



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

---

Volume 23 | Number 6

Article 6

---

January 2003

## BYU Journal Explores Hebrew Law in the Book of Mormon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(2003) "BYU Journal Explores Hebrew Law in the Book of Mormon," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 23: No. 6, Article 6.


Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol23/iss6/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## BYU Journal Explores Hebrew Law in the Book of Mormon

In February 2001, a conference titled “Hebrew Law in the Book of Mormon” was held at Brigham Young University under the sponsorship of FARMS (see “BYU Conference on Hebrew Law a Success,” *Insights* 21/4 [2001], available on the FARMS Web site). Among the papers presented there were studies by seven BYU students on aspects of ancient law that might be reflected in the Book of Mormon. These papers are now available in a special issue, copublished by FARMS, of the student journal *Studia Antiqua*. They treat such topics as slavery, the Noachide laws (minimum standards of social and moral conduct revealed through Noah and thus binding on all humanity), false prophecy, blasphemy and reviling, the status of women in ancient

Jewish law, and legal protections for widows and the fatherless.

The journal features an introduction by John W. Welch, a BYU professor of law who organized the conference and spoke at two of its three sessions. He summarizes the proceedings, highlights important issues, and provides helpful context for understanding the approaches taken in the student papers. He observes: “Law was extremely important in the ancient world, especially among the Israelites. Although it is often difficult to know exactly what the substantive and procedural rules of Israelite courts might have been in the seventh century BC and how much of that jurisprudence was carried over into the New World on the plates of brass and through the customs of Lehi and his descendants, reasonable reconstructions of Hebrew law in biblical times can be made, and those studies shed interesting light on possible meanings of many words and deeds reported in the Book of Mormon.” 

## New Book [continued from page 1](#)

Through the examination of key aspects and events, the growing imbalance between those elements during Lehi’s lifetime becomes clear. The bearing of international politics on Judah’s situation, the calling and authority of the prophets and the Judahites’ expectations of them, Israelite religion as practiced before the exile, the importance of the temple, the effects of the religious reforms enacted by King Josiah and the Deuteronomists, the trial of Jeremiah—all are part of the panorama in which the prophets foresaw disaster. The destruction decreed by heaven came, but not before Lehi and his family had escaped their city’s fall by fleeing into the wilderness (an action not without precedent in that time period) and traveling to southern Arabia along well-used commercial routes to continue their epic journey to the New World land of promise.

Given that this volume examines a time of significant complexity—a crucial moment in the history of the world documented only by ancient

writings that sometimes contradict each other and the serendipitous findings of archaeology that represent only a small fraction of the whole picture—the writers have constructed a remarkably full and detailed picture of life in Jerusalem as Lehi might have known it. As one might still expect, the incompleteness and ambiguities inherent in the evidence surface in the occasionally differing opinions expressed in these essays. For example, some take at face value the seemingly approving descriptions of Josiah’s religious reforms found in the book of 2 Kings; others note the less flattering comments about Josiah in 2 Chronicles and Jeremiah and wonder if the reforms added to the tension in negative ways. The reader therefore becomes a discerner, participating in the exciting task of reconstructing Jerusalem before the exile and deciding which aspects and events may have shaped the contrasting viewpoints of Lehi’s family members as they recalled their former home.

As the first book ever to deal exclusively with life in Jerusalem in the days of Lehi, this work is [continued on page 8](#)