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Since Cumorah - New Voices from the Dust: The Bible, the Scrolls, and the Book of Mormon - a Problem of Three Bodies

Author(s): Hugh Nibley

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SINCE

The Bible, the Scrolls, and the Book of Mormon— a Problem of Three Bodies

● Whenever an important document of the past is discovered, students immediately begin comparing it with every other document that might conceivably have any connection with it. This is not necessarily wishful thinking or “parallelomania”; it is the only way by which an unknown work can be assigned a likely place among the records of the race. “From the most diverse scientific areas,” writes Dupont-Sommer of the Dead Sea Scrolls, “studies are beginning to accumulate and converge ever closer towards the solution of the comparative problem.”¹ Recently this writer called attention to a large number of resemblances between the community of Qumran and an ancient religious society described by certain commentators on the Koran. Whether the parallels are significant or not remains to be seen, but the writer was entirely within his rights in calling attention to them.² It is also entirely in order for him to point out resemblances between the Book of Mormon and other religious writings:

CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

BY HUGH NIBLEY, PH.D.
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND RELIGION,
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

whatever may be the true explanation of those resemblances, nothing is to be learned unless the comparisons are actually made.

Taxonomists have a notoriously hard time seeing eye to eye, and what Yadin wrote eight years ago still applies: "Any attempt at this stage of research to identify the Dead Sea sect with any other sect of the time is more likely to be based on assumptions than on facts"; but one thing we can be sure, that "the commonplaces of scholarship are up for re-examination in the light of the new material offered by the scrolls."³ And one of those commonplaces, long accepted but completely untested, has been the status of the Book of Mormon. "Scholars may disagree violently with each other's interpretations," writes F. F. Bruce, "and engage vigorously in debate; far more progress will be achieved in this way than by a mute agreement to differ."⁴ Unfortunately, there has been no disagreement or debate about the Book of Mormon among those qualified to undertake a comparative investigation, but only a mute agreement to ignore: the apotropaic power of its title page has been insurmountable. But in view of the wonderful combination of circum-

stances that has been necessary to bring present-day students to a serious consideration of hundreds of valuable and neglected apocryphal writings, the neglect of the Book of Mormon should be anything but a surprise.

Persistent denial has only called attention to the fact that vested interests have influenced the study of the Scrolls from the first and that their discovery has not been greeted with cries of unalloyed delight by Christian and Jewish scholars. "It is as a potential threat to Christianity, its claims and its doctrines, that the Scrolls have caught the imagination of laymen and clergy," wrote K. Stendahl.⁵ It is not surprising that the Russians forthwith put forth the claim "that the Qumran discoveries conclusively prove that Jesus never lived."⁶ But it is somewhat disturbing that after the Russians have seen their error and changed their position, our American intellectuals still accept Edmund Wilson's verdict "that the rise of Christianity should, at last, be generally understood as simply an episode of human history rather than propagated as dogma and divine revelation."⁷ That "at last" clearly announces the vindication of a preconceived notion.

Actually the new documentary finds are a blow to conventional Christianity, which, as Stendahl points out, takes the position of the famous heretic Marcion: "He wanted Christianity to be a new religion, just as it is to us. Whereas the New Testament sees Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecies, we are apt to see him as the founder of a new religion. . . . Our pattern of thought is that of natural science: Jesus is the inventor of Christianity and the church is the guardian of his patent and copyright. In the New Testament the major concern is the diametrically opposite one: to make clear that all is 'old,' in accordance with the expectations of the prophets."⁸ If this fact had been recognized, all the fuss and alarm about the threat to the "originality" of Christ (especially among Catholic scholars) would have been unnecessary. "If Dupont-Sommer is correct in this approach," wrote R. K. Harrison, who felt on the whole that he *was* correct, "the very foundations of the Christian faith might well be shaken by the realization that a hitherto unknown pre-Christian Jewish religious community had possessed similar beliefs and practices. On such a view
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Christianity would have to abandon its claim to uniqueness."⁹

But the Christian scriptures make no such claim to uniqueness, as Stendahl reminds us, and the Christian doctors should have known better since, as Bruce observes, "it has long been known that some kind of parallel can be found in the Talmud to practically every element in the ethical teaching of Jesus."¹⁰ The men in the seminaries have known for years about all kinds of such parallels, but they have never made "a thorough attempt to come to grips with the basic problem of what such parallels actually mean"; instead they have been quietly swept under the rug, with the result, as Stendahl notes, that the Christian world was "badly prepared to receive the good news from the Qumran Scrolls."¹¹ And it is precisely on these presuppositions, in particular that of the absolute uniqueness of the New Testament and the finality of the accepted scripture, that all criticism of the Book of Mormon has been based in the past. The new discoveries thus cut the ground away from all such criticism.

