


Claremont Mormon Studies

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014  Issue 10

Reading Mormon History through the Hebrew Bible

A more robust engagement with the Old Testament would do much to help Latter-day Saints (and anyone else, for that matter) consider the complicated relationship between faith and history in a different, and helpful, light.

BY PATRICK Q. MASON HOWARD W. HUNTER CHAIR OF MORMON STUDIES

Every four years—including this year—Latter-day Saints study the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible, for Jews and many Christians) in Sunday School. True, Mormons believe the Old Testament is scripture, and so it deserves attention on that score alone. But the fact is, most LDS Sunday School teachers have not even read the entire Old Testament; even fewer actually know anything about ancient Hebrew culture, history, language, or religion. The curriculum focuses on only a sliver of the text, highlighting a relative handful of accessible stories known from childhood or carefully chosen proof texts that seem to confirm what Latter-day Saints already believe. Class sessions are often filled with complaints about how hard it is to understand what the scriptural writers are actually saying; Mormons' exclusive relationship to the

(CONTINUED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE)

In This Issue

“A View from Outside”

“Thank You for Being Respectful”

“Beyond Mormon Studies”

Mormon Scholars in the Humanities
at CGU

Student Contributions

Thanks to Donors

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

King James Version exacerbates this problem.

It's not my job to determine the Sunday School curriculum for the LDS Church. But from my perspective as a Mormon historian and a student of religion, I would suggest that rather than tossing the book in the can or continuing with a superficial treatment of it, a more robust engagement with the Old Testament would do much to help Latter-day Saints (and anyone else, for that matter) consider the complicated relationship between faith and history in a different, and helpful, light.

Of all the Latter-day Saints' sacred texts, the Old Testament is easily the most human. There are few angels here (among the mortals), and even the men and women who are the book's protagonists are deeply, and often tragically, flawed. Adam and Eve fall, Noah gets drunk, Abraham lies, Sarah gets jealous, Jacob deceives, Moses kills, Joshua and Saul commit genocide, David commits adultery, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are social outcasts—and these are the good guys! One can hardly walk away from the Old Testament without a sense that, as Reinhold Niebuhr was fond of saying, “the doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”

The stunning thing is that this was the narrative that was preserved and held sacred by the Jews and then adopted by Christians as a meaningful and faithful record of humanity's relationship with God. In the Old Testament, the covenant people are arrayed against God as much as they are with Him. Indeed, if there was ever a history written with “warts and all,” the Old Testament is it. The warts of a violent, misogynist, lustful, duplicitous, racist, greedy culture are presented not to embarrass the prophets and other figures who are simultaneously portrayed as spiritual exemplars. Rather, an acknowledgment of human frailty and deep imperfection—even among God's “chosen people” (itself perhaps a moniker of collective pride)—provides far more insight into the human condition than an airbrushed “faith-promoting” story ever could.

The history of the Latter-day Saints and their church, as Jan Shipps and others have pointed out, has a kind of scriptural function in Mormonism. Mormons look to their past not only for inspiration but also for validation. The Church is true, the argument goes, because we can see God's hand in our history (and conversely, we can see God's hand in our history because the Church is true). No doubt there was a false step here or there, it is conceded, but on the whole faithful Mormon history reads like hagiography. Scholars who have departed from “faith-promoting” narratives to tell Mormon stories of human and institutional fall- enness have often been derided, marginalized, or even disciplined. For many years the relationship between the Church and its intellectuals was tense.

Thankfully, that is not so much the case now. Historians, LDS and not, “faithful” and not, enjoy access to LDS Church archives that was unthinkable two to three decades ago. The LDS Church Historical Department has committed vast resources to important historical projects such as the Joseph Smith Papers and an in-depth analysis of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, leaving no stone unturned, even when the underside of the stone is unseemly. A series of well-researched and honest essays on various challenging aspects of Mormon history—including polygamy, Joseph Smith's use of seerstones, and the priesthood/temple ban on blacks—have been quietly but impactfully published on the Church's “Gospel Topics” website.

