



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

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Volume 24 | Number 4

Article 5

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January 2004

## Ancient Exegesis and the Study of Scripture

Cory Daniel Crawford

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### Recommended Citation

Crawford, Cory Daniel (2004) "Ancient Exegesis and the Study of Scripture," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 24: No. 4, Article 5.


Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol24/iss4/5>

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## Herculaneum Papyri Project Catalyzes New Oxford Society

Brigham Young University's Herculaneum papyri project continues to gain support among American and European scholars. The project's director, Roger T. Macfarlane, an associate professor of classics at BYU, was invited to serve on the organizing board of the nascent Herculaneum Society, which was inaugurated in Oxford, England, on 3 July 2004. The society promotes international attention on scholarship and fund-raising related to the ancient town of Herculaneum and its Villa of the Papyri. Together with David Armstrong, a classics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, Macfarlane will direct the North American division of the Herculaneum Society. "There is no secret," he says, "that the society is eager to capitalize on our project's success."

During the society's first year, a DVD copy of the KBYU-TV documentary *Out of the Ashes* is being offered as a perk for all new members. The board feels sure that the documentary's high quality will attract donors to the society's cause. The documentary, which has won two international awards and a prestigious Bronze Telly Award during 2004, tells the history of the Herculaneum papyri as well as the story of how BYU's Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts

(CPART, a sister organization of FARMS) has applied multispectral imaging technology to the scrolls. Information about the documentary is available online at [www.byubroadcasting.org/ashes](http://www.byubroadcasting.org/ashes). The Herculaneum Society can be visited at [www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk](http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk), and the site contains a link to the inaugural edition of the newsletter *Herculaneum Archaeology*. To stay abreast of BYU's ongoing work on the Herculaneum papyri, visit the CPART Web site at <http://cpart.byu.edu> and select the "Herculaneum" link. 

### Newsletter Survey Results

We would like to thank the more than 1,000 of you who participated in our subscriber survey several months ago. We have tallied the results, read your written comments, and considered how we can improve. Some of the results regarding the *Insights* newsletter may be of interest to you: 70% of subscribers are male, 30% female; 54% are over age 60 (26% age 50–59, 11% age 40–49, 5% age 30–39, 3% age 20–29, 1% under age 19); 91% read all or most articles; the favorite features are Scripture Insights (89%) and Updates (83%); 90% rate the quality of the newsletter "very good" or "excellent." Although we are pleased with the results, we are dedicated to improvement and will implement your suggestions for improvement where possible.

## Ancient Exegesis and the Study of Scripture

Attention to exegesis in and of the Hebrew Bible has much to offer Latter-day Saint students of scripture in their efforts to understand the biblical text.\* Exegesis is the explanation or interpretation of a text. The word is derived from Greek, meaning literally "to lead out (of)." The general study of biblical exegesis has come to incorporate at least three subdivisions, each having direct relevance for Latter-day Saints: inner-biblical allusion, biblical and postbiblical exegesis, and scribal comments and corrections.

Inner-biblical allusion refers, simply, to the Bible's self-reference. As Michael Fishbane has shown in his standard *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (1985), there is much evidence indicating that biblical authors used traditions found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to "preserve, render contemporary, or otherwise reinterpret these teachings or traditions for new times and circumstances" (p. 8). An example of this is Jeremiah 2:3, in which Jeremiah adapts a law known from Leviticus 22:14–16 in order to reinforce his teaching of the importance of Israel's relationship with God. Another example is Malachi 1:6–2:9, in which the prophet turns the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:23–27 into a condemnation of priestly practice.

Also in this category is typological adaptation. In this type of allusion, new events are correlated with old ones, revealing, as James Kugel has observed, “unexpected unity in historical experience and providential continuity in its new patterns and shapes.”<sup>1</sup> Fishbane demonstrates that typological thinking prevalent in later Christian interpretation is already found in the Hebrew Bible (pp. 350–51). This type of interpretation is perhaps most common in linking the hope for future deliverance with the exodus from Egypt (see, for example, Hosea 2:16, Micah 7:14, Jeremiah 16:14, and their subsequent contexts).

Inner-biblical exegesis takes allusion a step further. In the context of the Bible, exegesis refers to the resolution of problems in an authoritative tradition or text. Thus it is most visible in exilic and postexilic texts (after the Old Testament had become more fully authoritative) and begins to flourish in the intertestamental period in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical materials. Genesis 15 is a perfect example of a text that needed (and needs) explaining because of several ambiguous references and the poorly understood covenant-making ceremony in the latter verses. In verse 6, for example, the subject of the latter clause is unclear: “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Who is doing the counting or reckoning? Ezra, in Nehemiah 9:7–8, clarifies exegetically Genesis 15:6, making these verses an example of inner-biblical exegesis. As Kugel has shown, however, the interpretation found in the latter books of the Old Testament is only the beginning.<sup>2</sup> First Maccabees 2:52, Romans 4:3, James 2:23, Philemon, and 1 Clement all attest varying exegetical traditions dealing with Genesis 15:6. And this barely scratches the surface of the number of texts that solve problems in Genesis 15, let alone in the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, the study of Old Testament exegesis also examines scribal manipulation of the text. Fishbane outlines four principal situations in which the scribes were wont to tamper with the text: when divine honor was at stake (1 Samuel 3:13), when they perceived pagan elements (Deuteronomy 32:8), when they perceived theologically problematic statements (2 Samuel 8:18), and when they saw a need to cast the king’s religious deportment in a better light (1 Kings 11:31–33). Fishbane remarks

that these “theological changes underscore the fact that those persons most responsible for maintaining the orthography of the texts tampered with their wording so as to preserve the religious dignity of these documents according to contemporary theological tastes” (p. 67).

