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**Title** Testaments: The Literary Riches of the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract** Review of *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (2003), by David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes.

# TESTAMENTS: THE LITERARY RICHES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Stephen D. Ricks

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Over the past two years I have been teaching a Gospel Doctrine class. This year's course of study is the Book of Mormon. I was utterly delighted to have received a copy of *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* by David Bokovoy, a promising graduate student at Brandeis and formerly a seminary teacher in Tooele, Utah, and John Tvedtnes, research associate at FARMS and author of works of patient brilliance on a wide range of topics, including the religion of ancient Israel, Second Temple (intertestamental) Judaism, the New Testament, early Christianity, the Book of Mormon, and other Latter-day Saint scripture.

*Testaments* contains brief essays on the linguistic and literary patterns that mirror the Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern background of the Book of Mormon, including chapters on "Christ in the Testaments," "The Role of a Prophet," "Rod as a Symbol of Power," "Merism," "Firstborn in the Wilderness," "Seidel's Law," "The Symbolic Value of Clothing," "A Poetic Function of Enallage," "The Personification of Death and Hell," "Wrestling before God," "Confession of Sins before Execution," "Cities and Lands in the Book of Mormon,"

Review of David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes. *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*. Tooele, UT: Heritage, 2003. vii + 232 pp. \$16.95.

and “Hebrew in the Book of Mormon.” Of the 36 chapters, two-thirds were written by Bokovoy (1–3, 5–8, 10–15, 20–24, 27–29, 33, 34); one-third by Tvedtnes (4, 9, 16, 17, 19, 25, 26, 30–32); and two chapters by both (18, 35).

Let us consider two brief chapters from the book as examples of the quality of writing of the two authors in the task. Chapter 19, entitled “Choirs Above,” is only three pages long but is a tour de force of learning dense with detailed insights from Tvedtnes (pp. 132–34). After citing Mosiah 2:28, “I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood, . . . that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God,” he quotes three other Book of Mormon passages dealing with choirs of angels or “choirs above” (1 Nephi 1:18; Alma 36:22; Mormon 7:7) and the Doctrine and Covenants, which speaks of “shining seraphs around thy throne, with acclamations of praise, singing Hosanna to God and the Lamb!” (D&C 109:79). Tvedtnes cites several verses from the Pseudepigrapha mentioning angelic choirs and mortals “being taken to heaven and singing with the host of angels” (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 17:4–18:1; *Testament of Isaac* 6:6; *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* [Akhmimic] 8:2–3; *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 8:16–17; 9:29–32; *3 Enoch* 1:10–12, p. 133). He also notes a passage from the Dead Sea Scrolls *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH III, 22–24) in which “humans will sing in the angelic chorus” (p. 133); cites a verse in the *Zohar* (a medieval Jewish text), Exodus 19a; returns to the Benjamin materials (Mosiah 2:1); and notes more than a dozen Old Testament references. Observing that “King Benjamin was at the temple at the time he spoke of the heavenly choir (Mosiah 2:1),” Tvedtnes concludes that “it is likely that his discourse and the designation of his son Mosiah as the new king occurred at the Israelite feast of tabernacles, when a choir of Levites sang in imitation of the choir of angels” (p. 134). This chapter repays multiple readings.

In equal measure, in the five-page chapter 22 on “Heaven and Earth” (pp. 144–48), Bokovoy gives his readers sparkling insights into the phrase *heaven and earth* as “merismus,” the use of “two opposite

word pairs, to express the concept of *all* or *every*” (p. 144). After quoting Mosiah 4:9, “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend,” Bokovoy cites the Book of Mormon and the Bible several times as well as three ancient Mesopotamian texts, including the Assyrian Esarhaddon Treaty (“you are adjured by *all* the gods of *every* land, you are adjured by the gods of heaven and earth,” p. 144), the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* (“When *heaven* above was not yet even mentioned, firm-set *earth* below called by no name,” p. 145), and from the Sumerian *Birth of Man* (“In days of yore, the days when *heaven* and *earth* had been [fashioned], in the nights of yore, the nights when *heaven* and *earth* had been fashioned,” p. 145) to further illustrate the use of *heaven and earth* to mean the universe.

It would have been useful for *Testaments* to have a scriptural index and a subject index. I would appreciate both, but would be satisfied with a scriptural index alone.

This book could easily be used as a source for Gospel Doctrine class lessons. Oh, and by the way, I plan to continue to use it as a reference tool.