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EDITORIAL

David M. Morris
Editor

Since 2007, we have published one volume a year filled with scholarly articles, as well as book reviews. We will of course continue to do this, however, we will begin to publish book reviews directly, to the website and make a selection for each volume. This is to respond to the now numerous books and publications that are coming out.

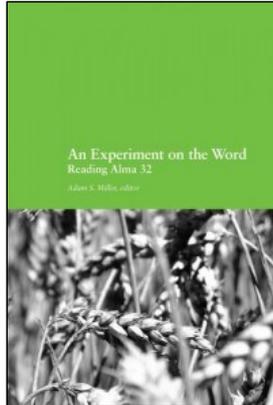
In this issue, we are excited to publish a lengthy consideration of Mormon identity by Wilfried Decoo, as well as Armand Mauss' article 'From Galatia to Ghana'. Following which, we are able to publish, 'Sacred Secrecy and the Latter-day Saints' by Douglas J. Davies as well as articles by Alan Goff and Kirk Caudle. A number of book reviews also appear, all of which are available on <http://www.ijmsonline.org>. A special appreciation is extended to the contributors for their kindness in making available their submissions.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and as formatively as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at editorial@ijmsonline.org

BOOK REVIEW: AN EXPERIMENT ON THE WORD: READING

ALMA 32 – *KIRK CAUDLE*



Title: An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32

Author: Adam S. Miller

Publisher: Worthy Publishing

Year: 2011

Pages: 112

Binding: Hardback

ISBN-13: 978-0983963606

List Price: \$19.95

An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32 is a collection of six papers presented at the first *Mormon Theological Seminar* (MTS). The *Mormon Theological Seminar* is a group of Mormon scholars who study scripture closely and charitably. This book does what other books in the field of Mormon studies are typically not doing, they are reading “Mormon scripture theologically rather than historically, doctrinally, or devotionally” (1). The *Mormon Theological Seminar* proves that Mormons can be theologians too. The authors introduced in *An Experiment on the Word* are proof that an individual can congruently be a faithful member of the Church and, at the same time, a theologian critically engaged in the reading of the *Book of Mormon*. I see the agenda of the book being to challenge the reader to do exactly what Alma 32 challenges its reader to do, to experiment upon the word. Adam Miller, editor and founder of the MTS, added that “to experiment upon the word is to experience the word” (15). I read the book with this phrase in mind because I believe that it encompasses the overall agenda of the collection.

The audience most suited for this book is one who has at least an elementary understanding of the *Book of Mormon*. An understanding of popular Mormon doctrines, and ideas, is not required. However, a mind already familiar with the text under discussion will have an easier time following the various presentations and their subtle nuances. With that said, whether an individual has read through the text once, twice, or

one-hundred times, that individual is sure to glean an additional understanding of *The Book of Mormon* and of faith in particular.

With the possible exception of James E. Faulconer, Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding at Brigham Young University, contributors to *An Experiment on the Word* are chiefly made up scholars unknown to the general membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Scholars contributing to this volume are not names that one will see popularly stacked on the shelves of Deseret Book. The curious reader should not let this lack of notoriety detour him or her from this book. These are each scholars with which the *Book of Mormon* connoisseur would do well to become more acquainted with.

The first essay, *Desiring to Believe: Wisdom and Political Power* is by James E. Faulconer. Faulconer sees the story of Alma and the Zoramites in Alma 32 and the story of Korihor in Alma 30 as stories which contrast opposite forms of desire. When Alma encounters the Zoramites they are experiencing a case of misplaced desire. Because of this misplaced desire, Faulconer teaches that the Zoramites “must give up the very form of worship in which they desire to participate; they must give up signs as the basis of belief” (26). The right form of humility creates a new desire. The Zoramites needed a desire which led them to faith, not knowledge.

‘You Must Needs Say that the Word is Good’, by the editor of this volume, Adam S. Miller, is the second essay. Although many questions are posed throughout this essay, one question looms throughout. Miller poses the question, “If we begin with the premise that humility is universally imposed, how might we read Alma’s discourse on faith” (32)? For Miller, Faith is knowing that the planted seed is good. This faith comes by humility. However, not just any type of humility, but humility that is free from compulsion. In fact, Miller actually defines faith as such, “faith is humility without compulsion” (35). In this way, faith is what arrives to supplement knowledge. Faith is not meant to replace knowledge. Miller shows that signs are always already there which add to one’s knowledge. We suffer from a lack of faith, not a lack of knowledge. As faith rids itself of sure knowledge that faith in turn finds perfection.

