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Abstract Review of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (1990), by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990. 164 pp. \$5.00.

Reviewed by Matthew Roper

Since the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, critics have pointed to the similarity of language between it and the Bible as a gross anachronism. Joseph Smith, it is alleged, plagiarized the Bible while writing the Book of Mormon and attempted to pass this new book off as an ancient work. For many of these critics the presence of phrases and ideas in the Book of Mormon also found in the New Testament is especially absurd. In their recent book, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, Jerald and Sandra Tanner have presented perhaps the most extensive list of alleged plagiarisms ever assembled by hostile critics of the Book of Mormon.

"In the light of computer research and the advances that are being made in this field," the authors solemnly assure us, "the future of the Book of Mormon looks very dim indeed."¹ "We feel that the evidence we now have against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is at least a thousand times as strong as the textual evidence we had against the Hofmann documents" (p. 75). "The material we have published . . . and the parallels to the Bible which follow, furnish irrefutable proof that the Book of Mormon is not the ancient text it claims to be. . . . It cannot be accepted as a genuine document" (p. 84).

The Tanners suggest that Martin Harris's loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon left a serious void in Joseph Smith's work, which they call the "black hole." Having lost so much, Joseph feared that if he attempted to rewrite this portion of the manuscript he would be unable to remember all the details of the lost narrative. Therefore, to avoid being detected as a forger and a deceiver, Joseph was deliberately vague concerning matters of history in the small plates (pp. 12-14). This is why, according to the authors, the section 1 Nephi through Omni contains so few details concerning wars, names of kings, cities, women, etc. (pp.14-23). To replace what had been lost, Joseph plagiarized from the Bible with the hope that he would not be detected. Today, using the computerized scriptures of the Latter-

¹ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "A Black Hole in the Book of Mormon," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 72 (July 1989): 14.

day Saint Church itself, it is possible, the authors say, to detect where Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible.

Plagiarism and the Bible

The Tanners' theory conjures up an image of Joseph Smith hiding behind a curtain, poring over his Bible, frantically plucking out choice tidbits of doctrinal matter here and there, splicing them into the Book of Mormon narrative, all the time hoping that no one would notice the source of his plagiarism. One problem with this hypothesis is the fact that none of those who witnessed the work of translation *ever* mentioned that Joseph used a Bible while working, and several of them emphatically denied that he had a manuscript or book of any kind.² It appears that the curtain was used only with Martin Harris, whom Joseph had reason, at first, to distrust, but others who participated as scribes and witnesses state that no curtain was used.³ Even Reuben Hale, who never joined the Church and believed the Book of Mormon to be a hoax, and who was surely looking for anything suspicious, is silent concerning any Bible use during translation. Thus if Joseph had been cribbing from the Bible, it is strange that no one ever mentioned his using one. The apparent absence of a Bible during the work of translation makes the hypothesis of plagiarism less easy to maintain.

Why then does Joseph make use of King James English in the translation of the Book of Mormon? Simply because that was the accepted biblical language of the day.

When Jesus and the Apostles and, for that matter, the angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they

² For a good discussion of this problem see John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 131-41; Welch's book is reviewed by Todd Compton on pages 319-22 of the present volume. For further background and insight into the translation process see Stephen D. Ricks, "Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1986, and John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1986.

³ Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 133-34.

do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century B.C. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When "holy men of God" quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing. . . . Inspired men have in every age been content to accept the received version of the people among whom they labored, with the Spirit giving correction where correction was necessary.⁴

How did the translator do this without the use of a Bible? Although there is still much to learn, it seems perfectly reasonable to me that the Holy Ghost could have conveyed King James English to the mind of the Prophet, while he translated through the gift and power of God. This seems perfectly acceptable, since King James English was the accepted medium of scriptural expression in Joseph Smith's day.

Plagiarism and the New Testament

Pages 75-164 of the Tanners' work are devoted almost entirely to a long list of comparisons between Book of Mormon language and the New Testament, which constitutes the main thrust of the evidence for plagiarism. I believe that comparative studies can sometimes enhance our understanding of scripture, as long as they are balanced and fair. Yet the Tanner parallels are seriously flawed for several reasons. First, the authors assume that they can prove their case for plagiarism by mere comparison with the King James Version—yet, without examining the linguistic complexities behind each passage, comparison with the King James Version leaves too many questions unanswered. Indeed, they have in fact proved little more than was known before. Merely noting similarity does little to show why such a translation could not be appropriate from a linguistic standpoint, if Joseph Smith was inspired by God to render it so.

