

INTERPRETER

— ∞ —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 4 · 2013 · Pages 161-163

Josiah's Reform: An Introduction

Benjamin L. McGuire

Offprint Series

© 2013 The Interpreter Foundation. A nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication. Visit us at MormonInterpreter.com

JOSIAH'S REFORM: AN INTRODUCTION

Benjamin L. McGuire

In 1951 in *The Improvement Era*, Sidney B. Sperry published a short article titled “Some Problems of Interest Relating to the Brass Plates.”¹ In this article he outlines several problems including issues related to the Pentateuch, Jeremiah’s prophecies, The Book of the Law, and the Brass Plates themselves. In many ways, Sperry laid down a gauntlet that has been taken up many times by LDS scholars looking for answers that help to explain these issues in the Book of Mormon within the context of the best current biblical scholarship.

Several aspects of these four issues coalesce in the brief period before the early destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. During this timeframe, the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses in our Old Testament) was still undergoing revision, Jeremiah was prophesying, the Brass Plates were created, and the Book of the Law (mentioned in 2 Kings 22:8 and now generally thought to be the Book of Deuteronomy) was discovered in the temple. It is also the time during which Lehi began his ministry in Jerusalem and left for the New World.

The discovery of the Book of the Law during King Josiah’s reign (from 640 to 609 BC) jump-started a reform movement within Judaism. As part of this reform, Josiah carried out an aggressive shift within the popular religion—removing pagan religious institutions, eliminating sites of worship throughout

1. The article can be downloaded at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=4&num=1&id=89>.

Judah in order to centralize all worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and attempting to reestablish the covenant between the Jewish people and God. These events are particularly noteworthy for LDS students of the scriptures since they occurred within the early lifetimes of the prophets Jeremiah and Lehi, and these events influenced both their ministries and their theology. The scriptures that were being used in Jerusalem at the end of Josiah's reign, including some of the prophecies of Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy (the Book of the Law) appear in the Brass Plates taken by Lehi to the New World. And both Jeremiah and the Book of Mormon quote and allude to Deuteronomy frequently.

In continuing this dialogue about the significance of these events, *Interpreter* presents two essays over the next two weeks, dealing primarily with Josiah's reform, its outcome, and its influence on later scripture (both in the writings of Jeremiah and the Book of Mormon, as well as second temple Judaism and early Christianity). The first is Dr. William Hamblin's "Vindicating Josiah." The second is Kevin Christensen's response: "Prophets and Kings in Lehi's Jerusalem and Margaret Barker's Temple Theology." Both of these essays engage the work of Margaret Barker, a biblical scholar working on the significance of the temple in ancient Israelite and Jewish religion, and in early Christianity.

Just as with the underlying biblical scholarship, these two essays present two different perspectives on the value of Josiah's reform and the nature of the Jewish apostasy that caused this reform. Margaret Barker argues that there was a shift in Jewish temple theology that begins with Josiah and culminates in second-temple Judaism—requiring a subsequent return to that temple theology seen in early Christianity. Christensen, in agreement with Barker, argues that Josiah's reform isn't just a reform movement, but is also a part of that apostasy or shift from an earlier temple theology, and that this perspective is re-

flected in Lehi's own concerns and teachings as he leads his family out of Jerusalem and into the wilderness. On the other hand, Hamblin argues that the apostasy in ancient Judah was more an issue of syncretism—the merging or combining of Jewish theology with the religious views of its neighbors. Hamblin argues that Josiah's reform was a successful reform, helping to maintain the older traditional temple theology, and then goes on to suggest that the real shift from these older (correct) traditions described in the Old Testament text occurred under the Hasmonean kings in the second century BC—well into second-temple Judaism (the period from the rebuilding of the temple around 530 BC up until the second destruction of the temple around AD 70). While both theories end up in the same place with regard to apostate temple theology in Judaism and a restoration in early Christianity, both theories have significantly different implications for reading the Book of Mormon and understanding Lehi's own vision of the temple.

Benjamin L. McGuire is a technologist in the field of healthcare in northern Michigan, where he lives with his wife and three children. He has special interest in the field of literary theory and its application to the Book of Mormon and early LDS literature. He has previously published with the Maxwell Institute.

