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Introduction

The Zarahemla Research Foundation (ZRF) published *The Book of Mormon: Restored Covenant Edition* in 1999. The title page proclaims “With text restored to its purity from the Original and Printer’s Manuscripts as translated by the gift and power of God through Joseph Smith, Jr. from the original plates preserved by the hand of God to come forth for this time” (emphasis added). The introduction enumerates the following objectives:

The Restored Covenant Edition (RCE) has been prepared because, according to our testimony, the Lord directed us to do it:

1) to restore the purity of The Book of Mormon by restoring words from the manuscripts that were either left out or changed,

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1 express appreciation to Ray Treat of ZRF, who provided copies of *A Comparison of the Book of Mormon Manuscripts & Editions* and *The Book of Mormon Chapter & Verse: RLDS–LDS Conversion Table*.

2) to reveal an understanding of the main purpose of The Book of Mormon which is to restore a knowledge of the covenants,

3) to reveal the underlying spiritual name of The Book of Mormon which is The Book of the Restoration of the Covenant because “Mormon” symbolically means restoration of the covenant,

4) to make available the poetic nature of the text making it easier to read and comprehend and easier to identify Hebrew poetry, and

5) to bring to light the natural grouping together of thoughts (without changing verse numbers) through the use of blank lines thus making it easier to comprehend. (pp. vii–viii)

According to the introduction, the RCE “is the most accurate and pure text available to date” (p. ix). However, the restoration, the editors admit, is not complete. In many instances, the wording in the original or printer’s manuscripts is not restored in the RCE. The ZRF presents three criteria allowing deviations from these early manuscripts:

1) The use of is/are/was/were where the manuscript form disagrees with current English grammar and restoration would cause a distraction;

2) other verb forms where the manuscript form is incorrect by English standards, creating an awkward reading; e.g., began/begun; overrun/overrun; overcame/overcome; and

3) other individual cases where an added word actually clarifies or smooths an awkward manuscript reading in English and its removal would be glaring. (p. ix)

In fact, however, many of the restorations do result in awkward English usage, and some are “glaring.” This awkwardness is acknowledged with the stated hope that “future studies may help to understand more clearly why these awkward renderings occur. In general,
no attempt has been made to modernize the English grammar” (p. x). This statement is at odds with the above three criteria. It is often difficult to see why some restorations (that seem to muddle the English) were made while others were not.

The Web site for the ZRF, www.restoredcovenant.org, includes a description of the foundation and its purpose:

Zarahemla Research Foundation is a non-profit, tax-deductible organization dedicated to Book of Mormon research. The foundation is not associated with any specific religious organization. Membership is open to anyone interested in Book of Mormon research.

Our purpose is to prepare believers for the Book of Mormon Breakthrough—the time when the Lord will take the Book of Mormon to the world in great spiritual power. We know that the Lord is growing the Bible and the Book of Mormon together in order to confound false doctrines, settle contentions, establish peace, and restore the covenants to the remnant of the house of Israel (2 Nephi 2:20-23 [LDS 3:12]).

The potential of the Book of Mormon is equal to the Bible, but there has been so little done with the Book of Mormon in comparison to the Bible that a giant vacuum exists. The Lord is in the process of filling that vacuum, and we are all called to be a part of that work. At Zarahemla, we are involved in researching all facets of the Book of Mormon and making that information available.

That said, it is to be noted that the founders of ZRF are members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). The Foundation is headquartered in Independence, Missouri, where that church is also based. The textual tradition of the RLDS clearly takes precedence in this restoration project. For instance, the versification is that of their authorized 1908 edition. Also, although several RLDS editions were compared by ZRF, only the most recent edition published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is considered.
Royal Skousen, in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, gives the following description of the four editions of the Book of Mormon that were published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime:

1. **1830**: 5,000 copies; published by E. B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York. In general, the first edition is a faithful copy of the printer’s manuscript (although on one occasion the original manuscript rather than the printer’s was used for typesetting). For the most part, this edition reproduces what the compositor, John H. Gilbert, considered grammatical “errors.” Gilbert added punctuation and determined the paragraphing for the first edition. In the Preface, Joseph Smith explains the loss of the Book of Lehi—116 pages of manuscript (see Manuscript, Lost 116 Pages). The testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses were placed at the end of the book. In this and all other early editions, there is no versification.

