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The Newsletter of
the Foundation for
Ancient Research &
Mormon Studies

INSIGHTS

AN ANCIENT WINDOW

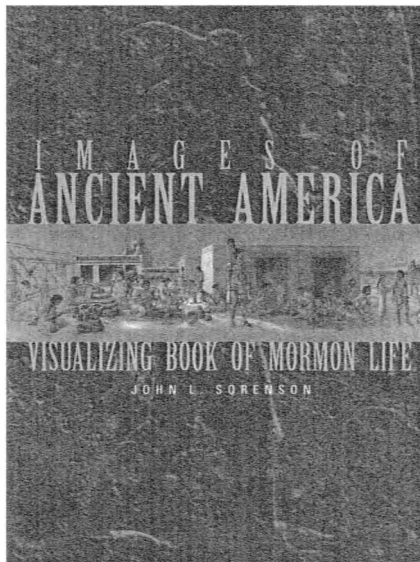
April 1998

"by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118)

***Images of Ancient America* Connects Mesoamerican Peoples and Lands to the Book of Mormon**

Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life, by John L. Sorenson, richly portrays the daily lives of the ancient peoples of Mesoamerica and their likely connections to the record known as the Book of Mormon. This full-color, large-format volume, the newest release from FARMS, contains careful research and over five hundred high-quality illustrations and photographs that shape vague ghosts from the past into flesh-and-blood people.

The book discusses and displays the whole range of life



among Mesoamericans. Each section includes information about Mesoamerica and the people who inhabited that land and special subsections that describe how that information relates to Book of Mormon lands and peoples.

The first section addresses "The Land and the Peoples." Mesoamerica—Mexico and Central America—was home to the highest civilization in the Western Hemisphere before the Spanish Conquest. The people who inhabited those lands lived in mountainous areas in relatively small communities.

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New Volume Explores King Benjamin's Speech

A long-awaited, 679-page volume on King Benjamin's speech has just come off the press—one of four books that FARMS is pleased to have published independently in 1998 (see the articles above and on page 4). Edited by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* is the culmination of many years' research on numerous aspects of this profound address.

Never before has such detailed examination been

given to Benjamin's speech. In the first essay, Elder Neal A. Maxwell discusses the main spiritual messages and personal character of Benjamin and sees the speech as a manual for discipleship. The following essays elaborate on its historical setting and Benjamin's place in Nephite history, introduce its characteristics as a masterful oration, and examine its role as a traditional farewell address in the ancient world.

Hugh W. Nibley expands our understanding of the importance of great assemblies, specifically focusing on the coronation assembly. He discourses on the principles of government and eloquently summarizes the consequences of the atonement and its efficacy in our lives.

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**Board elects
new president.**

See page 3.



The Foundation for
Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies

FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 117

Drought in the Time of Abraham

Recent evidence of a three-hundred-year drought in ancient Mesopotamia is consistent with references in the Bible and in the book of Abraham to famine during Abraham's time (see Genesis 12:10; Abraham 1:29–30; 2:1, 4–5, 15–17).

Two early Jewish texts, the first-century-B.C. book of *Jubilees* and Philo's first-century-A.D. *De Abrahamo*, mention a famine in Abraham's homeland of Ur.¹ Neither source was available to Joseph Smith. A recent issue of *Discover* magazine describes scientific research indicating a major drought in the Near East that lasted from about 2200 to 1900 B.C., which covers the time when Abraham lived.² A summary of those findings follows.

In 1966 British archaeologist James Mellaart suggested that drought caused the fall of several Near Eastern civilizations³ near the end of the third millennium B.C. Evidence for such a widespread drought has been uncovered in recent years by Harvey Weiss, professor of Near Eastern archaeology at Yale University. During excavations in 1993 at Tell Leilan in the Habur Plains in northeast Syria, Weiss noted that the city had been abandoned for about three hundred years, from 2200 to 1900 B.C.

