

Chapter 16

“Something to Move Mountains”: Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon

Hugh Nibley has had a revolutionary influence on the way we read the Book of Mormon. In *Lehi in the Desert, An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, and *Since Cumorah*, as well as in his many related articles, Hugh Nibley has set the Book of Mormon in an ancient Middle Eastern context and helped three generations of readers realize the book’s relevance and importance to our day. The effect of Hugh’s writings has been fundamental and far-reaching; our understanding of the Book of Mormon has deepened and our appreciation of the book has grown. As John W. Welch, BYU law professor and Book of Mormon scholar, puts it, “We are warned but reassured” by Hugh’s work.²

Hugh finds the Book of Mormon compelling in three fundamental ways: First, the uncanny parallels to other writings from the ancient Middle East have called forth Hugh’s respect for the Book of Mormon’s ability to fit comfortably within that historical and cultural milieu. Second, this, in turn, has caused him to see the book as a significant witness for the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith; these connections confirm the Prophet’s story about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and witness to his divine calling as a translator. Most importantly, Hugh Nibley venerates the book for its relevance to our day and its prophetic nature, for its accuracy in depicting the sins and

²Welch, “Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, April 1985, 56. I read a version of this chapter, titled “Something to Move Mountains”: Hugh Nibley’s Devotion to the Book of Mormon,” at the Literature and Belief Symposium, 28 March 1997 at Brigham Young University. It appeared in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997) 1-25, and *Colloquium: Essays in Literature and Belief*, edited by Richard H. Cracroft, Jane D. Brady, and Linda Hunter Adams (Provo, UT: Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, 2001), 489-513.