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Abstract Both Norton and Taylor review the volume *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, edited by Dennis L. Largey and published by Deseret Book.

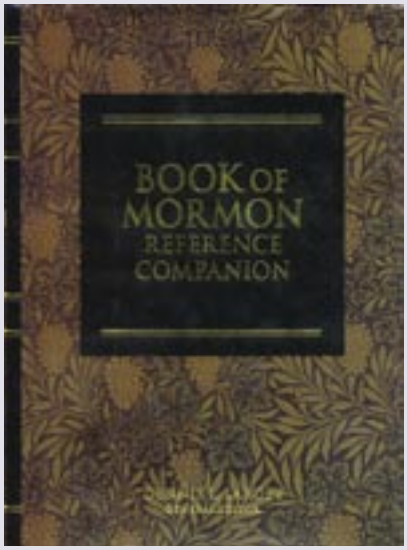
A READER'S LIBRARY

Review by Don E. Norton

The rumor was that George Johnson would give a pair of buckskin gloves to any deacon who would read the Book of Mormon. Brother Johnson and I were members of the rural Springdale Ward, Burley Stake (Idaho). This was in the late 1940s, when sacrament meeting attendance in many wards hovered around 20 percent and the Book of Mormon was not a commonly read (or highly esteemed) book in Latter-day Saint-dom. I got about a third of the way through it, then lost interest—and the pleasure of owning a pair of valuable buckskin work gloves.

Indeed, there wasn't much talk about the Book of Mormon in the church in those days. The first and second years of seminary were Old and New Testament, the third year (seminary was then a three-year program) church history. There was minimal reference to the Book of Mormon in missionary work, in general conferences, in church and auxiliary and Church Educational System curriculums, and in scholarly publications. (For the statistics of this "neglect," and the reasons for it, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 28/2 [1999]: 7–47.)

Then things began to change. Hugh Nibley's first article on the Book of Mormon appeared in the *Improvement Era* in 1948, followed by the serials (later to appear in book form) "Lehi in the Desert" (1950), "The World of the Jaredites" (1951–52), and "There Were Jaredites" (1956–57). Interest in the Book of Mormon rose in 1957: the Melchizedek Priesthood manual that year was Nibley's *An Approach to the Book of Mormon,* probably the first widely read commentary on that volume of scripture in the history of the church. Thanks in part to the stimulus of Nibley's scholarship, along with prodding by some General Authorities and a few members of Brigham Young University's religion faculty, principally Sidney Sperry and David Yarn, the Book of Mormon began gradually to take its rightful place in the church. My own personal immersion in the Book of Mormon in the early 1950s owes to Glenn Pearson, Reid Bankhead, and Eldin Ricks, whose BYU classes I took and who spearheaded the teaching of the gospel mainly by use of the Book of Mormon. In 1961 that scripture became the required



Dennis L. Largey, ed. *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. xxiii + 850 pp. Hardback, $49.95

BYU freshman course in religion, though only after extended debate among religion faculty and the administration. Over time, the Book of Mormon became part of the core curriculum of the seminary and institute programs and a routine part of the adult Sunday School curriculum beginning in 1972.

In 1986 President Ezra Taft Benson's well-known calls to return to the Book of Mormon gave impetus to Book of Mormon scholarship already under way by the Foundation for Ancient

Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) since its founding in 1979. Multiple FARMS publications have since fostered serious interest and scholarship in that volume of scripture so central to the restoration of the gospel. The agendas of the early meetings of the FARMS board often featured discussions of a reference manual, dictionary, or encyclopedia of the Book of Mormon. Other scholars have also contemplated compiling such a reference work. The propriety of such a volume, in light of renewed interest in the Book of Mormon and comparable works for the Bible, became more and more evident. Reference books of this type are useful study guides, despite their inherent limitations. The *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* will become a standard in many libraries, institutional and private, despite its relatively high price, as church books go, of $50.00. But at 850 pages, it's a bargain.

The *Reference Companion* contains over 900 alphabetized entries (covering more than 1,500 topics)—brief explanations of names and places from the Book of Mormon, but also more extensive treatments of doctrinal topics, history, key words and phrases, and outlines of books within the Book of Mormon. Some 111 authors contributed to the volume. One of the most valuable discussions is of the chapters of Isaiah that appear in the Book of Mormon—60 pages of outlines and synopses, definitions, contrasts to biblical Isaiah, and modern-day applications.