We need not discuss the various points of resemblance between the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, every one of which has been warmly defended by some experts and just as warmly disputed by others. They include such things as the presence in both communities—Christian and pre-Christian—of a hierarchical organization including a council of twelve and its presidency of three, the belief in continuing revelation and the leadership of inspired prophetic men, the idea of the restoration of the covenant to the elect of Israel, the dualistic doctrine of the world as a place of probation in which all are confronted by both good and evil and obliged to make a choice, com-

mon rites and ordinances such as baptism and the sacrament, common ideas about the Messiah, common usages and expressions such as reference to the community as "the Poor," a peculiar and common method of interpreting the scriptures.¹² The points of difference, on the other hand, are harder to find and easier to refute, since they almost invariably rest on the individual scholar's interpretation of what Christianity *should* be; the principal items are the differing attitudes of the two societies to

REMEMBERING

BY SOLVEIG PAULSON RUSSELL

*Today I'm thinking backward
To lovely things I've seen:
The rosy fire of sunsets,
Gold daffodils in green,
A violet peeping shyly,
A butterfly in flight,
And myriads of diamond stars
Pinned to the hood of night.*

*I'm thinking back to springtime
And the brightness of the air.
I'm thinking back to summer
And the autumn's crimson flair.
I'm cataloguing beauty
Of winter's snowy calm
And lifting up my thankful heart
In a thanksgiving psalm.*

the priesthood, the contrast between the "once-for-all baptism" of the Christians and the washings of the Essenes, the difference between the behavior of John the Baptist and the Qumran sectaries, the different attitudes towards sinners in the two churches, and above all the concept of the Messiah as one who is to come at Qumran but for the Christians has already arrived.¹³ These objections (all of which have been refuted) all rest on the basic fallacy that we know all there is to know about both societies, whereas the very purpose of studying the Scrolls is to learn more about both. But aside from that, isn't the difference just what one would expect?

In the Book of Mormon we have a pious church of anticipation before the coming of the Lord and a Christian church after his coming, and the differences between the two are very like those between the two Old World bodies. Why shouldn't the people of Qumran think of the Messiah differently? For them he was in very deed still to come, while the Christians necessarily saw him in a different light.¹⁴ The chief argument of those who would deny any significant resemblance between the two churches is that the former lived entirely in anticipation while the latter lived in fulfilment. But Stendahl has shown in detail that the Christians were if anything *more* engrossed in anticipation than even the people of Qumran had been; for them the Messiah had come indeed, but he was to come again, and the prophecies of the gathering and final redemption of Israel still awaited fulfilment.¹⁵

Of all the experts none is more determined to deny or at least minimize any connection whatever between the Scrolls and the New Testament than is A. R. C. Leaney. Yet even he concedes that the Christians did borrow one important thing directly from Qumran. That was their scriptural exegesis, "the interpretation of contemporary events in the light of prophecy through a typological or allegorical method," a method not to be confused with that of the schools but peculiar to these people alone, "arising out of the desire to see prophecy fulfilled in contemporary events."¹⁶ Along with this goes the use of "proof-texts" by which all the ancient prophets are called upon to explain a present doctrine or situation, another peculiar custom: "It is evident that the Qumran community was using many of the Christian church's proof-texts before the Christians used them."¹⁷ Though this was not known until the discovery of the

Scrolls, we have in the Book of Mormon the most lavish use of "proof-texts" along with "the interpretation of contemporary events in the light of prophecy," a usage first mentioned by Nephi, who as he preached to his own community in the desert "did liken all scripture unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning." (1 Nephi 19:23.)

If nothing else, then, the Dead Sea Scrolls—by throwing wide the door to possibilities that no scholar until now would even consider and by removing the classical obstacles that have always barred the layman from viewing the Book of Mormon with respect, namely the myth that the scriptures as we have them are complete and perfect for all time and that the world already knows everything essential about the ancient people of God—have set the stage for more thorough and serious study of the Book of Mormon than it has yet received. A summary of some of the important points of agreement between that work and the writings from the Dead Sea as we have noted them through the years will indicate what a vast field is opening out.

A Recapitulation

Since it is normal procedure to list parallels between Qumran and this or that book or society, and since the significance of such parallels is greatly enhanced by their cumulative effect, the following list needs no apology or explanation.

