

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

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ABSTRACT

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The basic premise of this thesis is that the Book of Mormon as we now have it was written middle part first (the books of Mosiah and Alma), then the latter part (3 Nephi through Ether) and finally the opening portion (1 Nephi through Words of Mormon). There is both external and internal evidence that supports this premise as valid. This thesis surveys the Old Testament quotations used in the Book of Mormon in the sequence in which they occur on the basis of the above premise. There are 21 chapters taken from Isaiah, two from Malachi, plus portions of Exodus 20 (the Ten Commandments) and of Micah, along with scattered verses from Isaiah, Proverbs and Jeremiah.

While 50% of all the verses from Isaiah are identical with the King James Version, including the italics the translators had inserted, the examination of the material following the above sequence, showed a decided tendency for the earlier portions to follow the KJV verbatim or nearly so. As Joseph Smith continued with the production of his book there was increasing liberty taken in altering the KJV. Not only were the italics either deleted or replaced, but the words of the text itself were altered. This alteration appeared to have had as its object both the removal of wording which Joseph Smith regarded as contradictory (i.e., the changes were harmonistic in nature) and an interpretive function to mold the passage so that it could be made to refer either to Joseph himself or to his Book of Mormon plot-line. In the process of alteration occasional errors were introduced into the biblical material of both a grammatical and substantive nature.

Following the same sequence, the Old Testament quotations were further examined to see how the material was employed. It was noted that the quotations were largely utilized to support Joseph Smith's eschatological views regarding the American Indians as being of Israelite origin. In this connection it is pointed out that the usage closely parallels the use of a number of the same passages by Rev. Ethan Smith in his View of the Hebrews, a book whose second edition was in print five years before the Book of Mormon. Many of the points made by this New England clergyman in regard to the Hebrew origin of the American Indians are paralleled in the Book of Mormon. This includes the idea that the American Indians, being Israelites, will be restored; that the American Gentiles have been divinely called to recover these Israelites; that the Pilgrim fathers were expressly brought by God to America to fulfill this role; that should they fail in this responsibility God will use the Indians/Israelites to destroy them; that America is one of the "isles of the sea" referred to by Isaiah and as such it will eventually become a center for the gathering of the American Israelites, becoming a veritable Garden of Eden. The closeness of these parallels, which include interpreting the same passages of Isaiah in precisely the same manner, are too numerous to be mere coincidence and therefore provide evidence that Joseph Smith was strongly influenced in his use of the Old Testament by Rev. Ethan Smith's book. In short, the Book of Mormon in its use of the Old Testament appears clearly to be a 19th century production and not a translation of an authentic ancient text. Its use of Old Testament events and names as models for events and names in the Book of Mormon adds further confirmation of the fictional nature of the Book of Mormon.