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Messiah DVD Now Available

The long-anticipated DVD set, *Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God,* is now available for purchase. For the first time ever, teachings of the restoration, sound academic views from faithful Latter-day Saint scholars, and state-of-the-art documentary production have been combined in this seven-part series on Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

The documentary is produced by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute, BYU Broadcasting, and Religious Education and is marketed by Deseret Book. The two-DVD set features all seven episodes hosted by S. Kent Brown (executive producer of the documentary and professor emeritus of ancient scripture), Gaye Strathearn (associate professor of ancient scripture), John Tanner (professor of English and BYU's Academic Vice President), and Andrew Skinner (professor of ancient scripture). This documentary is the result of over 200 hours of interviews with LDS experts in various fields. Filming was done on-site in Israel, Egypt, and Denmark, and on a specially built stage at the LDS motion picture studio. Special features of the DVD include a "making of" featurette, extra scholar commentary, translations into Spanish and Portuguese, and *Through His Eyes: Exploring the Landscape of Christ*, which includes new footage of many areas filmed while making the documentary.

Episodes may be viewed on the Internet at messiah.byu.edu, using the "watch episodes" link to BYU Television. *Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God* is available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com and Deseret Book. ◆

Neal A. Maxwell Institute Hosts Conference on Avicenna

There are few figures in the history of Islamic thought whose stature can rival that of Ibn Sina (980–1037), or Avicenna, as he came to be known in the Latin West. Educated at Bukhara, in modern-day Uzbekistan, Avicenna was, by his own admission, a prodigy and recognized as such early on. If there is a certain lack of modesty in his making that claim, there is no disputing that he had the credentials to back it up. He was forced by the turbulent politics of his day to move a number of times, but through it all he never stopped practicing medicine or writing treatises in his native Persian, as well as in Arabic. Avicenna's output was massive, and his many contributions to fields as diverse as medicine, philosophy, and mysticism were groundbreaking and precedent setting and remain influential (and sometimes controversial) to this day.

Recently, a group of specialists on Avicenna gathered under the auspices of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute to assess aspects of Avicenna's natural and metaphysical philosophies and their historical influence. The occasion for the conference, which was funded by a generous donation from Brent Beesley, was the publication, in two large volumes, of the complete text and translation of Avicenna's *Physics of "The Healing"* in the Islamic Translation Series— part of the Institute's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI). Jon McGinnis, the translator of the *Physics* and professor of philosophy at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, joined with other colleagues for three days of presentations and discussions, moderated by Daniel C. Peterson, editor in chief of METI, and D. Morgan Davis, who serves as its director. The list of other presenters included scholars from the Netherlands, Malaysia, Egypt, Finland, the UK, and the US, including James Siebach from Brigham Young University's Department of Philosophy.

The conference took place in the mountain setting of Park City, Utah, and at the BYU campus. By all accounts the meetings were stimulating and productive, so much so that on the concluding day of the conference all in attendance agreed that the various presentations should be compiled for publication, with Peterson and Davis as the volume editors. Discussions are now under way with a major academic publisher to bring that plan to fruition in the coming year. ◆

"And He Was a Young Man": The Literary Preservation of Alma's Autobiographical Wordplay

Thanks to the work of Hugh Nibley, Paul Hoskisson, Terrence Szink, and others,[1] the plausibility of Alma as a Semitic name is no longer an issue. Hoskisson has noted that "Alma" derives from the root *ʿlm* (< **ǵlm*) with the meaning "youth" or "lad," corroborating Nibley's earlier suggestion that "Alma" means "young man" (cf. Hebrew *ʿelem*, עלם).[2] Significantly, "Alma" occurs for the first time in the Book of Mormon text as follows: "But there was one among them whose name was *Alma*, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a *young man*, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken" (Mosiah 17:2; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine). This first occurrence of "Alma" is juxtaposed with a description matching the etymological meaning of the name, suggesting an underlying wordplay: *Alma* (*ʿlmʾ*) was an *ʿelem*. A play on words sharing a common root is a literary technique known as polyptoton.

