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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 21 | 2001

Number 9

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## Scholar Explains Isaiah's Imagery with Pictures

The book of Isaiah has often been a challenge to students and teachers alike. The prophet Isaiah dressed his prophetic writings in vivid imagery and symbolism that are not always clear to modern readers, whose world is far removed from that of eighth-century-B.C. Israel. A new book by Hebrew scholar Donald W. Parry, *Visualizing Isaiah*, helps bring that world—and Isaiah's prophetic writings—closer to home via a lavish gallery of provocative images with illuminating commentary.

Isaiah, a master poet, expressed his visions and prophecies using imagery and symbolism from the world around him. He used politics, religion, geography, and social conditions in the land of Israel. He also drew on the natural world, including animals, insects, plants, rocks, elements, and heavenly



The many photographs in Parry's book help bring home to modern readers the imagery Isaiah used.

objects. His writings mention colors, foods, armor, weaponry, numbers, occupations, persons, ecclesiastical offices, social relationships, human anatomy, places, and architecture.

Yet many of the symbols that Isaiah used are unfamiliar to

modern readers, while more familiar symbols have changed in meaning since Isaiah's time. This large-format, full-color book features photographs, charts, illustrations, and explanatory commentary to help modern readers understand many of Isaiah's most puzzling symbols.

The illustrations range from herds of sheep to looms and weavers, and from old stone feeding troughs to ancient cisterns and a model of the laver used in Solomon's Temple to hold ceremonial cleansing water. Photographs of ancient cities and ruined

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ISAIAH, BY GUSTAVE DORE

## LDS, Jewish Scholars Share Theological Views in New Book

A new book available through the Institute, *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*, edited by Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (University of Denver, 2001), presents the theological views of Latter-day Saint and Jewish scholars on the concepts of covenant and chosenness in both communities.

Those concepts “resonate deeply in both Mormon and Jewish traditions,” writes Seth Ward in the introduction, and “represent enduring interpretations of scriptural texts and promises, ever present in themes of divine worship and liturgy.”

First delivered at a scholarly conference at the University of Denver in 1998, the 10 papers treat such subjects as the biblical foundations of chosenness (election), Sabbath observance, Joseph Smith's teachings on the stages of covenant, covenant in the Book of Mormon, temple worship, and covenant

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*Lehi Building an Altar of Stones in the Valley of Lemuel, by Clark Kelley Price*

## Lehi's Sacrifices in the Wilderness

Religious life in ancient Israel derived much of its meaning from animal sacrifice. It was this way for Lehi and Sariah and their family members. How do we know? Because at critical moments during their first months away from their Jerusalem home they offered sacrifices. Their acts of devotion open a window onto the Mosaic law and its deep influence in the lives of believers.<sup>1</sup>

Nephi's narrative highlights three occasions when Lehi offered sacrifices (to be distinguished from burnt offerings): when the family arrived at their first campsite (1 Nephi 2:7), when the sons of Lehi returned from Jerusalem with the plates of brass (1 Nephi 5:9), and when the sons returned with the family of Ishmael (1 Nephi 7:22). In


each instance Nephi specifically ties these offerings to expressions of thanksgiving. Such details allow us to understand that these sacrifices were the so-called peace offerings that are mandated in the law of Moses (see Leviticus 3:1–17; 7:11–21; 22:29–30).<sup>2</sup> According to Psalm 107, a person was to “sacrifice the sacrifices of *thanksgiving*” for safety in journeying (v. 22; emphasis added), whether on water<sup>3</sup> or through the desert (see vv. 4–6, 19–30). Jonah, for example, having been delivered from the fish that had swallowed him, prayed to the Lord, saying, “I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving” (Jonah 2:9; compare Psalm 116:17; Hebrews 13:15).

The burnt offerings, on the other hand, present an entirely

different matter. They are for atonement rather than thanksgiving (see Leviticus 1:2–4). This type of offering presumes that someone has sinned and that therefore the relationship between God and his people has been ruptured, requiring restoration.<sup>4</sup> Priests offered this sort of sacrifice twice daily in the sanctuary of ancient Israel on the chance that someone in Israel had sinned. While the priests could not know that an Israelite had sinned, the Lord obliged them to make the offering anyway. In this sense it was a just-in-case sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> In Lehi's case we read that he sacrificed burnt offerings on two occasions. Let us examine them in reverse order.

The second instance involved Lehi's sacrificing burnt offerings after the sons returned from Jerusalem with the family of Ishmael in tow (1 Nephi 7:22). Had there been sin? Yes. The older sons had sought to bind Nephi and leave him in the desert to die (1 Nephi 7:6–16). Even though they had repented and sought Nephi's forgiveness (1 Nephi 7:20–21), Lehi evidently still felt the need to offer burnt offerings for atonement.

On the earlier occasion, Lehi offered such sacrifices after the return of his sons from Jerusalem with the plates of brass in hand (1 Nephi 5:9). Had there been sin? Again, the answer is yes. Not only had the older two brothers beaten the younger two, drawing the attention of an angel (1 Nephi 3:28–30), but

Nephi had killed a man named Laban who was a distant relative of Lehi (1 Nephi 4:5–18; 5:14, 16). Even though Nephi knew through the Holy Spirit that the Lord had commanded him to kill Laban and thus justified Laban's death (1 Nephi 4:11–13),<sup>6</sup> Lehi was evidently unwilling to take any chances. So he offered burnt offerings, exactly the right sacrifice for the occasion. 

