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Source: *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*

Editor(s): Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998

Page(s): 369–390

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Royal Skousen

*Comparing the 1829 Book of Mormon manuscripts with
the King James Version generates eight findings about
the Prophet's translation of the Isaiah passages.*



In analyzing the textual variants for the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon, we first have to decide which passages are actual quotes, in distinction to paraphrases or phrasal allusions. The first step in this process is to determine the degree to which a Book of Mormon passage can be lined up with a proposed corresponding Isaiah passage. Ultimately, I have decided to consider only those passages that can be lined up at the sentence level, thus eliminating phrasal allusions or situations involving the mixture of phrases within the same sentence.

In the resulting list of selected passages, I have distinguished three types of similarity. If a passage shows a high degree of correspondence, I have marked it with a *q* to indicate that it is a quote. In two cases the quote is only secondarily from Isaiah. In one of these cases, the quote is actually the same as the quotation of Isaiah from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke); in the other case the quote is from Malachi. I have marked these two secondary quotes of Isaiah with a 2. The remaining examples are clearly paraphrastic; these I have left unmarked.

q	Isaiah 2:1–14:32	2 Nephi 12:1–24:32
	Isaiah 5:26	2 Nephi 29:2
	Isaiah 5:26	2 Nephi 29:3
q	Isaiah 11:4	2 Nephi 30:9
q	Isaiah 11:5–9	2 Nephi 30:11–15

	Isaiah 11:11	2 Nephi 25:17
	Isaiah 11:11	2 Nephi 29:1
	Isaiah 28:10	2 Nephi 28:30
	Isaiah 28:13	2 Nephi 28:30
	Isaiah 29:3–4	2 Nephi 26:15–16
	Isaiah 29:4	2 Nephi 27:6–9
q	Isaiah 29:5	2 Nephi 26:18
	Isaiah 29:6	2 Nephi 6:15
q	Isaiah 29:6–10	2 Nephi 27:2–5
	Isaiah 29:11	2 Nephi 26:17
	Isaiah 29:11–12	2 Nephi 27:15–19
	Isaiah 29:13	2 Nephi 28:9
	Isaiah 29:13	2 Nephi 28:14
q	Isaiah 29:13–24	2 Nephi 27:25–35
	Isaiah 29:14	1 Nephi 14:7
	Isaiah 29:14	1 Nephi 22:8
	Isaiah 29:14	2 Nephi 25:17
	Isaiah 29:14	2 Nephi 29:1
	Isaiah 29:15	2 Nephi 28:9
	Isaiah 29:21	2 Nephi 28:16
	Isaiah 40:3	1 Nephi 10:7
2	Isaiah 40:3	1 Nephi 10:8
	Matthew 3:3	
	Mark 1:3	
	Luke 3:4	
	Isaiah 44:27	Helaman 12:16
	Isaiah 45:18	1 Nephi 17:36
2	Isaiah 47:14	1 Nephi 22:15
	Malachi 4:1	
q	Isaiah 48:1–49:26	1 Nephi 20:1–21:26
	Isaiah 49:22	2 Nephi 29:2
	Isaiah 49:22–23	1 Nephi 22:6
	Isaiah 49:22–23	1 Nephi 22:8
q	Isaiah 49:22–23	2 Nephi 6:6–7
q	Isaiah 49:24–52:2	2 Nephi 6:16–8:25
	Isaiah 51:10	Helaman 12:16

