

**“WORDS, WORDS, WORDS”:  
HUGH NIBLEY ON THE  
BOOK OF MORMON**

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**Marilyn Arnold**

**F**lannery O’Connor, a southern writer of no small reputation, was once asked how she saw her own work in relation to the writings of William Faulkner.<sup>1</sup> She replied that no one wanted her horse and buggy stalled on the tracks the Dixie Limited was coming down. That describes my position today. If ever there was a Dixie Limited in the Latter-day Saint community, it is Hugh Nibley. And here I am, sitting on the tracks. But I don’t intend to stay here long—that I can promise. I remember hearing Ray Bradbury describe his experience in writing the screenplay for Melville’s great novel, *Moby Dick*. Joking that he hadn’t been able to read the thing with any comprehension until he was thirty, he found that to do the screenplay he had to immerse himself completely in that very long book. He got up one morning, looked in the mirror, and said aloud, “I am Herman Melville.” Today I can stand before you and say, “I am Hugh Nibley.”

It is one thing to read the Book of Mormon in six or seven weeks, which I have done a few times. It is quite another to read virtually all of Hugh Nibley’s multitudinous writings on the Book of Mormon in nine or ten weeks. I would have brought my pages and pages of notes along to impress you, but they were too heavy to carry. In any event, here I am, up from that lesser-known Dixie. Lesser-known except in Utah. Having recently been educated by our man to the fact that the expression *land of*—whether it be *land of Jerusalem* or *land of Zarahemla*—can, by historical precedent, refer to both the city and the surrounding territory,<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1. Marilyn Arnold presents a lecture for the BYU Maxwell Institute in 2011.<sup>97</sup>

I can in all honesty claim to be from the *land of St. George*, even though technically I live in the town of Washington. And that last convoluted sentence, incidentally, would scarcely exceed some of Nibley's rhetorical exercises. And, incidentally, he employs the word *incidentally* freely to introduce countless side excursions into anything semipertinent that comes to his mind. And believe me, if you know Nibley, you know that a great deal comes to his mind, regardless of his announced subject.

Some of you are aware that I am an English teacher, in spite of a couple of side excursions into the Smoot Administration Building. Those of you familiar with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* will have recognized my title allusion. And those of you familiar with the writings and speakings of Hugh Nibley will recognize its appropriateness. When that old blunderbuss Polonius approaches Hamlet and asks what he is reading, Hamlet, book in hand, replies, "Words, words, words."<sup>3</sup> It is the same answer I would have given anyone who had asked me Polonius's question in those months of inundation in Nibley's writings. It was glorious. And it was maddening. I fell utterly in love with the man, and I wanted to shoot him.

### Hugh Nibley Assesses English Professors

Hugh Nibley is not kind to English professors in his writings, nor is he kind to college professors in a good many other fields. But

he has a special disregard for English teachers. They rank right up there with sociologists and anthropologists. Much as he sometimes sneers at what he deems rhetorical flourishes in writing—scorning the “mealy rhetoric” of early nineteenth-century romanticism<sup>4</sup>—he is a man highly conscious of style. He deftly employs nearly every rhetorical device in the book. I confess that I adore him for his inconsistencies. It was Emerson, after all—one of *my* guys—who pronounced “a foolish consistency” to be “the hobgoblin of little minds.”<sup>5</sup> For example, Nibley delivers one of his attacks on “professorhood” in the form of an ironic parable, scorching several academic fields in one fell swoop. (Yes, I know that “one fell swoop” is a colloquialism and a cliché, both of which Nibley uses frequently and happily. I insert them here and elsewhere in his honor.)

He uses his “little parable,” as he calls it, as a device for “explain[ing] the new trend in Book of Mormon criticism” practiced by “up-to-date intellectuals” in a variety of disciplines. I quote it because no paraphrase can do it justice:

A young man once long ago claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was ploughing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well-known form of delusion. An historian showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area but only quartz: the young man had been fooled by a quartz. When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a weary, tolerant smile and a kindly shake of the head. An English professor showed that the young man in describing his stone used the very same language that others had used in describing uncut diamonds: he was, therefore, simply speaking the common language of his time. A sociologist showed that only three out of 177 florists’ assistants in four major cities believed the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man but someone else who had found the stone.<sup>6</sup>

It is only “an indigent jeweler named Snite” who points out that the stone is available for examining, and the matter of its authenticity

has nothing to do with all these speculative assessments.<sup>7</sup> Guess who “Snite” is? No mystery there.

When Nibley lines them all up, however, the historians are clearly superior to the biologists, the sociologists, and the “oracles of the English department.” (Note the irony, which in Nibley is nearly always in the service of sarcasm unless he is speaking of himself, and then it is in the service of mock humility or mock ignorance.) He adds that “even English majors should know” that a poignant motif or idea “does not have to come from Shakespeare” to be valid. His specific reference here is to the “land of no return” motif found in Helaman 3, in the midst of admittedly “jumbled” though effective imagery.<sup>8</sup> (“Imagery,” I must remind him, is definitely an English major term, though we permit others to use it.)

Nibley admiringly and rightly praises the Book of Mormon as “a colossal structure,” a book that if “considered purely as fiction, . . . is a performance without parallel.” At the same time, he can’t resist contrasting it with the clearly inferior corpus of American literature—my specialty. Note the list of pejorative participles (I use alliteration in true Nibley fashion) and other adjectives with which he characterizes the literature of my field. He delights in describing it as “full of big, bumbling, rambling, brooding, preaching, mouthing books, spinning out a writer’s personal (usually adolescent) reminiscences and impressions at great and unoriginal lengths.”<sup>9</sup> I myself stand convicted of being a writer of such books (eight novels to date and, worse still, a memoir in the works). But as my tennis partner says, she doesn’t get sore at a bad call; she gets even. I was tempted to call this lecture “The Revenge of the English Professor,” but thought better of it.

### **Hugh Nibley’s Rage for Explaining**

Despite his seeming disdain for English teachers and their subject matter, Nibley is well versed in classical literature and a good deal of British literature. He even cites Mark Twain on occasion, and this in his writings about the Book of Mormon. Very likely, however, he was not familiar with Twain’s version of the diaries of Adam and Eve, set mainly in the Garden of Eden. As Twain tells it, in Adam’s voice, Adam’s life changes markedly when Eve is introduced into

the garden because talking is the thing she likes best, and talking is the thing he likes least. Adam says it is quite a relief to him when she takes up with a snake and has someone else's ear to bend. He confesses that he doesn't dare ask her anything because she has "such a rage for explaining."

