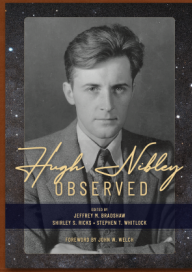


**What Did Enoch Scholar Matthew Black Say To Hugh Nibley
About the Book of Moses Enoch Account?**
Book of Moses Insight: April 22, 2021

WHAT DID ENOCH SCHOLAR MATTHEW BLACK SAY TO HUGH NIBLEY ABOUT THE BOOK OF MOSES ENOCH ACCOUNT?



THINGS THAT MATTERED MOST TO HUGH NIBLEY

BYU professor Hugh Nibley discovered many evidences of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. But did you know that he also made discoveries relating to the Book of Moses? And that there are non-Latter-day Saint scholars who agree with the significance of his findings?

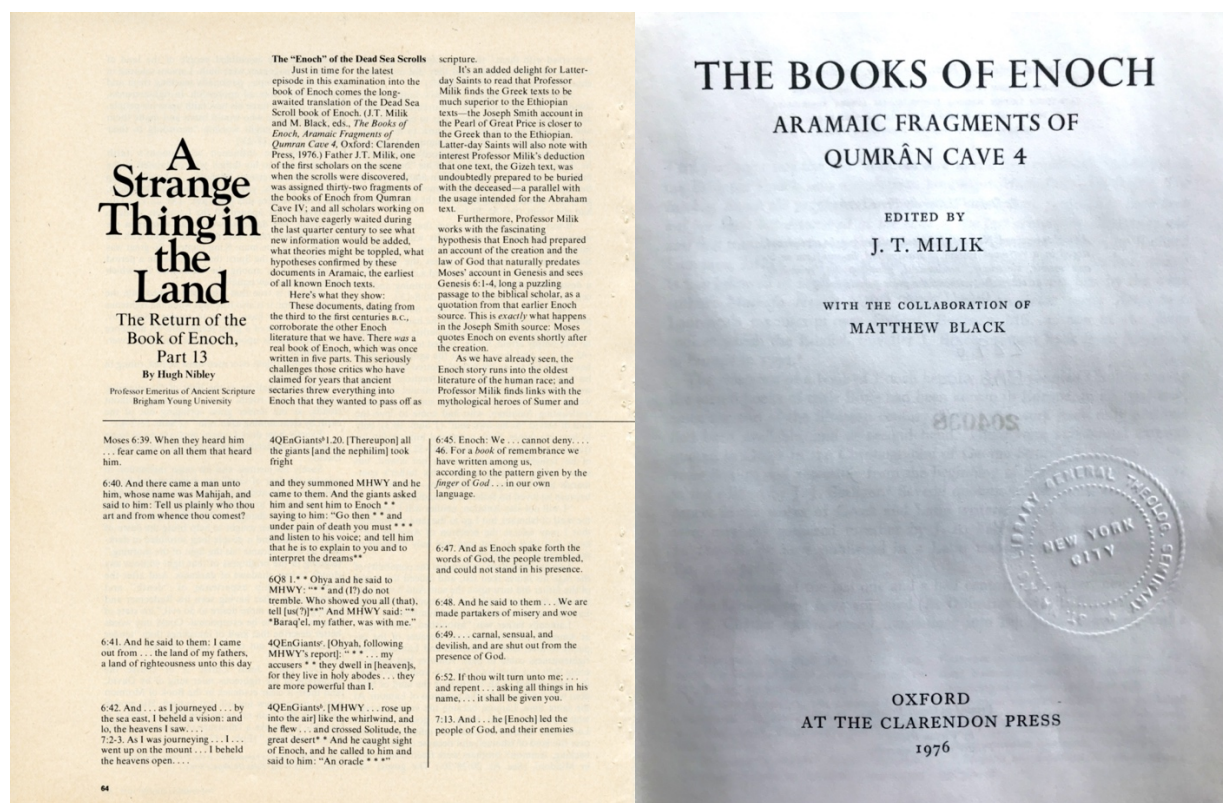


Enoch Window, Canterbury Cathedral, ca. 1178–1180

Chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Moses contain a record of the prophet Enoch that has been called the “most remarkable religious document published in the nineteenth century.”¹ What makes it so remarkable?

For one thing, it was produced at record speed. The expansion of the 5 verses in Genesis into 110 verses in the Book of Moses² appears have occupied only a few days of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s attention.

But even more striking is that the modern Enoch text has many resemblances with ancient Enoch manuscripts that were not available to Joseph Smith in 1830. Fortunately, Hugh Nibley was one of the rare scholars who mastered *all* the languages needed to read these texts in their original form.



