

THE FAITH OF AN OBSERVER--CONVERSATIONS WITH HUGH NIBLEY

Film Transcript

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Hugh Nibley: Twenty-three years ago today--if you will cast your minds back--on this same occasion, I gave the opening prayer in which I said, "We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood." (laughter) Now many have asked me since then whether I really said such a shocking thing, but nobody has ever asked what I meant by it. Why not? Well some knew the answer already, and as for the rest, we do not question things at the BYU. (laughter and applause) Well, never expected that!¹

Truman G. Madsen: There have been some things said about Brigham Young University by others, none of them are as painfully critical as what Nibley occasionally says, and the same goes for certain aspects of the Church, institutionally speaking. He really is its gadfly critic.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell: And Hugh, of course, is above the fray, not in the sense of his being esoteric, or highly advanced, but likewise, I think, because his commitment is so visible and has been so pronounced and so repetitively stated that that's not even the issue. So then we get on to, What is Hugh saying?

Sloan Nibley: Does he still talk so fast that no one can understand what he's saying?

1. BYU Commencement Address, 19 August 1983--this and over 100 other Nibley essays are available from F.A.R.M.S., P.O. Box 7113, University Station, Provo, UT 84602 (catalogue available).

TGM: No one knows what he knows, and that of course also is a problem with knowing him.

Phyllis Nibley: Sometimes I think I don't know him at all.

NAM: I'm just grateful that Hugh Nibley, with his brilliance wasn't buried somewhere in the Middle Ages, in some monastic assignment that he would have performed with his brilliance. I'm grateful, instead, that he has been preserved to be here in the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times when there could be a full flowering of his genius and his ability put at the disposal of the Kingdom. And Hugh Nibley, in his field, would be the most remarkable scholar we have. He is so focused on the things that matter, and is spiritually submissive, that he's impatient with mediocrity, he's impatient with irrelevance, and to the casual eye, that may be seen as eccentricity, when in fact I think it's a reflection of his deepened discipleship.

SN: I just have to take Hugh for what he is and let him drift.

TGM: Is he a cynic and a pessimist, with all kinds of negative things to say? Yes. Is he an optimist, an idealist, with great hope for the future? Yes. Some would say you can't get those together. He does.

HN: I never thought of myself as a participant, but always on the sidelines, always looking on, and always finding myself in a position where I rather could get a rather good look. But everybody's in that position if they just wanted to take it and realize what they were into. We're wandering around as strangers looking for things to recognize, and whenever you see something which you know is good, true, and beautiful, that's an act of recognition. And you recognize it as such not by analyzing it, but it comes to your memory, it hits you: "I've seen that, I know that's right," and so forth.

I'm still looking; I'm still looking for it. [Edfu] Darn, darn. Wait a minute. They've got it hidden around here somewhere. I want to see . . . just give me one little LC here and I'll be thankful, but, no, that won't do it. Let's look for it...sidi, sidi, sidi...sidi, fir...firash-weno? [Arabic "Sir, is there a bed here?"] (sidi) Yes, we know that this is sidi, but that's not the question. Ma attayir fauq? [Arabic "Is the bird above?"] (attayir fouq? ["The bird is above?"]) Ma firash? ["Where is a couch?"]² Desperately searching for it, eh? This is the search for the hypocephalus. Let's see now. They just started to carve this, you see. They haven't done anything here. Don't see it there. Now let me see, is it here? . . . go here. I've got to look at the other wall here. We'll jump down a ways. Good-bye; I'll see you.

Yes, like a swan.

Instead of the "Passionate Pilgrim,"³ we could call it the "Puzzled Pilgrim," 'cause that's what I've considered myself: as being a puzzled pilgrim, going on a pilgrimage; I wonder what the hell I'm looking at.

On his Childhood and Attitudes Toward Wealth

My earliest memory is of running away from home . . . I remember that day when I was three and ran away. I remember everything that happened that day because I was trying to figure out, I was determined, I had to run away, I had to find out what was up there. I used to walk along 24th, 25th Street; it used to go up the hill; it was in the distance, and it was usually raining or something like that, but there would be a rainbow there, Mt. Hood,⁴ or something. I would just ache to know what was up there. I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to know what was beyond that street, you know.

2. Cf. PGP Abraham, Facsimile 1:1,4, lion couch-altar, with bird-angel above.

3. This was once proposed as a title for this film.

4. Mt. Hood is the highest mountain in Oregon (Cascade Range).

Reed N. Nibley: It just always seemed to be there. He had this curiosity, an intense curiosity about everything. Making telescopes in high school.

SN: In the middle of the night, I remember more than once he would wake me up at 3:00 in the morning and tell me that Venus or somebody was having an occlusion. And I didn't care to see it particularly, I didn't give a hoot.

HN: I think I would show off how much I knew and this sort of thing; I was prone to show off, that's true. An insufferable little show off, I'll say that.

RN: Hugh was always allowed to do his thing. We sort of worked around Hugh. Things moved around Hugh. I'm sure Mother arranged things around Hugh.

PN: When he was a child he had a whole suite of rooms all to himself. He was given very special treatment. He was her favorite, and I think he suffered for it. Hugh's father tried to be a businessman like his father, Charles W. Nibley. Charles W. Nibley was one of the richest and most successful businessmen in the Church. He was a Presiding Bishop for many years, and a Counselor in the First Presidency. He had three wives and three families.