2. **1837**: Either 3,000 or 5,000 copies; published by Parley P. Pratt and John Goodson, Kirtland, Ohio. For this edition, hundreds of grammatical changes and a few emendations were made in the text. The 1830 edition and the printer’s manuscript were used as the basis for this edition.

3. **1840**: 2,000 copies; published for Ebenezer Robinson and Don Carlos Smith (by Shepard and Stearns, Cincinnati, Ohio), Nauvoo, Illinois. Joseph Smith compared the printed text with the original manuscript and discovered a number of errors made in copying the printer’s manuscript from the original. Thus the 1840 edition restores some of the readings of the original manuscript.

4. **1841**: 4,050 copies (5,000 contracted); published for Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Parley P. Pratt (by J. Tompkins, Liverpool, England). This first
European edition was printed with the permission of Joseph Smith; it is essentially a reprinting of the 1837 edition with British spellings.¹

The manuscripts compared in producing the RCE include the original manuscript, about 20 percent of which survives and is in the possession of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the printer's manuscript, all of which is in the possession of the RLDS Church. The printed editions include the 1830, 1837, and 1840 editions published under the authorization of Joseph Smith; the 1874, 1892, 1908, 1953, and 1992 editions published by the RLDS Church; the 1981 edition (1985 printing) published by the LDS Church; the 1990 Temple Lot edition published by the Church of Christ, Independence, Missouri; and the 1970 third edition, published by the Church of Jesus Christ, Monongahela, Pennsylvania.

ZRF offers a paperback, A Comparison of the Book of Mormon Manuscripts & Editions,² which lists all differences between the original and printer's manuscripts and the printed editions above and which gives all versions (from the above set) in which the various renderings are found. This book has 280 pages of changes with about 20 changes listed per page, or roughly 5,600 changes. The great majority of these changes were made before the death of the Prophet, presumably with his authorization, if not by himself personally.

I wondered if the rate of change from the manuscripts was consistent throughout the volume or whether the language became more refined as the translation process proceeded. To address this, I measured the number of pages of changes in A Comparison for each book in the RCE and the number of pages of text in the RCE for that book. The average value of the ratio of these trends was 0.32, with a standard deviation of 0.05. Statistical analysis of the ratio failed to disclose any

trends or "outliers." The rate of change is essentially constant throughout the volume, with only random variations about the average. By the way, this might indicate a single author of the original text and a single editor of the emended text.

The following abbreviations will be used: O = original manuscript; P = printer's manuscript; LDS = the 1985 printing of the Book of Mormon by that church; B = 1970 third edition, Church of Jesus Christ (Monongahela, Pennsylvania); TL = 1990 Temple Lot edition, Church of Christ (Independence, Missouri); CBMME = A Comparison of the Book of Mormon Manuscripts & Edition; and KJV = King James Version of the Bible. Also, "all printed editions" will mean "all printed editions before RCE" and will exclude the two manuscripts.

While it is tempting to consider their significance, the purpose of this review is not to discuss the changes in detail but rather to see whether the RCE lives up to the objectives stated in its introduction, as listed above. Royal Skousen, among others, has looked more carefully at the changes and their implications.\(^3\) Also, he is preparing a critical text that will provide a more detailed analysis of the changes than is present in CBMME.\(^4\)

The ZRF's first objective, "to restore the purity of The Book of Mormon," is discussed below. The RCE can offer little, if anything, toward the second and third objectives ("to reveal an understanding of the main purpose of The Book of Mormon" and "to reveal the underlying spiritual name of The Book of Mormon") that is not available in any other edition, with the exception of comments in the introduction. Objectives four and five ("to make available the poetic nature of the text making it easier to read and comprehend and easier to identify Hebrew poetry" and "to bring to light the natural grouping together of thoughts") are to be accomplished by the restoration of the text and its reformatting.


\(^4\) Royal Skousen, personal communication, 1999.
Reformatting and Restoration

The RCE presents significant changes in format from previous editions. Verse numbers are found to the left of the text, notes and cross references are in the outer margins, and leading phrases are outdented and capitalized in an attempt to show the poetic style. The format is illustrated by the following example from RCE 1 Nephi 1:1-4 (LDS 1:1-5); the italics indicate restorations that replace the words in brackets (from the LDS version):

1 I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore,
   I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father,
   And having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,
   nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days,
   Yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God,
   Therefore, I make a record of my proceedings in my days;
   Yea, I make a record in the language of my father,
   which consists of the learning of the Jews, and the language of the Egyptians;

2 And I know that the record which I make to be [is] true,
   And I make it with mine own hand,
   And I make it according to my knowledge.

