



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

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Volume 25 | Number 3

Article 2

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January 2005

## Lehi's Journey of Faith Topic of FARMS Documentary

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### Recommended Citation

(2005) "Lehi's Journey of Faith Topic of FARMS Documentary," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 25: No. 3, Article 2.

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 25 | 2005

Number 3

<http://farms.byu.edu>

## Library of Congress Hosts Academic Conference on Joseph Smith

In recognition of the bicentennial of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth, the Library of Congress, in Washington DC, hosted an academic conference on 6–7 May 2005 titled "The Worlds of Joseph Smith." Carried internationally via webcast, the event featured 17 scholars (nearly evenly divided between Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths) who examined Joseph Smith's theological contributions and evaluated the claim that the church he founded is on track to becoming a world religion.

"Our hope in this conference is to better understand Joseph's life and mission—to position him, to the degree we can, within the larger framework of American spirituality and world religions," said Robert L. Millet, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, in introductory remarks.

## Lehi's Journey of Faith Topic of FARMS Documentary

FARMS has teamed with award-winning Latter-day Saint filmmaker Peter Johnson to produce a documentary on Lehi and company's route from Jerusalem to the New World.

Based on the most recent research, the 90-minute DVD documentary will feature Latter-day Saint scholars commenting on proposed sites for the party's first base camp near the Red Sea; Nahom, where Ishmael was buried; and Bountiful, the fertile coastal locale where Nephi directed the building of his ship. The documentary will also feature the latest findings on Lehi's ocean voyage and explore candidates for Book of Mormon sites in Mesoamerica.

The following report covers the first three sessions of the conference; a report of the remaining two sessions will appear in a subsequent issue of this newsletter.

### Joseph Smith in His Own Time

Richard L. Bushman, an emeritus professor of history at Columbia University, presented the first paper, "Joseph Smith's Many Histories." He noted that "Joseph Smith assumes the character of the history selected for him" and argued that critics have failed to plumb his depths because they shrink his historical context. "Broadening the historical context increases appreciation of the man," he said. Bushman traced the Prophet's struggle for self-understanding and explained that after Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, his earlier marvelous experiences took on clearer meaning and import and his confidence soared as he came to recognize his prophethood.

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"Since I was first introduced to Peter Johnson, I have come to appreciate both his superb abilities and the skills of the filming crew who accompanied us on location in the Middle East," said S. Kent Brown, the director of Ancient Studies at Brigham Young University and the lead historical consultant on the documentary. "In my opinion, this film embodies not only the best of scholarship on the trek of Lehi and Sariah but also the finest in artistic presentation."

Johnson previously worked as an executive producer with the Audiovisual Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and before that as director of the BYU Motion Picture Studio, which under his direction became one of the top-rated university film studios in the world. He

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has directed such films as *A More Perfect Union* (winner of a regional Emmy award and nominated for a national Emmy) and the highly acclaimed *Mountain of the Lord*.

“I look at these FARMS scholars as detectives who have for years been searching and finding amazing clues that support and bolster the Book of Mormon account,” Johnson said. “They’ve published their findings in journal articles and books, but we now have the opportunity to present their stunning discoveries visually on film so they will be accessible in a compelling way to many, many more people.”

The filming took place in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Guatemala, and Mexico. The project was delayed following the bombing of the USS *Cole* and again in the wake of 9/11 but has since progressed to the final stages of scoring music, creating artistic backdrops, and film editing. Barring unforeseen production delays, *Journey of Faith* is scheduled to be released in the fall.

Johnson has felt a keen sense of purpose in the project from the start and is excited to see it nearing completion. Experiencing parts of Lehi’s trail through Arabia firsthand has heightened his appreciation not only of the hardships confronting Lehi’s party but also of the Book of Mormon in general.

“Now I read Nephi’s narrative with new eyes and am confident that others will too after seeing this film,” he said. “Set in its real-world context through the efforts of dedicated scholars and quality filmmaking, the Book of Mormon takes on added luster.” 📺

### PUBLICATIONS

***Early Christians in Disarray***, edited by Noel B. Reynolds, presents new research on the apostasy. Studies by several Latter-day Saint scholars in different fields explore the root causes of the apostasy and identify several common myths and misconceptions that Latter-day Saints share on this subject. The authors argue that the apostasy began as early as the first century AD. The volume is not a comprehensive or final treatment of the issues, but is designed to support and encourage further systematic research on the apostasy. Available in bookstores now.

***Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 2: 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16***, by Royal Skousen, is the second part of volume 4 of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. It continues with the analysis of every significant nongrammatical variant in the original and printer’s manuscripts and in 20 important editions of the Book of Mormon (from the 1830 edition to the 1981 edition). The task of this volume is to use the earliest textual sources and patterns of systematic usage to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Available in bookstores in August.

# Insights

A Window on the Ancient World  
Volume 25 | Number 3 | 2005

A Publication of the  
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and Mormon Studies (FARMS)**

Andrew C. Skinner *Executive Director*

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FARMS is part of Brigham Young University’s Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. As such, it encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. Under the FARMS imprint, the Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at FARMS include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

FARMS makes interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

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