The Bible and the Book of Mormon: A Review of Literature

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The enigmatic relationship between the Book of Mormon and the Bible\(^1\) goes all the way back to one of its earliest reviewers, Restorationist Alexander Campbell, who noted inconsistencies between the two. Campbell addressed the Book of Mormon text’s conflation of the Old and New Covenants, differing on details such as Jesus’s birthplace and, in particular, how much the Book of Mormon’s pre-Christian peoples

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anticipated New Testament events. The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi, Campbell wrote, “developed the records of Matthew, Luke, and John, six hundred years before John the Baptist was born.” From the time of Campbell and into the present day, much of Book of Mormon scholarship has pivoted around this issue. How could a text that claims origins prior to the canonization of the New Testament interact so explicitly with the New Testament text? And what of the Old Testament content, in particular Isaiah, strewn throughout its pages? For many years, those who saw the Book of Mormon as purely the product of the mind of Joseph Smith interpreted these interactions as a sign of indirect influence at best and plagiarism at worst. In response, those who were willing to subscribe to divine origins developed several possible solutions, such as the ideas that Book of Mormon authors had access to “untainted” biblical manuscripts that have since disappeared; or that they had a level of prescience in writing. However, in recent years, this apologetic-or-critical sentiment of arguing why the Bible is present in the Book of Mormon has begun to wane in favor of further exploring how the Bible is present in the Book of Mormon. The intent of this literature review is to lay out the different scholarship trajectories related to the presence of the Bible in the Book of Mormon.

Because this is such a broad field, there is not space to mention every work that has been written on the topic. It is hoped that this review will bring up to date those interested in engaging this field more seriously, by reviewing the most relevant scholarship. This review will be divided into two sections, the first dealing with the Old Testament text and the second, with the New Testament text. I will also divide each section into smaller sections that deal with topics particularly relevant to each of the two texts.

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Part I: The Old Testament

The Intertextual Relationship between Scriptural Authors and Their Texts

The many similarities between biblical and Book of Mormon narratives, doctrine, and language have spurred numerous academic studies. Due to the chronological point of convergence between events of the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, the early chapters of First Nephi have received particularly intense study. Representative of such work is the volume of essays compiled in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem.* Several of the essays deal with historical or cultural issues surrounding Lehi's life and subsequent departure from Jerusalem, including the role of women, religious life in general, Lehi's prophetic calling, biblical justification for the destruction of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem's turbulent political situation. The majority of these essays engage the role of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon on at least an implicit, if not explicit, level.

Mark D. Thomas's book, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives,* is a valuable example of a literary study of the Book of Mormon that considers biblical (primarily Old Testament) forms and

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ideas. The book includes several “literary forms” found throughout the Book of Mormon, such as Lehi’s dream, conversion stories, and warning prophets. Thomas analyzes each one within the Book of Mormon context while also bringing in insights from the Old (and New) Testament and nineteenth-century religious culture. It is clear that Thomas sees the latter two elements as a large influence on the composition of the Book of Mormon: “The Book of Mormon uses the Bible as proof text, as a springboard to new revelation and creativity, and as a mosaic in creating a new spiritual world for its latter-day readers.” 9 Thomas states that he intends his work to be “part of the foundation for a new tradition in Book of Mormon studies,” and rightly states that this can only be done “with rigorous, critical scholarship.”

In addition to Thomas’s work, scholars have focused on individual Old Testament stories that re-appear, often radically refashioned, in the Book of Mormon. Several scholars have noted that the Book of Mormon reproduces the story of Moses and the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt in its account of Lehi’s flight from Jerusalem. 11 S. Kent Brown, the author of several excellent literary studies, sees Lehi’s flight as a “conscious reenactment” of the exodus story by Nephi, and observes that later Nephite writers would make this connection even more apparent. 12 In his own study of Nephi’s journey, Alan Goff noted


his belief that biblical themes, such as the exodus, were so apparent to Nephi that it was “impossible that Nephi was not aware of them and did not intend that we see them in the story as he wrote it for us to read.”13 In an intriguing essay, Noel Reynolds argues that Nephi carefully constructed his history in a way that would “justify his ascent to leadership” and provide “a founding constitution for the Nephite people.” Reynolds notes how part of this argument involved alluding back to biblical narratives.14 In a separate essay, Reynolds argues that textual similarities between the Bible and the Book of Mormon can be best understood by the hypothesis that “the Book of Mormon writers had access in the brass plates to a document substantially the same as the book of Moses given to Joseph Smith by inspiration in 1830.”15

Other studies include a comparison of the abduction of the Lamanite daughters (Mosiah 20) with the similar story of the actions of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20);16 several essays explore Lehi’s throne theophany in 1 Nephi 1 and similar biblical accounts.17 In his MA work comparing the Bible and the Book of Mormon. See also “The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1/1 (1992), 63–80; “Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New,” in The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993), 89–100. Many of Brown’s essays have been republished, along with several previously unpublished essays, in From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998).


thesis, Wesley P. Walters identifies Old Testament parallels throughout the Book of Mormon not only with the exodus story but also with the accounts of Joseph, Daniel, Noah, and several incidents from Judges.\textsuperscript{18} Benjamin L. McGuire has written an excellent article comparing Nephi’s slaying of Laban with David’s slaying of Goliath. McGuire sees Nephi casting himself as David as a way of legitimizing his rule over Laman.\textsuperscript{19} McGuire’s work is significant because he proposes a sound methodology for identifying literary allusions. In the process, he becomes one of the first scholars to develop a grounded, intertextual study of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. McGuire’s study has been followed more recently by the work of Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition, Grant Hardy’s groundbreaking \textit{Understanding the Book of Mormon} contains many remarkable insights, including his discovery that Moroni may have structured the opening chapters of Ether with an eye toward the first ten chapters of Genesis. Working backwards from Genesis 10 to Genesis 1, Moroni’s abridgment of Ether’s record begins with a reference to the Tower of Babel. By the time the brother of Jared has his theophany in Ether 3, readers have reached the creation: “Step by step, Moroni’s account takes us back toward creation, reversing the effects of the Fall and restoring the close communication between God and men that was present in the beginning.”\textsuperscript{21}

