

AN OLIVE LEAF

BREAKING THROUGH TO ZION

By Hugh W. Nibley

In closing an issue of the magazine in which a good number of pages are devoted to questions about what the Book of Mormon is, it is appropriate to remember at least some of the things it actually says. And who better to turn to for delivering its message of Zion and universal brotherhood than the indomitable Hugh Nibley?

The following is excerpted from Nibley's 8 November 1984 address at BYU, "Breakthroughs I Would Like to See," published in Approaching Zion, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 9 (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 378–406.



THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS have always believed that the breakthroughs in science that have bettered the condition of man by bringing light and truth are an organic part of the restoration of the gospel. For us that is the great breakthrough: "The morning breaks, the shadows flee," "Now a glorious morn is breaking," "The veil o'er the earth is beginning to burst," "An angel from on high the long, long silence broke." For us the whole thing was a breakthrough. And it was just one surprise after another, nothing expected, contrived, or anticipated. The testimony of Oliver Cowdery appended to the Pearl of Great Price catches the spirit of the event: "What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world was racked and distracted—while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld, our ears heard. . . 'Twas the voice of an angel, from glory, 'twas a message from the Most High! . . . Man may deceive his fellow-men, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till naught but fiction feeds the many . . . but . . . one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Savior, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind!" Every breakthrough is also a breakout, liberating mankind from restraints and repressions of various kinds.

This is illustrated all through the Book of Mormon, beginning with the case of Lehi, depressed and frustrated by conditions in Jerusalem. Traveling in the desert, he saw a spectacle like Moses' burning bush, "a pillar of fire . . . upon a

rock before him; and he saw and heard much," which sent him scurrying back to Jerusalem, where he threw himself on his bed and had a vision in which "he saw the heavens open," and so on (1 Nephi 1:6-8). Here, then, was a breakthrough presently leading to a breakout, as Lehi fled in the night from the land of Jerusalem into the desert; and then another breakthrough when he left the Old World behind. Arriving in the New, Nephi suffered oppression under his brethren until he received a revelation and broke with them, leading his own following into a place apart, where they were able to live "after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27). Other such breakthroughs followed in the Book of

Mormon—those of Mosiah, and of Alma at the waters of Mormon. . . .

What he meant by "the manner of happiness" is illustrated in the model society of 4 Nephi: "And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free" (4 Nephi 1:3); "and it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land" (4 Nephi 1:13); "and how blessed were they! . . . The first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land" (4 Nephi 1:18). It was a noncompetitive society, which is the breakthrough I would ask you to envisage. . . .

Since I have been asked to tell what breakthrough I would like to see, I will state it quite frankly. It is the same one the prophets, seers, and revelators of modern times have yearned and worked for: namely, the observation by the Latter-day Saints of the law of consecration. I'm only expressing a personal wish, but that is what was asked for. I would like to see it happen in the first place because I have covenanted to keep it, and I would like to be able to do so. . . .

The program is an urgent one, and since the world is steadily getting worse, the chances of carrying it out in a sympathetic environment have not been improving. . . .

The express purpose of the law of consecration is the building up of Zion; it is God's plan, and his alone, for doing that. We do not wait until Zion is here to observe it; it is rather the means of bringing us nearer to Zion. 