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Abstract Review of *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban: A Comparison of Biblical and Book of Mormon Isaiah Texts* (1994), by H. Clay Gorton.

H. Clay Gorton. *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban: A Comparison of Biblical and Book of Mormon Isaiah Texts.* Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1994. 298 pp., with appendix, bibliography, and subject index. \$18.98.

Reviewed by Garold N. Davis

That the Isaiah controversy in the Book of Mormon is alive (and as controversial as ever) is evident from the recent edition of *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* in which both Matthew Roper and John A. Tvedtnes discuss this controversy at some length in their reviews of the latest by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.¹ *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban* will not solve this burning controversy. Sections of the book may, in fact, add much fuel to the fire. There is one thing this book will do, however. It will certainly make the task of combatants (and noncombatants) interested in the Book of Mormon Isaiah much simpler.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One is entitled "Evaluation and Significance of the Isaiah Variations" and contains an introduction explaining the position the author holds in regard to the Book of Mormon and the methodology to be used in the book. There follow five short chapters that will be helpful to the lay reader as well as the scholar. The first chapter discusses various aspects of the brass plates of Laban. Chapter 2 is a brief discussion of the challenges of translating and includes a short discussion on the distinction between translation and transliteration. The third chapter discusses the various biblical texts used in

¹ Matthew Roper and John A. Tvedtnes, reviews of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon"*, vol. 1, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 156-249.

making the comparison between the Book of Mormon and biblical Isaiahs. Chapter 4 identifies and describes a set of chiasmic structures found in the Isaiah passages, and chapter 5 is actually a summary of the conclusions reached in the comparative study.

The main body of the book is found in Part Two, which is the "Verse by Verse Analysis." The important contribution of H. Clay Gorton in this section of the book is that he makes available, in a very readable form, an analysis of nearly every verse from Isaiah found in the Book of Mormon alongside four other texts of the same verse. Gorton compares the Isaiah passages found in the Book of Mormon with English translations from the King James, the Douay-Rheims, the Septuagint, and the Salamanca Bibles and with the Spanish original from which the English Salamanca was translated. (The nature of these Bibles is outlined in chapter 3, as mentioned above.) The use of italics identifies additions, deletions, or changes in each of the passages for easy comparison. When the Book of Mormon text is identical with the King James text, Gorton has included only the Book of Mormon text with the caption, "No Change." Captions above other verses read, "Minor Stylistic Change Only" or "Stylistic Change Only" and the changes are italicized. When significant differences appear between the Book of Mormon text and the King James (and other texts), Gorton introduces the verse with a caption identifying the nature of the change, indicates whether there has been an addition or a deletion, and then adds a commentary on the changes. Here is an example from 2 Nephi 12/Isaiah 2:

Verse 5—The Accusation of Wickedness against
Israel Is Eliminated in the KJ

Book of Mormon

O house of Jacob, come ye
and let us walk in the light of
the Lord; *yea come, for ye have
all gone astray, every one to his
wicked ways.*

King James Bible

O house of Jacob, come ye,
and let us walk in the light of
the Lord.

In this case the Douay-Rheims, the Septuagint, the Salamanca Spanish, and the Salamanca English follow very closely the King

James Version. Any slight variations are italicized. Then follows a short commentary on the significance of the elimination of the phrase *for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways*.

Another example is 1 Nephi 20/Isaiah 48:

Verse 2—An Accusation Is Changed to a Commendation in the KJ Version

Book of Mormon

King James Bible

Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, *but they do not* stay themselves upon the God of Israel, *who is the Lord of Hosts; yea*, the Lord of Hosts is his name.

For they call themselves of the holy city, *and* stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts [is] his name.

Then follow the other texts with the variations italicized and a commentary on the significance of changing *but they do not* to *and*.

One thing becomes quickly obvious when we have the Isaiah texts from the Book of Mormon and the same texts from five different sources laid out before us, verse after verse, with the changes italicized, and that is that Joseph Smith did not slavishly copy from the King James Bible. The instances of “Additions” and “Deletions” in the King James Bible are numerous. Gorton tells us:

- A total of 348 textual changes are found in the 165 altered verses [of a total of 372 verses].
- The differences between the Book of Mormon and King James Isaiah texts are in the form of either *additions*, *deletions* or *modifications* to the original text of the Book of Mormon translation of the original records. Of these, 28% (104 verses) are additions, 30% (112 verses) are deletions and 42% (156 verses) are modifications. (p. 32)

By now some readers (I would imagine) are asking the questions: “Why, when the Book of Mormon text varies from the King James text, is it the King James text that has deleted from or added

to the original Isaiah text? Why is it not the Book of Mormon that has done the adding and deleting?" And this is where *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban* will likely fuel the fires of controversy.