If anything defines Hugh Nibley for me, outside his convictions regarding the Book of Mormon and his impatience with our money- and power-driven society, it is his "rage for explaining." Those of you who have read very much of Hugh Nibley, or heard very much of Hugh Nibley, know what I mean. This is a man who is compelled by some inner demon (or angel) to tell all he knows if he can possibly get away with it. And he knows a great deal. He is simply overwhelming, and I am still panting. If you think I exaggerate, take a look at copies or transcripts of talks he delivered at the BYU Law School, or the Alumni House, or a couple of Sunstone symposia. There is no way that a person speaking at a normal rate of speed could deliver those in fifty minutes or an hour. Of course, Nibley didn't exactly speak at a normal rate of speed, but still, I sense that his mind was going a hundred miles an hour. One of those talks runs to 58 printed pages. You have possibly heard of the book *Men to Match My Mountains*. Well, Nibley could have written of his lifelong journey of learning, and his passion for sharing what he learned, under the title *Tongue to Match My Thoughts*.

Actually, Hugh Nibley and I see eye to eye on a lot of things—our mutual hatred of war, of posturing, of showy intellectualism, of ostentatious wealth, of celebrity, of self-serving divisions into "good guys" and "bad guys," to name a few of the subjects that fill his Book of Mormon volumes. And all these he speaks of endlessly—and I do mean endlessly—in his writings and speeches on the Book of Mormon because that book teaches us the danger and folly of such things. Closer to home, but related to his descriptions of Nephite society gone awry, is the matter of BYU society. One of his favorite targets, you may remember, was the infamous campus dress code of yesteryear. He saw clearly the contradictions in our culture, and he didn't hesitate to point them out. I happened to be sitting on the stand behind him at the commencement exercises in August 1983 when he received an honorary doctorate. He spoke of the invocation he had offered twenty-three years earlier, also at commencement

exercises. On that earlier occasion, his opening words in addressing the Father—or was he informing him?—were “We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood. . . .”<sup>10</sup> I felt the shock waves that went through the audience even then. Myself, I confess that I had to suppress a snicker.

### **The Book Nobody Wants**

But the thing that welds Hugh Nibley to my mind and heart is our mutual love of the Book of Mormon. He alludes to it ironically as “the Book Nobody Wants,” allowing as how the world acts “as if the Book of Mormon were being forced on [it] against its will.” Then he adds an ironic comment that is pure Nibley: “Only the practiced skill and single-minded determination of the learned has to date enabled them to escape the toils of a serious involvement with [the Book of Mormon].”<sup>11</sup> He is never more eloquent or serious than when he is defending that book. When it comes to matters of his own faith, he writes with great feeling. Hear statements like this, for example, in the midst of his defense of the absolute truth and historical accuracy of the Jaredite account in the book of Ether:

Ether shows us human society divided into two groups, not the good and the bad as such, but those who have faith and those who do not. They live in totally different worlds, the one group in a real heaven, the other in a real hell. In no uncertain terms we are shown just what kind of world the faithless make for themselves to live in.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly before this he had written,

Those without faith live in a world of their own which to them seems logical and final; they take the very unscientific stand that beyond the realm of their own very limited experience nothing whatever exists!<sup>13</sup>

And then, after quoting the Lord’s assurances to Moroni that he gives “men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27), Nibley adds,

What man of the world or posturing Ph.D. is ever going to ask for weakness? The men of the world seek for the things of the



*Figure 2. “The thing that welds Hugh Nibley to my mind and heart is our mutual love of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>98</sup>*

world, the realities they know—and the greatest of these are “power and gain.”<sup>14</sup>

Did you notice the alliteration as well as the barb in “posturing Ph.D.”? Pure Nibley. I mention such things because an important aspect of my assignment is to discuss Hugh Nibley’s use of language in his writings on the Book of Mormon.

After pointing out that “in the Book of Mormon, specifically in Ether, . . . we read about things beyond the veil, of other worlds than this . . . and of men who talk with Jesus Christ face to face in visions,” he regrets that some of his “intellectual friends” are “knocking themselves out” to discredit it all. They, in fact, argue that the idea for Joseph Smith’s “first vision was first worked out by a committee in Nauvoo in 1843.” Then Nibley adds, in a statement

both clear and strong—and, I notice, ending in alliteration—“There is nothing like the story of the Jaredites to show us that the gospel is as timeless as it is true.”<sup>15</sup>

As he amasses evidence in *The World of the Jaredites*, to prove the book of Ether authentic, Nibley borrows a trick from the English teacher’s trade. He presents his mountains of evidence as a series of letters to an imaginary correspondent named “Professor F.” Perhaps the “letter” format gives Nibley a legitimate excuse for experimenting freely with language and style, though, really, he needs no excuse. He would do it anyway. He even plies the good Professor F. with figures of speech such as this one:

As with the Lehi story, if this is fiction, it is fiction by one thoroughly familiar with a field of history that nobody in the world knew anything about in 1830. So if Ether is a forgery, where did its author get the solid knowledge necessary to do a job that could stand up to five minutes of investigation? I have merely skimmed the surface in these hasty letters, but if my skates are clumsy, the ice is never thin.<sup>16</sup>

“If my skates are clumsy, the ice is never thin.” He uses metaphor to make his point, here and again at the end of the next and final letter to F.:

The book of Ether, like First Nephi, rings the bell much too often to represent the marksmanship of a man shooting at random in the dark.<sup>17</sup>

Nibley’s writings are laced with such figures of speech—very apt figures, I might add.

Some years ago I inherited the small office in the Harold B. Lee Library that Hugh Nibley had just vacated. In the hurriedly emptied desk I found a few handwritten three-by-five note cards. They were obviously his, but I didn’t try to track him down. They were a clue to his method of research and writing. It was the old method we learned in our freshman course on the research paper, and obviously it served him well. He had an amazing ability to weave bits and pieces, from sometimes dozens of sources, into a smooth discussion of a single limited topic. How on earth did he keep track of and organize these disparate pieces—which must have run into the thousands—into seamless, flowing narratives? In my



mind's eye I picture him at a desk, surrounded by stacks of cards, typing away on an old Underwood or Royal typewriter. When we read Hugh Nibley, we are in the presence of genius.

