1992

Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*

John A. Tvedtnes

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr

Title

Author(s)   John A. Tvedtnes

Abstract   Review of *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon* (1990), by Wesley P. Walters.

Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990. viii + 231 pp., with appendices and bibliography. $7.00.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

Mr. Walters's master's thesis has been known to Book of Mormon researchers since it was first submitted to the Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, in 1981. Now that it has been issued for public distribution by Jerald and Sandra Tanners' Utah Lighthouse Ministry, it seems appropriate that it be reviewed here.

Some minor updating was done to the book, but the text was not retyped. For example, a reference to one of the Tanners' own books, published after Walters wrote his thesis, has been added to the end of footnote 40 (p. 35). The insertion is, however, crooked, and was evidently typed at the end of the footnote with the paper not straight. But studies favoring the authenticity and antiquity of the Nephite record were ignored. Walters, when citing Latter-day Saint writers, typically used only those whose works are superficial, incomplete, and sometimes erroneous by current standards.

The information in Walters's book, though presented as scholarly research, has long been used by anti-Mormon writers as a source for "evidence" against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Mr. Walters shares this bias against the Book of Mormon,[1] and it has colored his study of its use of the Old Testament.

Unfortunately, Walters falls into the same trap as a number of other Book of Mormon critics. Basic factual errors found in his work suggest that he was so pressed to get into the negative aspects of the Book of Mormon that he neglected to examine his material seriously. In his preface, his oversimplification of the contents and story of the Book of Mormon results in minor errors that would catch the eye of even casual Latter-day Saint readers. For example, he has Moroni abridging the Nephite record instead of his father Mormon (p. v). But it is in other areas that I have serious concerns about the book.

---

[1] Walters, a minister, wrote a number of articles critical of the Latter-day Saint Church and its doctrines, including the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith's Use of the Bible

I believe that Mr. Walters has overstated the case when he claims that Joseph Smith was well acquainted with the Bible because of his early Methodist involvement. Though I have been an avid Bible reader since the age of eight (with earlier exposure through Bible classes with the Assembly of God), I have only recently come to realize how much of the Old Testament is reflected in the Book of Mormon. I typically read the Bible once a year and the Book of Mormon once or twice. Extensive academic preparation has also given me insights unavailable to the general public. Joseph Smith was less than half my age when he produced the Book of Mormon, so it is hard for me to believe that he could have known so much more about the Bible at the time he dictated the Book of Mormon. This is, however, a very subjective judgment, and I may be wrong. But the same can be said of Mr. Walters's opinion on this matter.

In cases where it seems unlikely that Joseph Smith could have picked up material from the Bible, Walters indicates that the Prophet got the ideas from Bible commentaries of the day (p. 49, n. 53). Our knowledge of the Smith family finances, though, makes it difficult to believe that Joseph Smith had access to such books.[2]

Walters suggests that Joseph Smith used Old Testament passages in the Book of Mormon text in the same way that "frontier preachers of that day would have done" (p. 94). He noted, for example, that Isaiah 52:7-10, often cited in whole or in part in the Book of Mormon, "must have been found frequently upon the lips of the frontier evangelists of Joseph Smith's day" (pp. 11, 41). I believe that he has gone too far in

---

[2]   Walters is only one of a myriad of scholars who have tried to determine what Joseph Smith could have known by examining what was published prior to the Prophet's work on the Book of Mormon. D. Michael Quinn, for example, in his *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), cited books that were a century or two old by Joseph Smith's time to show what was known. Despite his reputation as an historian and his favorable view of Joseph Smith, Quinn seems to be suggesting that Joseph Smith had access to these books. In my opinion, such ties have not been adequately established. Cf. Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library," *Brigham Young University Studies* 22/3 (Summer 1982): 333-56; also available as a F.A.R.M.S. reprint, 1982.

assuming that this is how "frontier preachers" would have handled the Old Testament. He gives no documentary evidence for this assertion.

One of Walters's pieces of evidence that Joseph Smith was well acquainted with the Bible is the Prophet's generous use of Bible passages in his own revelations (p. 13). What Walters fails to tell us is that all but a handful of these revelations were written after the Book of Mormon was published and therefore do not constitute evidence for the extent of Joseph Smith's Bible knowledge at the time he translated the Nephite record. Besides, Walters makes the *a priori* assumption that the revelations were not from God, but were Joseph Smith's own invention, alongside the Book of Mormon.

