

HUGH WINDER NIBLEY: THE MAN, THE SCHOLAR, THE LEGACY

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While I was investigating The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1969, after spending seven years studying to be a minister of the gospel, there were two things I was reading: the Book of Mormon and an article a ward member had given me, “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” written by a scholar named Hugh Nibley.¹ I had never heard of the Pearl of Great Price nor of Hugh Nibley, but what really surprised me as I read the article was that a scholar could combine faith and scholarship in such a remarkable manner—especially after I had read so much Protestant theology. Here was a fascinating article on an unknown subject by an unknown author which reflected both scholarly rigor and steadfast faith, together with an attitude of awareness and openness that converted me to the proposition that I could study anything known or unknown, in or out of space and time, from both earthly and heavenly teachers, and from many perspectives.

After my baptism I gradually read more articles by this interesting scholar. A few months after joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I found myself at Brigham Young University (BYU) and, drawing on my undergraduate languages of German, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, was soon involved with the Ancient Studies Library and its premier and most frequent user, Dr. Hugh Nibley. I gradually became his “personal librarian,” indexed his writings, and eventually helped the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) in editing three of his collected works (numbering nineteen volumes). I then began to realize that although there are several scholars who count Nibley as very



Figure 1. Gary with students in August 2007. A poster for the 1985 premiere of “Faith of an Observer” can be seen in the background.⁷⁶

influential in their careers, none had the overall abilities as a generalist librarian like myself to organize his writings.

I was then blessed to work with Dr. Nibley during most of my BYU career of thirty-six years and was continually taught by this man who was a true professional, possessing all the academic degrees he needed—but with the attitude of an amateur and a self-teacher.

And later came the humbling epiphany, as I reflected upon my life to this point, that the Lord “snatched” me away from family, religion, culture, ministerial career, and friends to “call me on a lifelong mission” to work with Hugh Nibley. The most wonderful thing about this Nibley connection was how his scholarship augmented my professional librarianship, even while my library skills enhanced his research. Hence, my observations will be from the perspective of a generalist, a librarian, and a friend who recognizes where Nibley has applied his considerable gifts.

This essay is in several parts. The first part is a personal appreciation entitled “Huge Windy Nebula: His Unique Scholarship.”²² This is followed by four lengthy appendixes:

- “Nibley the Man” (excerpts from my personal journal)
- “Hugh Nibley’s Favorite Themes”
- “Surprises from the Nibley Archives, 2007–2009”
- “Teaching about Nibley”

Huge Windy Nebula: His Unique Scholarship

Hugh Nibley closed his letters with a great variety of humorous “salutations,” such as “Goobers to All” or “Your henpecked grandson.” However, one wonders if he was doing more than merely jesting when he closed a September 24, 1971, letter to his missionary sons, “As per Ever, Huge Windy Nebula.” I believe that this signature is also very symbolic of his scholarship.

I will briefly explore his unique style of scholarship under three rubrics: Huge, Windy, and Nebula, with three attributes under each section—for a total of nine. From the outset I wish to point out that these nine points overlap somewhat and that these initial observations are also highly personal and idiosyncratic: a work in progress. Here are the nine points:

Huge

1. He was polymathic and broad-ranging in his research pursuits.
2. All knowledge is an open canon. There are no boundaries.
3. Studying thirty-two languages and cultures broadened his research even more.

Windy

4. “By study and also by faith”: a learned behavior.
5. Mantic or sophic perspective: an inborn or converted attitude.
6. Revelation and inspiration: receptivity to the Spirit.

Nebula

7. Thinking out of the box—and beyond.
8. Seeking balance and understanding the law of opposition in all things.
9. Eschatological scholarship as discipleship and consecration.

HUGE

With the publication of Nibley's *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*,³ I was tempted to abbreviate the "huge" section, for this volume 16 in the Nibley collected works is definitely huge by almost all standards. This tome represents most of the scholarly principles of Nibley.

It was, in fact, Joseph Smith, quoted by Nibley in "Educating the Saints," who gave the ultimate guideline for latter-day scholarship: "Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul to salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity."⁴ As Nibley's prophetic mentor, "he was wont to swim in deep waters," and then share his insights with the Saints. Nibley could not do otherwise.

1. *He was polymathic and broad-ranging in his research pursuits.*

Nibley's insatiable curiosity embraced anything and everything in and out of time and space. His spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical curiosity and awareness are legendary and led him to everything from camping alone in the same neighborhood as the bears and wolves around Crater Lake to methodically perusing the spines of thousands of books in the Berkeley Library, pulling off the shelves only those titles which showed promise for research. In the words of Zora Neale Hurston, author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."⁵

Despite his receiving a PhD from Berkeley in the 1930s, Nibley and his mind are a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) like that of Joseph Smith, who had little formal education. Yet their self-education has almost made both of them "extraterrestrial" scholars in their amateur BIG-PICTURE perspective and their combining of mortal and eternal principles. Most certainly Nibley gleaned much more from his autodidactic tendencies than from his university degrees. He was careful and wise to point out, however, that "being self-taught is no disgrace, but being self-certified is another matter."⁶ His openness and humility in his research were occasionally criticized as naïve, vulnerable, and gullible by other scholars, but he

paid little attention to other scholars and their opinions, feeling that too many of them were too afraid of being embarrassed by stepping out on so many research limbs.

His broad-ranging explorations and observations also helped him to develop many of his writing styles. (He did not possess merely one.) His wife, Phyllis, once told me that he liked to read fiction occasionally to escape from the rigors of scholarship. As I processed his book collections, I've seen no less than fourteen Agatha Christie mysteries, gleaned from four different rooms of his house. A comment in Christie's *Caribbean Mystery* hints that he was conscious of his own writing: "Christy [*sic*] manages to keep up with the times by getting older . . . superb!"⁷

A further example, box 8 from his northwest bedroom on the south wall is my favorite box. It included the following titles and informs us of his eclectic interests and collecting and studying habits: Frank Waters's *Book of the Hopi*,⁸ Robert Merriam's *The Battle of the Bulge*,⁹ *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden*,¹⁰ *The Colorado Plateau as a Holy Land*,¹¹ and John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*.¹² It is these multidisciplinary discoveries that led him to explore patternism, cross-disciplinary insights, ambiguities, and subtleties, and the interconnectedness of all topics as proceeding from God. He was thus aware of and alert to all ideas. And this leads to Nibley's second principle of scholarship:

2. *All knowledge is an open canon. There are no boundaries.*

Most of our latter-day prophets, from Joseph Smith to Russell M. Nelson, have encouraged the Saints to seek and embrace truth wherever they can find it. Nibley was an arch-proponent of this principle, and Jack Welch agrees: "Any subject mentioned, for Nibley, is an open invitation to discuss matters of universal significance."¹³ In order to do so, Nibley necessarily used a big-picture or high-altitude¹⁴ understanding and was not beholden to any one narrow scholarly methodology. He defended his perspective with the following:

Blindness to larger contexts is a constitutional defect of human thinking imposed by the painful necessity of being able to concentrate on only one thing at a time. We forget as we virtuously

concentrate on that one thing that hundreds of other things are going on at the same time and on every side of us, things that are just as important as the object of our study and that they are all interconnected in ways that we cannot even guess. Sad to say, our picture of the world to the degree to which it has that neatness, precision, and finality so coveted by scholarship is a false one.¹⁵

I found an example of this in an unpublished paper, “Plato’s *Republic*,” which Nibley wrote for a class at UCLA in the 1930s, while still an undergraduate. He was writing about the Dark Ages, where he saw a lot of faulty education. He called it “a time of illusions, when all Europe would be moved and its life directly influenced by the birth of a child with a golden tooth, or a Saint become the guide and claim the fealty of all men because she had succeeded in roasting a batch of snow-balls, or fetching sunlight into a monastery with a bucket.”¹⁶

The Dark Ages exemplified a time when academic scholarship often had too many creeds and closed canons. And we know as Latter-day Saints the danger in closed canons, for just as a closed canon of scripture is faulty, so also are closed canons in academic disciplines. But Nibley felt that these closed canons exist even today and are the same limitations that haunt mainstream Christianity and the closed canon of scripture: “hermeneutic blindness and androcentric presuppositions,” as well as “Eurocentric, patriarchal, and de-historicized assumptions of the past.”¹⁷ Add to this the more common limitations of superstition, pride, prejudice, ignorance, traditions, and ego, and one wonders if anything can be known for certain. Nibley has even had to fight against the traditional attributes of scholarship since the Enlightenment—the abstract in favor of the concrete, and the theoretical over common-sense knowledge. Perceiving these limitations has led to some additional salient thoughts from Nibley, including the following:

Now the office and calling of scholarship and science is to investigate the unknown.¹⁸

All scholarship, like all science, is an ongoing, open-ended discussion in which all conclusions are tentative forever, the

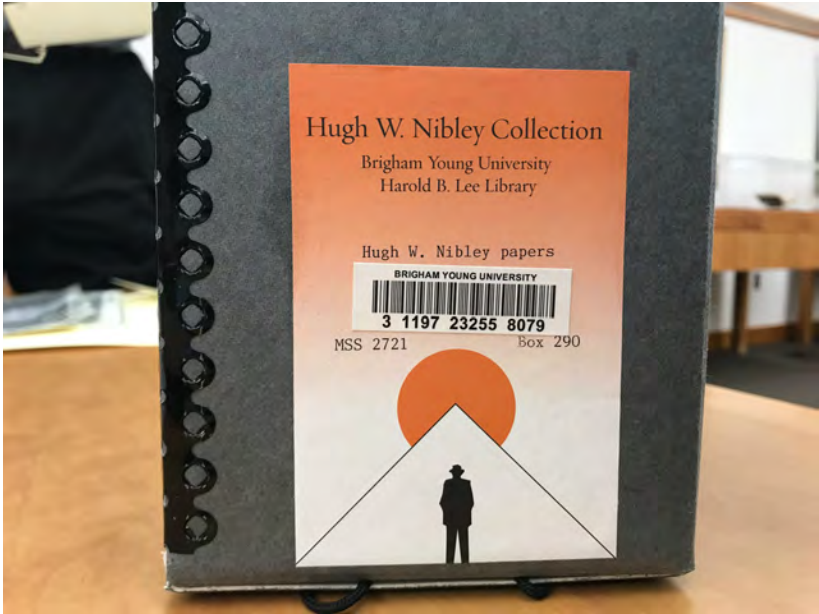


Figure 2. Box 290 of the BYU Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections Hugh W. Nibley Papers (MSS 2721).⁷⁷

principal value and charm of the game being the discovery of the totally unexpected.¹⁹

Let us not . . . seek to hold God to the learned opinions of the moment when he speaks the language of eternity.²⁰

Fortunately for us, Nibley ignored some of the errors some unfortunate scholars have favored over the centuries and which would call into question any of Nibley's works: Neoplatonic hermeticism, syncretism, mysticism, and astrological speculation.