3 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, my father Lehi having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days,
   And in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or that [the] great City Jerusalem must be destroyed;

4 Wherefore, it came to pass that my father Lehi, as he went forth, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

We find the book’s first two restorations in verse 2, line 1, and verse 3, line 5. The first of these appears in P and the 1830 edition, while the second is found only in P; O is not cited here.
Note that some of the punctuation is different from the LDS 1981 edition, although this is not an issue in the restoration since O was devoid of punctuation. For example, the parentheses in LDS 1 Nephi 1:4 (RCE verse 3, lines 2 and 3) do not appear in RCE.

The example above demonstrates how parallelism at the phrase and sentence levels is indicated by the formatting: line truncation, indentation, and capitalization, thus accomplishing fairly well the fifth objective regarding the natural grouping of thoughts.

Chapter breaks are those found in the original and printer’s manuscripts and retained in the RLDS editions, and verse numbers are those first published in the 1908 RLDS edition. (ZRF offers another paperback, The Book of Mormon Chapter & Verse: RLDS-LDS Conversion Table, which facilitates comparison of the two schemes of versification.)

Making Available the Poetic Nature of the Text

I will focus here on parallelism that is restored or negated by returning to the wording in O or P. Of the many instances of both, only a few can be considered.

A number of changes have been made in 1 Nephi 5:251–52 (LDS 19:13–14). CBMME comments that returning to the past tense of *crucify* and *turn* in accordance with O “restores Hebrew prophetic perfect tense in harmony with the rest of the passage.” The restored words are in italics and the LDS versions are in brackets in the following (my format):

> And as for *they which* [those who] are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet, they shall be scourged by all people, *saith the prophet,* because they *crucified* [crucify] the God of Israel, and *turned* [turn] their hearts aside, rejecting signs and wonders and [the] power and glory of the God of Israel. And because they *have turned* [turn] their hearts aside, saith the prophet,

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and have despised the Holy One of Israel, they shall wander in the flesh and perish, and become a hiss and a byword and be hated among all nations.

RCE restores parallelism, and more consistent usage, in 2 Nephi 1:6-15 (LDS 1:5-7) by using consecrated where P and all printed editions use covenanted (below, first line B). This change is consistent only with O. The relevant text is as follows (my format, underlining added to emphasize parallelism):

But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained

A a land of promise,
a land which is choice above all other lands,
a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed.

B Yea, the Lord hath consecrated [covenanted] this land unto me, and to my children forever,

C and also all they which should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

D Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me

C that there shall be none come into this land save they should [shall] be brought by the hand of the Lord.

B Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom He shall bring;

A And if it so be that they shall serve Him according to the commandments which He hath given,
it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity, for if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes; but unto the righteous, it shall be blessed forever.
Parallelism is restored with the addition of a second *wherefore* in 2 Nephi 5:27–28 (LDS 6:10–11), as found in P, 1830, and TL (my format):

And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted;  
*Wherefore,* after they are driven to and fro—  
for thus saith the angel—many shall be afflicted in the flesh and shall not be suffered to perish because of the prayers of the faithful,  
*Wherefore,* they shall be scattered and smitten and hated;

Parallelism is restored in RCE in 3 Nephi 4:55 (LDS 10:4) by inserting the second *O ye people* phrase in the following (RCE format):

*O ye people of these great cities which have fallen,*  
*which [who] are a descendant [descendents] of Jacob,*  
yea, *which [who] are of the house of Israel,*  
*O ye people of the house of Israel,*  
How oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and have nourished you.

LDS 10:4 has removed the repeated phrase altogether.

Again, parallelism is restored in RCE 3 Nephi 7:40 (LDS 16:15) where *return* appears in P while *turn* is in all printed editions. LDS 16:13–15 can be reformatted using P as follows (underlining added):

But if the Gentiles will repent and *return* unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.  
And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father.  
But if they will not *return* [turn] unto me, and hearken unto my voice,  
I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down.
A restoration of parallelism that causes a small change in meaning is found in RCE Ether 1:85 (LDS 3:20), which in P reads, “Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him.” All printed editions delete beholding.