What concerns me most about studies like this one is the inconsistency in the author's approach. For example, Walters's appraisal of Joseph Smith's abilities follows his own convenience. If Joseph used a KJV passage in the Book of Mormon, it is because he knew the Bible well. If he used a Greek form instead of a Hebrew form of a name, it is because he was ignorant of the Bible's use of the name and picked it up from a name list in the back of the Bible (pp. 19-20). But if Joseph Smith knew the Bible so well, why did he include the well-known New Testament name Timothy in the Book of Mormon? Why did he use the form Jonas, which he would have known from Matthew 12:39-41 to be the New Testament form of Jonah? And why use the name Esaias, which is the way Isaiah is rendered whenever his writings are cited in the New Testament? Surely the explanation lies elsewhere.[3]

Walters points out that the use of wording from Malachi 4:1 in two pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages (1 Nephi 22:15; 2 Nephi 26:4, 6) is anachronistic, since Malachi lived two centuries after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem and could not

---

3   Walters's arguments concerning the apparent Greek forms are further weakened by the fact that he has misunderstood how the New Testament uses Old Testament names. He says that Greek has no 'h' by which to transliterate Hebrew names ending in 'ah,' so "there developed a trend to end such names in 's' " (p. 19, n. 20). I find it hard to believe that a theological seminary would let such an erroneous statement pass. The 's' added to Old Testament names is the Greek nominative singular masculine form, which is a normal ending for masculine nouns. Its use was not "a trend" applied to Hebrew names; it was also used on Greek and other foreign names. Unfortunately, it is not consistently transliterated in the KJV New Testament.

have been known to the Nephites (pp. 9-10). The irony is that Joseph Smith must already have known this, having previously translated 3 Nephi 26:2, where Jesus notes that Malachi was not had among the Nephites.[4] Even if Joseph Smith were the author of the Book of Mormon, as Walters believes, one must wonder why he would make such a slip in the writings of Nephi. The answer probably lies in an earlier text from which both Malachi and Nephi were quoting. The concept (and much of the wording) in Malachi 4:1 is found in Isaiah 5:24; 33:11; 47:14 (cf. Obadiah 1:18); and Nahum 1:10.

Mr. Walters's research indicates that the Old Testament played a major role in the production of the Book of Mormon. Consequently, "any study of the Book of Mormon that overlooks the role played by the Old Testament in the formation of that book, fails to examine a significant part of the process that led to the writing of Joseph Smith's major work" (p. 6). The truth of this statement is, in my opinion, beyond question. But while Walters believes that Joseph Smith, as the author of the Book of Mormon, used Old Testament quotes, Latter-day Saints see their inclusion in the Nephite record as ancient.

Walters believes that the Book of Mormon's use of the language of the King James Version (KJV) is evidence that Joseph Smith authored the book. By that reasoning, we should reject the KJV as well, since its translators, though referring to the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testament, relied heavily on previous English translations of the Bible, resulting in the fact that much of the language of their Bible can be traced to Tyndale or even to Wycliffe. I suspect that if Joseph Smith had tried to use a style other than the KJV in the Book of Mormon, his contemporaries would have rejected it as "unscriptural" in its language.

Borrowing of Old Testament Stories

In a section entitled "Old Testament Events Echoed in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 25-30), Walters asserts that a number of Book of Mormon stories were really borrowed from the Old Testament. He actually begins with a New Testament story, however, noting that the account of Alma's conversion (Mosiah

---

4   It is generally acknowledged that the small plates were translated last. Walters appears to accept this view, writing that Isaiah 48-51, which is in 2 Nephi 6-8, was "the final segment of [Joseph Smith's] work" (p. 90).

27:10-20) was based on the experience of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). But Walters fails to note that two Old Testament stories bear similarities to those of Paul and Alma. The prophet Balaam, en route to pronouncing a curse against Israel, was stopped by an angel (Numbers 22:21-35). Moses, on his way to Egypt, was likewise stopped by the Lord, who threatened to kill him until Zipporah circumcised their son (Exodus 4:20-27).