3. *Studying original languages and cultures broadened his research even more.*

We will never know exactly how many languages Brother Nibley could use for his research, for he probably had no idea himself. He merely used them. George Bailey, an army buddy at Camp Ritchie during World War II, described Nibley as a "former professor of ancient history at Pomona College, who spoke sixteen languages

tolerably well and whose nodding linguistic acquaintanceship included twice that number.”²¹

As I worked with Nibley’s book collection in the University Archives, I noted that many of the notes he has made in these 2,000+ volumes are in modified Gregg shorthand and at least one of his many foreign languages. But his dabbling in 32 languages is only an infinitesimal foray into the 6,912 known living languages in 228 countries! Yet, according to Louis Midgley, a close colleague of Nibley’s, Nibley was able to enjoy veil partings because his “comparisons over time and between cultures” yielded new insights on old beliefs and scriptures.²² Having such facility with languages made it easier to study the cultures behind these languages as well as to avoid faulty translations. (Although, Nibley wasn’t always perfect in his own translations.)

If he were alive today, he almost certainly would run out to buy a text on the Bosnian language after learning that a certain hill in Bosnia-Herzegovina hides a real pyramid predating AD 600, supposedly built by the Illyrian peoples.²³ Or he would be excited by the new book to be published in April 2007 (and which I reviewed for *Library Journal*) in which the author, a minister named Brian D. McLaren, declares at least six of our Latter-day Saint principles as lost to the world for 1,800 years. (He is proclaiming these principles as *The Secret Message of Jesus*.²⁴ It will no doubt ruffle the feathers of many mainstream Christians as many readers discover that McLaren’s book is mostly what Latter-day Saints have been teaching for over 175 years. Nibley would have had a field day with this book!)

Most importantly, however, Nibley came close to Joseph Smith’s practice in language study. Associate Vice President John S. Tanner quotes Terryl Givens as saying, “Joseph consistently merged the gift of prophecy with the gritty work of language study.”²⁵ So did Nibley, if only as an unfrocked academic prophet. Nibley’s use of languages was downright powerful, as pointed out by one of the students in my Nibley class one semester when giving his reasons for taking my class: “I enjoy Nibley’s wit, meticulous notes, and source material, power over languages, and even his sarcastic snort.”²⁶

WINDY

At a three-part lecture series called “The Three Shrines,” which Nibley gave at Yale University in 1963, Brother Nibley described the “windy” part of his scholarship:

The Spirit bloweth where *it* listeth, it does not wait upon human convenience, nor do its manifestations comply with human expectations. Its operations are always surprising—they always catch men off guard.²⁷

How did the Spirit operate with Nibley’s scholarship? I will mention three aspects of this “windy” portion of his scholarship: learned behavior, attitude, and receptivity.

4. “*By study and also by faith*”: a learned behavior.

Nibley often spoke of how important it was to exercise our scholarship with both the mind and the Spirit, or study and faith. If Nibley is indeed an academic prophet, he would necessarily have to advocate and speak innovatively for a cause. For those of us here who have listened to Nibley extensively, even when he was not espousing a cause or discussing a topic few people could understand, the audience would at least catch his enthusiasm. (Now, the word “enthusiasm” comes from two Greek New Testament words, *εν* and *Θεο*, meaning “near God.”) I believe he maintained this enthusiasm, for the most part, because of his consistent life of faith in public and private, his frequent temple attendance, and his unwavering teaching that there are two things we Latter-day Saints should do exceedingly well during this life—repent and forgive. Often when I am reading something of Nibley’s it seems almost as if he could think with his heart and feel with his mind.

Another aspect of the mind and Spirit is the principle of repentance, or as I pointed out in a Sidney B. Sperry Symposium talk I delivered in 1985, “Repentance Is Also Re-Thinking,” changing our mind to be more in line with the Lord’s. (From two more Greek words, *μετα* and *νοια*, meaning “change of mind.”²⁸)

I have treated the mind and Spirit attribute only briefly, as the importance of learning by study and faith is common knowledge in our university setting. Indeed, it is part of BYU’s mission statement. Even our university motto, “The glory of God is intelligence,”

leads us to the exciting promise that “if your eye is single to my glory, your whole body will be filled with light.” These thoughts bring us to the next attribute.

5. *Mantic or sophic perspective: an inborn or converted attitude.*

Nibley gives us a very basic definition of these two terms in his “Three Shrines” talk. Both terms were very important at the time of Socrates and in Greek society.

Mantic simply means prophetic or inspired, oracular, coming from the other world and *not* from the resources of the human mind. The Mantic accepts the other worlds as part of our world experience, without which any true understanding of this life is out of the question.

Sophic, on the other hand, is the tradition that boasted its cool, critical, objective, naturalistic, and scientific attitude.²⁹

A mantic or prophetic perspective is that which unhesitatingly accepts supernatural occurrences and feelings as true reality. A sophic or philosophic perspective, on the other hand, is a humanistic and secular reliance on the powers of humankind alone. As a theology student it was very easy for me to get caught up in the sophic realm of religion, with its naturalism, reductionism, ecclesio-centrism, and near idolatry of both scriptures (“A Bible, a Bible . . .”) and theology. As I look back, it was an atmosphere similar to Joseph Smith’s, where “this people . . . honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8).

Genetic and environmental backgrounds usually determine whether a person has a mantic or sophic perspective toward reality. We need only think of the differences between Nephi and Laman. But those predispositions can be changed by conversion, a process we Latter-day Saints are all encouraged to participate in. Although our world is decidedly sophic and secular, there are hints that civilization is becoming more mantic. Three recently published books, Mark Patrick Hederman’s *Walkabout: Life as Holy Spirit*,³⁰ Margaret Barker’s *An Extraordinary Gathering of Angels*,³¹ and Mathai Kadavil’s *The World as Sacrament: The Sacramentality of Creation*,³² all give witness to this movement outside of the restored Church.

Most universities are sophic, but Brigham Young University is one of the few universities where there is a combination of the sophic and the mantic, where a testimony is fully acceptable for spiritual matters, while scientific proof is mandatory for mental and physical disciplines. But the mantic perspective is usually inclusive of the sophic, whereas the opposite seldom occurs. In other words, an inspired and mantic Latter-day Saint scientist—or someone like Albert Einstein—can use the Spirit to assist in scientific research, while the sophic scientist feels that he or she has no recourse but his or her own mind. A sophic person is not necessarily an atheist: he or she can be religious without calling upon the powers of heaven.

One of my favorite passages in McLaren's *The Secret Message of Jesus* applies to everyone when it comes to mantic or sophic world-views or perspectives:

A worldview is a way of seeing. It's not just what we see, but how we see everything else. It's the lens through which we see—a lens of assumptions, beliefs, images, metaphors, values, and ideas that we inherit and construct from our family, our teachers, our peers, our community, and our culture. As we go through life, many of us find it next to impossible even to *want* to question our inherited worldview, while others do exactly that: we rethink, we imagine other ways of seeing things, and we sometimes experience radical conversions out of one worldview and into another.³³

Paul, Alma, Moses, Abraham, Joseph Smith, and many others experienced these radical conversions or turnings to another worldview.

6. *Revelation and inspiration: receptivity to the Spirit.*

Some of the greatest adventures in living the gospel are the incredible and even ordinary surprises the Spirit often places before us. Joseph Smith said that “it is the spirit of revelation . . . when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas.”³⁴ Nibley claims he had daily spiritual surprises, although many were too spiritual and private for him to share with anyone; they were between himself and Heavenly Father. He felt that our own faulty wills and materialistic dreams pale in comparison. Nibley felt that many members of the Church wish they could avail themselves of revelation, but they either don't recognize the subtle

whisperings of the Spirit or are simply unreceptive to them. (And for many of us who minutely plan our days either on paper or electronically, we fail to leave time for the Spirit.) The secular world labels these experiences as serendipitous or synchronous coincidences. A profusion of them in Nibley's writings appear as insights, which, when the reader confronts them, cause the reader to ask, "Where did Nibley come up with such an insight?"

An example of this occurred to me one day years ago when I was looking for a female counterpart to Hugh Nibley's diversity. I came to work and read the daily biography on my tear-off calendar. On this particular day it happened to be Hildegard von Bingen, a German nun who lived between 1098 and 1179. I had never run across her before, but now I was keenly interested. I searched the library catalog, found several biographies about her, and began a friendship with a long-departed "sister" who was not only influential in Catholic ecclesiastical circles but was a visionary, author, theologian, religious superior, and musician—you can currently buy one of five CDs with her music. Since she was alive long before the printing presses, it was amazing that so much of her work has survived. But now she enriches the world with her thoughts, many of which Nibley would have resonated with completely.³⁵ She also seemed fearless around her male superiors, possessing a kind of prophetic authority. In any case, this serendipitous experience taught me something important about coincidence.

David Klinghoffer in *The Discovery of God* characterizes what Nibley experienced in his daily adventures: "God operates in the world through events that seem to come about by chance. His interventions in our lives are concealed by the appearance of randomness."³⁶ And Mark Patrick Hederman in his new book, *Walkabout: Life as Holy Spirit*, offers a different twist to the same phenomenon: "Coincidence is one of the ways in which the Spirit makes his [twenty-first-century] presence felt without importuning or interfering with free will."³⁷ Unless we recognize the operations of the Spirit, how could anything be more nebulous? And we turn to the third rubric: Nebula.

NEBULA

Very early in his life Nibley had an abiding interest in astronomy, to the extent that he removed his own eyelashes and darkened the nearest street lamp so that he would have better celestial vision. And in fact, one of his earliest writings was a poem he called “Two Stars,” describing Vega and Arcturus as he metaphorically outlined two worldviews.

According to Wikipedia, a nebula is an “interstellar cloud of dust, gas and plasma.” When thinking of creation and creativity, what could be a better scenario? At Nibley’s sixty-fifth birthday party in 1975, Academic Vice President Robert K. Thomas described a great scholar as “not one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite . . . power of combination; bringing together from the four winds [they are cosmic as well as earthly], like the Angel of the Resurrection, what else were dust from dead men’s bones, into the unity of breathing life.”³⁸ John Welch follows Brother Thomas with the following: “We will be everlastingly grateful to Hugh Nibley for bringing it all together, for taking dusty books and forgotten scrolls, and breathing into and out of their words the eternal truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁹

7. Thinking out of the box—and beyond.

Nibley often ignored traditional history and academic assumptions. To him, any discussion worth its salt needed to be open-ended. “In the study of ancient things . . . it is just the fantastic and incongruous which opens the door to discovery—never forget that. In scholarship as in science, every paradox and anomaly is really a broad hint that new knowledge is awaiting us if we will only go after it.”⁴⁰ He hated theology. On the Catholic News Service, December 5, 2005, at Vatican City, Cindy Wooden states that “theology is an academic discipline and must follow the rules of scientific inquiry.”⁴¹ So is theology really the word of God as the original Greek words would indicate? It was headlines like these that provided the beginnings of Nibley’s next new paper—an unheard of, alternative, or unorthodox approach to something very ordinary. He had a perennial problem with BYU students who

would say, "I've never heard of that before!" as if learning new ideas wasn't included as education!