RCE restores parallelism between Moroni 8:13 (LDS 8:12) and verse 19 (LDS 8:18), which in P says, “if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable Being.” The word God rather than Being appears in all printed editions. Verse 19 (LDS 18) reads, “For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable Being [being].”

Several other examples might be cited. On the other hand, in some instances parallelism that was established by changes made in 1830, 1837, or 1840 has been lost by returning to O or P. For instance, in accepting O in 1 Nephi 1:47–48 (LDS 2:16), RCE negates the parallelism that exists in P and all printed editions except TL, which says (my format):

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceeding[ly] young, nevertheless, being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I cried [did cry] unto the Lord; and behold, He did visit me, and did soften my heart, that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

A parallelism that is not in P but was established in 1830 onwards is also lost in RCE Alma 8:6–7 (LDS 10:5–6; my format with underlining added):

Nevertheless, after all this, I never have known much of the ways of the Lord and His mysteries and marvelous power.

I said I never had known much of these things, but behold I mistake, for I have seen much of
His mysteries and His *miraculous* [marvelous] power, yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people. Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; Therefore, I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know.

RCE restores the second *marvelous* to *miraculous*. Both *miraculous power* and *marvelous power* occur elsewhere in the Book of Mormon.

Another loss of parallelism in RCE, based on O, is found in Alma 16:195 (LDS 33:21; my format):

\[
\text{O my brethren,}
\]
\[
\text{if ye could be healed}
\]
\[
\text{by merely casting about your eyes}
\]
\[
\text{that ye might *behold* [be healed],}
\]
\[
\text{would ye not behold quickly?}
\]
\[
\text{Or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes that ye might perish?}
\]

P and all printed editions have *be healed*.

Although the number of restorations of parallelism outnumber those lost by the restoration, the objective of the RCE to make available the poetic nature of the text is realized only in part and actually fails in some instances.

**Restoring the Purity of the Book of Mormon**

We now focus our attention on the primary objective, restoration of "the purity of The Book of Mormon by restoring words from the manuscripts that were either left out or changed." Only a few of the many examples can be covered.

The vast majority of changes in the 1837, 1840, and LDS editions from O and P improve the English grammar. *Which* is changed to *who* or *whom* when appropriate; *which* is consistent with KJV usage,
as comparison of the Isaiah chapters reveals. The verb tense and number are corrected in many places. The word *that* has been deleted when deemed superfluous by modern English; CBMME says in a side note, “frequent use of ‘that’ is Hebraism.”\(^6\) *That which* in O and P has often been changed to *those who* in LDS. As acknowledged in the introduction, in many instances the restored rendering is awkward by current English standards. For instance, 1 Nephi 1:96 (LDS 3:30) reads, “And after *that* [omitted] the angel had *spake* [spoken] unto us, he departed.”

LDS modernizes several words, such as changing *hath* to *had*, *saith* to *said*, and so forth. On the other hand, in Alma 8:15 (RCE 6:19), the LDS version changes *received* to *receivedst*. A few other similar changes from modern to KJV English occur.

One of the common changes in LDS is the use of *exceedingly* where *exceeding* appears in O or P and most or all printed editions. *Exceeding* appears 34 times in the Old Testament (OT), 25 in the New Testament (NT), 42 times in LDS, and 3 times in the Doctrine and Covenants. *Exceedingly* appears 28 times in the OT, 11 times in the NT, 245 times in LDS, 8 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and 4 times in the Pearl of Great Price. Although I didn’t attempt to count the number of times *exceeding* was replaced by *exceedingly* in LDS, this minor change is clearly widespread.

As the first example of significant changes, consider 1 Nephi 3:127 (LDS 12:18), which appears in RCE as:

> And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them,
> Yea, even the sword [word] of the justice of the Eternal God
> and Jesus Christ, which [the Messiah who] is the
> Lamb of God.

*Sword* appears only in O, while *Jesus Christ* appears in O, P, 1830, and TL. *Sword of justice* occurs several times in the Book of Mormon. The sword is depicted as hanging over the people or being about to fall on the people unless they repent. *Word of justice* appears here only in the printed editions.