Secondly, the Tanners' argument assumes that many of their New Testament passages are unique to the New Testament. The presence of similar passages in the Book of Mormon is therefore seen as sure evidence of plagiarism, since the New

⁴ Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989), 215.

Testament was unavailable to Book of Mormon authors (pp. 79-81). Yet there are serious reasons to question this assumption.

Nibley pointed out long ago that the familiar "faith, hope, and charity" passage, which the Tanners compare with Moroni 7:44-46, may not necessarily be original with Paul, but rather may go back to an even older, as yet unknown source.⁵ Thus the authors' argument for plagiarism from Paul in this passage falls apart. The truth of the matter is that, until we can learn more about the background of such passages, the possibility that the Book of Mormon and the New Testament are independently quoting from an older source remains a very real one.

Another example of the problems with assuming that certain passages from the New Testament represent later developments, peculiar to Christianity, is seen in the Book of Mormon usage of the terms "Son of God" and "Son of the Most High God" (1 Nephi 11:6-7). These terms are seen by the Tanners as obvious plagiarisms from New Testament gospels (pp. 89-90, 159).⁶ Yet both titles have recently turned up in an unpublished Dead Sea Scroll fragment written in Aramaic from before the time of Jesus. Although it is unknown to whom the prophecy refers, the fragment states:

[X] shall be great upon the earth. [O king, all (people) shall] make [peace], and all shall serve [him]. He shall be called the son of] the [G]reat [God], and by his name shall be hailed (as) *the Son of God*, and they shall call him *Son of the Most High*,"

The writer for *Biblical Archaeology Review* states, "This is the first time that the term 'Son of God' has been found in a Palestinian text outside the Bible. . . . Previously some scholars have insisted that the origin of terms like 'Most High' and 'Son of the Most High' were to be found in Hellenistic usage outside of Palestine and that therefore they relate to later development of

⁵ Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 112; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 216. Since the Tanners quote from Nibley in their books, they should have mentioned this significant point.

⁶ Here they have followed the lead of other critics. Cf. Walter Martin, *The Maze of Mormonism* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1962), 325.

Christian doctrine. Now we know that these terms were part of Christianity's original Jewish heritage."⁷

If one small fragment can change our understanding of this term, is it really that hard to believe that other ideas and phrases found in the Book of Mormon, heretofore thought to be anachronistic, might also be verified in the future?

A third problem with the authors' parallels is that they have made no attempt to show where Book of Mormon prophets may have drawn upon Old Testament material, which *could* have been found on the brass plates. This is certainly an important issue in evaluating the worth of their comparisons. Yet they have failed to include this kind of information in their list. Since I used the same computer media they did, I can only assume that they have ignored those passages altogether. It is unfortunate that they would suppress this information.

Having reviewed the material in question, I conclude that most of the evidence may be divided into three groups:

1. Examples where Old Testament language is equal to or closer to the that of the New Testament passage given by the authors as proof of plagiarism.

2. Examples where Old Testament language can be found which very closely resembles that of the New Testament language.

3. Examples in which the Book of Mormon could have drawn upon Old Testament ideas.

What follows is a small sampling from a longer study by the present writer. For purposes of brevity, this review will only examine several of the Tanners' comparisons with passages from 1 Nephi. This will provide a good overview of the comparisons in general. The New Testament passages listed are those given by the Tanners as evidence of plagiarism.

Examples Where an Old Testament Rendering Is Equal to or Better Than the New Testament Reading Given by the Tanners

1 Nephi 8:19 a rod of iron (1 Nephi 11:25)

Revelation 12:5 a rod of iron

Psalms 2:9 a rod of iron

⁷ Hershel Shanks, "An Unpublished Dead Sea Scroll Text Parallels Luke's Infancy Narrative," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/2 (March-April 1990): 24.