The book also contains a variety of graphics—pictures, charts, maps, and especially outlines—that complement the written text. The book ends with appendixes and an index of topics. Appendix A, "Study Guide to the Book of Mormon," matches topics with readings and subject groupings; all entry titles throughout the text, wherever they occur, are cross-referenced by title in small capital letters. Appendix B (only eight pages) contains brief comments on the Book of Mormon by 15 church leaders, from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley.

Appendix C consists of about 150 definitions of words from Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language.* The implication, a questionable one, is that these definitions represent those Joseph Smith was familiar with as he translated the Book of Mormon. However, no explanation is given as to how or why these words were selected or to what extent they reflect contemporary upstate New York dialect, biblical usage, or Samuel Johnson's massive 1755 dictionary (Webster borrowed wholesale from Johnson). One of my favorite definitions, that of *fellow,* which King Noah uses to refer to Abinadi—"Away with this fellow, and slay him" (Mosiah 13:1)—is not included; one of Webster's definitions is "a man without good breeding or worth; an ignoble man," perhaps more apt than the more common meaning, simply a neuter-gender companion or associate. Webster's entry closely follows Johnson's, as do most of the others in the *Reference Companion.*

One could argue that the *Reference Companion* is either overdue or premature. It does represent well our present state of understanding of the Book of Mormon, but much thought and scholarship will continue to emerge. Hugh Nibley confessed to me, at a chance meeting in the 1990s, to having recently learned one of the most basic themes of the Book of Mormon, which a student had just discovered. What remains to be said or discovered may surprise us all. A periodic update of the *Reference Companion* will be advisable.

The scholarship and quality of the writing (though the book is well edited) are uneven, predictably so, with so many contributors. Perhaps for reasons of convenience, nearly two-thirds of contributors are members of the BYU religion or CES faculties; nearly another quarter are in some way affiliated with BYU. A broader range of thinking and scholarship might well have enriched the volume; an academic mind-set and training can be as much a blinder as an advantage. For example, the discussion of "Book of Mormon, Figures of speech in" relies on traditional literary categories of images, failing to consider that the richest imagery in the Book of Mormon (at its own insistence—see 2 Nephi 11:4), and in the scriptures in general, consists of types and shadows of features of redemptive patterns, itself a unique category, clearly the most vital one.

An index of all entries by a particular contributor would be helpful, to enable readers to find the contributors whose comments most interest them. (The BYU library is assembling such an index, which will be available on a Web site.) Authors' initials at the end of each entry are helpful, but the index of contributors (pp. xvi–xix) is alphabetized by

last name. I found myself hopping back and forth between entries and the list of contributors, scanning, for example, all the names whose last initial is *B* and then translating them into initials (MVB, TBB, KDB, ALB, etc.) to find "RLB." And I am still not sure who MDP is, the author of the article on "Hebraisms." (It's probably M. D. Pack, listed only as "DP" under the contributors.) Two librarians have also found this index format "annoying." Even so, this attractive (but heavy—it's printed on a high-quality gloss) volume will be well received; it fills a natural niche, and the numerous bibliographies in many entries (often a measure of their quality) are additional valuable resources to serious students of the Book of Mormon.

Review by Sally T. Taylor

Several weeks ago, the Gospel Doctrine teacher in our ward discussed Lehi's journey through the wilderness. He held the class spellbound with a story of a man from the Near East who had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The man had written about how Near Eastern customs and geography corresponded to the description of Lehi's travels in 1 Nephi. The teacher enumerated several specific points and details, bringing the journey into sharp focus. Suggesting that what was known in 1830 about the ancient Arabian Peninsula presented a far different picture from that shown in the Book of Mormon, he concluded that Joseph Smith could not possibly have known what he knew without divine assistance. As the teacher concluded the comparisons, I felt strongly of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

I had a similar verification as I devoured article after article in the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion.* The Lord asks us to read from the best books. This book more than qualifies to be in that category.

As one thumbs through the book, the first thing that catches the eye is the professional presentation. The quality of paper and binding, the physical presentation of each page, and the easily accessed sections make research with this book a pleasure. Everything is carefully referenced, either by scriptural reference or by bibliographic notation. Each alphabetical section begins with an eye-catching page with floral wallpaper and a quotation from the Book of Mormon with a highlighted word that begins with the letter of that section. I was curious to see if odd letters such as *Q, V,* or *W* had scriptural words. Sure enough. There were *quick, virgin,* and *worship*. I figured that it was okay not to have an *X* or *Y* section, however.

Another immediately stunning feature is the liberal use of illustration. Photos, paintings, portraits, maps, and facsimiles are sprinkled throughout the volume, most in full color. I think it was the first time I've ever seen a picture of the Anthon transcript. Although some of the paintings were familiar, others such as Thomas Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,* Liz Lemon Swindle's *Form of a Dove,* and Walter Rane's *Alma Arise* were new to me and breathtaking.