If it is assumed that the language underlying the Reformed Egyptian script of Mormon's abridgment was Hebrew, and if it is assumed that the Hebrew text can be reconstructed based on Biblical Hebrew (and these two assumptions must remain highly speculative), then we can detect a different kind of punning on "Alma" in the succeeding verses of this narrative. In addition to the Semitic root *ǵlm* (> *ʿelem*, "young man"), Hebrew possesses the homonymous verbal root *ʿlm* which means "to hide," "to conceal," and reflexively to "hide oneself."[3] Mosiah 17:3–4 informs us that when King Noah "caused that *Alma* should be cast out . . . he [Alma] fled . . . and *hid himself* [*hitʿallam]. . . . And he being *concealed* [cf. *neʿlam*] for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken." Later, we are told that at the waters of Mormon "[Alma] did *hide himself* [*hitʿallam] . . . from the searches of the king" (18:5). In these examples, the text plays on the homophony between Alma and *ʿlm* ("to hide"). Though lacking a true etymological basis, the interplay between "Alma" and *ʿlm* creates a clever explanation of Alma's providential escape: Alma was not only God's "young man," but also "hidden" so that he could teach and baptize the people and establish a church. This play on Alma and an unrelated *ʿlm* root is a literary technique known as paronomasia.

The use of polyptoton and paronomasia together involving a single name is also found in Biblical Hebrew narrative. Rachel's explanation of the naming of Joseph ("may he add") involves both its root of origin *ysp* ("to add") and the similar sounding *ʾsp* ("to take away," "gather up"): "God hath *taken away* [*ʾāsap*] my reproach" and "the Lord *shall add* [*yōsēp*] to me another son" (Genesis 30:23–24; cf. 37:5, 8; 41:17). Similarly "Noah," which connoted "[divine] rest," interplays with forms of the related root *nwḥ and the unrelated root *nḥm (to "comfort," "console," "be sorry," "regret") throughout the flood narrative. Noah (*nōᵃḥ*, "[divine] rest") is said to "comfort" (*yᵉnaḥᵃmēnû*) his forefathers concerning their work and toil (Genesis 5:29), which interplays with the Lord's "regretting" (*wayyināḥem*, *niḥamtî*) over having created humanity (6:6–7), the ark coming to "rest" (*wattānaḥ*, 8:4), the dove's attempt to find "rest" (*mānôᵃḥ*, 8:9), and the "sweet savour" (*rēᵃḥ hannîḥōᵃḥ*) of the sacrifice that appeased the Lord after the flood (8:21).

We find a similar use of polyptoton and paronomasia on *nwḥ and *nḥm in the lead-up to Alma's story. King Noah and his priests are caricatured as the moral obverse of the biblical Noah.[4] King "Rest" causes the people to "labor exceedingly to support iniquity" (Mosiah 11:6), while his priests laze about on an ornate breastwork built so "*that they might rest* [*wayyannîḥû] their bodies and their arms upon [it] while they should speak lying and vain words to [the] people" (11:11). Ironically, neither Noah nor his priests understood their role in achieving Isaiah's prophetic promise "the Lord *hath comforted* [*niḥam*] his people" (Isaiah 52:9; quoted by a priest in Mosiah 12:23, see 12:20–27), an idea integral to the folk-meaning of Noah's name: ("This same *shall comfort us* [*yᵉnaḥᵃmēnû*] concerning our work and toil of our hands," Genesis 5:29) and to Zeniff's hopes for his son and his people (cf. Mosiah 10:22).

Since Alma alone would have been privy to many of the events surrounding his repentance and conversion, we can infer that Mormon relied heavily on Alma's own account(s) in synthesizing this narrative. Just as Limhi culled a summary (Mosiah 7:21–22) of his grandfather Zeniff's history from first-person accounts and records in his library (cf. Mosiah 9–10),[5] including using Zeniff's self-introduction (cf. 7:21 and 9:1–3), Mormon has created an engaging narrative using eyewitness accounts at his disposal.