1 Nephi 11:25 fountain of living waters
 Revelation 7:17 living fountains of waters
 Jeremiah 2:13 they have forsaken me the fountain of living
 waters
 Jeremiah 17:13 they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of
 living waters

1 Nephi 11:25 the tree of life
 Revelation 2:7; 22:2 the tree of life
 Genesis 2:9 the tree of life

1 Nephi 12:5 And . . . after I saw these things, I saw the vapor
 . . . passed from off the *face of the earth*
 Revelation 7:1 And after these things I saw four angels . . . on
 the *four corners of the earth*
 Numbers 22:5 *the face of the earth*

1 Nephi 15:16 true olive tree
 Romans 11:24 good olive tree
 Jeremiah 11:16 a green olive tree

1 Nephi 2:10-11 Steadfast, and immovable in keeping the
 commandments of the Lord! Now this he spake because of
 the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel.
 1 Corinthians 15:58 Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always
 abounding in the work of the Lord.
 Psalms 78:7-8, 37 That they might . . . not forget the works of
 God, but *keep his commandments*: And might not be as
 their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; . . .
 whose spirit was not *stedfast* with God. . . . Neither were
 they *stedfast* in his covenant.⁸ (see also Isaiah 48:18-19
 and 1 Nephi 20:18-19)

⁸ For other examples compare 1 Nephi 1:20, Acts 7:54, and Jeremiah 26:10; 1 Nephi 9:2, 1 Corinthians 1:15, and 2 Samuel 18:18; 1 Nephi 11:6, Matthew 27:46, and Ezekiel 9:1, 11:13; 1 Nephi 11:12, Acts 8:39, and Genesis 44:28; 1 Nephi 11:27, Matthew 3:13, and Ezekiel 1:1; 1 Nephi 11:31, Matthew 4:24, Ezekiel 34:4, Deuteronomy 7:15, Isaiah 53:5, and Psalms 103:3; 1 Nephi 12:4, Matthew 27:51, and Ezekiel 12:18; 1 Nephi 15:35, Matthew 8:12, and Jeremiah 14:16; 1 Nephi 18:14, Mark 6:51, and Genesis 43:1; 1 Nephi 2:2, Matthew 2:13, and Genesis 31:24.

In this last comparison,⁹ the authors have only circled the Book of Mormon phrase "steadfast and immovable" (p. 85), yet while the words steadfast and unmoveable occur together in the New Testament, it seems clear that the passage of 1 Nephi 2:10-11, taken as a whole, fits best into the context of Psalms 78, especially since Nephi always compares his family's experience with the Israelite Exodus from Egypt.

The Tanners have theorized that Joseph Smith used much of the book of Exodus to create the narrative in 1 Nephi.¹⁰ But, it would be surprising if there were *not* such thematic similarities between the two. Nephi frequently compared his own family's experience with that of his Israelite forebears (1 Nephi 4:2-3; 17:22-44). It is likely that Nephi deliberately drew upon this theme when he made his compilation on the small plates. Recent studies have shown us how the Israelite theme is interwoven throughout the Book of Mormon with admirable skill and complexity, all of which suggests that this is more than sloppy plagiarism.¹¹

Examples Where Old Testament Passages Are Nearly Identical in English to Those Found in the Book of Mormon

1 Nephi 1:14 Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty!

⁹ For a good discussion of the poetic complexity of this passage see Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 84-92.

¹⁰ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Case against Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1967-71), 2:77-81.

¹¹ George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in Neal A. Lambert, ed., *Literature and Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981), 245-62; John W. Welch and Avraham Gileadi, "Research and Perspectives: Nephi and the Exodus," *Ensign* 17 (April 1987): 64-65; Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies* 27 (Fall 1987): 22-33; Terrence L. Szink, "To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16-18)," in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60-72; Alan Goff, "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and the Book of Mormon," Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1989; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111-26; Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 38-51.

Revelation 15:3 Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty

Psalms 139:14 Marvellous are thy works

Psalms 92:5 O Lord, how great are thy works!

1 Nephi 7:11 What great things the Lord hath done for us (2 Nephi 1:1)

Mark 5:19 how great things the Lord hath done for thee

1 Samuel 12:24 for consider how great things he hath done for you

Psalms 106:21 They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt

Psalms 126:3 The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad

1 Nephi 10:8 cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight (1 Nephi 11:27)

Matthew 3:3 crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight

Isaiah 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

1 Nephi 10:19 For he that diligently seeketh shall find

Matthew 7:8 he that seeketh findeth

Deuteronomy 4:29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him.