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6. Ibid., I n. 1.
The use of *Jesus Christ*, the Greek name and title of the Savior, could be argued to be out of place in the context of a people recently removed from Jerusalem. The Hebrew term *Messiah*, which seems more appropriate, is used twenty-nine times in the Book of Mormon before Nephi is told by an angel that his name would be Jesus Christ (see LDS 2 Nephi 25:19).

RCE 1 Nephi 3:179 reads, “Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that state of awful woundedness,” as in O, P, 1830, and TL. It is changed to *blindness* in the other printed editions (see LDS 1 Nephi 13:32, “awful state of blindness”).

RCE corrects an apparent error in copying O to P in 1 Nephi 4:23 (LDS 15:16), which originally read, “they shall be *numbered* again among the house of Israel.” P and all printed versions change *numbered* to *remembered*. *Numbered among the house of Israel* is a common Book of Mormon phrase, while *remembered* occurs only here.

RCE follows O in contrast with P and all printed editions by rendering 1 Nephi 4:62 (LDS 15:36) as follows:

> Wherefore, the wicked are *separated* [rejected] from the righteous,
> And also from that tree of life whose fruit is most precious and most desirable *of* [above] all other fruits;

P and the printed editions have *rejected* and *above* for these two italicized words. *Separated* implies an external force, while *rejected* sounds like the righteous took action themselves. The former probably fits the context better.

A subtle change in meaning is found in the restoration in 1 Nephi 5:152 (LDS 17:47), which appears in O, P, 1830, and TL as follows: “Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God insomuch *as if* my frame *had* no strength.” The other printed editions use *that* and *has*, changing a simile to a factual reality.

RCE retains *white and delightsome* in 2 Nephi 12:84 (LDS 30:6), which appears in P, 1830, and 1837, while 1840 and LDS have *pure and delightsome*. We might speculate that this was a prophetic change by Joseph Smith in the 1840 edition. The 1975 and earlier LDS editions retained *white*. 
RCE accepts a change from *my* in *P* and 1830 to *thy* in 1837 and most subsequent editions in 2 Nephi 2:19–20 (LDS 3:12), which now is written (my format, underlining added):

Wherefore, the fruit of *thy* [my in *P* and 1830] loins shall write;

And the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write;
And that which shall be written by the fruit of *thy* loins,
And also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah,
Shall grow together.

Joseph is here quoting the Lord, so *thy* is correct. Later (verse 25–28, LDS 2 Nephi 3:14), speaking of himself, he says (in LDS)

Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of *my* loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;

Only LDS and B have *my*. RCE goes along with *P* and all other printed editions in saying *thy* loins, which is obviously incorrect.

RCE stands alone in making some changes from the manuscripts and printed editions. For instance, RCE changes *no more*, as it appears in *P* and 1830, to *any more* in Alma 14:12 (LDS 23:7). All other printed editions give *any more*. Similarly, only RCE changes *as surely*, which appears in *P*, 1830, and 1837 in Alma 17:80 (LDS 37:45), to *assuredly*. LDS and all other printed editions change it to *as surely*. This change is made also in Moroni 7:26 (LDS 7:26).

RCE also makes a unique change from the obviously incorrect wording in Alma 21:76 (LDS 46:40) in *O*, *P*, and 1830. These earlier editions read, “because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases which was subsequent to man by the nature of the climate.” 1837 has to *which men was subject*. 1840 and LDS have to *which men were subject*. RCE alone says to *which man was susceptible*.

RCE breaks with *O*, *P*, and all printed editions by substituting *rights* for *rites* in Alma 20:50 (LDS 43:45), which reads in RCE, “fighting . . . for their *rights* of worship and their church,” and in
Alma 20:70 (LDS 44:5), which reads, “by our rights of worship, and by our church.” Between these verses, in Alma 20:52 (LDS 43:47), O and P have “their country and their rites and their religion,” which all printed editions change to rights; RCE agrees with the change. RCE also agrees with a similar change in Alma 23:6 (LDS 51:6) and 25:55 (LDS 55:28). It is puzzling that RCE claims to restore purity while making such changes from the original, especially when the change appears to be incorrect, as in the first two instances above. A distinct change in meaning results.

