

ENOCH AND NOAH ON STEROIDS

Bryan Buchanan

Review of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 590 pp. (full color interior includes footnotes; endnotes; three excursus sections; annotated bibliography on Enoch and the Flood; comprehensive reference list; thumbnail index of one hundred and eleven illustrations and photographs; and indexes of scriptures referenced, modern prophets quoted, and topics discussed). \$49.99 (hardcover).

Reprinted with the kind permission of the Association for Mormon Letters

If one were to poll readers of Mormon books to find: 1. the largest and 2. the most aesthetically pleasing titles published in the last few years, I think *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* by Jeffrey Bradshaw (published 2010) would win on the aggregate score. The attractive tome was absolutely packed to the gills, immediately changing the face of Book of Moses studies. What was not immediately apparent, however, was that the commentary only covered part of Moses (at the bookstore where I work, when we informed people of this, the most common reaction was, "What more could he possibly have to say on Moses!?!") (Turns out, quite a lot.) Now, with the assistance of David J. Larsen, Bradshaw has completed the

extensive commentary with the recently-published *In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah and the Tower of Babel*.

The Preface, short as it is, reveals important elements of the commentary to follow. The authors are candid in saying that they “love and revere the Word of God — in both its written and unwritten forms,” and, therefore, this “means that [they] cannot regard it ‘objectively.’”¹ However, lest that scare off some readers who might dismiss Bradshaw’s perspective at that point, he adds, “Of course, I do not believe that the scriptures, as we have them, are complete, perfect, and infallible. Indeed, in one sense I think it is fair to say that the scriptures are no more complete, perfect, or infallible than the people who study them.”² Having greatly enjoyed his first volume, I was pleased to see a similar “thoughtful faith” approach in the second.

The Introduction makes it clear that the authors will draw on biblical scholarship heavily, and it is up-to-date and top-notch scholarship at that. For the Enoch materials, they are familiar with the research of George Nickelsburg, the current authority in that field. They turn to Ronald Hendel, leading voice in discussions on Genesis, David Carr, who is a well-respected authority on the Hebrew Bible, and so on. As Bradshaw and Larsen wade through the perspectives of all these authors, they maintain that the text should be taken literally, though they draw a distinction between what ancient societies would mean by that and how that differs from a modern, clinical understanding requiring precise details.

One of the most important sections of the introduction comes under the heading: “Does the Book of Moses Restore the ‘Original’ Version of Genesis?” Obviously aware that a large percentage of Mormons likely hold this view, the authors flatly

1 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), xix. Hereafter referred to as IGIL 2.

2 Bradshaw and Larsen, IGIL 2, xix.

state, “We think it fruitless to rely on JST Genesis as a means for uncovering a Moses *Urtext*.”³ And, then, the key statement: “Mormons understand that the primary intent of modern revelation is for divine guidance to latter-day readers, not to provide precise matches to texts from other times.”⁴ Many Mormons, yes, but there are plenty who do not, and some of these even write books. Many unfortunate lines of research have attempted to do just what Bradshaw and Larsen counsel against.

One minor quibble with a point toward the end of the introduction—he cites a statement from Grant McMurray, former president of the Community of Christ, on the value of the JST. While the authors use the excerpt as an example of someone who doesn’t properly respect it, I think McMurray’s ultimate point is that the JST is not a viable candidate for an “official” version. Utah Mormons, while undoubtedly seeing the JST as a more valuable resource, do not themselves use it as the approved version either and are (again, admittedly to a lesser degree) somewhat unsure as to its ultimate status.

This follow-up volume follows the structure of the first: each pericope begins with an introduction followed by the scriptural text and traditional verse-by-verse commentary (within the larger section, the authors usually break it down to 3-5 verses at a time). Following this—the bulk of each chapter—come “Gleanings,” which are extended quotations from prophets/apostles as well as writers such as Hugh Nibley and Hyrum Andrus. Finally, in addition to footnotes—and thankfully in such a large work!—endnotes covering both introduction and commentary provide additional information at the end of each chapter. No one need fear that the authors will make unsubstantiated claims. The footnotes are copious but are almost exclusively citations for the wealth of sources

3 Bradshaw and Larsen, IGIL 2, 16.

4 Bradshaw and Larsen, IGIL 2, 16.

both ancient and modern, Mormon and otherwise employed in the narrative. Endnotes are truly notes—here the authors will survey at length (some entries run to nearly a page) the findings of scholars and usually weigh in with their opinion.

What I found so enjoyable in *In God's Image, vol. 1* was the way that so many sources, both Mormon and otherwise (particularly the latter) were woven together in the commentary. Many authors do this—so often, though, it feels like a writer is just throwing things at the reader. I came away from my first experience with Bradshaw's writing feeling that he had familiarized himself with the various texts adequately and used them responsibly. I get the same impression here. I also enjoy his careful eye to textual studies available for Moses. The first page of commentary gives a good sample of what the reader can expect: discussion of points made in the verse-by-verse from Richard Draper et al. in their commentary, a thought from Ronald Hendel, and a discussion of Oliver Cowdery's editing of the OT1 manuscript (taken from the critical edition of the JST texts).

Anyone who has read many commentaries knows the difference between walking away from a book feeling unsatisfied, thinking the author was just rehashing, and being pleasantly surprised at the depth of research. For me, the authors produced the latter in spades. The second volume is a worthy companion to an impressive first book—both content and appearance are at the same level. Once again, numerous works of art are used—not only to create a very appealing book but to enhance the analysis.

For a restoration scripture, the book of Moses has not received much attention by authors, and Bradshaw and Larsen have done much to rectify that problem. *In God's Image and Likeness 2* is an excellent resource—like the first volume, I wouldn't be surprised if hardcover copies sell out quickly and appreciate in value. Finished books were not yet ready at the

time of writing,⁵ so I will hope in advance that the material quality is of the same caliber of the first volume. For such a well-crafted book in terms of writing and organization, it is only fitting.

Bryan Buchanan works at Benchmark Books in Salt Lake City in order to alleviate his separation anxiety from his own library at home.

5 Books are available for pre-order on Amazon.com and are scheduled for availability in select bookstores by early February 2014.