(1) First of all, the Book of Mormon opens with a group of pious separatists from Jerusalem moving into the refuge of the Judean wilderness in the hopes of making a permanent settlement where they could live their religion in its purity free from the persecution of "the Jews at Jerusalem." This we pointed out in *Lehi in the Desert* before the publication of any of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The parallel needs no

comment. (2) These people, like those at Qumran, have a passion for writing and reading which seems to be a long-standing family tradition; they make records of everything, and (3) they know of an ancient tradition of the sealing up and burying of holy books in time of danger, to come forth "in their purity" at a later time. (4) They themselves engage in the practice, in which they even employ for their most valuable records copper and gold sheets on which they laboriously engrave

ANNIVERSARY—FORTY-SEVENTH

BY ANNIE K. WILSON

*Forty-seven years ago
We spoke the words that made us
man and wife;
And now it seems unreal.
Already we have spent a normal
life—
Moved to town and now returned
To build the third house near the
first one.
Although old age has lost some
thrills
And long-range planning now is
done,
The heartaches and the tears are
few,
For each has changed the I for You.*

their message in a cramped and abbreviated script. (5) Both peoples apply all the scriptures to themselves in a special way and never tire of presenting and discussing "proof-texts." (6) Both societies held a peculiarly "open-ended" view of scriptures and revelation and knew of no canon of the Old Testament but accepted the Apocrypha as inspired writings.¹⁸ This appears commonplace today, but we must remember that this attitude to the scriptures has been quite alien to conventional Christian and Jewish thinking and has been the one aspect of the Book of Mormon which has been most loudly denounced and ridiculed for over a century.

(7) In both the Book of Mormon and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the peculiar and until now quite unfamiliar concept of a "church of anticipation" is very conspicuous. (8) The religious communities in both hemispheres strove to keep the Law of Moses in all its perfection and were cool towards "the Jews in Jerusalem" who they felt had been false to the covenant by their worldliness. (9) They felt themselves in both cases to be the real elect of God, the true Israel, chosen to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. (10) Specifically, they both think of themselves as Israel in the wilderness and consciously preserve the camp life of the desert. (11) Both have suffered persecution and expect to suffer more, being repeatedly required to seek refuge by moving from one place to another. (12) Both societies are under the leadership of inspired men (designated in both traditions as "stars")—prophets and martyrs (13) whose main message is the coming of the Messiah and (14) whose exhortation is to "righteousness" and repentance—Israel must turn away from her sins and return to the covenant. (15) In both cases a sign of the return to the covenant and to purity was baptism with water.

(16) Both societies were headed by twelve chiefs from whom were chosen a special presidency of three,¹⁹ and (17) both were formed into groups of fifty for instructional and administrative purposes, each group being under the direction of a priest;²⁰ (18) for in both societies the old priesthood was still respected and the leaders had to be legitimate priests. (19) In both societies the chief priest or leader of the whole church traveled about among the congregations giving instructions and exhortations. (20) Both societies were secret and exclusive but would admit to mem-

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bership anyone in Israel who sought to live the covenant in righteousness.²¹ (21) Both societies were strict observers of the Sabbath, but set aside another day of the week for their special meetings. (22) Those who joined either group were required to share their earthly wealth with all their fellow members, and (23) though both groups were hierarchical and strictly authoritarian, a feeling of perfect equality prevailed.²² (24) All devoted their lives to religious activity (study, preaching, discussion, prayer, and the singing and composing of hymns) and to physical labor, even the leaders working for their own support. (25) The headquarters of the societies seem to have looked remarkably alike: both were at special watering places in the desert with sheltering clumps of trees. (26) Since Alma's church shared all things in common, they probably had communal meals, like the Essenes. When Alma says to his followers: "Come unto me and . . . ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely" (Alma 5:34), it was plainly imagery that his hearers understood.

(27) As strict observers of the Law of Moses, both groups respected the Temple and anticipated its perfect restoration. One of the first things Nephi's community did when they went out by themselves was to build a replica of the Temple. Such an idea has been thought utterly preposterous by the critics until the discovery in the present century of other Jewish colonies in distant lands building just such duplicates of the Temple. (28) Both groups, unlike the Jews at Jerusalem, regarded the Law of Moses only as a preparation, albeit an indispensable preparation, for more light to come, it "pointing
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their minds forward" to a fuller revelation of salvation.

