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First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon

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Title

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Abstract Review of *First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon* (1988), by Zarahemla Research Foundation.

First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon. Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1988. iv + 51 pp., with index. \$4.00.

Reviewed by Larry K. Smith

The *Study Book of Mormon* is published by the Zarahemla Research Foundation. I examined the only volume currently available—First Nephi. It has the complete text of the first book of the Book of Mormon with accompanying commentary, notes, appendices, and study aids.

The introduction discusses the authorship, the contents, the political background, and the date 1 Nephi takes place. It also gives an outline of 1 Nephi; the outline is then also embedded in the text portion as section headings.

The chapters are divided as they were in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (a total of seven chapters in 1 Nephi) with verse numbers added later. To illustrate, the *Study Book of Mormon* has 264 verses in the fifth chapter of 1 Nephi; the corresponding segment of the LDS Book of Mormon is 1 Nephi 16:1–1 Nephi 19:21.

The text itself is printed in a poetry-like style. This should facilitate reading and comprehension, and allow easier identification of various forms of Hebrew poetry. For example, the note for 1 Nephi 1:1–2 (1 Nephi 1:1–3, LDS edition) points out a little chiasm:

- a knowledge
- b record
- c language
- d learning of the Jews
- c' language
- b' record
- a' knowledge

and explains that the central part of a chiasm is the most important point. The *learning of the Jews*, therefore, “is one of the keys to understanding the Book of Mormon” (p. 3).

One of the most interesting features of the *Study Book of Mormon* is the Textual Comparison Chart found in the first appendix. It notes every change in 1 Nephi in the various editions of the Book of Mormon through 1840 and subsequent RLDS editions and gives the variants found in each. It entails much the same work that would go into producing a critical text of the Book of Mormon, and the Zarahemla Research Foundation plans to produce a complete comparison for the whole Book of Mormon, including Latter-day Saint editions.¹ The notation scheme indicates when each change occurred: O_c indicates a change or correction made to the original manuscript, possibly at the time of preparing the printer's manuscript, P₃₀ indicates a change marked on the printer's manuscript before the 1830 edition was printed, P₃₇ indicates a change marked on the printer's manuscript after the 1830 edition was printed but before the 1837 edition was printed, and so forth.

The second appendix is a concordance-like Topical Index that looks much like the LDS Topical Guide except that only Book of Mormon references are given. Each reference is also marked in the text.

The word *fullness* in 1 Nephi 3:165 (1 Nephi 13:24, LDS edition) has a superscript *T* (meaning there is a heading for "fullness" in the Topical Index) and the commentary at the bottom of the page says, "'Fullness' has been restored [from the original manuscript] to be consistent with the seven other occurrences of this phrase in the Book of Mormon. The miscopied phrase, 'plainness of the gospel,' does not occur anywhere in the Book of Mormon." Checking the same verse in the Textual Comparison Chart reveals that, indeed, "fullness" was used in the original manuscript while "plainness" appeared in every succeeding RLDS edition, including the printer's manuscript. The text, the footnotes and commentary, and the appendices amplify each other to give the reader greater insight.

¹ From a phone conversation with Ray Treat, a representative of the Zarahemla Research Foundation, on Saturday, 1 July 1995. The complete comparison will be called the Textual Comparison Chart, which will serve as a basis for the Restored Covenant Edition (a forthcoming new edition of the Book of Mormon).

On seeing this volume, one would logically assume that corresponding volumes exist for the other books in the Book of Mormon, forming a complete set, but such is not yet the case. The Zarahemla Research Foundation plans to return to the *Study Book of Mormon* and finish the project after first publishing the complete comparison of manuscripts and editions of the Book of Mormon mentioned earlier.²

The *Study Book of Mormon* is a serious attempt to help people become better scholars of the Book of Mormon. I believe it succeeds in presenting useful tools for such scholarship. Even though only 1 Nephi is available in this format, many insights can be gained and it can open one's eyes to new ways to study the Book of Mormon. The *Study Book of Mormon* will be of interest to LDS readers who can comfortably deal with chapter and verse divisions other than the ones they are used to. Readers familiar with the chapter and verse divisions in the *Study Book of Mormon* should unhesitatingly use it as an aid to their personal Book of Mormon study.

² Ibid.