Much of the recent scholarship has been devoted to the years leading up to the Babylonian captivity, examining how closely Book of

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\item Grant Hardy, \textit{Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 242. Of the Book of Mormon’s use of the Bible, Hardy writes: “It is striking that even though Joseph Smith sees the Authorized Version as authoritative, at the same time he appears comfortable modifying sacred writ” (Hardy, \textit{Understanding}, 68).
\end{itemize}
Mormon events and declarations reflect the cultural and legal circumstances from which the Lehites departed. One of the most impressive examples of this approach is found in John W. Welch's *The Legal Cases of the Book of Mormon*, where Welch argues that several legal trials that occur in the Book of Mormon follow the legal regulations detailed in biblical books such as Exodus and Deuteronomy. He persuasively argues that "it now seems clear that each legal case in the Book of Mormon can be amply understood in the context of pre-exilic Israelite law."  

David Rolph Seely has contributed two shorter studies in this area, one devoted to the legality of Lehi offering sacrifice outside of Jerusalem, and another focusing on the language of Deuteronomy in the Book of Mormon. Other similar studies include Taylor Halverson's examination of Deuteronomy 17:14–20 in the context of Nephite kingship and Neal Rappleye's study of the impact of the Deuteronomist reforms on Lehi's family.

In this category, we should probably include the work of Methodist scholar Margaret Barker. Over her lengthy career, Barker has developed the thesis that the Israelite religion looked much different prior to Josiah's reforms. She argues that the religion acknowledged multiple deities (including a female one), had a drastically different priesthood and

24. See David Rolph Seely, "Presentation on Deuteronomy in the Book of Mormon," presentation given at BYU Law School, November 18, 2015, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org. Seely has also begun working on the relationship between Jeremiah and the Book of Mormon, as evidenced by his paper at the 2017 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston.
series of temple rituals, and held a belief in *theosis*. In Barker's opinion, Josiah's reforms led to the eradication of these elements from Israelite practice and theology, and the Deuteronomist editors subsequently successfully removed many of these elements from their scriptures. Barker's thesis appealed to Latter-day Saint Book of Mormon scholars who saw in her work a way of explaining how so much of the Book of Mormon, especially the writings of Nephi, could contain elements that would seem out of place in Second Temple Judaism.27

*Traditional Scholarship and New Scripture*

For a long stretch of the twentieth century, Latter-day Saint writers have had a complicated relationship with higher criticism.28 Much of that relationship has been detailed in other works, so I will mention only a couple of them here.29 In his 1947 book, *Our Book of Mormon*, Sidney B. Sperry critiqued the position of what he called "liberal" scholars who advocated multiple authorship of the Pentateuch. Sperry acknowledged


28. For example, Bruce R. McConkie's entry on "Higher Criticism" in *Mormon Doctrine* cross-references "Apostasy" and includes the statement that higher criticism "should more accurately be called destructive criticism" (Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], 353–54).

that biblical scholarship as a whole was moving away from the belief in the unity of the Pentateuch authorship, but Sperry himself said that he still preferred the “conservative position.”30 As was customary in Latter-day Saint Book of Mormon studies, Sperry’s opinion largely became normative for several years. Opinions of how higher criticism could be usefully incorporated changed in 1977 with a landmark article written by Brigham Young University anthropology professor John Sorenson. Sorenson seriously engaged the Documentary Hypothesis and, in something of a bold move, did not shrug it off, but instead argued that the Book of Mormon “may thus support rather than challenge the notion that more than a single source underlines the Old Testament.”31 In Sorenson’s opinion, the brass plates may actually represent the “E” source hypothesized in the Documentary Hypothesis.32 The Northern Kingdom provenance of the “E” source, along with Nephi’s genealogy through Joseph, provided the necessary link in his thesis. A few years later, S. Kent Brown wrote an essay describing the Documentary Hypothesis and other current trends in biblical studies, although he was more hesitant than Sorenson about seriously engaging it.33


32. The Documentary Hypothesis is an attempt to make sense of the seemingly different texts that may have provided the sources for the current Old Testament. The “E” or “Elohist” text refers to one of these possible sources, named because of its use of “El” or “Elohim” to identify the God of Israel prior to Moses’s experience at the burning bush. The “E” text is believed to have origins with the northern tribe of Ephraim. A second text, known as “J,” refers to the Israelite God as “Yahweh” and focuses upon the southern tribe of Judah.

Sunstone essays of the early 1990s laid out the difficulties of reconciling belief in the Book of Mormon with higher criticism. In 1992, David P. Wright penned an intriguing essay entitled “Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in Search of Religious Truth.” Wright laid out two ideological positions when it came to how people approach scripture: Traditionalist (to read the text uncritically) and Critical (evaluating the contextual evidence). Among other issues, Wright personably and honestly treats how certain questions, such as the issue of multiple authors of Isaiah or the presence of New Testament content, impact the Book of Mormon. Wright ended his essay with a plea: “But reasoned critical study must be allowed to guide us in our search for historical understanding and matters related thereto.” In a response to Wright’s essay, William J. Hamblin critiques Wright’s methodology, finding his Traditionalist and Critical dichotomy to be a false one. Instead, Hamblin prefers to speak of secularist and supernaturalist paradigms. He criticized Wright for essentially trying to “have his cake and eat it too” in his creation of a “post-critical apologetic” position, stating: “Unlike most who walk this path, however, Wright is unwilling to take the final step and admit that if his secularist assumptions are correct, the gospel must be simply untrue.” Wright responded to Hamblin by noting that examples of Hamblin’s supernaturalist scholarship were more secular than Hamblin may have thought. Wright’s final words seem almost prescient, looking back twenty-five years later: “I am worried that alienating critical scholars who would constructively imagine new avenues of faith will leave the Church unprepared to deal effectively with critical conclusions like those described in my paper as they urge themselves more and more on the community.”

