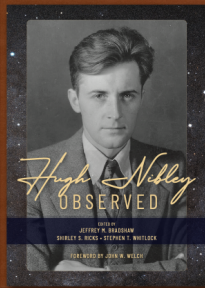


**Hugh Nibley's Love for God's Creation**  
Book of Moses Insight: 20 May 2021

# HUGH NIBLEY'S LOVE FOR GOD'S CREATION



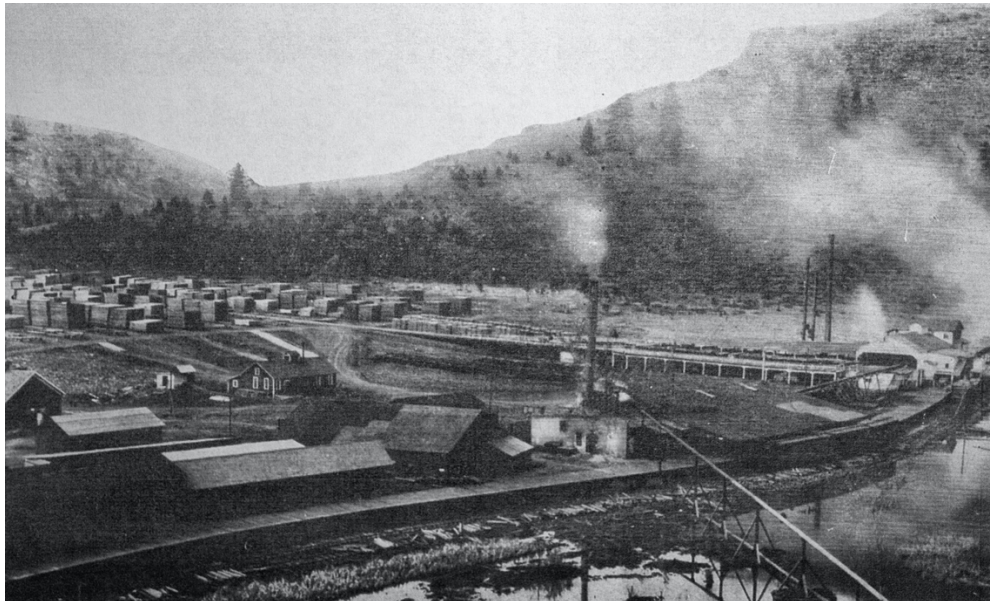
THINGS THAT  
MATTERED MOST  
TO HUGH NIBLEY

In Terry B. Ball's chapter in *Hugh Nibley Observed*, he describes Hugh Nibley's love for God's creation:<sup>1</sup>



*Goat mowing lawn.<sup>2</sup>*

A popular folktale concerning Nibley claims that rather than give in to the political and neighborhood pressure to keep his lawn mowed, the eccentric professor simply bought a goat and staked it out in his yard to eat the grass down.



*Plant of the Grande Ronde Lumber Company, Perry, Oregon.*

[Nibley's] ... biographer Boyd Petersen observes that while this tale is false, it does reflect Nibley's dislike for "the idea of trimming or cutting down any living thing"—a dislike, Petersen suggests, that grew out of Nibley's childhood experiences in "the lush green forests of Oregon," where he witnessed "their destruction at the hands of his own grandfather," [who owned the Nibley-Stoddard Lumber Company.]<sup>3</sup>

Later, Nibley lamented, "After my mission I visited a glorious redwood grove near Santa Cruz, California. Only there was no grove there; the two-thousand-year-old trees were all gone: not one of them was left standing. My own grandfather had converted them all into cash. ... Grandfather took something priceless and irreplaceable and gave in return a few miles of railroad ties."<sup>4</sup>




*Paul, Michael, Tom, Hugh, and Charles on a hike near Lincoln Beach, Utah Lake, ca. 1958.*

Nibley instilled his love of nature in his children. Describing a “spur-of-the-moment” outing in 1959, he wrote:<sup>5</sup>

On a sudden impulse (especially when there is urgent business to attend to for school, church, home, and society) I will let my boys inveigle me (after casually planting the idea in their not too innocent heads—they get the point) into dumping three or four sleeping bags, three loaves of homemade bread, some native cheese, hardboiled eggs, and apples, field glasses, axe, and knives into the back of the car and simply taking off. By determined and skillful reconnoitering, we manage to keep a jump ahead of civilization — it has become sort of a game — and it costs almost nothing.



12 October 1982 7th East Press Page 3



**One Reason Hugh Nibley Urges You To Support Ted Wilson For The U.S. Senate:**

"I came to Utah many years ago because I love the natural surroundings where my grandparents settled and where I wanted my children to grow up.

"My strongest reason for supporting Ted Wilson for the U.S. Senate, therefore, is that he shares these deep-seated feelings with so many of us.

"This fair portion of America The Beautiful is threatened as never before by plunder and pollution.

"Such physical devastation cannot be without spiritual impoverishment converting The Land Bountiful to The Land Desolation for future generations."

Authorized and Paid For by the Wilson for Utah Committee

Boyd Petersen observed that:<sup>6</sup>

when Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* launched the ecological movement in 1962, it found Hugh already a convert; and as public concern with environmental issues increased during the 1970s and 1980s, Hugh ... willingly and cheerfully spoke out on public occasions.

