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Abstract Joseph Smith has been charged with plagiarism in the Book of Mormon and his own revelations, largely because of lengthy biblical quotations (which, in each instance, have been credited to the Old Testament prophet whose words are being cited). Numerous examples in the Old Testament show that prophets freely borrowed verbiage from another. In the nineteenth century, newspapers reprinted material, often without attribution.

WAS JOSEPH SMITH GUILTY OF PLAGIARISM?

John A. Tvedtnes

Some critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have charged that Joseph Smith was a plagiarist, borrowing Bible passages and the writings of other people for both the Book of Mormon and his own revelations. Because the terms *plagiarism*, *plagiarize*, and *plagiarist* have legal implications, their use seems intended to cast aspersions on the Prophet and the church he founded.

A modern dictionary defines the verb *plagiarize* as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own.”¹ Webster’s 1828 dictionary, reflecting American usage in Joseph Smith’s time, has a similar definition: “The act of purloining another man’s literary works, or introducing passages from another man’s writings and putting them off as one’s own; literary theft.” These definitions automatically exclude the lengthier Bible quotations in the Book of Mormon since each instance credits the Old Testament prophet whose words are being cited² or, in the case of the Sermon on the Mount, credits Christ³ as sources for those quotations. These are the passages most

1. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003).

2. Nephi and his brother Jacob regularly gave Isaiah credit for passages taken from his book (see 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 6:4–6; 11:2, 8; 25:1, 4–7). The same is true of others who quoted Isaiah, such as Abinadi (see Mosiah 14:1; 15:6) and the risen Christ (see 3 Nephi 16:17), who also cited a passage from Malachi, naming him as the source (see 3 Nephi 24:1).

3. 3 Nephi 12:1; 15:1.

often cited by critics as “plagiarism,” so it is clear that they are misusing the term. Davis Bitton said it best:

But is that what is going on when the Book of Mormon quotes biblical passages? Was Joseph Smith indeed trying to claim that he, not Jesus, was the author of the Beatitudes? Was he trying to pretend that the beautiful prose of the Authorized Version was for the first time being produced by him? How foolish, then, to draw his quotations from the single work most familiar to the public in his lifetime! What intelligent reader of the Bible would fail to notice? If footnotes had been part of the apparatus of the original 1830 publication, most certainly he would have noted at the appropriate places: “Here I am using the most widely accepted English translation, the King James version, changing it only when I notice that it varies from the engravings before me.” Far from making an effort to conceal this relationship, as notes were added they called attention to the biblical passages that are quoted in the Book of Mormon.⁴

Plagiarism in Bible Times?

The concept of plagiarism is relatively modern. Many ancient texts do not disclose the names of the persons who authored them, though they sometimes name the copyist in a colophon. The books of the Bible usually name their authors, though there are exceptions. More important for the question at hand is that some of these books sometimes quote extensively from others without crediting the author. For example, portions of the historical chapters of Isaiah (chapters 36–39) are drawn from chapters 19–20 of 2 Kings without acknowledging that source.⁵

4. Davis Bitton, review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 3–4.

5. This assumes that 2 Kings was compiled by a later author or scribe since it also covers events that postdate the time of Isaiah.

The two books of Chronicles are later revisions of the material found in 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings, with additional material drawn from elsewhere.⁶ The Chroniclers emended the text when their theology did not agree with it. Thus, for example, whereas 2 Samuel 24:1 says that the Lord prompted David to conduct a census of the people of Israel, the version in 1 Chronicles 21 says it was Satan! Some variants, however, are unrelated to theological differences. In the story of the census, the Samuel account says that David purchased land from a man named Araunah to use as a place of sacrifice; the Chroniclers say the man's name was Ornan.⁷

By the time of the Chroniclers (probably after the Babylonian captivity), the divine name rendered *LORD* or *Jehovah* in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible had fallen into disuse and was usually replaced by *God*. This has led to such anomalies as the expression “Jehovah my God” becoming “God my God” in Psalms 43:4, 45:7, and 50:7.⁸ That such changes were made is best illustrated by certain psalms that are found in more than one of the five divisions of the book of Psalms. For example, Psalm 53, which uses *Elohim*, is the same as Psalm 14, where the name *Jehovah* is used.⁹ Psalm 70 and its parallel in Psalm 40:13–17 interchange the names *Elohim* and *Jehovah*. The same phenomenon occurs in Psalm 108, which seems to be a composite of Psalms 57:7–11 and 60:5–12. Some of David's psalms are found in both the book of Psalms and elsewhere, such as 2 Samuel 22, of which verses 2–51 were extracted to form Psalm 18:2–50. First Chronicles 16:8–36 contains segments of Psalms 105 (vv. 2–15), 96 (vv. 1–13), and 106 (vv. 47–48).¹⁰

