

A New Resource on the Book of Moses

Review of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses*. Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2010. xxxvi + 1101 pp., with appendix, bibliography, color plates, and indexes. \$49.99 hardcover (one volume), \$19.95 per volume softcover (three volumes).

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Commentaries on the Pearl of Great Price have steadily appeared ever since Milton R. Hunter's *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* first became available in 1948.¹ However, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw has produced the first commentary solely devoted to the Book of Moses in his book *In God's Image and Likeness*.

Bradshaw brings together a wide variety of ancient texts from traditions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, as well as modern views from Latter-day Saint authorities and scholars that the author correlates to select portions of the Book of Moses. This large volume begins with a roughly five-page preface with endnotes (pp. xxi-xxxv) in which the author mentions his opportunity to take a yearlong sabbatical in France to work on the commentary project (p. xxi). He explains how his

“awakening to the literary beauty of scripture” was facilitated by his mentor Arthur Henry King, who taught him to recite scripture out loud while looking for literary nuances (p. xxiii). He references Margaret Barker's argument for contextualizing scripture (p. xxiv) and ends with an injunction to search for revelation in understanding scripture (p. xxv).

An eighteen-page introduction with endnotes (pp. 1-31) considers the relationship between the Book of Moses, the book of Genesis, and the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and discusses their common or variant readings. Bradshaw also provides an excerpt from the seminal *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* on the chronology of the production of the Book of Moses.²

The introduction also includes a section on how to use the book. After explaining the

1. Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary: A Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1948).

2. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004).

threefold meaning of the book's title phrase, "In God's Image and Likeness" (pp. 10-11), Bradshaw outlines the book's arrangement and provides reasoning for his use of illustrations, which he inserts throughout the book to provide an added dimension to the many topics presented. It is in this section that the author describes how to follow the intricate system of gleanings, footnotes, and endnotes used extensively throughout the book.

In the final section of the introduction, entitled "On the Use of Ancient Texts," Bradshaw discusses methodological questions concerning the use of ancient texts. He acknowledges the difficulties and possible trappings of varying contexts and transmission issues when employing ancient texts to enhance scriptural understandings. He explains that his approach in this book is to include as much of the ancient and modern commentary as possible as a study resource (p. 17) to aid in better understanding the Book of Moses. For the most part the author's methodology combines two long-standing approaches in Latter-day Saint scholarship: (1) provide authoritative statements from General Authorities or commentary by scholars on select verses of scripture, and (2) include material from ancient texts for parallelistic comparison.

The next section of the book is the main commentary and comprises six chapters (pp. 33-509) divided according to the first six chapters of the Book of Moses (i.e., Moses 1-6:12). I was quite disappointed to learn that the commentary ends abruptly at Moses 6:12. How this decision was arrived at eludes me, but in my opinion the book would have been a lot stronger had it included the entire Book of Moses.

Each chapter of this commentary begins with a brief overview in which the historical background to the reception of the chapter (related

to the JST) and its general outline are discussed. After a few general themes related to the chapter are explored, the text block for the chapter and commentary follow. For the commentary, the author identifies certain words or phrases in select verses that ostensibly can be enriched or paralleled using ancient texts or modern commentary. The book has some very thoughtful insights in the chapter overviews and commentary. In the overviews, I particularly liked the discussions of the literary structure of Moses 1 (pp. 36-37) and the nature of Eden before the fall (pp. 141-44). I also liked the theme entitled "The Nakedness and the Clothing of Adam and Eve" (pp. 234-40).

Many of the insights from ancient sources in the commentary are very interesting. They are also utilized according to the author's promise of including as many as possible. In the end I can see how the commentary can be helpful in a comparative study, but in my view one must also be cautious with parallels. I did find a few instances where I believe the author misread some of the sources and misapplied them as parallels. One example of a misreading and misapplication I found seems to be Bradshaw's effort to identify the phrase "caught up" in Moses 1:1 (p. 42). He first notes examples from the scriptures of others who have been "caught up," such as Paul and Nephi in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and 1 Nephi 11:1, respectively. He then introduces a later statement of Nephi's that "upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains" (2 Nephi 4:25) and links the phrase "wings of his Spirit" to Abraham being "raised up to heaven on the wings of a bird," found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

The actual passage Bradshaw refers to from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12:7-10 reads as follows:

And the angel said to me, “Abraham.” And I said, “Here I am.” And he said to me, “Slaughter all these and divide the animals exactly into halves. But do not cut the birds apart. And give them to the men whom I will show you standing beside you, for they are the altar on the mountain, to offer sacrifice to the Eternal One. The turtle-dove and the pigeon you will give to me, for I will ascend on the wings of the birds to show you (what) is in the heavens, on the earth and in the sea, in the abyss, and in the lower depths, in the garden of Eden and in its rivers, in the fullness of the universe. And you will see its circles in all.”³

First, Bradshaw writes the phrase “wings of a bird,” which should actually be “wings of the birds,” as it appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Second, although the key word *wings* may give some force to the parallel, equating the “Spirit” with “birds,” in my view, is a stretch. Does a close examination of this passage, in fact, justify asserting that the phrase “wings of the birds” parallels “wings of his Spirit”? From the context of the passage, the “birds” motif appears not to be strongly connected to the notion of the “Spirit” but is a metaphor indicating the ability to swiftly move about or travel, that is, to the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the abyss, and so on. And who is it that travels swiftly like birds? Here, third, it is not Abraham who ascends to heaven on the “wings of the birds” (which is the main force of the parallel) but the angel to whom Abraham is talking.