A masterful overview and introduction begin the body of the *Reference Companion,* but even before that, a section entitled "About This Volume" gives 11 categories of structure that make the book more accessible to the reader: style and format, characters, places, doctrinal topics, books of the Book of Mormon, historical entries, historical background, general topics, words and phrases, reviews of Isaiah chapters, and appendixes. It also lists the names and affiliations of the 111 contributors to the volume, most of whom are associated with the Church Educational System or Brigham Young University.

The explanation of style and format details the alphabetical listing, the split-column format, and the uses of cross-referencing

and superscripts. The other categories denote the types of entries in the volume. For example, the explanation under "Characters" notes that the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* contains entries on every person named in the Book of Mormon (with a few exceptions in the Isaiah section) as well as on many biblical characters. The comprehensive nature of the volume is astonishing.

After the "Overview and Introduction" is a section titled "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon." Clearly and concisely, it details the events leading to the plates' removal from Cumorah, Joseph Smith's work with them, the opposition he encountered, and the eventual publication of the book are detailed and illustrated with appropriate pictures. At this point in the volume, the entries are alphabetical. Listed in the *B*'s under "Book of Mormon" is additional information about the Book of Mormon, such as its ancient Near Eastern roots, the Book of Mormon as another testament of Christ, the condemnation for treating the book lightly, early conversions through the Book of Mormon, editions, and so on. A more in-depth historical background here also details the early opposition to the work with pictures and research about that era. It is extremely impressive.

Moving from the *B*'s through the rest of the alphabet, I found incredibly fascinating information, topics that cover anything and everything a person might want to know about the Book of Mormon. And in most cases, if an entry doesn't cover the subject in enough detail, it has a bibliography of additional material.

Appropriately, another large section is on Jesus Christ. Again, I found the information beautifully presented, giving a comprehensive look at Christ's life, teachings, and importance to the human race. Within the subtopics on Jesus Christ are the names by which Christ is known and where each name is found in the Book of Mormon. I was astonished by the sheer number of times Jesus Christ is referred to by different names throughout the Book of Mormon. Also treated here is the Nephite anticipation of the coming of Christ, his premortal appearances, his roles as the Father and the Son, and his second coming.

Within the alphabetical listing are doctrinal topics. Wow! A church-talk handbook at the turn of a page, I thought. No matter what topic the bishop assigns for a sacrament meeting talk, I could be prepared. I thumbed through and was even more impressed by how each topic was presented. Explained first, in a concise sentence, is Latter-day Saint belief about a certain doctrine or principle, followed by a lengthy discussion and scriptural references to support that belief. An example is the term *mysteries of God,* defined as "truths known through revelation, such as doctrines of the gospel, and the 'ways' or divine actions and attributes of God" (p. 577). Further explanation and references follow. The number of doctrinal topics covered is high.

As rich as the clarification of doctrine and principles is, the way in which the prophets of the Book of Mormon are discussed may be even richer. They are briefly described, and then their lives and teachings are discussed, supported by scriptural references. Toward the end of each listing is a summary of that prophet's teachings in numerical order, followed by scriptural support. I turned immediately to Amulek, a prophet found in Alma 10.

Here was a man blessed with material abundance and social prominence. Although Amulek wouldn't listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost at first, the Lord finally sent an angel to enlist his help. Like some in the Lord's church today, I thought, once he gained a firm testimony of the truth, he was able to use his wealth and position to assist in the work. And then he gave it all up to serve the Lord.

The *Reference Companion* says about Amulek: "a descendant of Nephi and a prominent citizen of Ammonihah, a good and generous man who after conversion became a powerful teacher of the word of Christ" (p. 52). Listed after a more detailed summary of Amulek's life's work are seven of his major teachings, such as his testimony of Jesus Christ, his teachings on the atonement and on the resurrection, and so forth. The entries on all Book of Mormon prophets are similarly linked to doctrine.

Following the lead suggested in the "About This Volume" section, I checked how each separate book in the Book of Mormon is outlined. Clearly and effectively. Then I looked at categories that focus on specific people in the Book of Mormon. Many contained additional information, such as places where their names have been found in the Old World. For example, the name Alma is found in the Bar

Kokhba documents (picture on p. 581). Multiple uses of a name are clarified, such as Laman, the brother of Nephi. This name is also applied to Lamanite kings, a captain of Moroni's army, a city, and a river.