HN: Was it you who was up in Logan the other day, and saw that palace he built for one of his wives? He built these for his three wives, these palatial mansions. He didn't want them to grow up in poverty, his kids to grow up in poverty, and they didn't. See the result was they were all spoiled rotten. Had anything they wanted. And if they had to wait for money, five minutes, they were furious, and so forth and so on. And he enjoyed, he thoroughly enjoyed distributing it around. That is the only reason he wanted to make it, is so he could throw it around. He liked to see everybody happy. He thought that's the thing

that would make them happy, and it certainly did put on a show. I always knew it was there; we could always joke about him and so forth because my grandfather joked about it; he tried to laugh it off, you know, as you've seen in the letters. He talks playfully about filthy lucre and this that and the other, but it really worried him, considerably.

TGM: I keep telling him, your grandfather gave the Church \$500,000! Do you think it would've been better if he hadn't? He almost talks like a Franciscan: "It'd be better if we were all poor. Then you wouldn't be tempted to think God gave it to us, and we can use it the way we want to. God didn't give it to us, and if he did, honorably, then we'd better use it for Him, and not for feathering our own nest." Boy he's tough on that.

HN: I think it was that last talk I had with Grandpa, and I went to see Grandpa Nibley, and that's when he died. He had a suite on the top floor of the Hotel Utah. He said, "D'you see that window there?" Considering the things he'd done in his life, he says, "If an angel were to come through that door, I would jump right out that window. I wouldn't hesitate. I'd go right through that window," he said. He couldn't face an angel; he was talking about the culture shock of meeting an angel and so forth. And, uh, that was our parting conversation. The last words to me. Then we said good-bye, and so forth. But that left it with me, you see. Here he was in the First Presidency, had been Presiding Bishop for all those years, and yet he says now that he could not face an angel, and it had been because--we'd been talking about it--because of the things he had to do in the way of business. So I don't have much choice.

Paul Springer: Money's never meant much of anything to Hugh, that I could see. That's the last thing he would think about.

HN: But this is "the root of all evil," which I say is a very-- well the word is philarguria.⁵ And philarguria does not mean "love of money." We say that "well I don't actually love money; I like to have it; I want it, and so forth," but philarguria is simply "the desire to be rich." Philarguria is the desire for money in the bank which we all have, and that's the root of evil. "Do you have any money? Yes we have sufficient for our needs." There's nothing wrong with having sufficient, but, he says, "it's wanting more, that's the thing." Because more than enough is more than enough. If you don't need it, you don't need it. I mean how it could be clearer I don't know.

PS: The mere accumulating it for the sake of accumulating it was something that wouldn't occur to him. He had no dislike of it, he just didn't think about it. It's a wonderful way to be, they say.

HN: I mean people want things, they'll start wanting things, you start wanting things and there's no end. And you're tempted first, you must own this, and you must that, and then of course the Book of Mormon puts this beautifully, then the rivalries, the bitterness, and ending finally in murders, and so forth, it builds up there. But the temptation, and then the snare, you're caught in the rapids, and into many foolish desires for things, well lust, epithumia, is desire to possess something, lust after. That's a good strong word to use. We associate it with "sex," you see; that doesn't mean that. It means you've...I got to have that, I've set my heart on that, I've got to have a new Mercedes or something like that. Those are foolish and they're hurtful. "And I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."⁶ This is a parable and it ... I mean it was an expression

5. 1 Tim. 6:10.

6. Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.

for impossibility--it's a Sprichwort--for the impossible. A camel through the eye of a needle is absolutely impossible, you see. The apostles are amazed at that. You see, they didn't know of any postern gate through which you went and so forth. The idea a rich man must shed his riches to go through the eye of the needle, and this, that and the other. You see, it can't be done except by a special miracle from God; special dispensation. Notice, and when his disciples heard it, they were, notice, absolutely knocked over. They were astounded; they didn't know, as I say, of any other possible explanation. They really took it literally. It says here--it's a weak translation--⁷ but it says they were "exceedingly amazed." They were absolutely astounded and bewildered that he would say it's impossible for a rich man to get into heaven, saying "Who then can be saved?" But you're not going to get into the kingdom of heaven, or Zion on this earth if you're encumbered with riches; it can't be done.⁸

TGM: This is the title that we came up with,⁹ but have you heard the story on what the original title was? I thought it would please him. It was going to be called Nibley, no, The Nibley Legacy. And I had it all mocked up, and I invited him to my house. I had it on the coffee table. And he comes up with Phyllis and I say, "There's the book!" And I thought it was like announcing it with trumpets and he would jump for joy, and he

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7. Matthew 19:25 reads "exceedingly." Mark and Luke simply say that the disciples then asked who could be saved.
 8. Hugh Nibley's main articles dealing with economics, wealth, environment and the gospel are as follows (each is available separately from F.A.R.M.S.): "Breakthroughs I would Like To See," "Brigham Young on the Environment," "How Firm a Foundation," "Man's Dominion," "Our Glory or Our Condemnation," "The Philosophical Implications of Automation," "We will Still Weep for Zion," and "Work We Must but the Lunch is Free."
 9. Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless is a collection of essays by Hugh Nibley, published by the Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center Monograph Series and Bookcraft.

just, "Oh no, you can't do that! I don't like it! It won't do!" I said, "Well, why not?" "Well for one thing it sounds like I'm dead and gone, and I'm not, and another thing, Legacy, Legacy, what does that mean?" So I finally said, "Well, I'll call you tomorrow and maybe we can brainstorm." And in the meantime, I checked, and when I called him I thought I had him. I said, "Hugh, it's on the spine, it's on the cover, it's on the jacket, and it's on every page of the galleys. And if we change it now it will cost \$1100." I thought he'd say "Okay, go ahead." You know what he said? It's typical Nibley: "Change it and take it out of my royalties." Then I gasped and I said, "Hugh, do you care that much about a title?" He said, "No, I care that little about royalties!" (click)

On the Environment and Man's Dominion

SN: We went on a few trips with my father and up in the backwoods around Crater Lake and places like that. He was always up before dawn, and he always saw two or three bears. Course we laughed at him 'cause he was always seeing bears, until I got up one morning and went out, the first thing I did was run into a bear. So, we figured that he saw the bears all right.