Title Page of the Last Article in the Ensign “Strange Thing in the Land” Series³; Title Page of Milik and Black’s Book That Included a Translation of the Book of Giants.⁴

In 1976-77, Hugh Nibley dashed off one long, heavily-footnoted article each month for a series about ancient Enoch manuscripts and Moses 6–7 that was running in the Church’s *Ensign* magazine. As he was finishing the last article he received—“just in time”⁵—the anxiously awaited English translation of *The Book of Giants*, an account of Enoch found with the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶ The *Book of Giants* was arguably the *oldest* known Enoch manuscript known discovered anywhere.

20] ... עד כא סוף חלמא [vacat באדין] דחלו כל גבריא
 [ונפיליא ו]ק[ר]יו מהוי ואתה לה[ון] וז[עו לה] גבריא ושלחוהו על חנוך
 [ספר פרש]א ואמרו לה אזל] ... [ומותא לכה די
] ושמעתה קלה ואמר לה די יחון[ינך ו]יפש[ון]ר חלמא ...

‘[²⁰. . .] here the dream ends’.

[Thereupon] all the giants ²¹[and the nephilim] took fright and they summoned Mahawai and he came to them. And the giants asked him and sent him to Enoch, ²²[the distinguish]ed [scribe], saying to him: “Go then [. . .], and under pain of death you must ²³[. . .] and listen to his voice; and tell him that he is to explain to you and to interpret the dreams [. . .].”

The passage shown comes from J. T. Milik’s translation of BG, 4Q530, Fragment 2, column ii, lines 20-23. It tells of an incident where the wicked ‘Ohyah, Hahyah, and their fellows send Mahawai to ask Enoch about their frightful dreams of pending destruction. This copy of the book is located in the BYU Harold B. Lee Library Hugh Nibley Ancient Studies Room. Note that Nibley circled the Aramaic name Mahawai in pencil.⁷

Working quickly to meet his publication deadline, Nibley found many significant resemblances between the *Book of Giants* and the Book of Moses. His best known discovery is that a character with the name of Mahijah in the Book of Moses is a remarkable match for a character with a similar name in the *Book of Giants*. Nibley found that the characters not only match well in their unusual names but also in the roles they play.



Gordon Thomasson participates in a panel discussion at the “Enoch and the Temple” conference, BYU, February 22, 2013.”

The rest of the story is given for the first time in the new book *Hugh Nibley Observed*. As it happened, in 1976 the well-known Aramaic scholar Matthew Black, who collaborated on the English translation of the *Book of Giants*, gave a lecture at Cornell University⁸ where a Latter-day Saint doctoral candidate, Gordon C. Thomasson was present. Thomasson, who was well-versed in Nibley’s research on Enoch, approached Black after the lecture. As Thomasson recounts:⁹

I asked Professor Black if he was familiar with Joseph Smith’s Enoch text. He said he was not but was interested. He first asked if it was identical or similar to *1 Enoch*. I told him it was not and then proceeded to recite some of the correlations Dr. Nibley had shown with Milik and Black’s own and others’ Qumran and Ethiopic Enoch materials. He became quiet. When I got to Mahujah (Moses 7:2), he raised his hand in a “please pause” gesture and was silent.

Finally, he acknowledged that the place-name of Mahujah could not have come from *1 Enoch*. He then formulated a hypothesis, consistent with his lecture, that a member of one of the esoteric groups he had described previously must have survived into the nineteenth century, and hearing of Joseph Smith, must have brought the group’s Enoch texts to New York from Italy for the Prophet to translate and publish. I did not argue the point that the Book of Moses might not have been available in Europe in time for someone to sail to the United States and get to upstate New York to meet a late 1830 (or even 1832) “publication deadline.”

At the end of our conversation he expressed an interest in seeing more of Hugh’s work. I proposed that Black should meet with Hugh, gave him the contact information, and he contacted Hugh the same day, as Hugh later confirmed to me. Soon he made a previously unplanned trip to Provo where he met with Hugh for some time.



Matthew Black (1908–1994).

Black certainly knew enough about ancient Hebrew and Aramaic to have recognized, like Nibley, that the unusual names Mahujah and Mahijah were reasonable English equivalents of the similar *Book of Giants* name. and how unlikely it would be that these names appeared in text about Enoch by mere coincidence.

While at BYU, Black gave a public lecture but would not answer any questions about the Book of Moses. Near the end of the visit, Nibley said that he asked Black whether he had an explanation for the appearance of the name Mahujah in the Book of Moses and reported his answer as follows: “Well, someday we will find out the source that Joseph Smith used.”