Subsequent soil samples from the site showed that a section dating to the period of the city's abandonment comprised an eight-inch-thick layer of wind-blown sand with no earthworm tunnels, suggestive of a prolonged drought.⁴ Analyses of sediment cores taken from Turkey's Lake Van and from the Gulf of Oman also revealed increased layers of windblown dust at about 2200 B.C. In addition, a recent reexamination of the Greenland ice cores has shown that the Near Eastern drought coincided with a period in which the waters of the Atlantic Ocean had cooled. This cooling would have created a pressure gradient drawing moisture northward and away from the Mediterranean basin.

Weiss has pointed out that there is documentary evidence for the drought as well. One example is a cuneiform text known as the Curse of Akkad, which speaks of "large fields" that "produced no grain" and "heavy clouds" that "did not rain."⁵ Earlier scholars had concluded that these statements were to be taken metaphorically, but the physical evidence now points toward a literal interpretation.

Some scholars, while accepting the possibility of a limited

drought, have been slow to accept the concept of widespread drought because there is evidence that some of the cities in northern Mesopotamia continued to be inhabited during the time that Tell Leilan was abandoned. The book of Abraham, while speaking of famine in the region of Ur and Haran, does not suggest that all the cities were abandoned, only that some people moved on to what they hoped would be greener pastures. Significantly, Tell Leilan is in the same valley as Haran, where Abraham's family had moved during the famine, and some scholars believe that Ur was also located in that region.

NOTES

1. See *Jubilees* 11:11–13; *De Abrahamo* 91. The famine in Ur is also mentioned by some medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writers.

2. See Karen Wright, "Empires in the Dust," *Discover* (March 1998): 94–99.

3. These include Old Kingdom Egypt, the Akkadian empire of Mesopotamia, the early Minoan civilization of Crete, and the Indus Valley civilization.

4. For results of the 1993 studies, see articles in *Science* 261 (20 August 1993).

5. See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (1969), 646–51.

Based on research by John A. Tvedtnes

FARMS Board Elects Oswald as Next President

The FARMS board of trustees has elected Daniel Oswald to serve as the next president of the Foundation. His title will change, becoming executive director of FARMS as the affiliation with Brigham Young University is completed. He replaces Noel B. Reynolds, who has served marvelously as president since November 1991.

Oswald has served for over a year on the board of trustees; before that he served as an energetic volunteer for FARMS in various capacities since 1989, assisting in the strategic planning, development, fund-raising, and public communications efforts of the Foundation.

Reynolds has played a key role at an important time in the life of the Foundation. Under his direction, FARMS has faced significant opportunities and challenges connected with tremendous growth in resources, projects, and staff and with a changing relationship with Brigham Young University, culminating in the invitation to become part of the university. The board of trustees gave him heartfelt thanks for his service. He will continue to serve as a member of the board and be involved in FARMS projects and publications.

The board also expressed great confidence in Dan Oswald's ability to provide leadership for the Foundation. "He brings a unique blend of training and experience to the position that should serve FARMS well," said Daniel C. Peterson, chairman of the FARMS board of trustees. "We are fortunate that Dan is willing to devote this level of



time and energy to the Foundation."

Oswald is a native of Zurich, Switzerland, and completed his undergraduate education at the University of Zurich. He then came to BYU for graduate studies, receiving a masters of business administration from the Marriott School of Management and a juris doctorate from the J. Reuben Clark Law School at BYU.

After completing those studies, he took a position as strategy consultant with the London office of a leading international strategy consulting firm that serves clients in a number of industries worldwide. Later he returned to Salt Lake City to practice law with an established law firm until 1991.

Since then he has served as president and chief executive officer of Multiling International in Provo, which provides translation software products and services to corporations conducting international business. Multiling is now part of the Star group of companies, with offices in

Asia, Europe, and North America.

"Dan's business experience and skills will strengthen FARMS operations," says Peterson, "and his international experience will help FARMS provide better services to students of the scriptures outside the United States."

Oswald has also provided service and gained experience as a member of the board of a variety of corporations and non-profit organizations, such as the Society for the Industry of Multilingual Communication and Technology and the Utah Chamber Artists, among others.

He served a mission in England and Wales and has served extensively in a variety of church positions in Switzerland, England, and the United States. He is married to Tamara Bischoff, and they are the parents of six children.

