

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 28 · 2018 · Pages 37-48

Celebrating the Work of John W. Welch

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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CELEBRATING THE WORK OF JOHN W. WELCH

Steven T. Densley Jr.

A review of Paul Y. Hoskisson & Daniel C. Peterson, eds., *To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, The Interpreter Foundation, 2017, 543 pages. \$24.95 (paperback).

Abstract: In this collection of articles gathered in honor of John W. Welch, a wide variety of subjects are explored by authors from many different disciplines. Like the work of Professor Welch himself, these articles draw on scholarship from varied fields of study and provide many interesting and valuable insights.

A *festschrift* is a collection of writings in honor of a respected scholar. The word itself is German and can be translated as “a celebratory writing.” This particular *festschrift* begins with a celebration of the life and work of John W. Welch by colleagues and friends of Professor Welch including James R. Rasband, Paul Y. Hoskisson, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen E. Robinson.

Known to many as Jack, Professor Welch has been a law professor at the J. Reuben Clark Law School since its founding in 1979. While he is an accomplished legal scholar, he is best-known for his discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon while he was a missionary in Germany in 1967. While that was the discovery of a lifetime, Jack’s additional contributions are staggering. He instituted the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) in 1979. Since 1991, he has been the editor in chief of *BYU Studies*. He played a major role in the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. In 2010, he was designated the Karl G. Maeser Distinguished Faculty Lecturer, the

most prestigious award given by BYU. And most recently, he oversaw the creation of Book of Mormon Central, a website dedicated to sharing the scholarship related to the Book of Mormon with lay audiences all over the world.

Aside from these major accomplishments, Welch has been instrumental in many other significant projects, such as forming the “Biblical Law and Latter-day Saints” and the “Bible” groups within the Society of Biblical Literature, helping to bring the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit to BYU, helping to organize the exhibition of Minerva Teichert paintings of the Book of Mormon as well as the Joseph Smith Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress, and he has published hundreds of books and articles. The final section of the *festschrift* is a 22-page bibliography compiled by Stephen O. Smoot, of just some of the works published by Welch.

The short essays that introduce the volume each provide helpful background information regarding the life and work of Welch and the purpose of the *festschrift*. On a personal note, I was interested to learn about how Rex Lee was able to talk Welch into coming to join the law faculty of the newly formed J. Reuben Clark Law School. He was told that if he would teach one business-related course, he would be free to teach anything else he wanted. Welch suggested, somewhat in jest, “How about a course on Babylonian law and the Book of Mormon?” Rex Lee responded, “That’s the kind of thing we want at this law school” (xvii). I loved reading this, as a main reason I chose to go to BYU’s law school myself was so I could take a class on Ancient Near Eastern Law from Jack Welch.

I also loved reading the personal reminiscences of Stephen Robinson. I have known Professor Robinson longer than I have known Jack Welch, but I had no idea that they grew up together in California and crossed paths many times while obtaining their schooling before they both ended up teaching at BYU. Given this long and close personal relationship, Robinson is able to provide a unique perspective on what made Jack Welch the man he is today, including the impressive tidbit that Jack attained a perfect SAT score before entering college.

After these insightful short essays come separate chapters presenting scholarly work from several top minds. In the first, Kevin L. Barney dives into an extensive examination of a single verse of the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 15:29, the scripture mentioning baptism for the dead. This verse has long been used by Mormons as evidence to support the practice of vicarious work for the dead. The Mormon interpretation of that scripture has long been rejected in favor of alternative interpretations.

It has been claimed that there have been as many as 200 alternative interpretations of the verse, none of which support the Mormon practice of baptism for the dead (22). Barney explores this claim in depth, first rejecting the notion that there are 200 alternative readings and instead settling on 54, still a staggering number. He takes a close look at the basis for each alternative reading, often exploring various ways of interpreting the Greek language itself. Barney approaches this analysis in a way that should satisfy experts in the field but with enough clarity that non-experts, such as I, can follow the arguments. He concludes in a convincing fashion that Joseph Smith's interpretation of this verse, which has only recently gained the support of the majority of scholars, is the correct interpretation.

