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## **An Age of Discovery**

Hugh W. Nibley

N-AGE

# **Preliminary Report**

FOUNDATION FOR  
ANCIENT RESEARCH AND  
MORMON STUDIES

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FARMS Preliminary Reports are notes or tentative papers reflecting substantial research but not yet ready for final publication. They are made available to be critiqued and improved and to stimulate further research.

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## INTRODUCTION: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

It is very important for Latter-day Saints to keep pace, more or less, with the fast-moving developments in the fields of Bible and related studies. By failing to do this we run the risk of laboring to accommodate our religion to scientific and scholarly teachings that have long since been superceded, altered, or completely discarded. For example, the editors of the Expository Times, after searching the literature for the word kerygma (news, declaration, gospel message) announce in the latest issue of that journal that "thirty years ago it hardly existed . . . . In modern books on the New Testament, however, the index references to it may well outnumber those of any other single word." It was not until 1936, we are told, that C. H. Dodd showed "that the earliest preaching of the Church did not consist of the proclamation of moral standards enunciated by Jesus, nor yet of the record of His life as told in the Synoptic Gospels, but of bold dogmatic affirmations of faith about Christ." (Expos. Times, 73:226). What the Apostles preached was the Plan of Life and Salvation, designated today by the technical word kerygma and almost completely overlooked thirty years ago.

But thirty years ago was when most of our present leaders and professors went to school; hence there is a grave danger that we carry on and transmit as the latest scholarship ideas about Jesus as the preacher of the Social Gospel, or as the Great Teacher, ideas which have today been abandoned by virtually all competent scholars. Today all the old certitudes of the twenties and thirties, though still widely taught in our schools and Sunday schools, are a thing of the past:

H. H. Rowley: "A generation ago we could speak of 'critical' as over against 'traditional' orthodoxy . . . . We knew exactly where one 'document' ended and another began; there was little or no 'give' in it. Today everything is in flux." (Expos. Times, 71:97).

C. H. Gordon: "Though Bible scholars live in an age of unprecedented discovery, they stand in the shadow of 19th century higher criticism . . . . Now the conservative mind often latches onto higher criticism even though archaeology has rendered it untenable . . . . [They remain] devoted to JEDP [the documentary hypothesis attributing authorship of materials in the Pentateuch to the Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly writers]: the badge of inter-confessional academic respectability . . . . I am at a loss to explain this kind of 'conviction' on any grounds other than intellectual laziness or inability to reappraise. A professor of Bible in a leading university once asked me to give him the facts of JEDP. I told him . . . . He replied: 'I am convinced by what you say but I shall go on teaching the old system.' When I asked him why, he answered: 'Because what you have told me means I should have to unlearn as well as study afresh and rethink. It is easier to go on with the accepted system of higher criticism for which we have standard textbooks.' What a happy professor! He refuses to forfeit his place in Eden by tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge." (Christianity Today, Nov. 23, 1959, pp. 131-4).

J. N. Schofield: "Critical orthodoxy, which has shown itself to be capable of being as rigid and intolerant as uncritical orthodoxy, born in an evolutionary age, stresses the lowly beginnings of the Hebrew religion and its progressive development to the monotheistic heights of Deutero-Isaiah. [At the doings of these scholars] the onlooker exclaims, 'all things are possible to him that believeth.' . . . In 1889 Robertson Smith expressed his belief that . . . nothing of vital importance for the study of Old Testament religion remained uncertain." (Expos. Times, 71:195).

W. F. Albright: "Owing to the lack, until recently, of any real control of their views from external sources, biblical scholars have been forced to construct their systems in a historical vacuum. To redeem their constructions from pure subjectivity the ablest of them were forced to employ some philosophical scheme as a frame of reference." The favorite scheme was the Hagelian one which "connected unilateral evolution from the materialistic, sensuous, and disorderly to the spiritual, the ideal, and the orderly; it also assumed a historical dialectic passing through three necessary stages . . . which formed a bed of Procrustes into which all facts and generalizations had to be fitted." (Cross Currents, 9:114).

"If we discard the erroneous implications of historicism as applied to the field of religion by 19th century scholarship and if we utilize the positive results of archaeological research as fully as possible, the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the West appears in a new light." (Ibid., p. 121).