Matthew Black was not the only non-Latter-day Saint scholar to see significance in Nibley’s finding of common names in the Book of Moses and the *Book of Giants*. More recently, Salvatore Cirillo, in his thesis at the University of Durham,¹⁰ stated that he considered the names of the *Book of Giants* characters, including Mahaway, as “the most conspicuously independent content” in the *Book of Giants*, being “unparalleled in other Jewish literature.” Moreover, according to Cirillo, “the name Mahawai in the *Book of Giants* and the names Mahujah and Mahijah in the Book of Moses represent the strongest similarity between the Latter-day Saint revelations on Enoch and the pseudepigraphal books of Enoch (specifically the *Book of Giants*).”¹¹ However, in contrast to Matthew Black, Cirillo does not make any attempt to explain how a manuscript that was not discovered until 1948 could have influenced the account of Enoch in the Book of Moses, written in 1830.



Harold Bloom, 1930–2019

Speaking more broadly about the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, the eminent Yale professor and Jewish literary scholar Harold Bloom called these books two of the “more surprising” and “neglected” works of Latter-day Saint scripture.¹²

What did Professor Bloom find so “surprising” in the Book of Moses? He said he was intrigued by the fact that many of its themes are “strikingly akin to ancient suggestions.” While expressing “no judgment, one way or the other, upon the authenticity” of Latter-day Saint scripture, he found “enormous validity” in the way these writings “recapture ... crucial elements in the archaic Jewish religion ... that had ceased to be available either to normative Judaism or to Christianity, and that survived only in esoteric traditions unlikely to have touched [Joseph] Smith directly.”¹³ In other words, Professor Bloom found it a great wonder that Joseph Smith could have come up with, on his own, a modern book that resembles so closely ancient Jewish and Christian teachings.



City of Enoch

Since Nibley's passing, many more exciting discoveries about ancient Enoch texts and the Book of Moses have been made. For example, the Bible does not include the Book of Moses account of the gathering of Enoch's people to the city of Zion nor its mention that others were translated with him. However, newly analyzed fragments of the *Book of Giants* and other Enoch texts reveal Jewish traditions that confirm the Book of Moses. These traditions say that the righteous were gathered to divinely prepared cities and that some were taken up to heaven with him.¹⁴

Dr. Hugh W. Nibley
283 East 700 North
Provo, Utah 84606

May 6, 1997

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Brother [REDACTED]

The map to which you refer has been duly noted and discussed at some length in my forthcoming book. The Oxford Edition of the Book of Enoch was edited by Matthew Black and Malik. On the week it appeared in 1976, I spent several days with Dr. Black. He was greatly impressed by certain parallels between the Qumran Book of Enoch and Joseph Smith's. When I started asking for explanations he would switch to other topics, a ploy all too familiar with the Brotherhood. He is president of the St. Andrews Golf Club in Scotland, the oldest in the world, and greatly preferred talking golf with Billy Casper, who also happened to be visiting here at the time, than splitting heads about the Book of Enoch. He did say a number of times, shaking his head in a bemused fashion, "Someday we will find out where Joseph Smith got that...Someday a source will turn up." Which I doubt not for a moment, since we already have an impressive sampling. I am afraid it will not be what Brother Black is hoping for.

Yours truly,

H. Nibley

HN/pw

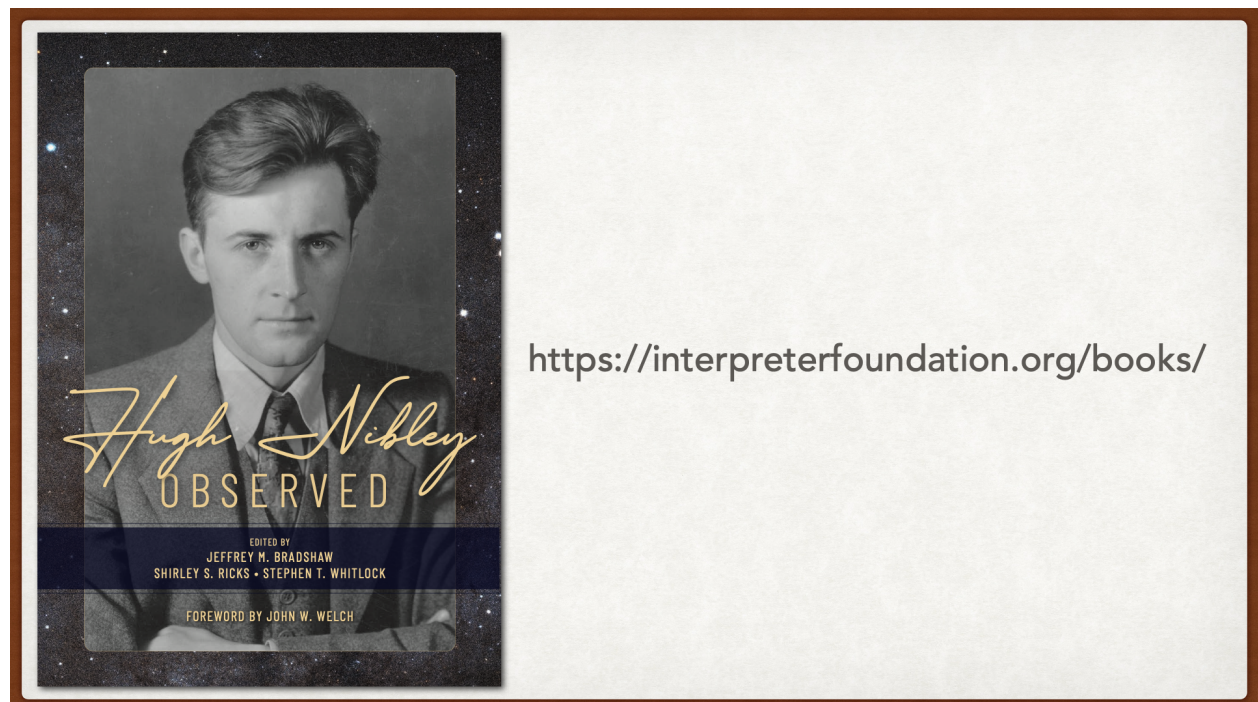
Letter summarizing Nibley's conversations with Professor Matthew Black in 1976.¹⁵

