



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 12 | Number 2

Article 6

2000

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Seely, David Rolph (2000) "“The Old Adorns the New”: Reading the Book of Mormon in Light of the Bible," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 12 : No. 2 , Article 6.

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FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title “The Old Adorns the New”: Reading the Book of Mormon in Light of the Bible

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Reference *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 39-43.

ISSN 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

Abstract Review of *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (1998), by S. Kent Brown.

"THE OLD ADORNS THE NEW":
READING THE BOOK OF MORMON
IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

David Rolph Seely

This volume is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarly studies of the Book of Mormon. S. Kent Brown brings to this collection of ten scholarly studies several decades of close, careful reading of the Book of Mormon and years of training and experience in biblical studies. In this volume he applies to the text of the Book of Mormon methodologies used for years on biblical texts: word studies, form criticism, and comparative analysis. The results are solid and significant. Six of the studies were published between 1984 and 1993. These are "Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi" (1984); "When Did Jesus Visit the Americas?" (1984); "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon" (1990); "Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons" (1992); "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite" (1992); and "Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New" (1993). Some of these pieces were groundbreaking when they were originally published and have become standard points of reference in the ongoing discussion of Book of Mormon issues. For example, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon" and "Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi" have played an integral part in the debate for many

Review of S. Kent Brown. *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*. Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998. xi + 198, with scripture and subject indexes. \$17.95.

years. It is very convenient for the Book of Mormon student to have these essays gathered together for the first time; they have all been revised and updated—some more than others, as have the bibliographies to reflect much of the discussion that has taken place since their initial publication. Four of the studies are new and will undoubtedly generate some lively discussion in the years to come.

All study of texts, both sacred and secular, is based on reading—why we read, how we read, and what we look for as we read. These essays are a reminder that much of scholarship rests on the basic task of reading. Brown elaborates: “They represent, on the one hand, attempts to set out the dimensions and complexities of the Book of Mormon record. They are not, on the other, attempts to finalize what can or cannot be known about a subject” (p. x). At the outset Brown identifies the single most important difference between the study of the biblical text and study of the Book of Mormon: The Book of Mormon is an English translation of a text, whereas the biblical text is available for the most part in its original languages: “One must keep in mind that students are somewhat handicapped because the English translation of Joseph Smith is effectively the *Urtext*, the original document, to which we must address all questions. We do not possess the ancient text from which Joseph Smith worked. Because that text is not available, there are limitations as to how far we can pursue certain issues” (p. x). Brown acknowledges the difficulties of doing “word studies” in light of the fact that the Book of Mormon is only extant in translation—thus it is only the English words that can be examined. For instance, a verbal phrase frequently used in the Exodus account is *bring out* or *bring forth*. “One can, of course, readily check the Hebrew term in the Bible. But we are limited to supposing that the same or a similar ancient term underlies these English phrases in Exodus-like settings described in the Book of Mormon” (p. x).

A brief review of four of the essays will help to give an overview of the whole book. One of the new studies is entitled “What Were Those Sacrifices Offered by Lehi?” (pp. 1–8). Three times in the Book of Mormon Lehi and his family offer sacrifice in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 2:5–7; 5:9; 7:22). In this piece Brown questions the meaning and purpose of these “sacrifices and offerings” in light of the law of

Moses as found in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible the task would be much simpler because most of the sacrifices and offerings are identified by specific terms. Brown marshals the biblical evidence but, more important, through a careful reading of the text is able to identify elements in the Book of Mormon narrative that strongly suggest the significance of the sacrifices. Consideration of the context points to the significance of the offering. Brown concludes that when Lehi “made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks” (1 Nephi 2:7; cf. 5:9; 7:22), “he was sacrificing a peace offering which served as a thanksgiving for safety in travel, whether for oneself or for others” (p. 6). When offering burnt offerings, Lehi was doing it in the context of atonement for sin (see p. 6).

