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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word* (1992), edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr.

Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992. viii + 300 pp., with subject and scripture indexes. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Mack C. Stirling

This book contains seventeen papers from the Seventh Annual Book of Mormon Symposium sponsored by the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. The authors' backgrounds include Brigham Young University religious education faculty (8), other BYU faculty (4), other Church Educational System faculty (3), an attorney, a dentist, and a General Authority.

Elder Russell M. Nelson begins the volume with a brief analysis of each of ten names, responsibilities, or aspects of the mission of Jesus Christ. These include Christ's roles as creator, redeemer, and judge of all mankind and are taken from the fifty-seven subheadings listed under "Jesus Christ" in the Topical Guide. Elder Nelson draws several comparisons between his former occupation as a cardiothoracic surgeon and his current calling as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and closes with his testimony.

Several of the authors treat those aspects of individual salvation emphasized in the book of Helaman. W. Ralph Pew investigates the principle of sanctification, which he defines as "a life-long process of refinement whereby the naturally occurring tendencies of mortality are preferentially purged from our soul through the atoning blood of Christ and by our voluntarily yielding our agency to God" (p. 207). Twice subsequently (p. 208) he refers to the carnal proclivities of mortality as a consequence of the fall that must be removed by sanctification. He does not consider the possibility that some of the deficiencies in our souls, such as pride, envy, or the tendency to anger, may result

from our development (or lack thereof) in the premortal existence. Pew's paper contains appropriate comparisons between sanctification and the process of refining metals, and likewise between Mosaic rituals and sanctification. The role and power of the Holy Ghost in sanctification are well described. A major strength of the article lies in its description of the relationships between the sacrament and sanctification, and the temple and sanctification.

Pew writes that part of his objective is to provide us with the ability to apply doctrinal concepts to the practical process of sanctification. However, his doctrinal analysis is not extensive. Typical of many current Latter-day Saint writers on this topic,¹ Pew neither attempts to describe the relationship between justification and sanctification nor to distinguish between them; indeed, he merges these two concepts into one (p. 209). He mentions the doctrines of grace and spiritual rebirth briefly, but the paper could have been strengthened considerably had he attempted more extensive definitions of these principles and a detailed investigation of their relationships to sanctification.

In a related article, Brett P. Thomas discusses the function of hearing and remembering the word of God in personal conversion and repentance, using the story of the conversion of their Lamanite jailers by Nephi₂ and Lehi₂ (Helaman 5:20–6:5) as his primary text. Thomas skillfully uses scripture and pertinent quotations from modern prophets to describe the nature and characteristics of the word and voice of God, as well as the effect of the word of God on mankind, both the righteous and the unrighteous. The paper is well written and well worth reading for its significant insights into personal sanctification, the role of the veil, and the mechanism by which giving heed to the voice and word of God will eventually lead us to a full capability to comprehend and live the truth.

Robert L. Millet focuses on the idea of building on the rock of our Redeemer (Helaman 5:12). Millet's considerable gifts for explicating gospel principles are well demonstrated in his paper. He describes how Jesus Christ is the Father in a very real sense,

¹ See Bruce A. Van Orden, "Sanctification by the Holy Spirit," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 212–22.

namely that of being the father of eternal life for those who are born again by accepting the gospel. He makes important observations about the nature and mechanism of Christ's atonement and about the power of the word of God to protect us from temptation and unsound doctrine and lead us back to God. Consistent with his previous writings,² Millet makes some very profound comments regarding the power and necessity of grace in our salvation, placing the interaction of our efforts and God's grace in good perspective.

