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The Newsletter of
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Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies

INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

March 1999

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

Sermon on the Mount Symposium Convened

At a FARMS symposium held on the BYU campus on 6 February 1999, John W. Welch discussed his newly revised and updated book, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7*. He also responded to comments from a panel of five BYU professors who explored the implications of his thesis that the Sermon on the Mount is best understood in a temple context.

Following opening remarks by FARMS research director M. Gerald Bradford, who conducted the three-hour event attended by some 400 people, Professor Welch began his remarks by likening Christ's sermon recorded in Matthew 5–7 to a kind of "Grand Central Station" of gospel teachings. Yet there is little agreement among scholars on what the sermon means, Welch said, adding that many theories attempt to explain its features but do not account for its totality.

Welch then told how, in 1988, he was surprised to discover that every element of the Sermon at the Temple fits squarely into the context of sacred temple instruction and covenant making. "The big picture fell into place—it was a mesmerizing experience," Welch said. Like its counterpart in 3 Nephi, "the Sermon on the Mount is astonishingly at home in the temple, with its instructions about holy living and covenantal laws and principles. . . . Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear can understand the Sermon on the Mount at multiple levels."

Welch's remarks focused on 48 elements in the Sermon at the Temple that, in both content and sequence, suggest its temple setting and relatedness. For example, the Book of Mormon account records Christ's instruction to his disciples on prayer; fasting, washing, and anointing; chastity; consecration and single-heartedness; glorious rai-

ment; a requirement of secrecy; and entrance into the Lord's presence. The temple connection is like an "overarching conceptual net" that holds both sermons together, whereas no other theory of the Sermon on the Mount can account for its full content and orderly arrangement, Welch said.

In his presentation, Welch drew special attention to the updated material in his book, which includes a new final chapter on ritual studies. Social scientific approaches to biblical texts have identified several characteristics that are typically found in texts that may have served originally as ritual texts, and the Sermon on the Mount figures well as such a text. Still, Welch left open the question of exactly how the sermon should be understood, whether as

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Bookstore Discounts for FARMS Members

FARMS members can now enjoy an additional benefit of membership. Upon presenting a membership card at participating bookstores, they will receive the same 20 percent discount on FARMS products that they currently receive on many items by ordering directly through FARMS. The membership card is enclosed in this mailing.

While members can still order materials from FARMS by telephone or mail, those who live near participating bookstores will appreciate the greater convenience this new program offers. This offer applies only to products carrying the FARMS logo, whether published by FARMS or through Deseret Book. See the enclosed flyer for details, including a list of participating bookstores.



The Foundation for
Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies

FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 124

When Did Nephi Write the Small Plates?

In reading 1 Nephi, few people stop to think when Nephi actually wrote this account of his family's flight from Jerusalem and journey across the sea to a land of promise. Knowing when Nephi began to write the small plates (beginning with the account we now have in 1 Nephi) clarifies the purposes that stand behind that record and influenced its final form and content.

Nephi's first set of plates were his large plates, fashioned after his arrival in the New World (1 Nephi 19:1–2). On these plates he recorded the book of Lehi and the secular affairs of his people.

Nephi made the small plates even later, after he had left the land of first inheritance and moved to the land of Nephi. The Lord instructed Nephi to make these plates so he could "engraven many things . . . which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people" (2 Nephi 5:30). Thus the small plates should be understood as having been written after the death of Lehi, after the separation of Nephi from his brothers Laman and Lemuel, after the small Nephite party knew of the life-threatening animosity of the Lamanites against them, after Nephi knew that he would eventually accept the role of king, and after the temple of Nephi had been constructed.

We tend to read 1 Nephi as if

it were a daily journal, but it is a reminiscent, retrospective account and a purposeful revision of the earlier book of Lehi and the other words previously recorded on the large plates. This matter of timing was important enough to Nephi that he stated three times in 1 Nephi that he was writing the small plates somewhat late in his life.

As early as in 1 Nephi 6:1, Nephi openly acknowledged that the small plates were being written after he knew what the book of Lehi contained. The book of Lehi would have been finished after Lehi and Nephi arrived in the New World.

In 1 Nephi 9, Nephi distinguished his small plates from the large plates, "upon which I make a full account of the history of my people" (verse 2), and explained that he had already been commanded to make the small plates so they might contain "an account engraven of the ministry of my people" (verse 3). From this we can confirm that Nephi began writing the small plates after the large plates were well under way—after the reign of kings was established, after Nephi received the Lord's commandment mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:30, and after he had a distinct group of people whom he could call (five times in this short chapter) "*my people*."