The Nibley corner

Deadline for Nibley Fellowships

Each year FARMS grants fellowships in the name of Hugh Nibley to promising graduate students pursuing degrees in fields of interest to FARMS. The fellowships honor Nibley's contributions to LDS scholarship. They are intended to help young scholars make contributions to research in fields related to ancient scripture.

Interested students should contact M. Gerald Bradford at the FARMS office. The deadline is 1 June 1998.

New FARMS publications

New Volume of Research Honors John L. Sorenson

To many, John L. Sorenson is best known for his research on the lands and cultures of Book of Mormon peoples, the topic of his 1985 book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, and the focus of his most recent book, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (see article on page 1). A highly trained anthropologist, Sorenson has often broken new ground in other areas of his discipline as well, such as his penetrating empirical studies of Mormon culture. Aside from teaching courses in anthropology and archaeology at BYU for many years, Sorenson worked in the private sector as a social scientist specializing in urban and military matters. Now retired, he actively pursues the interests that first captivated him: the cultures of Book of Mormon peoples, ancient civilizations in general, and his own Mormon society as a shaper of his life.

As a tribute to this consummate Latter-day Saint scholar, historian Davis Bitton has edited a volume of multidisciplinary studies that complement Sorenson's own wide-ranging research interests. *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (published by FARMS, now available through the enclosed order form) opens with a biographical sketch of Sorenson based on Bitton's recent oral history interviews of his colleague. Enriching this material with personal observations gleaned from more than thirty years of friendship, Bitton probes a dozen chronological periods to trace the experiences and influences that helped forge Sorenson's keen intellect and unique talents. The rest of the book presents new scholarly research from Sorenson's colleagues and former students and is divided into three categories: "Mormon History and Culture," "Elucidating the Book of Mormon," and "The Ancient World." The contributors are scholars from universities in California, Oregon, and Utah.

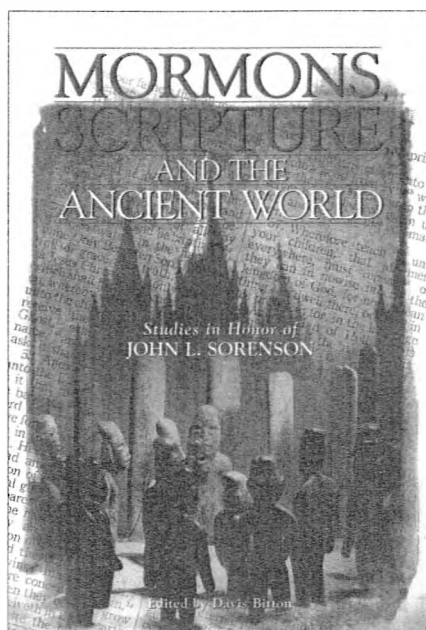
In "Baptized, Consecrated, and Sealed: The Covenantal Foundations of Mormon Religious

Identity," anthropologist Steven L. Olsen discusses three key concepts of Mormonism—the Church of Christ, Zion, and the house of Israel—and their implications for understanding Mormon social behavior and history. Davis Bitton's "Mormon Funeral Sermons in the Nineteenth Century" analyzes Mormon eulogies from the past century to identify

the standard features of this distinctive form of discourse. History professor David J. Whittaker chronicles the church's struggles to establish a California-based printing operation in "Parley P. Pratt and the Pacific Mission: Mormon Publishing in 'That Very Questionable Part of the Civilized World.'" Historian James B. Allen, in "The Rise and Decline of the LDS Indian Student Placement Program, 1947–1996," relates experiences of placement students and their foster parents and evaluates the program's overall effectiveness in light of its educational and religious aims. In "Mormon Intruders in Tonga: The Passport

Act of 1922," another historian, R. Lanier Britsch, details the surprising concatenation of events that led to the repeal of a discriminatory law that threatened to cripple missionary work in Tonga.