8. *Seeking balance and understanding the law of opposition in all things.*

This particular attribute caused me the most difficulty in coming up with a title. Perhaps a quote from Nibley himself will better explain my attempt: "Things that appear unlikely, impossible, or paradoxical from one point of view often make perfectly good sense from another."⁴² He explored this creative tension in scholarship by utilizing the Spirit to help in earthly learning and the mind in exploring celestial matters.⁴³ In his personal life, Nibley was conservative in religion but liberal in politics, although he wrote "Beyond Politics" toward the building up of Zion. Academic Vice President John S. Tanner asked the question, "Are we breaking into Babylon or building Zion's walls? . . . We . . . sometimes assume that secular subjects are to be learned exclusively by study, while religious subjects are to be apprehended solely by revelation. The Prophet [Joseph Smith] did not draw sharp distinctions between how we are to learn sacred and secular truth."⁴⁴

In more secular matters Nibley often saw both sides of an issue more clearly than most of us would have dreamed. Often his conclusions would be a compromise between two opposites, but more often he would just "leave it at that." The dichotomy of BYU provides an example:

I can see two totally different pictures of the BYU, each one a reality. From one direction I see high purpose, sobriety, good cheer, dedication, and a measure of stability, which in this unquiet world is by no means to be despised. Then by shifting my position but slightly I see a carnival of human vanity and folly to which only Gilbert & Sullivan could do justice, with solemn antics before high heaven that make the angels weep. Why take sides or contend? Both of the pictures are genuine!⁴⁵

In a paper he wrote for the graduate school in 1965, he offers his own unique version of the balance needed in scholarship:

Every study should be: (1) authentic, (2) original, and (3) significant. Without all three of these characteristics no study

should be published. With all three any study is certain to find publication without difficulty.⁴⁶

9. *Eschatological scholarship as discipleship and consecration.*

Eschatology deals with “last things.” Nibley provides us with a very compelling definition in “Historicity of the Bible.” “The eschatological viewpoint is that which sees and judges everything in terms of a great, eternal plan. Whether we like it or not, we belong to the eternities. We cannot escape the universe.”⁴⁷ Then, in one of my personal favorite quotes, the late Elder Neal A. Maxwell tells us how we can achieve Nibley’s grand vision:

For a disciple of Jesus Christ, academic scholarship is a form of worship. It is actually another dimension of consecration. Hence, one who seeks to be a disciple-scholar will take both scholarship and discipleship seriously, and likewise, gospel covenants. For the disciple-scholar, the first and second great commandments frame and prioritize life. How else could one worship God with all of one’s heart, might, *mind*, and strength? (Luke 10:27)⁴⁸

Add to Elder Maxwell’s injunction Nibley’s insistence that we need to “do the works of Abraham.” Can we completely fulfill at this university the inspired vision President Spencer W. Kimball had for this unique institution?

This university shares with other universities the hope and the labor involved in rolling back the frontiers of knowledge, but we also know that, through divine revelation, there are yet “many great and important things” to be given to mankind which will have an intellectual and spiritual impact far beyond what mere men can imagine . . . there must be an excitement and an expectation about the very nature and future of knowledge.⁴⁹

* * *

Many things have been said about the extraordinary man Hugh Nibley. As a brief summary, I review a few characteristics that stand out. Many of these could serve as biographical studies of Nibley’s scholarship and personality:

- Enjoyed being an amateur astronomer in his early teen years
- Called to the Swiss International Mission at the age of seventeen, serving mostly in Germany in the 1920s
- Received awards as a model ROTC student at UCLA in the 1930s
- Received his PhD from Berkeley
- Performed valiantly as a sergeant in the 101st Airborne during World War II
- Memorized some of the plays of William Shakespeare and quoted them often, particularly when teaching the Book of Mormon
- Wanted to be a historian like the great Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609)
- Served as the husband of Phyllis Draper, father of their eight children, priesthood holder, and Gospel Doctrine teacher
- Was a polymath and generalist like R. Buckminster Fuller, another hero of his
- Was a polylinguist, using thirty-two languages of varying fluencies for his research and writing
- Was an eccentric like Albert Einstein, with whom he shared a similar kind of mind
- Wrote like fellow World War II soldier and writer Kurt Vonnegut, with occasional biting satire—he and Mark Twain would also have seen eye to eye
- Exhibited a teaching style characterized by enthusiasm more than organization
- Called a modern-day St. Augustine or an early-Christian Origen
- Loved being an observer of life
- Accompanied on the piano his wife, Phyllis, as she played the cello and was always in attendance at her hundreds of concerts with the Utah Valley Symphony in the Provo Tabernacle
- Exhibited humility in public and private life, even feeling that any member of the Church could learn New Testament Greek and understand things as he did
- Challenged the Saints to apply themselves to the things that matter most so that Zion could be built up sooner and much more rapidly
- Admired by non-Latter-day Saint scholars such as Aziz S. Atiya, David Riesman, Robert M. Grant, Jacob Neusner, James Charlesworth, Cyrus Gordon, Raphael Patai, Margaret Barker, Matthew Black, George MacRae, Joseph Fitzmyer, David F. Wright, and Jacob Milgrom.

Conclusion

There are and have been many fine scholars at Brigham Young University. Hugh Nibley is only one example of what needs to happen here at BYU on a grander scale. What made Nibley's scholarship unique was the combination of all nine attributes I've discussed above in "Huge Windy Nebula." When the Church asked him to research the Joseph Smith Papyri, Nibley did not have any idea what he was up against, nor the conclusions he would ultimately make about the papyri. But he made the consecrated effort to do so. And in his own words,



Figure 3. Gary and Signe Gillum at "wake" after Nibley's passing, March 26, 2005.⁷⁸

The bringing forth of the papyrus fragments in 1967 was a reminder to the Saints that they are still expected to do their homework and may claim no special revelation or convenient handout as long as they ignore the vast treasure-house of materials that God has placed within their reach.⁵⁰

His many writings are eloquent witnesses to his consecrated efforts and the use of his considerable talents and spiritual gifts.

My conclusion to this essay about Hugh Nibley is best expressed by what I have written elsewhere:

Throughout his writings, Nibley implies that we all need to be doing the works of Abraham. Such works should give all of us a spiritual stance in which light is victorious over darkness, good over evil, the meaningful over the insignificant, and in which living is not acted out through a glass darkly simply because we have failed to clean the glass, but because in our searching we have not yet attained the clearest vision. Nibley is great because he has given us a "Saints Guidebook" for reaching that light.⁵¹



Figure 4. “Infinitely more important than Nibley’s scholarship, talents, and gifts was the man himself.”⁷⁹

APPENDIX 1. Nibley the Man

Infinitely more important than Nibley’s scholarship, talents, and gifts was the man himself. I have excerpted from my personal journal some of my favorite experiences with him. They are part of my monograph entitled “Observations of Hugh Nibley.”

September 20, 1979. The big day of Library Forum’s Sesquicentennial Lecture by Hugh Nibley, “How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So.”⁵² The Varsity Theatre was packed, and we had to turn away over 200 people. My introduction was very short: “The most revealing introduction anyone can give Hugh Nibley is that he needs no introduction at all. Brother Nibley . . .” His topic was mostly on the law of consecration, which he has now

determined to live himself. His talk was well liked, though very materialism-slandering. He talked about Geneva Steel, A-bomb testing, Utah's MX missile system, etc. Students want copies of the talk so badly that the library will be selling them in the bookstore. LaJean Purcell, Doug Bush, and I took Brother Nibley to the Skyroom for lunch. He was delightful to be with. He was very serious about everyone's living life to the fullest—consecrating everything to the Lord. Now to edit his lecture . . .



Figure 5. The talk “went on sale today for 35 cents, but the scant 480 copies were sold out by 5 p.m.”⁸⁰

October 23, 1979. Hugh Nibley’s “How Firm a Foundation!” went on sale in the bookstore today for 35 cents, but the scant 480 copies were sold out by 5 p.m. I ordered another 2,025. George Bickerstaff of Bookcraft called to say he is interested in my index to Nibley’s *Lehi in the Desert*.⁵³ I will have that ready perhaps by next weekend.

November 28, 1979. Wednesday I saw Hugh Nibley as I walked to the parking lot on the way home. He was gazing at the pink sunset [reflected] on the mountains and remarked how all of the sunsets are different. I responded with, “It’s too bad most people don’t notice them.” He said, “They’re too busy.” I’m amazed that Nibley’s September lecture has done so well—3,000 copies so far. (Today in priesthood in my Payson ward, Beau Parnell told me that the seminary faculty had been counseled to know the talk well.)

July 31, 1981. I had always wondered how Hugh Nibley would respond to my complete index and bibliography of his works. Today I found him in an excellent “chatty” mood and took him to my office after telling him that the “surprise” was too big to bring to him. [It consisted of a box of three-by-five cards, in these days before computers!] As he walked into my office he exclaimed, “What hath

the gods wrought?” and then wished, after seeming grateful, that he had had use of it before now. Well, all of this boosted my ego for the day. Next, it will be time to show him the Nibley quote book.

October 2, 1981. The other day I asked Nibley what he would think if someone (like me) were to put together excerpts of his lectures into a book for publication. Typically, he replied, “Irresponsible.” And then added with understatement, “Besides, it would be a rather slim volume.” Meanwhile, such a book, my “Nibley Quote Book,”⁵⁴ is being considered by Signature Books of Salt Lake. I expect to hear from Scott Kenney of the board any day now.

October 14, 1981. This week has come into being with a bang. Monday I hardly had a chance to sit down because of all the running around I had to do. I was amazed when they brought 90 books, newly cataloged and ready to shelve in the Ancient Studies Library. It was my good fortune that Hugh Nibley happened to be in the room when I arrived with them, for he was one 71-year-old child perusing these wonderful sets we purchased at the end of the budget year: *The Midrash Tanchuma*, a beautiful reprint of Graetz’s 1891 history of Israel (9 volumes), *The Massorah* (6 volumes), *The Sefer Anukh Ha-Shalem* (6 volumes), an 11-volume Babylonian Talmud, and the 50-volume *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, the long-sought-after set that Nibley raved about the most.

May 20, 1982. Last night’s *Payson Chronicle* had a half-page review of my Nibley book. The reviewer, Mike Olsen, said that I “performed a great service for Mormondom” in compiling it. Also, he called Nibley the Henry David Thoreau of the Church.

October 3, 1982. Friday I sat next to Hugh Nibley as we listened to Dr. [Nabil] Swelim’s lecture on his excavation of the Sinke pyramid in Egypt. For once Nibley called me by my first name.

July 26, 1984. On Thursday FARMS met, and I discovered that since FARMS now has a contract with Deseret Book, they want to publish all of Hugh Nibley’s works in several volumes.

November 4, 1984. Jack and I met with Deseret Book’s Vice President Ron Millett and Chief Editor Eleanor Knowles. All of my work on Nibley paid off, for they accepted the committee’s

suggestion to publish a 16-volume complete works of Nibley. Hence, they gave Jack and me the green light to work on a project that will probably be the most scholarly large project Deseret Book has ever undertaken.

February 15, 1985. Friday morning I met as part of the University Committee for BYU's celebration of Nibley's 75th birthday. I feel honored to be a part of it, along with LaMar Berrett, Keith Meservy, Al Christie, and Peter Johnson. Not to be a boast, but I had the most ideas: the Hugh Nibley Ancient Studies Library, Honors involvement, and bookstore. Best of all, Betsy and I will be at the March 27 birthday dinner with the Nibleys, President Holland, and Elder Neal A. Maxwell, who will be the main speaker.

