy Ghost shining with and through them. Rust said that the scene in which the twelve disciples were glorified in the presence of the Savior could “well represent a return to the Garden of Eden.”

### The Lord’s Prophecies

Focusing on the reasons why the Savior included Malachi 3–4 in his sermon to the Nephites during his ministry, Aaron P. Schade and David R. Seely entitled their joint presentation “The Writings of Malachi in Third Nephi: A Foundation for Zion in the Past and Present.” Schade, assistant professor of religion, BYU–Hawaii, and Seely, professor of ancient scripture, BYU, taught that four significant passages from Malachi teach doctrines that are essential for the building of Zion in the days of the Nephites as well as in the latter days. These doctrines include the importance of the Lord sending messengers such as Elijah and the coming of Jesus Christ to restore Melchizedek priesthood keys, which includes the power to seal families together in the temple. The writings of Malachi helped the ancient Nephites to build Zion and can help us as Latter-day Saints to build Zion in our own day.

Addressing the topic, “Jesus’s Use of Isaiah to Teach the Doctrine of the Gathering in Third Nephi 20:11–23:3,” Gaye Strathearn, assistant professor of ancient scripture, BYU, dealt with the question of who “my servant” is in 3 Nephi 20:43–45. She noted that Jesus is here quoting Isaiah 52:13–15. In its Isaianic context these verses are the introduction

to Isaiah 53 and so the servant refers to the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. In 3 Nephi, however, Jesus replaces Isaiah 53 with a discussion of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints have routinely interpreted the “my servant” in 3 Nephi 20 to refer to Joseph Smith, but Strathearn argues that Jesus interprets it more specifically to refer to the Book of Mormon.

Concluding this session, Heather Hardy, an independent scholar from Asheville, North Carolina, spoke to the topic “‘And They Understood Me Not’: Third Nephi as Fulfillment of Jesus’s Eschatological Prophecies.” She noted that following Albert Schweitzer’s 1906 book, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, New Testament scholars of the last hundred years have concurred that Jesus’s mortal ministry focused on his call to prepare for the imminent and cataclysmic coming of the kingdom of God. While establishing the centrality of Jesus’s kingdom teachings, Schweitzer also made evident a serious problem at the heart of the Gospels’ account, namely, that this kingdom seems never to have actually arrived. The testimony of 3 Nephi is that Jesus’s Palestinian prophecies about a great day of judgment, the coming of the Lord, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God within the lifetime of his hearers were in fact fulfilled in precise detail within the time frame he had foretold.

### Theological Implications

Addressing the theme “Theological Implications,” David Paulsen, professor of philosophy at BYU, entitled his remarks “The Social Model of the Trinity in Third Nephi.” He explained that Joseph Smith always declared the plurality of Deity as three distinct Gods (“social trinitarianism”), but many critics mistakenly say that early Mormonism was monotheistic, believing in one God in three modes (“modalism”). Paulsen’s extensive study of all references to God in the Book of Mormon revealed that the text as a whole is clearly anti-modalist. He listed six categories in 3 Nephi that witness that Christ is a separate person from the Father: ascension to the Father, Jesus praying to the Father and interceding on behalf of the people, Jesus receiving and obeying commandments from the Father, Jesus commanding the people to pray to the Father in his (Christ’s) name, the resurrected Jesus referring to the Father as “my Father,” and a catchall category that encompasses verses that otherwise differentiate between

the Father and the Son (for example, “Behold, my Son in whom I am well pleased”).

Robert A. Rees, emeritus professor, University of California, Santa Cruz, explored the topic, “Children of Light: How the Nephites Created Two Centuries of Peace.” Rees indicated that the Book of Mormon’s use of the elements of drama to show the historical conflict between the forces of darkness and light provides convincing rationale for the sustained period of peace (200 years) after Christ’s visit. Because of the dramatic transformation from darkness and hatred to light and love, the children held a vivid memory of being in Christ’s presence and therefore determined and covenanted to have peace the rest of their lives and to pass that on to their children and grandchildren. The dramatic narrative in 3 Nephi places a special burden on us to work to end war and actively use the energy of our hearts and souls, our time, and our economic means to work toward peace.

Victor L. Ludlow, professor of ancient scripture, BYU, concluded the session theme with his presentation, “The ‘Father’s Covenant People’ Sermon in Third Nephi 20:10–23:5.” He taught that the scriptural writings of ancient prophets, especially by Nephi in 1 and 2 Nephi, lay the foundation for the Father’s covenant teachings delivered by Jesus in 3 Nephi. This sermon is the capstone of Jesus’s three sermons in 3 Nephi. Ludlow noted three key words that describe this sermon: “Father” (appears 39 times in the 88 verses of the sermon), “covenant” (16 of the 154 “covenant” citations in the Book of Mormon appear in this sermon), and “people” (appears 35 times throughout the sermon). It is a chiasmic poem, instructing Israelites about covenant promises, some fulfilled and some for latter days, witnessing to the world of God’s power, and teaching and testifying. The pivotal point is the “promised sign” (3 Nephi 21:1–7), which is the Book of Mormon coming from the Gentiles to the Lamanites, who begin to accept it and its gospel message.

### The Written Record

Under the heading “The Written Record,” Grant Hardy, professor of history at University of North Carolina, Asheville, presented his research entitled “Christ’s Use of Scripture in Third Nephi 19–26.” On the second day of Christ’s New World ministry (3 Nephi 19–26), almost half of his sermon consists of quotations from Micah, Isaiah, and

Malachi. Hardy asked, why would the risen Lord, coming as God from heaven, need to cite scripture when his own words would have been accepted as scripture by the Nephites? At 3 Nephi 26:1–6, Jesus himself offers three keys to interpreting prophecies: overlapping applicability, multiple fulfillments, and recurrent attestation. Hardy said that although Latter-day Saints usually read the quoted scriptures of 3 Nephi 19–26 as applying particularly to the last days, many of those prophecies would also have been fulfilled among the Nephites at the time of Jesus’s appearance at the temple in Bountiful.

Borrowing from insights drawn from the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, who allegorizes the phenomenon of repetition in his famous short story, “Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote,” George B. Handley argued that the repetition of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi is a textual and allegorical clue about how to read revelation. Handley, professor of humanities, BYU, said that revelation requires the imagination and the language of the reader as much as it does an openness to the new language of God. It combines, in other words, our own historical context and cultural moment—all factors that shape how we read, what questions we ask, and how we judge—with the transformative power of divine will. He insisted that it is the necessity of this interface between the human and the divine—a kind of two-way and ongoing translation—that perpetuates and explains a theology of continual revelation, a balance that more closed models of revelation do not tolerate.

Concluding this session, Charles Swift, assistant professor of ancient scripture, BYU, explored the theme, “‘So Great and Marvelous Things’: The Literary Message of Third Nephi.” He discussed how 3 Nephi is written in such a way as to portray the Savior as God. While the New Testament Gospels paint a portrait of Jesus as both man and Son of God, 3 Nephi clearly emphasizes his divine nature. Swift specifically looked at how the book depicts prayer, miracles, and dialogue to show that the narrator purposely omitted some details and stressed others to convey the message that the resurrected Savior is God.

A panel discussion featuring Daniel C. Peterson, S. Kent Brown, Grant Hardy, Robert L. Millet, Richard Dilworth Rust, and John W. Welch concluded the conference, where they examined some of the topics presented during the conference. ♦