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Project Updates

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PROJECT UPDATES

Linguistic Report Submitted

Brian Stubbs has completed and submitted to F.A.R.M.S. his 93 page report entitled "Observations in Uto-Aztecan." Stubbs has been assisted by a research grant from the Foundation. His report concludes that there exists a possibility that "something Semitic" exists as a "substantial element of a proto Uto-Aztecan creole." (A creole is a mixture of two languages, for example, using the grammar of one and the vocabulary of another.)

He compares several hundred lexical sets showing similarities between Near Eastern Semitic languages and several branches of the New World Uto-Aztecan dialects. Stubbs finds that there are enough lexical, morphological, and root-specific semantic similarities that it would be difficult to attribute them all to chance.

These comparisons are representative: in Hebrew *dood* means beloved one or uncle, and *doda* means aunt. In Papago *daada-j* means mother's elder sister. Likewise, in Hebrew *hamar* means to cover or smear, while in Cahuilla *humay* means to smear or paint.

Research Corner: Synagogues in the Book of Mormon

Looking for an interesting research topic? You might consider studying the development of the synagogue in ancient Israel. It has some interesting possible parallels in the Book of Mormon.

Synagogues are mentioned several times in the Book of Mormon. Places of worship were called synagogues during the time of Nephi and Jacob (2 Ne. 26:26). Several centuries later, they were still being built by the Nephites "after the manner of the Jews" and were used along with temples and other sanctuaries, among other things, as places of preaching (Al. 16:13). Later, particular forms of synagogue worship developed. The Amalekites and Amulonites built synagogues "after the order manner of the Nehors" in the city of Jerusalem joining the borders of Mormon (Al. 21:4), where Ammon preached. The Zoramites also built synagogues in Antionum (Al. 31:12), which contained rameumptoms upon which the elect were allowed to pray.

Several points should be explored here. First is the amount of diversity evident in Book of Mormon synagogues. The institution of the synagogue was not rigid. There were synagogues after the manner of the Jews, after the manner of the Nehors, and in Antionum after a manner which amazed Alma and his companions. Similarly, ancient Israelite communal worship appears to have begun as a flexible practice and was known in several developmental stages.

The earliest hints possibly relevant to the origins and development of the synagogue in Israel are references to "holy convocations" (see Lev. 23:4; 2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 4:5), which according to Louis Finkelstein were the antecedents of the later established synagogue. It is noteworthy that these very early convocations were for the purposes of prayer and worship, which also seems to be the dominant function of the early synagogues in the Book of

Mormon. Nephi expressly calls his synagogues "houses of worship."

It is a matter of much scholarly debate when and how the synagogue as known to later Judaism actually developed. As the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* cautions, the specific origins of the synagogue are too faint "to venture a conjecture in this kind of antiquity." But there are certain possibilities. Some historians see the development of the synagogue occurring during the captivity of the Jews in Babylonia during the Sixth Century B.C. Others point to the Reforms of Josiah in 621 B.C. as giving rise to the use of local congregations for worship, prayer, and instructions among the Israelites. It is, of course, possible that both are right: there is no reason to believe that the Jewish synagogue suddenly came from nowhere and appeared in one instant in its fully developed form as known to later Rabbinic Judaism.

The Book of Mormon, of course, lends credence to the idea that synagogues, at least as places of worship, were known to Israel before the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem. While most scholars focus their attention on the development of the synagogue in post-Exilic Israel, those who discuss the pre-Exilic origins of the synagogue include the following: Leopold Loew, *Gesammelte Schriften*; Julian Morgenstern, *Studi Orientalistici in onore Giorgio Levi Della Vida*; Louis Finkelstein (long-time Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America); Azriel Eisenberg, and others. Weingreen in *Hermathena* (1964) writes: "It would be natural to suppose that, following upon the enforcement of Josiah's edict, religious services continued to be held outside Jerusalem, but now without sacrifices. . . . These must . . . have constituted the basis of the synagogue service of later times." An extensive treatment of all sides of the history of the synagogue can be found in Joseph Gutmann, *The Synagogue* (New York: Ktav, 1975).

Another aspect of this study would examine the name *synagogue*. The word *synagogue* is of Greek origin. It is the term used in the Septuagint to translate several Hebrew words ranging from *camp* to *assembly*, *community*, and *congregation*. The Hebrew roots involved here should be explored to cast light on the underlying practices of ancient Israel. Of course, we do not know what Hebrew or other word the Nephites or Zoramites used in naming their places of worship. It is interesting to note, however, that the word *synagogue* is made from two parts: the prefix *syn* which means together and the verb *ago* which means to gather or to bring together. Interestingly, in Alma 31:12 the phrase "gather together" appears in immediate literal conjunction with the term *synagogue*: "the Zoramites had built synagogues and they did gather themselves together."

Obviously, considerably more work will be needed before we fully will understand, if we indeed ever will, even the basic nature of ancient Israelite places of worship, their sanctuaries, temples, and the names by which they knew them. This history, however, is significant and takes on particular interest to the student of the Book of Mormon.

EN ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