Walters believes that Lehi's departure into the wilderness was borrowed from the story of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt (p. 26). The parallel, however, was drawn many centuries ago by Nephi, and was frequently repeated in the Book of Mormon. But the parallels go beyond that. The prophecies of Isaiah (11:16) and Hosea (8:11-13; 9:3) compare the forthcoming Assyrian captivity of Israel to their bondage in Egypt. Shall we then denounce these Old Testament prophets because they "borrowed" ideas from Moses for events that actually occurred?

Walters's list (p. 27) also indicates that the story of Alma's death (Alma 45:18) was borrowed from that of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). However, the Book of Mormon already drew the parallel in the next verse (Alma 45:19). The account in the Book of Mormon is much closer to that given in Josephus[5] than to the Bible version, in that it refers to the translation of Moses.

Walters also complains that the story of Joseph's coat (Alma 46:24) was borrowed from the Bible (p. 28). But since the Book of Mormon account is referring to Joseph, I fail to see the point. After all, if the Nephites had scriptures that spoke of their ancestor Joseph, why not use them? The fact that the Book of Mormon gives information about Joseph not found in the Bible shows that the Bible was not the sole source of information for this passage.

Walters believes that the thick darkness that could be felt in 3 Nephi 8:20 derives from Exodus 10:21-23 (p. 27). But if these phenomena were real, should we not expect them to be described in such terms?[6] The gospels tells us that there was

---

5   Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* IV, 8, 48.

6   The thick darkness and other cataclysmic phenomena recorded in 3 Nephi 8 are typical of volcanic eruptions. I discuss this at length in my forthcoming article, "Historical Parallels to the Destruction at the Time of the Crucifixion."

darkness in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45).

Walters notes that there are many parallels between the story of Nephi and that of Joseph in the book of Genesis. From this, he concludes that Joseph Smith borrowed from the Old Testament (p. 28). But there are many more parallels between the lives of Joseph and of Jesus Christ. Shall we then conclude that the story of Jesus is a fiction invented by the Gospel writers?

Similarly, Walters's observation that both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon Noah planted vines and had wine (p. 29) becomes a very minor point when one realizes that there are many more parallels between Jesus and Joshua, whose names are also identical. One need only note that there are dozens of instances of repeated stories in the Bible to realize that if Joseph Smith borrowed from the Bible to invent stories for the Book of Mormon, then a number of biblical authors must be guilty of the same thing.

Walters notes that the concept of "judges" in the Book of Mormon was borrowed from the biblical book of Judges (pp. 28-29). This should not be surprising, if the Nephites had access to that book in their scriptures. They probably patterned their government after that mentioned in the book of Judges. But Walters adds two further points. The first is that the concept of democratic election of judges is from Joseph Smith's American world rather than from ancient Israelite culture. This seems, though, to be contradicted in at least one story from Judges 8:22-23.

Walters's second point is that Joseph Smith, like the King James translators, misunderstood the nature of the Hebrew word *shophet*, rendered "judge." It did not denote one who "judges" (though this may be one of the minor duties of the Israelite judges), but one who governs. He does not indicate his evidence for this, but it comes principally from the Canaanite/ Phoenician usage of the word to denote rulers, along with an understanding of the major activities of the Israelite judges.

But it is Walters, not the Book of Mormon, who has misunderstood. The judges replaced the Nephite king, so the phrase "to judge this people" obviously meant more than sitting in a court of law (Mosiah 29:11-13, 28-29). "They did appoint judges to rule over them, or to judge them according to the law" (Mosiah 29:41; cf. Alma 4:17). The judge is often called

"governor."[7] Alma, as "the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi" led the army against the Amlicite insurgents (Alma 2:16). Other Nephite chief judges, such as Pahoran and Lachoneus, were also involved in military affairs, as were their ancient Israelite counterparts. For Walters to ignore these facts is unpardonable in what purports to be a scholarly thesis—but expected in a work that is principally designed to denigrate the Book of Mormon.