	Isaiah 52:1–2	Moroni 10:31
q	Isaiah 52:1–3	3 Nephi 20:36–38
q	Isaiah 52:6–7	3 Nephi 20:39–40
	Isaiah 52:7	1 Nephi 13:37
	Isaiah 52:7	Mosiah 15:14
	Isaiah 52:7	Mosiah 15:15–18
q	Isaiah 52:7–10	Mosiah 12:21–24
q	Isaiah 52:8	3 Nephi 20:32
q	Isaiah 52:8–10	Mosiah 15:29–31
q	Isaiah 52:8–10	3 Nephi 16:18–20
q	Isaiah 52:9–10	3 Nephi 20:34–35
	Isaiah 52:10	1 Nephi 22:10
	Isaiah 52:10	1 Nephi 22:11
q	Isaiah 52:11–15	3 Nephi 20:41–45
	Isaiah 52:12	3 Nephi 21:29
q	Isaiah 52:15	3 Nephi 21:8
q	Isaiah 53:1–12	Mosiah 14:1–12
q	Isaiah 53:7	Mosiah 15:6
	Isaiah 53:10	Mosiah 15:10
q	Isaiah 54:1–17	3 Nephi 22:1–17
	Isaiah 54:2	Moroni 10:31
q	Isaiah 55:1	2 Nephi 9:50
	Isaiah 55:1	2 Nephi 26:25
	Isaiah 55:2	2 Nephi 9:51

The next step is to prepare a computerized collation to compare the various textual sources. This step involves the following Book of Mormon and Bible texts:

1. the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon (the manuscript the scribes wrote down as Joseph Smith dictated the text)
2. the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon (the copy that the scribes produced to take to the printer of the 1830 edition)

3. the first three editions of the Book of Mormon (editions that Joseph Smith had some control over):
 - (a) 1830, Palmyra
 - (b) 1837, Kirtland
 - (c) 1840, Cincinnati
4. the current LDS edition of the Book of Mormon (dating from 1981, with minor revisions)
5. the King James Version of the Bible (namely, the current Cambridge text)
6. the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible¹

No more than 30 percent of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon is extant; only part of the Isaiah quotations are found in what remains:

- 1 Nephi 20–21 // Isaiah 48–49
virtually extant
LDS Church Historical Department
- 2 Nephi 6–8 // Isaiah 49–52
large fragments
Wilford Wood Foundation
- 2 Nephi 23–24 // Isaiah 13–14
large fragments
Wilford Wood Foundation
- 3 Nephi 20 // Isaiah 52
one minor fragment
LDS Church Historical Department

The printer's manuscript, which is owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, is fully extant except for three lines near the beginning of 1 Nephi.

In the King James Version there are words set in italics and others set in all caps. The italics represent words that do not occur in the original biblical languages, but which the

King James translators added to make the text read sensibly in English. Words set in all caps represent the translation of the sacred Hebrew name for God (*JHWH*).

In the remainder of this paper, I will briefly describe the basic findings from comparing these Isaiah passages.

First Finding: *The base text for the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon is indeed the King James Version of the Bible.*

The King James Version of the Bible is not an independent translation from the original biblical languages, but instead is a revision based on early English Bibles published in the 1500s.² An example of this dependence on earlier translations is found when we briefly compare the King James Version with the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was translated by Protestant exiles in Geneva, Switzerland, and was first published in 1560. It was the popular English Bible prior to the 1611 King James Version and served as the Bible of the Puritans and Shakespeare.³ The similarity between the Geneva Bible and the King James Bible is striking, as in the following comparison for Isaiah 53. (Here word differences are printed in bold; italics are preserved from the original.)

Isaiah 53: Geneva Bible versus King James Version

GNV	who will believe	our report and to whom is the arm
KJV	who hath believed	our report and to whom is the arm
GNV	of the Lord	revealed but he shall grow up before him
KJV	of the LORD	revealed for he shall grow up before him
GNV	as a branch	and as a root out of a dry ground he
KJV	as a tender plant	and as a root out of a dry ground he
GNV	hath neither form nor beauty	when we shall
KJV	hath no	form nor comeliness and when we shall
GNV	see him there shall be no form	that we should desire
KJV	see him <i>there is</i>	no beauty that we should desire

GNV him he is despised and rejected of men **he is** a man **full**
 KJV him he is despised and rejected of men a man

GNV of sorrows and **hath experience of infirmities** we
 KJV of sorrows and **acquainted with grief** **and** we

GNV hid as it were our faces from him he was despised and
 KJV hid as it were *our* faces from him he was despised and

GNV we esteemed him not surely he hath borne our
 KJV we esteemed him not surely he hath borne our