In short, if Mormon history is a kind of scripture, then that scripture is increasingly reading like the Old Testament. Or rather, it always did—Mormon history has had its share of saints and scoundrels, often the same people—but it seems the Mormon community is just now getting to a place where it can profitably read all the chapters of its history, not just selected passages.

As a secular academic enterprise, Mormon Studies at Claremont welcomes the renewed spirit of historical openness, transparency, and inquiry

that we see in contemporary Mormonism. Just as the Hebrew Bible is revered by believers and unbelievers as a revelation of some of our deepest wisdom about humanity's paradoxes and possibilities, so too does Mormonism potentially reward its students—regardless of their own faith commitments—with profound insights into the human condition.

If we can apply some of the wisdom of the Old Testament to our understanding of Mormon history, theology, and culture (and perhaps vice versa), then perhaps all those Sunday School lessons will have been worth it. 🙏

A View from Outside

That moment the lid to my own faith opened and I began to peer inside, seemingly for the first time. What transpired over the next two years was personally transformative.

BY CRAIG ROSSELL MORMON STUDIES COUNCIL MEMBER

My association with CGU's Mormon studies program began on September 3, 2009. That is the day I walked into the library of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity—an old two-story brick building on campus that must have been someone's home when it was first built. There I met Dr. Richard Bushman. I worked just a few blocks away. It was easy to get there. I asked if I might audit his course on the life and thought of Joseph Smith. I came to him a total stranger without the credentials to which he was accustomed. To my surprise, he graciously consented. That same day we examined the clerk's minutes from the 1826 Bainbridge, New York criminal trial of 20-year old Joseph Smith. That moment the lid to my own faith opened and I began to peer inside, seemingly for the first time. What transpired over the next two years was personally transformative.

I never missed one class, one assignment, one guest lecture or conference that first semester, and wrote a 50-page paper on the translation of the Book of Mormon based on hundreds of early Mormon documents. I discovered some amazing

facts about the translation story – things I had never heard before and haven't heard since. I would take another two courses from Richard, one on the Mormon theological tradition and finally one on early American religions. I never could take notes fast enough. The views expressly by non-Mormons were particularly enlightening. My materials from those courses fill jumbo notebooks. That training broadened my understanding of the historical roots and theological development of Mormonism. It also provided facts and information helpful to the ongoing debate about how Mormonism arose, what it is, and what its role is or should be in the communities of the world. In all this Richard became a dear friend and mentor. I also owe a debt of gratitude to his wife, Claudia, as well as CGU, for this accidental endowment.

After my release as an LDS bishop in 2012 I was invited on to CGU's Mormon Studies Council. It was a natural fit. This was not long after Dr. Patrick Mason assumed the chair left vacant by Richard Bushman. Last year I produced a video that describes the unique role Mormon studies at CGU

now plays in the world of religious discourse. I want word of what is happening here to get out. I must thank the many who contributed to the video's creation, particularly the Council itself. A finer focus group I could not have had.

It may seem far-fetched, since many more programs like CGU's may be expected in the future, but I suspect the day will come when CGU's Mormon studies program will bring as much prestige to the university as did the work on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices undertak-

en by Dr. James M. Robinson and others when I was growing up. It seems fitting that both of these ground-breaking initiatives found a home in the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity. Mormonism isn't very old as world religions go, but what Joseph Smith claimed to have exhumed in 1827 isn't that distant in years from what was unearthed in Palestine and Egypt little more than a century later. Mother Earth, it seems, has been rather good to CGU—and all of us. 🌀

Thank You for Being Respectful

Our time in the classroom is a consistent reminder that the academic pursuit of religion requires an open mind and a willingness to at least attempt to understand the deeply personal, sometimes volatile realm of religious faith, whether we are researching contemporary Mormonism, formative Judaism, or ancient Hinduism.