Walters believes that the stealing of wives in Judges 21:20-21 was the pattern used by Joseph Smith in writing Mosiah 20:1-5 (p. 29). Since parental permission was required for marriage in ancient Israel, neither the priests of Noah nor the Benjaminites in the time of the Judges could expect to have wives without stealing them. Bride capture is, in fact, an old idea and was found throughout much of the ancient world, not just in Israel. The fact that two different Israelite groups practiced it on a one-time basis is not at all unexpected, particularly if the priests of Noah were acquainted with the story from Judges 19-21.

Walters also sees the war strategies found in Alma 43, 52, and 56 as borrowings from the Bible (p. 29). In this, he is probably right. But why should the Nephites not borrow ideas from the scriptures in their possession? The Israelis borrowed some of their strategy from the Bible during the War of Independence in 1948, as did the British fighting the Turks at Michmash in 1917.[8] The point is that the borrowing need not have been done by Joseph Smith, whom Walters assumes to be the author of the Book of Mormon.

Walters goes too far when he states that Ammon's use of a sling in the Book of Mormon was borrowed from the story of David and Goliath. Slings were very common in the ancient Near East, and sling stones are often found along with other weapons during archaeological excavations of ancient Israelite cities. The use of slings by Israelites other than David is mentioned in Judges 20:16; Proverbs 26:8; Zechariah 9:15; 2 Kings 3:25; 2 Chronicles 26:14; Job 41:28. Since the Nephites came from the same area where David lived, should we not expect them to use the same kind of weaponry?

---

7   Alma 2:16; 30:29; 50:39; 51:15; 58:4; 60:1; 61:1-2; Helaman 1:5, 7, 9, 13; 3 Nephi 1:1; 3:1-2, 12; 6:22-25, 30.

8   Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 182-83.

The Isaiah Passages in the Book of Mormon

Walters claims that "nearly all" of Joseph Smith's changes in the Isaiah passages quoted in the Book of Mormon are unsupported by ancient versions. Even when such support exists, he says that there are other explanations (p. 92). He admits that Joseph Smith was right in one case, but quickly dismisses it as coincidence (p. 40).

My exhaustive research into Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions of Isaiah has shown that, where the Book of Mormon is at variance with the King James Version, the Nephite record is supported more often by the ancient texts. Walters, however, did not have access to my studies at the time he prepared his thesis. Because this material is now readily available, I shall not repeat it here.[9]

Walters points to the fact that certain Isaiah passages modified by Joseph Smith in some places appear without those modifications—or with different ones—later in the Book of Mormon. He sees in this evidence that Joseph arbitrarily made changes as he went along (pp. 89, 92). But this is not the only explanation, nor is it the simplest. Paraphrastic use of the Bible passages is the most reasonable explanation for these differences. Paraphrasis also explains the extensive modifications to Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27. I have dealt with these issues at length in my published works on the subject.

My study of the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon was prompted by the research of a friend, A. Chris Eccel, whom I first met while we were serving as missionaries. We carried on our friendship after returning home, and Chris was a witness at my first marriage in 1964. He and I carried on some correspondence about his research on the Isaiah variants.

Walters cites Eccel, noting that he "found in the Book of Mormon variants a consistent 'slackening-off toward the end of the quote.' It would appear that Joseph began with enthusiasm, but soon either became weary or lost interest" (p. 64). Despite this and other references to Eccel's work (see pp. 64, 66), Walters contradicts that theory. Note the following statements

---

9   John A. Tvedtnes, "The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report, 1983. See also my "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," in Monte S. Nyman, ed., *Isaiah and the Prophets* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Bookcraft, 1984).

from Walters, which indicate his assertion that Joseph Smith made more changes in the later passages:

"The liberties taken with the KJV become more pronounced as the Mormon leader increased his use of biblical quotations" (p. 38).

"In the final segment of his work, Joseph reached his most unrestrained period of alteration of the biblical text. Isaiah 49 through 51 received some of the heaviest emendation of any of the passages quoted" (p. 90).

"In the block of material from Isaiah chapters 2 through 14, written into 2 Nephi 12 through 24, Joseph began his most studied attempt at eliminating material he felt to be contradictory" (p. 90).

"In making his alterations, Joseph Smith began with restraint, following the KJV nearly word-for-word. As he progressed he became freer, altering both the italics and the text itself" (p. 93).