In a 1997 letter published in *Hugh Nibley Observed*, Nibley added new details about Professor Matthew Black's visit to BYU.¹⁶ Nibley wrote:

He was greatly impressed by certain parallels between the Qumran Book of Enoch and Joseph Smith's. When I started asking for explanations, he would switch to other topics, a ploy all too familiar with the Brotherhood. He is president of the St. Andrews Golf Club in Scotland, the oldest in the world, and greatly preferred talking golf with Billy Casper [a famous Latter-day Saint golfer], who also happened to be visiting here at the time, than splitting heads about the Book of Enoch. He did say a number of times, shaking his head in a bemused fashion, "Someday we will find out where Joseph Smith got that. ... Someday a source will turn up." Which I doubt not for a moment, since we already have an impressive sampling. I am afraid it will not be what Brother Black is hoping for.

Yours truly.

H. Nibley



<https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/>

Hugh Nibley's deep interest in the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ led him to many discoveries of importance to Latter-day Saints. The book "Hugh Nibley Observed" tells the story of the man and his work. For more information, visit interpreterfoundation.org/books/.

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Endnotes

¹ T. L. Givens *et al.*, *God Who Weeps*, p. 24.

² “In Genesis, Enoch is summed up in 5 verses; in Joseph Smith’s revision, Enoch’s story extends to 110 verses” (R. L. Bushman, *Rough Stone*, p. 138).

³ H. W. Nibley, *Strange Thing*, Part 13, p. 64.

⁴ J. T. Milik *et al.*, *Enoch*.

⁵ H. W. Nibley, *Enoch*, p. 276. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 267–268. Nibley complained that the *Ensign* editors only gave him two pages to wrap up the series, implying that they were weary of it (H. W. Nibley, *Hugh Nibley on the Book of Enoch*).

⁶ Published as J. T. Milik *et al.*, *Enoch*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 305. Photo by Stephen T. Whitlock taken on February 1, 2021. Photo ID: HBLL-ASR_STW9072-EC.jpg.

⁸ Professor Black had come to the United States to take up residence at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study (1977–1978) (W. McKane, *Matthew Black*).

⁹ For a the full account of Matthew Black’s encounter with the Book of Moses, see G. C. Thomasson, *Matthew Black and Mircea Eliade*, 423–427.

¹⁰ S. Cirillo, *Joseph Smith.*, p. 97. Cirillo drew upon the similar conclusions of the well-known *Book of Giants*’ scholar Loren Stuckenbruck (L. T. Stuckenbruck, *Book of Giants*, p. 27).

¹¹ In this and later quotes from Cirillo, we spell out the names of works he cites rather than using abbreviated versions of the names as he did.

¹² H. Bloom, *Names Divine*, p. 25. Hugh Nibley concurs with this assessment, noting that the Pearl of Great Price “has received less attention than the other writings and has been studied only superficially” (H. W. Nibley *et al.*, *One Eternal Round*, p. 18).

¹³ H. Bloom, *American Religion*, pp. 98, 99, 101.

¹⁴ See J. M. Bradshaw, *Enoch and the Gathering of Zion*.

¹⁵ H. W. Nibley, *Letter on Matthew Black*. With the kind permission of Boyd Jay Petersen.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*. With the kind permission of Boyd Jay Petersen.