HN: I went up to Crater Lake because we'd lived at Medford [Oregon] and I'd always wanted to go back to Crater Lake and I spent six weeks or more than that there and I walked up through the Umpqua Forest, and really those times were very wild--no roads or anything. Bears all over the place and the like. Very naive, I'd read the Concord School and thought that all you had to do was go back to nature, and I really believed that so I took a bag of wheat and some raisins and I lived on little red huckleberries and got myself terribly sick on too much of these things, you know.

SN: He explored a lot around Crater Lake. I think he swam out to an island there that was in that ice water. I don't know why he did it; I guess just because he enjoyed it.

RN: We went down and spent a weekend on the beach sleeping on the sand and listening to the seals bark all night long and we would walk up and down the coast. Whatever he saw would sort of unwrap his tongue and he would start talking. You know, whether it was a sea shell, or a wave pattern, or the color of the sand, or whatever it was.

HN: If Grandpa Nibley sees only the feet of timber in a forest and that's all it is to him, he is not having a fullness of joy or the fullness of the earth. For example, in 1925 I worked all summer in the Nibley-Stoddard Lumber Company in Cromberg, California, on the Feather River. My job was on the bull chain. I had these big things to throw, it was tough work all day long. Ten hours a day, six days a week. This bull chain, its purpose was to pile up to burn all the excess lumber. Well, everything that wasn't absolutely square from the middle of the log, all that was trimmed off and sent down this bull chain, cut off into sections, taken to the pile and burned. The whole thing was--this enormous pile!--burning day and night. This huge pile of timber. Of course, today that'd be worth millions of course, all that, just as fire wood, nothing else; but it was good wood. They didn't bother to save anything ... took the quickest possible profits from the redwoods. What did they take? Only the hearts of the redwoods for railroad ties.

That was something to see this destruction going on and so forth. "That I can murder and get gain."¹⁰ This was a form of murder, I mean this was taking life of various sorts. Because remember, this is a doctrine we do not emphasize, that we believe that all living things, you see, are spiritual beings too and shall have the resurrection; we're told that. But this wanton business to pervert them. Remember the Mahan principle, "I am . . . master of this great secret, that I can murder and get gain."¹¹

10. Hel. 6:17-23.

11. Moses 5:31.

But these things are to be enjoyed and they want to be enjoyed you see, legitimately. If you're fasting, you're not going to plunder. You're not going to waste. You're going to appreciate what's there. You're going to have a chance to enjoy it to the full and with cheerful hearts, countenances, and then of course the fullness, because we're missing the fullness of the earth if we don't do that. Then you consider the things to be thankful for and you immediately become aware of the beauties of the world and the delights around you. The delights of nature and so forth and the pleasures of the flesh that you enjoy. Merely breathing, merely drinking. Remember that marvelous character in Thomas Mann, the Zauberberg. P. Peppercorn, the fabulously rich Dutchman who is looked for everything you could find to bring delight. And finally he ends up with der Haben und Geben des Lebens. "The simple, noble gifts of life." He could take more joy in a glass of water than he could in a glass of the most costly wine, you see. This is simple the der Haben, the noble, simple gifts of life. Well, you find joy in those things, but only when you're fasting. Only when you distract your mind from all this other trash and tripe and jungle and concern and impressions that are being made, and what we look like, and so forth. You forget all that when you fast, you see. Then you can really enjoy, then you can really start enjoying everything about you and the whole situation then becomes marvelous, and then the heavens declare the glory of God. You only become aware of that when you're fasting, when you're abstracting your mind from normal concerns.

On Education

HN: A very interesting thing happened when I was in Berkeley, during a sabbatical. I was teaching there.¹² One student came. His name was Brown. A very fine young man. He had a problem. And this is the liberal Berkeley crowd you know. "How can I break the news to my parents that I really believe there was a

12. University of California, 1959-1960.

God?" But here I'm not subversive. I can get away with anything here because I can back it up with the scriptures. Here I can quote the scriptures freely. I'm going to bring that in no matter what. This is the only place I don't have to apologize for it. Even in school here teaching, the teacher cannot teach you at all. He's there to save your time. And when you bear your testimony, that is what you do, you don't twist anybody's arm or force them to believe. Now I believe, so you better believe or else! Well that's utterly meaningless. Then in other words, then you're saying, "Well what good does it do to say, 'I believe'? How will that effect another person." It's the same way with the written word. It will move some people very deeply and of course have no affect on others.

Or the mere understanding of the written word. Which is a mystery; after all, nobody knows how that takes place.¹³ Writing itself is the most--as Galileo says--its the most marvelous device ever invented. He says, No invention will ever approach writing for sophistication and the marvelous things it does. To transfer knowledge, the most delicate nuances of knowledge and feeling and emotion over thousands of years through any distance in space. It beats any TV or anything else you could possibly devise. It's marvelous! And do that, he says, with 24, 26 little symbols, very simple designs; that does the whole thing. And what a marvelous thing that was. That's given by the finger of the Lord, you see. But to work it, you see, you have to know what's going on, you have to read into it. Unless you know what you are reading, you can't read.

Paul Springer: I met him when he was at Cal in 1933. He was then a grad student. I forget what he was working on then; some absurd thing. The thing about him, he didn't give a damn for a degree.