Surely the "considerable reworking of Isaiah 29" (p. 73), if it represents Joseph Smith's own efforts, also works against Eccel's fatigue theory, for it appears in 2 Nephi 27, after the lengthy Isaiah quotes had already been dictated by Joseph Smith.

If Walters's evidence disagrees so drastically with that of Eccel, why did he cite Eccel? I have observed that, in the Book of Mormon-bashing game, critics tend to call in all the "evidence" they can muster, even when it destroys the internal consistency of their work.

Walters cites Eccel's conclusion "that the biblical passages were lifted from the King James text, modified to disguise their origin, and inserted into the Book of Mormon text" (p. 64, n. 57). If this was Joseph Smith's intention, then he was not very successful at it. Can anyone seriously believe that Joseph Smith was trying to "disguise their origin" when it is so obvious to us all that the wording is nearly the same?

New Testament Concepts in Old Testament Times

In his zeal to condemn the Book of Mormon, Walters departs from the theme of his thesis by turning to the New Testament. He complains that the Book of Mormon uses New Testament theology in an "Old Testament" context. He accuses Joseph Smith "of writing back into that Old Testament period New Testament words, phrases, and quotations, as well as the

introduction of New Testament concepts and teachings into that time frame" (p. 7).

If, however, Christ was the foreordained Savior, the fact that God revealed such knowledge to people before Jesus' birth should not be surprising. The prophecy in Isaiah 53 (which is closely paralleled by some of the newly released Dead Sea Scrolls discussed below) is acknowledged in Acts 8:32 to be an authentic prophecy of Christ. Like the Book of Mormon, this Old Testament passage reflects "New Testament" concepts in an Old Testament context.

There are, in fact, a number of so-called "New Testament" concepts found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Were it otherwise, Jesus would have been hard pressed to make converts among the Jews of his day. One of the "Christian" practices found in the pre-Christian period of the Book of Mormon is baptism, which Walters believes to be anachronistic (p. 15). He was evidently not aware that baptism was practiced in Judaism before the time of Christ, and that Jews still baptize converts.[10] He tries to explain away the "baptisms" of Hebrews 9:10 as "sprinklings" performed in Old Testament times. While the law of Moses uses the term *sprinkling* of blood dozens of times, it is used of water only in Numbers 8:7; 19:13, 18-21 (cf. Ezekiel 36:25). The term is used more often of oil than of water.[11]

The KJV of Hebrews 9:10 reads "washings." But the Greek uses the term *baptismois*, plural of the word from which derives the English "baptism," which means "immersions," not "sprinklings."

Walters's condemnation of New Testament themes in the pre-Christian era of the Book of Mormon is based mainly on Hebrews 7. He believes, on the basis of Hebrews 7:11-12, 23-25, that the Aaronic Priesthood was abolished and replaced by the Melchizedek, with only Christ holding the latter (pp. 16-17). This is the normal Protestant interpretation of the passage, necessitated by the fact that, at the Reformation, only the Catholic and Orthodox churches could lay claim to priesthood authority. Those churches, along with early Christians, clearly

---

10 For a discussion of pre-Christian baptism, see chapter 1 of my book, *The Church of the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980).

11 The ninth chapter of Hebrews refers to Moses' sprinkling of blood in verses 13, 19, and 21. Cf. the water in verse 22 and note the sprinkling of blood also in Hebrews 11:28; 12:24.

believed in continuing priesthood in the Church.[12] Hebrews 6:20 says that Christ, our high priest, went as the forerunner beyond the veil into the holy of holies of the heavenly temple, just as the Israelite high priest went beyond the veil into the holy of holies of the tabernacle and later the temple. If he is the forerunner, then we can follow and hence become high priests.

Further interpreting Hebrews in Protestant fashion, Walters writes that the old covenant had to be taken away in order that the new might be established. From this, he asserts that the old and new could not exist side-by-side. This is only partly true, however. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus not only declared that he had not come to destroy "the law or the prophets" (Matthew 5:17) and that not even the smallest part of the law would fail but would be fulfilled (Matthew 5:18), but also that he who broke the least of the commandments was guilty of them all (Matthew 5:19). He later went so far as to say that his disciples should obey the precepts of the Scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 23:2-3).

