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View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?

SPENCER J. PALMER AND WILLIAM L. KNECHT*

Recent imputations against Joseph Smith contain the charge that the Isaiah chapters of the *Book of Mormon* were purloined by the Prophet from a popular book first published in 1823 by a Protestant clergyman named Ethan Smith, under the title *View of the Hebrews: Exhibiting the Destruction of Jerusalem; the Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel; the Present State of Judah and Israel; and an Address of the Prophet Isaiah Relative to Their Restoration*.¹ Joseph Smith's detractors look upon this alleged act of plagiarism as a betrayal of his claim of a sacrosanct origin of the *Book of Mormon*.

Writers like Fawn M. Brodie and G. T. Harrison approach these "Isaiah parallels" with particular rejoicing and ridicule.² To quote Brodie:

. . . in writing the early portion of the book [The Book of Mormon] his [Joseph Smith's] literary reservoir frequently ran dry. When this happened he simply arranged for his Nephite prophets to quote from the Bible. Thus about twenty-five thousand words in the Book of Mormon consist of passages from the Old Testament—CHIEFLY THOSE CHAPTERS FROM ISAAH MENTIONED IN ETHAN SMITH'S VIEW OF THE HEBREWS--³ (Emphasis added).

Fortunately this allegation can be tested empirically. In an effort to judge the validity of the charge, we have taken the so-called Isaiah portion of the *Book of Mormon* (i.e., II

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¹Printed by Smith & Shute at Poultney, Vt., in two editions: 1823 and 1825.

²This is not to say that Harrison and Brodie are of the same scholastic stripe. Harrison's *Mormons Are Peculiar People* (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1954) often reaches the absurd. His tongue-in-cheek style is undisturbed by documentation. Brodie, on the other hand, takes her project seriously and uses footnotes regularly in her book: *No Man Knows my History; The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946). But see Hugh Nibley, *No Ma'am That's Not History* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Publishers, 1946).

³Brodie, 58.

Nephi) and recorded every identifiable reference, allusion, quotation, near (or partial) quotation in it, from Isaiah. Because Isaiah repeats himself (or rather repeats allusions) sometimes there is more than one Isaiah reference in any particular verse in II Nephi (e.g., II Nephi 7:2 is a quotation [Isaiah 50:2] and has identifiable reference to Isaiah 65:12 and 66:4.) We have limited the count to one identification unless it is in a verse common to both *View of the Hebrews* and to II Nephi. In that case, we have tabulated and counted all the references to see if any of the identifications or uses of a given verse are common.

We have attempted to carry an analysis of the common use of Isaiah beyond the broad brush technique of Mrs. Brodie. Table 1 lists the *verses* within each of the two works from Isaiah. A total of 459 identifiable references from Isaiah have been found in the book; 361 of that total are found in II Nephi; 116 in *View of the Hebrews*; 23 verses are common to both. It will be noted that there is no reference to Isaiah 66 in Table 1. This comes from the fact that although both *View of the Hebrews* and the *Book of Mormon* contain possible allusions or quotations from this chapter, the former uses verses 18, 20, and 21, while the latter refers only to verse 19.⁴

A total of 37 *chapters* of Isaiah are source for allusion, reference, quotation, near-quotation, or "mention" in the two works. Ethan Smith confined his "mentionings" to 24 chapters (giving credit for a "mention" when he simply makes a partial quotation from one verse even though he does not give credit for the quotation, e.g. see *View of the Hebrews*, 135 (232). The Prophets of II Nephi "quote" from 20 chapters and make allusions and/or references to (parts of) two more chapters, making a total of 22. There are nine Isaiah chapters commonly used in *View of the Hebrews* and the *Book of Mormon*.

Brodie bases her claim of plagiarism from *View of the Hebrews* upon the common use of Isaiah *chapters*. Does this existence of similar material in the two books damage the Latter-day Saint claim of the divine origin of the *Book of Mormon*?

Though it is proverbial that liars can figure, there is one test that can be applied to the statistics generated from this

⁴Typical examples of the use of Isaiah references by Ethan Smith and by the prophets of II Nephi are set forth in Table 3, in parallel columns.