6. Some Bible readers likely think that the descriptive phrase “chronicles of the kings of Judah/Israel” mentioned in 1–2 Kings refers to 1–2 Chronicles, but this is clearly not the case. The material to which the writer(s) of 1–2 Kings referred is usually not found in 1–2 Chronicles.

7. The difference can be explained on linguistic grounds, but the point made here remains valid.

8. Some scholars see this phenomenon as evidence that Jewish exiles returning from Babylon had merged *Elohim* and *Jehovah*, originally separate deities, into a single God.

9. Psalm 14:1–3//53:1–3 (cited by Paul in Romans 3:12) reads, “there is none that doeth good, no, not one,” which is closely paralleled in Ecclesiastes 7:20 (“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not”).

10. For more details, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Ancient Israelite Psalters,” in Victor L. Ludlow et al., *Covenants, Prophecies, and Hymns of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City:

In the Book of Mormon, briefer extracts from the Bible are usually not credited to the original author,¹¹ but they would have been readily recognized by informed readers as having come from a specific source. This was a common practice in ancient times. Thus we find the New Testament frequently quoting from the Old Testament, sometimes without citing the source.¹² Applying the same standard to the Bible that the critics apply to the Book of Mormon, one could conclude that some New Testament writers—and even Christ himself—are also guilty of “plagiarism.”¹³

Deseret Book, 2001). The ancient Israelites are known to have borrowed some biblical psalms from their neighbors and to have changed, for example, the name of Baal to that of Jehovah or Elohim.

11. For example, following the insertion of chapters 2–14 of Isaiah into his own book (2 Nephi 12–24), Nephi gave his own prophecy (in 2 Nephi 27) in which he cited snippets of Isaiah’s writings and even a paraphrase of Isaiah 29. This was his way of likening the scriptures to his own people, including those who would read his words in future centuries.

12. For example, in Revelation 4:8 we read, “the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; . . . they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” The same imagery is found in Isaiah 6:2–3: “Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings. . . . And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord.” In Paul’s epistle to the Romans we find the following Old Testament passages cited without authorial credit (though he sometimes says it is “written”): Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:17), Deuteronomy 10:17 (Romans 2:11), Psalm 51:4 (Romans 3:4), Psalm 14:1–3//53:1–3 (Romans 3:10–12), Psalm 5:9 + 140:3 (Romans 3:13), Psalm 10:7 (Romans 3:14), Isaiah 59:7–8 (Romans 3:15–17), Psalm 36:1 (Romans 3:18), Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:3), Genesis 17:5 (Romans 4:17), Genesis 15:5 (Romans 4:18), Psalm 44:22 (Romans 8:36), Genesis 21:12 (Romans 9:7), Genesis 18:10 or 14 (Romans 9:9), Genesis 25:23 (Romans 9:12), Malachi 1:2–3 (Romans 9:13), LXX Exodus 33:19 (Romans 9:15), Exodus 9:16 (Romans 9:17), Isaiah 28:16 (Romans 9:33), Deuteronomy 30:12–14 (Romans 10:6–8), Joel 2:32 (Romans 10:13), Isaiah 28:16 (Romans 10:11), Psalm 86:5 (Romans 10:13), Isaiah 52:7 (Romans 10:15), LXX Psalm 19:4 (Romans 10:18), Isaiah 29:10 (Romans 11:8), Isaiah 59:20–21 (Romans 11:26–27), Isaiah 40:13 (Romans 11:34), Amos 5:15 (Romans 12:9), LXX Proverbs 3:7 (Romans 12:16), Deuteronomy 32:35–36 (Romans 12:19), Proverbs 25:21–22 (Romans 12:20), Isaiah 45:23 (Romans 14:11), Psalms 69:9 (Romans 15:3), Psalm 18:49//1 Samuel 22:50 (Romans 15:9), Deuteronomy 32:43 (Romans 15:10), Psalm 117:1 (Romans 15:11), Isaiah 52:15 (Romans 15:21). In some cases, the KJV does not read the same for the Old Testament and Romans passage, but Paul’s verbiage came from the Greek Septuagint (LXX). While there are some Old Testament passages in Romans that Paul attributes to an author (usually Esaias = Isaiah, Moses, and David), the vast majority of his quotations are unattributed.