The section on Book of Mormon topics begins with former FARMS president Noel B. Reynolds's "Nephite Kingship Reconsidered," which explores four political themes in the Book of Mormon that help illuminate the character of Nephite government. In "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," Arabist Daniel C. Peterson discusses the ancient Israelite tradition concerning the goddess Asherah and points out how the account of Nephi's vision of the tree of life implies Nephi's familiarity with that tradition. In "A Singular Reading: The Māori and the Book of Mormon," political scientist Louis Midgley describes from firsthand experience how the Māori of the early 1950s, because of their unique cultural background, resonated more to the implicit messages of the Book



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New Volume of Research Honors John L. Sorenson

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of Mormon narratives than to the book's isolated doctrinal teachings. "Pattern and Purpose of the Isaiah Commentaries in the Book of Mormon," a paper by comparative literature professor Garold N. Davis, focuses on the unity and import of the Book of Mormon prophets' inspired commentary on Isaiah's writings.

Of the four chapters in the final section, two deal with matters suggestive of transoceanic diffusion between the Old and New Worlds. In "Resist-Dyeing as a Possible Ancient Transoceanic Transfer," UC Davis textiles specialist Stephen C. Jett compares textile arts in both hemispheres involving shared techniques too complex to be attributed to independent development. In the next chapter, "Pre-Columbian American Sunflower and Maize Images in Indian Temples: Evidence of Contact between Civilizations in India and America," University of Oregon geographer Carl L. Johannessen argues that temple carvings in India that depict the American crop plants maize and sunflowers constitute compelling evidence for the diffusion hypothesis. In the third, law professor John W. Welch, in his paper

"Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon," discusses how features typical of ancient Hebrew, Greek, and other forms of legal documentation are reflected in the construction of the Book of Mormon record. In the final chapter, "Festivals as Context for Exchange in the Great Basin-Columbia Plateau Region of Western North America," anthropology professor Joel C. Janetski presents evidence indicating that annual festivals among the early peoples of the western United States were important links in a structured system of trade and cultural exchange that spanned the continent.

An additional feature of this book is the bibliographic record of Sorenson's works. Compiled by David J. Whittaker, this registry documents Sorenson's prodigious research and writing efforts that have spanned nearly fifty years.

Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World offers readers intriguing new research as well as a sampling of the kind of engrossing inquiry that characterizes the life work of an exceptional Latter-day Saint scholar.

Publicly speaking

BYU Symposium Honors Renowned LDS Scholar

Scholars who contributed to the newly released FARMS book *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* presented their papers at a symposium held at Brigham Young University on 21 March 1998. Sponsored by the BYU Department of Anthropology and FARMS, the half-day event featured seven LDS scholars who summarized their recent research and then responded to questions from the audience.

Both sessions of the conference reflected broad areas of interest to John Sorenson, who attended the event along with about three hundred participants. The first session, "The Book of Mormon and the Ancient World," was conducted by University of Utah emeritus professor of history Davis Bitton, editor of the honorary volume, and included presentations by Daniel C. Peterson, Louis C. Midgley,

Stephen C. Jett, and Joel C. Janetski.

The second session, titled "Mormon History and Culture," was conducted by M. Gerald Bradford, director of research for FARMS, and included papers by Davis Bitton, Steven L. Olsen, and R. Lanier Britsch.

For summaries of the papers presented at this conference, see the article on page 4 of this issue of *INSIGHTS*.

Attendees described the symposium as a delightful potpourri—not only because of the diverse topics and academic disciplines represented, but also because of the geographical areas covered in the various lines of research: the ancient Near East, New Zealand, Tonga, southern Asia, South America, India, and the Great Basin of the western United States.

FARMS project report

Imaging the Fire-Damaged Petra Scrolls

A FARMS-sponsored team specializing in state-of-the-art imaging technology is producing remarkable images of the Petra scrolls.

These ancient papyrus documents were found in a charred heap during the 1993 excavation of a sixth-century Byzantine church in Petra, in southwestern Jordan.

The American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan, asked the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART), a subsidiary of FARMS, and BYU's College of Electrical Engineering to perform multispectral imaging (MSI) on the 152 scrolls that had been unrolled.

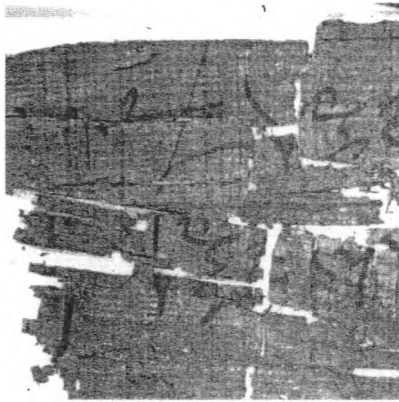
The tightly wrapped scrolls somehow survived the fire that gutted the church long ago, but they are marginally readable.