(29) Doctrinally, a fundamental teaching of both societies was the idea of a divine plan laid down in the heavens at the foundation of the world, each individual having a claim or "lot" in the knowledge and the fruits of the plan. (30) Historically this plan is unfolded

apocalyptically in a series of dispensations, each divine visitation being followed by the apostasy and punishment of the people, necessitating a later restoration of the covenant. (31) This restoration is brought about through the righteous remnant, the few who remain faithful in Israel and continue to look for the Messiah and the signs of his coming. (32) The series of visitations and "ends" will be consummated with

a final destruction of the wicked by fire, from which the elect will be miraculously delivered.

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTES

¹A. Dupont-Sommer, *Nouveaux Aperçus sur les Manuscrits de la Mer Morte* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1953), p. 200.

²H. Nibley, in *Revue de Qumran*, 5 (1965), pp. 177-199.

³Y. Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 188.

⁴F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1961), p. 141.

⁵K. Stendahl, *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (N.Y.: Harpers, 1957), p. 1.

⁶Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁷Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 108.

⁸Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹R. K. Harrison, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, an Introduction* (Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 102.

¹⁰Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹¹Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹²Most popular books on the Scrolls, including all referred to so far in these footnotes, contain a chapter on the Scrolls and the New Testament. Stendahl's entire book is devoted to the subject, and lists of points of resemblance may be found in J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (Naperville, Ill.: A. R. Allenson, 1959), p. 98; A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Jewish Sect of Qumran and the Essenes* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1954), pp. 147-166.

¹³These points are brought up by W. F. Albright and discussed by Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Largely devoted to minimizing any resemblances between the Scrolls and the New Testament is A. R. C. Leaney, *Guide to the Scrolls* (London: SCM Press, 1958), pp. 68ff, and G. Graystone, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ* (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1956), see especially pp. 26, 63.

¹⁴"This Messiah was different from any kind of Messiah expected at Qumran . . . and all the accompaniments of messianic expectation had their meaning transformed," with the coming of Christ; Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 147. This is exactly the situation in the Book of Mormon: "Old things are done away, and all things have become new"; 3 Nephi 12:47.

¹⁵Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-16.

¹⁶Leaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 71.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁸"A Jeremiah or an Ezekiel could and did read the past biblical history while each was making history to come. Neither could have named many books that were ultimately to constitute the Old Testament"; E. A. Speiser, in *Centennial Review of Arts and Science*, IV (1960), No. 2, p. 210. The same would apply to Qumran.

¹⁹This system has been examined in an article by Bo Reicke in Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-156.

²⁰Mosiah 18:18.

²¹*Ibid.*, 18:5-6.

²²Bo Reicke comments on this; *op. cit.*, pp. 154-6.



... PARTING WITH PEOPLE WHO GO THE WRONG WAY ...

RICHARD L. EVANS

There is a sentence from Abraham Lincoln which says: "Stand with anybody that stands right and part with him when he goes wrong."¹ We have talked before of being in the right places for the right purposes to realize the right results; and of being in the wrong places for the wrong purposes for the wrong results. Now this citation from Lincoln suggests being with the right people for the right purposes. We all like to be popular. We all like to be approved. Most of us like to live with as little friction as possible, as little misunderstanding, as little of variance from the crowd as we can, within the limits of our own convictions. But because of mistaken loyalty, or false pride, or misplaced confidence, or other reasons, many have gone the wrong way by following people who were going the wrong way. Sometimes loyalty is given as the reason—but is one really loyal when he is disloyal to his better self, or disloyal to the law? Is one really loyal when he disregards what is good? Following the wrong people to the wrong places may not be an act of loyalty at all. Indeed, we may be much more loyal when we refuse to follow people to the wrong places, because if we don't follow them, they may think more earnestly about their own errors and turn back from what they shouldn't do or where they shouldn't go, if we set before them an example and have the courage to take independent action. We have to do our own thinking, make decisions, live by principles, with courage to assert ourselves, courage not to follow the crowd when it is going the wrong way. And we can't really exonerate ourselves or make a wrong thing right merely because it is participated in by more than one person. The basis of judgment must be the judgment of individual acts, and a wrong isn't right simply because it is done by a crowd. It is often lonely to part company with people who are going the wrong way, to turn back from a wrong road, but not nearly so lonely as it is to go to the end of it. We ought to follow good things as far as they go, with loyalty for lawful and proper purposes, but not for the wrong things, not for improper purposes. To cite again the sentence from Abraham Lincoln: "Stand with anybody that stands right and part with him when he goes wrong." What other advice could anyone give, in honor and in honesty?

¹Attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

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