For example, in a full page spread in a local newspaper, he wrote in tones that characteristically alluded to themes from the Book of Mormon:

This fair portion of America the Beautiful is threatened as never before by plunder and pollution.

Such physical devastation cannot be without spiritual impoverishment, converting the Land Bountiful to the Land Desolation for future generations.

Nibley frequently quoted Brigham Young:<sup>7</sup>

Brigham Young [insisted] that the greatest physical asset the Saints possessed and one that they should treasure most highly was pure air. [Brigham said:] "What constitutes health, wealth, joy, and peace? In the first place, good pure air is the greatest sustainer of animal life."



*Geneva Steel Mill.*

A local sore point during those decades was the Geneva Steel Mill just six miles northwest of Provo.<sup>8</sup>

After giving a talk on the subject at a Clean Air Symposium in 1989, he declared in a letter to a local newspaper:<sup>9</sup>

I no longer worry much about Geneva. ... The only time it really [gets] to me [is] on those sweet spring nights when every breath from the west reminded me of what I was missing. Unfortunately, breathing was not optional or I could have escaped that prejudice, too. Today I see in Geneva a smoking fumarole at the base of a mighty volcano which is just about to blow. ... I take small comfort in the conviction that before long circumstances are going to settle the problem for us. ...



As Ball observed:<sup>10</sup>

Nibley's closing conviction proved prophetic. The mill stumbled along for another decade and then went bankrupt in 1999, closing forever in November of 2002.



*Adam tills the earth. Brigham Young taught: “Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds.”*

Nibley corrected those who spoke ignorantly about the meaning of God’s words to Adam and Eve: “Let them have dominion” (Moses 2:26). He pointed out that the sense of the Hebrew term behind the English words “subdue” and “dominion” did not mean that humankind was to selfishly and greedily mistreat God’s Creation as if it were a personal possession. In an October 1972 article first published in the Church’s youth magazine, the *New Era*, Nibley argued that the word “dominion” comes from the Latin *dominus* (“lord”), “specifically ‘the lord of the household,’ in his capacity of generous host, ... [responsible as] master for the comfort and well-being of his dependents and guests.” To have “dominion” in the priesthood sense means to have responsibility, specifically as God’s representative on earth.”<sup>11</sup>





As an example of Nibley's deep feelings about the sanctity of all life, he recounted the following experience:<sup>12</sup>

One morning just a week after we had moved into our house on Seventh North, as I was leaving for work, I found a group of shouting, arm-waving boys gathered around the big fir tree in the front yard. They had sticks and stones and in a state of high excitement were fiercely attacking the lowest branches of the tree, which hung to the ground. Why? I asked. There was a quail in the tree, they said in breathless zeal, a quail! Of course, said I, what is wrong with that? But don't you see, it is a live quail, a wild one! So they just had to kill it. ... Does this story surprise you? What surprised me was when I later went to Chicago and saw squirrels running around the city parks in broad daylight — they would not last a day in Provo. ...

[Nibley] called the vicious doctrine [that motivated such actions] the "Mahan Principle," referring to the "great secret" that Satan revealed to Cain (Moses 7:31), that one may kill to enrich oneself. In his mind, the killing included not only the taking of life, but also the destruction of nature.

Nibley further commented: "A favorite theme of Brigham Young was that the dominion God gives man is designed to test him, to enable him to show to himself, his fellows, and all the heavens just how he would act if entrusted with God's own power; if he does not act in a godlike manner, he will never be entrusted with a Creation of his own, worlds without end."<sup>13</sup> "Man's dominion is a call to service, not a license to exterminate."<sup>14</sup>



*Louise Parker: Without Any Ire.*

As Boyd Petersen concludes: “Hugh Nibley has raised a voice in the wilderness for the wilderness. It’s a voice *immersed* in the wilderness. His is also a voice *devoted to* the wilderness. His preoccupation with nature has made him an advocate for environmental issues, urging us to rethink our attitudes about the earth and repent of our destructive ways.”<sup>15</sup> Nibley agreed with Joseph Smith’s teaching that the Millennium would be delayed until men and women became righteous stewards of the earth. The Prophet said: “Men must become harmless, before the brute creation; and [only] when men lose their vicious dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb [will be able to] dwell together, and the sucking child can play with the serpent in safety.”<sup>16</sup>

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## Endnotes

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- 1 Terry B. Ball, in J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Hugh Nibley Observed*, p. 176.
  - 2 <https://fancycrave.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Goat-Eating-Grass.jpg>.
  - 3 B. J. Petersen, *Truth Is Stranger*, p. 22.
  - 4 B. J. Petersen, *Nibley*, p. 69.
  - 5 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
  - 7 J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Hugh Nibley Observed*, p. 180.
  - 8 B. J. Petersen, *Nibley*, p. 78.
  - 9 J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Hugh Nibley Observed*, p. 188.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
  - 11 Cited in J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 114.
  - 12 J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Hugh Nibley Observed*, p. 185.
  - 13 H. W. Nibley, *Dominion*, p. 10.
  - 14 Cited in J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 114.
  - 15 B. J. Petersen, *Nibley*, p. 83.
  - 16 J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 26 May 1834, 2:71.