Nibley told me today he had written several poems before his mission and would like to see them in his collected works. And here I didn't even know he had written poetry! What a wonderful day!

July 10, 1985. I brought Nibley some freshly picked cherries from our family picking at Albert Payne's orchard. The next day he came down to Payson and picked some himself!

April 1, 1988. Worked on *Abraham in Egypt*⁵⁵ and my personal bibliography. I fielded a reference question today concerning a quote about Darius and Alexander the Great. Church offices called concerning this Nibley quote for Pres. Monson's talk during priesthood conference. I found it in Nibley's *Abraham in Egypt* [1981 edition], p. 192. I will listen for it in conference tomorrow night.

April 15, 1988. Before I went into [Wilfred] Griggs's office I remarked to Nibley that he had two secretaries going. He responded with: "Origen had 7 working for him." Griggs then said: "And all writing. Right?" Nibley at 77 still has a sense of humor.

June 27, 1988. I ran into Hugh Nibley in the hallway. The conversation immediately turned to the weather and the excessive (for Utah) humidity. After telling me that the overactive sunspot activity on the sun was causing an eleven-year drought cycle, he reminded me that these were the last days and that we should start behaving ourselves. Unfortunately, for a lot of people the calamities

of the last days won't make them any better. "They will become more desperate," said Nibley.

September 2, 1988. I worked with Nibley on footnotes again today, mostly with the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus. He was so excited to read the Egyptian hieroglyphics that he went far beyond simply translating the relevant spots. And here I was trying to get done! Nevertheless, I enjoyed the hour with him.

September 9, 1988. Pat Ward, Nibley's secretary, told me two very interesting stories about Nibley today. One was following his baptism of Kresimir Cosic before his temple endowments. Being 7'5", Beehive Clothing naturally had nothing in stock with his size. But when he walked in with Brother Nibley, the Relief Society sisters were astounded, now knowing why they made the oversize suit the night before, which fit Kresimir to a tee. The other story is how a Hopi matriarch took Nibley surreptitiously to an underground Kiva and not only showed him frescoes on the wall unknown to almost all white men, but the Hopi stone as well, which is similar to the Egyptian emerald stone.

September 23, 1988. Memo to Pres. Jeffrey Holland concerning my proposal for a Nibley Ancient Studies Library. I later called Randy Olsen about my idea to have the Ancient Studies Library named after Hugh Nibley. He liked the idea and said he would bring it up in Administrative Council.

September 30, 1988. The administrative council liked my idea about the Hugh Nibley Ancient Studies Library. It will first have to go through proper channels.

December 23, 1988. [Two Nibley gems:] "All sin is a form of suicide," and "Sin is that which diminishes the glory of God."

July 1, 1989. [At our "daughter" Margaret Yazzie's wedding in Dinebeto, Navajo Nation.] While everyone mingled and chatted afterwards, I found the medicine man, Lorenzo, by himself, so I seized this opportunity to learn from him. Knowing about the experiences Hugh Nibley once had with the Hopi and Navajo, I asked him how he learned. A discussion about animal totems and astronomy then ensued. Suddenly I knew how Abraham learned about the heavens, for this supposedly unlearned man knew some

things about the universe that I had never learned in books. He also talked about the native peoples of South America and their connection to his own people—as well as the Mongolian Athabascan language group which was similar to his own tongue. And finally, he talked about the “sacred four” and the four cardinal points of the compass, as well as the colors, elements, seasons, emotions, and activities of his people that corresponded to the “four.”

July 14, 1989. At a FARMS party at Jack Welch’s, we all witnessed Nibley quoting Shakespeare as he gazed at Rock Canyon and the beautiful mountains.

February 4, 1990. At 2 Signe and I set up for the Utah Valley Symphony Young Artists concert for the senior citizens at the Eldred Center. I sat a mere six feet from the soloists. Again, they all amazed me. Talking to Hugh Nibley afterwards, he said he didn’t know whether he could tell the difference on a recording whether [Karl] Richter, [Vladimir] Horowitz, or one of these talented girls performed it.

February 9, 1992. [From a letter to my son Grant, serving in the North Carolina Raleigh Mission.] Your mission is an excellent time to consider your plans for your life, by using the advice given in Doctrine and Covenants 9:9. I wish I had had advice like that when I was your age. I was reading some Nibley the other day where he said that there are two things that Latter-day Saint kids are no longer being taught in the Church. One is that we have a guardian angel watching over us and at times giving us guidance (much like Clarence in *It’s a Wonderful Life*). The other is that our covenants and actions and thoughts are being recorded on the other side.

March 8, 1992. [From a letter to our son Karl, serving in the Portugal Lisbon North Mission.] Your question about guardian angels. Look in the topical guide to your triple under “Angels.” Do you see the many references to ministering angels? And read Doctrine and Covenants 107:18 and 19. I trust Hugh Nibley; and not only that, I know they exist from my own experiences. That’s the key. Get your own testimony. On everything!

August 7, 1997. I decided to work on the inventory of Nibley’s personal correspondence. I found a little gem in a letter written in 1946 from Hurricane, Utah. In it he describes his learning of



Figure 6. Gary with collection of boxes containing documents relating to One Eternal Round, 2008.⁸¹

Russian in Heidelberg by paying the rent for a Ukrainian soldier in return for Russian-Only-Spoken-here! Here are his words:

If there is any language that simply *must* be heard to be learned it is Russian—don't you agree? Everything goes along just too lovely for words for a few days, and then one morning you wake up to discover that it all seems weirdly unfamiliar, and you have to start all over again. Unless somebody keeps dinning the stuff in your ears without mercy until it is fixed there for good and all, you can never tell when your mind will spring a leak and the whole thing run off. Haven't you noticed that when you are thinking and reading Russian you have the greatest difficulty in comprehending anything else, even English? That may be symbolic. The whole thing is spiritually another world.

Here is an unexpectedly funny niblet—a wonderful sentence—from Nibley in 1948, addressed to his lawyer friend Paul Springer:

I would say that the ghostly carnival that cavorts over your churning counterpane represents by comparison with the

febrile excesses of the waking mind a wholesome and rational interlude, a retreat as it were of the overwrought spirit from the giddy chamber of mirrors in which it lives by day.

Incidentally, Nibley has been ill these past few weeks, getting dizzy every time he stands up or tries to walk. A student had found that he had fallen on the sidewalk between BYU and his home. He jokes about death, obviously very ready, but he wants to make sure Pat Ward, his secretary, gets his book *One Eternal Round*⁵⁶ together correctly so that he won't need to try to communicate with her from the other side of the veil. It is reported that he has had several blessings that tell him he will live into his 90s. But then, only the Lord really knows for sure.

September 17, 1997. A student named April Black is attending BYU, majoring in cosmology. Since she has read some of Hugh Nibley's works, I showed her the primary sources in the Ancient Studies Library. Seeing Hugh Nibley's door open, I took a chance and introduced April to Hugh Nibley, back to work finally after his summer illness. He was very friendly and gracious to her, and after I mentioned to him that April wanted to major in cosmology, he mentioned the study of the Pearl of Great Price and then gave his rendition of "If You Could Hie to Kolob,"⁵⁷ using the older tune which predated the Ralph Vaughan Williams tune. It was a wonderful few moments with a great man, and a moment April will not soon forget, I'm sure.

December 3, 1997. Yesterday as I cleaned up in the Ancient Studies Library, I found an unfinished article Hugh Nibley had left on the shelf. As I read it this morning I was cosmically awakened by this thought of his: "The greatest fun in the world is the unfolding or unwrapping of intelligence, making of life a perpetual Christmas morning, and that is the one thing God desires more than anything—to bring others up to his own level, 'This is my work and my glory,' to share it all with all of us. . . . The more intelligence is shared, the greater it becomes; light cleaveth to light and intelligence to intelligence, the eager reception of whatever is good, true, and beautiful is the rule that sustains the universe, and it is simply love. Why then did the world have to be a vale of tears? For learning and for testing; to be without experience of the whole

spectrum of suffering would leave one woefully unequipped to deal with the throngs of anguished spirits and sinful inhabitants that to our certain knowledge swarm around us. If our mission is to save others, we must know what they must be saved from.”

May 11, 2000. Randy Olsen came up to show me that the Hugh Nibley plaque had been mounted in the Ancient Studies Room, using words I had suggested—“In appreciation for Nibley’s academic and spiritual contributions to the university.” Now for the celebration in the fall . . .

June 29, 2000. This evening was the open house for the new Special Collections Library. Since Signe was playing in the string quartet, I needed to wait until 6 p.m. for her to finish. So I went to the bank to make a deposit for the Utah Valley Symphony. When I came back to the library, Brother Nibley was waiting near the front entrance. I asked him if he knew about the open house. He didn’t. But when I told him that a string quartet was playing and that Chad Flake had told the audience in the auditorium that the Mercer Egyptology collection was the first special collection acquired by the library, Nibley seemed interested in going downstairs with me. So we took the elevator to the first floor and entered the open house. Because of Nibley’s jovial mood, archivists Scott Duvall and Brad Westwood were able to talk to him about his leaving his personal papers with the university archives. All of the official negotiations have previously come to naught, but simply because I saw Nibley waiting to go home, things are happening with his collection. I can hardly wait for Library Director Randy Olsen to return from vacation so I can tell him about the success we had with Nibley.

September 22, 2000. This morning I chatted a little with Curtis Wright and Dan McKinlay in Curtis’s office. We began talking about Nibley, and how when Curtis was a student in Nibley’s Greek class, he one day saw Nibley reading his Book of Mormon. Nibley exclaimed to Curtis: “I found a mistake in the Book of Mormon!” Curtis thought it was some important error, but had a real laugh when Nibley responded: “Well, here in Alma 42:10 it talks about how we are all ‘carnal, sensual, and devilish.’ The writer forgot to add ‘Stupid!’” Curtis has also been having trouble with editors lately: “The editor killeth, and the footnote giveth life!”

October 30, 2000. Rebecca Everett arrived in Provo from Hawaii in heavy rain, toting her Nibley portrait with her, fortunately wrapped very well to protect it on the plane and from the moisture. We unveiled her portrait in the New Friends Room, in the presence of Randy and Julene. We were all astounded and amazed at the beautiful labor of love the portrait exhibited.

Having appreciated and studied Nibley's writings ever since 1969, the same year I first became enamored with him, Rebecca's greatest desire was to be able to meet Nibley in person. So after a chatty and amiable lunch in the Cougarreat, we went to the Ancient Studies Library, hoping that we would have success. The Muses must have been with us, for we not only found Nibley in his usual spot doing research, but he was in a good mood. All three of us were visibly moved by the experience with the portrait and by Rebecca's reading of the poem to him. Finally, I dared take a photograph of her standing with Nibley, the portrait between them. What a joyful day for Rebecca and me. It was more than a red-letter day in her life!⁵⁸

November 4, 2001. Tonight was the celebration I have been awaiting for ten years: the official naming of the Ancient Studies Room after Hugh Nibley. Immediately upon arriving at the library following the end of the workshop, I went straight to the Ancient Studies Library to see if everything had been done correctly. The Nibley portrait was hung too high, but the Egyptian mummy case and everything else was perfectly arranged. About 60 of us gathered in the President's Dining Room of WSC to honor Nibley. Becky Everett sat with Signe and me. We were later joined by Jack and Jeannie Welch and a reporter from University Communications. We had lively discussions about our various trips to Europe and the dangers we had faced. Academic Vice President Alan Wilkins was conducting. After his introductory comments, I gave the invocation and blessing on the meal. Kent Brown told a story about Nibley, and then President [Merrill] Bateman talked about the contributions Nibley had made to the university and the Church.

