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Editor's Introduction

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Editors' Introduction

SINCE ITS INAUGURAL APPEARANCE IN 1992, the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* has consistently provided members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with leading-edge scholarship on the Book of Mormon that has deftly explored its historical, theological, linguistic, literary, and cultural contexts in most interesting and compelling ways. We are sincerely grateful to each of the previous editors of the *Journal*, who have added their distinctive contributions to what has long been recognized as the most consistent publication of quality research on the Book of Mormon. We take this rich past very seriously and know that we have big shoes to fill as we move forward.

In deciding how to proceed, we feel there is much to learn from what has happened in the past ten years in the burgeoning field of Mormon studies, where an important emphasis on bringing Mormonism into conversation with the wider academy has emerged. Hundreds of articles and dozens of books have appeared under the imprimatur of a variety of scholarly institutions and academic publishers, all of them helping to clarify how the study of Mormonism can enrich the study of other religious and historical traditions, as well as how the study of other religious and historical traditions can enrich the study of Mormonism. Institutional support for these developments has come in the form of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, published by the Church Historian's Press. Each volume of the Prophet's papers that has been published adheres to the highest standards of acceptable practices in documentary editing and historical research, and each is written for both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars interested in the writings of Joseph Smith.

How close the study of the Book of Mormon relates to these developments has been somewhat unclear. Nonetheless, the study of

Mormonism's sacred texts is beginning to move beyond the confines of the Latter-day Saint audience and into the realm of interested non-Latter-day Saint scholars. Examples of works published in academic presses by Mormon scholars such as Royal Skousen (*The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, published by Yale University Press), Grant Hardy (*Understanding the Book of Mormon*, published by Oxford University Press), and Terryl Givens (*By the Hand of Mormon*, also published by Oxford University Press) attest to this fact. We also see growing interest in the Book of Mormon from non-Mormon scholars such as Laurie Maffly-Kipp (who edited the Penguin Classics edition of the Book of Mormon), Paul Gutjahr (whose *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* was published by Princeton University Press), and Elizabeth Fenton (who is currently preparing, with Jared Hickman, a collection of literary essays on the Book of Mormon for Oxford University Press).

We believe that the sacredness, richness, and depth of the Book of Mormon warrants its inclusion alongside other world scriptures—such as the Bible, the Qur^ʿan, the Tao Te Ching, or the Bhagavad Gita—that receive serious study in the larger academy. We, therefore, believe it is time to increase the academic focus and broaden the intended audience of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (restoring both its original name and, in many ways, the vision of its first editor, Stephen D. Ricks). Our hope is that this will bring the Book of Mormon into larger conversations related to sacred texts going on in both Mormon studies and religious studies. In accordance with this vision, we have begun to make a concerted effort to include more non-Latter-day Saint scholars in the *Journal* as contributors, reviewers, and editorial board members. We have already begun to publish material that will be of interest to both believing and nonbelieving scholars, as well to educated nonspecialists. Certainly, we invite those willing to contribute this sort of material to submit academic work on the Book of Mormon for possible future publication in the *Journal*.

We are aware that the approach to Book of Mormon studies on which we have settled may not please both believers and nonbelievers at the same time. It is, of course, inevitable that both will be coming

to the Book of Mormon with differing assumptions and expectations, especially in light of the way that discussion of this volume of scripture has traditionally been governed by debates about the volume's claims to describe ancient American history. We expect that both some believers and some nonbelievers will therefore experience some discomfort in joining the conversation. In the long run, however, we feel strongly that this is the best way to gather into one place serious research that will speak both to believers interested in investigating their own sacred text with genuine rigor and to nonbelievers interested in investigating how the Book of Mormon works as a religious volume meant to speak to the modern world.

In this issue we have six full-length essays, two review essays, and two shorter notes. In the lead article, "The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32," David Bokovoy argues that creation motifs from Genesis 1–3 are reflected in Alma's discourse on faith. Bokovoy reveals a fascinating theological intersection in that sermon between motifs drawn respectively from the Priestly and Yahwistic creation narratives in Genesis, showing striking artistry in the Book of Mormon's handling of biblical traditions and texts. Through a direct comparison between the Yahwistic image of a seed and the Priestly motif of God's creative word, Alma weaves a jointly Yahwistic and Priestly theology of creation's relevance to believers. Bokovoy's article beautifully exemplifies close reading of the Book of Mormon in connection with the larger body of biblical studies, modeling a methodology that deeply enriches and illuminates the meaning of the Book of Mormon as a theological text.

Heather Hardy is the author of the second article, "'Saving Christianity': The Nephite Fulfillment of Jesus's Eschatological Prophecies." Hardy begins with New Testament critical scholarship, stretching from Albert Schweitzer to Bart Ehrman, in which it is proposed that Jesus's eschatological prophecies, because they were originally intended to be understood as predicting fulfillment within a single generation, should be regarded as essentially failed prophecies. Hardy, however, argues that the Book of Mormon presents itself as a record of the surprising temporary

fulfillment of Jesus's eschatological prophecies within a generation of their first utterance—fulfillment that took place in the New rather than in the Old World. Hardy further clarifies that the Book of Mormon anticipates a *second* fulfillment of such eschatological predictions at Christ's second coming, giving the New Testament's apocalyptic anticipations a double application. Hardy's approach to the text strongly underscores how the Book of Mormon speaks—and intentionally so—in surprising and instructive ways to deep concerns about the foundations of the Christian tradition.