In January 1998 Gene Ware of Electrical Engineering, Steven W. Booras of CPART, and BYU graphic design student Omar Kamal traveled to Amman to determine the best method of imaging the Petra scrolls. After trying several methods, the team obtained optimal results using a computer-controlled digital camera with a tunable filter. Surpassing conventional photography and even infrared techniques in this application, multispectral imaging within the green band of the visible color spectrum has produced exceptional images in which the flat-black ink of the script is easily distinguishable from the glossy-black background of the burned papyri. These improved images will greatly facilitate the transcription, preservation, and eventual publication of the scrolls.

Using commercial software, the team will piece together the enhanced images to form a seamless mosaic of the fragments. Having determined the best method of imaging the scrolls, the team plans to return to Amman in August 1998 to continue their work.

Written in cursive Greek and dating from A.D. 523 to 559, the scrolls are detailed legal documents concerning real estate transactions, wills, bequests, inheritances, dispute settlements, marriages, and

related matters. *Biblical Archaeologist* notes that these scrolls "constitute the largest group of written material from antiquity in Jordan" and shed light on economic and social aspects during a period that is "otherwise almost a blank page in the history of Petra" ("Conservation of the Petra Papyri," *Biblical Archaeologist* 57/4 [1994]: 243).



Digitally enhanced image of a burned scroll fragment from Petra.

According to Booras, possible future work on the Petra scrolls may entail creating a searchable computer database of the scrolls, complete with images and translations. MSI technology can make other contributions, he says. "I'm fairly confident this technology

can be successfully applied to palimpsest—writing material whose original writing was erased and then overwritten with new text—in order to reveal the underlying text."

Electronic media

Books on CD and Web

Two new FARMS books, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited* and *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, plus other FARMS volumes and more than two thousand other works, are included on a new CD, "Infobases Collectors Library."

Since FARMS has not yet produced its own CD of research materials, the Foundation is happy to make the "Collectors Library" available at a discount as a service to its readers.

Infobases will allow upgrades not only from their own products (Collectors Library 1994, 1995, and 1997) but also from competing products—call for details.

New FARMS publications are also being posted on the FARMS website as fast as our volunteers can manage, so check out www.farmsresearch.com.

“Weasel Words”—a Feature of Careful Scholarship

Sometimes readers misunderstand the careful, deliberate phrasing that scholars commonly employ to ensure accuracy in their assertions. So-called weasel words like *possibly* and *likely* do not simply reflect timidity on the author's part; rather, they are often necessary to avoid overstatement and other misrepresentations of the facts.

Scholars and other careful writers know that all arguments are not created equal. Some points are strong, others are moderate, and some are weak. In most fields, the most interesting work is done on the boundaries, where theories, hypotheses, incomplete data, and uncharted terrain generally leave open ground between right and wrong, between accurate perception and erroneous judgment.

In dealing with scholarly materials, readers must watch for qualifiers that indicate the strength or weakness of a particular position. Writers must also be careful, so that their wording conveys the appropriate degree of certitude or caution. Such rhetorical signals are often sent by adverbs that fall along a spectrum. For example, in stating various degrees of affirmation for an argument, an author might use these crucial qualifying expressions, ranging from strong to weak: *absolutely, certainly, inevitably, conclusively, definitely, obviously, clearly, probably, naturally, reasonably, evidently, likely, plausibly, arguably, apparently, seemingly, may be, might be, perhaps, possibly, could be, imaginably, hypothetically, or supposedly.*

When an author claims that something is “evidently” the case, we assume this means that some significant evidence supports the conclusion. An author's claim that something is “apparently” the case is a weaker assertion, one that only appears to be so, perhaps through circumstantial evidence or remote inference. If we were to assign numerical values indicating degrees of certainty for the following words, our ranking might look something like this: *absolutely* signals that something is more than 99 percent certain; *conclusively* is about 90 percent; *clearly*, 80 percent; *reasonably*, 70 percent; *evidently*, 60 percent; *likely*, more than 50 percent; *plausibly*, 40 percent; *seemingly*, 30 percent; *possibly*, 20 percent; and *imaginably*, less than 5 percent.