BY COURTNEY RABADA MA STUDENT IN RELIGION

"Thank you for being respectful." These were the parting words of a woman who was kind enough to chat with my classmate and me when we attended Sunday service at one of the local LDS wards. Since our visit was part of an assignment for this semester's Gendering Mormonism class, I was taking notes throughout the three-hour session, which easily could have led someone to believe I was being the opposite of respectful. But this woman understood that, as a student, I could show respect to her faith by being genuinely interested and engaged.

Tasked to view the service through the lens of gender, I found myself jotting down information about the number of women versus men on the dais (two versus five), whether or not fathers took unhappy children out to the lobby (they did), the

gendered pronouns in the hymns we sang (all male), and the focus on the mourning of Joseph of Egypt's father when the coat of many colors was found torn and bloodstained (with nary a mention of his mother's heartbreak). Without understanding the assignment, someone reading these observations could easily have concluded that I was being disrespectful.

A visitor to our weekly class sessions would see us brainstorming about the roles of men and women in the church, and failing to reach a consensus about which were most prevalent. They would hear us disagree about the nature of priesthood, motherhood, and whether inherently separate spheres can ever be equal. If they followed me to the library, they might find me in a whispered conversation with a male classmate about the lack of

(SEE RESPECTFUL, PAGE 6)

Thanks to Our 2013–2014 Donors

We extend our deepest gratitude to the following individuals who donated to the Claremont Mormon Studies Program and the Howard W. Hunter Foundation during this year and last. Our program is flourishing in every way because of your generous support!

We did our best to include all of the 2013–2014 donors, but apologize in advance for any oversights and request notification of any errors or omissions. For any corrections, please notify Christie Frandsen at christiefrandsen@gmail.com. ☺

\$500,000 or above

- Roy & Carol Christensen

\$100,000 or above

- Menlo F. Smith

\$50,000 or above

- John & Rebecca Hawkins

\$10,000 or above

- Stephen & Jane Bradford
- Rob Briggs
- Russ & Christine Frandsen
- Don & Jette Laws
- Armand & Ruth Mauss
- Mike & Debbie Milam
- Craig & Theresa Rossell
- Anonymous

\$5000 or above

- Weatherford & Lisa Clayton
- John & Louise Dalton
- Richard & Diane Dow

\$1000 or above

- Joseph & Marilyn Bentley
- Gerald & Barbara Bowns
- Mary Lythgoe Bradford
- Richard & Claudia Bushman
- Robert Crockett

- Dr. Gregory & Dorothy Winder DeVore

- Joe & Lydia Grigg

- Val & Alice Hemming

- Cynthia Kofford

- Ed Mauss

- Steven Mauss

- Mark McPaulin

- Ralph & Jeanne Muhlestein

- Robert & Lo-Mari O'Brien

- Charles Schofield

- Morris & Dawn Thurston

- Charles & Tammi Woodhouse

Up to \$1000

- M. R. Ballard

- Jonathan & Sunny Beutler

- Dr. R. Lanier Britsch

- John & Shirley Carmack

- LeGrande & Marguerite Eliason

- Glen Franks

- Christopher & Jennifer Halloran

- Monte & Melanie Harrick

- Donald C. Houle

- Blair & Janet Hoyt

- Jacqueline Howard

- Louine Hunter

- Randall H. & Carole Johnson

- Greg Kofford

- Scott Parks Letellier

- Gordon & Barbara Mauss

- Bruce & Helen McGregor

- Thomas & Martha Mumford

- Orlin & Opalgene Munns

- Guy Murray

- Craig Nelson

- Brian & Lisa Palmer

- Carol Pearson

- Frank & Anna Rolapp

- Bryant & Betty Rossiter

- Dr. Tammi Schneider

- Dr. Gary & Deborah Scott

- Clay Smith

- Milan D. Smith

- Ed Tolman

- Dallas Brent Tolton

- Jed & Elizabeth VanDenBerghe

- Regina Vigneault

- Donna West

- James Wilkinson

- Brooke Jones Williams

- John R. Williams

- Robert & Diane Wilson

- Bill & Marilyn Wright

- Anonymous

(RESPECTFUL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

female leadership within the church. Finally, they would witness occasionally emotional and always animated discussions among students who respect one another and the traditions we study.