I feel that Millet's article is extremely worthwhile, but I was somewhat troubled by two of his comments. In mentioning these, I do not wish to detract from the value of his excellent paper, but rather to provoke further thought and comment. First, I found unconvincing Millet's speculation that Lucifer certainly would not have included mention of coercion or denied agency as part of his public proposal in the War in Heaven (p. 20). It seems quite possible to me that Lucifer could have mentioned the mechanism (coercion-violation of agency) by which he proposed to guarantee salvation for all when he publicly proposed his alternative to God's plan. Second, Millet appropriately urges us to heed, accept, and respect our church leaders, but then he makes the extreme statement that "there is no power to be found in Christ independent of his constituted priesthood authorities" (p. 31). Taken at face value (and admittedly out of context) this would mean, among other things, that devout non-Mormon Christians could never receive any benefit from prayer. I doubt Millet intended this. In any case, it is particularly ironic that the person Millet quotes most in his chapter (more than any prophet or priesthood authority) is the non-Mormon writer C. S. Lewis.

Andrew C. Skinner contributes an interesting paper on the life of Nephi₂, concentrating on the marvelous revelations he received as recorded in Helaman 10. Although the phrase "calling and election made sure" does not occur in the Book of Mormon, the principle certainly does; and Skinner makes a compelling case that Nephi₂ had this ultimate experience with God. Skinner also demonstrates how the examples of the unconditional promise of

² See Robert L. Millet, *By Grace Are We Saved* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989).

eternal life of the Book of Mormon parallel the pattern of covenant making in the Old Testament. These observations, along with the perspectives shed on the Second Comforter, personal revelation, and the pursuit of the promise of exaltation, make this article a valuable addition to the literature on these topics. Skinner does reach one conclusion which I question, and which should ideally have been pursued further, namely, that to have been foreordained to eternal life would have been the greatest appointment or calling possible in the premortal existence (p. 116). This raises the question of how many of the premortal spirits were foreordained to eternal life. If all were, it doesn't make sense to label it as the greatest calling in the premortal existence. If fewer than all were, what would be the implications for those not so foreordained? Do they have any possibility of gaining eternal life?

Monte S. Nyman examines the role of the book of Helaman in restoring plain and precious parts that have been lost from the gospel. He is successful in generating a surprisingly long list of examples in which the book of Helaman confirms the reality of various Old Testament people and events. He is less successful with his several quotations from *The Interpreter's Bible*, which he uses as examples of errant Christian thought potentially corrected by the Book of Mormon. For example, he correctly quotes *The Interpreter's Bible* 1:562 as saying that the Tower of Babel story is a naive answer to the origin of language differences and that differences of language developed over long periods of time as various groups of the human race went through the separate phases of their existence (p. 149). However, the text from Helaman (6:28) that he quotes to correct this proposed misconception says nothing about language at all, although it does refer to the Tower of Babel. Nyman is least successful in the concluding section, entitled "New Testament Principles Taught in the Old Testament." Since the book we call the Old Testament certainly did not exist—as it is currently constituted—at the time of Helaman, this section would have been more appropriately entitled "Gospel Principles Taught in Old Testament Times." Here, Nyman falters when he proposes that the original source for similar phrases in Helaman and the Sermon on the Mount, such as "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," was the brass plates (p. 159). Why couldn't the book of

Helaman have been the first written record of such phrases? Nyman presents no evidence to the contrary.

Douglas Brinley writes on the relationship between the land of America and the various civilizations which have lived on it. He provides a well-organized summary of each of the peoples, their relationships to the commandments of God, and their eventual apostasy and destruction. He develops an insightful description of the stages in the development of apostasy in society. His major theme is that when the majority of the people chooses evil over good, destruction awaits (Mosiah 29:27; Helaman 5:2). Powerful and pertinent correlations are drawn between this concept and prophetic counsel given by President Benson to our modern society.