In the next chapter, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw argues "that the scriptural triad of faith, hope, and charity should be understood as something more than a general set of personal attributes that must be developed in order for disciples to become like Christ" (59). Instead, Bradshaw contends that these three terms describe three distinct stages in the progression of a disciple of Christ toward eternal life. He explores various passages of scripture where prophets have admonished us to adopt these three virtues as we press forward along the path to eternal life. He also notes how this pattern of progression finds a symbolic representation in both ancient and modern temples. Bradshaw's analysis is, as always, intriguing and provides grounds for further exploration of this interesting hypothesis.

James E. Faulconer then explores, in the context of modern philosophy, how it can be said that we can come to know God when God is transcendent. This involves a discussion of human perception and the nature of divine transcendence. In part, we are able to know God because we are like Him in certain basic ways. We too are material beings. We too suffer. "We do not suffer because we are defective, but because we are like God" (132). Putting these similarities aside, we ultimately come to know God through revelation. While some have had an experience with God in the flesh,

even without direct experience of God as a being, we know him, as opposed to only knowing *of* him, by being in relationship with him. We know him by living the way, truth, and life that he is. That too is revelation. We know him in prayer and worship, more revelation. Like Abraham, we find ourselves called by God and we must respond "Here I am" (Genesis 22:1), announcing our readiness to be commanded by him (133).

Next, John Gee presents an essay that is appropriate to both the title and the subject of the *festschrift*. As Jack Welch's work has focused, to some degree, on ancient legal practices, Gee examines the law of the Roman courts and examines the Gospel of John in light of this law. Through examining the Greek language of both the Gospel of John and various ancient non-biblical sources, he draws fascinating parallels between legal disputes in the ancient Roman courts and the final judgment of God and concludes that "[i]n John's gospel, the individual is the defendant; Jesus is the judge; the devil is the prosecuting attorney; and the Holy Ghost is the defense attorney" (150).

Paul Y. Hoskisson submitted a study that also fits appropriately within a volume honoring the work of Jack Welch. In it, he explores the concept of Janus parallelism in the Hebrew Bible and examines a possible case of Janus parallelism in the Book of Mormon. Janus parallelism is an ancient Near Eastern literary form discovered in the 1970s by the American scholar of Near Eastern cultures, Cyrus Gordon. The structure turns on a word that has multiple meanings wherein the poetry preceding the word relates to one meaning, and the poetry following that word relates to a different meaning. It would be very difficult to identify this kind of poetic structure in a translated text since it depends upon a word in the native language that, when translated, almost certainly would not retain multiple meanings. Hoskisson provides an intriguing possibility of Janus parallelism in 1 Nephi 18:16 where the word "praise" could have been translated from a Hebrew word that can also mean "sing." Of course, we cannot be certain whether this is a genuine example of Janus Parallelism. However, like chiasmus, the concept deserves further attention.¹

Kent P. Jackson then provides a brief overview of some of the facts pertaining to Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Moses. This article should prove helpful to those interested in some basic information regarding the process, including the names of the scribes, some of the dates when the revelations were recorded, and information regarding the paper used and changes in the color of ink or handwriting.

1. It should be noted that Jeff Lindsay also discussed Janus parallelism on his blog, proposing a number of possibilities of Janus parallelism in the Book of Mormon in a five-part series. Jeff Lindsay, "Janus Parallelism in the Hebrew Bible: Could It Also Be in the Book of Mormon?", *Mormonity* (blog), January 22, 2017, <http://mormonity.blogspot.com/2017/01/janus-parallelism-in-hebrew-bible-could.html>. See also Jeff Lindsay, "Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job: A Review of Scott B. Noegel's Work," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 27 (2017): 213-20, in which Lindsay reviews Scott B. Noegel's, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

Louis Midgley next reviews some passages from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in light of the restoration of the gospel. De Tocqueville observed that due to the various characteristics of a democracy and the influences that exist among a people who live in a society that places a high value on equality, "[o]ne can foresee that democratic peoples will not readily believe in divine missions, that they will willingly laugh at new prophets, and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, not beyond it" (178–79). Although de Tocqueville wrote just after the founding of the Church, there is no evidence that he was aware of Joseph Smith or of his new religious movement. De Tocqueville's observations are nevertheless insightful and instructive, not only as they relate to the appearance of a new prophet on the earth, but also as they relate to the continued spread of that new religion throughout the world to other cultures that also value democracy and equality.