Just as we share a love of, and gratitude for, the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley and I share a fascination with language, with words in action. These kinds of things link us, no matter our differences. And yet, we look at the Book of Mormon with different eyes. He sees the book in a broad context, historically and culturally. He sees it validated, not only by the Spirit speaking to his soul, as it most certainly does, but also by all he has learned through his study of ancient languages, literatures, cultures, artifacts, geography, history, documents, and manuscripts. And by his travels in the Old World, and his reading of those rare and valuable scholars who have earned his respect. Nibley's most important contribution to Book of Mormon studies may well be in his examining that remarkable book and proving it indisputably on the world's terms, even though he himself needs no such proofs.

I, on the other hand, have examined the Book of Mormon almost exclusively in the isolated world it creates on the page. And I have long argued, and still believe, that anyone who can read, and is willing to be guided by the Spirit, can access and understand this book, as Moroni promised, and arrive at a new and deeper testimony of its truth with each reading. Mine is the more limited view, Nibley's the more expansive, actual-world view. He has the knowledge and experience to broaden our understanding of the world of the Book of Mormon as an absolutely real world, based in the political, religious, and social culture of Old World desert and city from which it comes.

### ***Overproving the Book of Mormon***

In every detail, from desert winds and bows and arrows to sticks and oaths and shining stones, Nibley documents and verifies the Book of Mormon. He argues, and I'm sure he is right, that "the test of an historical document lies . . . not in the story it tells, but in the casual details that only an eyewitness can have seen. It is in such incidental and inconspicuous details that the Book of Mormon shines."<sup>18</sup> It is the small details that expose a fraudulent work and prove a genuine one.

After all, no perpetrator of a fraud, least of all (and note the alliteration, which Nibley loves to employ to enhance his sarcasm) “the fabulous forger”<sup>19</sup>—Joseph Smith, according to the critics—could possibly invent all the myriad of tiny details that are woven into the Book of Mormon. No one could do that, in Joseph Smith’s day or any day since, really, and be right every single time. And all these little details, Nibley proves, are seated firmly in the everyday lives of ancient contemporaries of the Lehites and Jaredites. His point? It is absolutely ridiculous to think an uneducated farm boy, the alleged perpetrator of a fraud in the early nineteenth century, could have invented details that have only come to light in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

Nibley’s mind is full of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Lachish letters, and many other documents and artifacts—and everything anyone else has said about them. He handily pours it all out on paper, drowning me in names I can’t pronounce and documentation I can scarcely wade through. What’s more, he has tracked down virtually every written criticism of the Book of Mormon, from the beginning, and soundly discredited it. This is a man who has no qualms about exhibiting his own thorough and impressive, even exhausting, scholarship. Yet, I remind you, this is also the man who joyfully takes potshots at academia and those who inhabit it—especially those in tweed jackets with leather patches on the elbows.

Sometimes Hugh Nibley’s approach is so heavy with information and so encumbered with documentation that he wears me out. (He forgets that some of his readers are only English teachers and labor under limitations foreign to him.) I confess that I like Nibley best when he is explicating the Book of Mormon itself, when his touch is lighter, when he reduces the mountains of external evidence, informative though they are, and carries me with him into the language and power of the book itself. We then explore the text together, and oh, this is a man who knows how to read a text closely when he wants to. At those times, he literally soars. Even then, however, he sometimes can’t resist telling all he knows. Ah, the burden of knowing so much. Would that I carried such a burden!

Professor F. of the letters, “a purely fictitious anthropologist in an eastern university,”<sup>21</sup> turns up again in Nibley’s second book on the Jaredites, where he becomes a player in Nibley’s drama

patterned after Plato's famous dialogues. (Anthropologist he may be, but F.'s library looks suspiciously like that of an English professor.) Naturally, Professor F. is a pretender to intelligence, and he is equipped with the tweed coat and pipe "required" by "his profession and institution."<sup>22</sup> The other players are the intelligent Professor Schwulst, a rare breed with a name to match, and "Mr. Blank," the self-effacing Nibley character.

Surely, one key to Nibley's method is in the statement which he puts into the mouth of Professor Schwulst: "The only way we can be sure [a thing has been proved] is by *overproving* it."<sup>23</sup> And overprove Nibley does at times, maybe most times, especially in establishing that the book of Ether fits the true epic form, that it is written in "the best heroic manner" and describes "a real world."<sup>24</sup> I am convinced. But then, I was already convinced, long ago. As Mark Twain remarked in his tongue-in-cheek assessment of the veracity of the Book of Mormon, "I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified."<sup>25</sup> Four of the eight witnesses, you might remember, were Whitmers.

Schwulst is obviously a device for giving Hugh Nibley another voice, supposedly an objective one, whereas Mr. Blank is just as obviously out to prove something. Schwulst can thus corroborate Blank's (Nibley's) arguments from a seemingly unbiased and well-informed point of view. To give Schwulst credibility, Nibley even has him occasionally "amend" Blank—on a minor detail, of course.<sup>26</sup>

### Re-Creating a World We Can See and Touch

At times, though, the burden of information Nibley carries ceases to be mere facts in his hands, and he actually re-creates a world I can see and touch. I rejoice when he describes events and people as though he were there and knows them personally. When that happens, he takes us into the world of the Book of Mormon in a new and fresh way, sharing incredible insights. Even some of the seemingly small details, such as those I alluded to earlier, take on new meaning and expand my appreciation for things I have simply passed over in my reading of the Book of Mormon. He explains things I wouldn't have noticed or understood if I hadn't read his works. For example, he reminds us that there are virtually no

domestic scenes in the book of Ether. Rather, “as in all true epics, every scene . . . takes place either on the battlefield (as in chapters 13 to 15), in the court (as in the tales of intrigue in chapters 7 to 12), or in the wilderness, where hunting and hiding play almost as conspicuous a part as fighting (Ether 2:6–7; 3:3; 14:4, 7; 10:21).”<sup>27</sup>

One of the most interesting new insights for me was Nibley’s explanation of the sworn verbal oath, which was absolutely binding in the ancient Arab world and in the Book of Mormon. In fact, it appears to represent the only honor to be had among murderers and thieves, whether they be Gadiantons or apostate Nephite commanders of Lamanite armies. As a child of our time, I had puzzled over the seeming naivete in Book of Mormon leaders who took captive enemies at their word and released them on the sworn promise that they would cease their hostilities. And I remember, too, that at one point Zerahemnah refused to swear such an oath because he feared it could not be kept and his word would be broken (see Alma 44:8). I wondered why a scumbag like him would even think twice about breaking his word.