Table No. 1
 ISAIAH REFERENCE COMPARISON
 (Resume of Verse by Verse Comparison)

Book of Mormon		Description	Isaiah		View of the Hebrews	
References ^a . 1st Ed.	2nd Ed.		Ch.	Verse	Description	Reference ^b .
NR	235	Allusion	5	26	Allusion	2 Nephi 29: 2
			5	26	Quotation	15:26
NR	236	Part Quote	7	8	Quotation	17: 8
NR	235	Allusion	7	18	"	17:18
NR	256	Quotation	10	20	"	20:20
NR	256	Quotation	10	21	"	21:21
NR	256	Quotation	10	22	"	20:22
58	56	Quotation	11	11	"	21:11
58	56	Quotation ^c .	11	12	"	21:12
73	70	Part Quote	11	12	"	21:12
143	242	Quotation	11	12		
73	72	Part Quote	11	13	"	21:13
58	56	Quotation ^c .	11	15	"	21:15
59	56	Quotation ^c .	11	16	"	21:16
NR	63	Quotation	14	1	"	24: 1
NR	62	Allusion	14	25	"	24:25
159	260	Part Quote ^c .	49	1	Allusion	10:21
65	63	Allusion	49	22	Quotation	6: 6
75	73	Allusion	49	22		
65	63	Allusion	49	23	Quotation	6: 7
161	261	Part Quote	51	3	"	8: 3
61	58	Quotation ^c .	60	9	Allusion	10:21
136	233	Part Quote	60	9		

study which is valid in judging the claim of Brodie that Joseph Smith cribbed from another's work, when he could not find any other source of inspiration. Following a method of analysis widely accepted by statisticians—the test for hypergeometric distribution—we shall assume that the two authors worked independently, that there was *no* collusion. Under this method of analysis, the probability is that a certain number of chapters *will* appear in common.

By using the figures applicable in this case, one should assume that eight chapters should most frequently appear in common. As indicated in Table 2, our survey finds nine such common chapters: 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, 49, 51, 60 and 66. This is an insignificant variation from eight, and one which, statistically speaking, should be expected a large proportion of the time. In fact, nine or more chapters in common under the

data of this test should appear 46 percent of the time, or in other words, have a .46 probability.⁵

The validity of this test is suggested by the following analysis: If Joseph Smith had foreseen and tried to avoid an attack such as that Brodie lays to him, he might well have avoided *all* references to Isaiah which were quoted by Ethan Smith, since Ethan had already referred his reader to that text. The absence of any common Isaiah chapters would have been suspicious indeed, since this would strongly suggest a deliberate effort to avoid suspicion particularly if it is realized that the book of Isaiah is a primary source for anyone dealing with the subject of the dispersion and gathering of Israel. The odds are approximately one in one million against there being *no* common Isaiah chapters in the *Book of Mormon* and *View of the Hebrews*. Judged on the basis of this analysis, neither Brodie nor Harrison has yet solved the enigma of Joseph Smith's inspiration.

a. Parallel listing of pages from the two editions reflects the same reference, quotation, or allusion. In rewriting the text for the second printing, Reverend Smith made some additions and deletions; hence there are not always parallel references and the designation "NR" (no reference) appears.

b. All chapter and verse references are to editions of the *Book of Mormon* printed subsequent to 1920. The initial division into chapters and verses occurred in 1879. A revision of the footnotes was made in 1920. It is upon these notes that the writers relied in tabulating the Isaiah references.

⁵The writers are indebted to Melvin W. Carter, of the Brigham Young University faculty, for suggesting the application of the test for hypergeometric distribution to this problem and for working out the probability upon the basis of our tabulations. A discussion of this method of analysis is found in B. W. Lindgren & G. W. McElrath, *Introduction to Probability and Statistics*. The Macmillan Company, (New York: 1959) 146-147.

Our conclusions are based upon the following exercise:

- a. Classify each chapter of Isaiah as being in *View of the Hebrews* (Q) or
- b. as not appearing in *View of the Hebrews* (R).
- c. Q plus R equals N (the total number of Isaiah chapters).
- d. y equals the number of chapters common to both works.
- e. n equals the number of chapters used by II Nephi prophets.
- f. Solve the formula

$$P(y) = \frac{\binom{Q}{y} \binom{R}{n-y}}{\binom{N}{n}}$$

c. Quotation, but without verse reference; always true of *Book of Mormon* quotations.

Table No. 2
ISAIAH REFERENCE COMPARISON
(Chapter by chapter)

View of Hebrews*	Book of Mormon*
	(2 Nephi)
	2
	3
	4
5	5
	6
7	7
10	10
11	11
	12
	13
14	14
16	
18	
26	
	28
	29
35	
36	
40	
41	
42	
43	
44	
49	49
	50
51	51
	52
	55
56	
58	
59	
60	60
63	
65	
66	66

* The number indicates Isaiah chapter from which the respective works make mention, quotation, allusion, citation or reference.