Robert L. Millet's essay examines what C. S. Lewis wrote about five doctrinal subjects. First, Lewis believed that there are so many similarities between Christianity and the myths and legends from around the world, not because Christianity is derived from these myths, but rather because these myths are reflective of what Lewis called the "true myth" — that Christ died, descended into Hell on our behalf, then came back to life. Second, Lewis believed we all share a longing for a higher existence; for another country, one not of this world, where we might feel more at home and more alive. Third, Lewis shared with Mormons similar beliefs regarding our fallen nature. Fourth, Lewis saw in human beings the potential to become like God. Fifth, regarding the nature of evil and suffering in the world, Lewis wrote that "free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having" (201). Millet convincingly explains the parallels between each of these ideas and the teachings of the Church. Of course, the views of Lewis were not, in all ways, consistent with Mormon views. However, much like those souls Lewis describes who were slowly becoming Christians, Lewis seems to have been one who, in many ways, was slowly becoming Mormon.

Steven L. Olsen examines the overarching message of the Book of Mormon and the way in which three of its principal authors, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni, advance that message. Olsen observes that the Book of Mormon "is not a history in the conventional academic sense" (244). Rather than document and describe the key events of the long history of the Jaredite and Nephite communities, Mormon and Moroni,

following the lead of Nephi, focus closely on the centrality of Christ and the importance of covenants with Him in the personal and collective lives of these people. Olsen's thesis is advanced through descriptions of the way in which individuals and communities made covenants and the consequences that followed from breaking these covenants. Olsen makes some important observations about the Book of Mormon as a whole. He does not, however, discuss the roles that long descriptions of wars and the activities of secret combinations play in a record with this specific focus. It would be interesting to see how Olsen might account for these elements of the narrative.

The next entry comes from Donald W. Parry, a member of the International Team of Translators of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In his article, he compares the text of the Great Isaiah Scroll, the most complete of the twenty-two copies of Isaiah among the Dead Sea Scrolls, to the text of Isaiah as it appears in the Masoretic text. He lays out a large number of textual variants, including accidental errors, intentional changes, synonymous readings, and differences among the stylistic approaches of the scribes. This is a highly technical article, unlikely to be appreciated by those who do not read Biblical Hebrew.

Daniel C. Peterson then examines the doctrine of the trinity as it exists in creedal Christianity and explores whether the teachings of restored Christianity can be reconciled with the traditional understanding of the trinity. Certainly, there are some traditional explanations of the trinity that do not square with Joseph Smith's teachings that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are separate beings. However, there is a strain of thought among creedal Christians, known as "social trinitarianism" that seems quite consistent with the Mormon understanding of the Godhead. According to social trinitarianism, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are thought to be one in will, understanding, and love, and this "serves as a paradigm of what human community can and ought to be" (291). Mormons would agree with this kind of explication of the trinity; but Peterson moves beyond this to argue that there may even be a way to understand the Nicene Creed that is consistent with Mormonism. The chief objection Mormons have to the Nicene Creed is the concept that the Father and the Son are a single being. The word *homoousios*, used in the Nicene Creed, has been understood to mean "of the same substance." It is possible, however, for Mormons to accept that the Father and the Son are "of the same substance," as the phrase is used in the *Clementine Homilies*, where the apostle Peter taught that "The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of

God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance” (303). With this understanding of *homooousios*, as well as a doctrine that is consistent with social trinitarianism, Mormonism may be much more consistent with mainstream Christianity than is commonly thought.