Unusual words or short phrases also are identified. The words *jot* and *tittle* are not only defined but also illustrated. I found that illustration extremely helpful. Some words that are slightly unfamiliar to the modern ear or whose definitions have varied from Webster's 1828 dictionary, such as *fain, besom,* or *bittern,* are listed with their earlier meanings in an appendix. Short phrases, such as "voice of the people" or "sanctified in the flesh," are also explained. A linguistic examination of Hebraisms gives the nonspecialist reader a depth of understanding that usually only scholars can achieve.

As I searched the *Reference Companion* for specific topics, I couldn't help pausing on the colorful charts and graphs featured throughout it. One example is the chart titled "Doctrines Taught in the Book of Mormon according to D&C 20:17–36" (p. 237). Verse by verse, the Doctrine and Covenants passage is compared with the Book of Mormon. Twenty doctrines are listed in this chart.

Other charts are equally interesting and helpful, such as those on the chronology of the translation of the Book of Mormon (p. 159), the reign of the judges (p. 474), the weights and measures listed in Alma 11:5–19 (p. 609), and the allegory of Zenos (p. 805). And I was excited to see a genealogy chart of the posterity of Jared. Reading Ether, I've often wanted to stop and get out a piece of paper to trace the ancestry. Here it's done for me.

I'm sure many readers will rejoice at the section comparing the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi with those in the Old Testament. There are not only an outline and a verse-by-verse comparison but also a liberal use of charts showing the similarities and differences between the two versions of Isaiah. Background information and commentary on the section give further assistance. The Malachi section in 3 Nephi receives a similar, if less-extensive, treatment.

Throughout the book, historical and doctrinal charts show relationships and clarify time frames. Charts and graphs also show the relationship between modern and ancient gospel concepts, linking the full canon of scripture effectively, and colorful maps show the different eras of ancient Israel's history.

Another of my favorite sections was that on poetry in the Book of Mormon. As a poet myself, I was drawn to the beautifully presented and accurate analysis noting and illustrating the four kinds of parallelism found in 2 Nephi and Alma.

The book concludes with an appendix containing a study guide for the Book of Mormon, an appendix with statements about the Book of Mormon by leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (with their pictures), and an appendix with the words from Webster's 1828 dictionary, as mentioned previously.

Overwhelmed by the richness of the book, I knew I had to use a critical eye to find problems or cracks in the facade. First, I looked at the controversial topic of Book of Mormon geography. Many interesting conjectures on the location of Book of Mormon sites have circulated for years. Conflicting accounts make it a touchy area. Which theory was going to be adopted? I was ready to heatedly debate the choice. To my delight, I found that the section was written with great tact. A generalized map not linked to any actual historical locations showed cities and landmarks mentioned in relation to one another, rather than in relation to known geographical areas. The contributors of the volume did not reject any sincere effort of research in this area, but neither did they endorse any. They conclude the section with Elder John A. Widtsoe's statement "All such studies are legitimate, but the conclusions drawn from them, though they may be correct, must at best be held as intelligent conjectures" (p. 289).

A second controversial topic is the presence of alleged anachronisms in the Book of Mormon—linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal. I had heard the criticism that horses and steel did not exist in pre-Columbian America and that the Book of Mormon was therefore in error. Also some doctrinal concepts such as unpardonable sin are not commonly considered as being taught until the New Testament. Critics have therefore attacked the book's use of these concepts. Each of these criticisms is effectively defused. We are left to wonder what all the fuss was about.

As a final touchy area, I checked the handling of the

"great and abominable church." Rather than tying it to any one church either in existence or in ancient times, as an earlier generation of Latter-day Saints tried to do, the entry lists the characteristics of the great and abominable church as found in 1 Nephi and in the book of Revelation. A statement toward the end of the article is particularly helpful: "It is unwise and inaccurate to point to any particular church or political system as *the* great and abominable church. No single organization meets all the requirements." The article then lists these requirements and reiterates: "The conclusion is inescapable: no *single* entity can be *the* great and abominable church from the beginning of the world to the end. Rather, the role has been played by many different actors in many different times" (p. 314).

So now I'm left trying to find something critical to say about the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion,* and I've come up short. Maybe if I went line by line with my red plastic ruler through the volume, I'd find something to complain about. But maybe not. I frankly have nothing but praise to offer. I am honored to have this book on my bookshelf, where it won't collect dust because it is consulted so often by everyone in my family, particularly when we are called upon to teach a lesson or give a talk. It is a gold mine of information.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend this book for every home. As a reference book about the Book of Mormon, this volume is a landmark.