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Love vs. Hate: An Analysis of Helaman 15:1–4

Few literary genres from the ancient world stand out so prominently as the Near Eastern vassal treaty. Scholars have shown that these political contracts formed between vassal kings and suzerain provided the conceptual background for the book of Deuteronomy.¹ “The assumption is that Israel conceived of its relation to Yahweh as that of subject peoples to a world king and that they expressed this relationship in the concepts and formulas of the suzerainty treaty.”²

In the Near Eastern treaty, vassals were required to love their superiors: “If you do not love the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal,” warns the Assyrian treaty of Esarhaddon, “[then] may Ashur, king of the gods, who determines the fates, decree for you an evil, unpropitious fate.”³ In this ancient context, “loving the king with one’s entire heart signified the severance of all contact with other political powers.”⁴ Hence, Israel’s command to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” presented in the book of Deuteronomy, seems to refer to a political commitment rather than an emotional attachment (Deuteronomy 6:5).⁵

Scholars in recent decades have shown that in the biblical world the word *love* often represented a covenantal devotion to one’s superior, while its opposite,

namely *hate*, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation.⁶ While the connotation of these words for Westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, *love* and *hate* often carried the aforementioned unique covenantal connotation.⁷

“All their [the Ephraimites’] wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house” (Hosea 9:15). As demonstrated in this biblical passage, the Ephraimites’ wickedness resulted in their loss of the blessing associated with having the God of Israel serve as their sovereign. The Lord hated the Ephraimites “for the wickedness of their doings” because in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties these acts were tantamount to a political insurrection. As a result, the Ephraimites were removed from God’s covenantal house or family. “I will love them no more,” declared the Lord: “all their princes are revolvers” (Hosea 9:15). Thus, the words *love* and *hate* in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof).

With this observation in mind, the problematic passage in Helaman 15 where Samuel the Lamanite describes God’s love and hatred seems to convey a specific nuance derived from the world of antiquity. When Samuel

presents his inspired message to the people of Nephi, he declares, “They [the Nephites] have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved” (v. 3). With these words, Samuel attempts to remind the Nephites that they have traditionally served as God’s covenant people. In this relationship, the Lord has acted as the Nephite suzerain from whom the people of Nephi have received reciprocal “love.” In contrast, Samuel presents his own people, the Lamanites, as those whom God “hath hated because their deeds have been evil continually” (v. 4). Significantly, Samuel uses the verb *hate* in the same context in which it appears in the book of Hosea. God hated the Lamanites in a parallel manner to the way he hated the Ephraimites: their evil acts had placed them outside the boundary of his covenantal relationship.

While some modern readers have expressed concern regarding this apparently harsh statement preserved in the Book of Mormon, Samuel’s message relates perfectly to the context of “love” and “hate” in the ancient sense of alliance. ■

Notes

1. See A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy: New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1979), 33; and Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Eisenbrauns, 1992), 60–61.
2. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Fortress Press, 1985), 205.

3. As cited in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, 1969), 537, 538.
4. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 81.
5. William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77–87.
6. N. Lohfink, "Hate and Love in Osee 9, 15," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 417.
7. This would explain why the Lord says that he loves Jacob (Israel) but hates his brother Esau (Malachi 1:2–3; Romans 9:13).

By David E. Bokovoy

THE LOOK OF AMERINDIANS

Lure of the West, the Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibit now showing at BYU's Museum of Art, includes a painting that may be of special interest to FARMS patrons. *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri and Pawnees*, by Charles Bird King in 1821, depicts five American Indian chiefs. James D. Horan, writing in *The McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians* (New York: Bramhall House, 1982), observed that the King painting was one of a large



Charles Bird King, *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri and Pawnees* (1821), Smithsonian American Art Museum

series of paintings commissioned by the U.S. government in the 1820s. Horan's album reproduces most of them and

sets their context. These portraits of Amerindian leaders of the eastern, southern, and plains states were painted while they visited Washington, D.C.

Horan notes that this art depicts faces far different from the "Mongoloid" norm assumed or pictured in most textbooks as representing "American Indians." For example, Horan refers to "McIntosh, the handsome Creek who looked like a swarthy-skinned Scots Highland Chief" (p. 122). Other notable examples of European-looking Amerindians (many of them Creeks or Shawnee) can be seen on pages 140, 160, 272, and 318. Today's experts on the Native Americans still have no answer to how such close resemblances to Europeans are to be accounted for. Whether the answer lies in the Book or Mormon or elsewhere, at least the problem suggests that conventional arguments that no voyagers crossed the ocean from the Old to the New World need rethinking. The free exhibit will continue at the Museum of Art until 18 May.

Historicity continued from page 1

historicity and toward the underlying order embodied in scriptural accounts.

John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks focus on historical plausibility as a method for determining historicity, disclosing both the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology. They show that the Book of Abraham is plausible in terms of what we know about its genre, specificity of concrete detail, particulars of government, social organization, and religious custom.

As Louis Midgley explains in his essay, critics of the Book of Mormon have tried to find a middle ground between deliberate fraud and divine authen-

ticity to justify its coming into being. But those who approach the study of the Book of Mormon from a naturalistic viewpoint have already imposed upon it the conclusion they hope to reach. Daniel C. Peterson presents a straightforward and entertaining discussion of the difference between historicity and inerrancy.

Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures is a thoughtful examination of an important issue for Latter-day Saints and people of faith everywhere. The collective force of this volume comes from its variety of engaging academic perspectives, showing that the historicity of the LDS scriptural canon is vital to the spiritual purposes behind them. To obtain a copy, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of our Web site. 