In 1 Nephi 19, Nephi was again self-conscious of the difference between his large plates and his small plates. Immediately after Lehi's party arrived in the New World, the group found ore out of which Nephi was able to make the large plates (1 Nephi 18:25–19:1). Once again he explained on his small plates that the large plates already contained material that was reported "more particularly" (1 Nephi 19:1–2). Again he affirmed that the small plates were being written by way of commandment, specifically "for the instruction of *my people*" and also for other purposes known to the Lord (verse 3).

These overt disclosures invite us to ask how the timing of Nephi's writing influenced the final form of the first parts of the Book of Mormon. How happy biblical scholars would be to know the time and place when the book of Exodus or the Gospel of Matthew took their final forms, for then they could probe the nature of those texts more certainly. In the case of Nephi's writings, because we know when, where, and why he wrote what he did, we can confidently turn our attention to pursue intriguing interpretive questions and to extract meaning from the lessons he left behind.

By John W. Welch

Scripture insight

A Literary Analysis of Moroni 7

Moroni 7 is one of the most tightly woven and forceful sermons in the Book of Mormon. Recorded by Mormon's son Moroni, this sermon on faith, hope, and charity is particularly poignant because Mormon has been killed by the Lamanites and Moroni is the solitary survivor. We can picture Moroni rereading this sermon in order to strengthen his own faith, hope, and charity—topics he addresses in his concluding words in the Book of Mormon.

Designed to strengthen and reconfirm the "peaceable followers of Christ" (verse 3), the sermon begins with a gracious but clear affirmation of Mormon's authority—it is, Mormon says, because of the gift of the Lord's calling that he is permitted to speak unto them.

In speaking of his calling as a gift, Mormon establishes a thread that takes on significance as the sermon continues. His is a good gift; later he speaks of how a hypocrite cannot offer an acceptable gift to God (verses 6–10). On the other hand, "every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ" (verse 16). Then Mormon's sermon focuses on the spiritual gifts of faith, hope, and charity. The metaphor of the gift is especially appropriate in a sermon about love presented in love: something precious is offered without compulsion, yet it will be efficacious only if accepted.

Thus the sermon progresses in a simple yet subtle interlocking of parts. Mormon's initial

discourse on good and evil works leads to analysis of principles on how to judge if something is of Christ or of the devil (verses 17–19). The earlier counsel to "lay hold upon every good thing" is turned into the leading question, "how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing?" (verse 20). This leads to the analysis of the answer—faith. Then Mormon gives his interim conclusion: "Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. . . . Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved" (verses 33–34).

Linking faith with redemption, Mormon then confidently affirms, "I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness" (verse 39). This treatise on faith naturally leads to an analysis of hope, a necessary result of faith. Mormon shows the root of faith to be hope; of hope, meekness; and of meekness, lowliness of heart (verses 42–43). If one is meek and lowly in heart and confesses that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity, "for if he have not charity he is nothing" (verse 44). This declaration leads to a definition of charity, with the summation being that "charity is the pure love of Christ, and . . . whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him" (verse 47).

In his conclusion, Mormon works backward, calling on his auditors to pray for love, which comes to those with faith in

Christ and engenders hope of being like him. Earlier in the sermon, Mormon showed how we can come unto Christ; at the end, he shows us how to become like him. —*Adapted from Richard Dilworth Rust, Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon (Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997).*

New publications

New Book, Video on Dead Sea Scrolls

FARMS is pleased to make available a new volume containing the proceedings of the international conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls held at Brigham Young University on 15–17 July 1996. Sponsored by BYU and FARMS, the conference attracted scroll scholars from around the world, many of whom presented their latest research. Edited by Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich, *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* marks a milestone in scroll research.

Emanuel Tov, editor in chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls publications team, attended the three-day event and pronounced it "a very good conference, which has really advanced scholarship" in the field.

Although quite technical and intended primarily for scroll scholars, the 700-page volume is

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Dead Sea Scrolls (continued from page 3)

a comprehensive report on the state of scroll scholarship and would be a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in the scrolls (see the order form).