Richard O. Cowan describes the interrelationships between the Nephites and the Lamanites, showing that the boundaries between the two groups were not rigid, that those called Lamanites were at times more righteous than those called Nephites, and that both groups merged at the coming of Christ to the Americas, only to separate later based on righteousness versus wickedness rather than on genealogy. This paper is a useful summary of some important historical features of the Book of Mormon, which should help to correct a number of misconceptions commonly held about the Lamanites by students of the Book of Mormon. However, Cowan's purpose in writing that "this inaccurate perception [of the Lamanites as a cursed and loathsome people] may actually discourage some Latter-day Saints from wanting to share the Book of Mormon with Lamanites today" (p. 251), seems a bit overstated. I doubt this is actually a significant problem in the Church. I also wondered about Cowan's assertion that by A.D. 367 "the mark of the dark skin had not yet returned to the wicked" (p. 260), based on the statement in Mormon 5:15 that "this people [the Lamanites] shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond description of that which ever hath been amongst us." This falls short of actually saying that the Lamanites had no dark skin by the time of Mormon. Rodney Turner's conclusion that "there is no explicit refer-

ence to [the timing of] the restoration of the dark skin in the Book of Mormon" seems more judicious.³

In a relatively brief paper, Ronald D. Anderson examines Helaman and 3 Nephi for "leitwörter," which he defines as repeated thematic keywords that serve to highlight the meaning of a text. He demonstrates that *remember* occurs 13 times in Helaman 5:6–12 and that the root word *remember* occurs over 240 times in the Book of Mormon. However, only a minimal analysis is offered of the mechanism whereby repetition of this word enhances an understanding of the Book of Mormon, although an apposite quote from President Kimball on the significance of the word *remember* is included. Even more briefly, Anderson notes the repetition of the words or phrases *pondering*, *O Lord*, *saith the Lord*, *I*, and *cursed*, as well as other words in several texts from Helaman and 3 Nephi. Although these observations of instances of simple repetition are not without value, even more valuable would have been a deeper investigation of the texts involved and an attempt to correlate the use of a thematic word by one author with the use of the same word by a different author to enhance interpretation of both texts.

R. Wayne Shute and Wayne E. Brickey assert that perplexity is an essential precursor to all real learning (p. 177). Their thesis is that prophets naturally perplex us because they speak from a perspective different from ours, and that this perplexity can, in turn, lead either to mind-enlarging, soul-saving inquiry, or to self-sufficient, soul-jeopardizing indifference or rebellion (pp. 180, 189). The prophetic missions of Nephi₂ and Samuel the Lamanite are used very convincingly to illustrate these principles. In addition, the authors point out most appropriately that the idea of a suffering and slain Redeemer is perplexing to the natural man, even though this reality is the most important truth to be learned in our mortal existence. This paper is a very worthwhile contribution and should serve, at the very least, to remind us that if we do not occasionally experience confusion and perplexity in our religion, we have ceased to learn.

³ Rodney Turner, "The Lamanite Mark," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 148.

The apostasy and destruction which came upon the Nephites prior to Christ's visit to them have long been used in the Church as types of the wickedness and destruction to come upon our world prior to the Second Coming. Not surprisingly, four different chapters treat this theme. John L. Fowles traces briefly the decline of the Nephites, appropriately relating this decline to rejection of the word of God. He correlates the word of God with the covenants of God and reminds us of the power of the word to lead people to do that which is just. Although Fowles does not break new ground in this paper, he does close with some well-stated admonitions about the importance of being able to study the scriptures for ourselves, that we might become more empowered to receive the word of God.

Chauncey C. Riddle structures an analysis of the events in 3 Nephi 6 and 7 and their latter-day parallels around his observation that the Lord has specifically designated both the meridian of times and the last days as "days of wickedness and vengeance" (Moses 7:46, 60; p. 191). Riddle moves beyond the simple listing of obvious parallels between Book of Mormon times and our own times to consider insightfully how the wickedness and vengeance of the last days fit into the purposes of God, both for the righteous as well as the wicked. He offers a profound analysis of the relationship between passing through the spiritual fires of wickedness and temptation and passing through the actual fires of destruction prior to the Second Coming. One of his final statements, "being in hell is a blessing which makes possible the greater blessing of inheriting glory afterwards" (p. 205), succinctly solves a dilemma confronting many modern Christians, the question of how a perfectly loving God can consign people to unpurposeful suffering in hell.⁴ This paper represents another valuable contribution by the author to Latter-day Saint literature.