Proverbs 8:17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me

Jeremiah 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart

1 Nephi 13:27 pervert the right ways of the Lord

Acts 13:10 pervert the right ways of the Lord

Jeremiah 23:36 for ye have perverted the words of the living God

1 Nephi 14:11 the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters (1 Nephi 13:10;14:12)

Revelation 17:1 the great whore that sitteth upon many waters

Jeremiah 51:13 O thou that dwellest upon many waters

1 Nephi 19:16 the four quarters of the earth

Revelation 20:8 the four quarters of the earth

Isaiah 11:12 the four corners of the earth (see also Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 38:6)

1 Nephi 22:18 blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke

Acts 2:19 blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke

Joel 2:30 blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke¹²

Examples Where Similar Ideas Could Have Been Found or Formulated from the Old Testament

1 Nephi 10:4 a Savior of the world (1 Nephi 13:40)

John 4:42 the Saviour of the world

Isaiah 43:11 I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour

Isaiah 52:10 all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Psalms 65:5; 67:7; 98:3; Isaiah 41:5; 45:22; Jeremiah 16:19)

1 Nephi 10:10 the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world (1 Nephi 11:21, 27, 31-32; 13:40)

John 1:29 the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world

Genesis 22:8 God will provide himself a lamb

Isaiah 53:6-7 The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
... He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.

¹² For other similar examples compare 1 Nephi 1:18, 1 John 1:3, and Deuteronomy 5:24; 1 Nephi 2:1, Luke 19:17, and 1 Kings 2:26; 1 Nephi 3:8, Luke 23:8, Job 3:22, and Psalms 21:6; 1 Nephi 3:20, Acts 3:21, Isaiah 64:4, and Ezekiel 38:17; 1 Nephi 3:24, Luke 7:36, and Daniel 2:16; 1 Nephi 7:16, Matthew 2:16, and Genesis 4:5; 1 Nephi 8:12, Matthew 2:10, Psalms 43:4, and 1 Kings 1:40; 1 Nephi 10:8, Luke 3:16, and Numbers 14:12; 1 Nephi 11:1, Matthew 4:8, and Ezekiel 40:2; 1 Nephi 11:13, Acts 7:20, Genesis 12:14, 24:16, and Daniel 12:10; 1 Nephi 11:28, Matthew 13:2, Isaiah 13:4, and Joel 3:14; 1 Nephi 11:30, John 1:51, and Genesis 28:12; 1 Nephi 11:34, Revelation 19:19, and 1 Samuel 13:5; 1 Nephi 11:35, Acts 8:26, and Judges 2:4; 1 Nephi 12:4, Revelation 8:5, and Isaiah 29:6; 1 Nephi 13:11, Romans 1:18, and Psalms 78:31; 1 Nephi 13:37, 2 Peter 1:11, Psalms 145:13, and Daniel 4:3; 1 Nephi 13:41, John 10:16, and Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24; 1 Nephi 14:15, Revelation 16:1, 2 Chronicles 34:21, and Psalms 78:31; 1 Nephi 15:15, John 15:1, and Genesis 49:11; 1 Nephi 15:18, Acts 3:25, and Genesis 15:18, 22:18; 1 Nephi 17:42, Acts 6:11, and Numbers 21:5; 1 Nephi 22:20, Acts 3:22-23, and Deuteronomy 18:15, 19; 1 Nephi 22:23, 1 John 2:15, and Isaiah 34:1.

1 Nephi 10:12 branches should be broken off
 Romans 11:19 branches were broken off
 Jeremiah 11:16 The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree
 . . . and the branches of it are broken (see also Ezekiel
 17:22-3)

1 Nephi 10:18 For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever
 Hebrews 13:8 the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever
 Psalms 102:24-27 Thy years are throughout all generations. Of
 old [yesterday] hast thou laid the foundation of the earth.
 . . . They shall perish, but thou shalt endure. . . . They
 shall be changed: But thou art [today] the same, and thy
 years shall have no end [forever].
 Psalms 90:2 From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (see
 also Malachi 3:6; Isaiah 46:10)

1 Nephi 12:10 Lamb of God their garments are made white in
 his blood (1 Nephi 12:11)
 Revelation 7:14 made them white in the blood of the Lamb
 Genesis 49:11 he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes
 in the blood of grapes
 Leviticus 8:30 And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of *the*
blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it *upon*
Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and
 upon his sons' garments with him; and *sanctified* Aaron,
 and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments
 with him. (see also Exodus 29:21; Daniel 12:10)

1 Nephi 12:18 a great and a terrible gulf divideth them (1 Nephi
 15:28)
 Luke 16:26 a great gulf fixed
 Exodus 8:23 And I will put a division between my people and
 thy people.