This brief survey of certain points of biblical exegesis has important implications for Latter-day Saints. Inner-biblical allusion and exegesis show how ancient prophets and authors likened scriptures to themselves, adapting older traditions to new situations. The Book of Mormon provides a rich source for examining exegetical method, as evidenced by the work that has been done on Book of Mormon Isaiah commentaries.<sup>3</sup> We have evidence of typological exegesis within the Book of Mormon in Alma 37:38–46, where the Liahona is compared typologically to obedience to the words of Christ, and arrival in the promised land is cast as a type of entrance to eternal life. A more subtle example of biblical allusion in the Book of Mormon is Nephi’s probable reliance upon a tradition similar to Exodus 21:13–14 (which indicates the conditions and consequences of taking a life when the victim was delivered up by God), underlying his account of the killing of Laban (1 Nephi 4:5–18). These prophets manifest an array of exegetical techniques that fit within many of the paradigms outlined by scholars. As John Day has remarked, the Old Testament prophets are rich in inner-biblical interpretation,<sup>4</sup> and the Book of Mormon prophets are not different in this regard.

Regarding postbiblical exegesis, Kugel’s monumental work (including his observation that ancient interpreters saw the scriptural text as cryptic, fundamentally relevant, absolutely consistent, and divinely inspired)<sup>5</sup> indicates that when we look to apocrypha and pseudepigrapha for evidence of ancient extrabiblical traditions, the utmost care should be taken not to overstate the issue when positing or reconstructing a tradition lost from the biblical text. This is because most of the time the interpreters create or reuse exegetical traditions that stem from a biblical text closely resembling our current version(s).


The study of scribal comments and corrections is interesting to Latter-day Saints because it helps reveal the process whereby the biblical text was

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## Ancient Exegesis cont. from p. 5

manipulated and changed. It should be noted, likewise, that the scribes in many cases were probably not guilty of malfeasance but were attempting to make the text relevant to their current situation. In the end, as Fishbane concludes, the Hebrew Bible, “despite its authoritative character, is not a ‘clean’ or ‘corrected’ text-copy, but rather a compound of errors, corrections, and supplements” (p. 38).

The study of inner-biblical allusion and exegesis reveals the need for contemporary students of scripture to be intimately familiar with a broad range of biblical tradition, because often allusion and interpretation are found only with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament text. As Fishbane notes, “Aside from [a] few instances of *explicit* citation or referral, the vast majority of cases of . . . exegesis in the Hebrew Bible involve *implicit* or virtual

citations” (p. 285). That is, prophets assumed their readers and listeners would have been so familiar with the tradition that a word or two would suffice to indicate to the audience a whole conceptual field.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if we are to get at the fullest meaning of scripture, we must attempt to approximate the ancient familiarity with texts and traditions. 

By Cory Daniel Crawford

### Notes

1. “The Bible’s Earliest Interpreters,” *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 352.
2. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (1998), 297, 308–11.
3. See, for example, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (1998).
4. “Prophecy,” in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Garson and H. G. M. Williamson [1988], 39.
5. See *Traditions of the Bible*, 14–19.
6. See S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* (1996), 9–11.

## Original Text cont. from page 1

will be published at the rate of one per year over the next four years until the entire text is analyzed.

Here in part 1 of volume 4, Professor Skousen examines 774 cases of variation or potential variation in his quest to determine the original reading of the Book of Mormon text. In 420 instances, the current standard version varies from his proposed original text, and 157 of these have never appeared in any standard printed edition of the Book of Mormon. Most of the 420 differences involve variation in phraseology, but 75 of them alter the meaning in ways that would affect translation—though never in a manner that changes either doctrinal content or the fundamental meaning of the text.

One of the most important findings of the critical text project, says Professor Skousen, is that “the original text of the Book of Mormon is much more consistent in its usage and phraseology than the current standard text.” Occasional errors of transmission have created what he terms textual “wrinkles,” where novelties have been introduced instead of the words and phrases that are consistently found elsewhere in the text.

For example, in our current version, 1 Nephi 8:31 states that Lehi “saw other multitudes *feeling*

their way” toward the tree of life. However, Professor Skousen observes that the original text is wholly consistent elsewhere in representing people as *pressing*, never *feeling*, their way. As it turns out and just as one might have expected, the original reading of 1 Nephi 8:31 explains that Lehi “saw other multitudes *pressing* their way” toward the tree of life. When Oliver Cowdery was preparing the printer’s manuscript, he misread the handwriting in the original manuscript of the unknown scribe 3, mistaking *pressing* for *feeling*.

At 1 Nephi 10:10, the current text describes John the Baptist as having baptized the Lamb of God, “who should take away the *sins* of the world.” But the original manuscript reads *sin*, in the singular. Elsewhere, the original Book of Mormon text normally speaks of the Savior as taking away the (plural) sins of mankind, but in the two places where it speaks of the atonement in connection with John’s baptism of Jesus (here in 1 Nephi 10:10 and in 2 Nephi 31:4), it uses the singular *sin*—precisely as does John the Baptist himself in the New Testament (see John 1:29).

1 Nephi 12:18 refers, in our current editions, to “the *word* of the justice of the eternal God.” But, in every similar case elsewhere, the Book of Mormon alludes to the *sword*, not the *word*, of God’s justice. And once again, Professor Skousen demon-