As I have suggested, in his works on the Book of Mormon Hugh Nibley gives new meaning to the term *creative writing*. It seems there is scarcely a form of written discourse he won’t experiment with—and most of them are literary, though he might not own up to it. I have already spoken of his use of the parable, the epistolary form, and the Platonic dialogue (drama). Well, there are more. For an old *Instructor* magazine he even writes a little story in which he imagines Nephi as a boy in Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> Nephi, as Nibley portrays him, was a bright boy but deservedly subjected to “extra disciplining” because his mind had a tendency to wander in the classroom. This is how he describes Nephi in his eagerness to meet the arriving caravan of his uncle Ishmael:

Once released [from school], he raced down the winding, narrow streets like a skillful quarterback carrying the ball, barely missing dirty children playing tag or King-of-the-Mountain, servant girls with huge jugs of water, poor peasants peddling loads of firewood, donkeys burdened with dried fish from Galilee or cheese from Bethlehem.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 3. Nibley "pretends a playful ignorance."<sup>99</sup>

What Nibley is doing, of course, is re-creating the world of Jerusalem as it very likely was six hundred years before the birth of Christ.

Hugh Nibley has other devices up his sleeve, too. In *Lehi in the Desert* he frames his response to Book of Mormon detractors in the form of a little narrative describing a mock trial in which Lehi, "the old patriarch[, is put] on the stand as a witness." On the court docket is "the case of Joseph Smith versus the World. Smith has been accused (and how!) of fraudulent practices, and Lehi is a witness for the defense. He claims to have spent years in certain parts of the Near East about 2550 years ago. Is he telling the truth?"<sup>30</sup> In other words, is the record accurate in its representation of Old World settings for events related in 1 Nephi? Nibley opens the scene with a disclaimer stating that "we have never been very much interested in 'proving' the Book of Mormon." I can't really buy that statement

since he spends hundreds and hundreds of pages doing just that, but he adds an important qualifier: “For us its divine provenance has always been an article of faith, and its historical aspects by far the *least* important thing about it.”<sup>31</sup>

In this same chapter of *Lehi in the Desert*—one of many in which Nibley goes after Book of Mormon debunkers—he pretends a playful ignorance: “It was all too easy for the present author, lacking the unfair advantage of either wit or learning, to show where Mrs. Brodie in composing a history of events but a hundred years old contradicted *herself* again and again.”<sup>32</sup> Ironic modesty followed by the poisoned dart. Pure Nibley. In the service of humor, he also wants to assure his audience that even he has had his blind spots. Let one example serve here, this for the entertainment of his fellow high priests in the manual *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*:

Years ago the author of these lessons in the ignorance of youth wrote a “doctoral dissertation” on the religious background and origin of the great Roman games. . . . He has developed this theme through the years in a number of articles and papers read to yawning societies. And all the time it never occurred to him for a moment that the subject had any bearing whatsoever on the Book of Mormon!<sup>33</sup>

But back to the trial narrative where Nibley imagines Lehi on the witness stand. Nibley points out that “generations of shrewd and determined prosecutors have failed to shake Lehi’s testimony or catch him contradicting himself.” Moreover, “behold, out of the East come new witnesses[,] . . . a host of sunburned explorers returned from Lehi’s deserts to tell us what life there is like.” And all of them—“ancient poets of the Arabs, crates and crates of exhibits A to Z, seals, inscriptions, letters, artifacts from Lehi’s own homeland”—confirm Lehi’s account. “In the light of all this new evidence,” Nibley says, “the defense asks that the case be reopened.”<sup>34</sup> I’m with him. He then goes on for a page and a half with a volley of short rapid-fire questions the prosecution uses in cross-examining “Lehi and the new-found witnesses.” These, Nibley says, are only some of the “well over a hundred possibilities” he has uncovered, “most of them such questions as *no one on earth* could have answered correctly 120 years ago.”<sup>35</sup> Then he asks and answers the anticipated rhetorical question: “But haven’t we been

decidedly partial in dealing with Lehi? Of course we have. We are the counsel for the defense."<sup>36</sup>

In 1964 Hugh Nibley updated his 1957 manual for Melchizedek Priesthood lessons, titled *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. I have to say that Nibley's choice of subject matter for a Sunday morning priesthood course would have surprised me if *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* had been the first of his writings on the Book of Mormon I had read or reread. His rage for explaining is evident here, too. And, true to form, many of the lessons are less about the Book of Mormon itself than about how the book fits into its larger context, ancient Jerusalem and the Arabian desert—setting, governance, inhabitants, culture, challenges, habits, and so on. Thus the book becomes a highly selective "approach to the Book of Mormon," with no intent to be a commentary on sacred text itself. It is learned, it is crammed with pages and pages of facts, and it can be difficult to digest.

In my mind's eye I picture a class of high priests in Koosharem nodding off while a struggling teacher faithfully tries to present volumes of material he himself cannot fathom. For example, in just five pages of the second lesson, we get references to the plates of Darius, the Jewish colony at Elephantine, the Palace of Assurnasirpal, Sumerian Umma, King Nu'man of Hira, Eusebius, the Bertiz valley, the Orphic mysteries, places called Thurii, Sippar, and Assur, the groves of Persephone, Plato's description of Minos, the Isles of the Blest, Tartarus (hell), the Demotic Chronicle of Egypt, the Kalawan copper plate, the Taxila silver scroll, the Qumran Cave, the Sanskrit writing of India, the Phoenician alphabet, Sumatra, the Hittites, the Karen plate, the Ugaritic library, the cuneiform tablets, Ahijah the Shilonite, and the Kasia plate.<sup>37</sup> (Granted, I have seen some of these written before, but most of them I have never heard pronounced.) I concede, too, that as the final lessons move more solidly into the Book of Mormon itself, they become more accessible to average (i.e., normal) folks. But Hugh Nibley has to tell us what he knows, and what he knows is ancient history.