The next entry, from Dana M. Pike, examines Jeremiah’s call as a prophet and the distinctions between what occurred before Jeremiah entered the womb and what occurred while Jeremiah was still *in utero*. Pike compares various Bible verses that use the words “womb” and “knew” and concludes that we should not conflate the events described in Jeremiah 1:4–5. He emphasizes that Jeremiah was consecrated and appointed as a prophet before he was born. However, the Lord knew Jeremiah before he entered the womb, not just while he was in the womb. Pike observes that this raises interesting questions regarding election and our pre-earth life. Answers to those questions, however, must wait until we have more information.

In a most appropriate entry in honor of Jack Welch, Noel Reynolds examines the chiasmic structure of Second Nephi. He explains that when Jack Welch discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, little was known regarding the broad range and depth of rhetorical principles and technics used by Hebrew writers around the time Lehi left Jerusalem. As more information has come to light, it has been discovered that “when longer texts are organized chiasmically, the ordered elements of that chiasm will consist of subordinate units of text that will themselves be delimited and organized according to some rhetorical principle” (334). While Reynolds has earlier argued that Second Nephi was “a random collection of teachings and prophecies that [does] not fit into First Nephi’s structure” (349), upon analyzing Second Nephi as a whole for its chiasmic structure, he discovered “a plausible division of the book into 13 sub-units that readily organize themselves chiasmically as a whole” (349). He further analyzed one of those sub-units, 2 Nephi 11:2–8, and found that it, too, contained chiasmic structure on two additional levels. Clearly, the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon contains high-level chiasmic structure and that sub-units of the book contain additional levels of subordinate chiasmic structure merits further exploration.

The next essay honors Jack Welch in a different way by providing evidence of the Hebrew language influence underlying four personal names that appear in the Book of Mormon and not in the Bible. Stephen D. Ricks convincingly examines the possible Hebrew roots of the names Zoram, Jarom, Omni, and Mosiah. He concludes that the evidence appearing in this essay as well as similar evidence produced

by the Book of Mormon Names Project, are “satisfying the aims and requirements of Book of Mormon scholarship in showing that the Book of Mormon is arguably an ancient document” (356).

David R. Seely then examines the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, which indicates that God would raise up another prophet like Moses. He considers the early Jewish interpretations of this prophecy, the treatment of this scripture in the New Testament and similar language in the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as the prophecies about a future prophet that appear in the Book of Mormon. Does this prophecy refer to many prophets? Or does it just refer to one, and if so who? Elijah? Christ? Or a latter-day prophet such as Joseph Smith or Brigham Young? This prophecy has been viewed in different ways and perhaps is still being fulfilled through latter-day restoration of prophetic authority. Indeed, it could be said of each modern-day prophet that God will “put [His] words in his mouth and he will speak to [God’s people] all that [God] command[s] him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

In the most unusual and perhaps most interesting of the essays, Andrew C. Skinner examines the way the Hebrew language has been seen in the past as having magical powers. The Bible clearly indicates that magic of various sorts was practiced among the people of ancient Israel. Later, in the Talmud, “[t]he Rabbis did their utmost to combat superstitions which were forbidden by the Written Law, to eliminate the magic which smacked of idolatry, but they had to accept those charms which were sanctioned by the ‘scientists’ of that time” (380). The Talmud recognizes the Hebrew language as having a special status, as it was the original language of scripture and thus God’s language (380). Hebrew was seen as “the official language of God, Heaven, and angels” (381). Thus, Jews who had a secular name were also given a Hebrew name, “for the angels certainly could not be expected to recognize an individual by any other” (381). In order to invoke supernatural protection, the rabbis relied primarily upon the power of Hebrew words, names, letters, and numbers (381).

This tradition among the Jews was adopted later by Christian groups and is evident in Coptic, Syriac, European, and African texts. Hebrew words were used not only in magical incantations but also on amulets that were supposed to provide protection from the forces of evil. These traditions also influenced the development of Christian and Jewish mysticism. Skinner’s article highlights some fascinating information and emphasizes that the use of the Hebrew language by Christians during the Middle Ages in particular is a field that remains fairly open for exploration.