November 14, 2002. A wonderful quote from Hugh Nibley, as I proofread Boyd Petersen's new biography of his father-in-law, *A Consecrated Life*.⁵⁹ I've read many wonderful things about his life, but so far the most important was a comment that he made while

on his mission in Germany in the 1920s: “The Gospel is a fulcrum for everything else in my life.”

December 23, 2002. Library Journal, for which I write a book review every six weeks, has just sent me a new book to review—a choice which causes me to believe that my editor at *LJ*, Carolyn Kuebler, is definitely inspired: David Klinghoffer’s *The Discovery of God: Abraham and the Birth of Monotheism* (New York: Doubleday). Did she know that I will be teaching a course on Abraham and Hugh Nibley less than a month from now? Or that while in Yucca Valley during Thanksgiving I read a similar book by Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*?⁶⁰ Who says the universe is not orderly! No one can say *my* guardian angel doesn’t know what I’m doing . . . or being . . . or knowing. What a sense of enduring sanction this Feeling gives me! It’s like being completely bathed in divine light, love, and laughter.

January 6, 2003. Class went extremely well—20 students. We discussed the syllabus and then explored the various themes we could keep in mind while studying Nibley’s works: shedding light on new areas, “Big Picture” focus, seeing things from a different angle, and his consecrated life of discipleship.

October 10, 2003. A day of days, three hours of soul-satisfying, mind-fulfilling, and happifying activity at the home of Hugh and Phyllis Nibley. At 1:45 I met five of my students (from my winter semester’s Nibley class) at the Karl G. Maeser statue in front of the Maeser Building: Sarah Phipps, Adam Anderson, Ben Anderson, Matt Brice, and Melbourne O’Bannion. It was a cool but beautiful day as we descended the steps down Maeser Hill, as Hugh Nibley himself has done thousands of times in his 93 years. In ten minutes we were standing outside the Nibley home on 700 North, awaiting the arrival of Brad Westwood and John Murphy from Special Collections, and Boyd Petersen, Nibley’s son-in-law, to show us what to take today. Meanwhile, Bronia Nibley, Paul Nibley’s wife, and her daughter Anna arrived, just after John Gee left the house after discussing Abraham with Hugh.

When Boyd arrived, I asked if he felt it was all right for the students to meet Nibley while we awaited Brad and John. Boyd and Phyllis both thought that would be all right. I also told Nibley about

how John Gee had brought three moldy and water-damaged books into my office that very morning: all of them about the cuneiform in the Archives at Mari, and all of them never checked out from Ancient Studies!! I told Nibley about how the person who had “lifted” them from Ancient Studies, Jonathan Gemill, had died in his sleep two years ago. Nibley wondered how Jonathan had pulled that off, for he wondered if he could do that, too! A chuckle from all of us in the room! After that humorous experience with a frail and failing but still alert and awake Hugh, I invited the students in to meet our great mentor. Adam Anderson, who like Nibley had served a mission in Germany, immediately greeted Nibley in perfect German, eliciting a response in German from Hugh! (The other students were amazed!) And then each student got to shake Nibley’s hand—reverently. One of the students asked about Nibley’s magnum opus, his yet to be completed *One Eternal Round*. Nibley responded, “Still round and round.” That also got laughs from everyone. Then I ushered the students out, for by this time Brad and John had arrived.

All 8 of us together then tackled the hundreds of books in his garage: I grabbed them off the shelf while Sarah put them in the boxes, still another labeled the boxes, and yet another carried the boxes (soon to be 60) out to the BYU van. I handled books as old as 1608 and 1621 (Greek texts published in Germany), five paperback copies of the Book of Mormon (all annotated with marginalia by Nibley, pointing the way towards a future commentary of the Book of Mormon), a complete set of Tolstoy (in Russian), several books in Arabic, and a complete set of Hindu scriptures. Halfway through, however, I had to don a mask because of the dust in the air from moving books which had probably sat in this garage for decades.

Meanwhile, Brad, the students, and I had lively discussions about Nibley and his books when we came across interesting things, like a 1920s Kodak camera in one corner. Brad and I also wondered if Nibley knew that he was a convert from Catholicism and that I was a convert from Lutheranism—working together on his collection. I was really heady from this three-hour experience, knowing the inspiring fun I would have in the future going through this fine collection of books. But I was tired as the four male students and I walked up Maeser Hill to the library, where Matt and Adam went

to the loading dock to help Brad and John unload those 60 boxes to take to Special Collections. Then, as I walked to the car to meet my wife Signe, I wondered how Nibley must feel about all of his books being taken out from under him, as it were, after many decades of reading and researching in them. But I rested assured that Nibley is grateful that many students will get good use out of his lifetime of labors and collections.

In November 1984 I had expressed my dismay that working with Nibley's writings was interfering with family and professional responsibilities. Now I realize that all of these past years have culminated with a soul-heightening and deepening experience today that testifies to me that it was all well worth the effort and the many hours I have devoted to the project. May I always feel that way!

January 16, 2004. My Nibley class met in the Special Collections classroom this morning, where my colleague Russ Taylor showed us a cuneiform tablet from 2055 B.C. Babylon, a page from the Gutenberg 42-line Bible, and an original copy of the Book of Mormon.

February 26, 2004. At 5:45 I met 10 students, along with Professors Bill Hamblin and David Seely, Michael Lyon, and a couple of students' friends. We took the traditional Nibley path from the Maeser Building to the bottom of the hill and over to Nibley's house. Hugh and Phyllis invited us into their house to sing a birthday song to Nibley's words "Now that oysters are in season" to the melody of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from Symphony no. 9. Nibley was very touched and was mouthing the words to the last two lines. Amazing that he would remember something so well from his high school days when he was but 16 (1926)! Then I gave him a tin of oysters, a bag of pretzels, and a carton of buttermilk (instead of beer) to soak the pretzels in. He and Phyllis were both so appreciative of us, especially when Nibley found out we were from BYU, not his ward!

June 29, 2004. Susan Wheelwright finished the last of the Nibley boxes—for 1,922 titles! What a project, which began nearly a year ago and went through over 150 boxes of Nibley's own books. Now for the printing of the 106-page inventory. Then I stopped by the Library Administrative Offices, where Brittany had finished retyping nine of Nibley's unpublished and almost illegible manuscripts.

February 24, 2005. Joany [Pinegar] in the Ancient Studies office just called and informed me that the Religion Department told her that Hugh Nibley passed away this morning—one month before his 95th birthday. Phyllis had checked on him at 7 a.m. When she went to check again at 10, he had already quietly and peacefully slipped away.

At 10 p.m. tonight Bishop Matthew Christensen, who had been one of my Nibley students last year, called in behalf of Phyllis Nibley to inform me of the funeral Wednesday in the Provo Tabernacle. Through her bishop she conveyed thanks for all that I've done for the family.

March 2, 2005. I could not have imagined a grander funeral than Hugh Winder Nibley's in the Provo Tabernacle, where Signe and I have performed and attended so many times in the past years: from Utah Valley Symphony and Utah Baroque Ensemble concerts to stake conferences to family graduations. You would have thought that Nibley was a General Authority because of all the attention he was getting:

- Two Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both of them having served as president of BYU during Nibley's tenure: Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Jeffrey R. Holland. The funeral was presided over by Elder Oaks and conducted by Nibley's bishop—and my former Nibley student—Bishop Matthew Christensen. Robert Cundick was the organist, and Martha Sargent was the chorister.
- The Utah Baroque Ensemble, in which I am a baritone singer, was chosen to provide the music for the funeral. The conductor was Martha Sargent, and Jerri Bearce was the organist. It was amazing that I would be in attendance at this funeral for two reasons: The choir sang one of my favorite choral pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach, "Come, Sweet Death." They also sang "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," joined by the congregation in the chorus.
- Members of Hugh Nibley's family spoke after the choir sang: Zina Nibley Petersen, Rebecca Nibley, Charles Alexander Nibley, Michael Draper Nibley, Thomas Hugh Nibley, Christina Nibley Mincek, and Paul Sloan Nibley.
- Hugh's brother Reid Nibley played a piano solo, Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," and accompanied Kelly

Clark Parkinson in her rendition of “Vocalise” by Sergei Rachmaninoff, who had performed in the Provo Tabernacle in 1938.

- My friend, colleague, and Nibley supporter John Welch was the second to the last speaker.
- Elder Dallin H. Oaks was the concluding speaker, he who had once taken classes from Hugh Nibley in the 1950s at BYU.
- The prayers were offered by Boyd J. Petersen and Otto Draper.
- Last but not least, the casket was beautifully handmade by son Paul Nibley—out of several beautiful woods, with ancient symbols on it.

* * *

One thing Nibley and I had in common and which made all the difference in our lives, careers, and our eternal perspective was a near-death experience. While in Los Angeles in December 1936, he had often speculated about what the afterlife was like. According to his wife, Phyllis, in *Faith of an Observer*,⁶¹ her husband had an appendicitis attack, requiring him to go to the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital in Loma Linda, California. Apostle Matthias Cowley gave him a blessing, and Nibley had a near-death experience that made him feel like he could know anything and everything and share the perspective of Joseph Smith when he famously said, “If you could look into heaven 5 minutes . . .” Not only did this experience shape his life and give him a testimony of the afterlife, it was a special blessing, which, I believe, spared his life several times a few years later when he was in the US Army at Normandy and during the Battle of the Bulge. He himself felt like he had had some kind of divine protection. It may also have protected him from PTSD (post-traumatic stress syndrome), which many veterans were afflicted with not only during World War II but in many wars since then.

When Boyd Petersen’s biography *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* was published, I was asked to write a review for *BYU Studies*.⁶² Here is an excerpt from that review, in which I describe Nibley’s perspective on life:

Nibley has been variously called an eschatological thinker, a Renaissance man, a true hero of World War II, a polymath,

a multiglot, a truth seeker and truth defender, an expounder, and an eternal amateur, “with guts.” After thirty-four years of knowing this enigmatic brother, I see Nibley as a hobo bravely and blithely sitting on top of a boxcar, preferring to suffer the wind and bugs and sunburn in order to allow his curiosity a 360-degree view, rather than merely facing forward [or looking out the window] with the passengers and engineers inside the cars [and locomotive]. To others he may seem an erudite mystic, but Boyd Jay Petersen finds him an authentic, down-to-earth and up-to-heaven, constant, consistent “messenger of light” who wants no disciples for himself but instead leads scholars to the Savior.