GNV **infirmities** and carried our sorrows yet we did **judge**
 KJV **griefs** and carried our sorrows yet we did **esteem**

GNV him **as plagued and** smitten of God and **humbled** but
 KJV him **stricken** smitten of God and **afflicted** but

GNV he was wounded for our transgressions he was **broken**
 KJV *he was* wounded for our transgressions *he was* **bruised**

GNV for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace *was* upon
 KJV for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace *was* upon

GNV him and with his stripes we are healed all we like sheep
 KJV him and with his stripes we are healed all we like sheep

GNV have gone astray we have turned every one to his own
 KJV have gone astray we have turned every one to his own

GNV way and the Lord hath laid **upon** him the iniquity
 KJV way and the LORD hath laid **on** him the iniquity

GNV of us all he was oppressed and he was afflicted yet
 KJV of us all he was oppressed and he was afflicted yet

GNV **did he not open** his mouth he is brought as a **sheep** to
 KJV **he opened not** his mouth he is brought as a **lamb** to

GNV the slaughter and as a sheep before her **shearer** is dumb
 KJV the slaughter and as a sheep before her **shearers** is dumb

GNV so he openeth not his mouth he was taken **out** from
 KJV so he openeth not his mouth he was taken from

GNV prison and from judgment and who shall declare his
 KJV prison and from judgment and who shall declare his

GNV	age	for he was cut	out of the land of the living
KJV	generation	for he was cut off	out of the land of the living
GNV		for the transgression of my people was he plagued	and
KJV		for the transgression of my people was he stricken	and
GNV		he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in	
KJV		he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in	
GNV		his death though he had done no wickedness	neither
KJV		his death because he had done no violence	neither
GNV		<i>was</i> any deceit in his mouth yet	the Lord
KJV		<i>was any</i> deceit in his mouth yet it pleased	the LORD
GNV	would break	him and	make him subject to
KJV	to bruise	him	he hath put <i>him</i> to
GNV	infirmities	when he	shall make his soul an offering
KJV	grief	when thou shalt	make his soul an offering
GNV		for sin he shall see <i>his seed</i> and	shall prolong <i>his</i> days
KJV		for sin he shall see <i>his seed</i>	he shall prolong <i>his</i> days
GNV		and the will	of the Lord shall prosper in his hand
KJV		and the pleasure	of the LORD shall prosper in his hand
GNV		he shall see of the travail of his soul and	shall be satisfied
KJV		he shall see of the travail of his soul and	shall be satisfied
GNV		by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many	
KJV		by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many	
GNV		for he shall bear their iniquities therefore will I give	
KJV		for he shall bear their iniquities therefore will I divide	
GNV		him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil	
KJV		him <i>a portion</i> with the great and he shall divide the spoil	
GNV		with the strong because he hath poured out his soul unto	
KJV		with the strong because he hath poured out his soul unto	
GNV		death and he was counted	with the transgressors and
KJV		death and he was numbered	with the transgressors and
GNV		he bare the sin of many and prayed	for the
KJV		he bare the sin of many and made intercession	for the

GNV **trespassers**
 KJV **transgressors**

For Isaiah 53, 88 percent of the King James text is identical with the Geneva Bible.

In fact, the Geneva Bible itself is a revision, not a translation from scratch. All the early translations of the English Bible are ultimately based on the biblical translation made by William Tyndale in the 1530s.⁴ Jon Nielson's recent master's thesis shows that in the portions of the Bible that Tyndale translated before he was martyred, about 82 percent of the King James text is identical, word-for-word, with Tyndale's translation.⁵

So an important question is whether the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon actually come from the King James Bible. Andrew Stewart, a student in my 1991 course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, identified unique readings in the various early English Bibles (including the King James Version); he then compared those readings with the Book of Mormon text. Not surprisingly, in every case except one Stewart found that the Book of Mormon agreed with the unique readings in the King James Version.⁶

But the one exception is very interesting. In 2 Nephi 12:16, the text reads "upon all the ships of the sea and upon all the ships of Tarshish."

