

*Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, edited by Dennis Largey (Deseret Book, 2003)

The *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* strives to do for the Book of Mormon what generations of encyclopedic Bible dictionaries have done for the Bible. The work of eight editors (including a graphics editor who has assembled hundreds of fine color pictures) has led to an attractive tome of over nine hundred entries by over one hundred contributors on the “peoples, places, doctrines, books, historical topics, general topics of interest, and important words and phrases in the text” (xi).

This volume will serve as a ready reference for personal scripture study as well as a handy resource for answers to academic questions about the Book of Mormon. Some past guides to the Book of Mormon have emphasized devotional topics, leaving those searching for rich scholarly context wanting more; others have been thick on scholarship but thin on aids to gaining inspiration through scripture study. Drawing on the efforts of top CES educators as well as the work of FARMS and BYU scholars, the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* offers something for everyone, and the volume succeeds as both a devotional aid and as scholarly reference work.

Numerous esoteric tidbits such as the medical implications of Shiz’s rising up after decapitation (722) and explanations of such commonly read—but sometimes not fully understood—Book of Mormon figures of speech such as “hiss and a by word” (332–33) will delight the curious reader, as will more weighty topics such as the Book of Mormon doctrine of repentence (676–78) and an examination of Chief Judge Pahoran’s example of

how to deal with false accusation in a Christlike manner (626–27).

In case you were wondering what the difference between “dregs” and “dross” is, see the particularly handy appendix of definitions from Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* (829–35). This reference shows how the first readers of the Book of Mormon were likely to have understood words whose meanings may have changed or become unfamiliar to us today.

Studies of the historicity of the Book of Mormon are not neglected. An entry on the Spaulding theory explains why even most anti-Mormons have largely abandoned the idea that Joseph Smith plagiarized Solomon Spaulding’s writings in translating the Book of Mormon (734–35). External evidences of the Book of Mormon are represented, such as interpretations of the Mesoamerican monument Stela 5, which apparently parallels Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life (740–44). Also included are internal evidences such as Hebraisms in the translated language of the Book of Mormon text (321–25).

However, not all of the volume’s entries reflect the latest scholarship. For example, the work by Latter-day Saints in the late 1990s on Stela 5 suggests that its connection to the Book of Mormon is tenuous. One of its significant figures, for example, is a female “holding a serrated spine from a stingray which she is using to jab a hole in her tongue to extract blood for an offering to the gods” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 [1999]: 28). It is difficult to imagine a connection between this representation and anything in Lehi’s dream.

Generally, the editors preferred breadth and comprehensive coverage of topics over exhaustive treatment of any particular issue, but most entries

have ample bibliographies for readers wanting to know more. While future work will continue to enhance our reading of the Book of Mormon, it seems likely that the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* will become a regular first stop for reference information on many topics related to the Book of Mormon.

—Eric A. Eliason

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*Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights*, by S. Kent Brown (Covenant, 2004)

Listening carefully to the fine points of every text, Kent Brown ruminates over the real life settings and personal qualities of several personalities who left their lasting imprints on the pages of the Book of Mormon. Few know the trail from Jerusalem to Arabia better than Professor Brown, who has studied, traveled, and filmed that region extensively. The first two of six chapters in this book vividly walk the reader alongside Lehi's caravan. The remaining chapters bring to life the main experiences and legacies of King Benjamin (Mosiah 1–6), the four missionary sons of Mosiah (Alma 17–26), the resurrected Christ (3 Ne. 11–26), and Moroni (Morm. 8–Moro. 10). In every case, insights are drawn out of the text as readers strive to hear the voices of these towering figures.

Brown brings years of experience to bear on his task. He is always attentive to the literary feel of each text, and he is keenly in tune with relevant cultural practices from antiquity. Whereas his previous *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla* (BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998) included several previously published pieces, this volume offers entirely new material. It continues very con-

structively in the style and trajectory of Brown's many previous Book of Mormon projects.

Readers are repeatedly rewarded by clear and engaging descriptions. Details are plentiful, such as information on the three votive altars from around 600 BC south of Wadi Jawf that attest to the use of the name Nahom (Nihn or Nehem), where Ishmael was buried. People come to life, especially with the human dimensions of women, children, and family. Themes reverberate, especially those of revelation, deliverance, ordinances, and redemption. But most of all, through these insights, readers become hearers of voices that speak throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon.

—John W. Welch

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*On Human Nature: The Jerusalem Center Symposium*, edited by Truman G. Madsen, David Noel Freedman, and Pam Fox Kuhlken (Pryor Petten-gill, 2004)

This modestly packaged book delivers a royal banquet of human understanding. In 1993 the BYU Jerusalem Center hosted a conference on human nature. Speakers from major religious traditions around the world were invited to address the question "In the approaches to human nature throughout world faiths, is there any common ground?" Very engaging answers then were offered by nine prominent articulators of views found in Asian religions, the Hebrew Bible and Jewish rabbinics, as well as among the Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Latter-day Saints.

Each essay is quite distinctive, not only in content but also in approach. Altogether, the topic of human