Using Limhi's quotation of Zeniff as a model, we may further surmise that the initial characterization of Alma (Mosiah 17:2) was originally an autobiographical introduction. Enos's,[6] Benjamin's,[7] and Zeniff's[8] imitations of Nephi's self-introduction suggest that Alma had ample precedents. Alma may have written such an autobiography later in life at Zarahemla, when he would have had access to all the records in Mosiah's possession. Comparing Alma's introduction into the narrative with Nephi's autobiographical introduction, we can see how Mormon may have adapted an autobiographical note by Alma based on the earlier autobiography of his ancestor:

I, _Nephi_, having been born of _goodly_ parents,	But there was one . . . whose name was _Alma_, he also being a descendant of _Nephi_.[9] And he was _a young man_, (_'elem_)[10]
therefore I _was taught_ somewhat in all the _learning of my father_ [_'abî_]. (1 Nephi 1:1)	and he _believed_ the words which Abinadi had spoken. (Mosiah 17:2)

I _Nephi_,
being exceedingly _young_ (i.e., he was an _'elem_),
nevertheless being large in stature,
and also having great desires to know the mysteries of God,
wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord;
and . . . he did . . . soften my heart that _I did believe
all the words which had been spoken by my father_ [_'abî_].
(1 Nephi 2:16)

The characterization of Alma in Mosiah 17:2 makes use of Nephi's self-characterization in 1 Nephi 1:1 and 2:16. Just as "Nephi"—the name may derive from Egyptian _nfr_[11] ("good," "goodly," "fair")[12]—was a fitting name for one who acquired a knowledge of the "goodness . . . of God" from his "goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1)[13] and, as an _'elem,_ "did believe all the words [of his] father (1 Nephi 2:16), so too was "Alma" a fitting name for an _'elem_ of "goodly" ancestry who "believed the words [of] Abinadi," the _father_ of his faith and repentance in Christ. Mormon, for his part, has done a remarkable job incorporating Alma's words into a compelling narrative, without obscuring the latter's use of polyptoton and paronomasia or its possible literary antecedents. ◆

By Matthew L. Bowen

Nibley Fellow and PhD student in Biblical Studies at the Catholic University of America

Notes

1. Hugh W. Nibley, _An Approach to the Book of Mormon_, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 76; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Alma as a Hebrew Name," _JBMS_ 7/1 (1998): 72–73; Terrence L. Szink, "New Light: Further Evidence of a Semitic Alma," _JBMS_ 8/1 (1999): 70. See further Terrence L. Szink, "The Personal Name 'Alma' at Ebla," _Religious Educator_ 1/1 (2000): 53–56. John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, in "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," _JBMS_ 9/1 (2000): 41–51, note in addition that "a number of other biblical names have been found at Ebla, which is in the region that some scholars consider to be the homeland of the Hebrews."

2. Hoskisson, "Alma as a Hebrew Name," 72–73; Nibley, _An Approach to the Book of Mormon_, 76. Nibley suggested that "Alma" can mean "a young man, a coat of mail, a mountain, or a sign."

3. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, _The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament_ (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:834–35.

4. Although they are both described as winemakers (Genesis 9:20, Mosiah 11:15), the Book of Mormon king Noah is not described as having comforted or brought rest to his people—just the opposite. Some scholars believe that the etiology for Noah's name ("And he called his name Noah saying, This same shall comfort us [_yᵉnaḥᵃmēn_u] concerning our work and toil of our hands," Genesis 5:29) alludes to wine-making. In any case, the kind of "rest" that King Noah brought his people was quite different from the "rest" implied in his name.

5. See John Gee, "Limhi in the Library," _JBMS_ 1/1 (1992): 54–66. Gee shows how Limhi quotes his sources with scrupulous accuracy. We can probably assume similar care on Mormon's part.

6. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Wordplay on the Name 'Enos,'" _Insights_ 26/3 (2006). Here I endeavor to show how Enos's self-introduction (Enos 1:1) is modeled on Nephi's, including the latter's use of nameplay.

7. See John A. Tvedtnes, "A Note on Benjamin and Lehi," _Insights_ 22/11 (2002): 3. Tvedtnes shows how Benjamin's counsel to his sons (Mosiah 1:2–6) consciously imitates Nephi's language in 1 Nephi 1:1–4. In this instance too, the imitation of Nephi is discernible beneath Mormon's editorial work.

8. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:1: "I, Nephi [cf. Egyptian _nfr_ = good, goodly, fair], having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; . . . yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God"; Mosiah 9:1: "I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers' first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites . . . that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed."

9. Cf. Mormon 1:5: "I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi . . ."

10. Cf. Mormon 2:1 (1 Nephi 2:16) "And notwithstanding I being young, was large in stature . . ."

11. John Gee, "A Note on the Name _Nephi_," _JBMS_ 1/1 (1992): 189–91.

12. Raymond O. Faulkner, _A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian_ (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 132.

13. Matthew L. Bowen, "Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," _Insights_ 22/11 (2002): 2. A play on the meaning of "Nephi" here assumes that Nephi, who indicates at least some knowledge of the Egyptian language (1 Nephi 1:2), integrated the word _nfr_—in at least some of its senses—within the developing Nephite language which was, at its base, a Hebrew dialect.

Latest *FARMS Review* Tidies Garden of Book of Mormon Studies

A trio of essays in the current issue of the Review (vol. 22, no. 1) concerns John W. Welch's *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, which makes a highly original and important contribution to biblical studies by revealing the "temple register" and organic unity of Jesus's famous sermon. George L. Mitton's introductory remarks call attention to two scholarly reviews of Welch's study that find his thesis intriguing and plausible. A substantial excerpt from Welch's preface to his book follows, as does a review by Gaye Strathearn that offers a helpful summary of Welch's approach and argument and of the book's importance for Latter-day Saints.

The current issue also provides an exhaustive review of Rodney L. Meldrum's controversial book *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon Remnant through DNA*. This book attempts to use DNA science to argue that the prophesied surviving remnant of Lehi's seed is now genetically detectable among Native Americans living near the Great Lakes in the United States (a region that Meldrum calls the "Heartland"). Physician Gregory L. Smith shows that Meldrum's facile interpretation of population genetics and DNA evidence is fatally flawed in virtually every particular. In a related essay, geneticist Ugo A.

Perego further clarifies many of the complex scientific issues bearing on efforts to genetically determine the origin of Native Americans.

Also included is John Gee's essay on grace, showing that Jesus did not teach the concept of grace as it is taught in Protestant traditions. In addition, he demonstrates that the term has a broad and often-overlooked range of meaning, the earliest being "good works." Gee explains that the New Testament (as well as the Book of Mormon) teaches that grace comes as the result of people's actions. Other contributions are Steven L. Olsen's exploration of the concept of prospering as utilized by Book of Mormon prophets, John Tvedtnes's response to critics who allege that Joseph Smith plagiarized from the Bible and elsewhere, and reviews by Ben McGuire and Robert Boylan that expose the failings of the critique of the Book of Mormon found in Ross Anderson's *Understanding the Book of Mormon*. The editor's introduction, by Louis Midgley, sets out the role of the F*ARMS Review* in seeding and weeding the garden of Book of Mormon studies. Several Book Notes introduce worthwhile books.

The *FARMS Review* can be accessed on the Maxwell Institute website at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu. ◆

From Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Gospel truths about life and the human condition stand in stark contrast to the world's view; the world's solutions so often lead mankind into conceptual cul-de-sacs. Without gospel truths, man's efforts to reach his goals are like the northbound explorer who drove his dog sled feverishly northward on an ice pack that was flowing southward—only to find himself farther from his destination at the end of a hard day's journey than he had been at dawn! —*The Smallest Part* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 36, as quoted in *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 352–53