2 Nephi 12:16 // Isaiah 2:16

upon all the ships of the sea
 Septuagint (Greek)
 Coverdale 1535

and upon all the ships of Tarshish
 Masoretic text (Hebrew)
 all early English Bibles except for Coverdale

The first phrase is found in the Septuagint (or Greek) version of Isaiah, the second in the Masoretic (or traditional Hebrew) text. While looking for unique readings, Stewart discovered that the first phrase (but not the second) occurs in Coverdale's 1535 Bible as "upon all shippes of the sea," while all the other early English Bibles have only the other phrase, "upon all the ships of Tarshish."⁷ Quite possibly Coverdale's translation is based on the Greek version of Isaiah.

Second Finding: *The original manuscript for the biblical quotes shows that the text was dictated by Joseph Smith; no physical copy was given to Oliver Cowdery to copy from.*

Some scholars have assumed that Joseph Smith used a King James Bible to dictate the biblical passages in the Book of Mormon.⁸ The reason for this claim is that the biblical quotations are based on the King James text. Yet witnesses who observed Joseph Smith dictating the Book of Mormon claimed that Joseph Smith used no books at all.⁹ In any event, we can definitely establish that Joseph Smith did in fact dictate the biblical quotations to his scribe; he did not hand over an emended Bible for the scribe to visually copy the text from. This conclusion can be seen when we examine Oliver Cowdery's spellings in the Isaiah portions of the original manuscript. Here we find the normal spelling variants that Oliver used when writing down other portions of the Book of Mormon. For example, in 1 Nephi 20–21 (quoting Isaiah 48–49), we find the following typical spelling errors:

the Lord of *hoasts*
I have *declaired*
least thou shouldst say
& my *moulton* image
even *hiden* things

hath *spaned* the heavens
cut off nor *destroid*
he *lead* them
in an *exceptable* time
for a *covenant*
shall not *hungar*
thou shalt surely *cloath* thee
& *removeing* to & fro

We also find that Oliver Cowdery sometimes misinterpreted what Joseph Smith dictated, as in 1 Nephi 21:11, which has *away* in the original manuscript (as well as in the printer's manuscript) instead of the correct *a way*:

1 Nephi 21:11 // Isaiah 49:11

and I will make all my mountains *away*
(instead of *a way*)

Oliver Cowdery also interpreted unfamiliar words in terms of more familiar words; for example, in 2 Nephi 24:23, he wrote *the bosom of destruction* (in both the original and printer's manuscripts) since the word *besom*, meaning 'broom,' was totally unknown to him:

2 Nephi 24:23 // Isaiah 14:23

and I will sweep it with the *bosom* of destruction
(instead of *besom*)

Third Finding: *The original Book of Mormon chapter divisions of the Isaiah quotations follow a larger thematic grouping, not the interruptive chapter system found in the King James Bible.*

Although the base text for the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon is the King James Version, the original Book of Mormon chapter divisions ignore the chapter system found in the King James Bible. The division into the

66 relatively short chapters in Isaiah dates from late medieval times.¹⁰ The original Book of Mormon chapters are based on narrative unity and group the King James chapters into more coherent units. And in one case, the grouping does not overlap with the beginning and ending of the King James chapters:

<i>Original Book of Mormon</i>	<i>King James Version</i>	<i>Current Book of Mormon</i>
1 Nephi VI	Isaiah 48–49	1 Nephi 20–21
2 Nephi V	Isaiah 49:24–52:2	2 Nephi 6–8
2 Nephi VIII	Isaiah 2–5	2 Nephi 12–15
2 Nephi IX	Isaiah 6–12	2 Nephi 16–22
2 Nephi X	Isaiah 13–14	2 Nephi 23–24

Of course, the current LDS chapter system in the Book of Mormon does agree with the King James chapter system, but this has only been true since 1879, when Orson Pratt divided up the original Book of Mormon chapters to facilitate the versification of the text.

