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New Reader's Edition of the Book of Mormon

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New Reader's Edition of the Book of Mormon

With the recent publication of *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, Grant Hardy has provided the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with a remarkable new version of their founding text. Although Hardy gears his book to a broad readership, those who truly love the Book of Mormon, seek to be serious students of it, or both will find *A Reader's Edition* well worth owning. Why? Because in this edition the text is displayed not in verse format but in discrete, sub-headed sections of greater length with ease of reading the end in view.

We are familiar with the Book of Mormon printed with the verses separated sequentially and appearing in double columns. We forget that the first editions of the Book of Mormon did not appear this way. Although the versification added later is very useful, allowing the reader to locate specific passages that would otherwise be difficult to find, it decoys us into thinking that Mormon and the authors whose work he redacted thought and wrote in that format.

The very appearance of the text in our sacred texts lures us into thinking of each verse as a separate, unconnected thought—as a “scripture” that can be wrenched from its context in the larger whole and then mixed and matched with any other verse. *A Reader's Edition* makes doing this much more difficult by drawing our attention back to the context in which each sentence and verse is set.

The way the Book of Mormon, as well as the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price, is currently formatted is obviously an attempt to imitate the format of the familiar King James Version of the Bible. But the Bible has been formatted differently over time, and now a host of competing modern translations of the Bible exhibit strikingly different and remarkably more useful formatting than that of the KJV (though they maintain the versification). These modern translations attempt to visually identify larger literary units, to indicate where quoted material appears, to distin-

guish poetic forms from prose, and so forth—all to aid the reader.

In similar fashion, Hardy provides readers of the Book of Mormon with a much different (and, I believe, much improved) formatting. While retaining the chapters and versification, he has removed the sometimes distracting headnotes and cross-referencing apparatus, which were not part of the sacred text itself, and added headings that identify the start and finish of lengthy “multichapters,” as well as topics within chapters, enabling the reader to better grasp the original narrative structure. He also includes eight highly informative appendices—for example, chronologies of the translation of the Book of Mormon and of key events in the book's narrative, a list of 50 significant textual changes in various authorized editions of the Book of Mormon, a list of Hebraisms underlying the text, charts and maps, and the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates along with historical background. His introduction to the book is carefully crafted and well worth reading and pondering. It contains, among other topics, a brief summary of the Book of Mormon, a history of how it originated, and an explanation of its religious significance.

Readers familiar with Donald W. Parry's book *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), a very useful study aid, will find that Hardy's edition moves in somewhat different directions. Hardy has not duplicated Parry's work by providing the intensive formatting intended to identify all of the literary devices found in the Book of Mormon. Rather, to promote readability, he has been selective in presenting poetic passages in appropriate formats. The University of Illinois Press is to be congratulated for making available *A Reader's Edition*, which will make a fine addition to the libraries of those with a serious interest in the Book of Mormon. 📖 —by Louis Midgley