13. See his essay "The Genesis of the Written Word."

HN: A university is nothing more nor less than a place to show off. And that's what they are doing. Everybody is consciously acting a role there. Everybody's after eminence. That's their objective. Their whole objective is eminence. They have nothing else to live for. It's the predicament of Faust, you see, in the opening act of Faust. There Faust says: "Heise Doktor. Heise Magister"--"I'm called now 'master', I'm called even a 'doctor', and here I am, and I've been fooling people all these years." So Faust the greatest, learnedest man in the world decides there is nothing left to do but commit suicide because it's a fake, the whole thing is a fraud. Well, that's when you bring the university and the scholarship and theology together. So the devil appears and he makes his bargain and so forth as a result. When scholarship is clothed in the robes of authority and that. That's why they're the "black robes of the false priesthood," you see.

There is no such thing as having an education at all. No, "education," that means a formal line of training. That there is such a thing as a terminal degree. You have an education, that's an utter absurdity. It's all becoming business and law now. Well that's it, that's the thing to do. So that's what an education is. But that's not where your learning and knowledge really comes from. It's the gospel of repentance and it's progressive repentance. "Wherefore, . . . you shall repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore."¹⁴ And "forevermore," it's progressive repentance to realize where your weakness is. Now that's a humiliating process. It's one people can't put up with. It's a progressive revelation of your own ignorance as you go on to solve a problem. The great Scaliger¹⁵ for example, the greatest scholar who ever lived, when he was learning Hebrew he went to the ghetto and the children made fun of him, correcting his

14. Moses 5:8.

15. Joseph Justus Scaliger, an Italian Scholastic of the 16th Century--see Nibley, "New Light on Scaliger," Classical Journal, 37 (1942), 291-295.

Hebrew which was very crude, you see. And scholars wouldn't speak to him. They were indignant. He was willing to humiliate himself and "become as a little child," you see. Unless you become as a little child you are not intelligent, you see; you're stupid. And that's...they blocked it because of their haughtiness, their pride, and that pride is stupidity, that is what it is. But I've noticed that all along, because as students we were so blessedly ignorant, so horribly ignorant and the teacher was--you're declared a Ph.D. when you still don't know anything and from then on you go on teaching and you begin to pontificate from that moment; but you still don't know anything, you see.

No matter how sharply you focus on a particular subject, or how highly you specialize, you miss most of it, no matter what it is, so that no person has the same experiences or reaction as the others. You see a different thing. Everyone's seeing is selective--and mine has been, you see. I select certain things and completely bypass others to an astonishing degree. I think if you live right and keep your mind open--if you ask for revelation and so forth and your mind is open you will receive hints and proddings that are stronger than just normal insights and things like that. Things that are very strong sometimes.

On Faith and Testimony

PS: One thing that he has that I would give anything to have is the gift of absolute faith. He has it. And this you can't acquire. You either have it or you don't. He has it and I don't. We used to talk about that in terms of Faust. You know that famous line: Die Botschaft hoere ich wohl, allein mir fehlt der Glaube: "I hear the message well, but I don't have the faith."

Question: Did you always have a testimony of the gospel?

HN: Except for one short period. When the bottom of the world fell out. That was desperate. But ah...

Q: When was that?

HN: It quickly--it came back with a bang. I was terribly bothered about this afterlife business and that sort of thing. I had no evidence for that whatever. And I remember I went up to Mt. Wilson¹⁶ at that time. I walked around in the snow and brooded about it and I came back. We had a meeting at the old Hollywood Ward. Matthew Cowley's father was the speaker that night. So I went up to meet Brother Cowley and as soon as he took my hand he says, "Come with me, I want to give you a blessing." The blessing was: the thing that had been puzzling my mind, the Lord would give me an answer immediately. Within the week I had an appendicitis attack and so we went to the old Seventh Day Adventist Hospital out in Loma Linda and had the appendix taken out.

PH: As I understand, he swallowed his tongue and actually was at one time technically dead, and of course they realized what had happened and worked frantically to . . . and brought him back. But during that period he had one of these "life after death" experiences very much like the ones that Dr. Moody describes.¹⁷

HN: Then all of a sudden down this thing like a tube, you know, you get sucked down this thing and you come out . . . Oh, boy, I know everything, and everything is there, and this is what I wanted to know! Three cheers, and all this sort of thing. I started solving problems and everything else and then they found the resuscitator, and the doctor says I talked to him all during the operation. I said: "Just because I can't move now, it looks as if I wasn't feeling this, but it hurts so much worse than I can describe. It's real all right." And I talked with him the whole time during that thing; and Dr. Wayland talked about that. He'd never seen anybody do anything like that. But all I wanted

16. Mt. Wilson is above Pasadena, California. Hugh was living in Glendale, California, at the time.

17. Raymond A. Moody, Life After Life (Mockingbird/ Bantam/ Ballantine, 1975/1976); Reflections on Life After Life (Bantam, 1977).

was to know whether there was anything on the other side, and when I came out there, I didn't meet anything or anybody else, but I looked around and not only was in all possession of my faculties but they were tremendous. I was light as a feather and ready to go, you see. Above all I was interested in problems. I'd missed out a lot of math and stuff like that, how would I be able to go, well in five minutes I could make up for that. Remember, as Joseph Smith said, "If you could look for five minutes into yonder heavens," you see, forget about all the rest you ever bothered about.

So that gives me a great relief, so that's why I don't take this very seriously down here. We're just sort of dabbling around, playing around, being tested for our moral qualities, and above all the two things we can be good at, and no two other things can we do: We can forgive and we can repent. It's the gospel of repentance. We're told that the angels envy men their ability both to forgive and to repent because they can't do either, you see. But nobody's very clever, nobody's very brave, nobody's very strong, nobody's very wise. We're all pretty stupid, you see. Nobody's very anything. We're not tested on those things; but the things the angels envy us for, we can forgive and we can repent. So three cheers, let's start repenting as of now.

