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**Abstract** Review of *How to Increase Your Enjoyment of the Book of Mormon: Striking New Insights into the Life of Mormon and His Work* (2005), by Keith Bailey Schofield.

## MORMON'S SPIRITUAL TREASURE, “DAZZLING” OR OTHERWISE

Paula W. Hicken

Review of Keith Bailey Schofield. *How to Increase Your Enjoyment of the Book of Mormon: Striking New Insights into the Life of Mormon and His Work*. Orem, UT: Granite Publishing and Distributing, 2005. xi + 235 pp., with index. \$17.95.

During the 1980s when I began to pursue freelance writing, I attended a few workshops to learn the craft. One of the pointers I remember from those lectures was to write a how-to piece because readers navigate toward essays that feature a way for them to develop new skills or improve their lives. I never wrote a how-to article. But a glance at Keith Bailey Schofield's title suggests that he did, or at least intended to. However, I am perplexed by the decision to use “how to” in the title. Schofield's book is better described as a biography of the prophet Mormon. “No penetrating study of Mormon and his work has been written since the publication of the Book of Mormon almost two centuries ago, a fact that amazes me” (p. 3). His book is an effort to provide this previously unwritten “penetrating study.”

Schofield's use of the words *penetrating study* brings two issues to mind. First, if the book is a penetrating study, which would encourage serious study, why use the word *enjoyment*, a term that connotes reading for entertainment? Schofield's publisher was possibly hoping to entice a broad group of potential buyers ranging from those who want to be entertained to those who want to be enlightened. Second, Schofield's statement astonishes me. I wonder how he defines “Mormon

and his work.” Numerous “penetrating” studies of Mormon’s work, which might be considered the entire Book of Mormon, come to mind.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Schofield’s focus is narrower, intending only to consider Mormon as the compiler or editor of the book. If he means that no specific study of the prophet Mormon has been written, then he may not be aware of articles by Jeffrey R. Holland, Spencer J. Condie, and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, for example.<sup>2</sup> Although these are not book length, they represent insightful studies of the life of Mormon. I believe Schofield intends his “penetrating study” to be about the life and editorial work of Mormon.

Part of the challenge of constructing a penetrating study of Mormon is the lack of adequate source material. Jerry L. Ainsworth wrote a book titled *The Lives and Travels of Mormon and Moroni sev-*

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1. To mention only a few, Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997); Noel B. Reynolds and Charles D. Tate, eds., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982); Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989); and numerous in-depth studies published by the Maxwell Institute, such as John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992); Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997); Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004)—all of which predate Schofield’s book. See also any issue of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.

2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Mormon: The Man and the Book, Part 1,” *Ensign*, March 1978, 15–18; Holland, “Mormon: The Man and the Book, Part 2,” *Ensign*, April 1978, 57–59; Spencer J. Condie, “Mormon: Historian, General, Man of God,” in *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 168–79; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction: Papers from the Ninth Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 1994*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1995), 117–31.

eral years ago.<sup>3</sup> T. Lynn Elliott, in a review of this book, describes the challenge to create a history of Mormon:

Unfortunately, [Ainsworth] faces the same problem as have other authors who have dealt with [the issues of answering questions about Mormon and Moroni], namely the paucity of source material. Taken together, the books of Mormon and Moroni make up only thirty-one pages in the current English edition of the Book of Mormon, and much of this space is dedicated to doctrinal subjects rather than to biography, history, geography, or culture. To these pages one can add the occasional marginal notes that both Mormon and Moroni make at various places in the Book of Mormon, but even so, one is left with very little firsthand material with which to reconstruct the “lives and travels” of these two men.<sup>4</sup>