In yet another departure from O and P and all printed editions except LDS, RCE agrees with the LDS use of travails rather than travels in 2 Nephi 12:49 (LDS 29:4) and several other places. On the other hand, RCE departs from O, P, and all printed editions except TL in changing travel to travail in 1 Nephi 5:56 (LDS 17:1), yielding, “And we did travail and wade through much affliction in the wilderness,” justified in a footnote in CBMME on the basis of content and parallelism.7

Variations in the use of strait and straight are found among O, P, RCE, and LDS. All instances of strait and straitness in LDS also appear as such in RCE. However, in several verses, strait in O or P is changed to straight in LDS and all printed editions. In six of these cases, RCE also uses straight, namely 1 Nephi 3:8 (LDS 10:8), “Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make His paths straight”; 1 Nephi 5:28 (LDS 16:23), “and out of a straight stick an arrow”; 2 Nephi 6:81 (LDS 9:41), “Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him”; Alma 10:82 (LDS 14:28), “And they straightway came forth out of the prison”; Alma 22:8 (LDS 50:8), “And the Land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the East Sea to the west”; and Alma 26:43 (LDS 56:37), “But pursued their march in a straight course after us.”

On the other hand, in 2 Nephi 3:58 (LDS 4:33), RCE retains strait where it appears only in O or P and in none of the printed editions: “Wilt Thou make my path strait before me?”; Alma 5:17 (LDS

7. Ibid., 21.
7:9), “And walk in His paths which are strait”; Alma 5:34 (LDS 7:19), “I perceive that ye are making His paths strait”; Alma 17:42 (LDS 37:12), “And His paths are strait”; and Alma 17:79 (LDS 37:44), “point to you a strait course to eternal bliss . . . point unto them a strait course to the Promised Land.” It seems that straight is the better choice in all these latter cases, as all prior printed editions imply. Here, also, a change of meaning results.

In Alma 8:51 (LDS 11:2), the original manuscript reads, “and thus the man was compelled to pay that which he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber.” P, 1830, and 1837 have striped, while 1840 restores stripped. The RCE editors chose to accept P rather than O, saying in a marginal note, “striped = lashed.” It seems to me that stripped is more consistent with the context.

RCE breaks with O and LDS and agrees with P and all other printed editions by saying the Lamanites “knew not whether to go or to strike” (RCE Alma 24:45, LDS 52:36). O and LDS have whither, which seems to fit the context better. In Alma 30:12 (LDS 63:8), RCE breaks with P and agrees with all printed editions by changing whether to whither. RCE stays with P in retaining whither in Mormon 4:12 (LDS 8:10), while all printed editions have whether. In P the verse reads, with respect to the Three Nephites, “and whither they be upon the face of the land no man knoweth.” However, in yet another break with P and in agreement with the printed editions, RCE uses whither instead of which in Ether 6:35 (LDS 14:1).

Thus we may conclude that while RCE makes a number of useful restorations, it fails to restore the “purity of the Book of Mormon” because it inserts words that were not there originally and in some cases retains corrections and emendations made in later editions. As noted earlier, the editors recognized that a full restoration of the “purity” of O and P would not be appropriate. However, the choice of when to improve the English over O or P seems somewhat arbitrary, and some of the changes from O or P are glaring contradictions to the objective. Particularly troublesome are those cases in which the meaning is altered by the change.
Conclusions

Of the five stated objectives of the Restored Covenant Edition of the Book of Mormon, only one seems to have been fully satisfied: the format “bring(s) to light the natural grouping of thoughts.” Two of the objectives, “reveal[ing] an understanding of the main purpose of The Book of Mormon” and “reveal[ing] the underlying spiritual name,” cannot be achieved to any greater degree with this edition than with any other.

The remaining two objectives are not met well. The editors admit at the outset that restoring the “purity” of the original or printer’s manuscript would result in awkward wording in places. They make what appear to be arbitrary decisions about which previous changes in language to accept and which to reject, resulting in some improvement in English and some restoration of awkward wording. More seriously, they make a number of changes of their own beyond what is in the original manuscripts and all previous printed editions. While the format of the book does “make available the poetic nature of the text” to a certain extent and parallelism is restored in many instances, parallelism that was introduced by Joseph Smith in the early editions is lost in a few places.

On the other hand, the changes from the original manuscripts in the present LDS edition have affected the language and presentation but have had little effect on the ideas and concepts presented in the book. Mostly, the English has been improved from that originally dictated by Joseph Smith. Almost all of these changes were made by the Prophet himself, or at least with his approval. While it might be possible to produce a version of the Book of Mormon that is an improvement over the present LDS edition, the RCE leaves much to be desired.