On War and Politics

RN: Oh, I can remember very clearly one day, he had a huge steamer trunk which was filled with shoe boxes which contained his notecards, and he was going through this, and either filing or setting them up somehow. And mother said, "What on earth are you doing that for?" He said, "Oh I'm just getting ready; I'll be going to war." This was some years before the war broke out. But he had sized that up pretty early.

HN: My first assignment--it was so typically Army you must hear about it: It was the eve of Thanksgiving, and I was scrubbing toilets out with a big brush, with a big scrubbing brush. I was

busy scrubbing these latrines out and so forth, and an officer came to me and said, "Come with me and bring the brush." So I said "Come with me and bring the brush." It was a huge pile of celery, they were preparing it for the officer's mess the next day. He says, "Clean this celery off." But I said, "But this brush, I just used it for cleaning toilets..." "That doesn't make any difference, if it looks shiny and clean, that's the Army, that's all we want to know." So there I was cleaning that celery for the officers the next day for their Thanksgiving dinner with a toilet brush. That's so typically Army. I mean it's marvelous, you know, and it just goes on.

Lucien Goldschmidt: Camp Richie was set up to train people for Intelligence Service, G-2 service. There never were more than I think eleven or twelve hundred people at the top. We were in the same class in Richie, and this was the German class. There's Hugh Nibley himself in the third row, second person from the left.

HN: But they were all these famous men. Lots of them were great musicians, artists and so forth. That's where I met Lucien.

LG: I would think that I on the whole was more optimistic about the President and some of the intentions than Hugh Nibley might have been. He was often pessimistic. He altogether regarded that we were at the end of the times and that more disasters were ahead of us. Hugh Nibley decided that he would not like to be an interrogator. The idea of pressing others, soldiers who were under orders not to reveal information, and to press them to reveal it, seemed morally unpleasant to him. He therefore, went into that section called, "Order of Battle," in which the purpose was to know what forces were facing any one of the sections of our Army.

HN: Now OB teams were to be attached only to Army Groups. That was as high and safe as you could get, with one exception. So

when we were in London we received our assignments. I remember Veigner came out and was up in the top floor late at night at the British War Office there and they had a special wooden structure built up there, because they didn't have enough space in this little dark hall, we were standing there waiting for the judgment, and Brown went in--he was our Lieutenant and spoke with a very thick German accent. He went in to get the assignments. They were going to give the assignments to all of them. And we were it, we were the one who would not be attached to the Army Group. We would be attached to the 101st Airborne Division. We would be the first to land in Normandy. We would be the very first.

And of course men who had been waiting for twenty and thirty years for a war to get into, you see, were just itching for it. That was the happy war. It was the chance to get fast promotions. It was the big time, it was the chance for heroics. It was the chance to get a big command and above all it was a chance to see Basel. And, oh, there were men, officers who just revelled in it because it was their life's career. I'll tell you if there was anything that puzzled me all the time I was there, I would say, "What on earth am I doing here? Why was I put in this situation?" I felt I was just an observer. "Why, am I being shown this awful stuff? I don't want to see it!" It was utter waste. But the wrongness of what we were doing was so strong that everybody would cry. People would cry, they would weep. They would...tears would stream down...the wrongness. It was so utterly, unspeakably sad. It wasn't terrifying, but it was so sad you could hardly stand it. People would do such things to each other, you see.

Yes, it's a lonely beach. It was a good place to land I suppose. Unexpected. But they knew all about it. The first ones that came out said, "But wait a minute, what happened. We thought you were going to come yesterday." But they missed on the time and they didn't think we'd be insane enough to come in the weather, and they never thought we would land in the various places we did, and of course neither did we. It was accidental.

Blown all over the place. Oh the stories they told afterwards. The places they were landed in. And the complete confusion everywhere, which confused the enemy as much as it confused us.

They said they'd never had a storm like that since the day World War I began. I remember the day World War I broke out. I was four years old. I remember it vividly. My father coming in reporting, and so forth. I remember the day it ended, exactly. Mean time we played in muddy lots. We played soldier, and when I found myself in the mud in France it was the very same thing. And again, when we'd make our operations, our drills, our CPX's on the British coast, here were these gun emplacements, but they had been Roman fortifications. They were gun emplacements made for the invasion of Napoleon and here we were manning the same things for the same war. We hadn't moved since the time of the Romans; the same thing. So I'm convinced, you see, that I've seen one war, two wars, and I'll probably see three. We haven't learned a thing! And this is the thing that impressed me the more than anything else--why I can't get excited or sentimental about the whole operation of World War II--the word that kept in my head more than anything else was "silly."

It was utterly silly. It was needless, it was silly. They never had to give Hitler all that power. Fortunately, he was...if he hadn't been insane he could have pushed us back into the sea with the greatest of ease. But the whole thing was silly, unnecessary, uncalled for, as the next war will be. I had a full year of preparation for this operation, and it was all carefully planned. I knew perfectly well... It was so inter-meshed, so carefully coordinated, just as they say "the elaborate plans for nuclear war: This will happen and this will happen. Then we'll plan how we can control it." But they couldn't control anything. First place the weather. They couldn't move on the fifth. They had to move on the sixth. That threw everything out, for us, but it saved our lives because the Germans were expecting us on the fifth. But nothing worked. Everything went foul here. People being landed on the wrong beach. The wrong things being landed at the wrong time and so forth. All sorts of

confusion. Not getting the things you wanted. So, this idea that we can carefully plan it, that we have the intelligence to manage it, or the character to control events, is utterly absurd! "Man is nothing,"¹⁸ as the Book of Mormon says, "How great is the nothingness of man," and Moses said, "I hadn't supposed that before,"¹⁹ but it is true. "I am nothing!" And King Benjamin when he says, "We are less than the dust,"²⁰ means get down there and realize what you are. But we don't. We are very proud and arrogant. We still are...we have the power, we have the might. We can tell people what to do and they'll do it. Especially certain people in Washington feel that very strongly, as you know.