Schofield’s portrait of Mormon is derived from Mormon’s writings in the nine chapters of the short book of Mormon (although two are written by Moroni), three chapters of the book of Moroni, and the many verses Mormon inserts as compiler, abridger, and redactor, which include the Words of Mormon. Schofield is confident this is enough, declaring, “I saw that even though Mormon had written little about himself, his writings were so extensive that deductions and inferences could be drawn bit by bit from his writings that would reveal various aspects of his life” (p. 4). Schofield categorizes his biography as “interpretation” (p. 57), “theory” (p. 66), “inquiry” (p. 71), “inference” (p. 73), “guesses” (p. 86 n. 4), and “pure speculation” (p. 84). These are accurate descriptions. For example, Mormon’s father took him to the land of Zarahemla when he was eleven years old (Mormon 1:6). According to Schofield, Mormon was “overwhelmed” by the size of the “city” of Zarahemla, and his “dramatic reaction” means that “Mormon was born and raised in a small town, village, or on a plantation” (pp. 9–10).

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3. Jerry L. Ainsworth, *The Lives and Travels of Mormon and Moroni* (n.p.: PeaceMakers, 2000).

4. T. Lynn Elliott, “Discovering Mormon and Moroni,” review of *The Lives and Travels of Mormon and Moroni*, by Jerry L. Ainsworth, *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 1.

The actual text reads as follows: “And it came to pass that I, being eleven years old, was carried by my father into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla. The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea” (Mormon 1:6–7).

When I read those verses I picture an eleven-year-old being surprised by how much the land of Zarahemla had grown, but I do not detect that he was overwhelmed or that his reaction was dramatic. I could equally speculate that Mormon had visited the land before and therefore later noted how much it had grown since that time. Although I currently live in a metro area, when I return to the small town I lived in previously, I notice the growth and will often comment on the changes. It does not follow that I am overwhelmed or that my reactions are dramatic. Clearly the population growth of the land of Zarahemla was significant enough to mention. This fact might have served to set the stage for conditions Mormon writes about in the following verses: war began between the Nephites and the Lamanites, wickedness was prevalent enough for God to remove the Three Nephites, Mormon was not allowed to preach to the people because of their hardened hearts, the Gadianton robbers infested the land, and the “power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite” (Mormon 1:19; see vv. 8–18). Observing the teeming land of Zarahemla and perceiving the connection between it and the degradation of the Nephite society that followed seems appropriate for a young man who only one year earlier had been given the charge to “remember the things that ye have observed” and to “engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people” (vv. 3–4). Mormon’s observations seem to me to have little to do with whether he was “raised in a small town, village, or on a plantation.” More likely his observations were influenced as Terryl Givens describes: “Much of the balance of the record, written mostly in the third person and mediated as it is by Mormon’s perspective from the

side of apocalyptic destruction rather than of hopeful exile, is marked by the somber lessons of lived history.”<sup>5</sup>

Schofield’s discussion of Mormon’s military career is another example of his unconvincing use of deductions and inferences. Mormon writes that he was only in his sixteenth year when he was appointed leader of the Nephite armies (see Mormon 2:1–2). Schofield notes, “The Nephites were not so reckless as to elect a military leader solely because he was large in stature. They had to see in Mormon numerous qualities that would fit him for high command. . . . Selected Nephite men, including Mormon, had to be trained during the four-year peace following the first series of battles” (pp. 43–44, 45). Schofield then conjectures that Mormon’s “intelligence and education would have enabled him to speak with clarity and act with confidence. His military training would have taught him enough to be sure of himself when dealing with military matters” (p. 48). A few pages later Schofield seems to contradict his earlier assertions when he calls Mormon an “inexperienced commander” and argues that it “would not be a surprise if Mormon had flaws in his leadership” (p. 49). Reading the same verses, I see no mention of military training. Could readers conclude that Mormon was born great, achieved greatness, or had greatness thrust upon him?<sup>6</sup> Rather than gain skills through extensive training, which may have consisted of “hour after hour, day after day, and week after week learning and then sharpening their skills with the weapons with which they fought” (p. 45), Mormon may have succeeded as a military leader because he was endowed with other skills, such as “integrity and faithful independence,”<sup>7</sup> “a strong body and a resolute spirit,”<sup>8</sup> “compassion and charity,”<sup>9</sup> and a divine calling to be in a position of leadership “for such a time as this” (see Esther 4:14). One can only wonder at the lasting influence the visit from Jesus Christ had upon Mormon’s leadership (see Mormon 1:15).