FARMS members interested in a less technical update on scroll scholarship may enjoy a documentary that recently aired on KBYU-TV, titled *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (see the order form). This hour-long program, reported at greater length in the February *INSIGHTS*, recounts the dis-

covery of the scrolls, how BYU and FARMS became involved in scroll scholarship, and the history of the Qumran community. The program also features comments from prominent scroll scholars, explores the meaning of the scrolls, and reports the contributions of BYU faculty members to scroll research. Two years in the making, the documentary is narrated by KBYU-TV's Sterling Van Wagenen and is a well-researched and engaging production available on videotape through FARMS.

Insights revisited

Nibley on the Infancy Gospels

A mass of popular fables and miracle stories about Jesus' childhood have come down to us as the "Infancy Gospels." In *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, Hugh Nibley calls these stories unabashed daydreams in which Jesus is always the "super-boy" whose tricks are the dread and envy of all his fellows.

For instance, Jesus slides down a sunbeam or hangs his water pitcher on a sunbeam, and when the other boys try it with disastrous results, Jesus instantly and magically mends the damage. When Joseph the carpenter has a hard time fitting pieces of wood together, Jesus simply blesses them into place. When a local bully jostles Jesus in the street or breaks his sand castles with a stick, the offender is at a word from Jesus withered upon the spot. When the other kids will not play with Jesus, he turns them into goats, and so forth.

Yet Nibley points out that if we strip these legends of their fantastic accretions, the nonmiraculous elements they all have in common may go back to a foundation of fact.

For one, all the sources agree that Jesus' family was often in trouble and moved frequently. The early anti-Christian writers made much of this. They depicted Jesus and his family as improvident ne'er-do-wells tramping about the country looking for odd jobs. These writers also portrayed Jesus as an ambitious boy who picked up a bag of magic tricks in Egypt along with exalted ideas about his divinity and who gathered about him a band of vagabonds and desperadoes with whom he ranged the countryside, picking up a living by questionable means.

The Infancy Gospels were apparently written in reply to these scandal stories. Both Christian and anti-Christian accounts agree that the trouble was about Jesus and that it was the local scribes who stirred up the people against him and his family.

But what did Jesus do to make trouble? All the sources agree with Luke 2:52, that he was a good boy and everybody liked him. Even our collectors of miracle tales are careful to specify that there was nothing abnormal about his family life.

It was not anything Jesus did, according to the early sources, but rather things he said that got people upset and enraged the local clergy. The sayings attributed to him as a child are significant since they are found among the early *logia* of Jesus, some of which are being accepted by scholars today as genuine utterances of the Lord: "My nature is not yours. I existed before you were born. . . . If you wish to become a father, be taught by me. . . . No one else has seen the mark of the cross which I have sworn to bear. . . . You do not know how you were born or where you came from; I alone know that. . . . I know where you were born, and I know it from my Father who knows me."

Whether authentic or not, these childhood sayings of Jesus represent the oldest pre-Synoptic Christian record. Also, all three references to Jesus' childhood in the New Testament mention his phenomenal wisdom—a quality so impressive that even the greatest doctors in Jerusalem were "astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47).

So what can we conclude from the so-called

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Sermon on the Mount Symposium (continued from page 1)

a foreshadowing of, a preparation for, or an accompaniment to an early Christian initiation ordinance or endowment—or perhaps all three.

Welch concluded by listing some important ramifications of his thesis: what the sermon's apparent temple context implies about the sacred nature of Christ's teachings to his disciples; what it implies about the nature of the apostasy, namely the loss of ordinances and "plain and precious" meanings of scripture associated with them; and what it implies about the Prophet Joseph Smith's 1829 translation of the Book of Mormon, which was translated before the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples were even on the Mormon map. Welch called for a new view of the Sermon on the Mount—one that is strengthened by the temple, that enhances one's understanding of the temple, and that derives great insights from the Book of Mormon.

The panel discussion that followed gave voice to many favorable comments as well as thoughtful reflections about where Welch's intriguing study might lead interested scholars. Gaye Strathearn of BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture agreed that the Sermon on the Mount was not composed by Matthew and suggested that further evidence be developed on the multiple recitations of that sermon by Jesus. She also drew useful attention to the position of Matthew 5:48 as a transitional verse linking chapters 5 and 6 of Matthew. Strathearn did, however, indicate that the Hebrew word behind "perfect" could have been *tammim* ("complete") rather than Welch's preferred *shalom*, and suggested that its merits should also be investigated.