The Way Out: Salvation and the Temple

HN: Why are we so benighted? Why is Israel so small? Why are those who accept the Lord's solution so small? Because...not only because they want it that way, but remember, Israel itself rejected the Lord. In every dispensation they do not seek him. They could find him instantly if they sought him. Remember Abraham was the only one, we're told, for ten generations who sought after the Lord, and as we're told in the second chapter of the Book of Abraham, "Thy servant has sought thee diligently, now he has found thee."²¹ So there's good news and bad news, as there always has been. There's always been bad...the good news is here. The gospel is here. The bad news, people aren't going to accept it. It's going to be rejected. And that's it. They go on together. "But as many," beginning of John remember, "But as many as received it, he gave power to become sons of God."²² See

18. Hel. 12:7

19. Moses 1:10

20. Mosiah 2:25

21. Abr. 2:12

22. John 1:12

that is the big issue. That is Israel. That is the peculiar people that is set apart, isolated and so forth. He gave them power to become sons and Gods, to move into a totally different sphere. A totally different life and how many people are willing to do that and how many people are ready. Remember, "the light shined in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not!"²³

TGM: Nibley has been a ritualist. That is a man who not only sees that one way to study cultures is to look at their rites, r-i-t-e-s, but in addition is convinced that somehow these rites tie in to the ideas of the temple, and finally even to the foundations of civilization. Egypt seems to be the capital or the center related to many other cultures both temporally and spatially.

HN: The Egyptians realized, as we do, that all life comes from the Sun. It's energy reaches us--its most immediate sensation is light. And if you are in Egypt you know the Sun dominates the picture. Light and life are literally inseparable. That's a scientific fact of our own day. The light of the world is the life of the world, as the scriptures tell us.²⁴

Here we are in the dark, mysterious passages beneath the Egyptian temples. But they are still places of joy. We've got the joy symbols here. Just in coming down the final step here is the picture of the Sun-disk sending down its rays from heaven, it says, even to this dark place.

Who wants to plunge into a dark underworld and leave this all behind? And only Egyptians I say, were honest enough to recognize, that alone is the fundamental question.

The oldest written text in the world is here. We do not start out with primitives uttering a lot of mumbo jumbo and dancing around and practicing cannibalism, and so forth. It is a

23. John 1:5

24. D&C 88:7-13

very highly developed doctrine. There's only one older text of it, and that is from the Shabako Stone. Well here we are at the end of the journey where we learn it is not the end. Just as they enter the door, we have been told, he says, "The priests sing, he has come here to be purified; he has come here to be purified," and then they break out into a hymn of praise and joy: *Anekhef, anekhef, wenis pen, anekh.* "He lives, he lives. This Wenis lives. He does not die." *En metef, en metef.* "He does not die. Wenis does not die. This Wenis does not die." *En sekef.* "He does not pass away." *Enn hepef.* "He is not covered over." After all he may be here, but he is not covered over. "Unis is not covered over," and he is going on and on.²⁵ And finally we get to the end...and here... From this it's clear that he has completed all the ordinances. They say to him, *pesherenek yatu*, "Thou hast..." See, *yatu*: "Thou hast circumambulated the holy ceremonial centers."²⁶ I wrote a study on that, I know what I'm talking about there.²⁷ Finally he says, "You are reinstated, complete."

Or this displays the Egyptian love of multiple meanings. The various members of the body are those of 'Atum, the Creator God, or they even are 'Atum. The Egyptians loved punning and I believe that *em-temet* can mean "completed, or a perfect thing."²⁸ In this case the legs are completely restored, it's a perfect passive participle. Your face, your head. Then is the tongue down here complete. He is physically reinstated, everything is taken care of. He is now ready to leave and he doesn't stay long.

The positivism of modern science has obsessed us with this idea that the Egyptians are beset with this morbid preoccupation

25. Pyramid Texts 167ff (Utterance 219) of Wenis/Unis, the last pharaoh of the 5th Dynasty, and the first to have his pyramid-tomb inscribed with such texts.

26. Cf. Pyr. 406-407 (Utt. 274).

27. The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1975), esp. Parts VI and VII.

28. Cf. Message, p. 257, Hebrew *tamin*.

with death, the gloom and the tomb. The grisly mummy image, you know, that we got with the Egyptians. Nothing could be further from the truth. Resurrection, not death is the theme here. Look at this man. He's striding forth with purpose and gladness. His eyes looking forward. The hands above his head are raised in the Ka-gesture which is the salute to the spirit moving into the higher realm...the upper world, is the Ka. You see, when you enter the presence of a great one you raise both hands to show that you are not armed. Also, that you bear no ill will and that you trust him completely. He is coming into the presence of the Father, you always call him the "Father," with complete trust and confidence. That's followed by the hepet, or the "embrace."²⁹ Then you embrace him and you become one with him. You become his son.

I have friends that say not only that they don't believe on such absurdity, but that they don't believe for a minute that I believe on it. They say you can't believe on anything so silly, so far away. We've got so far away from that. But when you're close to it I mean it becomes an obsession. What would you rather have? Would a man not give everything you see, to have complete life, I mean abundant life and live forever? What is the greatest of gifts? It's eternal life. But we say there's no such thing! Well they say, there is, and of course your obsessed with eternal life, if there is a chance for it. You'll take... you'll do everything. And I think that it's important that we have these records and go back to these early times to get us off dead center.