35. Wright, “Historical Criticism,” 35.
Two recent treatments of this question demonstrate how belief in both the Book of Mormon and higher criticism have been resolved. First, in a 2000 Dialogue article, Latter-day Saint scholar Kevin L. Barney notes how he reconciles belief in the Book of Mormon with the Documentary Hypothesis:

In the case of the Book of Mormon, I see no necessary conflict between that book's essential historicity and the Documentary Hypothesis. The dating of the sources raises a potential conflict, if one accepts a late date for P [Priestly source] or the growing trend, described by Dozeman, of a late date for J [Yahwist source]. But in the model of the theory I accept, the sources are all pre-Exilic, and, as I have indicated, I tend somewhat towards a certain agnosticism on the dating of the sources anyway.

Second, mention must be made of David Bokovoy's work in his monograph Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy. Bokovoy recognizes that while "Historical Criticism (and by extension, Higher Source Criticism) presents some difficulties for the Book of Mormon's claims," he also believes that "a careful reading of the text and a consideration of the work as revelatory literature can resolve some of these issues." Bokovoy helpfully observes that it is not the Documentary Hypothesis itself that is the issue; rather, "it really is the dating of the Pentateuchal sources that presents the only major challenge for the Book of Mormon's claims for ancient authenticity, not the hypothesis itself." Bokovoy concludes with the observation that possible inconsistencies,

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38. See also David Rolph Seely, "We Believe the Bible to Be the Word of God As Far As It Is Translated Correctly": Latter-day Saints and Historical Biblical Criticism," Studies in the Bible and Antiquity 8 (2016): 64–88.
such as those raised by higher criticism, can be eased when Joseph
Smith's role is taken into account: "Joseph was doing the very thing that
the ancient authors of the Hebrew Bible did by taking a previous source
and making it relevant for a contemporary audience. Nephi, Mormon,
Moroni, and Joseph Smith were all continuing the tradition of using
archaic sources to create new scripture."

The Old Testament and Book of Mormon Isaiah
Without a doubt, the most serious arena of contention regarding how
the Old Testament is included in the Book of Mormon involves the
Book of Mormon's incorporation of texts that its authors logically
wouldn't have had access to. Texts such as Second and Third Isaiah as
well as Malachi are generally believed to have been composed after 600
BC, meaning that their appearance in the Book of Mormon could be
viewed as anachronistic. The first serious attempt by a Latter-day Saint
scholar to engage the "Isaiah Question" is found in the work of Sidney
Sperry. Beginning with his 1926 MA thesis written at the University
of Chicago and further developed in subsequent publications, Sperry
tackled the two thorniest questions surrounding inclusion of the Isaiah
passages. First, how could Second and Third Isaiah be present in a
text that claimed to have cut off all ties with Jerusalem around 600 BC?
Second, how should the Book of Mormon's "translation" of Isaiah that
so closely resembled the King James Version be approached? Sperry's
answer to the first was to challenge those who would "dismember" Isa­
iah and instead asserted a sole author for Isaiah's sixty-six chapters. To
the second question, Sperry conceded the near impossibility of Joseph

42. Bokovoy, Authoring, 213.
43. Some preliminary work had been done by B. H. Roberts; see New Witnesses for
44. Sidney B. Sperry, "The Text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" (Master's thesis,
University of Chicago, 1926). Sperry's work directly addressing the "Isaiah Problem"
can be found in "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," Improvement Era 42
(September 1939): 524–25, 564–69; and (October 1939): 594, 634, 636–37. Sperry's
work has been republished a number of times, most recently as "The 'Isaiah Problem'
Smith translating the Isaiah chapters into the exact same language as the KJV, and instead argues that Joseph Smith simply opened up to the appropriate KJV chapters of Isaiah and copied directly from the text. Sperry does, however, isolate several instances where the Isaiah text within the Book of Mormon differs from the KJV Isaiah passages, and, in those instances, Sperry asserts that Joseph translated those verses from the gold plates. Sperry devoted much of his career to the Isaiah problem, including supervising his own students' MA theses, such as H. Grant Vest’s MA thesis written at Brigham Young University in 1938. Sperry’s work on Isaiah was viewed as thorough enough that his conclusions went largely unchallenged for decades. Even the prolific scholar Hugh Nibley largely followed Sperry in his own writings. However, the last two decades of the twentieth century saw two new positions become firmly established. The first position was carved out when John Tvedtnes carefully gathered information from roughly two hundred places in the Book of Mormon where text from Isaiah appears, and then honed in on where the Book of Mormon differs from the KJV. By comparing the variants in the Book of Mormon to other, more ancient texts of Isaiah, such as the Masoretic and LXX (Septuagint)

45. H. Grant Vest, “The Problem of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon’ (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1938). Vest’s work is more than just an extension of Sperry’s work, and deserves to be read in its own right.


47. See Hugh Nibley, Since Cumorah, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 126–34. Nibley even makes the comment that he has largely avoided the Isaiah Question “since this has been in capable hands in the past” (Nibley, Since Cumorah, 121). However, what Nibley does say about the Isaiah Question is certainly worth reading.