Finally, two experiences in Nibley’s library office reminded me that he still reflected on his experiences in World War II:

June 20, 1982. I asked Nibley about June 6, 1944—D-Day. He then animatedly began to tell me about not being put on the glider that ended up crashing, instead driving General Pratt’s jeep ashore to Utah Beach, and then hiding out later in a French farmhouse. He cracked me up.

August 7, 1999. Signe and Tim and I watched the video *Saving Private Ryan*. Never has there been a movie which portrayed war more realistically and vividly. Not only that, there was a sequence in a which a 101st airborne glider had crash-landed, killing nearly everyone aboard because armor plate had been added to the glider to protect its “General” passenger, thereby destroying the aerodynamics and trim on the glider, making it fall like a brick out of the sky. It was [perhaps] this glider that Hugh Nibley was kicked out of just before D-Day, giving up his seat for this selfish general.

December 17, 1997. I was just in the Ancient Studies office to check with Kent Brown concerning the *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. Before I could leave, Pat was telling us that yesterday Hugh Nibley told her it was the anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. He also told her that as an intelligence officer in Order of Battle it was his business to find out what direction the German army was coming. He told the commander what he thought the Germans would do, but the commander would not listen, and the American troops were not moved. Consequently, the Germans came straight south in a concentrated counteroffensive,

wiping out many of the American troops in this famous battle. The next day the commander told Nibley he had been right. Of course this incident didn't get into the history books: it was just one more mistake in that war.

APPENDIX 2. Hugh Nibley's Favorite Themes

Taking the gospel seriously. In a lot of his writings, you can't help but get the feeling—and he said it specifically himself—that you can either take the gospel seriously or yourself seriously: you can't do both at the same time. And that's something to think about.

The eschatological man. One of his favorite stories that he tells is of a man who goes to a doctor to find out why he has this or that pain and discovers that he has six weeks to live because he has this very invasive cancer. Well, like any of us would do, that would change our perspective pretty quickly, wouldn't it? And we would start doing some things that had a higher priority in our lives than what we had been doing. Well, that's what this man does. Two and a half months go by. And then he gets a call from the doctor, who says, "Oh, we had your file mixed up with somebody else's, and you're healthy. You're as fit as a fiddle." The eschatological man, rather than going back to the way his life had been before, decides, "Well, I can see what my priorities in life should be, I am going to continue with that." Nibley has used this theme time and again to show us how there are things that should take higher priority.

Temples in Egyptian Christianity. This is an obvious one. He was one of the first scholars to show the similarity between Egyptian temples and our own temple ceremony. His two books *Temple and Cosmos* and *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* are both very eye-opening in this regard.

The works of Abraham and the Pearl of Great Price. The book that he's been working on for the last fifteen years is called *One Eternal Round*. Its concern is Facsimile 2 in the Pearl of Great Price. He has found drawings similar to the facsimiles in museums all over the world. He hasn't gone to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg himself, but, for instance, Dr. Thomas F. Rogers, a BYU

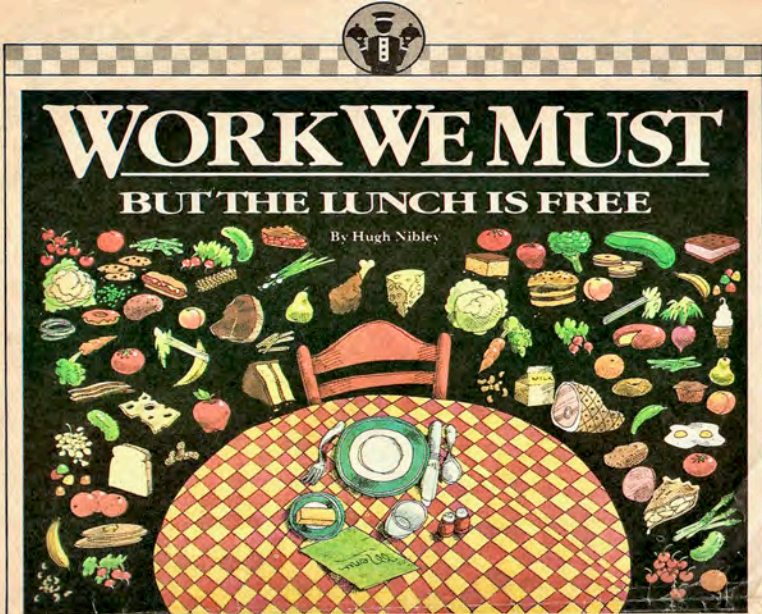
professor who went over to the museum while serving as president of the Russia St. Petersburg Mission, was asked to look for these hypocephali. (The hypocephalus is an “under-the-head document”—it is placed with the deceased to provide her or him instructions for crossing into the other world.) He said that there were two examples of hypocephali in the Hermitage, and they were very much like the one we have in our Pearl of Great Price. The Coptic Museum in Cairo also has numerous copies. So this has been a theme of Nibley’s for a long time.

Work we must, but the lunch is free. This was actually the name of a talk that he gave in Salt Lake City to the Cannon-Hinckley Club. He feels that the Lord has given us a life to live here, and we need to work, and he gives us all that we need to sustain our lives while we’re working. Too many of us are, however, out there trying to see how much more lunch we can acquire, rather than realizing that for all of us the lunch is free. Again, a question of priorities.

Leaders and managers. We all know that leaders are more effective than managers. In fact, if you look at the business world you will see more and more corporations using that model. This theme is based on personalities in the Book of Mormon, from King Noah to Moroni.

The Book of Mormon and, especially, the Nephite disease. We’re all familiar with this theme: we get prosperous and cocky and arrogant, and before we know it, we’ve lost our blessings, become humble and teachable, and end up starting all over again. He has felt many times that we’re in that situation today.

Multidisciplinary study and education. Nibley has never been the kind of person who wanted to specialize. For example, “I’m going to specialize in knowledge about the left pinky. And that’s going to be the whole of my career—doing that.” Nibley can’t stand that, and frankly, one of the reasons I became a librarian was because librarians are generalists and multidisciplinary scholars. Nibley felt that we can learn a lot more from each other if we can accept other disciplines and, in fact, sometimes even use diverse disciplines



WORK WE MUST
BUT THE LUNCH IS FREE

By Hugh Nibley

According to the gospel of evolution, lunch is the meaning of life. Everything is lunching on everything else, all the time, and that is what makes us what we are: that is the key to progress. And when the beasts are not lunching, they are hunting for lunch. They all have to work for it: there is no free lunch in the world of nature, the real world.

“Nature red in tooth and claw,” was Tennyson’s happy phrase. Of course, he got the idea from Darwin, as Spencer did his even happier phrase, “Survival of the fittest.”

The *Origin of Species* put the unimpeachable seal of Science on the lunch-grab as the Supreme Law of life and progress. Basically, Darwin gave the blessing of science to men who had been hoping and praying for holy sanction to an otherwise immoral way of life. Malthus had shown that there will never be enough lunch for everybody, and therefore people would have to fight for it; and Ricardo had shown by his Iron Law of wages, that those left behind and gobbled up in the struggle for lunch had no just cause for complaint. Darwin showed that this was an inexorable law of nature by which the race was actually improved—Mill and Spencer made it the cornerstone of the Gospel of Free Enterprise—the weaker **MUST** fall by the way if the stock is to be improved. This was movingly expressed in J. D. Rockefeller’s discourse on the American Beauty Rose, which, he said, “can only be produced by sacrificing the

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Illustration by Brent D. Burch

Figure 7. Publication of an abridged version of Nibley’s controversial talk to the Cannon-Hinckley Club on May 19, 1987.⁸²

together with our own—or at least have some rudimentary knowledge of them.

The history of Christianity. There is one volume of the collected works where Nibley looks at the early church fathers and shows what their perspectives of Jesus Christ and the early church were. In fact, the original talks were on the radio in the 1950s. His criticism of early Christianity is the basis for his commencement address in 1983 in the Marriott Center. He prefaced his remarks by referring to a prayer he gave at a devotional in the George Albert Smith Fieldhouse:

Twenty three years ago today, if you will cast your minds back, on this same occasion, I gave the opening prayer, in which I said, “We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood.” Now, many have asked me since then whether I really said such a shocking thing. But nobody has ever asked what I meant by it. Why not? Well, some knew the answer already, and as for the rest, we do not question things at the BYU. [Laughing and applauding] Well, I didn’t expect that.⁶³

APPENDIX 3: The Eschatological Dignity of Hugh Nibley: Surprises from the Nibley Archives, 2007–2009

From early 2007 until my wife Signe and I served a senior mission in the California Anaheim Mission in June 2009, I found myself in the Brigham Young University Archives, along with several students, processing Nibley’s voluminous papers, ending up with 294 archival boxes. Decisions were easy to make, however, for I often felt like Hugh Nibley was looking over my shoulder. It was by no means a boring task, for there was always a surprise right around the corner, as the items below give credence to.

Information gleaned from his papers

- Hugh was a featured piano soloist in at least two concerts early in his life—one of those as a participant in a summer music program at BYU and Aspen Grove (1942).

- Diplomas and certificates of achievement never displayed were found.
- He was asked to contribute to volume 1 of James Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*—he declined, though he gave permission to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* to publish his article on the “Greek Apocalypse of Daniel.”
- He sat on a BYU committee doing curriculum study for a Book of Mormon course (1950s).
- A thick folder on “Dewey and Education” (an article in progress?) was found.
- An original draft of “Change out of Control”⁶⁴ mentioned the World Trade Center and the need to tear it down in thirty years because of technological advances (1970s).
- Amazing Lamanite documents about the Hopi, Mayan, and Navajo tribes (in the *Themes* box of the Nibley Archives) were found.
- Hugh refused a \$5,000 payment from General Authorities for the *Approach to the Book of Mormon* priesthood manual,⁶⁵ which, under pressure, he finally accepted (1956).
- An *Ägyptologie Papyruskunde* catalog from Otto Harrassowitz, book dealer in Wiesbaden (1978), with several items checked was found.
- Instructions for the new GI (soldier) were found: the beginning of a biography.
- A list of influential friends and acquaintances was found.
- A detailed car accident report, March 16, 1970, was found.
- A 1962 application for a Guggenheim grant with the best curriculum vitae we have from him was found (he didn't get the grant, for he missed the deadline for application).
- A possible chapter or article outline was found: “Where does the hypocephalus belong? What about seer-stones? Prayer circles? Temples? Vestments? Fasts? Prayers? Alms? The 5 Duties of Islam? The Sacraments? Forbidden food?”
- Thousands of excerpts from Brigham Young's writings from the *Journal of Discourses*, typed and stapled according to subject, were found.
- Hugh participated in the design of the San Diego California Temple.⁶⁶

Correspondence

- Letters from and to Pastor Schmiessing in Winfield, Kansas, in 1961, while I was a Lutheran student there, were found.⁶⁷
- A December 22, 1938, letter from Apostle John A. Widtsoe asking him to submit articles on the Book of Abraham to the *Improvement Era*, especially on the three facsimiles, was found. This predates Elder J. Reuben Clark's requests and the Church's request for research on the Joseph Smith Papyri by almost thirty years.
- Correspondence with Paul Springer was Nibley at his best, when he was most relaxed and free.

