



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 19 | Number 1

Article 4

2007

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Sorenson, John L. (2007) "Valuing Davis Bitton," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol19/iss1/4>

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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Valuing Davis Bitton

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Reference *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 9-11.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Sorenson reminisces about his experiences with Davis Bitton, telling of Bitton's love for truth, God, family, and friends.

VALUING DAVIS BITTON

John L. Sorenson

I could not summarize, let alone relate, the important events in the life of Davis Bitton. My purpose now is not to relate his life but to evaluate it. That may seem presumptuous. He will be judged by a better judge than any of us. So this is not a judgment except to point out some ways in which I knew our friend. His life experience may be of benefit as an example or model for our enrichment. My observations come from forty-three years of friendship with him. I speak simply of what he has meant to me. You may know him more fully than I do or in a different manner, and it is understandable that some may have different views.

He loved the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I cannot give a higher compliment than that. At the same time he was humble and discerning enough to suppose that neither he nor any others of us mortals can do more than *approach* the whole truth. That is what he desired, and he approached it as far as he was able.

He was honest and moral in the fullest sense of the term *moral*, and he liked to be with honest and moral people.

He was a saint, a Latter-day Saint, whether one capitalizes the label or not. He believed—that is, he had a full conviction—that we and our sphere here were created by God for his announced purposes.

This is a slightly edited version of a talk given at the funeral of Davis Bitton, 17 April 2007, Salt Lake City, Utah.

He believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and the Savior of all humankind.

He believed that the original gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored to the earth in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and that it continued to be taught and expounded by subsequent prophets up through Gordon B. Hinckley.

He worshipped God with his whole heart, soul, and mind, especially his mind. He was well equipped to do that, not being afraid to exercise his considerable capacities for the Lord's cause and for the good of God's children. He gave effective service to society, not only to society in general and to academics, but to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to his fellow humans as he encountered them.

He loved his family, and he had many friends. He cultivated faith, hope, and charity toward those with whom he dealt.

He was faithful in keeping his promises to God, to his loved ones, and to his fellows, including me. He was a diligent worker, never a slacker. If he had idle moments, he was probably thinking of how he could use his time better. He endured adversity but rose above it.

Some of you may feel that what I have sketched just now is too idealistic a picture of him—that he had flaws on which I have chosen not to dwell—and I cannot doubt that he had unmentioned flaws. All men and women do. In my evaluation I have tried to do what I could to express briefly my regard for the value of the life of this good man. In the same manner, if I were evaluating the apostle Peter on the basis of the New Testament, I would find recorded there some obvious weaknesses, and I could mention those just as I could have tried to detect the weaknesses in Davis. But Peter turned out to be one of the favored children of the Lord who rose above his temporary follies to become a perfected judge over us all. It is not the “raw” Peter that I would celebrate, but the “cooked” Peter at the close of his life. In the same way I acknowledge the developing and still-striving Davis who was perhaps not yet all he might have been.

Finally, indulge me in a moment of irony. I understand from the editorial staff of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon

Studies (now the Maxwell Institute) that, when Davis was acting as editor in preparing a Festschrift in my honor ten years ago, he kept trying to hurry that work along because he thought I might be gone before the book was done. And here is the irony: My wife Helen told me just recently that should Davis still be in the land of the living at the time of *my* funeral—she would ask him to speak for me. Well, it has proven otherwise, but we will meet again before long in a place where there is no narcolepsy nor aching backs for either of us. We can renew our friendship and give thanks to each other for the benefits of friendship. Davis was a dear friend, a valued compatriot, and a blessed example, and I commend his life to you to benefit and enrich your own.