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FARMS Symposium Opens Window on Lehi's World

FARMS's publication earlier this year of *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* was a significant milestone in Book of Mormon studies. The prodigious effort marshaled the research talents of 19 BYU scholars in a multidisciplinary reconstruction of Lehi's Old World environment. Those who acquaint themselves with this groundbreaking research will read 1 Nephi with new eyes—with a greater awareness of the sociocultural context and lifeways of Lehi's world.

A FARMS Book of Mormon Symposium held at BYU on 21 February 2004 provided further opportunity to publicize this new research. The half-day event featuring presentations by several contributing scholars and excellent visual aids stirred the interest of a spectrum of people eager to add a new dimension to their understanding and appreciation of the Book of Mormon.

The guiding question behind both the book and the symposium was, How can visualizing life in Lehi's Jerusalem help us to better understand the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon?

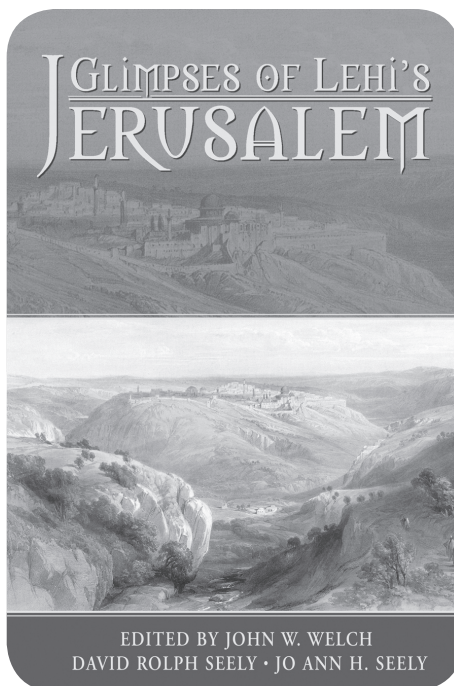
As if in answer to that question, John W. Welch, one of the editors of *Glimpses*, began the first session with a tantalizing overview titled "Culturegram: Jerusalem 600 BC." In fitting tour guide persona, he mapped the terrain of the upcoming presentations and highlighted salient research findings, raising expectations for the day's proceedings and emphasizing how "seeing things in light of Lehi's day makes the scriptural account vivid. We learn a lot by being on location." Underscoring the importance of this new

research, Welch remarked, "Nibley brought us Lehi in the desert. *Glimpses* brings us Lehi in the city."

For example, Jerusalem back then was a small city just below the Temple Mount with a population small enough (about 25,000) to fit in BYU's Marriott Center. The book of prophecy given to Lehi was likely a scroll since there were no bound books at the time. Welch also touched on the political mood, domestic life, olive culture, temple ritual, Sabbath observance, legal trials (held at the town gates), and capital offenses such as striking a parent and being a false prophet—the latter evidencing Lehi's courage as a true prophet preaching among the wicked in Jerusalem.

The next two presentations took up archaeological issues. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, an associate professor of church history and doctrine who has done extensive archaeological work in Israel, discussed the 1 Nephi references to Lehi's "house at Jerusalem" (1:7) and his "land of inheritance" (2:4), arguing that the two were different locations (the house being in the city and the ancestral land lying some 21 miles north of Jerusalem, in the territory of Manasseh). He suggested that Lehi's ancestors fled their Manasseh homeland around 724 BC to escape the Assyrian onslaught and eventually settled in Jerusalem, perhaps in what was known as the Mishneh quarter of Jerusalem, where refugees avoided deportation to Assyria.

Dana M. Pike, a professor of ancient scripture, discussed Hebrew inscriptions dating to Lehi's time. He discussed several artifacts, such as the Ketef Hinnom amulets (two small rolls of silver foil with religious inscriptions) and the approximately 700 seals and bullae (seal impressions) found to date, attesting to an extensive practice



of written communication. He listed many socio-cultural and religious implications of the artifacts and concluded that they augment the depictions in the Bible and 1 Nephi.

Glimpses coeditor Jo Ann H. Seely, an instructor in ancient scripture, began the next session with a slide presentation covering everything from the Temple of Solomon, tomb paintings, stone altars, and Bedouin tents to Wadi Sayq (a site on the Omani coast that fits Nephi's description of Old World Bountiful) and the recently discovered gold book from Bulgaria that dates to 600 BC (see *Insights*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2003, for a report).


Archaeobotanist Terry B. Ball, an associate dean of Religious Education, and botany professor Wilford M. Hess spoke via videotape on Book of Mormon cereal grains (e.g., wheat, corn, and barley; see Mosiah 9:9) and textiles (e.g., linen and silk), fleshing out the agricultural scene in the New World. Although there is no empirical evidence for wheat in pre-Columbian America, Ball said, it could have been cultivated there anciently but later disappeared if the intensive cultivation it requires was disrupted. Hess discussed maize, neas and sheum (perhaps grains but possibly tuber crops), and grape and olive cultivation. Ball concluded that corn, neas, and sheum were most likely native crops new to Lehi's people, who probably brought other crops with them to the New World and successfully cultivated them.

David R. Seely, a coeditor of *Glimpses* and a professor of ancient scripture, pointed out how knowing the religious background of the ancient Israelites can lead to better appreciation of the three purposes of the Book of Mormon stated on its title page ("to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord

hath done for their fathers," "that they may know the covenants of the Lord," and to bring all to a knowledge that "Jesus is the Christ"). For example, in their portrayal of sacred history, the Bible and Book of Mormon highlight the long relationship of God with his children. That relationship is defined by covenant, regularly taught with sym-

bols from the temple, and reconfirmed through covenant renewal. Throughout the law of Moses, many different symbols taught the ancients (and teach moderns too) about the nature and reality of the coming of the Messiah in Jesus Christ.

S. Kent Brown, the director of Ancient Studies, posed the question, Why did Lehi's party flee southeast into Arabia rather than southwest into Egypt, known as a land of refuge since Abraham's time? In answer, he identified routes leading from Jerusalem to Egypt and Arabia and elaborated on the commercial and military contacts that Jerusalem enjoyed with Arabia. One early contact was the Queen of Sheba, from whose powerful kingdom incense, gold, rams, spices, and precious stones eventually came to the temple at Jerusalem. Brown concluded that Lehi must have received a directive from the Lord to flee into Arabia since Egypt was the usual destination for refugees. Yet Lehi probably knew something of the routes to Arabia, and his party would not have been "completely uncomfortable" traveling there given the commercial and military contacts and infrastructure along the way.

For more information on the book *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, see "New Book Offers Views of Jerusalem as Lehi Knew It" (*Insights*, vol. 23, no. 6, 2003). To order a copy of the book, use the enclosed mail-order form or visit the FARMS section (under "BYU Publications") of byubookstore.com. 

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