



An Approach to the Book of Mormon (The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley)

Hugh Nibley

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Readers of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, the sixth volume in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, will find erudite and sometimes unexpected insights into this book of scripture - as evidenced by this excerpt from the preface to the 1964 edition. (p.xii-xiii)

*When in 1946 this writer composed a little treatise called *Lehi in the Desert* from limited materials then available in Utah, he had never knowingly set eyes on a real Arab. Within the last five years Aneze tribesmen and citizens of Mecca, including even guides to the Holy Places, have been his students, in Provo, of all places, while Utah has suddenly been enriched with a magnificent Arabic library, thanks to the inspired efforts of Professor Aziz Atiya of the University of Utah. As if it were not enough for the mountain to come to Mohammed, those sons of the desert who came to Provo found themselves taking a required class in the Book of Mormon from the compiler of this manual. Naturally he was more than curious to see how these young men would react to the Book of Mormon treatment of desert themes, and invited and even required them to report frankly on their impressions. To date, with only one exception, no fault has been found with Nephi on technical grounds. The one exception deserves the attention of all would-be critics of the Book of Mormon.*

It was in the first class ever held in "Book of Mormon for Near Eastern Students," and the semester had barely begun when of course we ran smack into the story of how Nephi found Laban dead drunk in a dark alley and cut off his head - a grisly tale that upsets Nephi himself in telling it. As we rehearsed the somber episode, I could detect visible signs of annoyance among the Arab students - whispered remarks, head-shakings, and frowns of dissent. Finally, toward the end of the hour, a smart young man from Jordan could hold out no longer. "Mr. Nibley," he said, plainly speaking for the others, "there is one thing wrong here. It doesn't sound right. Why did this Nephi wait so long to cut off Laban's head?" Since I had been expecting the routine protests of shock and disgust with which Western critics react to the Laban story, I was stunned by this surprise attack - stunned with a new insight into the Book of Mormon as a message from another age and another culture.

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