While scholars do not usually define exactly

what they mean when they use these words, it would be possible to do so. It has become necessary in the legal world to define what is meant by similar words that define the standard of proof that must be met in a given case. The outcome of many cases hinges on the degree of evidence a party must produce in order to bear his or her burden of proof. Legal evidence is variously described as being beyond a reasonable doubt, dispositive, clear and convincing, substantial, competent, preponderant, probable (as in “probable cause”), plausible, material, relevant, or merely possible (see John W. Welch, “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995], 171).

Many lists of this kind could profitably be created, displaying semantic ranges along various lines. For example, a list can be created for words of negation. A conclusion may be rejected because it is unclear (a fairly mild rebuff that asks for the point to be reconsidered and reformulated), doubtful, unreasonable, or even worse, unimaginable. A list of such words might include, ranging from weak to strong rejection, *unclear, obscure, uncertain, confused, inconclusive, doubtful, unlikely, improbable, implausible, unreasonable, illogical, contradictory, impossible, unimaginable, or preposterous.*

Because scholars do not have rigid definitions, readers must attempt to discern what an author is saying whenever these sorts of words are encountered. Even though these gradations may operate only implicitly in scholarly discourse, they are important markers that often dictate what is actually being said or not said.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is the use of adverbs that may be used to modify the words in the previous lists. For example, one might reject a certain claim by saying it is “*completely* unreasonable,” “*highly* unreasonable,” or “*somewhat* unreasonable.” These words of emphasis also fall along a spectrum, something like this, from strong to weak: *completely, totally, emphatically, undoubtedly, clearly, highly, very, really, quite, or somewhat.*

Readers should be on their guard especially against the emotional force conveyed by the strongest of these words. Authors tend to use the

“Weasel Words”—a Feature of Careful Scholarship

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words on this list argumentatively. If a point is clear, the facts will usually speak loudly enough for themselves. When an author adds an adverb of emphasis like *clearly* to the rhetoric of an argument, it may indicate that the evidence is not as strong or as noticeable as the author feels it should be.

The range of things that we may know, conclude, deduce, infer, assert, claim, think, propound, presume, propose, assume, imagine, or suppose is wide. Good scholars will qualify their assertions with the proper degree of caution, for it is just as wrong to understate a case as to overstate it. Similarly, readers should not attribute to an author

either a larger or smaller degree of certitude than the scholar intended to claim for a particular position or assertion.

While these words serve many important purposes in scholarly discourse, by necessity they often are used in hedging or waffling on a point. Thus, on two grounds they may be called “weasel words”—not only in the sense that they may give scholars a way to weasel out of a tight or awkward situation or to hide behind a carefully chosen qualifier, but also in the sense that they help us ferret out the truth or the degree of certainty of what is being said.

King Benjamin’s Speech (continued from page 1)

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch draw on material from the Bible and old Jewish traditions to explore at great length the rich tapestry of the speech in the context of ancient Israelite festivals; threads from observance of the New Year, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles—all part of the autumn festival complex—are interwoven in the setting of Benjamin’s address. Aspects of the sabbatical and jubilee years also appear as a part of these fascinating comparisons.

