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### Seidel's Law

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## Chapter 10

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*And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be there was an opposition. (2 Nephi 2:15)*

When the Book of Mormon made its initial appearance in 1830, the Western world possessed a very limited knowledge of the literary and editorial techniques often utilized by biblical authors.<sup>1</sup> Even today, many students of the Bible remain unaware of the exciting textual discoveries made by certain Israeli scholars whose work has only appeared in Modern Hebrew. One article in particular has had a tremendous effect upon our understanding of editorial activity in the Old Testament.

In 1955, a scholar by the name of Seidel published an important essay on parallel statements in the Psalms and Isaiah.<sup>2</sup> Though many of Seidel's original claims proved doubtful, his work prepared the way for further analysis of inverted quotations in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

Both the Old and New Testaments contain many examples of reversed citations. For instance in Leviticus 26:4 the Lord declares, "And the land shall yield her

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<sup>1</sup> See David E. Bokovoy, "Inverted Quotations in the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 20/10, (2000).

<sup>2</sup> M. Seidel, "Parallels between Isaiah and Psalms," *Sinai* 38 (1955–56) 149–72, 272–80, 335–55 (in Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> See especially Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Inverted Quotations in the Bible: A Neglected Stylistic Pattern," *Biblica* 63/4 (1982): 506–23.

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increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.” Yet when this same statement appears in the book of Ezekiel, the author intentionally reverses its original sequence: “And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase” (34:27). Following Seidel’s initial description of this phenomenon, scholars began to demonstrate that when quoting from an earlier source, biblical authors often reversed its sequence.<sup>4</sup>

The Old Testament contains many examples of inverted quotations. One of the promises given to Jacob by his father Isaac in the blessing recorded in Genesis 27 states: “Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee” (v. 29). However, when this same promise appears later in the book of Numbers the order is reversed: “blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (24:9). Today, this inversion is known as Seidel’s law.

Inverted quotations also appear in the Book of Mormon. For example, when the prophet Alma addressed the members of the church in Zarahemla he asked the question, “Can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?” (Alma 5:19). With this question, Alma reverses the order of the classic biblical psalm: “who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4). By drawing attention to this citation in Psalm 24, Alma seems to provide additional commentary to his speech concerning entering the presence of the Lord. Like the main idea presented in Psalm 24, the thought of entering the presence of the Lord is a central theme in Alma’s discourse:

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17–20.

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Can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day; Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say— Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth— and that he will save you? (Alma 5:16–17)

Those who attempt to deceive the Lord in his presence are not the pure in heart. Only he that “hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully . . . shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Psalm 24:4). “Or otherwise,” declared the prophet Alma, “can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God, with your souls filled with guilt and remorse” (Alma 5:18).

Alma’s question seems to convey a greater connection to Psalm 24 with an understanding of biblical Hebrew. In Hebrew, the preposition *before* literally means “to the face of.” Alma was asking the people of the church if they would feel at ease before “the face of God” and his heavenly tribunal. According to both Alma and the Psalmist only “he that hath clean hands and a pure heart . . . is the generation of them that seek [God] that seek thy *face*, O Jacob” (Psalm 24:1–6). This example from the Book of Mormon of Seidel’s law demonstrates the way scriptures provide what scholars refer to as inner biblical exegesis.

One clear illustration from the Hebrew Bible of Seidel’s law that has a strong connection with the Book of Mormon appears in Deuteronomy chapter 4. In the midst of his sermon to all Israel, Moses provided his people

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with the following admonition:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves . . . lest ye corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth: and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them.” (Deuteronomy 4:15–19)

A close reading of this comprehensive list reveals an example of Seidel's law. In order to demonstrate that this prohibition against idolatry directly quotes from the first chapter of Genesis, the author intentionally reversed the sequence of the creation account. This illustration of an inverted quotation in the Old Testament has a parallel in Lehi's discourse presented in 2 Nephi chapter 2.

During his sermon given to his son Jacob, Lehi discussed God's creative acts recorded in the book of Genesis. Like Moses in the above passage, Lehi specifically reversed the order of creation in accordance with Seidel's law: “And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man,” he stated in the midst of his discourse, “after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be there was an opposition” (2 Nephi 2:15). This verse provides another illustration of an inverted quotation in the Book of Mormon.

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Notwithstanding its initial correspondence with the biblical passage, 2 Nephi 2:15 obviously differs from the inversion cited in Deuteronomy. While Lehi referred to the creation account in Genesis by specifically reversing the order of its last three components, he summarized the remaining elements with the inclusive statement, “and in fine, all things which are created.”<sup>5</sup> This synopsis makes sense. Moses felt the need to categorize every possible example to which Israel might look toward in idolatry while Lehi’s reference to the creation simply demonstrates the need for opposition in all things.

While in the nineteenth century literary tools such as Seidel’s law were not known to Book of Mormon critics, they have increasingly exemplified the strong correlation between Israelite and Nephite authors.

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<sup>5</sup> The expression “in fine,” used eighteen times in the Book of Mormon, is an English borrowing of the French *enfin*, literally “in end,” but meaning “finally.”