## Old Testament

### Human Beginnings

T. C. Mitchell: "It seems false always to view the archaeological remains in the light of an evolutionary hypothesis. It might be therefore that technically advanced cultures, including such things as agriculture, were in existence at times much earlier than we have supposed." (Faith & Thought, 91:49).

### The Flood

W. Lambert: In 1957 the Epic of Atra-hasis was discovered, the main fragments of which are a Sumerian tablet from c. 1700 B.C., and two Babylonian versions from 1550 B.C. This shows that the familiar Babylonian flood-story "has been wrenched from its context . . . . The importance of this epic is that it has the same outline as the early chapters of Genesis . . . . The very considerable importance of this material is the proof it offers that the whole framework of the Hebrew tradition in Gen. 1-10, and not just the episode of the flood, has its counterpart in Sumero-Babylonian legend." (Semitic Studies, 5:144-6).

In these documents special mention is made of the great violence of the winds at the time of the flood, and the general upheaval of nature. (Ibid., p. 117f).

Peculiar emphasis is placed on the communication of God to the hero by whispering through a "**kikkisu**," a reed partition of some sort. "In this way En himself did not betray the divine secret, for it was the reed wall which actually passed on the words to Atra-hasis." In later times "the whispering through a reed wall is an awkward survival," which the scribes do not understand. (Ibid., p. 119).

An interesting detail in the new flood-story is that when God commands Atra-hasis to build a ship, "Atra-hasis now protests his inexperience in boat-building -- we are reminded of a similar hesitance on the parts of Moses and Jeremiah -- so En draws the design of the boat on the ground." (Ibid., p. 120).

The stories of Nephi and the brother of Jared furnish the closest possible parallels.

#### The Patriarchal Age

G. E. Wright: "One of the remarkable results of archaeological research during the period between the two wars was the sudden emergence of the Patriarchal Age of Biblical history as one which could be fitted within an actually discernable period in the history of Western Asia." (Expos. Times, 71:292).

A. Parrot: "One-hundred years ago in Mesopotamia it was discovered that history lies behind the Old Testament . . . . Today the Old Testament itself is being discovered. Who would deny today that one can understand the Canaanitish background without the Ras Shamra texts? [Discovered in 1928]. The story of Abraham's migration is literally supported by the Mari Tablets." The Nuzi tablets make "frequent mention of the Habiri" and the Ben-yamin people and the Dawidum. The Benjaminites are described as first using fire-signals from towers. (Rev. Hist. & Phil. Relig., 1950:1-9).

T. L. Wooley: "We had been accustomed to think of Abraham as a simple dweller in tents, and find him a possible occupant of a sophisticated brick house in a city . . . we had really learned something about him which, as a matter of fact, literature did not tell us and we should never have guessed." (Digging Up the Past, pp. 64-66). "To most people this picture of the elaborate conditions of domestic life at Ur will come as a surprise and must seriously affect their conception of the patriarch." (Excavations at Ur and the Hebrew Records, pp. 43f).

C. H. Gordon: "The contracts from Kirkuk and nearby Nuzi confront us with biblical parallels that cluster around the Patriarchs . . . . Abraham was of Mesopotamian origin, and his son and grandson married girls from their kin in Mitanni. At the same time, Egyptian blood was in the Patriarchal household; Hagar was an Egyptian . . . . Canaan itself was a melting pot . . . . The Patriarchal Hebrews enjoyed the ideal spot and the ideal time to fall heir to the rich and varied heritage of the entire ancient Near East, when Egypt and Babylonia were nearly spent. The pastoral and semi-nomadic purity of Patriarchal life saved the Hebrews from the decadence of that cosmopolitan age." (J. Near Eastern Studies, 13:56-59).