Speaking engagements

- Utah State Prison (medium security). January 30, 1972, subject unknown.
- Oklahoma State University's Religious Emphasis Week, March 5, 1963, where he gave three papers: "The Play Must Have a Part," "Is Religion Materialistic?" and "Does Religion or Christianity Have a Place on the Campus?"
- Evening lectures on religion at the University of Utah, Utah State, and BYU between October 22 and December 17, 1956: "The Varieties of Christian Theology."
- Wells Stake, Whittier Ward, Whittier, California, Mutual Improvement Association Speech Festival, February 2, 1954, on folklore.
- Provo Community Church (1950s).

Observations made

- I discovered one entire box of personal journals! (unfortunately, most of the entries are in Niblish.)
- Spencer W. Kimball's article "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976, found in fourteen widespread locations throughout his papers, more than any other article written by anyone else, seemed to be Nibley's mantra or philosophy of life.
- Three photocopies of Harold Bloom's talk on American religion and Joseph Smith were spread throughout his papers. All were heavily annotated.

- Six copies of “A Strange Thing in the Land” on Enoch from the *Ensign* were found throughout his papers. These are unusual in that Nibley has heavily annotated each *already-published* article of his.
- Three copies of *Temple and Cosmos* in his personal book collection have been annotated, almost as if he were reading another author.
- A *New Yorker* cartoon by Dr. Duane Davis depicts two inscribers chiseling hieroglyphics in an Egyptian temple. The supervisor noticed a mistake and said, “Man before jackal except when followed by hawk.” (“I” before “E,” etc.) Nibley didn’t get it (or was pulling our leg). He translated the glyphs, said it was authentic, and gave a history. Ever the literalist!
- “Genealogists are the only true historians.”
- His handwriting was neatest when writing Cyrillic [Russian] script.

Curious artifacts

- “Steamer trunks full of note cards” (as mentioned by his brother Reid Nibley in *Faith of an Observer*) equal 67½ linear feet or 810 linear inches, or about 250,000 cards. (Nibley’s “hard drive.”) This approximates the height of the Kimball Tower building on the BYU campus. There are many more cards within his research folders. These are in English, his modified Gregg shorthand, and in many languages. Unusual topics include Las Vegas credo, Slavic epics, obsolescence of science, Muslim sects, the bee, Joseph Smith and Enoch, and the Egyptian Copts.
- Cancelled checks dating back to his UCLA days in the 1930s were found.
- A purple jogging-shoe pin, given to him by someone, reminiscent of his wearing purple K-Mart shoes with a black suit, was found.⁶⁸
- A dentist’s office receipt was found in the middle of many Joseph Smith Papyri drafts and notes.
- Krešimir Ćosić’s personal correspondence and papers as part of the Nibley papers was found. (Ćosić obviously trusted him with them.)
- His own cartoon drawing of a man “having fun” was found.
- From his secretary Pat Ward’s office, a copy of C.S. Lewis’s *Till We Have Faces*,⁶⁹ from the library of Orson Scott Card,

presumably lent to Nibley by Card, was found (added to the Card Archives).⁷⁰

Languages: *From his writings, his language-study materials, his books, his experiences.*

- Anglo-Saxon*
- Arabic*
- Aramaic
- Assyrian
- Avestan (related to Sanskrit)
- Canaanite (used in his Teachings of the Book of Mormon honors class from 1988 to 1992)
- Coptic (includes Sahidic)*
- Cuneiform
- Danish
- Dutch*
- Egyptian Demotic
- Egyptian Hieratic
- Egyptian Hieroglyphic*
- English*
- French*
- German*
- Greek, Ancient*
- Greek, Modern
- Gregg shorthand, modified by Nibley and known in his personal journals as “Niblish”
- Hebrew*
- Hopi
- Hungarian
- Icelandic
- Irish (Gaelic)
- Italian
- Latin*
- Mayan
- Navajo
- Norwegian
- Old Bulgarian (Church Slavonic)
- Old English
- Old Norse*
- Persian
- Russian*

- Sanskrit
- Spanish
- Swedish
- Syriac
- Turkish

Fluency in the various languages listed above varied widely. An asterisk (*) marked his most fluent. Nibley also learned code language in the army, and if music notation is considered a language, that should be included as well. However, computer language is decidedly not something he ever learned, although he attempted to use computers for a short time.

Benefits from processing Nibley's papers:

- A 350-page finding aid available online and open for research.⁷¹
- A list of Nibley's unpublished papers in the BYU archives, some of which may be published some day.

APPENDIX 4: Teaching about Nibley and His Life and Works

In 2001 I submitted an application to the Honors Department to teach an annual course on the "Life and Works of Hugh Nibley." In preparation I also had a discussion about it with Nibley. He preferred that I call the course "Doing the Works of Abraham." So, that's how Honors listed it in the course catalog. I taught for five winter semesters, from 2003 to 2007, with about 120 students altogether. (Jack Welch filled in for me in 2007 when I was in the hospital with a spinal hematoma.) Besides using Boyd Petersen's biography of Nibley, we discussed the following titles, which I considered the core of Nibley's writings and the most likely to mirror the works of Abraham:⁷²

Old Testament and Related Studies

"Before Adam," 49.

"Patriarchy and Matriarchy," 87.

"Treasures in the Heavens," 171.

Enoch the Prophet

“Enoch the Prophet,” 3.

Mormonism and Early Christianity

“The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” 45.

“Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” 100.

Lehi in the Desert

“Lehi in the Desert,” 3–123.

An Approach to the Book of Mormon

“The Way of the ‘Intellectuals,’” 361.

Approaching Zion

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” 1.

“What Is Zion? A Distant View,” 25.

“Zeal without Knowledge,” 63.

“Gifts,” 85.

“How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So?,” 149.

“Work We Must, but the Lunch Is Free,” 234.

“Meaning of the Atonement,” 578.

The Ancient State

“New Light on Scaliger,” 303.

Temple and Cosmos

“The Meaning of the Temple,” 1.

“Do Religion and History Conflict?,” 434.

Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints

“Man’s Dominion, or Subduing the Earth,” 3.

“Stewardship of the Air,” 55.

“Promised Lands,” 76.

“Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” 278.

“The Day of the Amateur,” 301.

“Educating the Saints,” 306.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 407.

“Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift,” 491.

Abraham in Egypt

“The Sacrifice of Isaac,” 319.

“The Sacrifice of Sarah,” 343.

“Bird Island”⁷³

Since both Nibley and I eschewed the normal tests that are regularly given in college classes, I opted for open-book tests. In addition, I gave them a choice between writing a paper about Nibley or choosing one of the following unpublished articles to edit:

- “Egypt and Joseph Smith: Perennial Egypt”
- “Freemasonry and Joseph Smith”
- “Irenaeus (2nd-Century Church Father)”
- “The Lesson of the 6th Century B.C.”
- “Mormons and the Environment (1987)”
- “Plato’s Athens”
- “There Is Always Egypt”
- “The Thousand-Year Question”

For each of the Nibley readings I asked each student to email me a “Nibleyesque Musing.” Some examples below are from one of the students, Svetlana Tamtik, who also ended up as one of the student workers in the Family History Library when I retired. She was on her way to a master’s degree and the writing of a thesis comparing Latter-day Saint theology with Russian Orthodoxy when her mother, dying of cancer, needed her in Kyiv, Ukraine. Sadly, she ended up herself with fatal cancer a few years ago, dying on December 22, 2014. A mutual Ukrainian friend on Facebook sent me her incredible obituary—in both Russian and English. Like Hugh Nibley, she had many of his same talents and gifts:

- Being humble like a child helps us to have an open mind for learning; and having an open mind is essential for receiving personal revelations or insights.
- The amount of knowledge that we will be able to receive from this “fountain of wisdom” [Nibley] would reflect the size of our own vessels.
- It seems to me sometimes as if everyone is saying, “Everything is well in Zion,” and “*A Book of Mormon! A Book of Mormon! We have a Book of Mormon, and there cannot be any more Book of Mormon!*”
- Nibley would feel confident in leading the faithful remnants into the Utah wilderness and establishing a holy community where there would be no money, and a big emphasis would

be placed on obtaining true *knowledge*. I just can't help but see him as a desert guru!

- It seems a natural tendency in Nibley's life to reject something completely if he was hurt or affected by it somehow. It includes his allergy for wealth as well as his sickness with war.

Here are the best of five years' worth of musings by students. They are comments about Nibley himself or comments he would have made had he been here:

- Nibley had a very Enoch-esque faith, which, if coupled with an entire people with similar faith, would have allowed God to act through man by moving mountains, shielding against missiles, and causing the elements to stir for the benefit of man.
- Nibley *regularly expected* for miracles to happen. I think he believed in the scripture where it says that God is still a God of miracles. And Nibley was taking full advantage of that!
- Things that break down—energy, our bodies with age, the world—all can be reached by the power of the “At-onement,” which brings their decaying particles into a healthy whole once more.
- The more we expand our own capacity for learning and knowledge, the more God will expand our spiritual gifts.
- Nibley explained many of the mysteries of the gospel in a very scholarly way that I think will allow my children to expand their testimonies.
- If there's any single message that stands out to me from this class, any precipitate from all the aspects of Nibley's work that we've studied, it's the concept that this world is not reality but merely a testing place.
- I'm glad that President McKay approved of a more difficult approach to the scriptures than the general primary answers; I think one of the aspects I love best about Nibley's work is how it makes me rethink and reexamine the scriptures and doctrines I've grown up with.
- Nibley reminds me that leadership doesn't depend on titles but on character and is transparent in the eyes of one's followers.
- If we learn about the gospel of love and charity, we can be stronger than mere rule-observers.

- Nibley is set apart from other people in his incredible intelligence, grounded and founded in gospel learning.
- It is interesting to see that the text of the Isaiah scroll is closer to the fragments of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon than to the book of Isaiah as found in the current Old Testament.
- Historical proof and political comparisons of the Book of Mormon and its accuracy is impressive, but it's the ability to apply it to my real life that is truly precious.
- Criticism in our modern society is pejorative, presumptuous, and pretentious. When we criticize, it seems that we are not—as per Nibley's translation—following the pure doctrine of criticism: that of refining, searching, and changing.
- No matter how wild, how unexplainable, how unpredictable our lives become, the preservation of our own personal universes depends on our connection with God, however we can make it.
- Not everything that hurts is bad, and life is for living. It's always an epiphany with Nibley.
- My hope is that my entry in the book of life will be able to pass the test of witnesses as an acceptable record.
- How infinitely difficult it would be to go from a state of perfect organization and go down to experience death. No wonder the Brethren are so adamant about us going to the temple to “reorganize” ourselves according to heaven's standards.
- The universe is perfect and operates in its way seemingly for and in behalf of spiritual, intelligent life.
- Nibley is correct when he asserts that evolution cannot account for the fulness of man. Natural selection selects for survival elements, not spiritual elements.
- Without agency there really would be no progression. And when we aren't actively choosing to repent and forgive, then we aren't progressing.
- I really like how the temple orients us to the world we are in, and also orients us to what we really want to face and what's most important in this life.
- True retirement was never a possibility for Nibley. Retiring meant that he would have to give up doing what he loved best: getting people to think clearly about the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- I've come to see not only the human side of Nibley but also how his faith mitigated his weaknesses.