It will be remembered that the Lord divided the Red Sea—
 a great and terrible gulf, allowing the Israelites to pass through
 safely while the Egyptians were destroyed. Clearly the Lord
 separated the righteous, symbolized by the Israelites, from the
 wicked, symbolized by the Egyptian armies. It was the gulf
 which caused the inevitable separation (Exodus 14:21-30).¹³

¹³ For other examples compare 1 Nephi 5:18, Revelation 11:9,
 Genesis 10:20, Isaiah 66:18, and Psalms 22:27; 1 Nephi 6:5, John 17:14,

One comparison that deserves closer attention than the Tanners have given it is the one made between Nephi's vision and John's Apocalypse. Doesn't the similarity in passages prove that Joseph plagiarized the New Testament? I believe this assessment to be incorrect. Out of the 28 items John lists in his catalogue of Babylonian goods (Revelation 18:12-13), only five (gold, silver, fine linen, silk, and scarlet), are to be found in 1 Nephi 13:6-7. Why only these? Here is where a comparison with Old Testament passages would have been of real value. Unfortunately the Tanners have provided no Old Testament background against which 1 Nephi 13:6-7 can be measured. I am convinced that John and Nephi were both drawing upon the same familiar imagery of Israel and the temple. Note, for example, the comparisons below.

1 Nephi 13:7 And I also saw *gold*, and *silver*, and *silks*, and *scarlets*, and *fine-twined linen*, and all manner of precious clothing

Revelation 18:12 the merchandise of *gold*, and *silver*, and precious stones, and of pearls, and *fine linen*, and purple, and *silk*, and *scarlet*, and all thine wood . . . and all *manner* vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble.

and 1 Samuel 30:22; 1 Nephi 8:15, Luke 1:22, and Jeremiah 7:27; 1 Nephi 8:20, Matthew 7:14, and Psalms 27:11, 119:35; 1 Nephi 8:23, 2 Peter 2:17, Genesis 15:12, and Job 3:5; 1 Nephi 9:6, 1 John 3:20, and 2 Samuel 14:20; 1 Nephi 10:17, Acts 1:16, and Micah 3:8; 1 Nephi 11:1, Acts 8:39, and Ezekiel 3:12, 11:24; 1 Nephi 11:7, John 1:34, and Psalms 2:7; 1 Nephi 11:22, Romans 5:5, and Psalms 36:10; 1 Nephi 11:31, Matthew 4:23, and Psalms 103:2-3; 1 Nephi 11:31, Matthew 4:24, Leviticus 17:7, and 1 Samuel 16:14; 1 Nephi 11:33, 1 John 2:2, Isaiah 24:5, and Daniel 9:24; 1 Nephi 11:36, Matthew 7:27, Revelation 16:21, and Isaiah 24:20; 1 Nephi 12:2, Matthew 24:6, Isaiah 37:7, and Jeremiah 4:19, 51:46; 1 Nephi 12:4, Matthew 27:51, and 1 Kings 19:11; 1 Nephi 12:7, Acts 11:15, and Numbers 24:2, 11:25; 1 Nephi 12:18, Romans 1:21, Psalms 119:113, and Jeremiah 4:14; 1 Nephi 13:28, Revelation 1:11, and Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Nephi 13:28, Revelation 13:8, Exodus 32:31, and Isaiah 34:16; 1 Nephi 13:37, Luke 2:10, and Isaiah 52:7; 1 Nephi 13:39, Revelation 20:12, and Daniel 7:10; 1 Nephi 13:41, Mark 12:32, and Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Nephi 14:28, Revelation 10:4, and Daniel 12:4; 1 Nephi 19:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Nephi 19:9, Matthew 18:7, and Isaiah 13:11; 1 Nephi 19:14, Matthew 24:9, and Jeremiah 49:15.