Paul wrote that the law of Moses was "added" because of transgression (Galatians 3:19). To what was it added? Was it not to the higher law of the gospel revealed through Moses? The Book of Mormon indicates that it was only this added part, the "performances and ordinances" or "statutes and judgments," that was abolished with Christ's coming (2 Nephi 25:30; Alma 25:15; 4 Nephi 1:12). What remained was the law that God had always revealed to his prophets even before Moses' time.

Some of the differences in terminology between the KJV New and Old Testaments resulted from the fact that different translation committees worked on them. The New Testament committees deliberately used words already common in the Christianity of the day. Subsequent translators have done the same, and Joseph Smith was no exception when it came to the Book of Mormon.

For example, the Book of Mormon uses the term *Messiah* more than two hundred times. Though the Hebrew word behind this English transliteration appears 39 times in the Old Testament, it is translated "Messiah" only in Daniel 9:25-26.

---

12 For priesthood offices in New Testament times, see Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; 1 Timothy 3:10-13; Titus 1:7. In Acts 8:18-19, we read that when one Simon "saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." This power was the priesthood.

Elsewhere, it is rendered "anointed one." The Greek word with the same meaning gave us the term *Christ*. Joseph Smith's use of the latter term 214 times in pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages before 3 Nephi is justified by the fact that it was the preeminent term for "anointed one" used in Joseph Smith's culture. There is no hint here that the Book of Mormon contained a Greek word or that the term rendered "Christ" by Joseph Smith was foreign to pre-Christian Israelites. Nor should we be surprised to find the term *Christians* in Alma 46:13, 15-16; 48:10, where it denotes followers of the Messiah, translated into its modern English equivalent. We have a parallel in the Israeli group that calls itself the "Messianic Assembly" in English. Since the word from which "church" derives means "assembly," this organization's Hebrew name translates to "Christian Church."

Recently released fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered nearly half a century ago at Qumran support the view of the Book of Mormon that a knowledge of a savior-messiah was had in ancient Israel.[13] One scroll describes a messianic figure who would speak in parables and warns that his opponents would malign him. Another document anticipates the idea that the Messiah would raise the dead. A scroll fragment of only five lines speaks of a "leader of the community" being "put to death" and mentions "piercings" or "wounds." The same text uses such messianic terms as the *staff*, the *branch of David*, and the *root of Jesse*. An Aramaic scroll contains concepts found in Luke 1 and even parallels some of the language of that chapter. Both documents refer to a messiah descended from the house of David. Each uses the phrases "he shall be called the son of the most high," "he will be great upon the earth," and "his kingdom is an eternal kingdom." Another messianic text speaks of the Messiah ruling over heaven and earth, healing the sick, and providing a resurrection from the dead. All of the concepts in this text are found in the Book of Mormon, often in the same combinations found in the Qumran document.

Use of New Testament Passages

Walters also claims that the Book of Mormon is false because it quotes KJV New Testament passages in an Old

---

13   I have recently prepared an article comparing passages from these scrolls with Book of Mormon teachings about Christ, and hope to have it in print shortly.

Testament context. I responded to this accusation in my review of the Tanners' book, showing that most of the New Testament texts were quotes or adaptations of Old Testament passages.[14] Walters has a few better examples than the Tanners gave, but their list was more extensive.

An example is Walters's assertion that Joseph Smith borrowed the Melchizedek concept in Alma 13 from the epistle to the Hebrews (pp. 13-14).[15] The New Testament text, of course, is based on Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4. Walters complains that Joseph Smith's explanation of Melchizedek detracts from the theme in Hebrews. In this case, the Prophet is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Had the Book of Mormon completely followed the Hebrews passage, it would have been blatant plagiarism. By introducing new material, it contradicts the New Testament and is thereby proven false. To me, the fact that Alma 13 does not parallel Hebrews 7 demonstrates independent thought rather than reliance on the New Testament. Moreover, ideas about Melchizedek are found in other nonbiblical texts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of these ideas resemble what is found in the epistle to the Hebrews, while others resemble those found in Alma 13.