Nonetheless, at times he can be downright mesmerizing, and even understandable, especially for a reader sensitive to the way he works with words and sentences. This is not a man interested in facts and ideas alone. As I have suggested, this is a man who

loves writing for its own sake, a man emotionally involved in his subject, and a man with the rhetorical gifts to do his subject justice. I could cite countless examples, but let's look at just one small section from lesson 3 in the priesthood manual. Nibley is speaking of the "astoundingly cosmopolitan world in which Lehi lived," and I think his high priests would understand this perfectly:

It was an unsettled age of big ideas and big projects, a time of individual enterprise and great private fortunes flourishing precariously under the protection of great rival world powers, everlastingly intriguing and competing for markets and bases. A strange, tense, exciting and very brief moment of history when everything was "big with the future." No other moment of history was so favorable for the transplanting of civilization, so heavily burdened with the heritage of the past, or so rich in promise. For a brief moment the world was wide open. . . . There was nothing on the political or economic horizon to indicate that the peace and prosperity achieved by the shrewd and experienced leaders of Egypt and Babylon could not be permanent, or that the undreamed-of riches that were being amassed on all sides actually represented the burst and glitter of a rocket that would in an instant vanish into utter darkness.<sup>38</sup>

Beautifully written, but a bit frightening, isn't it? Change the names of the countries and move the passage into the twenty-first century and we see history repeating itself. And remember, Nibley wrote those words more than fifty years ago.

One of my favorite lessons in the manual is the chapter that paints a "Portrait of Laban." Nibley insists that "everything about him is authentic," that he "epitomizes the seamy side of the world of 600 BC," and that "Nephi resurrects the pompous Laban with photographic perfection—as only one who actually knew the man could have done." Then Nibley goes on to enhance Nephi's description with a string of adjectives that few English professors could top. Laban, he says, "was a large man, short-tempered, crafty, and dangerous, and to the bargain cruel, greedy, unscrupulous, weak, vainglorious, and given to drink."<sup>39</sup> Later, with mock admiration, Nibley concedes "in all fairness that Laban was a successful man by the standards of his decadent society. He was not an unqualified villain by any means." Furthermore, "he was



shrewd and quick, . . . not a man to be intimidated, outsmarted, worn down, or trifled with." Then Nibley adds the punch line: ". . . he was every inch an executive."<sup>40</sup> The high priests in Koosharem would love that last line. Nibley had no kind words for wealthy power mongers.

### Hugh Nibley and the Way of the Intellectuals

In one of the lessons Nibley takes the opportunity to discuss what he calls "The Way of the 'Intellectuals,'"<sup>41</sup> those for whom "the search for knowledge is only a pretext."<sup>42</sup> Indicating that "Lehi's people inherited a tradition of intellectual arrogance from their forebears,"<sup>43</sup> Nibley goes on to list and discuss the intellectuals of the Book of Mormon—Sherem, Nehor, Amlici, Korihor, Gadianton. Against them he sets "the great Alma," who started out as one of their stripe. "It took an angel to convert him," says Nibley, "yet he was made of the right stuff!"<sup>44</sup>

Maybe Nibley uses slang expressions, colloquialisms, modern phrases, and the like at least partly because he does not want to be taken for one of those intellectuals who pretend to more knowledge and ability than they have. If Hugh Nibley sometimes buries us in his scholarship, perhaps it is because in his enthusiasm for his subject, he forgets that we Latter-day Saints are his principal audience—much of the time his only audience. Like his lessons in the priesthood manual and his series in the *Improvement Era*, Nibley's writings and talks vindicating the sacred record are rarely delivered to the external world. Perhaps some of them should have been delivered to that world as well as to us.

Many of you have heard Hugh Nibley speak. I am reminded of a comment James Russell Lowell made about Ralph Waldo Emerson's lectures. He said something like this: "We do not go to hear what Emerson says, we go to hear Emerson." In his discourse, that is, Emerson could be difficult if not impossible to follow. But he was nonetheless spellbinding. Nibley's addresses at the BYU Law School, the Alumni House, and two Sunstone symposia are cases in point. I mentioned their length earlier, but said little about his method in those settings.

In speaking at the Sunstone symposia, Nibley adopts a no-holds-barred form of rhetoric. Modernisms abound in both addresses.



*Figure 4. "Nibley occasionally proceeds by asking questions which he then answers."<sup>100</sup>*

Twice he describes the iniquities that permeated Nephite society prior to the cataclysm as a "rich mix of our prime-time TV."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, "organized crime" runs rampant when Kishkumen hires Gadianton, "a fast-talking professional hit man, . . . to organize his mafia."<sup>46</sup> Nibley observes that when "business boom[s]," people are corrupted. "The prosperity in the time of good king Mosiah produced a spoiled generation of smart-alecks"; and while Alma's people later became "an ideal community (Alma 1:26–28), . . . the rest of society" went to an assortment of immoral and criminal activity. In fact, they offered "all the excitement of a highly competitive society, a night of prime-time TV."<sup>47</sup> And I suspect that 1988 prime-time television was tamer than 2010 prime time.

Throughout his writings Nibley occasionally proceeds by asking questions which he then answers. Some of his questions

are rhetorical, with the answer implied in the question. In the 1981 law school address, however, Nibley adopts the question-and-answer format for nearly the entire speech. He sets up a straw man as questioner, raising points Nibley wishes to address. That goes on for forty-five pages. After that, he shifts to "Comparative Notes on Ancient Mesoamerica."<sup>48</sup> He titles the speech "Freemen and King-Men in the Book of Mormon." That is an apt title, yes, but the speech could just as accurately have been titled "Lessons from the Book of Mormon for Our Day, and Especially for Aspiring Attorneys." Nibley has the pulpit and he uses it to good advantage. Predictably, the address is laced with platitudes and themes which he deems especially appropriate for law students.