Fourth Finding: *The original Book of Mormon text is closer to the King James Version.*

In working with the original manuscript, I have discovered a number of cases where the original reading is different from our current reading and in each case the original reading agrees with the King James reading—or is at least much closer to the King James reading. As an example, consider a large fragment of the original manuscript from 2 Nephi 7.¹¹ When Oliver Cowdery produced the printer’s manuscript by copying from this portion of the original manuscript, he made at least six changes, five of which appear to be accidental and are probably due to tiring:

2 Nephi 7:2, 4, 5 // Isaiah 50:2, 4, 5

	<i>Original Manuscript</i>	<i>Printer's Manuscript</i>
2	wherefore when I <i>came</i> there was no man I make <i>the</i> rivers a wilderness they <i>dieth</i> because of thirst	wherefore when I <i>come</i> there was no man I make <i>their</i> rivers a wilderness they <i>die</i> because of thirst
4	he <i>wakeneth</i> morning by morning he <i>wakeneth</i> mine ear	he <i>waketh</i> morning by morning he <i>waketh</i> mine ear
5	the Lord God hath <i>opened</i> mine ear	the Lord God hath <i>appointed</i> mine ear

In each of these six cases, the original reading agrees with or is closer to the King James reading.

Another example of an original King James reading is in 2 Nephi 24:

2 Nephi 24:25 // Isaiah 14:25

	<i>Original Manuscript</i>	<i>Printer's Manuscript</i>
25	I will <i>break</i> the Assyrian in my land	I will <i>bring</i> the Assyrian in my land

Here the Wilford Wood fragment has *brea* at the end of a line, with the *a* only partially visible. The original *k* was presumably written at the beginning of the next line, but this part of the page is no longer extant. In any event, Oliver Cowdery, in his copying, misread the line-final *brea* as the beginning of the word *bring*, which seems to fit semantically and makes an interesting reading—but nonetheless wrong. Oliver Cowdery typically made copying errors at the end of lines by accidentally changing or omitting a word.

For most of the Book of Mormon—in fact, for most of the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon—the original manuscript is no longer extant. The preceding examples (in which the original manuscript restores a King James reading) should warn us that single-word differences may simply be due to copying errors, especially when the words are visually similar. Other examples of possible scribal errors include the following:

2 Nephi 20:13 // Isaiah 10:13

BoM	and I have moved	the borders of the people
KJV	and I have removed	the bounds of the people

2 Nephi 23:15 // Isaiah 13:15

BoM	every one that is proud	shall be thrust through
KJV	every one that is found	shall be thrust through

2 Nephi 24:19 // Isaiah 14:19

BoM	and the remnant	of those that are slain
KJV	<i>and as</i> the raiment	of those that are slain

Fifth Finding: *The majority of differences between the Book of Mormon text and the Isaiah text are not associated with italicized words in the King James Version.*

Stan Larson, along with others, has claimed that Joseph Smith used a copy of the King James Bible to produce the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon.¹² Larson has also argued that Joseph Smith knew what the italics in the King James Version meant; namely, that the italicized words had been added by the translators of the King James Bible and could therefore be altered.¹³ Yet it is doubtful whether Joseph Smith would have even known what the italics meant, especially since no explanation for their use is ever given in the King James Bible. This use of italics originated with the Geneva Bible, which did explain its purpose.¹⁴

William Calhoun and Margaret Robbins, two students in my 1991 class on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, studied this issue regarding italics and concluded that there was little evidence in support of Larson's hypothesis.¹⁵ More recently, I have made an actual count for all the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon. In my analysis I used only the direct quotes and ignored the paraphrastic passages since their differences are even less predictable by reference to the italicized words in the King James Bible. The results are as follows:

total number of differences	516
total number of italicized words	392
overlap: differences + italicized words	150
differences linked to italicized words	$150/516 = 29\%$
italicized words linked to differences	$150/392 = 38\%$

For direct quotes there was a total of 516 differences between the Book of Mormon text and the King James text. Of those differences, only $\frac{29}{100}$ percent could be linked to italicized words in the King James Bible. In other words, 71 percent of the differences are unrelated to italics and must be explained in terms of other factors. Moreover, the majority (62 percent) of italicized words are unchanged in the Book of Mormon. If the italicized words have an effect, they do not explain very much.