Texts, Tvedtnes concluded that the changes Joseph Smith made to Isaiah were actually supported by the earlier versions of Isaiah. In other words, the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon actually represent an earlier, more accurate version of Isaiah that the KJV Isaiah lacks. The other side of the argument has been most forcefully argued by David Wright, who sees the Book of Mormon Isaiah not as representative of an earlier text, but as a thorough redaction of the KJV Isaiah. Wright interprets the variants as a result of Joseph changing or "re-working" the italicized wording of the Isaiah passages and sees any potential connections between the Book of Mormon Isaiah and ancient texts as "insubstantial." 49

One variant in particular, 2 Nephi 12:16 (Isaiah 2:16), has garnered a large amount of attention due to a possible link between the LXX and 2 Nephi 12:16. The phrase "upon all the ships of the sea," is absent from the KJV Isaiah but is present in both the LXX and 2 Nephi 12:16. This is especially prevalent in Dana M. Pike and David Rolph Seely's "Upon all the Ships of the Sea, and Upon All the Ships of Tarshish": Revisiting 2 Nephi 12:16; and Isaiah 2:16," Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 14/2 (2005): 12–25; as well as in Ronald V. Huggins's "Without a Cause' and 'Ships of Tarshish': A Possible Contemporary Source for Two Unexplained Readings from Joseph Smith," Dialogue 36/1 (2003): 157–79. 50


50. Sperry was the first to notice this intriguing variant. See Sidney B. Sperry, Our Book of Mormon, 172–73. See also David P. Wright. "Does 'and upon all the ships of the sea' (2 Ne. 12:16 // Isa. 2:16) Reflect an Ancient Isaian Variant?," Mormon Scripture Studies (2001), http://www.mormonscripturestudies.com.
Most Latter-day Saint treatments of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon written since 1980 have followed Sperry and Tvedtnes when dealing with the questions of provenance and translation (although such discussions rarely occupy more than a couple of pages). These treatments include Monte S. Nyman, Great Are the Words of Isaiah (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); Victor L. Ludlow, Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 93–98; Hoyt W. Brewster, Isaiah Plain and Simple: The Message of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995); Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, Understanding Isaiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998); and Victor L. Ludlow, Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003).

In recent years, some scholarly attention has turned toward the question of how the Book of Mormon is using Isaiah, rather than looking for reasons why it is there. Grant Hardy has argued that the inclusion of the Isaiah chapters, particularly those in 2 Nephi, cannot be simply understood through an appeal to a “proto-text” or to Joseph simply copying straight from the KJV, stating that “it is clear that [the Book of Mormon] offers something of a midrash on Isaiah.”52 Unlike most scholars who write on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, Hardy is not satisfied with simply pointing out the similarities between the two texts. Rather, his focus is on how Nephi uses Isaiah and what that usage can tell readers about Nephi’s self-understanding. By the time readers reach 2 Nephi 25, Nephi’s writing “represents a deliberate, creative synthesis of his own revelations, the writings of Isaiah, and the prophecy of Joseph.”53

In 2011, the Mormon Theology Seminar published a series of papers entitled Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: 2 Nephi 26–27, ed. Joseph

51. Two essays from this volume are particularly noteworthy for how they handle the “Isaiah Question” (John W. Welch, “Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon,” in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, ed. Parry and Welch, 423–48), and the Isaiah variant issue (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, ed. Parry and Welch, 369–90).

52. Hardy, Understanding, 69.

53. Hardy, Understanding, 81.
M. Spencer and Jenny Webb (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2011), which also focuses on the question of how Nephi uses Isaiah. One of the founders of the Mormon Theology Seminar, Joseph Spencer, has been particularly devoted to the role of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. Spencer views the Abrahamic Covenant as a prominent, if not the prominent, theme in the Book of Mormon, and he argues that the Book of Mormon authors use Isaiah’s writings as a theological framework to advance their larger project. Those wishing to engage Spencer’s work on Isaiah should see his An Other Testament: On Typology (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2016); and The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford, 2016). The highly fruitful works of both Hardy and Spencer suggest that Book of Mormon studies will thrive by continuing to move on from the Isaiah Question and source-critical approaches in order to focus more on theology and intertextuality.

As opposed to the mammoth amount of literature devoted to the “Isaiah Question,” questions surrounding Malachi in the Book of Mormon have received much less attention. Wesley P. Walters noted in his MA thesis that Jesus gives Malachi 3 and 4 to his Nephite audience because they were scriptures “which ye had not with you,” but that Malachi 4:1 had appeared as early as 1 Nephi 22:15: “Thus the Book of Mormon itself recognizes that the Jewish people in ancient America could not have had Malachi’s words, yet the Book of Mormon managed to refer to those words in America one hundred years before Malachi had written them.”

More recently, Colby J. Townsend employed a nice blend of source criticism and intertextual work on Malachi to demonstrate the explicit dependence of the Book of Mormon upon the KJV Bible.

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Part II: The New Testament

Critical New Testament Text Found in the Book of Mormon

Sidney B. Sperry performed the first serious study of the topic in his work *The Problems of the Book of Mormon*. Sperry readily conceded that the New Testament was present in the Book of Mormon, in particular, 1 Corinthians 12 and Moroni 10, 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7, as well as Matthew 5–3 and 3 Nephi 12–14. Sperry provided three possible answers, all of which influenced how this problem was handled for the next few decades. First, Sperry suggested that the similarities could be due to Jesus relaying the same teachings to both the Jews, Christians, and the Nephites. Second, he suggested that Moroni and Paul could both be tapping into an existing cultural tradition about spiritual gifts or charity. In other words, the similarities between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon are due to a “common body of teaching” that both texts relied upon. Christianity “was in the world from the beginning,” and so it was totally logical that both texts would overlap in narrative and language. Finally, Sperry offered a solution similar to that of the “Isaiah Question”: When Joseph Smith “came to a passage which contained statements which reminded him of similar ones in the New Testament, he was doubtless influenced by their wording and used them whenever it was possible to do so.” Additionally, small differences that existed between similar texts, such as 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7, would be attributed to Joseph inserting the Nephite reading.