Actually, he begins this speech rather matter-of-factly and almost harmlessly—for him. But in time he warms to his subject and really heats things up. I picture his audience squirming as he lectures to them from the book of Alma, his weapon of choice on this occasion for teaching what I have come to call the "Nibley doctrine." At the heart of this doctrine is the injunction to free ourselves from worldliness and the inequality it breeds. Repeatedly Nibley demonstrates a central Book of Mormon teaching: that peace and harmony abound only when people adopt and promote the principle of equality—of goods, position, and opportunity. Nibley says that the danger lies not in "riches as such, . . . but in the unequal distribution" of them, which he calls "an abomination to God." He sneers at "careerism" and "the game of status and prestige," and asserts in one of his hundreds of quotable quotes that "where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away."<sup>49</sup>

### **Nibley on War and Peace**

I suspect the ROTC knew better than to invite the pacifistic Hugh Nibley to speak to their students, even though he sees Captain Moroni as the ideal for all military personnel. (He notes in addressing a Sunstone symposium in 1988 that Moroni has been wrongfully "held up as the model of military macho to LDS youth.")<sup>50</sup> For models Nibley would give us, as he does the law students, men who chose to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to their enemies rather than fight them—men like Ammon and his brothers, and Alma, who "knew that the gospel was the only solution."<sup>51</sup> They absorbed

abuse without retaliating, and touched hearts by serving and teaching. And then there were the converted people of Ammon, who buried their swords and chose to be slaughtered themselves rather than to slay another human being.

Captain Moroni, Nibley reminds us, was a man who hated war and bloodshed. He averted it whenever and wherever he could. And when he couldn't, his "wars were all defensive,"<sup>52</sup> never preemptive. For Moroni, "peace and freedom were as inseparable from each other as both were from equality,"<sup>53</sup> which Nibley calls Moroni's "grand passion, . . . a positive mania with him."<sup>54</sup> Nibley points out, too, that "some of the most valiant warriors and seasoned fighters" were "very conspicuous pacifists and war-objectors in the Book of Mormon." I can hear the regret in his voice and the grateful sighs in his audience as he concedes that "we cannot go into their stories here."<sup>55</sup>

Since equality, freedom, and peace—inseparable in Nibley's mind—were his grand passions, too, one wonders if he came to these great notions through his reading of the Book of Mormon, or if he found in that book confirmation of already deeply held beliefs. Moroni, whom Nibley describes as "the greatest champion of equality,"<sup>56</sup> loved peace, and he knew peace and freedom could be gained and maintained only through equality. Nibley insists repeatedly that the Book of Mormon teaches this principle: without equality "there can be no freedom."<sup>57</sup> It is the king-men in the Book of Mormon who love war, he says, and the freemen who hate it. In typical Nibley fashion, he injects phrases from the modern era. King-man Amalickiah, in the true spirit of "the postwar boom,"<sup>58</sup> made "masterful use of the media" as "he saturated the airwaves" with "his propaganda."<sup>59</sup> Does any of this sound familiar?

### **Wealth and Social Climbing**

Nibley really loads the language when addressing the law school. Just as he had done in the priesthood manual, he talks of how the Gadiantons took over the legal system in Nephite society, gaining "complete control of the law-courts," and doing "whatever they pleased under color of legality."<sup>60</sup> He gets very specific with these law students. Contending that wealth corrupts with great speed, he allows as how "at once the happy recipient of a big promotion is



Figure 5. "Grades are acquisitive, competitive, and phony; but they are the official legal certificates that everyone must have."<sup>101</sup>

expected to change his lifestyle, move to a better part of town, join different clubs, send his children to different schools, even change his church affiliation for a more fashionable one."<sup>61</sup> A warning, surely, to his young audience whom he clearly deems to be committed to "education for success."<sup>62</sup>

By the way, in the priesthood manual, no less, Nibley speaks of the "Gadanton Protective Association," which "soon became the biggest business in America."<sup>63</sup> Sly dog, he capitalizes the three initial letters, giving us GPA. We all know what GPA is. Later in the same lesson he calls up the reference again, taking specific aim at the legal trade. He speaks of "judges who happened to be card-holding members of the Protective Association."<sup>64</sup> And in a similar vein, remember the hapless professor in Nibley's Platonic dialogue? There and in previous fictional correspondence, he is dubbed

“Professor F.” or simply “F.” With his obvious limitations, the poor fellow could not be Professor “A,” “B,” or even “C.” The business of grades was obviously on Nibley’s mind in his address to the BYU Alumni people, too. He reports that in the preceding week students who enrolled in his religion classes “had just one question to ask: How do we get grades?” Listen to his take on the matter of grades:

Grades are acquisitive, competitive, and phony; but they are the official legal certificates that everyone must have, issued in fixed denominations on a mathematically graduated scale, to be converted it is hoped hereafter into legal tender of the land. . . . This is no trifling thing; the seeds of such corruption are all-pervasive.<sup>65</sup>

And while he is at it, he hits the dress code again, declaring that the “mechanical legalistic smoothness”<sup>66</sup> of it “is nowhere more in evidence than here in our midst, where for years short skirts were modest and long slacks immodest—because the rules said so; mustaches and beards, mandatory among our grandfathers, became by decree carnal, sensual, and devilish.”<sup>67</sup>

But back to the law school address. On the subject of the pursuit of worldly success, Nibley is relentless. He describes some of the king-men as “a self-styled aristocracy, social climbers ‘lifted up in their hearts’ by their new wealth (Alma 45:24), haughty and aspiring judges, power-hungry local officials—including ‘almost all the lawyers and the high priests’—men taking advantage of church positions (3 Nephi 6:27).”<sup>68</sup> But the freemen are a very different story. Unlike the king-men,

they made war with heavy reluctance and without rancor. . . . They were peace-loving, noncompetitive, and friendly, appealing to the power of the word above that of the sword. . . . [They were] quick to spare and forgive. They were not class-conscious, but prized equality among the greatest of blessings. In their personal lives they placed no great value on the accumulation of wealth and abhorred displays of status and prestige, e.g., the wearing of fashionable and expensive clothes. Eschewing ambition, they were not desirous or envious of power and authority. . . . They sought the solution to all their problems in fervid prayer and repentance.<sup>69</sup>

Nibley's fictitious questioner is not convinced. "It sounds rather boring to me—too idealistic and unrealistic," he or she says. Nibley answers that it seems that way to us because "we have disqualified ourselves for that kind of life; nothing short of a fix moves our jaded and over-stimulated appetites anymore."<sup>70</sup> And this, remember, was 1981, nearly three decades ago. Imagine the rhetoric with which he would characterize (and blast!) our society today.