As one of the few non-LDS students in the class, I am almost certainly more critical of the church than most of my classmates who practice Mormonism. But I sincerely believe that my classmates know how much I respect them and that the feeling is reciprocated. When we find ourselves debating opposing views on a text, issue, or belief, we know it is never personal. We all understand that the classroom is a safe place to express our opinions, whether or not we agree. Each one of us is there to learn not only from books, assignments, and Dr. Mason, but also from each other. This simply isn't possible without genuinely respecting one another as scholars, colleagues, and human beings.

Of course, respect reaches beyond interpersonal relationships. Our time in the classroom is a consistent reminder that the academic pursuit of religion requires an open mind and a willingness to at least attempt to understand the deeply personal, sometimes volatile realm of religious faith, whether we are researching contemporary Mormonism, formative Judaism, or ancient Hinduism. We are studying more than the details of various religions. We are also learning how to conduct ourselves as scholars and that the very best scholarship is deeply respectful of the doctrines, beliefs, cultures, and members of the traditions it explores, even when critiquing them. Ultimately, it is the respect of the subject and of one another that allows us to generously share our insights, passionately disagree, and mindfully become the most successful scholars of Mormonism, and religion, that we can be. ☺

MSH CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Mormon Scholars in the Humanities at CGU

In March, the Claremont Mormon Studies program at Claremont Graduate University hosted the annual conference of the Mormon Scholars in the Humanities. A number of students from our program participated in the event. The theme “Narrative” carried participants across disciplines to examine Mormonism. We reviewed a few of the sessions and offer them here as a peek at the conference which occurred March 27–29, 2014.

Michael Haycock spoke about the relationship between the church and the state in Nephite political philosophy, proposing that Nephites did not develop institutions robust enough to negotiate pluralism. Kim Berkey presented on Samuel the Lamanite's address to Zarahemla and the Nephites' reactions to the sign of Christ's coming, arguing that misunderstandings led both believers

and non-believers into fallacious models of temporality and faithfulness. Kirk Caudle drew parallels between the Israelite king Josiah's discovery of the book of the law in the temple and Joseph Smith's bringing forth the Book of Mormon, arguing that both new books served similar social and religious purposes.

In a panel entitled “Mormon Theology and Narrative,” Jon England discussed how Martin's Cove at the Mormon Handcart Historic Site has become a sacred space within Mormonism, and Matthew Pitts presented on a uniquely Mormon view of Jewish-Indian heritage. Jon's presentation discussed how not only narrative, but Mormon creed, ritual, and behavior are all prevalent at Martin's Cove and are used to distinguish it as a sacred landscape. Matthew Pitts also used narrative to il-

lustrate a uniquely Mormon view of Jewish-Indian connection. While other Israelite-Indian connection narratives died out at the end of the nineteenth century, the Mormon narrative of Indians descending from the Jews of Jerusalem lives on.

Friday's "Gender and Sexuality" session began with Brian Whitney's paper "LDS Women's Role: Rhetoric in Official Church Discourse." Whitney analyzed the percentages of General Conference talks that addressed women's roles in terms of whether they constituted essentialist or performative rhetoric. Alexandria Griffin presented "To Young Men Only: Gender and Homosexuality in Mormonism," in which she argued that both official and unofficial LDS discourse on homosexuality has historically prioritized men and offered potential explanations for this. Julie Frederick's "Conflicting Narratives Concerning Human Sexuality" traced differing attitudes toward the human body and sexuality from antiquity to present-day Mormonism. The 9:00 am Saturday session included panelists Chase Kirkham from CGU, Professor Bruce Jorgensen from BYU, Rachel Hunt from CGU, and Professor David Gore from the University of Minnesota—Duluth. Kirkham elaborated on how time factored into Adventist leader William Miller's personal religious narrative; Jorgensen articulated the narrative structure of Reynolds Price's *A Long and Happy Life* and explored Price's strategy of employing "open" time (as opposed to the more common use of "closed" time)