- The unique nature of this religion is the emphasis placed on constantly learning and growing and seeking new understanding.
- One of our greatest challenges here is to choose those things that we will value most highly and go to the greatest lengths to attain and preserve.
- Temple service is redemptive—not only for those for whom vicarious work is done, but also for those who are doing it.
- As a defender of the faith, Hugh Nibley was able to find congruity while compiling the ancient information and resources that became his writings. It is interesting to see that when one is doing something for righteousness' sake, the reasoning seems to hold together.
- We are here to learn how to become “celestial citizens.”
- It was certainly a revelation for me, having previously thought of the sealed portion [of scripture] as containing doctrinal mysteries rather than as a verification of the translated portion. It would also be interesting to think of these principles in reference to the seven seals in Revelation.
- In the book of *2 Jeu*, considered by Carl Schmidt the most instructive of all early Christian texts,⁷⁴ the apostles and their wives all form a circle around the Lord, who says he will lead them through the secret ordinances that shall give them eternal life.
- Nibley was more a critic of Latter-day Saint culture than of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What he saw among the Saints was that they were settling for mediocrity.
- I loved Nibley's attitude. He didn't appear to have any regrets or boastfulness in his accomplishments. The only thing he worried about was his children and the future. But his past was just that: past.
- Physical science has taught me the principle of Occam's razor, that in science you take the simpler of two explanations when you have more than one. Joseph Smith's story might be an incredible one, but it is the most believable.
- I believe it was Nibley's willingness to exercise his faith in the Lord and his representatives that originally caught the eye of the Brethren and increased their trust in Nibley. All of his writings support the Church. He clearly is spreading the gospel in a way that only Nibley is capable of.

- When it becomes Theology with a capital “T,” I run for the hills. God has certainly given us hints (and I would argue as much as we need to know) about his character and plan.
- I feel like Nibley is like reading Isaiah—there are plenty of details that most often none of us will ever really fully understand . . . but if we capture the grand picture Nibley is attempting to paint, we can see how comprehensible the gospel really is.
- I can understand Nibley’s fascination with other religious sects. . . . It is neat to understand and discern the kernels of truth in other religions, and this only affirms the truthfulness of the gospel.

Not surprisingly, all of my honors students received grades of A or B, something they all worked hard for and deserved because of their “Nibleyesque” involvement in the class. Another class assignment included a “mind map,” with some students using Facsimile 2 in the Pearl of Great Price as an example to follow.⁷⁵

Gary P. Gillum is a librarian emeritus of Brigham Young University. He has compiled bibliographies of works in Mormon studies and as the foreign languages bibliographer; he became the librarian of religion, philosophy, and ancient studies in 1980. Gillum was Nibley’s “personal librarian” during much of Nibley’s time at BYU. Because of his familiarity with Nibley’s sources, Gillum helped in editing three volumes of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, as well as indexing, reviewing, and archiving his works. He also compiled Of All Things! Classic Quotations from Hugh Nibley and taught an honors class on Nibley at BYU for five years. Gillum has written reviews for Library Journal, BYU Studies, and Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, in addition to serving on the editorial boards for BYU Studies and Dialogue. He has been a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, American Theological Library Association, and Mormon History Association. He and his wife Signe share seventeen children and eighty-one grandchildren.

Notes

1. See Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, January 1969, 26–33.
2. Gary P. Gillum, "Huge Windy Nebula," was part of BYU's Harold B. Lee Library House of Learning Lecture Series, January 12, 2006. A video of the presentation is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO_X5mwtHWY.
3. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005).
4. Hugh Nibley, "Educating the Saints," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 313.
5. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), page unknown.
6. Hugh Nibley, "It Takes All Kinds," p. 5 of an untitled manuscript of a draft of a pamphlet on the Book of Abraham, incomplete, 1977.
7. Agatha Christie, *Caribbean Mystery* (New York: Signet, 1966), inside back cover.
8. Frank Waters, *Book of the Hopi* (New York City: Penguin Books, 1977).
9. Robert E. Merriam, *The Battle of the Bulge* (New York City: Ballantine Books, 1947).
10. Rutherford H. Platt, ed., *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Berkeley: Apocryphile Press, 2005).
11. Details of the book could not be located.
12. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
13. John W. Welch, "The Timelessness of Hugh Nibley," *This People* 8 (April 1987): 39.
14. See Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 25.
15. Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, May 1970, 85.
16. Nibley, "Plato's *Republic*" (unpublished manuscript), p. 29.
17. McLaren, *Secret Message of Jesus*, n.p.
18. Nibley, "New Look," 86.
19. Nibley, "Common Carrier: Author Defends Image of Joseph Smith" (unpublished), n.p.
20. Hugh Nibley, "The Prophets and the Open Mind," in *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 134.
21. George Bailey, *Germans: Biography of an Obsession* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 24.
22. Midgley, "A Mighty Kauri Has Fallen," 613 (this volume).

23. See Aida Cerkez-Robinson, "Bosnian Mound Could Be a Pyramid," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-dec-04-adfg-pyramystery4-story.html>.
24. Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).
25. John S. Tanner, *Learning in the Light* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 4.
26. Martin Pulido, "Doing the Works of Abraham" (Nibley honors class, winter semester 2006).
27. Hugh Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic and Sophistic," in *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 337.
28. Compare Russell M. Nelson, *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 318.
29. See Nibley, "Three Shrines," 315–16.
30. Mark Patrick Hederman, *Walkabout: Life as Holy Spirit* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006).
31. Margaret Barker, *An Extraordinary Gathering of Angels* (London, England: MQ Publications, 2004).
32. Mathai Kadavil, *The World as Sacrament: Sacramentality of Creation from the Perspectives of Leonardo Boff, Alexander Schmemmann, and Saint Ephrem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).
33. McLaren, *Secret Message of Jesus*, 51.
34. History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–July 1842], p. 9 [addenda], josephsmithpapers.org.
35. Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings: Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Mark Atherton (New York City: Penguin Classics, 2001).
36. David Klinghoffer, *The Discovery of God: Abraham and the Birth of Monotheism* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 268.
37. Hederman, *Walkabout*, back cover.
38. Thomas, "Influence of Hugh Nibley," 405 (this volume).
39. Welch, "Nibley's Articles of Faith," 590 (this volume).
40. Hugh Nibley, "The Babylonian Background," in *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 365–66.
41. Online source for this quotation was not found.
42. Hugh Nibley, "Before Adam," in *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 65.
43. See Nibley, "Educating the Saints," 326–27.
44. John S. Tanner, "One of the Great Lights of the World': Seeking Learning by Study and Faith" (speech, Brigham Young University Conference, Provo, UT, August 23, 2005), *BYU Speeches*, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/john-s-tanner/one-great-lights-world-seeking-learning-study-faith-byu/>.

45. Hugh Nibley, "Some Reasons for the Restored Gospel," lecture given during Klaus Baer's visit to BYU in 1975. Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author. The manuscript's title was included in the bibliography in *Of All Things! Classic Quotations from Hugh Nibley*, ed. Gary P. Gillum, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993).
46. Hugh Nibley, "Writing and Publication in Graduate School" (paper delivered to the History Honors Banquet, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, May 12, 1965); photocopy of typescript in possession of the author.
47. Nibley, "Historicity of the Bible," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, 1.
48. *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 87.
49. Spencer W. Kimball, "Second Century Address," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 4 (1976): 445–57.
50. Nibley, "New Look," 91.
51. Gillum, "Scholar of the Spirit," 420 (this volume).
52. Published as Hugh Nibley, "How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So," in *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 149–77.
53. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*.
54. Published as Gary P. Gillum, ed., *Of All Things! A Nibley Quote Book* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1981). Reprinted in a revised and expanded second edition by Deseret Book and FARMS in 1993.
55. Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).
56. Published posthumously as Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2010).
57. Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), no. 275. Compare Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 284.
58. Boyd Petersen received permission to use the portrait for the cover of his biography of Nibley. See also this volume, 24, 31–35.
59. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*.
60. Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York City: William Morrow, HarperCollins, 2005).
61. See Hugh Nibley, "The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2008), 161–62. <http://www.bhporter.com/Hugh%20Nibley/The%20Faith%20of%20an%20Observer%20Conversations%20with%20hugh%20Nibley.pdf>. For the film itself, see Sterling Van Wagenen (producer), Brian Capener (writer, director, and photographer), and Alex Nibley (writer), *The Faith*

- of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), DVD and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYPVZvRXpIY>.
62. See Gary P. Gillum, review of *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, by Boyd Jay Petersen, *BYU Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 169.
 63. Nibley, "Faith of an Observer," 148.
 64. Hugh Nibley, "Change out of Control," in *Approaching Zion*, 407–21.
 65. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham: Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957).
 66. See letter by William S. Lewis Jr., Nibley Collection, box 1, folder 22. Rumors have circulated that attribute the name for the architectural motif of the two interlocking squares as being the "seal of Melchizedek" to Nibley. However, Michael Lyon, Nibley's illustrator, traces the term to a Catholic commentary on symbols that he used and states that it is a rare term with no contemporary explanations. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve. God's Image and Likeness 1* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 573. <https://archive.org/download/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>.
 67. The last name is spelled differently in the Nibley Collection Finding Aid: "Earl W. Schmiesing." Nibley Collection, box 51, folder 7.
 68. For a photo, see Brady, "BYU Folklore," 662 (this volume).
 69. C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (New York City: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956).
 70. Pat Ward was Nibley's secretary beginning in August 1988.
 71. Gary P. Gillum, John M. Murphy, and student manuscript processors, *Register of the Hugh W. Nibley Papers, 1910–2005* (MSS 2721), Collection Finding Aids of the L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, March 2011.
 72. All of the volumes were placed on reserve in the Harold B. Lee Library for the use of the students. Volumes 15 through 19 of the *Collected Works* were not yet published.
 73. Hugh W. Nibley, "Bird Island," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 4 (1977): 120–23.
 74. Carl Schmidt, ed., *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*. Trans. Violet MacDermot (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1978).
 75. See Charles Hampden-Turner, *Maps of the Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1981).
 76. Courtesy of Gary P. Gillum. Photo ID: 200402-Gillum photos with students-August 2007 027-E.jpeg.
 77. Photograph by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, January 7, 2021. Photo ID: IMG_0022.jpeg.

78. Courtesy of Shirley S. Ricks. Photo ID: ShirleySRicks-20050326 Gary and Signe Gillum Nibley wake.jpeg.
79. Photo by Mark A. Philbrick, BYU Photo. Published in *BYU Today*, February 1984, 17. With permission. Photo ID: HBLL-BoydP-STW8051-ECR-Box1Folder1.jpeg.
80. Scan of personal copy belonging to Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. Photo ID: 790920-Nibley-How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So_Page_01.jpeg.
81. Courtesy of Gary P. Gillum. Photo ID: 200402-Gillum with One Eternal Round boxes-IMG_0555-E.jpeg.
82. *BYU Today*, November 1987, 8–12, illustration by Brent D. Burch; reprinted in *Approaching Zion*, 202–51. The talk was delivered at the Lion House in Salt Lake City. Photo ID: 8204-Work we must but the lunch is free-E.jpeg.