In the third essay, "Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared," Joseph Spencer takes a more phenomenological approach in looking at three intersections between the respective visions of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita and the brother of Jared in the Book of Mormon. The first two interconnecting points advance similarities: (1) that both narratives within which the visions take place exhibit the literary features of the epic and (2) that both visions are presented as launching religious revolutions, with Arjuna's vision introducing into Hinduism the principle of devotion and the brother of Jared's vision modeling a pertinent sort of faith for gentile readers of the Book of Mormon. The third intersection shifts from similarities to significant differences: the distinct role played in each vision by the notion of divine incarnation. Spencer's examination represents a unique and needed approach in illuminating the value of studying the Book of Mormon alongside religious texts from other traditions.

Paul Owen provides a theological and literary analysis of 1 Nephi 13–14 in the fourth contribution, "Theological Apostasy and the Role of Canonical Scripture: A Thematic Analysis of 1 Nephi 13–14." He examines three particularly significant visions among the thirteen given to Nephi in 1 Nephi 11–14. These three represent the specifically apocalyptic portion of Nephi's overall visionary experience: (1) the vision of the great and abominable church, (2) the vision of the mother of harlots, and (3) the vision of John the apostle. In conversation with other interpreters, Owen provides detailed textual exegesis of these visions, constructing an illuminating interpretation of the great and abominable

church as politicized Christianity, of the complex relationship between Mormonism and the wider Christian tradition, and of the influential role apocalypticism may have played in the writing of the Book of Mormon. Owen's approach models the kind of close exegetical attention the Book of Mormon has seldom received, combined with inventive and suggestive interpretations about the larger implications of the Book of Mormon's key texts.

The fifth article in this issue of the *Journal* is the work of Dan Belnap. In "And It Came to Pass . . .": The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges," Belnap reads the books of Mosiah and Alma from the Book of Mormon to see what can be learned about the sociopolitical dynamics of the complex events they narrate. Noting that an inordinate amount of the Book of Mormon's thousand-year narrative is dedicated to the events of just one year of history—the eighteenth year of the reign of the Nephite judges—Belnap suggests that understanding the narrator's principal purposes in this major portion of the Book of Mormon requires close scrutiny of the historical setting established for the events of that year. He argues that the events of that apparently crucial year in Nephite history are predicated on the confluence of a number of complicated narrative developments recounted in the text, which can only be properly understood if the book is read critically. Belnap powerfully underscores the immense complexity of the sociopolitical narrative of the central part of the Book of Mormon and the virtues of reading the text with a historical-critical eye.

In the sixth and final article, "The Deliberate Use of Hebrew Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon," Carl Cranney draws on an ongoing debate concerning the presence of Hebrew poetic patterns in the Book of Mormon. Rather than defending or contesting the presence of such textual structures in the book, however, Cranney asks what can be learned from where apparent parallelistic structures are to be found. By performing a statistical analysis of the frequency of parallelistic poetic patterns (as cataloged by Donald Parry) within the distinct genres of texts that make up the Book of Mormon, he demonstrates that poetic

parallelisms appear systematically in specific contexts through the text. His findings strongly indicate that, whatever their original source, parallelistic poetic forms were included in the Book of Mormon intentionally rather than occurring by happenstance. Cranney's work points to the importance of investigating more closely the variety of genres making up the Book of Mormon and what they suggest about how the content of the book should be read.

In every issue of the *Journal*, we plan to include review essays focused on influential books that relate to Book of Mormon studies. In this issue Ben Park reviews two particularly relevant works of history, David F. Holland's *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* and Eran Shalev's *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, both of which deal with the Book of Mormon in the larger context of religious writing in America in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Finally, Roger Terry looks at Brant A. Gardner's *The Gift and Power of God: Translating the Book of Mormon*, in which Gardner—the author of the most substantial commentary on the Book of Mormon published to date—provides a detailed defense of some of his exegetical and interpretive presuppositions.

In the future, we also plan to include shorter notes in the *Journal* that briefly introduce research on various topics related to the Book of Mormon. Some notes may develop into full-length articles and some may remain as is. Two such notes are included in this issue. In the first, Kimberly M. Berkey, a promising young Book of Mormon scholar, argues for a discernible structure in Alma 13 that problematizes standard interpretations of that text. In the second note, Brad Kramer, a trained anthropologist, notes the anthropological significance of parallels between the resurrection narratives of the New Testament and the folklore surrounding the Three Nephites.

We should also note that with this new direction, the *Journal* is returning to the smaller 6 × 9 format (the common size of academic journals) and fewer images.

Finally, the new editorial team consists of Brian M. Hauglid, editor; Mark Alan Wright, associate editor; and Joseph M. Spencer, associate editor. An editorial advisory board has also been formed with both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars.

We thank the inestimable Shirley Ricks, the production editor, who has worked with the *Journal* since its inception, Andrew Heiss for typesetting this issue, Joe Bonyata for his oversight, and Angela Barrionuevo and Don Brugger for their proofreading.