to reveal the complexities behind the characters' actions; using Paul Ricoeur's scholarship as an interpretive lens, Hunt highlighted the relationship between memory and identity as it occurs within the family unit, the Book of Mormon, and sacrament meeting; and Gore taught on the evolution and devolution of political structures as they cycled from monarchies to mob rule and explained how the cyclical nature of governments affected the nature of politics in Rome, the United States, and the Book of Mormon.

The keynote speaker Richard Kearney, casually describing his conversations with Emmanuel Levinas, and stoically speaking right through an earthquake, delivered his keynote address on "Narrating the Stranger." In the speech, Kearney expressed the idea that in the moment that a person interacts with a stranger, the person makes a wager about whether the stranger might be divine. The talk focused on mythological and biblical stories as shown in art and literature, and concluded with implications of how this idea might impact everyday life.

The conference brought a number of outside scholars to Claremont and offered a wonderful opportunity for networking, camaraderie, and showcasing current research across the various fields of Mormon Studies. We appreciate Alan Goff and David Paxman for seamlessly organizing and orchestrating such an excellent conference here at the Claremont Graduate University. 📍

Visit Us Online

Check out our updated website and subscribe to this newsletter by visiting:

claremontmormonstudies.org

Please direct any questions to **newsletter@claremontmormonstudies.org**.

Student Contributions to Scholarship

We asked students to provide some details about their recent academic work. Included here are some of their contributions to scholarship.

Jon England

- “Devil’s Gate: A Mormon Example of Creating Sacred Spaces with Narrative,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.

Tom Evans

- “The Mormon Jesus in Mexico,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.

David Golding

- “From Dusting Feet to Saving Souls: Mormon Missions in Thought and Practice,” Mission in World Religions Symposium, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, February 2014.
- “Mormon Missions” in *Mission in World Religions: Toward a Comparative Missiology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).

Alex Griffin

- “Guilty of Levery: Mormon Self-Representation in Comedic Films,” Religions in Conversation Conference, Claremont Graduate University, February 2014.
- “Queer Mormons and the Politics of Usable Pasts,” American Academy of Religion Western Region Conference, March 2014.
- “To Young Men Only: Gender and Homosexuality in Mormonism,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.

Lincoln Hale

- “The Staurogram: A Depiction of Christ Crucified,” Religions in Conversation

Conference, Claremont Graduate University, February 2014.

- “Connective Leadership for Children,” Research Conference, Claremont Graduate University, 2014.
- Hugh W. Nibley Fellowship, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2014.

Michael Haycock

- “The Righteous Man Regardeth the Life of His Beast: The History and Decline of Mormon Animal Consciousness,” American Academy of Religion Western Region Conference, March 2014.
- “‘Every Man According to His Mind’: Church(es), State, and Narrating Nephite Decline,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.
- Summer Seminar Participant, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, Summer 2014.

Maclane Heward

- “Hawn’s Mill Massacre: A Narrative of Remembrance,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.

Chase Kirkham

- “Constructing a Resilient Faith: The Temporal Narrative of William Miller,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, March 2014.
- “From Cyclical Security to Faithful Assurance: The Temporal Conversion of William Miller,” American Academy of Religion Western Region Conference, March 2014.

- “Illustrating the Passage of Time: The Temporal Charisma of William Miller,” Religions in Conversation Conference, Claremont Graduate University, February 2014.

