

"smote" are great words—kind of romantic and powerful. "Dwindle and perish" are terrific words, too. Besides that, the ETR version just stops with not believing in God, rather than explaining what happens as a result. I like the elaborate language, the code words, the old-fashioned flavor of the authorized version. It makes it seem more solemn, more important, and more holy. Being impressed by the language of the scriptures isn't as important as understanding what they say. The best combination, of course, is to do both; and I think the ETR can help get people ready for the authorized version.

I know that the First Presidency has made a statement discouraging modern-English versions of the Book of Mormon (*Church News*, 20 Feb. 1993), but I honestly don't see what they're upset about. After all, the church itself puts out those comic-book type illustrated stories of the scriptures, which are obviously for very young children. They're *really* boring. They don't even have any dialogue to make them interesting. And I sat through *lots* of cartoon versions of Book of Mormon stories in Primary. Obviously, nobody thought they were going to wreck my testimony.

I think that anything that helps make the Book of Mormon familiar, important, and understandable for kids and other beginning readers is all to the

good and will ultimately lead them to the book itself. It sounds to me as if the general authorities think the real Book of Mormon is so boring that no one will ever read it if they have any alternative.

My folks buy me comic-book versions of Shakespeare and I've been in three Shakespeare plays put on by my fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classes using easy-to-read, paraphrased scripts. Nobody ever tried to tell me that I "knew" Shakespeare as a result and wouldn't want or need to read (or see) the real plays. I haven't started reading Shakespeare yet; but when I do see movies of the real plays, I'm much more interested because I understand the plot, who the characters are, and don't have to struggle so much to understand the language. (By the way, we use a modern language version of the Bible for family scripture study, too.)

I think the most efficacious methodology is a smorgasbord. Keep numerous versions around the house. Let the kids experiment with all of them and gravitate to the ones they want. After all, if the scriptures are one of the main mechanisms by which the Holy Ghost communicates to us, then we should facilitate numerous opportunities for that to happen.

And the fog index for that paragraph is 10.3.

Women's Rights

James R. Baker. *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992.

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THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN ARE A CON-

tested issue in religious communities which look to the Hebrew Bible, known as the Old Testament among Christians. A serious matter for these communities—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—is how the Hebrew Bible understands the rights of women. Among Jews and Christians both defenders and opponents claim that the patriarchy of the book rightly or wrongly has promoted the diminishing of women's rights and roles in society.

In this discussion, the relationship of the Old Testament's understanding of the rights of women to that of its contemporary cultures is a very relevant issue. Some would argue that patriarchy is not a characteristic of the basic faith of the Bible but rather has been acquired during the history of Israel as it was lived among the cultures of the ancient Near East.

The author of *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*, James R. Baker, is a lawyer and approaches these issues through a careful knowledge of the legal codes of the ancient Near East. Twelve such "ancient legal documents" are identified, ranging in time from the Code of Ur-Nammu, ca. 2200 B.C., to "Jewish Law," ca. A.D. 200-600. The next latter code is the Neo-Babylonian Laws of ca. 600 B.C.

Citing the authority of G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, Baker asserts that "the law throughout the Fertile Crescent was for most practical purposes universal and the legal principles underlying the various codes were basically the same" (2). Having said this, the author gives a brief resume of the sources, background, and some characteristics of each of the legal documents which he uses.

A variety of Old Testament stories involving women are retold. Most of the stories are the Genesis accounts of the patriarchs of Israel, although the story of

Ruth and of several of the women associated with King David are also presented. Discussion of these stories enables the reader to see that each involves a context of legal practices, mostly involving the position of women in marriage and families. Various marriage arrangements are distinguished, such as metronymic, polygynous, and levirate; various aspects of the stories can be better understood through knowledge of these distinctions. The roles given to the women of the stories were often at least partially determined by the legal understanding of those roles in the communities of the ancient Near East. No stories of women outside the Old Testament are considered.

The texts which Baker uses represent both a variety of time periods as well as literary types. There is, however, no discussion of a methodology for analyzing such historical texts and literary types. Rather Baker seems to rely on retelling the story in the style of a contemporary storyteller who is free to add assumptions about motive, character, etc., and to use other material to fill in blanks. For example, details about the Genesis account of Jacob and Rachel are filled in from Josephus who wrote in the Common Era.

While Baker cites many scholars on a number of points, there is no awareness of a considerable body of scholarship having to do with the nature of the biblical texts themselves. Baker notes that "most modern scholars adhere to the documentary hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen" (12). It is difficult, however, to reconcile this statement with "the Hebrew Bible was written by scribes who lived at or near the times they were describing, whatever the historicity of any particular story" (ix). Moreover, there seems to be an assumption that all of the material is of the same

literary type, whether it be the patriarchal stories of the Pentateuch, the later historical material regarding David, or the much later story of Ruth told within the conflicts of the post-exilic period. One does not need to accept the great body of biblical scholarship, but, one would think, any treatment of biblical texts should at least be aware of it.

There are a number of women in the pages of the Old Testament, and it would be difficult to consider them all. Nevertheless, Baker gives no reason for his selections. Is it that all of the women considered are dealt with in relation to men or to matrimonial matters? One wonders why such women as Miriam (Exodus 15) or Deborah the prophetess (Judges 5) who are much more stand-alone figures were not also considered. One might also ask about the woman in the poems which make up the Song of

Songs.

While the belief is expressed regarding the basic agreement of the various ancient codes, there is no discussion of the understanding of the rights of women in those codes. This would have been singularly useful, and the writer seems well prepared to have done so. Similarly, however, there is no real analytic discussion of those rights in the Old Testament. Rather the reader is given a kind of a commentary from the codes on some of the Old Testament material.

Stories in the Old Testament about women are given useful development in terms of their representation of the legal codes of the ancient Near East. This fact makes the book interesting and in some ways valuable. Nevertheless, the absence of any clear methodology for considering historical texts mitigates its usefulness for the serious student.