13. For example, in Matthew 21:13, 16, the Savior quoted Jeremiah 7:11 and Psalm 8:2 without credit. When the devil tempted Christ in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–10),

The same can be said of the writers of the various Old Testament books, who sometimes borrowed from earlier prophets, usually without giving credit. Perhaps the most well-known example is found in a passage shared by Isaiah and Micah, who may have been contemporaries.

Isaiah 2:2–4

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Micah 4:1–3

1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

It seems evident that one of these prophets borrowed verbiage from the other. Moreover, part of each passage seems to have been borrowed from the prophet Joel (or vice versa), who wrote, “Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears” (Joel 3:10). Micah 4:7 (“the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever”) seems to derive from Isaiah 24:23 (“the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion”) or from Psalm 146:10 (“The Lord shall reign for

the Savior responded by quoting Old Testament passages (see Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16) without naming the source. Though Moses is said to have recorded the words, they were delivered to him by the premortal Messiah (see 3 Nephi 15:4–5).

ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations”). Some critics might respond that the passages from Isaiah and Micah are the same because they were both dictated by God, the real “author” of the Bible. If that be the case, then why must we assume that God could not have dictated Old (and even future New) Testament passages to the writers whose words are preserved in the Book of Mormon?

Here are some other examples of Old Testament prophets who borrowed (sometimes by paraphrase) from Isaiah’s writings (or vice versa):

Isaiah 3:1

For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.

Isaiah 11:9

for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea

Isaiah 29:14

Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good. (See Isaiah 40:9)

Isaiah 59:7

Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood.

Ezekiel 4:16

Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment.

Habakkuk 2:14

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 1:5

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

Nahum 1:15

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!

Proverbs 1:16

For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

The prophet Obadiah borrowed elements of Jeremiah's writings, as the following table demonstrates. Note that the quotations all come from the same source (Jeremiah 49) and are all included in Obadiah 1.

Jeremiah 49

14 I have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathen, saying, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle.

16 Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord.

9 If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough.

7 Concerning Edom, thus saith the LORD of hosts; Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished?

Obadiah 1

1 We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

3 The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?

4 Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

5 If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?

8 Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?

9 And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

12 Behold, they whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunken; and art thou he that shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt surely drink of it.

17 Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof.

16 For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau¹⁴ for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

Obadiah 1:3–4//Jeremiah 49:16 borrows terminology from Balaam’s prophecy of Edom and its neighbors (see Numbers 24:12–24), especially from Numbers 24:21, where he mentions the “rock” and the “nest.”

Another example comes from Joel, the source of the prophecy concerning the wonders in heaven that will precede Christ’s second coming:

The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. . . . And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. . . . The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. (Joel 2:10, 30–31; 3:15)

Several Old Testament prophets borrowed from this passage, as the following extracts demonstrate:

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth,

14. Esau was also called Edom, whence the name of the land in which he settled (see Genesis 25:30; 32:3; 36:1, 8, 19, 43). This explains why Esau and Edom are paralleled in Obadiah 1:8.

and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. (Isaiah 13:10, also quoted in 2 Nephi 23:10)

And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God. (Ezekiel 32:7–8)

Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. (Micah 3:6)

Amos 8:9 may be an allusion to the same passage: “And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.” See also Isaiah 24:23: “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.”¹⁵

Christ also incorporated Joel’s prophecy into his recital of the signs of his second coming, though he gives no attribution:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. (Matthew 24:29; compare Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33)

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars

15. These prophesied events were known by the Lamanite prophet Samuel, who associated them with the time of Christ’s death (see Helaman 14:20; compare 3 Nephi 8:22). In the Doctrine and Covenants, these are said to be signs of Christ’s second coming (see D&C 29:14; 34:9; 45:42; 88:87; 133:49). I have argued elsewhere that Christ’s appearance to the Nephites in the city Bountiful foreshadowed his second coming; see “Christ’s Visit to the Nephites as a Type of his Second Coming,” chap. 39 in John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999, later reissued by Horizon).