#### Notes


1. The main study so far is that of the author, "What Were Those Sacrifices Offered by Lehi?" in his *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 1–8.
2. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 3:218–19.
3. That sacrifices could be offered on ships at sea is affirmed in Jonah 1:16.
4. Consult Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 175–77, 267–68, 858.
5. As an example, Job 1:5 records that Job "offered burnt offerings" just in case his "sons have sinned."
6. John W. Welch and John A. Tvedtnes have discussed ancient legal dimensions of Nephi's act. See Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 119–41; and Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 110–12.

By S. Kent Brown

### Tibetan Prayer Wheel Donated

The Institute expresses appreciation to Malan Jackson, senior advisor of international affairs at Utah Valley State College, for his recent donation of a beautiful Tibetan prayer wheel. Made of silver, brass, and copper, the device consists of a shaft running through the middle of a hollow drum (the wheel), to which is attached a small ball on a chain. The wheel is decorated with coral stones and Tibetan characters referring to Buddha. Inside, a very thin strip of tissue paper hundreds of feet long winds around the shaft. On the paper are written traditional prayers.

Buddhist worshippers offer up those prayers by holding the shaft and moving the hand rapidly in a clockwise motion, which causes the ball to rotate and the wheel to spin. According to Buddhist tradition, this spinning motion sends the prayers to heaven.


Jackson has studied central Asia, China, and Mongolia for the last 45 years and has focused on Mongolia and Tibet for more than 30 years. He acquired the prayer wheel on a recent trip to Mongolia. Jackson previously donated to the Institute a 16th-century glossary of Tibetan religious terms. 

#### PUBLICLY SPEAKING

## Institute Scholar Speaks at Congress of Jewish Studies

John A. Tvedtnes, senior research associate at the Institute, presented a paper titled "Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon" at the 13th annual World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem on 13 August 2001. His paper was well received, and some of the attendees offered him additional ideas. One of the speakers drew attention to several fourth-century-B.C. Jewish inscriptions found in the Bosphorus region, one of which names "Saria wife of Man, Na daughter of Man." Sariah, the name of Lehi's wife, has previously been attested as a Jewish woman's name in one of the fifth-century-B.C. papyri discovered at Elephantine, Egypt. For the latter, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Eleph-

antine Papyri," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 296–300; reprinted in John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 6–10.

As important as it is, Tvedtnes's paper is not the first positive study of the Book of Mormon to be presented at a scholarly conference in recent years. Papers on Book of Mormon topics have been presented by others at national and regional meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Noted Book of Mormon researcher Angela Crowell has presented three papers at SBL meetings on the topics "Biblical Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon," "A Comparative Study of Biblical Hebrew Sentence Structure in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon," and "A Comparative Reading of Homiletic and Narrative Midrash in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon." 



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## LDS, Jewish Scholars

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and chosenness in postmodern Jewish thought. A helpful appendix surveys Jewish writings on Mormonism and Mormon writings on Jews and Judaism.

Though not intended as a comprehensive analysis, *Covenant and Chosenness* offers insightful comparisons between the two religious traditions. “While we ought not gloss over [significant] differences,” writes Andrew Skinner, “still it is profound similarities, parallels, and commonalities between the two groups that are most striking and noteworthy within the Judeo-Christian sphere of belief systems.”

The LDS contributors to the volume are Brigham Young University scholars Susan Easton Black, Truman G. Madsen, Daniel C. Peterson, Stephen D. Ricks, and Andrew C. Skinner. Representing the Jewish community are scholars Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Neil Gillman, Raphael Jospe, Menachem Kellner, and Seth Ward.

The conference, titled “Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism,” was sponsored by the University of Denver’s Center for Judaic Studies, with support from the Ensign Foundation, BYU, and FARMS. To obtain a copy of the book, use the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 


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## Isaiah’s Imagery continued from page 1

walls help the reader to imagine how Israel looked when Isaiah wrote his prophecies. All of the images are accompanied by scripture passages and commentary by the author. Charts throughout the book explain archaic language, give timetables, and show scripture parallels.

*Visualizing Isaiah* is divided into seven sections, each detailing one broad aspect of the book of Isaiah: “Ancient Israel,” “Ancient Israel’s Neighbors,” “Warnings to the Wicked,” “Blessings and Duties of the Righteous,” “The Restoration and the Gathering,” “The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Christ,” and “The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.” The book also includes a scripture index, a list of sources consulted, and a section on how to use the book.

Donald W. Parry is associate professor of Hebrew language and literature at Brigham Young University and a leading scholar in the study of Isaiah. Parry’s other books include *Understanding Isaiah*, *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources*, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, and *The Great Isaiah Scroll: A New Edition*.

For purchasing information, see the enclosed order form or visit the FARMS Web site. 

# Insights

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FARMS is a research arm of Brigham Young University’s Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. As such, it encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. Under the FARMS imprint, the Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at FARMS include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

FARMS makes interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

It is hoped that this information will help all interested people to “come unto Christ” (Jacob 1:7) and to understand and appreciate more fully the scriptural witnesses of the divine mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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