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Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon, I

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Abstract: A series that produces evidence that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Hebrew work, containing Hebraisms. Emphasizes: (1) The Book of Mormon contains peculiar grammatical structures that are similarly found in the Bible, (2) many of the proper names in the Book of Mormon possess a notable Jewish character, and (3) many of the Jaredite proper names contain Hebraic similarities that date back to the period predating the Tower of Babel. The first part covers Hebrew grammar.

Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS W. BROOKBANK.

I.

At the beginning of these remarks, it is confessed that not many different kinds of Hebrew idioms are known to the writer to exist in the Book of Mormon; but our readers may rest assured that those which are brought to their attention, will be sustained by proofs fully competent to manifest their Jewish character, and a few of them well sustained, make it necessary for us to refer the authorship of the Book of Mormon to some person or persons who were familiar with the peculiarities of the Hebrew language.

With respect to the idiom first to be considered, we find the following statement is given in Green's Hebrew Grammar, paragraph 269, as the principle upon which it is based. He says: "The dependence of one verb upon another is most distinctly expressed by putting the second verb in the infinitive. The second verb may, however, be in form co-ordinated with the first by being put in the same or an equivalent tense with or without a copulative, the true relation between the verbs being left to be inferred from their obvious signification." He then gives some examples to illustrate the application of the principle thus enunciated, and from them the following are selected: "I know not (how) I shall flatter." In this example *how* is a supplied word, and an infinitive is thrown out of use by co-ordinating *flatter* with *know*. The meaning of the expression becomes plainly manifest by restoring the infinitive, as, "I know not how to flatter." A second illustration is, "How can (or shall) I endure and see the evil that shall come upon my people"—the

second verb is here put in the same order as the first one, instead of being made to occur in its usual dependent relation, as, "How can I endure to see," etc. This example is taken from Est. 8: 6; and if we incorporate the marginal reading into the text, it will read, "How can I be able *that* I may see," etc. The sense is not thereby modified, but this rendering serves to show that the connective is not always the same—that one being used which the sense most obviously demands. With this peculiar idiomatic structure of sentences let us now compare the following expressions taken from the Book of Mormon:

1. "How is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?" (I Nephi 17: 51); instead of, "How is it that he cannot instruct me how to build a ship?"—*build* in the text being co-ordinated with *instruct*.

2. "And bade him that he should read;" for "And bade him to read" (I Nephi 1: 11).

3. "Commanded my father * * * that he should take his family" (I Nephi 2: 2).

4. "Did plead with me that I would forgive them" (I Nephi 7: 20).

5. "And desired him that he would give unto us the records" (I Nephi 3: 24).

6. "I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me" (I Nephi 8: 8.)

7. "I cast my eyes round about that perhaps I might discover my family also" (I Nephi 8: 13).

8. "I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard" (I Nephi 14: 28).

9. "The Lord created the earth that it should be inherited" (I Nephi 17: 36).

10. "He hath created his children that they should possess it" (I Nephi 17: 36).

Many more examples can be found in the Book of Mormon to illustrate the idiom under consideration, but those now given suffice all present purposes, since they manifest beyond a doubt that this peculiar form of expression was familiar to the writers of that record. The reader can easily supply the infinitive form of the dependent verbs.

Again, we find that the Nephite authors made frequent use of a figure of speech called *enallage*, which is a convenient

term to express the substitution of one gender, person, number, case, mode, tense, etc., of the same word for another; and learned commentators inform us that it was frequently applied by the ancient Hebrews.

Dr. Angus in the *Bible Hand Book*, paragraph 277, speaking of Hebraisms, says that plural forms are sometimes put by the Jews for the singular to imply that there are more than one person or thing held in view, though it may be to only one that the direct address or reference is made. In other words, when more than one was to share in a thought, or sentiment, the plural was sometimes used to show that the single individual chiefly in mind was not the only one to whom it was applicable, and, conversely, when more than one was to be included, the singular could be substituted for the plural to show, among other things, that those to whom the thought or command, etc., was directed, were not viewed collectively only, but as individuals also, who separately composed the mass. An example of the substitution of the singular for the plural occurs in the terms used by Moses in giving the ten commandments to the Israelites (Ex. 20).