Infancy Gospels

(continued from page 4)

Infancy Gospels about Jesus? Among other things, they demonstrate that the youthful Jesus said things that astonished and disturbed people and that the local ministers stirred up trouble and spread scandalous reports about the family—a striking parallel to the Palmyra tales about the Joseph Smith family. —Adapted from Hugh Nibley, "Early Accounts of Jesus' Childhood," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (1987).

Richard D. Draper, also of the Department of Ancient Scripture, offered comment from a historian's perspective. He agreed with most of Welch's conclusions but wondered how much of the temple symbolism would have been understood at first by the disciples in Jesus' day. He proposed that the Sermon on the Mount should be viewed not as an echo of the temple but as prefiguring it, since obviously the "whole mystery is not disclosed" in the sermon.

Don E. Norton of the Department of English pointed out that much of the New Testament is indeed well understood in light of modern ritual studies. He noted that, until recent decades, classical as well as biblical studies have suffered from inattention to ritual, and he commended Welch for adding a chapter that exemplifies this approach.

While praising Welch's book as "ingenious" and "brilliant," John S. Tanner, chair of the English department, sought greater clarity about the meaning of Welch's central assertion, that the sermon is a temple text. Tanner felt that this claim is unproblematic if it means that the sermon was given at a temple or that it illuminates temple worship, but he considers the claim problematic if it means that the sermon describes a Nephite endowment or is the source of Nephite temple ritual and ceremony. He puzzled over the notion that the momentous event of Christ's appearance to the Nephites somehow became institutionalized in sacred temple rituals and ceremonies.

S. Kent Brown of the Department of Ancient Scripture commented on what he called the "geography" of the sermon texts, notably the idea of sacred space that is preserved in the texts, which adds to Welch's thesis. He explained that the position of Jesus in the sacred middle position ("midst"), the ascent implied in building upon the rock, and the descent into the narrow, sandy valley where the floods can rage against one's (sacred) house all point to a sense of holiness, security, and proper orientation represented in a temple, on the one hand, and to the insecurity and danger in the world on the other.

In response, Welch answered questions in the time allowed, developed several of the suggestions raised by the panelists, and agreed that the subject of the symposium could be profitably continued. Summing up the experience, Gerald Bradford said,

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Upcoming events

During March, FARMS is sponsoring a series of free public lectures on the Book of Abraham. These lectures are the first-fruits of an effort by FARMS to sponsor research and produce publications and public presentations on the Book of Abraham. This first series will be presented each Wednesday night in March at 7:00 P.M. in the Tanner Building at BYU. Ample free parking is available in the lot west of the building. The following remaining lectures will be in room 151 of the Tanner Building.

- **March 17**, John Gee, assistant research professor at FARMS, will discuss "Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri."
- **March 24**, Michael Lyon, independent illustrator and researcher, will discuss "Appreciating Hypocephali."
- **March 31**, Hugh W. Nibley, emeritus professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU, will discuss his forthcoming book *One Eternal Round*.

Forthcoming publications

Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions, by James E. Faulconer. This study aid offers pointers and strategies that will help students of the scriptures improve the overall effectiveness of their study. Faulconer discusses outlining, an in-depth method of cross-referencing, the benefits of using dictionaries and concordances, rhetoric, and using the valuable reference tools in the LDS edition of the scriptures. Available this spring.

Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon, by Hugh W. Pinnock. This book is a result of the author's long-standing interest in Hebrew literary forms. It includes a helpful introduction to the subject and chapters on repetition, parallelism, and miscellaneous literary forms discoverable in the Book of Mormon. Elder Pinnock defines each form, gives numerous examples from the Bible and Book of Mormon, and offers comment in a faith-promoting light. Available this spring.

Sermon on the Mount Symposium (continued from page 5)

"In my estimation, Welch's work on the Sermon on the Mount is a model of how Latter-day Saints ought to approach biblical studies. Aware of a great deal of the literature on the subject, Welch illustrates how the Latter-day Saint view of the fulness of the gospel makes possible an even greater appreciation of teachings found in the Bible."

INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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The Purpose of FARMS

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) encourages and supports research about the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ and other ancient scriptures. It also works to preserve ancient religious documents.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation affiliated with Brigham Young University. Its main research interests include ancient history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to the scriptures. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of the scriptures, solid research and academic perspectives alone can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about the scriptures.

The Foundation works to make interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these publications, including most royalties, are used to support further research and publications on the scriptures. 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 take more seriously these ancient witnesses of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.