The Editor's Notebook

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Title  The Editor’s Notebook

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Abstract  Introduction to the current issue.
Some people see great potential for research to turn up new ways of seeing and thinking about the world. Others tend to feel that everything important must already have been discovered. For the latter, “research” means finding authorities who offer a confident answer to each question that occurs to us to ask. For the former, the best part of any question is the quest part.

Brigham Young once observed, “A spirit and power of research is planted within [humans], yet they remain undeveloped.”1 He also said, “If I do not learn what is in the world, from first to last, somebody will be wiser than I am. I intend to know the whole of it, both good and bad.”2

Book of Mormon studies is one special manifestation of that general curiosity that Brother Brigham recommended. Simply treading the same mental and spiritual ground year after year as we examine the scripture may not advance our understanding as much as it puts us to sleep. For us to read scripture doggedly time after time may yield little new insight or appreciation of what the text contains that might inspire. We might well gain more by pausing to ask, “Why did the Lord make this statement at this historical moment?” or, more specifically, “Why did Book of Mormon writers use the name Jehovah only twice in the entire text—and one of those in the last verse of the book?” Just as challenging is seeking new depth in a word we have read so many times that we no longer think about its meaning—for example, what does it mean to “harrow up” a person’s soul (2 Nephi 9:47; Mormon 5:8)?

All the authors whose work we publish offer us new views of expressions that may have become commonplace in our reading. That is what research is about—to crack open previously closed windows of our minds. This issue of the Journal offers a new tool to help us do so. Dr. Cynthia Hallen, a linguist at BYU, starts a new department entitled “What’s in a Word?” As she pursues her own quest for new understanding, she will share items of interest that will extend and enrich our grasp of scripture.
“What Meaneth the Words That Are Written?” Abinadi Interprets Isaiah Ann Madsen


2. The brass plates version of Isaiah prefaces the name of Isaiah, as the Dead Sea Scrolls document called the Great Isaiah Scroll, by about 400 years. The KJV Old Testament. So the writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon become the earliest text of Isaiah available to us.

3. 1 Nephi 3:17–20 implies that the record on the brass plates would have perished if Nephi had not recovered it. On the importance of this record, see 1 Nephi 5:17–19. 3 Nephi 10:17 offers an example of other precious material found in the brass plates concerning the “seed of Joseph.”


5. In my edition of the scriptures, Abinadi’s response runs for nearly five pages, including the last verse of Isaiah 12 and the entirety of Mosiah 13–16.


10. Ed. Cook, 64.


13. Hugh W. Nibley offers an additional view: “Why would help come from the mountains? That is explained very well in those wonderful verses of Isaiah which the prophet Abinadi uses so effectually, Isaiah 52:7 . . . . How beautiful upon the mountainside are the feet of him who brings good tidings”—literally, are the legs of the runner who brings good news and who causes us to hear that there is peace. . . . Abinadi is announcing that from the other side of the mountain, from the other world, comes the good news. This is revelation. It’s the welcome messenger from the other world, the angel who brings us the gospel—who brings us the message of salvation, who brings us the message of peace, which you don’t find on this side of the mountain.” (“The Mountain of the Lord’s House,” lecture 16 of Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price [series of videotaped lectures], from a 1988 honors class at Brigham Young University on the Pearl of Great Price], transcript pp. 8–9).


15. In Alma 32, Alma expounds the method whereby this change can occur.

16. The descriptive material for this article was compiled by Kirk Henrichsen, of the staff of the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City, who kindly offered it for use in the Journal.


18. Times and Seasons, 1 March 1842 (also known as the Wentworth Letter), “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” Book of Mormon; and Orson Pratt, in a pamphlet titled An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records (Edinburgh, Scotland: Ballantine and Hughes, May 1840), 12–13. The Wentworth Letter, the Prohet Joseph Smith’s sketch of the history and faith of the Latter-day Saints written for the editor of the Chicago Democrat, utilizes much of the same language found in Pratt’s pamphlet. Although Pratt did not see or handle the plates, he learned much about them through his close association with Joseph Smith. Nowhere in the documentary evidence did the witnesses or other key participants in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon describe the plates as being made of solid or pure gold.


22. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 3:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not an eyewitness of the plates.

23. Ibid., 19:211–12, 9 December 1877.

24. David Whitmer interview, Edward Stevenson diary, 22–23 October 1877, Historical Department Archives, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Original capitalization and punctuation have been modernized. In Stevenson’s interview, Whitmer recounted his mother’s description of the rings. He says, “I have seen them. . . . They were filled with gold.” (Edward Stevenson diary, 22–23 October 1877, Historical Department Archives, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). So the writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, which the prophet Abinadi uses so effectively, Isaiah 52:7 . . . , are missed by those who don’t understand that when the full stack of plates were positioned on a table, the open rings would be located on the reader’s right side. The sealed portion would probably be located at the bottom on the left-hand side of the sealed plates on top so that they would open to the right.


29. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 3:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not an eyewitness of the plates.

30. Ibid., 19:211–12, 9 December 1877.

31. David Whitmer interview, Edward Stevenson diary, 22–23 October 1877, Historical Department Archives, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.


33. David Whitmer interview, Kansas City Journal, 5 June 1881, 1.


36. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 3:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not an eyewitness of the plates.


38. Testament of Eight Witnesses


42. Ibid. 1842, 707.


ENDNOTES