As it was with Isaiah, Sperry’s work on the New Testament in the Book of Mormon influenced those who followed. When Daniel L. Ludlow published his *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* in 1976, he followed Sperry’s lead. In commenting on 3 Nephi 12–14, Ludlow stated: “When the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites, he gave them the same sermon. . . . However, the account of this sermon in the Book of Mormon is much more complete and makes

much more sense than the New Testament account.” In his discussion of Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians 13, Ludlow wrote that “the statement on faith, hope, and charity may not have been original with either Mormon or Paul; it may have been contained in an ancient record available to both of them, or it may have been included in the teachings of the Savior that are not recorded either in the New Testament or in the Book of Mormon.” Ludlow also suggested, as did Sperry, that “the Holy Ghost may have revealed this idea in essentially the same way to both Mormon and Paul.” Speaking on the same topic, Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Both Paul and Mormon expounded with great inspiration about faith, hope, and charity, in many verses using the same words and phrases. If there is any difference between them it is that Mormon expounds the doctrines more perfectly and persuasively than did Paul. It does not take much insight to know that Mormon and Paul both had before them the writings of some Old Testament prophets on the same subject.”

A shift in how the New Testament problem was viewed occurred with the publication of two landmark papers by noted biblical scholars Krister Stendahl and James Charlesworth. Prior to Stendahl’s and Charlesworth’s essays (the latter of which I’ll discuss in the next section), much of the discussion concerning the New Testament in the Book of Mormon revolved around the question of historic authenticity—if the Book of Mormon really did cite phrases and lengthy passages from the New Testament, what did that say about its claims? For this reason, authors who supported a divine provenance for the Book of Mormon

58. Ludlow, Companion, 263.
59. Ludlow, Companion, 336.
60. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 18. In a multi-volume commentary on the Book of Mormon penned by Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, the authors note of Moroni 7:45 that “Mormon’s language here is unmistakably similar to Paul’s language in his epistle to the Corinthians. Certainly both could have received independent revelations from the Lord on the same manner” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon. Vol. 4: Third Nephi through Moroni [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992], 4:343).
looked for alternate reasons why the texts might be similar, such as an earlier source or prophetic inspiration, while those who challenged the book’s provenance found the New Testament to be proof positive that Joseph Smith constructed the text. The brilliance of both articles is that they avoided this question of historic plagiarizing and instead focused on how the Book of Mormon uses the Bible.

Krister Stendahl’s article easily stands as one of the most nuanced readings of the Book of Mormon ever undertaken by a non-Latter-day Saint scholar. Stendahl takes as his texts of comparison Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–14. He makes some preliminary observations, such as 3 Nephi’s emphasis upon the non-Matthean belief, its tendency toward expansion (“filled” vs. “filled with the Holy Spirit”), and its preoccupation with correctly understanding the relationship between Jesus and the Law of Moses. Stendahl then moves on to his major point of emphasis, an astute observation that while 3 Nephi 12–14 may look on the surface like a plain reproduction of Matthew 5–7, subtle additions and nuances reveal that the speaker of the Nephite sermon is not the Matthean Jesus, as one would expect, but the Johannine Jesus. Stendahl observes: “The real analogy between the Johannine Jesus and the Jesus of 3 Nephi is found in the style of discourse.” Stendahl notes, among other traits, a self-referential style of discourse, an emphasis upon the centrality of faith, and the use of rhetorical elements such as “verily, verily” and “behold, behold.” Significantly, Stendahl also observes that 3 Nephi 12–14 eliminates specific references to first-century Jewish issues, such as the references to Pharisees and scribes. Stendahl’s reading of 3 Nephi 12–14 is a reminder that, while the Book of Mormon may adopt King James biblical language and style, and in some places might even seem to reproduce lengthy quotations, readers must be mindful of how the language of the Bible is being used and reproduced throughout the Book of Mormon.

As for the work of others following Stendahl, John W. Welch penned a significant book comparing Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–14. Welch openly acknowledges the similarities between the two texts (“pervasively similar”) and offers a variety of solutions to the problem, including Joseph
Smith’s familiarity with the King James Bible and a remedy for the inadequate manner in which “translation” has typically been understood.61 Stan Larson took a more text-critical approach, isolating several variants from Matthew 5–7 and comparing them to the Book of Mormon. The result, Larson argues, is that “the Book of Mormon text of the sermon is not a genuine translation from an ancient language but Smith’s nineteenth-century targumic expansion of the English KJV.”62 Writing about the connections between 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7, Brant Gardner states: “Undoubtedly 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 is the model upon which Moroni 7:45 is written. Obviously, the same reason for similarity of language exists here as on other occasions where New Testament passages appear in the context of the Book of Mormon text. Joseph’s familiarity with King James Language has supplied the vocabulary for this concept.”63

The Presence of New Testament Language in the Book of Mormon

As far back as the work of B. H. Roberts, it has been noted that the language of the New Testament is present in the text of the Book of Mormon at a phrasal level. Roberts observed several narrative similarities between the two texts, such as the destruction that accompanied the death of Jesus, the fate of John and the three Nephites, and the departures of Moses and Alma. He also noted textual similarities, such as that between Matthew 17:20 and Ether 12:30. Instead of trying to explain these similarities away, Roberts suggested that “the New Testament might well be thought to supply the suggestions and the Book of Mormon a kind of elaboration, or enlargement, of the incidents.”64

