

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 27 · 2017 · Pages 181-185

Miracles in the Book of Mormon

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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MIRACLES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Gary P. Gillum

Review of Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Miracles of the Book of Mormon: A Guide to the Symbolic Messages*, 2015, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 447 pp. + bibliography, appendix of Brief Biographical Sketches of Ancient and Modern Non-LDS Sources Cited, index, etc. Hardbound. \$27.99.

Abstract: *Author Alonzo L. Gaskill has used his considerable scholarly and spiritual skills to provide the reader with a book that describes and applies to our lives the miracles found in the Book of Mormon, some of which may have slipped the reader's eyes, mind, and heart.*

We live in a world where the media and many of those who speak for churches and religious movements insist that there are no longer any miracles, even if there once were. Many highly educated people, including scientists, affirm that only tangible things are real and important. Then, along comes a book that supports the thoughts of one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, Albert Einstein, who said: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is.”¹ The ever-childlike Einstein was always discovering, wondering, and seeking during his amazing life.

But if everything is a miracle, what sets apart the 59 miracles in the Book of Mormon that Gaskill so passionately describes? His focus is on that which almost everyone, believer or unbeliever, would acknowledge as extraordinary — that is, “on those events in the Book of Mormon that confront us with a sense that God’s power is absolutely incomprehensible and unexplainable to finite humans” (1). In fact, Gaskill does not include

1. Quoted in Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife*, 2012, New York: Simon and Schuster, 147.

the dreams and visions of Lehi, Nephi, and others among his 59 miracles. His reason for not including them is simply that many believers — even in this era of skepticism and worldliness — are also partakers of similar phenomena that can excite, comfort, guide, and give testimony to our lives. In other words, among the Latter-day Saints, they are very commonplace, even though they are not talked about often because of their sacred nature.

As Gaskill discusses each Book of Mormon miracle, he follows a consistent pattern, citing its scriptural source and summarizing the miracle and its context, its symbolism, allegorization, and application. Gaskill's gift in exegesis is manifest especially in the chapters about Ammon and King Lamoni (196–209), where he interprets “arms” not as the upper bodily limbs of the enemies but rather by the weapons they carried, and Lehi and Nephi's transfiguration (257–66) with Gaskill's amazing application for the Saints by describing his own conversion to the gospel.

Gaskill enables the reader to grasp the power of the Book of Mormon, suggesting how each miracle can apply to the reader's life today. Andy Skelton, another reviewer, found this true of himself: “I have also begged for forgiveness [like Alma the Younger in Alma 36] and have been granted it as soon as I have asked. This may be the most powerful and relevant miracle of the Book of Mormon. Everyone who asks for forgiveness gets it. Starting with Laman, Lemuel, and Nephi” (421).²

Gaskill is well suited to write this commentary, particularly since he is both a scholar of religion and a fairly recent convert from Greek Orthodoxy to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Having been on “both sides of the aisle” myself, I have seen that it is even more effective, among those coming from “the outside,” to provide friendly support from both ancient and modern sources. Gaskill's sources include St. Hilary of Poitiers (AD 300–68), who believed “scripture consists not in what one reads, but in what one understands.” Gaskill has taken this as a challenge: he strives to help his readers understand the Book of Mormon in a manner in which they may not have understood it previously. Similarly, Mother Teresa is quoted more than once, as are Confucius and others.³

I am pleased that Gaskill often cited and quoted Hugh Nibley. It appears that Nibley had as much influence on Gaskill's reading of the

2. This may be a promotional blurb included by Gaskill in the final pages of the text, as part of the final footnote.

3. A useful two-page list and one-line bio of the writers Gaskill cites is found in an appendix at the end of the book (422–25.)

Book of Mormon, as he did on mine. It is also no surprise that Gaskill would dedicate his book to this great LDS scholar and mentor. Like Nibley, Gaskill has respect for the miracles (mostly of healing) in the New Testament as well as lesser known miracles, of which there is testimony in the Eastern Orthodox tradition and also in early Roman Catholicism. An example is the ministration to Joan of Arc by Michael the Archangel and by Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch.⁴

I was much relieved and found it most refreshing that the author did not resort to higher criticism or invoke the skepticism prevalent in mainstream Christian theological treatises and commentaries. Gaskill insists his book is more for the ordinary Church member than for the scholar.

I highly recommend this book to readers who seek an edifying new way to understand the Book of Mormon. This book will, I believe, strengthen the faith of readers. They will see the Book of Mormon on a deeper, higher, and broader level and hence as the very Word of God.

Gary P. Gillum is *Ancient Studies, Philosophy, and Religion Librarian-Emeritus at Brigham Young University. He has compiled, edited, indexed, reviewed, and archived Hugh Nibley's writings for over 35 years. He has also published extensively in BYU Studies, Dialogue, and Library Journal (over 60 reviews of new publications on Islam, Judaism, and Christianity). He and his wife Signe are the parents of a blended family of 17 children and 79 grandchildren. They reside in Catalina, Arizona.*

4. Cited in Albert Bigelow Paine, *The Girl in White Armor: The Story of Joan of Arc*, 1967, New York: Macmillan, *Reader's Digest* condensation, 157.