Sixth Finding: *Corrections in the original manuscript give very little evidence for the hypothesis that Joseph Smith altered the text while he supposedly read it off from a King James Bible.*

Stan Larson has argued that we can find evidence for this hypothesis by identifying examples where Joseph Smith first dictated the King James text and then made changes

away from that text.¹⁶ Supposedly, the original manuscript should thus show the scribe first writing the King James textual version, then correcting it to agree with Joseph Smith's revised text. The major problem with this proposal is that there are very few cases that can even be considered examples of editing while dictating. In the Isaiah quotations, there are only three examples in the extant portions of the original manuscript where the scribe first wrote something like the King James text and then altered it away from that text.

In 1 Nephi 20:11, Oliver Cowdery first wrote "for how should I suffer my name to be polluted," which is somewhat close to the King James text "for how should *my name* be polluted." Then, in heavier ink, Oliver Cowdery crossed out the words "how should I" and wrote above the crossout, again in heavier ink, "I will not," which agrees with the beginning of the following clause ("and I will not give my glory unto another"). The heavier ink flow suggests that the change is not immediate; moreover, it removes a difficult reading. In the original and printer's manuscripts, virtually all corrections in heavier ink that remove difficult readings reflect conscious editing later on the part of the scribe rather than immediate editing by Joseph Smith. In the following comparison, we give both the reading of the original Book of Mormon text (BM*) and the reading of the current text (BMc), as well as the King James Version (KJV) and the Joseph Smith Translation (JST):

1 Nephi 20:11 // Isaiah 48:11

BM*	for how should I suffer my name to be polluted
BMc	for I will not suffer my name to be polluted
KJV	for how should <i>my name</i> be polluted
JST	for how should my name be polluted

BM*	and I will not give my glory unto another
BMc	and I will not give my glory unto another
KJV	and I will not give my glory unto another
JST	and I will not give my glory unto another

A clear example demonstrating that Oliver Cowdery did indeed make conscious changes in the Book of Mormon text is found in 2 Nephi 7. Here the printer's manuscript shows Oliver Cowdery using heavier ink to cross out *dieth* and then writing *die* above the crossout, again in heavier ink. A difficult reading is removed (since the *-eth* ending is not supposed to occur with plural subjects). And we know this change represents conscious editing on Oliver Cowdery's part since the original manuscript has only *dieth* and Oliver originally wrote *dieth* when producing the printer's manuscript; only later did he replace *dieth* with *die*.

2 Nephi 7:2 // Isaiah 50:2

BM*	because the waters are dried up
BMc	because the waters are dried up
KJV	because <i>there is no water</i>
JST	because the waters are dried up
BM*	and they dieth because of thirst
BMc	and they die because of thirst
KJV	and dieth for thirst
JST	and they die because of thirst

The other two examples of possible editing away from the King James text seem quite weak and can be readily explained in other ways:

1 Nephi 21:21 // Isaiah 49:21

BM*	behold I was left alone these where had they been
BMc	behold I was left alone these where have they been
KJV	behold I was left alone these where <i>had</i> they been
JST	behold I was left alone these where had they been

1 Nephi 21:24 // Isaiah 49:24

BM*	shall the prey be taken from the mighty
BMc	for shall the prey be taken from the mighty
KJV	shall the prey be taken from the mighty
JST	shall the prey be taken from the mighty

In each case, the scribe in the original manuscript (Oliver Cowdery) first wrote the text of the King James Version, then corrected the text to read slightly differently. In these two examples the corrections in the original manuscript appear to be made with the same ink level as the surrounding text. The past tense form *had* in the first example may represent the King James text, but it may just as easily be due to tense agreement with the past-tense form *was* in the preceding clause (“behold I was left alone”). In the second example, agreement with a null or zero reading does not seem particularly persuasive when the only word involved is such a frequent function word as the conjunction *for*.