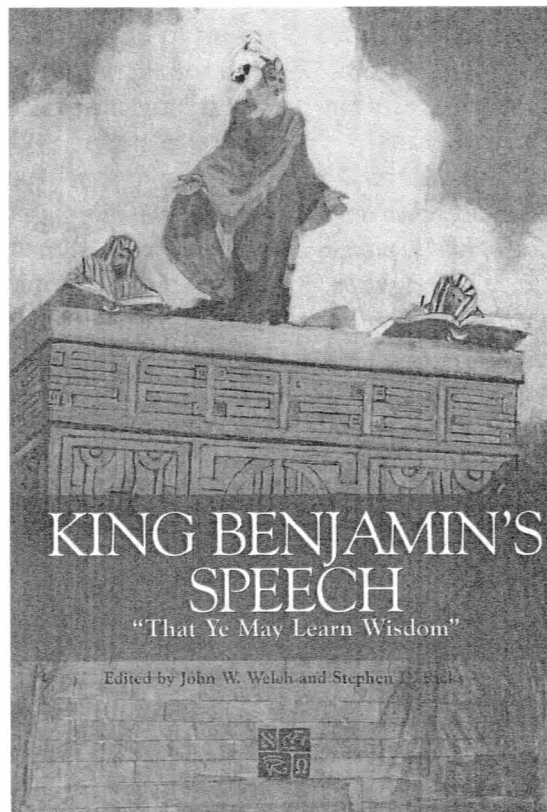
John W. Welch brings his legal background to bear as he compares Benjamin’s oration to a “prophetic lawsuit,” a type of speech form found in the Bible. Stephen D. Ricks compares aspects of kingship, coronation, and covenant known in the ancient world to the significant events of Mosiah 1–6. The nature of priesthood and its relationship to the mystery of spiritual rebirth are topics dealt with by M. Catherine Thomas. Another in-

teresting essay by Welch examines Benjamin’s covenant as a possible precursor to the Nephite sacrament prayers.

The intricate literary structures appearing in Benjamin’s discourse are itemized in extensive detail; the speech contains numerous examples of parallelism, repetition, and chiasmus, evidence of the care Benjamin took in preparing and preserving his words. In the final chapter of the book, Bruce A. Van Orden enumerates the use of Benjamin’s speech in doctrinal applications by General Authorities and a few women leaders in general conference since 1897. Van Orden also surveys the history of scholarly commentary on Benjamin’s speech.

Absolutely not to be overlooked and perhaps the most important part of the volume,

the last 145 pages present the complete text of Benjamin’s speech with notes and commentary on numerous terms and phrases. This useful reference



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Images of Ancient America (continued from page 1)

Because of the terrain, climates varied widely even among locations just a few miles from each other, and people from one community rarely encountered people from another. There was no dominant political empire, and the diverse environments fostered cultural variation.

The next section, "Mesoamerican Civilization," explains that while each ancient Mesoamerican community had its own individual cultural pattern, Mesoamerican civilization consisted of the common features of those cultural patterns. The Spaniards were surprised by the sophistication of the Aztecs, who, although they indulged in barbaric human sacrifices, had a complex social system, dwelt in large cities, and used functional technology. Though their tools were simple, their skills and resourcefulness were remarkable.

The third section depicts aspects of "Life's Routine," including foods, animal use, crafts and tools, markets and commerce, transport, and houses and furnishings.

Section four, "Society," addresses social issues and family relationships, focusing on family and kinship, childhood, youth, community, social rank, women, health, clothing, weaving and textiles, ornamentation, diversions, architecture, and cities, towns, and villages.

The next section, "Government," discusses rulers, taxes, courts and justice, secret groups, and foreign relations.

Section six, "War and the Military," explains

King Benjamin's Speech

(continued from page 8)

tool relates the speech to other scriptures and directs the reader to additional resources. The book concludes with a select bibliography of LDS writings about Benjamin's masterful oration together with scripture and subject indexes.

This book holds rich promise as a valuable resource for study on King Benjamin's speech. These essays help us appreciate the inspiration, wisdom, eloquence, and profound spiritual insight of Benjamin's speech. It was a landmark in its own day, and it still stands as a tower of truth and goodness today.

that although war was the standard state of affairs, it was approached cautiously because of the host of sacred consequences surrounding it. Topics considered are military organization, battle and conquest, weapons and armor, and fortifications.

Section seven, "Belief and Worship," discusses the many aspects of religion that were central to Mesoamerican life, including sacrifices, sacred places, personal worship, burial and afterlife, and priests, prophets, and shamans.

Section eight, "Knowledge Systems," discusses the Mesoamerican calendar and its connections to astronomy and astrology and how unique cultural knowledge was preserved through written records.

The next section, "Arts and Symbols," discusses what art forms and objects the Mesoamericans considered to be beautiful, as well as the symbolism in their art and architecture.

