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"That Which Ye Have Retained"

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Chapter 7

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And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi is more particular concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained. (D&C 10:40-41)

In the revelation known as D&C 10, received after Martin Harris lost the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation, the Lord distinguished between “the words which you have caused to be written, or which you have translated which have gone out of your hands” (D&C 10:10) and “that which you have translated, which you have retained” (D&C 10:41). Presumably, Joseph Smith kept some of the translation back and did not give it to Martin Harris. This would have included at least the first part of our current book of Mosiah.¹

The same revelation may contain an important clue about how much of the dictated manuscript Joseph retained. In D&C 10:4, the Lord instructs him, “Do not run faster or labor more

¹ For a brief discussion, see John A. Tvedtnes, Review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, in Daniel C. Peterson (ed.), *Review of Books on The Book of Mormon* 3 (1991); Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994), 139.

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than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end.” This seems to be based on Mosiah 4:27, where we read, “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.”

The expression “run faster” is found in no other passages of scripture. This fact, coupled with the words “than you/he have/has strength” and “be diligent” suggest that the passage in Mosiah 4:17 is the source of the words in D&C 10:4. One could, of course, argue that the Lord was certainly able to reveal to Joseph Smith parts of the Book of Mormon that he had not yet seen. But it seems much more reasonable that he would refer to a passage with which the prophet was already familiar—a pattern found throughout the Doctrine & Covenants, which contains a wide variety of quotes from the Old and New Testaments and the Book of Mormon.²

D&C 10 cannot be read in isolation from D&C 3. While the latter notes Joseph’s loss of the plates and the power to translate, the former speaks of the restoration of these privileges. Because both were received at a time of heavy involvement with the Book of Mormon translation, we should not be surprised to find that D&C 3:2 also quotes from the Nephite record: “For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.”

Compare this passage with Alma 7:20:

I perceive that it has been made known

² Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants frequently quote from the Book of Mormon or the Bible, just as the New Testament often quotes Old Testament passages and the Book of Mormon cites the Bible.

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unto you, by the testimony of his word, that he cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round.

Turning to the right hand or the left is an expression found in the Bible and would be insignificant by itself. But the expression “crooked paths” is unique to these two passages, which also share the phrase, “his course is one eternal round.”³

This suggests that the portion of the manuscript that Joseph had retained may have gone as far as Alma 7 or Alma 8. Further support for this idea comes from the fact that there are other expressions found in D&C 3 and 10 that first appear in the book of Mosiah or the early part of Alma. These include “boast(s) in his/their own strength” (D&C 3:4; Mosiah 11:19) and “Satan has great hold upon their hearts” (D&C 10:20; Alma 8:9).⁴ Neither expression is biblical.

CONCLUSION

We cannot know for sure how many pages Joseph held back, but the suggestion that he may have retained more than a handful is intriguing and merits consideration.

³ The latter is also found in 1 Nephi 10:19, while in Alma 37:12 it is combined with the words “his paths are straight.”

⁴ To be sure, some of these expressions are also found in later passages of the Book of Mormon, but in this case they may have been borrowings from the Mosiah passages or at least have become idiomatic in the Nephite language.