Book of Mormon Names

In his attempt to prove that the Book of Mormon borrowed names from the Bible, Walters reproduces, in an appendix, a page from the January 1910 issue of the *Improvement Era*, which compares Book of Mormon names to Bible names.[16] Walters's caption notes that it was the LDS Church's own magazine that "first noted that Book of Mormon names were modeled on biblical names." The truth is that the article was written to show that Book of Mormon names followed authentic Hebrew patterns. The comparative list was merely for illustration and was not intended to imply that the Book of Mormon borrowed names from the Bible.

Walters, like other critics before and since, believes that Joseph Smith used names found in the King James Bible and modified them to suit his purposes. He cites John B. Krueger's

---

14   John A. Tvedtnes, review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 188-230.

15   Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-11, 15, 17, 21.

16   Appendix C. See also n. 18 on p. 18.

1979 study of Book of Mormon names and includes the complete text in an appendix for first-hand review by his readers. What Walters did not know is that I corresponded with Krueger soon after the study came into my hands in 1980 and pointed out that such a comparison proved nothing, since one would expect Book of Mormon names to resemble Hebrew names in the Bible. I told Krueger about my study of the phonology of Book of Mormon names and showed the consistency in those names.[17] I also discussed the etymology of some of the names. Krueger replied with an almost apologetic letter, indicating that his study was not a serious one and that he had never considered the possibilities I suggested. Walters would have done well to have consulted my work, which was available several years before he wrote his thesis.

Joseph Smith's Purpose in Using Old Testament Passages

Walters suggests that Joseph Smith employed Old Testament passages in the Book of Mormon as more than just filler (p. 93). In this, he contradicts the Tanners' view that Joseph Smith was filling a "black hole" created by the loss of the 116 pages. Either theory spells death for the other.

Walters believes that the Old Testament passages used in the Book of Mormon were intended to establish an exegetical basis on which Joseph Smith could lay his claims to being called of God and could establish doctrines he wished to promulgate. It is in this area that I believe Walters is standing on the shakiest of foundations. The interpretations given to the various passages cited by Walters are his own. I find no evidence that Joseph Smith assigned such meanings to the passages in question.

For example, Walters writes that Isaiah 52:14 in 3 Nephi 21:10 and Isaiah 52:12 in 3 Nephi 21:29 were intended by their context to apply to Joseph Smith. He says that Joseph is the one whose visage was marred (p. 45). He evidently came to this conclusion by interpreting the "words" of 3 Nephi 21:11 to be the Book of Mormon, despite the ambiguity of that passage. Walters's interpretation is contradicted by the Book of Mormon itself. Abinadi, in explaining Isaiah 52:7-10 (Mosiah 12:21-24),

---

17 John A. Tvedtnes, "A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 141 (December 1977): 1-8; F.A.R.M.S. reprint, 1977.

quoted Isaiah 53 and explained that it had reference to Christ (Mosiah 14-15). As part of this explanation of Isaiah 53, he cited Isaiah 52:7 (Mosiah 15:14-18). Immediately after speaking of Christ, he cited Isaiah 52:8-10 (Mosiah 15:29-31).

The passage about the servant with the marred visage is immediately followed in 3 Nephi 21:11 by a reference to the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:19. From a number of passages, we know that the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is Jesus.[18]

Conclusions

Though issued under the guise of scholarly research, Reverend Walters's book is not a serious attempt to study the use of Old Testament passages in the Book of Mormon, as its title suggests. Rather, it is a biased and clearly negative view of Joseph Smith and his work. While it raises a few new questions, most of it is a rehash of what other critics of the Book of Mormon have already said.[19] If there is one good thing about books like this, it is that they prompt us to study the Book of Mormon even more, in order to get at the truth of the matter.

---

18 Acts 3:20-23; 7:37; 1 Nephi 22:20-21; 3 Nephi 20:23. Even in the account of his life, Joseph Smith made it clear that this passage referred to Christ (Joseph Smith-History 1:40).

19 Among the new material is the appendix devoted to an explanation of the name "Mormon," which Walters believes Joseph Smith derived from a bird name known to have been explained in books available in Palmyra in his time. The suggestions are as ludicrous as the idea that the Prophet got the name from the Greek word for "demon." Why should Joseph Smith leave himself open to the kind of criticism that would result from such stupidity? Even a good charlatan—which is what Walters obviously believed Joseph to be—learns to cover his tracks.