What should we be looking for? Remember 1st Nephi ends with four things. There are four things we should never look for. The first thing is gain. The second is power. The third is popularity, and the fourth is the lusts of the flesh, it says.³⁰ Those are the things, and they all go together. And those are

29. Message, pp. 240-44.

30. 1 Nephi 22:23

the things everyone is looking for. Those are our objectives. Then you say, well what should be our objectives? Ah, Abraham. The Book of Abraham. That second verse says what, "I Abraham," what he was after what he wanted. Now here's what he's after, "greater happiness and peace and rest for me."³¹ So he seeks for "the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same having been myself a follower of righteousness."³² Now obviously he is in on a tradition. We're dealing here with a sort of closed circle. Every time we mention these things, remember, we're dealing with a closed...you have to be an initiate, you have to be inside. These things can't be treated lightly. They have to be taken seriously. You see the great emphasis on Israel is that it's a holy people set apart. The word "peculiar," sigil [segullah], is a word they use, which strongly resembles the Latin sigil [sigilla], "to be sealed." A sealed people. Peculiar, set apart, reserved to me. The Lord uses those expressions all along. You're supposed to be absorbing as many into you as you can. You're supposed to going...so eventually you will suck in the whole world. And at each particular stage, the knowledge is limited to those who will receive it.

Wherever we look in these Egyptian monuments, the king has to follow one thing--Maat, "righteousness." Maat. "Righteousness, justice, fairness, honor, a stable social order, things as they should be." We would say the two things that cover everything are that...the Beloved Son (who) is "full of grace and truth."³³ You see truth has nothing false about it. But grace says there is nothing negative about it. Self-interest, ulterior motives, scheming, gaining, trying to get ahead, influence, power game. None of that. Grace is the very opposite of that. It's charis, our word "cheer" is also related to it. Also the Greek charis,

31. Abr. 1:2

32. Abr. 1:2

33. John 1:14.

Latin gratia. Gratia means "thanks," it means "a free gift." A gift you don't ask anything in return for. You feel that way, just as we give things to children not for what they can do for us, but because of love, you see. So grace is...the tendency is of course to render it in the new translations as "love," which is right. So grace and truth...and this is Abraham. Right from the beginning here when he says where..."having been a follower of righteousness"--this is righteousness; this is Maat--Desiring also to be the one to possess greater knowledge." Always he wants to possess great knowledge and then he wants a greater knowledge too.

Here's where we draw the line, you see, we don't think that's so important. We've lost interest in knowledge today, and it's a very interesting thing. We want power, recognition and things like that, but knowledge for its own sake doesn't excite us very much. It's surprising how many students will say, "Don't tell us something we don't already know." I used to have students come up indignantly and say to me after class, "Brother Nibley I've never heard of that before." "Of course that's why you're here, because you've never heard of that before!" But no they just want to be told the same standard routine testimony and so forth. Desiring to one to possess great knowledge and to be a greater follower of righteousness. Notice there is your gospel of repentance, to be a greater follower. You're not doing well enough. Never doing well enough. Always to be...like the man Adam, he is ever seeking more light and truth or more light and knowledge, either one you see.

Abraham not only had to take his wisdom to the Egyptians but he had to acquire wisdom from them. This was the going concern. This was the center of--not just the intellectual, but the spiritual center of the world at the time. Abraham has to hack in, to use that expression now, on the whole world of his time because he is the father of the faithful, and it's going to spread everywhere. He had to know the world, and the best place to get in on the ground floor was certainly Egypt. So he did and we have to do the same sort of thing.

Thanks to this prolonged drought that was on the world, as testified from literature in all directions there, the religious observances had degenerated into rites of desperate and bloody nature to make the waters run, to bring prosperity, to bring fertility to the land and so forth. It was a time of famine. Remember the whole story of Abraham, the background, the first of the labors of Abraham. The plague for Abraham was famine. Abraham made himself very unpopular. For that reason he would be an ideal substitute for the king for the sacrificial rites. The king was responsible for the prosperity and fertility of the land as he was for the victory of the army. When those failed he was supposed to be put to death. Even when they didn't fail, every thirty years at the Sed festival³⁴ he had to be put to death supposedly to renew his strength. But he found a substitute, and there's a lot said about these substitutes. And we are told that Abraham went through this routine too. That he was rescued at the last minute, rescued by an earthquake. The moment he is rescued, the angel takes him up to heaven and then the angel shows him a picture. He draws the whole thing for him on this round picture and points it out to him and says, "when you get back to earth you'll make a duplicate of that," you see. Well, he shows him this diagram of the cosmos, and it looks like our Facsimiles, and of course we see it as the hypocephalus, what it is. Then Pharaoh ordered all his court, 365 nobles, to bring their children to the court and had Abraham sit on the throne and teach them about the Sun and the stars. That's what it says here in Facsimile 3 [Book of Abraham]. "Where Abraham seated upon the throne of Pharaoh is discoursing upon the heavens." Now here's an interesting thing. That figure on the throne is Osiris. Well of course he's Osiris; he has to be.³⁵ Abraham would have to be Osiris in that capacity. And he is the king. But how it begins, it begins with the Figure One. Osiris is lying on the couch.

34. Message, p. 198.

35. Message, pp. 91-92.

And he cries out, "Come to my aid and rescue me!" When he reaches the depth, at the last extremities, he cries out, and the Angel of the Lord comes to deliver him. Now this is Horus, you'll notice. He is the Horus Hawk; and always the son of Osiris, is Horus. Horus comes in the form of a hawk and rescues him and takes him up and he delivers him and then he takes him on a guided tour through the heavens, and before you receive your final throne you have this tour of the universe and you see all this stuff and then in the final scene you mount the throne. This is what you do. You come out in glory. And so this is the theme and is exactly the course, the sequence that we follow in the Pearl of Great Price. Facsimiles 1, 2, and 3 in that order.