Another fascinating study of language has been undertaken by Royal Skousen in his attempt to reconstruct the original text of the Book of Mormon. He draws upon this research for an article that examines the phrase “pleasing bar of God” as it appears in the standard edition of Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34. He argues that “the word *pleasing* does not really work as a descriptive adjective for the ‘bar of God’” (413). He suggests instead that “pleading bar of God” would make more sense. He speculates that perhaps Oliver Cowdery heard it wrong when taking dictation from Joseph Smith. John S. Welch, father of Jack Welch, criticized Skousen’s conclusions in a 2006 FARMS Review article that examined three earlier papers Skousen published promoting this theory.² While this more recent article of Skousen’s provides additional data regarding the use of the phrase “the pleading bar” as a legal term, it would have been helpful if Skousen were to more directly respond to the ten different points of criticism raised by Welch. Unfortunately, Skousen does not acknowledge Welch’s article. Skousen has thus provided further data regarding an interesting, but highly speculative, theory.

Robert F. Smith contributed an article that continues the exploration of language in the Book of Mormon. In addition to chiasmus, Smith shows that the Book of Mormon contains a wide variety of other ancient Hebrew poetic forms such as *parallelismus membrorum* (parallelism of members), numerical sequences, climactic tricola, tetracola, paired tricola, progressions, lyric poetry, and more. Smith builds upon the work of others who have identified poetic structure in the Book of Mormon, including Jack Welch, Don Parry, and Grant Hardy. Smith also compares some of the poetical forms to similar forms found not only in the Bible but also in the literature of the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Babylonians, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most remarkably, Smith notes how in the case of poetry found in 3 Nephi 22:4 and 1 Nephi 20:1, the Book of Mormon quotes Isaiah in almost identical language. However, there are some lines in the Book of Mormon that do not appear in the Massoretic Text of the Bible. When this text is formatted in a way that highlights its *parallelismus membrorum*, it is revealed that the poetic structure fails when only the language of the Massoretic Text is available. When the additional language that appears only in the Book of Mormon is present, the poetic structure is complete. While there are other ways the language could be formatted, the fact that organizing the text as a *parallelismus membrorum* completes a poetic form that is incomplete

2. John S. Welch, “Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God,” *FARMS Review of Books* 18/1 (2006): 139–47.

without the unique Book of Mormon language makes this a significant and exciting discovery.

The next chapter resulted from a collaboration between Richard E. Turley Jr. and Stephen O. Smoot. In it, they note the important role record-keeping has played throughout history, especially with regard to the history of God's dealings with mankind upon the earth. Records are made not only of events but also of saving ordinances, the recording of which is so essential that if ordinances are not recorded on earth, they "shall not be recorded in heaven" (D&C 128:8). The oldest records we have were preserved on stone. We also have ancient records on metal, wood, animal skins, papyrus, and on pottery sherds. Similar media, such as paper and metal, have been used in modern times. In addition, records of the Church have been kept on glass, plastic, wax, shellac, vinyl, and more recently, on tape, magnetic discs, CDs, DVDs and flash drives. Turley and Smoot opine that both old and new technologies will continue to be used in preserving the essential records of the Church.

The final chapter, written by John Tvedtnes, explores various appearances of tree of life imagery, along with its associated fruit, water, and wood, as these images appear in the scriptures as well as in non-scriptural, ancient sources. It is a fascinating overview of Christological symbolism.

Conclusion

This is a strong collection of articles from scholars at the top of their fields. It should serve as a resource for advancing the scholarship in the various fields covered. However, some will observe that it would be even more useful if it had a subject index and scripture index.

In a work honoring Jack Welch, it is appropriate that this book covers a wide range of topics, including ancient law, language studies, and the temple. Of course, true to the nature of a collection such as this, not everyone will be interested to the same degree in every chapter. Furthermore, while it is clear in many cases how the subject of the chapter is related to and inspired by the work of Jack Welch, in other cases, it is less apparent. Nevertheless, there is sufficient material to allow all readers to discover something personally satisfying and enriching.

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