The application of methodologies familiar to biblical studies to the text of the Book of Mormon gives impressive results. Indeed, methodologies used for centuries in biblical studies have not yet been attempted on most Book of Mormon texts. Of special interest in this regard is “The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite,” originally published in 1992 (pp. 128–45). Much significant work has been done in this study to identify and analyze poetry and poetic structures in the Book of Mormon. Applying the form-critical categories used by biblical scholars in the study of the Psalms, Brown identifies and isolates two poems in the sermon by Samuel the Lamanite that closely resemble the well-known category of “laments” in the Psalms (see Helaman 13:32–33, 33–37). Using the work of biblical scholars, Brown analyzes the contents and poetic structures of these pieces. As might be expected, Brown identifies several ways in which these laments are similar to those found in the Bible and at the same time describes significant differences. If these literary conventions were known to the Nephites through the brass plates, we might expect to see significant development in the biblical forms as they were passed along in the Nephite tradition. Brown points out one development—that these laments contain prophecies—a phenomenon that is unknown in the biblical tradition but found in the Thanksgiving psalms from Qumran.

In one of the most methodologically simple pieces, “Alma’s Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons” (pp. 113–27), Brown

studies the sermons of Alma looking for allusions to his three-day conversion experience. The mechanics of this study are very simple, yet the results are most impressive. Through a careful reading and analysis of Alma's conversion as found in his recitation of this experience to his son Helaman (see Alma 36), Brown identifies six elements of Alma's conversion story (see pp. 114–15). He then traces these elements through the major sermons of Alma. The result is a better appreciation and understanding of Alma's sermons through recognition of these rich allusions, and a greater grasp of the doctrine of the atonement that Alma teaches through the reality of his own conversion.

At least one of the new studies will generate some spirited discussion. In "Sojourn, Dwell, and Stay: Terms of Servitude" (pp. 55–74), Brown examines the "eight-year" sojourn in the wilderness experienced by Lehi and his family (see 1 Nephi 17:4).¹ Through a detailed word study of the pertinent terms used in the text, Brown comes to a conclusion that may be a surprise to some, that Lehi and his family experienced a "period of servility" (p. 59) in the wilderness. He further supports his conclusion by looking at how these terms are used in the story of Ammon in King Lamoni's court.

This study raises a very important issue in Book of Mormon scholarship—the proper use of word studies. The use of word studies may vary depending on how the reader understands the process of the translation of the Book of Mormon. In the introduction, Brown acknowledges that final conclusions in word studies on the Book of Mormon are difficult since, as we have already noted above, the text of the Book of Mormon as translated by Joseph Smith is in English, not in the original, ancient language of the authors. Brown then describes the basic premise of his work, that the Book of Mormon is a very precise and accurate rendering of the ancient text: "Naturally, to proceed with a study of this sort, one has to assume—correctly, in my view—that the English text of the Book of Mormon represents an accurate translation which in turn can serve as the basis for studies of terms, whether individual words or phrases" (p. 55).

1. Brown published a related essay, "A Case for Lehi's Bondage in Arabia," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 205–17.

Even assuming that the English words closely represent exact terminology in the ancient text, word studies can be tricky. For example, the same word in English can have many different meanings, depending on its context. How much credibility can be given to Hebrew word studies within Book of Mormon studies? Do the authors of the Bible use the terms in the same way the Book of Mormon does, and can we apply the meanings of the Hebrew terms to the context of the Book of Mormon? Brown's studies and others like it will undoubtedly generate much discussion about methodology in Book of Mormon studies. This discussion will ultimately lead to further debate about the nature of the translation of the Book of Mormon—one that will be enhanced by the upcoming publication of a critical text of the Book of Mormon. Some may disagree with Brown's conclusions about Lehi and his family, but the reader might not ever read the section about Lehi's sojourn in the wilderness in the same way again. And the discussion of the language in the story of Ammon and King Lamoni is a model for the potential of word studies in the Book of Mormon.

This volume deserves attention for several reasons. These essays are models for close reading of the Book of Mormon, for the application of a variety of methodologies, and for asking questions of the text of the Book of Mormon in order to find previously unnoticed evidence. A review of any single piece in this volume will reveal much evidence in the narrative of the Book of Mormon that may not have been noticed by careful, inquisitive readers. Some of the conclusions will be discussed and tested for years to come. As described by the author, these studies "set out the dimensions and complexities of the Book of Mormon record" without being "attempts to finalize what can or cannot be known about a subject." "Hence in some ways—though not all—these studies must be considered provisional, not definitive" (p. x).

The studies in this volume will stimulate and challenge the reader and, significantly, will invite the reader back to the text of the Book of Mormon, where there is still much to be learned.