Exodus 28:6, 8, 15 And they shall make the ephod of *gold*, of blue, and of purple, of *scarlet*, and *fine twined linen*. . . . And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of *gold*, of blue, and purple, and *scarlet*, and *fine twined linen*. . . . And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work . . . of *gold*, of blue, and of purple, and of *scarlet*, and of *fine twined linen*.

Ezekiel 16:10-13, 15 I clothed thee also with broidered work. . . . I girded thee about with *fine linen*, and I covered thee with *silk*. . . . Thus wast thou decked with *gold* and *silver*; and thy raiment was of *fine linen*, and *silk*, and broidered work . . . but thou . . . playedst the harlot. [It is profitable to examine 1 Nephi in light of this whole chapter]

It is interesting to note that, while John uses the term "fine linen," Nephi uses the term "fine-twined linen" which is also used in Exodus in the description of the tabernacle and the garments of the High Priest. In short, there appears to be a closer relationship between 1 Nephi 13-14 and the Old Testament imagery of the temple than there is with the New Testament book of Revelation. Thus the case for plagiarism in this passage seems unwarranted.

Frankly, I was surprised to find that so much of the material had reasonable precedents in Old Testament scriptures.¹⁴ Still, the problems associated with examining only the English translations are clear. I would like to see an in-depth study of the Semitic background behind the New Testament passages which most resemble those in the Book of Mormon. I believe that such a study would show how frequently the New Testament draws on older material. Given the tentative and preliminary nature of this kind of evidence, it seems a little presumptuous for the authors to proclaim that they have "proved" the Book of Mormon a modern forgery (p. 84), especially since they have excluded any discussion of the Old Testament background behind these passages, and in some cases seem to have suppressed evidence where the Old Testament provides a closer reading.

¹⁴ For a treatment of the Old Testament backgrounds to Matthew 5-7, see Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 113-29.

The Small Plates: A Conglomeration of Odds and Ends

The authors assert that the small plates of Nephi contain little significant historical information (pp. 12-27) But I think that they have oversimplified the situation. I would agree that some portions of the Book of Mormon give less information on history than others, but this may be said for many parts of the book (4 Nephi for example), and not the small plates alone. But even so, how can the Tanners' theory account for what *is* there? Critics have had a field day, for example, with Nephi's description of life in the Arabian desert.¹⁵ Yet scholars who have taken the time to examine this part of the Book of Mormon in detail have demonstrated that it displays an astounding degree of historical and literary complexity. The Tanners' theory does little to account for this.

I find it odd that, while the authors would quote a statement by Hugh Nibley on page 84, they are completely silent about his landmark studies dealing with this section of the Book of Mormon,¹⁶ to say nothing of the work of more recent scholars. The complex situation at Jerusalem,¹⁷ strange descriptions of desert life,¹⁸ directions of travel,¹⁹ the complex

¹⁵ See for example M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible: Is It from God?* (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1887), 60-68, whom the Tanners recommend. "It certainly would not have been possible for them to journey from Jerusalem to the Red Sea in three days, approximately 175 miles, with a party which included women and children and the old patriarch Lehi." Gordon H. Fraser, *What Does the Book of Mormon Teach?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 35, cf. 33-38. As recently as 1985, one critic saw the idea of a place called Bountiful as just too funny for words. "Arabia is bountiful in sunshine, petroleum, sand, heat, and fresh air, but certainly not in 'much fruit and wild honey,' nor has it been since the creation of time." Thomas Key, *A Biologist Looks at the Book of Mormon* (Issaquah, WA: Saints Alive in Jesus, 1985), 1-2. In light of the research which has been done on Lehi's desert experience, such criticisms seem almost comical.

¹⁶ Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988); *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988); *Since Cumorah*, 137-290.

¹⁷ Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 3-24; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 380-406.

¹⁸ Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43-123; *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 59-144; *Since Cumorah*, 264-90;

motif of the Tree of Life,²⁰ the broken bow incident,²¹ the place called Nahom,²² a bountiful oasis along the southeastern Arabian coast²³ (just to name a few elements), make the authors' assertion that the small plates are merely a hodgepodge with no significant historical information hard to swallow.