Certainly not every use of ancient texts in this volume demonstrates a misreading or misapplication, but the above exemplifies problems that can

happen when reading through a large number of texts. Mining thousands of pages of ancient (or modern) texts presents a significant challenge for anyone undertaking this kind of project. Thus it should be no surprise that errors occur.

A definite challenge arises in deciding which phrases in ancient texts should be applied to certain verses in the Book of Moses. Should the context of the chosen portion of the ancient text align with the context of the phrase or verse of scripture to which it is compared? If so, what criteria should be followed to make sure that the context of the ancient text can be validated? And when a valid parallel is found, what does that mean? Does it somehow authenticate that portion of scripture to which it is compared? In general, Bradshaw provides no analysis in the commentary that answers these questions. And, quite frankly, it would be near impossible to do so without expanding the project into many volumes. The author’s main purpose is simply to provide an environment in which to enrich one’s study of the Book of Moses.

After each chapter of commentary, Bradshaw provides “gleanings,” or excerpted quotations from various authors (Latter-day Saints and others) that provide additional information. These gleanings come from a variety of ancient or modern authors such as Philo, at-Tabataba’i, Juanita Brooks, C. Terry Warner, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, C. S. Lewis, Brigham Young, and, of course, Hugh Nibley. The gleanings can be as short as one sentence or several pages long. Although some of the gleanings were interesting, I admit that I did not always understand how some of them related to the Book of Moses.

The rest of the book (pp. 510-1101) contains various types of resources. In the section entitled “Excursus” (pp. 510-783), the author supplies

3. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, “Apocalypse of Abraham,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:695. I used the same source Bradshaw used.

fifty-five essays on various topics such as “Science and Mormonism,” “The Circle and the Square,” and “The Five Lost Things of the Temple.” Again, although some of these articles were interesting, I was a bit stymied trying to figure out how these essays directly related to the Book of Moses. To me they seemed to deal with mostly tangential topics.

An appendix (pp. 785–803) also contains ancillary materials such as the “BYU Evolution Packet” put together in 1992, an essay on how the packet was put together, and other materials on the origin of man. An annotated bibliography of ancient texts related to the Book of Moses and JST Genesis (pp. 805–908) provides a modicum of contextualization for the ancient sources used in the book, which includes some useful charts. The book ends with references to modern LDS and other sources used in the volume (pp. 911–1009), a selection of beautiful color plates of artwork used in the book (pp. 1010–39), and helpful indexes (pp. 1041–1101) to figures, scriptures, statements of latter-day prophets, and topics.

There is always room for improvement in any project of this scope. Here are a few weaknesses that attracted my attention: (1) It is not a complete commentary of the Book of Moses (it treats the text only up to Moses 6:12). (2) The notes can be very long and laborious to read. (3) The notation system can sometimes be quite difficult to follow. There are both endnotes and even footnotes to the endnotes throughout the book. (4) Except for the commentary chapters, most of the material in the book (especially the “gleanings” and “excurses”) is not about the actual Book of Moses itself, but is instead a collection of ancillary materials of various topics that seemingly arise in the Book of Moses. (5) A clear, consistent editorial style, such as Chicago or Turabian, is not followed in the book. Sometimes references to

cited books and such are shortened, making it difficult to ascertain the source without going to the full reference in the back of the book. In my view, more editing needed to be done to weed out superfluous or overlong references.

Bradshaw has done a great service in providing such a large array of material to supplement one’s study of the Book of Moses. But it should also be understood that this vast amount of material is subjectively put together and does not follow any methodology of scholarly restraint. This, in and of itself, does not make this a bad book, but readers should be cautious in accepting that every insight or comparison presented in the book is valid or of equal importance. In addition, although Bradshaw does not argue that parallels give authenticity to the scripture, readers should be wary of concluding that one can “prove” the scriptures by finding parallels. Perhaps the book’s real value in using so many ancient sources will not be so much in authenticating the truthfulness of the Book of Moses as in authenticating its antiquity.

As far as fulfilling the purposes the author intended, that is, providing a wealth of information from both ancient and modern sources for those who wish to study the Book of Moses, I think this book is a success. It should be noted, however, that except for the actual commentary, the book is mostly a potpourri of materials loosely related to the Book of Moses rather than a cohesive presentation on the Book of Moses itself. In my view, the value of this book lies in its usefulness as a select commentary on Moses 1:1–6:12 and as a reference or sourcebook on various topics that appear to emerge from the Book of Moses. 

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