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5. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 53.

6. See William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.145–46 (Riverside ed.).

7. Holland, “Mormon, Part 1,” 16.

8. Holland, “Mormon, Part 1,” 16.

9. Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” 122.

However, scholarship from John A. Tvedtnes supports Schofield's conclusions, rather than my own. He writes:

[A student in my Book of Mormon class] suggested that Mormon, the father of the abridger of the Nephite record, was a professional soldier. As evidence, he noted that the younger Mormon was eleven years of age when his father took him into the "land southward" (Mormon 1:6) and that "in this year there began to be a war between the Nephites . . . and the Lamanites. . . . The war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon" (Mormon 1:8, 10). The family's departure into the war zone hints at a military transfer. In light of this possibility, I suggest that the historian/general/prophet Mormon was, in fact, from a line of army leaders who belonged to a military caste.<sup>10</sup>

Many of Schofield's speculations beg for more scholarly discussion. One example concerns the language on the plates. Schofield guesses that in order for Mormon to work with the plates of Nephi he had to have knowledge of Egyptian. "You can imagine that learning Egyptian with its unfamiliar characters and unfamiliar syntax would have driven the young Mormon to his studies day after day, month after month" (p. 21). Schofield also supposes "it is logical to assume that Ammaron was the tutor who taught that language to the young Mormon" (p. 21). Moroni summarizes the script used on the plates as "characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech" (Mormon 9:32).<sup>11</sup> The suggestion that Mormon had to know Egyptian

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10. John A. Tvedtnes, "Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 317.

11. For more discussion on the language and writing of the Nephites and writing during the preexilic period (which would have been the type Lehi and Nephi took with them into the New World), see John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 51–120; Gee, "The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas," review of *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book*

is not objectionable, but more discussion should be pursued. How well was this script known? Did only those who kept these particular records know it? Where and how Mormon learned to write reformed Egyptian script is uncertain. We do not know that Ammaron taught Mormon himself. Their association could have been several years or only enough time for Ammaron to be spiritually guided to Mormon and to watch or talk with him to “perceive that [he was] a sober child, and [was] quick to observe,” and then to conclude he was the designated custodian of the sacred Nephite records (Mormon 1:2). The Book of Mormon does not indicate how soon after Ammaron’s instructions to Mormon that Ammaron died. Since in most ancient cultures literacy is taught by father to son,<sup>12</sup> perhaps Mormon’s father taught him or caused him to be taught. But we just don’t know, because the record does not say.

Whatever language the Nephites spoke was probably an amalgam of Hebrew and the native languages of their region of the New World. Languages fuse and confuse over time.<sup>13</sup> We see this natural process in the history of the English language. Although English has Germanic roots, through time it has absorbed words from Latin, Greek, French, and other languages; it continues to change. Moroni indicates that the Nephites’ “reformed Egyptian” script was “handed down” and “altered.” He does not indicate why or how or when they altered it, other than the fact that their spoken language influenced the changes. We have no reason to doubt that Mormon was able to read the script written on plates during Nephi’s time, just as many English speakers

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*of Mormon*, by Stan Larson, *FARMS Review* 10/2 (1998): 158–83; Gee, “Epigraphic Considerations on Janne Sjedahl’s Experiment with Nephite Writing,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 25; John S. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 259–76; John Gee, “Egyptian Society during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty,” in *Glimpses*, 277–98; Aaron P. Schade, “The Kingdom of Judah: Politics, Prophets, and Scribes in the Late Preexilic Period,” in *Glimpses*, 299–336; Brian D. Stubbs, “Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let’s Void the Void,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 1–49.