of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. (Mark 13:24–25; compare Luke 21:25)

John describes his vision of the heavenly bodies in similar terms, but without connecting his words to the earlier prophecies:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. (Revelation 6:12–13)

And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. (Revelation 8:12)¹⁶

Peter, on the other hand, credits Joel:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel[:] . . . And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come. (Acts 2:16, 19–20)

Nineteenth-Century Practices

The critics typically apply twentieth- and twenty-first-century standards and norms to the time of Joseph Smith to demonstrate that he was a “false prophet.” In his day, newspapers frequently reprinted articles published in other newspapers, sometimes with attribution and sometimes without. Latter-day Saint publications borrowed from other

16. Revelation 21:23 says that the heavenly city that will descend to earth has no need of sun or moon because God and the Lamb will provide its light. The idea seems to derive from Isaiah 60:19–20: “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

periodicals and vice versa. For example, following the publication of the first extract from the Book of Abraham in the 1 March 1842 issue of the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo, Joseph noted that “several of the most widely circulated papers are beginning to exhibit ‘Mormonism’ in its true light. The first out of a *fac-simile* from the Book of Abraham, has been republished both in the New York *Herald* and in the *Dollar Week Bostonian*, as well as in the *Boston Daily Ledger*, edited by Mr. Bartlett; together with the translation from the Book of Abraham” (*History of the Church*, 5:11). He also noted the publication of an article from the *Boston Bee* in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* (*History of the Church*, 5:556). The 1 April 1843 issue of *Times and Seasons* (vol. 4, no. 10, p. 149) featured an extract from a newspaper called the *Daily Sun*.

Many newspapers of Joseph’s day, however, merely reprinted material found in other publications without crediting sources. In the days before wire services like AP, UPI, and Reuters, this was how news got from one country or state to another. Indeed, newspapers and musical compositions were not covered by the Copyright Act of 1790, which secured to an author the exclusive right to publish and sell “maps, charts and books” for fourteen years, with the right of renewal for an additional fourteen years if the author was still living. The act specifically excluded the works of foreign authors. During the nine years following its passage, only 556 out of approximately 13,000 titles published in the United States were copyrighted. Today, U.S. copyright law covers any and all written manuscripts, even if not published, provided the author can prove authorship. The text of the KJV Bible, of course, is not copyrighted.¹⁷

In a few cases, Joseph Smith, in his translation of the Book of Mormon and in some of his revelations, used verbiage that is also found in the English translations of early Church Fathers that were published *after* the Prophet’s death. Compare the following examples (with emphasis added):

17. The copyright notice in the 1979 LDS edition of the Bible applies only to introductory material, chapter headings, footnotes, and appendix material.

18. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (reprint of 1885 ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:414.

Joseph Smith (1805–1844)

the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth (D&C 1:30)

For have not they revealed *the plan of salvation*? (Jarom 1:2)

that *the plan of salvation* might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations (Alma 24:14)

the great plan of salvation (Alma 42:5)

This is *the plan of salvation* unto all men. (Moses 6:62)

Irenaeus of Lyon (died AD 155)

the only true and life-giving faith, which the *Church* has received (*Against the Heresies* 3, preface)¹⁸

We have learned from none others *the plan of our salvation*, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us. (*Against the Heresies* 3.1.1)

These parallels are certainly on a par with the ones that critics like the Tanners cite as Book of Mormon borrowings from the New Testament. The term *plan of salvation* does not appear in the Bible. Various passages in the Doctrine and Covenants also quote parts of the Bible, sometimes without credit. Here, for example, Joseph Smith used New Testament verbiage from Jesus:

a generation of vipers shall not escape the damnation of hell (D&C 121:23)

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matthew 23:33; compare Matthew 12:34)

Even before the Savior began his ministry, John the Baptist was using the same expression, saying, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7). Doctrine and Covenants 121:23 credits “the Lord of Hosts” for this idiom, while Jesus never credited John the Baptist. When one acknowledges that Jesus, John, and Joseph were speaking for the Father, it seems unfair to single out Joseph Smith as guilty of plagiarism.

Refuting the Critics

I have previously addressed questions about Book of Mormon borrowings from the Bible. These studies include my reviews of certain writings by critics Wesley Walters¹⁹ and Jerald and Sandra Tanner,²⁰ as well as a review coauthored with Matthew Roper.²¹ It seems appropriate to include some of that information here.