Another example of the superficial nature of the Tanners' work is their assertion that Joseph Smith used the Isaiah chapters in 1 and 2 Nephi as filler material to make up for what was lost in the 116 pages. "It seems rather obvious," say the authors, "that Joseph Smith did not have any important historical Nephite-Lamanite material to fill in the gap. Consequently he was forced to insert a conglomeration of 'odds and ends' to use up space" (p. 23). "While [Nephi] claims that he is copying from the 'plates of brass,' it is obvious . . . that the material really comes from the 48th and 49th chapters of the Book of Isaiah in the King James Version of the Bible" (p. 23). "Nephi

19 Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43-118; Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail," *Ensign* 6 (September 1976): 33-54; (October 1976): 34-62; Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in Noel B. Reynolds and Charles D. Tate, eds., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982):143-56; Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, "The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi's Trail," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1988.

20 Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43-46; Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 157-62, 188-92; C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 75-101; William J. Hamblin, "Pre-Islamic Arabian Prophets," in Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1983), 96-97.

21 Nahum Waldman, "The Breaking of the Bow," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69 (October 1978): 82-88; Goff, "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts," 92-99.

22 Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 79; Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign* 8 (August 1978): 73; Aston and Aston, "The Search for Nahom," 1-16; Goff, "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts," 92-107; "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom," in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991): 92-99.

23 Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 108-13; England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land," 144-54; Aston and Aston, "The Search for Nahom," 16-23.

then proceeds to quote *thirteen chapters* of Isaiah . . . from the King James Version!" This is really a surprise to the authors. "That Joseph Smith would have to throw in so many chapters of Isaiah as filler shows that he was having a very difficult time trying to find something suitable to replace the material in the lost 116 pages. . . . The fact that we already have the same material in our Bible makes the situation even more ridiculous" (p. 24).

Yet all this is nothing new. The more important questions, which the Tanners never get to, are what to make of the Isaiah *variants* in the Book of Mormon and what to say of the sensitive selection and use of these quoted passages.²⁴ John Tvedtnes has done a rather thorough study of these and has shown that the Book of Mormon variants accord remarkably well with other texts of Isaiah, and in some cases provide a superior reading to the King James Translation.²⁵ This fact greatly weakens the Tanners' case that this material was just filler to save time and worry.²⁶

²⁴ Book of Mormon critics of the past objected not so much to the Bible passages as they did to the variants between the two. H. Stevenson complained in 1839, "I likewise object to the undue liberty which the author of Mormon has taken with the language of the Holy Ghost, in making so many unwarrantable alterations in many of the passages which he has quoted," *Lecture on Mormonism* (Newcastle: Blackwell, 1839). For William Palmer these passages are a "wretched mangling," a "horrible mutilation of scripture" which "would be truly laughable were they not too shocking to be ridiculous," *Mormonism Briefly Examined* (London: Hall, 1849), 2. If the Prophet was plundering the Bible to save time, he certainly made it hard on himself by going to the trouble of changing everything. The authors seem to be unaware of the significance of those variants.

²⁵ John Tvedtnes, "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, eds., *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1984), 165-77. This was an abbreviated version of a 137-page study made available as a F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report in 1981.

²⁶ The Tanners have also claimed that the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12-14 represents another example of "filler" material in the Book of Mormon (p. 72). They have again ignored the complexities of the variants and also the Old Testament background behind such material. Larson's arguments, to which the Tanners vaguely refer, have been answered by Welch. See Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 91-129, 145-63.

Other Problems

Although the authors dislike the small plates of Nephi, they object to other portions of the Book of Mormon as well. "Our research with regard to the black hole in the small plates of Nephi made us aware of the fact that the entire Book of Mormon is also lacking a significant number of important things that should be there if the book were really a history of ancient Jewish people in the New World" (p. 46). The authors are puzzled as to why the Book of Mormon rarely mentions its money system after the chapter 11 of Alma. For them this is evidence that "Joseph Smith never did take his money system very seriously. Perhaps he was too lazy to look back in the manuscript to see what names he had given to the various pieces" (p. 50). But perhaps the Tanners might wonder how this "lazy" boy came up with a money system so brilliantly complex, which happens, incidentally, to make very good sense in an ancient setting,²⁷ and may even have employed a few ancient Near Eastern names.²⁸ Just another lucky guess?