12. Personal communication with Egyptologist John Gee, 21 August 2007.

13. Most of the observations in this paragraph were brought up during my conversation with John Gee, 21 August 2007.

living in 2007 are able to read and understand the King James Version of the Bible or Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, written about 400 years ago. And many English students and scholars familiar with the Early Modern English of King James and Shakespeare can figure out Middle English words written a few centuries earlier than that.

The subtitle of Schofield's book, *Striking New Insights into the Life of Mormon and His Work*, refers to insights Schofield considers new, five of which he names in the book (pp. 5–7). These insights may best be described as personally striking to him because he mentions them broadly and does not explain them well enough for me to understand his meaning or adopt his enthusiasm. The book's cover and title page also feature the phrase "a dazzling spiritual treasure," which probably refers to the Book of Mormon. I was put off by the use of excessive adjectives elsewhere too: "breathtaking spiritual sensitivity" (p. ix), "brilliant creativity" (p. ix), and "incredibly perceptive Nephite prophets" (p. x). The book contains frequent flowery narrative, such as "You may be sure that Mormon . . . consistently went to his studies and tutors feeling anticipation, challenge, excitement, wonder, delight, and passion for learning. The exhilaration and near ecstasy of prized learning has a celestial quality that the studious young Mormon would have deeply felt" (pp. 22–23). Thankfully, this style dissipates in later chapters.

Elliott said of Ainsworth's work: "Perhaps because of the paucity of material available on the lives of Mormon and Moroni, most of this book deals with subjects other than these two men."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Schofield's book could have been a little less tangential (for example, he includes a chapter on King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma, and the Savior, with the correlation that as compiler and abridger, Mormon was influenced by them and determined the content of their Book of Mormon accounts).

Schofield's final chapter is reminiscent of the message President Ezra Taft Benson often delivered about asking ourselves if we have taken the Book of Mormon too lightly. I found this chapter stirring, not because he mentioned anything new or thought provoking, but because I had just read Schofield's two hundred pages with Mormon

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14. Elliott, "Discovering Mormon and Moroni," 2.

on my mind. Being an editor and writer myself, I considered Mormon's work as compiler and writer and wondered if he viewed the Book of Mormon as his magnum opus or as the culmination of his life's dedication to the care of a sacred record that would bless the lives of future generations. I envisioned him sorting through stacks of plates, writing, compiling, and selecting during the horrific years of degradation and destruction of a people who would not repent and be converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. But he persisted because he knew the purposes of the Lord would be fulfilled and the book would convert millions in a future day (see 3 Nephi 30:1–2; Mormon 5:9–14; 7:2–10). I wondered if I appreciate Mormon enough.

In an address given at a Brigham Young University nineteen-stake devotional in 1994, Elder Joe J. Christensen, then of the Presidency of the Seventy, spoke of a resolution to expand our intellectual horizons and increase in wisdom.

Suppose you were to read an entire book each week for the next seventy years. You would read 3,640 books. That sounds like a lot, but in the Library of Congress are more than 27,000,000 books. Futurist Alvin Toffler said that books are spewing from the world's presses at the rate of one thousand titles per day. That means that in seventy more years there will be an additional 25,000,000 volumes. Even if we read continually, we could not read more than the smallest fraction of the books in print. Therefore, we should not waste time reading anything that is not uplifting and instructive.<sup>15</sup>

I think about this advice almost every time I pick up a book. I thought about it after finishing Schofield's book, and I asked myself if reading his book was time well spent. Although I do not consider Schofield's book a "penetrating study," nor entertaining, I found it a biography meant to inspire and motivate readers to deepen their study of the Book of Mormon.

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15. Joe J. Christensen, "Resolutions," *Ensign*, December 1994, 63. This address is also available in its entirety at [speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=7704&x=28&y=6](http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=7704&x=28&y=6) (accessed 16 August 2007).