In any case, what is surprising is that there are so few potential examples of Joseph Smith’s changing his mind, not only in the Isaiah passages but throughout the extant portions of the original manuscript.

Seventh Finding: *The few Isaiah passages that have been quoted more than once in the Book of Mormon may provide evidence for helping to restore the original reading.*

There are a number of Isaiah passages that are quoted more than once in the Book of Mormon:

Isaiah 11:4–9	2 Nephi 21:4–9 / 2 Nephi 30:9,11–15
Isaiah 49:22–26	1 Nephi 21:22–26 / 2 Nephi 6:6–7,16–18
Isaiah 52:1–2	2 Nephi 8:24–25 / 3 Nephi 20:36–37
Isaiah 52:7	Mosiah 12:21 / 3 Nephi 20:40
Isaiah 52:8	Mosiah 12:22 / Mosiah 15:29 / Nephi 16:18 / 3 Nephi 20:32

Isaiah 52:9–10	Mosiah 12:23–24 / Mosiah 15:30–31 / 3 Nephi 16:19–20 / 3 Nephi 20:34–35
Isaiah 52:15	3 Nephi 20:45 / 3 Nephi 21:8
Isaiah 53:7	Mosiah 14:7 / Mosiah 15:6

As an example of where comparison suggests possible emendation of the text, consider two quotations from Isaiah 49:

1 Nephi 21:25–26 / 2 Nephi 6:17–18 // Isaiah 49:25–26

BM1	for	I will contend with him
BM2	for thus saith the Lord	I will contend with them
KJV	for	I will contend with him
JST	for thus saith the Lord	I will contend with them
BM1	that contendeth with thee	and I will save thy
BM2	that contendeth with thee	
KJV	that contendeth with thee	and I will save thy
JST	that contend with thee	and I will save thy
BM1	children and I will feed them that oppress thee with	
BM2		and I will feed them that oppress thee with
KJV	children and I will feed them that oppress thee with	
JST	children and I will feed them that oppress thee with	
BM1	their own flesh	
BM2	their own flesh	
KJV	their own flesh	
JST	their own flesh	

The first line in this collation (BM1) gives the original text from 1 Nephi 21; the second line (BM2) gives the original text from 2 Nephi 6. Note that the first text is identical to the King James text. But the second text may have originally been closer to the King James text than it currently is. We only have the printer's manuscript for the second text and two of the differences could be errors:

- First, evidence from immediate corrections in the manuscripts shows that Oliver Cowdery frequently had difficulty in distinguishing between Joseph Smith's pronunciation of

them and *him*, since in normal speech both these pronouns are pronounced identically—as *'em*.¹⁷ So the pronoun *them* in 2 Nephi 6:17 may have actually been *him*. Nonetheless, the pronoun *them* may well be correct; it could represent an attempt to make the pronoun agree with the *them* that occurs in the following clause (“and I will feed them”).

- Second, the phrase “and I will save thy children” could have been accidentally lost in copying since this clause and the next one both begin with the same words (“and I will”).

Despite these possibilities, there is probably not enough evidence to actually emend the text in 2 Nephi 6.

Eighth Finding: Joseph Smith’s “New Translation” of the Bible used the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon as a source for changing some of the corresponding biblical text in Isaiah.

The Joseph Smith Translation (or JST, for short) shows that Joseph Smith sometimes used the Book of Mormon text to make changes in the Isaiah text of the Bible.¹⁸ For instance, the JST of Isaiah 29 follows the Book of Mormon text, including the much longer paraphrastic section from 2 Nephi 27:6–24 that deals with reading a sealed book. The identity is word-for-word except for two minor changes (*that* instead of *which* in verse 10 and a deleted *if* in verse 13).

In fact, we can show that the base text for making these changes in Isaiah is the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The Joseph Smith Translation, when it follows the Book of Mormon text, agrees with the 1830 edition, as in 2 Nephi 27:5, for which the 1830 edition contains a unique reading:

2 Nephi 27:5 // Isaiah 29:10

BM*	and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity
1830	and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquities
BMc	and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity
KJV	the seers hath he covered
JST	and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquities

The printer's manuscript and all Book of Mormon editions from 1837 on have *iniquity*. Only the 1830 edition has the plural *iniquities*.