N. Glueck: Discovered the main road between Canaan and Sinai in 1958; the road had been lined with settlements and camp-sites in Abraham's day, but "all of these sites were destroyed at the end of the Abra(ha)mitic period, and for the most part were not reoccupied ever again . . . . After having discovered these Abra(ha)mitic



period sites, the chapters in the Bible describing the journeys of Abraham and his people and of Chedorlaomer and his confederates across the Negev became clear to us. It is remarkable that the Bible retained a clear memory of the existence of the Abra(ha)mitic sites in the Negev." (Gen. 12 & 13). In Genesis 14, when Chedorlaomer crossed the Negev, "they destroyed all the Middle Bronze I cities in the Negev, just as they had destroyed them along the entire length of central Trans-Jordan . . . . Our archaeological discoveries in the Negev are in harmony with the general historical background of the accounts in Genesis 12, 13 and 14 dealing with Abram's journeys into the Wilderness of Zin from Palestine to Egypt and back again, and with biblical accounts of an unsuccessful part of the Exodus described in Numbers 13 and Dt. 1." (Proc. Am. Phil. Soc., 100:150-5).

Though the milieu of the Patriarchal stories is completely accurate, the stories themselves are unique.

G. von Rad: "The stories of the Patriarchs tell of happenings which are completely without analogy." (Expos. Times, 72:216). They are unique historical events.

H. H. Rowley: "It now appears that the documents have correctly preserved the memory of customs long obsolete when they were written down," therefore "if traditions are credible where they can be tested, there is reason to treat them with respect where they can not." (Expos. Times, 71:97).

C. H. Gordon: "The beginnings of Israel are rooted in a highly cultural Canaan where the contributions of several talented peoples [including the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and branches of the Indo-Europeans] had converged and blended. The notion that early Israelite religion and society were primitive is completely false." (Christianity Today, Nov. 23, 1959, pp. 133-4).

### The Old Testament as History

T. C. Mitchell: Discredited is the old theory that Genesis was not intended as a history, but as "poetic media for the conveyance of divine truth. There is no clear indication that these chapters are couched in other than plain narrative prose, and apart from the serpent, there is nothing in them which is intrinsically fabulous." Certainly "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that to our Lord these early narratives described actual events." (Faith and Thought, 91:48).

J. Gray: In the Old Testament history far outweighs saga, which is readily discernible. "This respect for fact and historical perspective in the records of the race finds no parallel in the whole literature of the ancient Near East until the time of Herodotus of Halicarnassus." (Vetus Test. Supp., V, p. 218).



W. F. Albright: "It is clear that the substantial historicity of biblical tradition has been vindicated to an extent which few unprejudiced bystanders could well have dreamed possible a generation ago." (Cross Currents, 9:117).

E. A. Speiser: Archaeology has shown that "none of the Pentateuchal and other early historical sources of the Old Testament invented its material . . . J or P or D or the like cannot be charged with any kind of fabrication." (Contemp. Rev., 4:214).

C. H. Gordon: The Patriarchal narratives show "a distinctive epic attitude. In other words, the content and omissions of pre-Solomonic Hebrew history have been conditioned by a specific epic standard as to what in the end what is not worthy of saga." (J. Near Eastern Studies, 11:213).

### Old Testament Doctrine

H. H. Rowley: There is absolutely no evidence that monotheism developed out of polytheism in Israel. "There is no proof whatever that in Israel polytheism changed to monotheism through natural evolution or philosophical speculation. There is no evidence that Moses was a polytheist in the sense of worshipping several gods; there is also no proof that he was a monotheist in the sense of denying the existence of more than one god." (Zt. A.T. Wiss., 69:7).

G. E. Wright: "Central to the Patriarchal stories are the kerygmatic themes of election and promise . . . ." (Expos. Times, 71:293). In other words, the **gospel** is present from the beginning.

W. Harmann: Hebrew literature had always employed the expression "Son of God," implying at the very least that God is a Father. (Zt. f. Relig. u. G., 12:242-251).

D. Daube: "The narrative of the Exodus is dominated by the concept of God as go'el, 'redeemer,' of the nation, as the mighty relative or legitimate owner who enforced his right to recover a member of the family or property subjected to foreign domination." (Archiv Orientali, 17:88). The idea of the redemption is familiar from the first.

### The O.T. in its Near Eastern Setting

C. H. Gordon: "The magnificent structure of Old Testament higher criticism is not to be brushed aside; but its individual results can no longer be accepted unless they square with the Hebrew Text as we can now understand it in the light of parallel literatures from the pagan forerunners and contemporaries of the Hebrews in the Bible Lands." (Ugarit. Lit., p. 7).