Since a computer check of the Book of Mormon does not reveal the existence of words such as "passover," "Jubilee," or "booths," the authors conclude, "In the Book of Mormon . . . there is *not even one case where a Jewish Feast or Festival* was celebrated in the New World!" (p. 59). Although I would like to give the authors the benefit of the doubt, I find it difficult to believe that they are completely ignorant of the work that has been done in recent years on King Benjamin's address. On page 84 they quote from Hugh Nibley; why don't they mention his studies on Near Eastern festivals and the Book of Mormon?²⁹ Contrary to the authors' assertion, it can be shown—rather convincingly, in my opinion—that Mosiah 1-6 represents a prime example of a New Year rite in the ancient Near East, such

²⁷ Richard P. Smith, "The Nephite Money System," *Improvement Era* 57 (1954): 316-17; Paul R. Jesclard, "A Comparison of the Nephite Monetary System with the Egyptian System of Measuring Grain," *The Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 134 (October 1973): 1-5; "Weights and Measures in the Time of Mosiah II," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1983.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 295-310; *Since Cumorah*, 247-51; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 247-48.

as the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles.³⁰ Scholars have also noted elements of the ancient coronation rite and covenant renewal ceremony in Mosiah 1-6.³¹

King Benjamin's speech also appears to contain all the major elements of a classic farewell address.³²

One has to wonder if the authors are deliberately suppressing such information.³³ The authors would give their readers the impression that they have at last come up with "absolutely devastating" evidence against the Book of Mormon's authenticity, yet most of the criticisms which they raise are merely rehashes or expansions on familiar criticisms of previous

³⁰ Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 295-310; John Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 2:197-237.

³¹ Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1-6)," *BYU Studies* 25 (1984): 151-62; John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," F.A.R.M.S. working paper, 1985; Gordon C. Thomasson, "Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and the Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. working paper, 1982; "The Coronation of Kings," F.A.R.M.S. Update, July 1989. For evidence of other ritualistic elements in the Book of Mormon see "The Sons of the Passover," F.A.R.M.S. Update, August 1984; "The Execution of Zemnariyah," F.A.R.M.S. Update, November 1984; "New Year's Celebrations," F.A.R.M.S. Update, January 1985; "Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av," F.A.R.M.S. Update, February 1985; "Abinadi and Pentecost," F.A.R.M.S. Update, September 1985; "This Day," F.A.R.M.S. Update, April 1990.

³² "Benjamin's Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address," F.A.R.M.S. Update, June 1987, citing William S. Kurtz, "Luke 22:14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104/2 (1985): 251-68. It can be shown that King Benjamin's speech meets more of Kurtz's criteria than any example which he has listed.

³³ Lawrence Foster, a non-Latter-day Saint historian states, "Even when the Tanners backhandedly praise objective Mormon scholarship, they do so primarily as a means of twisting that scholarship for use as yet another debater's ploy to attack the remaining—and in their eyes insurmountable—Mormon deficiencies." Foster also notes that "until the Tanners are prepared to abide by accepted standards of scholarly behavior and of common courtesy, they can expect little sympathy from serious historians." Lawrence Foster, "Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17/2 (Summer 1984): 45-46.

anti-Mormon polemicists, with little attempt to understand why such arguments have proved inadequate in the past.³⁴ Although their latest work presents an interesting theory, that theory ignores or fails to account for most of the complexities found in the Book of Mormon. The last decade alone has seen a virtual avalanche of information which tends to support the view that the Book of Mormon is not only ancient, but remarkably complex in ways we had not thought of before.³⁵ Until the authors are willing to deal seriously with such information, honestly and objectively, their "black hole" arguments will amount to little more than an insignificant perturbation on the continuum of warped anti-Mormon space and time.

³⁴ Their predictions of doom regarding the future of the Book of Mormon (pp. 75, 84) seem completely out of touch with current advances of Book of Mormon research. (See the most recent F.A.R.M.S. Catalogue for information on recent research).

³⁵ The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies has recently published a whole volume dealing with the complexities associated with warfare alone in the Book of Mormon. See Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books and F.A.R.M.S., 1990). Such scholarship suggests that the Book of Mormon is far more complex than the authors would like their readers to believe. See the reviews of this book by David Honey and Kurt Weiland in this issue. See also Sorenson and Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*.