Walters pointed out that the use of wording from Malachi 4:1 in two pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages (1 Nephi 22:15; 2 Nephi 26:4, 6) is anachronistic since Malachi lived two centuries after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem and could not have been known to the Nephites. The irony is that Joseph Smith must have known this already, having previously translated 3 Nephi 26:2, where Jesus notes that the writings of Malachi were not had among the Nephites.²² Even if Joseph Smith were the author of the Book of Mormon, as Walters believes, one must wonder why he would make such a slip in the writings of Nephi. The answer probably lies in an earlier, unattested text from which both Malachi and Nephi were quoting. The concept (and much of the wording) in Malachi 4:1 is found in Isaiah 5:24; 33:11; 47:14 (compare Obadiah 1:18) and Nahum 1:10.

Walters suggested that the Book of Mormon's use of the language of the KJV is evidence that Joseph Smith authored the book. By that reasoning, we should reject the KJV as well, since its translators, though occasionally consulting the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments, relied heavily on previous English translations of the Bible. As a result, much of the language of that Bible version (about 80 percent) can be traced to William Tyndale's translation

19. John A. Tvedtnes, review of *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*, by Wesley P. Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 220–34.

20. John A. Tvedtnes, review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, Volume 1,"* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 204–49.

21. John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha: Shadow or Reality?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 8/2 (1996): 326–72.

22. Both LDS and non-LDS scholars have acknowledged that the small plates were translated last, after Joseph had dictated Mosiah through Moroni. Walters appears to accept this view, writing that Isaiah 48–51, which is quoted in 2 Nephi 6–8, was "the final segment of [Joseph Smith's] work."

eight decades earlier, with some parts traceable to John Wycliffe's Bible, published in the late fourteenth century. A similar feature is found in the Greek text of the New Testament, which, when quoting Old Testament passages, draws not on the Hebrew original but on the Septuagint Greek translation prepared a couple of centuries before the time of Christ.²³

In outlining their "black hole" explanation of the Book of Mormon's small plates, the Tanners theorized that Joseph Smith used filler from the Old Testament in order to make up for the lack of historical detail that would have contradicted the material contained in the lost 116 pages of manuscript. Citing a number of chapters of Isaiah, they find it odd that Nephi would quote this material rather than recount the history of his people. Because that material is already found in our Bible, the Tanners term its inclusion in the Book of Mormon "ridiculous."

Actually, Nephi's work in this respect is no less ridiculous than the fact that the Bible repeats the genealogy lists of Genesis 5, 10–11, 36 in the early chapters of 1 Chronicles, that 2 Kings 18–20 repeats material already found in Isaiah 36–39, or that much of the history found in the books of Samuel and Kings is repeated in Chronicles, and so on. The Tanners use the same tactic as many other anti-Mormon writers, attacking the Book of Mormon in the same manner that unbelievers attack the Bible. This double standard compromises the work of these naysayers. Moreover, Nephi used most of the Isaiah quotations as a vehicle to explain the meaning of his own revelations from God (see 2 Nephi 25:1–31:1). He could not have done this as effectively had he not quoted them for his readers in the preceding chapters (2 Nephi 12–24).

In the appendix to their book, the Tanners claim that many passages found in the Book of Mormon were borrowed from the New Testament. I countered with examples of those passages in the Old Testament and noted that in some cases the New Testament is actually quoting from the Old, while in others the passages employ common

23. For a detailed discussion of the issues, see John A. Tvedtnes, *Defining the Word: Understanding the History and Language of the Bible* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2006).

Hebrew idioms. I further noted that their “black hole” theory is at odds with their “Bible plagiarism” theory. The latter assumes that Joseph Smith’s fantastic memory enabled him to recall biblical expressions and incorporate them wholesale into the Book of Mormon. The former has Joseph Smith “forgetting” what he had given in the 116 lost pages and having to avoid discussing the same topics, lest he contradict what he had dictated earlier.

In explaining their position on biblical “plagiarism” in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners note that, while they are not opposed to the use of Bible passages per se in the Book of Mormon, “what we do object to is [Joseph] Smith appropriating Bible verses and stories into his own works . . . and claiming that he is translating from ancient documents.”²⁴ Ironically, what they describe is precisely what the translators of the KJV did. Joseph Smith is in good company.

24. Tvedtnes, review essay in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 232.