Matthew Pitts

- “A Divergent Path: Reconsidering a Distinctive Mormon Jewish Indian Theory,” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.

Rachel Hunt Steenblik

- “Memory and Narrative: Paul Ricoeur and Latter-day Saint Injunctions ‘to Remember,’” Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference, Claremont, March 2014.
- With Heidi Zameni, Debbie Ostorga, and Nathan Greeley, “An Awareness of What is Missing: Four Views on the Consequences of Secularism,” *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University*, November 2013.
- Rachel gave birth to Cora Evelyn Steenblik in Brooklyn, New York on October 10, 2013.

Beyond Mormon Studies

It is not enough for the scholar of Mormonism to ask what history or sociology has to say about Mormonism; one should additionally inquire as to what Mormonism can tell us about a given history or an accepted theory.

BY MASON ISOM MA STUDENT IN RELIGION

Mormon Studies is exciting. It is a budding field filled with possibility. Graduate students are always in search of the untrodden paths in their respective disciplines and Mormonism still has much to offer by way of unexplored territory for any number of disciplines. As an emerging field of study, however, it is necessary for Mormon Studies to point beyond itself by offering fresh perspectives on more traditional fields and subjects. In other words, it is not enough for the scholar of Mormonism to ask what history or sociology has to say about Mormonism; one should additionally inquire as to what Mormonism can tell us about a given history or an accepted theory.

Allow me to offer an example from my time here at Claremont. I began my studies here with an interest in religious conflict as well as religious efforts to build peace. Having graduated from Brigham Young University—Hawaii in International Cultural Studies, I felt a little like a fish out of water in Mormon Studies which is so grounded in History. My first semester, Patrick Mason offered a class on Mormonism and Politics. I was fascinated, but found I lacked much of the context of 19th century American history to fully appreciate how uniquely Mormon and yet thoroughly American Mormonism was as an emerging religious tradition. Despite my handicap, my mind was sufficiently blown as American politics proved to be an effective way to track the major transitions throughout Mormon history.

At the time I didn't quite see how this experience fit into my larger interest of religious conflict, especially within contemporary Mormonism. Today's American Mormons are generally conservative, patriotic, and see their citizenship in the American nation and their membership in the LDS church as complementary identities. The major tensions between the Church and the State seemed to be in the past.

A class the following year on the various forms of religious fundamentalism reignited my interest in the intersection between religion and the public life, and I began to look at Mormonism's history through a different lens. Many Americans, and Mormons for that matter, don't realize the crucial role that Mormonism has played in the development of religion in public American life. Not only did Mormonism serve to provide the first test of the religious freedom clause in the Supreme Court, it also serves as a brilliant case study for understanding American secularity, or the proper role of religion in public life, and how a religion originally public and political could thrive through privatization.

In the years since September 11, 2001, scholars and politicians alike have become attuned to the critical role of religion in the present global conflicts, particularly in resistance to the idea that religion should be relegated to the private sphere. For this young scholar, who struggled early on to understand how his interests in Mormonism and

religious conflict might combine, Mormonism has come to provide a case study for understanding a present and pressing global issue. Other scholars both of Mormonism and of secularity, might do well to look to Mormonism's history and adaptation as well.

This is one small example of the potential offerings that Mormon Studies has for other disciplines and fields of study. Claremont Graduate University has become a hub for this type of dialogue between Mormon Studies and academia at large and the conversation is still developing. ☯

Claremont Mormon Studies Newsletter is a joint
publication of the

HOWARD W. HUNTER CHAIR OF MORMON STUDIES

CLAREMONT MORMON STUDIES COUNCIL

CLAREMONT MORMON STUDIES STUDENT ASSOCIATION



Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies

Patrick Q. Mason

Claremont Mormon Studies Council

Chairman

Steve Bradford

Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association

President

Alan Clark

Vice President

Lincoln Hale



Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies

831 N. Dartmouth Ave.

Claremont, CA 91711