



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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## Research Corner

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## ANCIENT CHRISTIAN WRITINGS AVAILABLE

The long-awaited first volume of Doubleday's landmark publication of the Pseudepigrapha is off the press — and the best deal anywhere for getting a copy is through F.A.R.M.S.

What is the Pseudepigrapha? This is a collection of books written by Jews and Christians between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. that were never included in the Bible, and are not classified with the Apocrypha or the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were generally written in the name of some Old Testament hero (the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Testament of Job) and they often reflect traditions with early roots.

Seventy years ago only 13 such writings were known. The 1983 Doubleday publication includes more than 80.

This tremendous outpouring of information has enhanced our knowledge of early Christianity, of ancient Judaism, and consequently of Jesus. Many of these early Judaeo-Christian traditions are reflected in the Book of Mormon.

How can you order this important volume? It normally retails for \$35.00. By using the enclosed F.A.R.M.S. order form you can get this valuable work for only \$23.00. We are indebted to Doubleday, to Professor James H. Charlesworth, and to Dr. David Noel Freedman (Editor of the Doubleday Anchor Bible Series) for extending this extraordinary privilege.

## CONTEST WINNERS

The Comprehensive Bibliography of the Book of Mormon keeps growing. Thanks to many people who sent in additions and corrections to the bibliography prepared by Gary Gillum and Jack Welch last year, that listing has increased from 1700 to over 2000 entries.

The Bibliography contest winners were John A. Tvedtnes (81 additions), Salt Lake City, UT., Wade Lillywhite (53), Santa Ana, CA, and Ross Geddes (28), Mansfield, Australia. F.A.R.M.S. is pleased to award them autographed copies of recent publications about the Book of Mormon.

Ed Snow helped enter these changes and additions into the bibliography computer data base.

## HELP US BUILD A LIBRARY

"What would you think about building a first-rate research collection of scholarly materials about the Book of Mormon?" asks F.A.R.M.S. President John W. Welch, who adds, "We think it would be a big step forward in facilitating Book of Mormon research." And this dream may not be too far off.

F.A.R.M.S. has begun seriously collecting books and articles on the Book of Mormon. In addition to the rare first edition of the Book of Mormon which was recently donated to F.A.R.M.S., participants have donated original copies of Hugh Nibley's *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1957), Sidney B. Sperry's *Ancient Records Testify* (1938), John A. Widtsoe's *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon* (1937), Franklin S. Harris' *Book of Mormon Message and Evidences* (1953), B.H. Roberts' *New Witnesses for God* (1926), and many other valuable papers and articles.

If you have any books which would help build this research base, ask yourself how useful they might be to the Foundation. Help us create a complete Book of Mormon collection. If we, together, don't do it — who will?

## RESEARCH CORNER

New ideas keep cropping up. Here are a few of the more striking points that researchers have recently noticed.

### *Nephi's Bow*

Alan Goff has submitted a paper suggesting that the ancient Near Eastern practice of "breaking the bow" may shed light on the account of Nephi breaking his bow in 1 Ne 16. An article in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69 (1978) pp. 82-88, demonstrates that symbolic meaning was attached to the breaking of a bow. Kings would break the bows of disobedient vassals, and in Psalms God is asked to break the bows of the wicked. The bow was a symbol of power and leadership.

*Nephi's report of his broken bow need not be read symbolically*, but his brothers may have seen it that way in light of their ancient Near Eastern backgrounds. It was immediately after Nephi made his new bow and thus had the only bow in camp that his brothers complained that Nephi had "taken it upon him to be our ruler." 1 Ne 16:36.

### *Ammon and Cutting off the Arms of Enemies*

Another observation bears out an odd but ancient practice reflected in Alma 17:39 where Ammon returned to King Lamoni "bearing the arms which had been smitten off . . . of those who sought to slay him; and they were carried in unto the king for a testimony of the things which they had done."

The practice of cutting off the arms of enemies, specifically as a testimony of the conquest of victims, is attested in Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, Vol. 2 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), p. 399. The extreme left of band 4 of the Gates of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) shows the Assyrian troops cutting off the head, feet and hands of vanquished enemies. "In other reliefs, the artists of the Assyrian kings depict the military scribes recording the number of enemy dead in accordance with the number of severed heads, hands and feet which Assyrian soldiers hold up before them."

### *The Sword of Laban, Nephi's Steel Bow, and The Brass Plates*

Christopher Munson has conducted further research into the metal alloys known and used in the Near East at or before the time of Lehi. There are several interesting instances of steel.

A dagger with a gold hilt found in Tutankhamen's tomb is reminiscent of Nephi's description of the sword of Laban. "The haft of the dagger is of granulated gold, embellished at intervals with collars of Cloisonne work of colored rock crystal, but the astonishing and unique feature of this beautiful weapon is that the blade is of iron still bright and resembling steel."

A brittle, carbonized iron called Martensite was also commonly produced. Nephi's steel bow that broke may have been made of this alloy.

Regarding brass (an alloy of copper and zinc), Munson points out that bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) frequently contained small amounts of zinc as well. Although high quality brass contains a high percentage of zinc, lesser amounts of zinc would produce brass-like alloys which would be soft enough to inscribe — but more tarnish-resistant than common bronze. Lehi was impressed that the Plates of Brass would not "be dimmed any more by time." 1 Ne 5:19.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲדָמָה הָיְתָה תְרוֹ וְכֹהוּ יְהוָה