Latter-day Saint scholars were slow to respond to Roberts's groundbreaking work, although this was not the case for those outside the Latter-day Saint academic community. Several scholars brought the presence of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon to the forefront, including Thomas O’Dea and Fawn M. Brodie. In 1968, Jerald and Sandra Tanner compiled a list of several hundred parallel phrases shared by the Bible and the Book of Mormon,parallels that in their minds supported the assertion that Joseph Smith copied the Book of Mormon from the KJV Bible. While somewhat useful, the Tanners' list suffers from the lack of a sound methodology and the inclusion of any two- or three-word phrase, no matter how common. While it focuses primarily on the Old Testament, Wesley P. Walters's MA thesis (1981) observes that in addition to New Testament phrases located in the Book of Mormon, "New Testament concepts, interpretations and theology are all worked into the text itself. Moreover, the New Testament’s interpretation of Old Testament events and teachings are expanded upon, and in some instances mistakenly expanded." This led Walters to conclude that "the Book of Mormon, through this process of expansion of New Testament material along with its misinterpretation of that material, clearly demonstrates that it is not an authentically ancient work."

An important contribution in this area is the work of Hugh Nibley. While Nibley largely followed Sperry in searching for an early source common to both the Book of Mormon and the New Testament, unlike Sperry, Nibley was able to put forth more definitive possibilities, relying primarily upon recent archaeological discoveries. Nibley recognized full well that "The New Testament flavor of so much of the Book of Mormon has been until now the strongest single argument against its authenticity." The solution, for Nibley, was obvious. The monumental textual finds at Qumran and Nag Hammadi provided tantalizing clues to the provenance of the Book of Mormon, and Nibley found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi literature clear and obvious parallels to the Book of Mormon. The seemingly anachronistic presence of the title "Christ" in 2 Nephi could be explained by a passage in the Gospel of Philip, while Alma's reference to faith in terms of a seed could be found in the Apocryphon of James. Speaking of the Pauline "faith, hope, and charity," Nibley wrote that this is a formula "on which the new Coptic texts cast some light, and which was known to be not a Pauline invention but a well-known expression in very ancient times; most recently the Dead Sea Scrolls have amply shown that many supposedly unique Pauline expressions were actually borrowed by Paul from much older sources." The clear association between Ether 12:6 ("The Book of Mormon passage most often attacked as evidence of fraud") and Hebrews 11:1 could be explained because "the Scrolls, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament speak a common language."


71. Hugh Nibley, "Since Cumorah: New Voices from the Dust," *Improvement Era* 69/3 (1966), 197. When Nibley published the 1st edition of *Since Cumorah* in book form in 1967 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), he toned down the language to suggest a more generic ancient source for Paul's writings, rather than the Dead Sea Scrolls, suggesting that he may have realized he had overreached with his claims. See also Nibley, "The Literary Style of the Book of Mormon" (*Church News* 29 [1961]: 10, 15), where he calls the parallels between 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 7 a "striking vindication" of the Book of Mormon's inspiration, due to the reliance of Paul upon "some older but unknown source" (Nibley, "Literary Style," 15).

ever, all this is not to say that Nibley didn’t fall back on Sperry’s position from time to time. On one occasion he wrote that “what is thought to be a very serious charge against the Book of Mormon today is that it, a book written down long before New Testament times and on the other side of the world, actually quotes the New Testament! True, it is the same Savior speaking in both, and the same Holy Ghost, and so we can expect the same doctrines in the same language.” While many would look at Nibley’s reasoning and find it the outdated product of mid-twentieth-century comparative studies, Nibley stands apart among his peers for not simply claiming an urtext for the Book of Mormon, but actually trying to locate it, even if more modern scholarship has proven some of his views to be mistaken.

As mentioned earlier, important contributions to this topic were coming from biblical scholars such as Krister Stendahl and James Charlesworth. The appearance of explicit Christian messianism in the chapters prior to 3 Nephi was of key interest to Charlesworth. He observes that Jewish pseudepigraphic texts such as 4 Ezra and 3 Enoch and Christian compositions such as 1 Enoch and the Odes of Solomon do use terms such as “the Messiah,” “the Anointed One,” and “the Christ.” However, Charlesworth notes that “we need to be cautious and recognize that most of the pseudepigrapha do not contain these technical terms.” Charlesworth then turns his attention to the Book of Mormon. He correctly notes that 1 Nephi 10 marks an entry point for messianism in the Book of Mormon, and then identifies several sections that he believes demonstrate a “later Christian influence,” such as 2 Nephi 25:16–19; 26:3 and Mosiah 3:8–10. Charlesworth suggests that this explicit messianism, one pre-dating the birth of Jesus Christ, could be the product of editors such as Mormon or Joseph Smith and proposes that this explicit messianism be studied more closely by redac-

73. Nibley, Prophetic Book of Mormon, 216.
tion critics. Charlesworth further notes two particular areas where the Book of Mormon and the pseudepigraphic literature overlap, specifically the idea that Jesus will visit the lost tribes of Israel and the idea that the coming of the Messiah could be perceived as a return of the Messiah. Charlesworth suggests that many of the similarities between the pseudepigraphic literature and the Book of Mormon are the result of common origins, particularly the Bible.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Latter-day Saint scholars began to turn more of their attention to the language of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon, largely in response to those who were trying to use the presence of New Testament language in the Book of Mormon as proof of fraudulence. In a response to the Tanner's *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, Matthew Roper argues that much of the New Testament language likely had a Semitic background that could explain its presence in the Book of Mormon: “I would like to see an in-depth study of the Semitic background behind the New Testament passages which most resemble those in the Book of Mormon. I believe that such a study would show how frequently the New Testament draws on older material.” 76 In a review of the same work, John A. Tvedtnes proposes a slightly different solution: “My response to this criticism is that Joseph Smith deliberately used the King James Version wording because it corresponded to the Bible known to his contemporaries. . . . The use of precise New Testament phraseology is not negative, however, as long as the idea fits the passage.” 77 In another essay dealing with specific similarities between Jacob 7 and Romans 11, Tvedtnes argues that, while “the grafting of the branches appears to be related to Paul's comments in Romans 11:17–24,” in his opinion, “Paul was more likely

