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Book Excerpt: Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon

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Book Excerpt: *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*

Royal Skousen's work continues on the *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. Below is an excerpt from part four, forthcoming this summer.

Alma 43:13–14

*and thus the Nephites were compelled alone to withstand against the Lamanites
which were a compound of Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael
and all those which had [desented >jg dissented 1] dissented ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST]
from the Nephites
which were Amlicites and Zoramites
and the [desendants 01]descendants ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST] of the priests of Noah
now those [desenters 0]descendants 1]descendants ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST]
were as numerous nearly as were the Nephites*

At the beginning of Alma 43:14, the original manuscript reads *desenters*, which Oliver Cowdery miscopied into the printer's manuscript as *desendants*; in other words, he ended up replacing *dissenters* with *descendants*. This mistake (a visual error) was facilitated by the similar spelling Oliver used for both these words. Notice that earlier in this verse Oliver wrote *dissented* as *desented* in \mathcal{D} (but which the 1830 typesetter respelled in \mathcal{D} as *dissented*). Moreover, at the end of verse 13, Oliver spelled *descendants* as *desendants* in both manuscripts. The proximity of this last instance prompted the error at the beginning of verse 14.

Here we have a clear example where the current text states a highly improbable increase in population. It is at most only a couple of generations since the priests of Noah (the Amulonites) got their start, yet the current text states that by this time their descendants were nearly as numerous as the Nephites! On the other hand, the original manuscript makes perfectly good sense when it claims that there had been so many dissenters over the years that now these Nephite dissenters had become nearly as populous as the remaining Nephites. The original, correct reading thus shows how precarious the situation had become for the Nephites.

Summary

Restore in Alma 43:14 the reading of the original manuscript: “now those **dissenters** were as numerous nearly as were the Nephites”; here the text is referring to the total number of Nephite dissenters, which includes the descendants of king Noah's priests.

Symbols

0 stands for the original manuscript (\mathcal{O})
1 stands for the printer's manuscript (\mathcal{D})
A–T stands for printed editions of the Book of Mormon, from the 1830 (A) to the 1981 (T)
jg means that John Gilbert, the 1830 typesetter, made the change in the printer's manuscript

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