Jenny Webb, scholar of comparative literature, is next up with ‘It is Well that Ye are Cast Out: Alma 32 and Eden’. Webb notes, while citing Alma 32:10–11 that “private worship seems to have been either unknown, or at the very least, not legitimated” (43). This statement got

my mind moving. From the first page, Webb made me wonder if Mormons are more of a people concerned with private or with public worship. After all, Mormons attend church every Sunday, yet many of the most special experiences happen when people are alone. Webb argues that the casting out of the Zoramites, from their synagogues, was for the best. This is not a ground-breaking claim. However, she makes some fascinating connections between this casting out and the Adam and Eve Fall/Redemption story. I have not seen many these connections made elsewhere. Her novel connections are an outstanding addition to Book of Mormon scholarship.

Joe Spencer, who in my opinion is among the foremost Book of Mormon scholars today, provides the fourth essay, Faith, Hope, and Charity: Alma and Joseph Smith. Spencer provides two of the best definitions of faith and hope that I have ever read. He does this, in part, by showing that Alma 32:21 (the usual verse used to define these two terms) cannot be separated from the verses that follow, 22 and 23. From these three verses Spencer recognizes that “faith is a question of one’s actively believing the word to be true, hope is a question of one’s recognition of the possibilities that are opened by the word or name that has been delivered” (60). It seems to me that Spencer presents faith as truth and hope as the future possibilities of that truth. The close attention that Spencer gives to the text is, as always, spectacular. Joe Spencer is a philosopher, and he writes like one too. Although Spencer can be difficult for the average person to read, his essay should not be missed.

‘So Shall My Word Be: Reading Alma 32 through Isaiah 55’, by New Testament scholar Julie M. Smith, is the fifth essay. Honestly, out of all the essays, this essay had me the most skeptical going in. Smith intertextualizes Alma 32 and Isaiah 55, meaning that she reads Alma through the lenses of Isaiah. Her connections are both novel and inventive. What Smith does with Isaiah 55 is something that few Book of Mormon scholars have successfully attempted. In the end, Smith makes a very strong case that the two chapters are connected.

The fifth and final essay, ‘Faith and Commoditization’, comes from Robert Couch, professor of finance at Willamette University. Couch provides, hands down, the best introduction of any of the essays. In his introduction, Couch juxtaposes those who have a home grown garden and those who purchase produce from the supermarket. Couch relates “With the rise of globally-integrated markets . . . the fruit trade is

booming and it makes less and less economic sense to tend our own gardens and grow our own fruit. For much less effort, and usually less expense, we can pop into the local supermarket and have our pick from a wide selection of beautifully-presented fruit” (87). Couch goes on to describe the difference between being a consumer and being a producer of faith. Consumers are only into price, like those who shop at certain department stores, and do not care if “sweatshop labor was used in the production process” (89). In a spiritual sense, consumers demand knowledge and become sign seekers (D&C 46:10). When one comes to the realization of his or her own lack of knowledge then “religious consumers feel comfortable in terms of having ample and convenient access to knowledge, this supposed knowledge takes up the space that the true believer would otherwise fill with faith” (94). After reading this essay the message that I came away with was that being a righteous spiritual consumer means learning how to gain true faith no matter what the cost.

Multiple authors bring up the fact that chapters 30–35 in the Book of Alma are really one chapter in the original text of *The Book of Mormon*. This is extremely helpful information while reading through these six essays. Another common theme in many of these essays is that faith does not equal knowledge. Knowledge is always already there. It is faith, not perfect knowledge, which should be the desired destination.

Although this book is excellent, I have two problems pertaining to the layout of the book. Problem one, the book contains no scripture index. A scripture index at the back of the book is extremely helpful when doing personal scripture study and needing help with a particular scripture. The second criticism is related to the first criticism. The book sorely needs a general subject index. The book is available for preview on Amazon. However, many people go to the index while looking at a preview to see how much a specific issue might be covered. The lack of the inclusion of a general subject index is a major oversight in an otherwise outstanding work.

The major difference that I noticed between *An Experiment on the Word* from other works at popular Mormon bookstores pertaining to scripture is that it is not apologetic. According to my reading, the purpose is not to persuade the reader of the truthfulness of anything. *An Experiment on the Word* does not have a goal to convince the reader to believe something. The purpose of the book is not to take sides on particular

doctrinal issues. Rather, the purpose of this, and I am assuming subsequent Salt Press and MTS books, is to move readers to read scripture closely, charitably, and to act upon a belief. *An Experiment on the Word* is among the best books relating to Mormon scripture currently on the market. It is a must for any serious student of the *Book of Mormon*.