Even as he warns law students against the speedy and corrupting power of wealth,<sup>71</sup> and "the deceitfulness of the self-image,"<sup>72</sup> Nibley can't resist sarcastically crediting the Zoramites with "unswerving adherence to proper dress standards!"<sup>73</sup> (Again, the contradiction he saw in the old BYU dress code takes a hit.) He reminds us, too, that at one point Nephi asked the Lord for a "horrendous" famine to stop the people from plummeting to destruction. "So finally," Nibley says, "the people were willing to give up their stocks and bonds and settle for just their lives."<sup>74</sup>

### The Polarizing Syndrome

Hugh Nibley's message to those gathered at the BYU Alumni House in September 1981 is tailored to them as pointedly as is his message to the law school. (1981 was a very good year for promoting the Nibley doctrine via the Book of Mormon.) I won't go into a lot of detail here, but I can sense his emotion as he now declares the Book of Mormon to have one dominant theme, "the polarizing syndrome."<sup>75</sup> (The book's central themes can shift with Nibley's audiences.) He defines this polarization as drawing lines and separating into sides, into the so-called "Good Guys" and "Bad Guys," and he declares that the Book of Mormon teaches such divisions to be oversimplifications and often wrong. Furthermore, he reminds us that many times a good share of the Nephites become bad guys while many Lamanites become good guys. I recall that in Helaman the converted Lamanites won't tolerate the criminal Gadiantons, while the Nephites embrace them (see Helaman 6:37–38).

In language conspicuously aimed at enthusiastic (rabid?) alumni fans, Nibley derides competitions designed to eliminate opponents until we prove who is "Numero Uno."<sup>76</sup> Moroni, Nibley says, uses the "dismal tale" of the Jaredites to illustrate the utter "insanity" of "the polarizing mania that destroyed his own

people.”<sup>77</sup> In jockeying for the “Number One” spot, people are killed right and left, and finally a whole civilization is wiped out. As “the world polarizes around over-rated individuals,” only Shiz and Coriantumr are left. And then only Coriantumr remains, “all alone, the undisputed Number One.”<sup>78</sup> Pristine Nibley irony.

Nibley’s lengthy discussion of the dangers of polarization, which destroyed Nephites, Jaredites, and Romans alike, is clearly issued as a warning to us. We, too, he implies, are “champions of one-package loyalty,”<sup>79</sup> and participants in a government and society bent on “widening the gulf” between ourselves and the currently identified opponent or enemy. Nibley calls it “Planned Polarization”<sup>80</sup> and declares that it is fabricated by the power seekers. (You might remember that Nibley attacked Richard Nixon ruthlessly in that speech.) He pricks our collective conscience with President Spencer W. Kimball’s “great bicentennial address.” In that address, President Kimball spoke of our unfortunate dependence on every kind of military weapon and fortification to deliver us from the enemy, and added, “When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God. We must leave off the worship of modern-day idols and a reliance on the ‘arm of flesh.’”<sup>81</sup> Nibley turns to the evil of polarization again in his 1988 Sunstone address, making his point with heavy irony: “War settles everything by a neat polarization: everything evil on one side and everything good on the other. No problem remains for anybody on either side but to kill people on the other side.”<sup>82</sup>

In *Since Cumorah* Nibley devotes an entire chapter to the problem of polarization. He titles it “Good People and Bad People,” and delivers this stunning insight: “The Book of Mormon offers striking illustrations of the psychological principle that impatience with the wickedness of others (even when it is real wickedness and not merely imagined) is a sure measure of one’s own wickedness.”<sup>83</sup> The second edition of this volume was published in 1981, the same year as the Alumni House and law school lectures. Perhaps the subject struck Nibley with new importance as he possibly revisited *Since Cumorah*, first published in 1967.

Whether it is Satan or a mortal foe, Nibley asserts, “Nothing is more crippling to creative thinking than obsession with an enemy.” Pause on that statement a moment. “Nothing is more crippling to



creative thinking than obsession with an enemy." Nibley goes on: "The person who can think of only one solution to a given problem is mentally bankrupt; the person who can think of only one solution to every problem is doomed."<sup>84</sup> He says that "there is no mention [in the Book of Mormon] of God's being an enemy to the devil, or of fighting against him." The "only invitation" to God's followers is "to love God and to serve him by doing good continually."<sup>85</sup> (No need to refight the war in heaven, I suppose.)

As he works toward the end of the alumni address, Nibley brings his discussion even closer to home. He sees Latter-day Saint people in Utah associating one political party with "The Way of Light" and the other with "The Way of Darkness." The logic of that polarization leads one to conclude that "since there are only two sides, one totally evil and the other absolutely good, and I am not totally evil, I must be on God's side, and that puts you on the other side."<sup>86</sup> Like the Book of Mormon, Nibley's words seem to apply to almost any age, including ours today. Food for thought, indeed.

### **Irresistible Phrases**

There are many things about Hugh Nibley that simply amaze me, and none more than his eloquence. As I have said, he is a man who knows how to use language to accomplish his purposes; and his purposes, like those of the writers and editors of the Book of Mormon, have much to do with us. Let me share a few of his more quotable quotes and irresistible phrases with you:

Admission of ignorance . . . is really no substitute for knowledge.<sup>87</sup>

None may commit his decision to the judgment of a faction, a party, a leader, or a nation; none can delegate his free agency to another.<sup>88</sup>

Only those who are aware of their lost and fallen state can take the mission of the Savior seriously.<sup>89</sup>

The devil does not care who is fighting or why, as long as there is fighting. . . . The moral is that wherever there is a battle, both sides are guilty.<sup>90</sup>



*Figure 6. "In the desert we lose ourselves to find ourselves."<sup>102</sup>*

To discover that one is nothing is the first step to breaking loose [as per King Benjamin's address].<sup>91</sup>

God has given us our gifts and talents to be placed freely at the disposal of our fellowmen (Jacob 2:19), and not as a means of placing our fellowmen at our disposal.<sup>92</sup>

The only place we can confront [evil] and overcome it is in our own hearts.<sup>93</sup>

Hugh Nibley is not just informing us, he is chastising us and calling us to repentance. His writings on the Book of Mormon confirm that he became something of a self-appointed conscience for people of the last dispensation, in the same way that Socrates has been spoken of as the gadfly of Athens. In personality as well as in lifestyle it would seem that Nibley resembles Socrates, whose concern for right conduct and whose ready wit and ironic pretense of ignorance were legendary. And if our fellow countrymen can plead ignorance and go their merry way in pursuit of pleasure, wealth, status, and power, we who have the Book of Mormon—and with it prophets and the restored gospel of Jesus Christ—cannot plead ignorance or go our merry way. Nibley is dead serious about this, and it may well be the central message of all his writings on the Book of Mormon.