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inspired by the writings of Zenos.” Tvedtnes surveys a number of biblical and non-biblical sources in presenting his argument that Jacob 7 represents an engagement with earlier texts and traditions already in existence prior to Paul’s letter.

The last decade or so has seen a shift by Latter-day Saint scholars toward the position that the New Testament plays a significant role in the composition of the Book of Mormon. In his analysis of Ether 12, Grant Hardy does not hesitate to tackle what he terms “a couple of glaringly problematic chapters from the New Testament’s Epistle to the Hebrews.” The problem, Hardy notes, is that Moroni writes Ether 12 as if he “is as fully familiar with the text of Hebrews as he is with Nephi’s or Mormon’s writings.” In contrast to many who have written on this topic, Hardy claims that the presence of New Testament phrases “are not simply the haphazard result of a biblically literate translator putting ideas into an idiom respected by his readers,” but rather “a creative adaption.” Hardy concludes with the statement that “Ether 12’s clear and thorough dependence on Hebrews 6 and 11 . . . has simultaneously supplied some of the most compelling evidence that the book has its origins in the nineteenth century.” Hardy’s meticulous attention to detail, his uncanny awareness of nuance, and his willingness to carefully read the text as it is written make his monograph an absolute must-read and a model for how an analysis of the use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon can be responsibly done.


79. Books critical of the Book of Mormon continue to be published as well, although many of them largely recycle the arguments found in previous works. See, for example, Earl M. Wunderli, An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Itself (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), esp. 73–77.

80. Hardy, Understanding, 255.

81. Hardy, Understanding, 256–57.

82. Hardy, Understanding, 260.
Brant A. Gardner has written a six-volume commentary on the Book of Mormon. In his discussion of 1 Nephi 10:8–9, which bears close similarities to Isaiah 40:3–4 and Mark 1:2–7, Gardner writes:

The relationship of text to translation is not a literal word-for-word translation of each word on the plates but a casting of the meaning of those words into phrasing that Joseph knew and understood. A number of these referents are from the New Testament, and it appears that Joseph was more conversant with the New Testament than the Old. In this case, Mark became the model for the English text, although Isaiah had to have been the model for Nephi's text, since he would not have had access to Mark's.  

In a recent monograph on the translation of the Book of Mormon, Gardner re-affirms this same position on why the New Testament is present in the Book of Mormon, writing that

I see the process of translating these passages as consisting of two parts. The first is that there was a meaning on the plates that could be appropriately rendered into English. Then, Joseph's familiarity with the New Testament passages primed his memory with the familiar phrases. Those phrases were available and appropriate to the meaning Joseph understood and therefore became the way the plate text meaning was expressed in the English translation.

My own work has sought to further explore the complexities involved with the Book of Mormon's use of the New Testament. In a 2016 monograph, I analyzed all the places where the Johannine Prologue appears in the Book of Mormon and divided those usages into various categories based upon how the Johannine phrase was integrated into the text.

85. Nicholas J. Frederick, The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016). For a similar attempt at a close intertextual study, but on a much smaller scale, see Nicholas J. Frederick, “If
While I see the overall project as the author of the Book of Mormon seeking religious authority and legitimacy through allusion to a well-respected religious text, I am struck by how thoroughly and organically the New Testament phrases are woven into the Book of Mormon. I sought to understand this “weaving” a little better in a 2018 *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article, where I argue that the Book of Mormon is a complex redaction of the KJV New Testament. In the process, I identify several different types of “weavings” performed by the author, from simple phrasal insertions to entire sentences constructed out of multiple New Testament documents. I also included an appendix of approximately seven hundred places where the Book of Mormon has incorporated the New Testament. In an attempt to demonstrate how fruitful it could be to read the Book of Mormon intertextually with the New Testament, Joseph M. Spencer and I co-authored an article looking at how John 11 is adapted in Alma 19 in a way that provokes theological and eschatological questions and answers.

*A Methodology for Responsibly Identifying Texts within the Book of Mormon*

Serious study of the New Testament language in the Book of Mormon has largely been hamstrung by the lack of a sound methodology for...
identifying responsibly how one determines that a phrase is, in fact, from the New Testament and not the Old Testament or just the product of a text written in King James language. The first real step in this direction was taken by Noel B. Reynolds in his essay “The Brass Plates Version of Genesis.” Reynolds argues that textual similarities between the Bible and the Book of Mormon can be best understood by the hypothesis that “the Book of Mormon writers had access in the brass plates to a document substantially the same as the book of Moses given to Joseph Smith by inspiration in 1830.”

In order to better grasp the intertextual relationship between the brass plates, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Mormon, Reynolds laid out a methodology for determining dependence. His seven criteria included repetition of phrases, similarity of context, and distinctive terminology. While Reynolds’s thesis that the Nephites had access to a document similar to the Book of Moses in the form of the brass plates may seem untenable by today’s standards, Reynolds deserves a great deal of credit for recognizing that this type of close, intertextual study requires a firm and thorough methodology.