And so at the great temple at Dendera, you find way up on the roof the Resurrection Complex, and there what do you find but the themes of this Osiris myth. A sacrifice, a revelation of the cosmos, followed by coronation. It began with the drama of the passion or the sacrificial death of Osiris. But the hawk is bestirring him here. But here you notice instead of him on the lion couch, is the disk arising, but it is not the solar-disk. It's the Kheperu, which means he is "changing" his form now. Preserving his identity, but changing his form, and rising up. That is the symbol of transformation and ascension, both. He's got to rise. He has to make an astral journey here. These are astral figures, you'll notice that there are stars strewn all through here, and here he's in...notice here is the king, he is striding through the heavens with the bull, with the Ka-bull, with now a star between his horns. That's probably the constellation of Taurus, but notice here are the two heavenly ships as you'll find on all the hypocephali. Because they represent passing through the heavens. You've got to have that part with, these go, in other words, right with the Lion couch. Facsimile 2 should go with Facsimile 1. You can't separate the cosmic functions from the resurrection and from the burial. So what do you do when you make the transition from here? You pass through the cosmos. So this is when he passes from the one to the other, he passes through the universe and this is the record that's left.

These are the signs of the Zodiac as we recognize them. We recognize the Ram, the Bull, the Heavenly Twins. See in this context of being resurrected and passing through the heavens, they're very cosmic conscious. They are conscious of the cosmos all the way through, and you'll notice the two boats facing each other: The Mandjet-bark and the Mesketet-bark, the morning-bark and the evening-bark, the cycle of time and the Sun.

So here we have the hypocephalus motifs between what? Between Facsimile 1; next Facsimile 2; next Facsimile 3 is coronation. Now we emerge directly from the passage room, with celestial room, the passage through the kingdoms, the passage through the cosmos rather, not the celestial, to a coronation. We would say Facsimile number 3. This is the king on his throne, and all of these are typical coronation figures celebrating him, endowing him with the things he needs, and so forth. After passing through the cosmos, our hero, be it Abraham or someone else, now sits on the throne of Pharaoh and is endowed with his power. Notice he is holding--of course he has to hold--the insignia of justice and judgment, the flail and the hook, and he is being hailed as the living king.

Therefore, these are the Mysteries of Osiris--see they are taught to him--and they include the greatest mystery of all is what comes after life. You see that is what they want to know. But the main idea is, you see, we are talking about this making connections and hacking in or getting into the circuit, and so forth. These temple ordinances and things...they put you into an eternal, into a different order of things, and which the world will not understand. And if you try to make them vulgarized down here and treat them as if they belong to this universe of discourse, then you spoil them. But you have this...general sense now, of working ourselves into a much larger universe of discourse. We have been very localized here and Joseph Smith had a mind as broad as all eternity and he introduced us into all of this and then we immediately...our first reaction is to flinch and draw back. You say, well let's go back to tithing and the Word of Wisdom, and that's the story. It's a mystery because

it's not known to the world we see around us. It is a mystery in that sense, but it shouldn't be a mystery to you. You're free to go as far as you want it is entirely up to you. We're all still qualifying as Osirises, as far as that goes.

We must do the works of Abraham. And then we are told specifically in the Doctrine and Covenants, that means sacrificing, if necessary, your own life. Abraham was willing to do that, and everyone at some time or another will have the opportunity to show that he'd be willing to do that. Remember we're told that Abraham was tested to the last extreme, to the ultimate extremity, as we are told in the Doctrine and Covenants.³⁶ Unless you are willing give everything you cannot claim eternal life. It's not to be cheaply bought. These are the great blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and must be brought...they must be willing even to give life itself, and so forth. As there's a story told in the Midrash. It begins with Abraham sitting in the door of his tent in the plain of Mamre in the heat of the day. But this was a hot day, you see. It's probably what inspired the story probably. It was a hot day. It said it was a day like the breath of Gehinnom. Like the breath of Hell was coming out, and you can see the kind of country it was, and is, when this is so, the heat and the dust and the sand...that's utter desolation. And he was worried, of course, because he says some poor stranger might be lost out there. Someone might have lost his way, and be perishing, because you're not going to last an hour in this. So he sent his faithful servant Eleazer out to look everywhere. He sent him out in all directions and he came back, "No, I can't find anyone anywhere." He was still worried. He says, "There might be someone out there." You have these feelings...so he went out himself, though he was very sick at the time. He was sick and ailing, and old, and he went out into that Hell. And he looked and searched, but he found no one. And at the end of the day he came back exhausted toward his tent. As he approached the tent the three strangers were standing there. It was the Lord

36. D&C 101:4, 132:36, 50-51.

and the two with Him. Because the Lord goes with His two counselors so to speak. He throws himself down on his face, and then it is that He promises him Isaac. As a reward for what he had done. This supreme offering. It's a very moving story.³⁷ He'd gone out to look for his fellow man and ...out in that dusty hell, you see, all alone. Eleazer couldn't find any, and he said, "I think I can find someone." Well he found something. He found the answer to the thing he'd prayed for all his life. His son Isaac. It's a beautiful story. But the desire of Abraham, was that through him, his people and all mankind should be blessed. This Abraham who towers like a colossus is Every Man, as every man should be. In this world, remember what the Lord promised the Apostles: "In this world ye shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."³⁸

37. See Bernard Beer, Leben Abrahams nach Auffassung der Judischen Sage (Leipzig: O. Leiner, 1859), pp. 37-39, 153-159, nn. 367-409.

38. John 16:33

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