It is not surprising that Joseph Smith viewed the Book of Mormon as an inspired text and thus felt free to use the Book of Mormon in altering the biblical text for Isaiah. But apparently he did not realize the extent to which his copy text, the 1830 edition, contained textual errors; as a consequence, these errors were carried over into the JST. This transmission of textual errors, as well as the specific use of the 1830 edition, was first discovered by Don Bradley, Scott Grover, and Keith Clayton, three students in my 1994 class on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon.¹⁹ The most striking examples of errors being transmitted come from the Wilford Wood fragment for 2 Nephi 7, where Oliver Cowdery accidentally introduced a number of changes into the printer's manuscript:

2 Nephi 7:2, 4, 5 // Isaiah 50:2, 4, 5

BM*	I make the rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink
1830	I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink
BMc	I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink
KJV	I make the rivers a wilderness their fish stinketh
JST	I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink
BM*	he wakeneth morning by morning he wakeneth mine
1830	he waketh morning by morning he waketh mine
BMc	he waketh morning by morning he waketh mine
KJV	he wakeneth morning by morning he wakeneth mine
JST	he waketh morning by morning he waketh mine
BM*	ear the Lord God hath opened mine ear
1830	ear the Lord God hath appointed mine ear
BMc	ear the Lord God hath opened mine ear
KJV	ear the Lord GOD hath opened mine ear
JST	ear the Lord God hath appointed mine ears

Textual errors such as *their* for *the* (in verse 2), *waketh* for *wakeneth* (two times in verse 4), and *appointed* for *opened* (in verse 5) were copied over into the JST.

Conclusion

This brief summary of work on the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon shows how complex the whole subject can be. Not only does textual criticism provide insight into possible changes in the Book of Mormon text, but it can also help us see how the text was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith and then transmitted and preserved in printed editions down to our own time. The changes in the text are minor and not too frequent—and they never prevent us from understanding the spiritual message of the Book of Mormon.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith Jr., *The Holy Scriptures, Inspired Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments: An Inspired Revision of the Authorized Edition* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1974).
2. David Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), vii–xiv.
3. F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the earliest English Versions to the New English Bible* (New York: Oxford English Press, 1970), 86–92.
4. Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, vii–xiv.
5. Jon Nielson, "Authorship of the King James Version of The Bible" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1994), 93.
6. Andrew Stewart, "KJV as a Source for the Biblical Quotations in the Book of Mormon" (unpublished research paper for Royal Skousen's course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 1991), 1.
7. Stewart, "KJV as a Source," 5–6.
8. Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe, 115–63 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 116.

9. Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 51–2, 55.

10. M. H. Black, "The Printed Bible," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 419.

11. For color and ultraviolet black-and-white photographs of this fragment, see Skousen, "Piecing Together the Original Manuscript," *BYU Today* 46/3 (1992): 22.

12. Larson, "Historicity," 129–30.

13. *Ibid.*, 130–1.

14. Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 127–8.

15. William Calhoun, "Isaiah, Italics, and the Book of Mormon"; Margaret Robbins, "King James Version as a Source for the Biblical Passages Quoted in the Book of Mormon" (unpublished research papers for Royal Skousen's course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 1991).

16. Larson, "Historicity," 129–30.

17. For examples, see Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo: FARMS, 1997), 61–93.

18. For a summary of how often Joseph Smith used the Book of Mormon in his revision of Isaiah in the JST, see Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, 2nd ed. (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1995), 102–3, 106.

19. Don Bradley and Scott Grover, "Textual Fingerprinting: Examining Joseph Smith's Use of the Book of Mormon in His 'New Translation' of the Bible"; Keith Clayton, "Translation, Transmission, and Transcription: The Book of Mormon Isaiah Variants and the JST" (unpublished research papers for Royal Skousen's course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 1994).