H. H. Rowley: "The view that the Hebrew prophets were an entirely unique phenomenon in the religious history of the world . . . is one that cannot be maintained." e.g. "That the story of Wen Amon [the Egyptian] presents us with prophecy closely similar to that of early Israelite prophets cannot be gain-said . . . . More recently evidence of prophets at Mari at a much earlier date has come to light. It is therefore quite impossible to treat Hebrew prophecy as an isolated phenomenon." (Hooke, Myth, Ritual & Kingship, pp. 238-9).

G. Lanczkowski: Old Testament prophecy is typical of the Near East. The swarming of false prophets "posits incontestably the awareness of genuine prophecy." The Egyptian Eloquent Peasant text "shows the existence of the prophetic movement in Egypt which is fully analogous to that of the Old Testament." (Zt. A. T. Wiss., 70:34-38).

K. A. Kitchen: The Brooklyn Papyrus, published in 1950, shows the operation of Egyptian prisons in Joseph's day. Of 75 prisoners' names, 40 are West Semitic: "The genuine antiquity of some patriarchal names is thus brightly illumined . . . . The names of Shiprah and Pu'ah are now definitely known to be authentic and early West Semitic personal names." (Faith & Thought 91:180-4). In 1938, Lehi was first shown to be an authentic and early West Semitic personal name, by N. Glueck. An ostrakon of Ramses II shows the touchiness of the Egyptian governor in control of prisoners, and its impatience of idleness. (Ibid.).

E. Drioton: Egyptian Wisdom Literature is closely related to Hebrew, but in the case of the famous Teachings of Amenemope "the Egyptian Amenemope is actually an indifferent Egyptian translation from a Semitic-Hebrew original, itself composed by Jews in Egypt. This would be the 'Words of the Wise' on which Proverbs also subsequently drew." (Faith & Thought, 91:191-3).

W. F. Albright: "The Bible strikes root into every ancient Near Eastern culture, and it cannot be understood until we can see its relationship to its sources in true perspective . . . ." (JAOS, 64:148).

C. H. Gordon: "The people of ancient Greece and Israel have a common Semitic heritage based on the flow of Phoenicians culture . . . . We were brought up to believe that the Jews gave us ethics and religion, that the Greeks willed us science and philosophy. Yet, we now see a similar tradition running through both cultures, and we can't be sure which culture gave us what." (Christian Sci. Monitor, April 18, 1962). (Compare Approach to the B. of M., Chapters 3 & 4).

### "Patternism"

J. Schofield: Old Testament institutions "have substantial apologists among other peoples, the distinctive character which they exhibit among the Hebrews being in the spirit with which they are made the exponents. Written records, especially religions of the Near East and the Old Testament." (Expos. Times, 71:196).

K. H. Bernhardt: While Israelite political and religious institutions have close parallels all over the Near East, "the peculiar characteristics of the Israelite kingship is the formal **refusal** of the office with set arguments . . . . This custom of royal polemic must be regarded as among the most ancient statements of kingship in the Old Testament." (Vet. Test. Supp., VIII, 305). While Mosiah contains a full display of patternism, this is also the peculiar Book of Mormon attitude to kingship. It recognizes the prevalence of the institution of kingship, but insists on giving it a peculiarly democratic interpretation.

#### Language of the O.T.

H. H. Rowley: Even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls "it was no longer assumed that if a Hebrew passage is unintelligible it must be corrupted." (Expos. Times, 71:97).

C. S. Rodd: "During recent years great advances have been made in the correct understanding of Hebrew words whose meaning had become lost in the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament writings. This has largely been the result of the recovery of many of the languages spoken in the ancient world. It is now realized that Israel was no more isolated in her language than she was in her religion and culture, and that Hebrew . . . borrowed freely from other languages." (Expos. Times, 71:131). "Surprise is often expressed that a word should now be said to have a completely different meaning from that given in standard dictionaries and translations." (Ibid.).

T. H. Robinson: "We now know the meaning of "rare words which had never been explained. Examples of this type may be seen in hashmal [brass] found only in Ezekiel." (Zt. A.T. Wiss., 73:267). Mention of brass has always been thought to be one of the flaws in the Book of Mormon.

