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James P. Bell

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Author(s) James P. Bell

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Abstract Bell reviews the following books about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon: Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr.'s edited volume *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*; Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor's edition of *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*; John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks's edited volume *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*; and Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch's edited volume *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*.



A READER'S LIBRARY

Efficacious Scholarship

James P. Bell

Though my qualifications to contribute to this column are scant, I suppose I qualify as a “general reader” with a fairly good-sized library dealing with Book of Mormon studies. But scholar I am not; rather, I am an end user, whose primary interest in gospel scholarship is finding insights that will help me do what the scriptures are intended to help me do, which, I believe, is to live a Christlike life. Some scholarship does little to move me toward that end, but much does—and the four books I’ve chosen to discuss fall, on the whole, into this latter category. (Doing them justice is another matter: Their combined 2,000 pages means I can devote all of about half a word to each page.)

My first two favorites do not deal directly with the Book of Mormon, but rather with the man who brought it forth—Joseph Smith. Both books shed light on how he gave us the Book of Mormon, but also—and of interest to me, at least—provide insight into the life of the prophet that puts the translation, publication, and distribution of the Book of Mormon in their broader context. And that context, in my view, makes the book Joseph brought forth all the more remarkable.

The first is *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993). As so many volumes on gospel

scholarship do, this book grew out of a symposium held at BYU in 1992 that focused exclusively on Joseph Smith (as well as addresses given at the 1991 dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Building on the BYU campus). Contributors include Presidents Gordon B. Hinckley, Boyd K. Packer, and Rex E. Lee—each of whom provides personal reflections on the prophet—as well as a number of other scholars who deal with topics ranging from Joseph Smith as athlete, translator, and friend, to the prophet’s concept of the City of Zion. (A second reason for suggesting this book is that it likely will lead you to the many other books and monographs that have been published over the years by the Religious Studies Center.)

The second book on Joseph Smith is one that I’ve read around in since my youth but that has recently been reissued in a vastly improved format. *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996) provides a fascinating insight into the growth and development of Joseph Smith, as well as a mother’s view of Joseph’s preparation to become a prophet, courtship and marriage, bringing forth the Book of Mormon, travails with the early Saints, and martyrdom alongside his beloved brother Hyrum. Lucy Mack Smith’s narrative (which the Proctors have “restored” to its original state) is

informal enough that it can be enjoyed by readers of all ages and levels of gospel and historical understanding but meaty enough (and supplemented by thoughtful notes and references) to satisfy—and inspire—the serious student of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

My third and fourth choices deal directly with the Book of Mormon, and both are recent publications of FARMS. The first book, *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), provides some 600 pages of insight into the best-known sermon in the Book of Mormon. The book’s introduction reminds us that “Mormon abridged many Nephite records, but not King Benjamin’s speech” (an obvious point that had been lost on me) and that the speech “still stands as a shining beacon of truth and goodness in our day” (a point that had not eluded me, although I *am* too often guilty of reading the speech in parts rather than as a whole).

The book could be viewed as worth having for the essay by Elder Neal A. Maxwell alone. He sets an example for all scholars as he engages in careful analysis that speaks to both the mind and the soul (and encourages both to move to higher plains of understanding and activity). But there is much more in this volume that will keep ambitious scribes busy for years

to come, including 11 other essays by leading scholars and an appendix that includes the complete text of the king's address with notes and comments. (This feature will ensure that careful readers of King Benjamin's sermon will never want for one more insight.)

Finally, I would recommend a book that reminds me how limited my understanding of the Book of Mormon really is each time I even look at the cover (let alone dip into its pages)—*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998). Beginning with my first exposure to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon as a freshman at BYU, I have long taken the road of least resistance when I come upon the many chapters of Isaiah that have found their way into the Nephite record. This book, though, is changing that, as Andrew C. Skinner illuminates the reasons why Nephi inserted Isaiah 48 and 49 into 1 Nephi, as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shares his apostolic insights on Isaiah's prophecies concerning Christ's ministry, and as Dana M. Pike examines the "How beautiful upon the mountains" imagery found in Isaiah 52:7–10 (which was one of a handful of passages in Isaiah that I felt I understood but that I now see in a whole new light).

As one who likely will spend the remainder of his days on the receiving end of the voluminous scholarship that is being produced—and published, which is a rather recent occurrence that we ought not take for granted—I must acknowledge my gratitude for those who are providing me with insights that add to my meager attempts to teach, that enliven conversations I have with family and friends, and that, above all else, help the scriptures work upon me all the more efficaciously. □



A Jaredite Barge in Lake Michigan?

A flurry of press dispatches and Internet messages earlier this year reported that an "enigmatic" object had been found in the waters at the mouth of the Chicago River near its entry into Lake Michigan. Described in terms like "a huge wooden cylinder" and "something like a submarine," it is still not clear exactly what has been found, but the notice taken by the press may have raised questions in the mind of some *JBMS* readers.

At least one inquiry to FARMS concerns whether this might be one of the Jaredite "barges" mentioned in Ether 2:15–25. Not enough clear information has been published yet to establish whether the find could qualify as a barge or any other type of vessel, but there are compelling reasons practically to rule out any possibility that the object could have a connection to the Book of Mormon.

The entire waterway area where the wooden object was found is a much-modified and dredged zone. The chance of any object more than a century old existing intact in such a busy commercial spot is virtually zero. In fact, the possibility of a wooden object that would be more than 4,000 years old even being preserved for that length of time in relatively intact form—as the reports indicate—seems most unlikely. Furthermore, the Jaredite barges obviously arrived on an ocean shore, on either the Pacific or Atlantic coast of America; no logi-

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cal analysis of their landing point would place their barges in Lake Michigan.

What we can learn from this case, and similar finds reported in the press, is that information of this sort is much too skimpy to justify any rush of adrenaline in LDS or any other readers. We are always at the mercy of two parties in such situations, reporters and advocates. Reporters rarely know enough about archaeology to provide an accurate and informative article about a find. Even if they talk at some length (that would mean, for a reporter, a few hours) to well-informed experts, they are not likely to learn more than a few basic facts about the find. Given the press's interest in the sensational, almost invariably what is reported in the early stage of a research project will exaggerate or misunderstand at least some of what is and is not known. Deservedly little credence is given such hasty reporting. Archaeologists themselves frequently find themselves misquoted or misunderstood by deadline-sensitive journalists.

Increasingly we also should realize that parties who want their cause to be put in a good light in relation to a discovery intervene to shape press reports. In the case of the Chicago "submarine" find, it appears that some underwater archaeologists (whether amateur or professional) wanted to gain time and funding to conduct better studies of the "mysterious object." To protect their interest