It is made very clear from the outset that the author is a firm believer in Joseph Smith's account of how he obtained the Book of Mormon, with all that this implies. Consequently, one major thesis is that the Book of Mormon Isaiah taken from the brass plates of Laban predates 600 B.C. and is, therefore, the oldest of the Isaiah texts (and, presumably, the least corrupted). Gorton writes:

In the chapters that follow, the Book of Mormon Isaiah will be compared in complete detail with the **King James Bible** which was used as the basic text for Joseph Smith's translation of the Isaiah chapters. Since the BM version is a translation of a copy of the Brass Plates of Laban, it is the most ancient scriptural text available today. Further, it was translated into English by the gift and power of God. (See Introduction to the Book of Mormon.) Therefore, it is concluded that any differences between it and other versions are the result of changes made to the original text from which the BM Isaiah was translated. (p. 41)

How, then (if the Book of Mormon Isaiah is taken from the oldest and least corrupted text), did the many additions and deletions get into the King James Isaiah? Once again Gorton is unequivocal:

The examination in this work of the substantive differences between the Bible- and Book-of-Mormon versions of the Isaiah chapters leaves no doubt that the changes were anything but accidental. . . . It is difficult to attribute to scribal errors either adding or deleting text to or from the original writing, especially when such additions and deletions are predominantly in a direction which tends to justify [ancient] Israel in its apostate condition.

As the uniform bending of trees in a windswept region gives evidence of the direction of the prevailing

wind, so does the uniform direction of the altered Isaiah verses give evidence of the specific bias of those who wrote and rewrote the Bible versions of Isaiah. (p. 66–67)

It was those uninspired men, principally in the pre-Christian days of apostate Israel, who, as they copied the scriptures, interpreted them in the light of their own circumstances and their frequently apostate beliefs. (p. 32–33)

And,

It becomes obvious from a study of the variant texts of Isaiah, as compared to the BM original, that those who wrote the versions available today made their changes “with malice aforethought.” The bulk of the significant differences between the KJ and the BM texts are passages in which the BM text is more critical of the sins of apostate Israel. The comparison shows that in the KJ version, criticism and condemnation of corrupt leaders and evil practices are repeatedly shifted or softened so the impact on guilty Israel is noticeably lessened. (p. 44)

Well, Gorton has produced the Book of Mormon Isaiah, verse by verse alongside four other Isaiah texts, and the reader can now, quite conveniently, decide for him- or herself. Of course, if the critic is of the opinion that it was Joseph Smith, and not ancient scribes, who entered the 348 textual changes “with malice aforethought,” then that critic should also be prepared to explain the intricate and complex procedure these changes suggest, as well as the implications of these changes.

What does Gorton do with Deutero-Isaiah (and, consequently, with Trito-Isaiah)? Consistent with his belief in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, he dismisses this problem from his a priori assumption.

The reasons for doubting that the prophet Isaiah was the sole author of the book that bears his name are various, but principal among them is the misguided

notion that a prophet cannot see beyond the horizon of his own times. In other words, the critics opine that valid prophetic predictions are never more than the logical conclusions that can be drawn from observed phenomena. (p. 49)

And, consequently,

Since the Book of Mormon establishes that at least six of the Deutero-Isaiah chapters are known to have existed prior to the period attributed to them, . . . the premise set forth by the higher critics is proven to be fallacious, and their arguments may be discounted *en [sic] toto*. (p. 51)

One interesting argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and the veracity of Joseph Smith comes from a rather unexpected direction in chapter 4, "Chiastic Comparisons." The author prints out for the reader's benefit a group of chiastic structures found in the Book of Mormon Isaiah and concludes:

In the ten chiasma [*sic*] that are common to the Isaiah Chapters in the BM and KJ, there are found no embellishments or enhancements in the Bible version. However, textual deletions from the KJ version have seriously degraded the chiastic structure of four of the chiasma [*sic*] and entirely eliminated a fifth chiasmus. (p. 65)

Gorton concludes from this observation:

If Joseph Smith had been an imposter and had copied the Isaiah chapters from the Bible, it is inconceivable that he could have made additions to the text that would have filled in the missing elements in five of the ten chiasma [*sic*] that are common to the two texts. (p. 65)

The book contains a short appendix with statistical charts showing the number and type of changes made in the King James Isaiah. There is also a short bibliography.

Having these Book of Mormon Isaiah passages laid out in a clearly readable form for comparison with the King James Isaiah (and four other texts) is, in my opinion, worth the price of the book in itself. I have found it a very convenient reference work. It will be a valuable tool for teachers and scholars of the Book of Mormon.