#### The Integrity of the Text

C. H. Gordon: "I am distressed to meet ever so many intelligent and serious university students who tell me that their teachers of Bible have killed the subject by harping on the notion that biblical study consists of analyzing the text into JEDP. The unedifying conclusion of all such study is that nothing is authentic. That this type of teaching should go on in our age of discovery when biblical scholarship is so exciting is, so to speak, a perverse miracle." (Christianity Today, Nov. 23, 1959, p. 134).

W. A. Irwin: Conventional Ezekiel scholars: "As matters stand, they have given only opinions, when the situation cries aloud for assembling of evidence and for close-knit argument . . . . not a single scholar has succeeded in convincing his colleagues of the finality of his analysis of so much as one passage . . . ." (Vet. Test., 3:54,66).

K. A. Kitchen: Wahn has shown that varieties of style occur within single Egyptian documents -- no need for breaking them up into JEDP! (Faith & Thought, 91:188f). "No Egyptologist [or other Orientalist in parallel disciplines] is such a fool as to see 'sources' behind such texts and inscriptions, or to scissor up these stone stele . . . . The history of texts, literary and otherwise, must be determined by objective and wholly different methods." (Ibid., p. 190).

C. H. Gordon: "The criterion of variant names [specifically for God -- e.g. the Jahwist vs. the Elohist] as an indication of differences of authorship must be drastically discounted in the light of Ugaritic . . ." (Ugarit. Lit., p. 6). "No one questions that Hammurabi's Code is a single composition in spite of the fact that the prologue and epilogue are not only written in poetry [as against the prose of the laws] but in a different dialect from the laws, because the poetry calls not only for different style but even for different grammatical forms." (Ibid., p. 7).

C. H. Gordon: "The rediscovery of the lost literature of the Bible World shows us that most biblical books could be accepted in Israel as single compositions." (Ugarit. Lit., p. 6).

H. H. Rowley: There is "a growing emphasis on the unity of the Old Testament . . . . The Psalter is now being brought into relation with both prophecy and cultus. Here once more there has been a significant perception that beneath all its variety of forms and of idea, the Old Testament has a deep unity . . . ." (Hooke, Myth, Rit. Kingship, p. 260).

### The Isaiah Question

J. Schofield: "Today there is a confident assertion that the prophets of Israel were all cultic officials . . . and that much of Israel's literature . . . merely relate part of the myth and ritual pattern in story form . . . ." (Expos. Times, 71:197). Heretofore the belief has been that the prophets were **against** all cult, and especially the Temple.

J. Eaton: "The more the authorship of the Book of Isaiah has been investigated, the more complicated has the question appeared." After the higher critics got through with Isaiah "there remained very few long passages of unchallenged authority . . . . It seemed that the entire book was best described as an anthology of the work of many writers." (Vet. Test., 9:138). Today the important facts are: "1) the continuing importance of prophetic societies, 2) the connection between prophecies and cult, and 3) the importance of oral tradition." (Ibid., p. 140). Today it is clear that Isaiah is **not** "a confusing amalgam of greater or smaller fragments from many sources." (Ibid., p. 139). Isaiah, like all prophets, made constant use of earlier scripture, and especially of words used in the Temple Service. Like Paul, he does not attempt to be original, but quotes whenever it suits his purpose. For example the "Four Servant Songs," apparently a conspicuous case of interpolation, are not a

contamination of the text at all: Isaiah used them deliberately, and they not only belong where they are but are indispensable "in any adequate interpretation." (Ibid., p. 140). It is true, Isaiah does contain the words of many men from many centuries, and yet it is equally true that Isaiah is a unity. How can the two facts be reconciled? By the new "understanding of the conditions and methods of prophetic tradition," with special reference to "the importance of the prophetic societies, the connection between prophecy and the cult, and the importance of oral tradition." (Ibid., p. 141). In a prophetic society "a great father remained the center and soul of his family even after his death and might continue to be spoken of as identical with his family . . . . These prophetic societies . . . were essentially related to the religious communities of later Judaism and of Christianity." They were "called to a special task of guarding and witnessing to Yahweh's revelations vouchsafed in the first place to Isaiah." (Ibid., p. 149). Thus the integrity of Isaiah was preserved, Isaiah himself being a storehouse of information going back to the earliest times and reflecting the ritual of the Temple.