Table No. 3
 ISAIAH REFERENCE COMPARISON
 Textual Comparison

View of the Hebrews ^a	Isaiah	Book of Mormon ^b (2 Nephi)
<p>But that it may appear that the prophetic writings unite to exhibit this as a great object of the christian's belief, I shall note some of the other predictions of it.</p> <p>In Isaiah xi, the stem from the root of Jesse is promised. The Millennium follows, when the cow and the bear shall feed together, and the wolf and the lamb unite in love; and nothing more shall hurt or offend. 11. "And is shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again, the second time, to gather the remnant of his people, who shall be left, from Assyria and from Egypt, and from Patbros, and from the isles of the sea."</p>	Isaiah 11:11	<p>his hand on the cockatrice's den.</p> <p>9. ¶They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for ^hthe earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.</p> <p>10. And in that day ⁱthere shall be a root of Jesse, which shall ^jstand for an ensign of the people; to it ^kshall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.</p> <p>11. And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again ^lthe second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, ^mfrom Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Patbros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.</p>
<p>12. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the four corners of the earth." Here just before the Millennium, the Jews and ten tribes are collected from their long dispersion, by the hand of Omnipotence, set a second time for their recovery.—</p> <p>This standard of salvation at that period, is a notable event in the prophets. See <i>Isai. xi. 12</i>, where God sets his hand a second time to gather his Hebrew family from all nations and regions</p>	11:12	<p>12. And he shall ⁿset up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the ^ooutcasts of Israel, and ^pgather together the dispersed of Judab from the four corners of the earth.</p>

- a. 1825 Edition
 b. 1830 Edition

13. ^qThe envy of E^pbraim also shall depart, and the adversaries of Judab shall be cut off; E^pbraim shall not envy Judab, and Judab shall not vex E^pbraim.

14. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west; they shall spoil them of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

15. And the Lord ^rshall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and ^smake men go over dry shod.

11:13

13; "The envy also of E^pbraim shall depart; E^pbraim shall not envy Judab, and Judab shall not vex E^pbraim." Here the mutual jealousies between the two branches of the house of Israel, which before the expulsion of the ten tribes kept them in almost perpetual war, shall never again be revived; which passage assures us of the restoration of Israel as Israel.

In Jer. iii. those two branches are distinguished by "back-sliding Israel, and her treacherous sister Judab." Israel was already put away for

A body of the Jews, and some of several other tribes, were recovered from ancient Babylon. God is going, in the last days, to make a *second*, and more *effectual* recovery from mystical Babylon, and from the four quarters of the earth. The prophet proceeds; 15. "And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall unite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod. 16. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt." Mr. Scott, upon this passage, says; "For the Lord will then remove all obstacles by the same powerful interposition, that he vouchsafed in behalf of Israel, when He sep-

14. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west; they shall spoil them of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

15. And the Lord ^rshall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and ^smake men go over dry shod.

16. ^tAnd there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, ^ulike as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

11:15

11:16

Upon this final restoration of his brethren, this prophet exults in lofty strains. Several of the many of these strains shall be here inserted. Isai. xlix. *Listen O isles unto me; (or ye lands away over the sea) hearken ye people from afar.* 11. I will make all my mountains a way; and my high way shall be exalted. 12. Behold these shall come from *far*; and lo, these from the north, and from

49: 1

20. And now, my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea.

21. But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the *isles of the sea*; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

22. For behold, the Lord God has ^oled away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also.

5. And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

6. And now these are the words: *Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.*

49:22

7. *And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.*

49:23

8. And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has ^dshown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

ness in the latter days." Here is a description of the present dispersed state of Israel; and a prediction of their national restoration, "in the latter days."

This restoration is a great event in the prophets; and we find it in the New Testament. Paul (in his epistle to the Romans, chap. xi.) notes their being again grafted into their own olive tree, as a notable event of the last days, which shall be the "riches of the gentiles;" yea, "life from the dead" to them. *See also Isaiah, xlix. 18-23.* One passage more I will adduce from the writings of Moses; Deut. xxx. The long and doleful dispersion of this people had been predicted in the preceding chapters. Here their final restoration follows. "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, and thou shalt call them to mind

CHAPTER 8.

Jacob's teachings continued—Compare Isaiah 51.

1. Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness. Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged.
2. Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him.
3. For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; and he will *make her wilderness like Eden*, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.
4. Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people.

51: 3

almost like the conversion of dragons and owls of the desert. Rivers of knowledge and grace shall in such wilds be opened for God's chosen. It will then truly be fulfilled, that God in comforting Zion, will "*make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord*," Isai. li. 3. Such passages will have a degree of both literal and mystical fulfillment.

A signal beauty will then be discovered in such passages as the following; Isai. xli. 14. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord God, thy Redeem-

20. And now, my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea.

21. But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon *the isles of the sea*; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

22. For behold, the Lord God has ^oled away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also.

60: 9

The same thing is noted in Isaiah lx. The Jewish church is called upon; "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. The gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. 8. Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows? 9. *Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee.*" Here are ships conveying