Gerald Hansen, Jr., describes the book of Helaman as a frightful warning used by Mormon to teach us "to avoid wickedness that could lead to our destruction" (p. 163). Hansen maintains that "the sins of the great and spacious building—pride and seeking wealth—are more perilous than the sins implied by the

⁴ See Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The entire book struggles to solve this dilemma.

mists of darkness—immorality and drunkenness—because they are not as obvious” (p. 166). He explores the presence of crime, pseudo-patriotism, and injustice in Nephite society and in ours, showing that we are prone to define righteousness in our own terms rather than God’s (p. 166), that we are easily seduced to participate in improper activities just to make money (pp. 169–70), and that we tend to silence divergent voices, thereby eliminating genuine discussion and inhibiting our ability to correct problems (p. 172). This paper is well written, full of important insights and observations, and worth consideration by all Latter-day Saints.

Thomas W. Mackay examines Helaman 12 and other appropriate texts to develop a description of Mormon’s philosophy of history. His conclusion, which I find compelling, is that Mormon had a providential view of history wherein “the events of human history demonstrated God’s justice and his ultimate control of the affairs of men” (p. 137). Mackay observes many interesting aspects of Mormon’s historical writing, such as his focus on spiritual values rather than measurable material achievements (p. 136), his view of history as composed of alternating cycles of righteousness and wickedness (p. 137), and his aversion to all offensive warfare (p. 141). He emphasizes that the essential difference between Mormon as a prophet-historian and modern secular historians is the issue of revelation—the ability to discern the presence of God’s hand in human history. Mackay’s paper is an important and valuable contribution to a growing body of literature on Mormon’s function as an editor.⁵ All of these publications illustrate the astonishing complexity of the Book of Mormon and the corollary to that complexity, the low probability from a purely logical perspective that Joseph Smith was the original source for the book.

Victor L. Ludlow investigates the bonds created between members of secret combinations as examples of covenants patterned after covenants between God and man. He notes that the word *covenant* is used fifteen times in Helaman through 3 Nephi

⁵ See Grant R. Hardy, “Mormon as Editor,” John A. Tvedtnes, “Mormon’s Editorial Promises,” and Tvedtnes, “Colophons in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 15–37.

8 to refer to the vows between the wicked in secret combinations. Ludlow is very insightful in demonstrating effectively that these covenants among the wicked follow the suzerain-vassal treaty pattern of the ancient Near East (historical background, stipulations, blessings and curses, witnesses, and some form of remembrance or record) which is characteristic of many of the covenants from God recorded in scripture. I accept Ludlow's thesis that studying the pattern of secret combinations in their original and subsequent forms can "provide insights for us today" (p. 266), but find a little paradoxical later comments such as "harboring too much time, talk, and energy on evil doings may lead to evil doings" (p. 275). The probability of "evil doings" is better correlated with one's intent in studying evil rather than the depth of one's analysis thereof.

Ludlow structures his paper somewhat arbitrarily by dividing the verses containing the fifteen references to covenants among the wicked into eight separate texts, each text then undergoing individual analysis. For each text, a chart is generated listing the key elements and the covenant features found in each. This results in eight charts, most with two parts, and in a great deal of redundancy from one chart to another, unnecessarily cluttering the paper and making absorption of the message rather tedious. It is difficult to see the forest because of the trees. For example, Helaman 6:21-30 is separated into three texts with three overlapping analyses; elegance and insight would have been better served with a unified analysis. In addition, Ludlow's analysis of 3 Nephi 7:11 (pp. 278-79) is flawed. This verse, which mentions the secret covenants of the wicked only in passing, describes rather the efforts of the more mainstream Nephites to oppose secret covenant combinations. Characteristics of these more mainstream Nephites are inappropriately used by Ludlow to fill out one of his eight charts about the secret covenants of the wicked.