Just previous to the announcement of these laws, God had instructed his servant to speak to the people, saying, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenants, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Ex. 19: 4, 5). This is a preface to the ten commandments, and plural forms are used exclusively when reference is made to the whole body of the Israelites; but there occurs a remarkable and uniform substitution of the singular for the plural, when the obligation of the law is being laid upon these same people. By the use of *thou* and *thy* instead of *ye* and *your*, however, every individual is searched out and made to feel his personal accountability before the law almost as sensibly as if he had been commanded by name to observe it. None could deceive himself with the vain plea that all must be well with Israel individually in the sight of God, because collectively the people were acknowledged by him. It is thus manifest that this idiom placed in the power of the Jews a wonderfully effective mode of address. An example of a differ-

ent kind—one that illustrates the substitution of the plural for the singular, is found in Gen. 19: 29, where it is stated that God overthrew the “cities” in which Lot dwelt. Now Lot could dwell in only one of the cities of the Dead Sea plain, as physical necessities require us to suppose, but in using the plural for the singular in this case, the manifest purpose is to point out the fact that disaster had befallen not only the city where Lot had his abode, but that other cities also in the same neighborhood had been overwhelmed, and probably in the same manner. Other examples of this kind of enallage occur in Judges 12: 7; Nehemiah 3: 8; and elsewhere in the Bible.

Turning, now, to I Nephi 2: 19, 20, we find a remarkable change in number involving the Hebraism under consideration. The text reads thus: “And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me saying, Blessed art *thou*, Nephi, because of *thy* faith, for *thou* hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. And inasmuch as *ye* shall keep my commandments, *ye* shall prosper and shall be led to a land of promise, yea, a land which is choice above all lands.” It is to be observed with respect to the grounds for the change in this text from the singular to the plural, that as Nephi’s faith in God, and his diligence in serving him, were not characteristic of all the people with whom he was associated, the Lord commends him personally for his individual righteousness, and so uses the singular pronoun in his address; but, on the other hand, as he purposed making the promise of prosperity under the stated conditions broad enough to apply not only to Nephi, but to all his companions as well, and to their posterity, *ye* is appropriately substituted for the singular *thou* in the latter part of the text, according to the principles of the idiom in hand. Nephi, further, though a chosen and highly favored servant of God, was thus left without any grounds for claiming special favors and privileges under the general promise of prosperity to all who should heed the commandments of the Lord.

In I Nephi 17: 55, there is another fine example of enallage. This verse reads: “And now, they [Nephi’s brothers] said, We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down before *me* and were about to worship me, but I

would not suffer them, saying, I am *thy* brother, yea, even *thy* younger brother, wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee." The exhortation to his brothers to refrain from their idolatrous act is thus made with all the force of an appeal to each of them individually. Each one was to judge of Nephi's humanity by the personal consciousness they individually had of their own humanity, and consequent lack of all just claim to divine honor; and if there happened to be one among them who was less richly endowed by nature than his brothers, Nephi by the use of the Jewish idiom, placed himself upon an identical footing with that one, so far as the nature of his being was concerned. In concluding remarks upon this example of enallage, may it not be said justly that it was purposely brought by the spirit of inspiration into the closest association with that other example of the same kind in the latter part of the quoted text where *thy* is used in reciting a portion of the ten commandments, in order that our attention should be called more readily to Nephi's use of this Hebraism.

A third example is taken from Jacob 7: 6, "For I have heard and also know that *thou* goest about much, preaching that which *ye* call the gospel." Here Jacob, being the only preacher concerned, the singular pronoun is used, but as his teachings were regarded not only by himself as gospel, but were so esteemed by all the Nephite Christians, a change to the plural *ye* is allowable and highly appropriate according to the genius of the Hebrew.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Flagstaff, Ariz.

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ONI D. STUART.

Uintah, Utah.