Within each of these sections, Sorenson draws relevant information from the Book of Mormon to show the connections between what scholars have learned about Mesoamerica and what we glimpse from the Book of Mormon of daily life. For example, in the clothing section, he points out that murals and other evidence have led anthropologists to conclude that clothing had considerable social significance: "The wealthy used sumptuous fabrics and inventive decoration to place themselves visually atop a hierarchy of prestige and privilege and to display icons that signaled their social roles. . . . Some materials, like the feathers from certain birds, were prohibited to those not socially entitled to them."

Sorenson then makes clear the connection to the Book of Mormon in a subsection devoted to "Visualizing Book of Mormon Life." He points out that the Book of Mormon is explicit about clothing serving at times as social insignia. He cites an example from Alma's day in which divisions among "the people of the church" were signaled by the wearing of "very costly apparel" (Alma 4:6; see 4:7). He discusses the prophet Samuel and his condemnation of the Nephites because they considered "costly apparel" a key to a man's status as a prophet (Helaman 13:28; see 13:27).

In the section of the book that illustrates the use of symbolism, one specific set of Mesoamerican symbols that is shown and discussed includes various

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Forthcoming publications

FARMS Review of Books 10/1. This issue includes reviews of Quinn's *Same Sex Dynamics*, "The Mormon Puzzle" from the Baptists, and *How Wide the Divide* (by both LDS and non-LDS reviewers). Available in May.

Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 7/1. Don't miss the first issue of the newly formatted journal—the same original research presented in a more user-friendly, illustrated format. Available in July.

Images of Ancient America

(continued from page 9)

reptiles: snakes, crocodiles, and even dragons. One powerful association with these creatures in the minds of the peoples of Mesoamerica was the underworld, the home of the dead. Indeed, for many the earth was considered to rest on the back of a great reptilian monster that floated on the subterranean ocean. Hence reptiles were associated with danger and death.

Similarly, the Book of Mormon uses reptilian imagery in several ways, some of which fit closely with Mesoamerican traditions. Satan is described as "that old serpent" (2 Nephi 2:18; Mosiah 16:3). This image is broadened in other places to include "that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell" (2 Nephi 9:19; see 9:10 and 24:9), associating the reptilian monster not only with the devil but with death and the abode of some of the dead.

Over and over through these sections of *Images of Ancient America*, Sorenson makes connections between the best scholarly evidence about Mesoamerica and details from the Book of Mormon.

The final section of the book, "Book of Mormon Peoples and History," places the Nephite story in the context of Mesoamerican times and places. It relates Mormon's geographical descriptions to Mesoamerica, discusses Nephite history, approximates relationships between Mesoamerican and Book of Mormon peoples especially at crucial points in Nephite history like the apostasy, discusses Book of Mormon lands and natural disasters around the time of the crucifixion, describes the evidence for the destruction of the Nephites, and discusses successor peoples.

Images of Ancient America describes and displays the lands, peoples, and culture of ancient Mesoamerican civilization. It is a book to be savored for its beauty and studied for its accurate and sometimes startling information about Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon. *Images of Ancient America* will help you read—and see—the Book of Mormon in new ways.

INSIGHTS AN ANCIENT WINDOW

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Elder Holland's Published Address on Isaiah Is Also Available on Tape

In the wake of the recent FARMS release of *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (1998), we have received a number of requests for the audiotape of the first chapter by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, which was the keynote address at the FARMS symposium that resulted in the book. We are pleased to make that tape available again at a discount through the order form included with this issue of *INSIGHTS*.

In "More Fully Persuaded': Isaiah's Witness of Christ's Ministry," Elder Holland draws from some of Isaiah's most stirring prophecies as he outlines five crucial aspects of Christ's divine mission: his birth and mortal ministry, his labors in the spirit world, his fatherly care for Zion, his second coming and millennial reign, and his crucifixion and atonement.

Elder Holland concludes his discussion of Isaiah's testimony by commending his audiences to a study of Isaiah 50, 53, and 61, noting that "more beautiful passages do not exist regarding the Savior's atonement and crucifixion." Rather than analyze these momentous prophecies, Elder Holland simply recites them and invites his audience to listen and "enjoy the poetic eloquence of a prophet's testimony."

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