A second major step forward was taken with the 1993 publication of David P. Wright’s article “In Plain Terms That We May Understand: Joseph Smith’s Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12–13.” Wright states up front that he intends to demonstrate that “the dependence of Alma 12–13 on Hebrews constitutes an anachronism and indicates that the chapters are a composition of Joseph Smith.” Had he stopped here, Wright’s work would not have differed much from the work of his predecessors, such as Wesley Walters. What makes Wright’s work so valuable is that he was also interested in the question of “how Joseph

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Smith used Hebrews in his composition of Alma 12–13: What parts of that epistle did he pick up? How did he represent and transform these elements in the Book of Mormon chapters? What new ideas grew out of his use of the biblical text? Looking at the Melchizedek material, Wright finds that “Smith does not simply cite the passage from Hebrews but gives it a new context and meaning.” Wright also provides a detailed critique of the traditional idea that similar content in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon is due to a “proto” text, an approach that Wright claims has “several difficulties.” The best part of Wright’s article is the conclusion, in which he lays out four different traits determining how Joseph Smith uses the language of Hebrews: textual conservation, solving problems, midrashic transformation or expansion, and recontextualization. Wright included his desire that “such classification provides a basis for further study” but his work has unfortunately not received the reception it deserves.

Benjamin L. McGuire is another key participant in the methodology conversation. In an essay arguing for literary allusions to the story of David slaying Goliath in Nephi’s slaying of Laban, McGuire sets out his own methodology based upon the groundbreaking work of Richard Hays and Ziva Ben-Porat. McGuire seeks to find what he terms the “literary allusion” through which the Book of Mormon can be interpreted. He proposes a series of “signals” and “markers” as well as a way of evaluating how those literary cues can be interpreted. McGuire is on point when he says that “any study that deals with intertextuality

90. Wright, “In Plain Terms,” 166.
93. One scholar whose work could be viewed as following Wright’s model is Mark D. Thomas. See Thomas, Digging in Cumorah, esp. 16–24. See also Thomas, “Mosaic for a Religious Counterculture,” 47–68.
and authorial intent will always remain hypothetical.”94 These words are especially germane to the Book of Mormon, a text for which the original is not available. McGuire followed up his Journal of Book of Mormon Studies essay with a lengthy (and quite valuable) two-part essay in the Interpreter.95 Although the immediate occasion of the article is a critique of Rick Grunder’s Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source, McGuire uses the opportunity to warn against those who engage in comparative studies irresponsibly, as such studies inevitably lead to flawed results. McGuire’s two-part piece should be required reading for anyone attempting to venture into the waters of scriptural intertextuality.

In a 2015 essay in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, I also ventured to lay out a methodology for serious intertextual work, although mine was limited to the New Testament, which I see as presenting a different set of problems than the Old Testament.96 Due to how thoroughly the Book of Mormon integrates the New Testament, I suggested abandoning the typical hierarchy of Quotation, Allusion, and Echo—terms that typically rely on strings of consecutive words—in favor of either “Allusion” or “Interaction.” This change allows readers to bypass the distracting question of how Lehi can be “quoting” John in 2 Nephi 2 or how Nephi can be “quoting” Paul in 2 Nephi 4. However, as long as the terms are clearly defined, the terminology itself is less important. Additionally, I also laid out a series of criteria for establishing a threshold for what phrases should be considered actual interactions, while at the same time weeding out those that likely are not. Again, due to the complexity of the topic, I suggested employing terms such as “Precise,”

"Probable," and "Possible." In my opinion, only the first two categories are of any value, and those that fall under the umbrella of "Possible" should not be seriously considered as data points.

Conclusion

Interest in the relationship between the Bible and the Book of Mormon shows no signs of going away. The scholarship being produced on the topic continues to be more informative and refined. However, there is, in my opinion, much more that needs to be done. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, so much space has been devoted to the Isaiah Question, yet what of texts such as Joshua, Ezekiel, or Job? Are those texts (or others) present? If so, how are they incorporated into the text? Are there theological or eschatological applications, or is their presence largely rhetorical? David Rolph Seely has begun to explore other Old Testament books, but there remains plenty to be done. Furthermore, the work of Grant Hardy and Joseph Spencer has demonstrated that studying how an Old Testament text is used in Book of Mormon, rather than just where, can be a remarkably fruitful endeavor. Likely, further success in this second point will depend upon how thoroughly scholars engage the first.

As far as the New Testament is concerned, the majority of the work in recovering New Testament phrases has, I think, been largely accomplished. The task now is to determine what to do with this information. Again, studies of how individual authors are represented would be a productive starting point. We need to determine if, say, the majority of Book of Mormon phrases that were drawn from the Gospel of Mark came from narratives, while those drawn from the Gospel of Matthew came from Jesus's speeches, would that matter? How is Paul's theology represented in the Book of Mormon, and how does that representation work in relation to places where Paul's epistles are actually cited? Is there any correlation at all, or does the Book of Mormon provide its own language when engaging Pauline thought? And what of the Book of Revelation, whose language courses throughout the Book of Mormon?
Does its language simply exist to provide eschatological punch to the Book of Mormon message or does it serve to position the text as a revelation itself? Once Book of Mormon scholars reach a point where there exists a consensus on what Book of Mormon passages are drawn from the New Testament, then this type of work can begin in earnest. On this point, then, I see study of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon to have advanced beyond that of the Old Testament, which, to my knowledge, still lacks a catalogue of which Book of Mormon passages can be identified as having an Old Testament provenance. Obviously, there is a different set of problems when it comes to Old Testament content in the Book of Mormon, but those problems are by no means insurmountable, and the initial methodological work has already been completed. It’s just a matter of taking the next steps.

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