Ludlow does draw a number of good comparisons between the evils of secret combinations in the Book of Mormon and evil in our modern world, appropriately emphasizing that even members of the Church can support the work of evil secret combinations to the degree that they remain in sin. He does not attempt to identify specific secret combinations in our time, a wise decision.

Allen J. Christenson examines social, economic, and political conditions described in Helaman and 3 Nephi just prior to the coming of Christ. He notes the remarkable increase in trade, wealth, and class distinction described in the Book of Mormon during this time period. Christenson then surveys some of the archaeological evidence (largely from the Mayan city Kaminaljuyu) which confirms just such an expansion in wealth, commerce, and social distinction in Mesoamerica between approximately 100 B.C. and A.D. 50, using the major current secondary sources. This interesting observation and its correlation are not new, having been previously described by John L. Sorenson.⁶ Sorenson, however, is more adept at integrating the Book of Mormon into ancient Mesoamerica, although Christenson does provide some information about Cerros not found in Sorenson's book, supporting the thesis that the Book of Mormon actually does describe conditions present in ancient Mesoamerica.

Christenson is at times less cautious than I would prefer in using the Book of Mormon to explain Mesoamerican archaeological findings. For example, in the section entitled "Rise of Secret Societies," he uses two paragraphs to describe Monte Alban, and then three paragraphs to describe the secret society of Gadianton. Christenson does not directly label Monte Alban as a Gadianton city, but it is clear that he wishes the reader to see it as such. Although Monte Alban was clearly involved in military expansion during the time in question,⁷ it seems premature and injudicious to correlate it directly to a Gadianton stronghold. The current archaeological findings could undoubtedly be explained in other ways. I must also admit to being perplexed after reading in Christenson's paper a passage referring to Linda Schele and David Friedel's *A Forest of Kings*: "As new kingdoms grew and proliferated, free territories either joined the growing network of economically interconnected states or were swallowed up by it" (p. 232).⁸ However, a statement declaring essentially the opposite

⁶ John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 121-32.

⁷ Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 242.

⁸ Referring to Linda Schele and David Friedel, *A Forest of Kings* (New York: Williams, Morrow, 1990), 59-60.

is found in their *A Forest of Kings*: "Political coherence and integration characterized life within the dominion of a King, but in the borderlands between the kingdoms, the opportunity must have existed for adventuresome people to maintain independent chiefdoms, or even for whole villages of unallied farmers to exist."⁹ Although Christenson may be correct in his ideas, I feel that this inconsistency illustrates the general principle that great care should be exercised when one is faced with the temptation to pick and choose isolated conclusions from Mesoamerican archaeologists that appear to confirm one's current interpretation of Book of Mormon history.

Christenson's paper is valuable in reminding us of the remarkable correlation between the economic and social conditions described in general terms in the Book of Mormon in the first century B.C., and the current consensus of archaeologists regarding economic expansion and social stratification in Mesoamerica at about the same time. It is also especially worthwhile in reminding us that many of the problems in Nephite society resulted from rejection of their prophets' words concerning the dangers of the pursuit of wealth and material well-being, with the obvious application to our society.

The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word is typical of the previous yearly monographs on portions of the Book of Mormon published by the BYU Religious Studies Center. Many of the contributions have the substance and depth of a good-to-excellent Sunday School Gospel Doctrine lesson. Others show evidence of more profound insight, deeper analysis, or more extensive scholarly research. I believe most Latter-day Saints would find this book a worthwhile addition to their libraries, as with other volumes in the series. However, it must not be forgotten that the Church still awaits an in-depth, scholarly but faithful commentary on the Book of Mormon. Such a publication would aid immeasurably in permitting us to plumb the profound truths of the book.

⁹ Ibid., 60.