Hugh Nibley is the Book of Mormon's impassioned defender. And as such, he is also the gospel's impassioned defender. Moreover, like the prophets he revered, he lived what he taught. And he feared for us. The whole corpus of his Book of Mormon writings is his testimony, but let me conclude with three short statements. In the first he says, in effect, that any mortal writings, including his own, pale in comparison with the ancient record given to us:

Nothing can do justice to the power and impact of the Book of Mormon account itself. And still there are those who maintain that a flippant and ignorant youth (so regarded) of twenty-three composed this vast and intricate history, this deep and searching epic of the past, this chastening and sobering tract on the ways of the wicked.<sup>94</sup>

The second is simple and to the point. As I have said, Nibley could construct highly complex sentences. But he also knew the power of the short declarative sentence. "The whole force and meaning of the Book of Mormon," he says, "rests on one proposition: that it is true. It was written and published to be believed." Then he says it again. "It was written to be believed. Its one and only merit is truth."<sup>95</sup> I know, just as Hugh Nibley knows, with my whole heart and soul, that the book is true. That mutual conviction binds us in a very lovely way, and I am grateful for it.

The last example I will cite is a statement that has also become a lasting truth for me. It explains my decision to take an early retirement and flee, like Lehi's family and others in generations that preceded and succeeded him, to the desert. For this one statement I can forgive Hugh Nibley everything: ". . . in the desert we lose ourselves to find ourselves."<sup>96</sup>

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for Peace: A Global Anthology of Poetry by Women and of Dennis Largey's Book of Mormon Reference Companion. She has written eight novels, including *Minding Mama*. Among her publications are *Pure Love*, *Sweet Is the Word*, *From the Heart: Charity in the Book of Mormon*, and the text for Sacred Hymns from the Book of Mormon. Her most recent publication is *Poems from the Garage*.

### Notes

1. Originally published as Marilyn Arnold, "Words, words, words': Hugh Nibley on the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 2 (2010): 4–21. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol19/iss2/3>. Reprinted with permission.
2. See Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 68.
3. William Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1974), 1155, act II, scene ii, line 192.
4. See Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, January 1969, 26–33.
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance."
6. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 121. John Welch, general editor of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, reminds us in his introduction to this volume of the Collected Works that this book contains "three lengthy serials" (p. xii). All three appeared serially in the *Improvement Era*—the first in 1950, the second in 1951–52, the third in 1956–57. In 1952 the first two series were published together in a book titled *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites*.
7. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (1988 ed.), 121–22.
8. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 161–62.
9. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 138–39.
10. Hugh Nibley, "Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 491.
11. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 193.
12. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 261.
13. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 260.

14. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 260.
15. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 262–63.
16. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 259.
17. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 263.
18. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 58. See also Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 114–23.
19. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 59.
20. See Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 60–72.
21. Nibley, *World of the Jaredites*, in *Lehi in the Desert* (1988 ed.), 153.
22. Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, in *Lehi in the Desert* (1988 ed.), 285.
23. Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 405.
24. Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 407, 409.
25. Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1913), 113.
26. For example, see Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 414.
27. Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 410.
28. See "The Boy, Nephi, in Jerusalem," *Instructor*, March 1961, 84–85; reprinted as "The Boy Nephi in Jerusalem," in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 207–11.
29. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 208.
30. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 115.
31. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 114.
32. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 120.
33. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 308.
34. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 115.
35. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 116–17.
36. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 120.
37. See Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 23–27.
38. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 38–39.
39. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 120.
40. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 123–24.
41. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 361.
42. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 363.
43. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 363–64.
44. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 364–65.
45. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 552, 555.
46. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 552.
47. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 513.
48. In parallel columns Nibley compares passages from the Book of Mormon with passages from various studies on the Mayans in a volume titled *The Classic Maya Collapse*, ed. T. P. Culbert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1973).
49. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 348–50.
50. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 522.

51. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 355.
52. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 354.
53. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 351.
54. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 346.
55. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 358–59.
56. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 351.
57. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 346.
58. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 330.
59. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 332–33.
60. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 360.
61. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 365.
62. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 6.
63. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 383.
64. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 387.
65. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 457.
66. Nibley borrows this term from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who uses it in describing the American system, a system which Solzhenitsyn regards as “far more dehumanizing” than “the abyss of lawlessness” of the Soviet system. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 456; see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “A World Split Apart,” *National Review* 30 (1978): 836.
67. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 456.
68. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 370.
69. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 371.
70. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 371.
71. See Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 365.
72. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 344.
73. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 345.
74. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 362.
75. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 435–68.
76. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 437.
77. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 438–39.
78. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 443–44.
79. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 448. Nibley attributes the phrase to J. Voght, whom he quotes in “The Unsolved Loyalty Problem: Our Western Heritage,” *Western Political Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1953): 650.
80. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 449.
81. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 452. Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 6.
82. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 526.
83. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 353.
84. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 455.
85. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 459. But see Mormon’s second epistle to his son, where he says the two of them must continue to “labor

diligently . . . that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness” (Moroni 9:6).

86. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 462–63.
87. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 266.
88. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 462.
89. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 485.
90. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 491–92.
91. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 518.
92. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 397.
93. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 369.
94. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 398.
95. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 85, 86.
96. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 148.
97. From BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Marilyn Arnold, “The Book of Mormon: Passport to Discipleship (2011 Neal A. Maxwell Lecture), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyhLwvvMQCw>. Photo ID: Screen Shot 2021-01-21 at 6.38.16 AM.jpeg.
98. Circa 1950. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 3. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8244-EC-Box289Folder3.jpeg.
99. Circa 1950. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 3. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8247-EC-Box289Folder3.jpeg.
100. Circa 1950. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 3. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8250-EC-Box289Folder3.jpeg.
101. Taken at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, 1976. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 11. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8268-ECR-Box289Folder11.jpeg.
102. Petersen Collection, box 10, folder 1. Photo ID: HBLL-BoydP-\_STW8591-EC-Box10Folder1.jpeg.