

Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon

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24. *Concerning Certain Prepositions.*

"From before." This is the translation of a compound Hebrew preposition, but the meaning may be, or, rather is, expressed in English by "from" alone. In Ezra 7:14, a reading is, "art sent of the king," but which literally is, "art sent from before the king." In Eccle. 10:5, "from," standing by itself, is all that our language requires to express the sense of the Hebrew "from before." In Dan. 2:18, we find, "That he would desire mercies of the God of heaven," but strictly "from before the God of heaven."

Conforming to the foregoing Hebrew form, the Book of Mormon employs the compound "from before," in a number of passages, as, "And they fled from before my presence." I Nephi 4:28. "They did not flee from before the Lamanites." Mormon 2:24; "hide our sins * * from before thy face." Moroni 9:15. And also, I Nephi 4:30; Alma 44:12; 2:32; Mormon 4:20; 2:25; II Nephi 9:8; Mos. 17:4; III Nephi 4:12; Ether 13:22, and elsewhere.

25. *By the hand of.*

The equivalent of this prepositional phrase in Hebrew is compounded of a preposition and a noun. When rendered in English it generally appears as simply "by." But expressed in full, as above it sometimes makes the sense almost ludicrous from our point of view, as, "At the same time spake the Lord by the hand of Isaiah." Isa. 20:20. "And hast consumed us because of [by the hand of] our iniquities," Isa. 64:7. "Came the word of the Lord by [by the hand of] the prophet Haggai," Hag. 2:1. "Did all things which the Lord commanded by [by the hand of] Moses," Lev. 8:36.

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"And was suffered by the hand of [by] the Lord, that I should be a ruler." Mos. 2:11. "That they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of [by] the Lord." Mos. 1:2. "I have acquired much riches by the hand of [by] my industry." Alma 10:4. "And never could a people be more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of [by] the Lord." Ether 10:28.

26. *Other Hebraisms occasionally used.*

"Stole the heart of," Gen. 31:20.

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"Stealing away the hearts of the people." Mos. 27:9. "She did steal away the hearts of many." Alma 39:4.

27. *"Spake hard things," or spake roughly.* Gen. 42:7,30.

"A hard vision," i. e., a "grievous" one. Isa. 21:2.

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"Thy brothers murmur, saying, It is a hard thing which I have required of them." I Nephi 3:5. "Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto me." I Nephi 3:28; and I Nephi 16:1, 2, 3.

28. *"All things."*

This is a peculiar Hebraism for "enough," or, "sufficient," as, "Because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have all things," i. e., enough for all my wants. Gen. 33:11.

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"And it came to pass on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness," etc., I Nephi 18:6. The meaning of "all things" in this text is plainly "sufficient," and refers to the provisions necessary to sustain the lives of Lehi and his people while crossing the seas to the land of promise.

Evidently, also, the phrase "all things," which occurs quite a number of times in the Book of Mormon, is, in some other instances, to be interpreted in the light of this Hebraism, even though we may not confine the sense strictly to that of enough or sufficient. See II Nephi 6:3; Mos. 26:38; Hela. 8:24.

29. *"A Man of Words."*

From Biblical sources we have, "I am not eloquent" for "I am not a man of words," in the original. Ex. 4:10.

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"And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people." Mos. 27:8; "For there was one Gadianton who was exceeding expert in many words." Hela. 2:4.

30. *A peculiar form of address.*

"Hear, ye people, all of them," Mic. 1:2, for "Hear all ye people."

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"I do not mean that ye, all of you," Alma 32:25, and similarly

in III Nephi 17:25, a portion of the text reads, "for they, all of them."

31. *"Words" for "Commandments."*

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first; and I will write upon these tables the words [commandments] that were in the first tables which thou break-est." Ex. 34:1; see also Deut. 28:14.

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"And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him, who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words [commandments or precepts] which I have spoken unto you." Alma 5:61. In III Nephi 30:1, "words" is used for "commandments"—those given in verse 2.

32. *"Make" or "Made an end."*

In the use which the ancient Jews made of "make" or "made" in connection with "end" there is a Hebraism of a peculiar character being wholly foreign to the genius of our own language; thus, "And Moses made an end of speaking," Deut. 32:45. The idea of making, or of constructing an end to one's speech, does not harmonize with our mode of thinking on this point. We think that the "end" of a speech necessarily follows when one *ceases* to speak. We do not "make an end to our writing, but simply stop the work, and it is thus ended immediately. One additional example from the Bible follows: "And when Jesus had made an end [ceased] commanding his disciples." Matt. 11:1.

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"I make an end of [cease] speaking," I Nephi 14:30. "And I know of no revelation, save that which has been written, neither prophecy, wherefore that which is sufficient is written, and I make an end." Omni 1:11. A good English ending occurs in this example with the writing of the last letter in the phrase "sufficient is written" but the "end" that suited this Hebrew author is found where he "made" it.

33. *"Make an Oath."*

"For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the Lord of Mizpeh." Judg. 21:5.

English speaking people say they "take an oath" or "swear with an oath"—"make an oath" is not the proper form for us.

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"And he also made an oath unto us." I Nephi 4:35, 37. "The king of the Lamanites made an oath unto them." Mos. 19:25.

"And also Limhi * * made oath unto the king of the Lamanites," verse 26, and see chap. 20:14.

34. *Concerning Compound Words.*

Compound words in Hebrew are few, except in proper names. *Greene's Heb. Gram.*, par. 195. 3. A list of different hyphenated compounds of common words, not numerals, in the Book of Mormon, totals about thirty of which ten occur in the writings quoted from the Book of Isaiah. Of course this fact does not show that the Book of Mormon is an Hebraic record, but if there were many compounded forms in that work one could not easily account for them, since it is claimed that it was originally written by Jews, and its translation inspired by that Spirit which emanates from Him who was himself a Jew. The consistency observed in reducing compound forms of common words to a minimum is a substantial one. It is still more noteworthy that the proper names in the Book of Mormon are in many examples of undoubted compound structure and thus sustain a harmony, as Hebrew proper names should, with the second part of the statement last quoted from Prof. Greene's work. Gad is a Nephite name, and from it apparently as a base there was constructed Gaddiandi, Gaddianton, and Gaddiomnah.

Jacobugath resolves into Jacob-u-gath; Kish, Kumen and Riplah were also the more simple forms of certain Nephite names. In compounds of one form or another they appear as A-kish, Kish-kumen, Rip-la-kish, Kumen-onhi Pa-cumen-i; "cumen" spelled with a "c," in the last name being probably the same with "kumen" in others; for the Jews frequently spelled proper names in more than one way, and this practice gives rise to difficulty in recognizing certain persons or places spoken of in the Bible. So this and other apparent orthographical changes in the Book of Mormon names is a consistency of no little value. The reader will readily find a number of additional names in that work which are doubtless compounded forms.

To conclude remarks relating directly to these matters, we will examine the first chapter of 1 Nephi, which is the first chapter in the whole Book of Mormon, and point out some of the peculiarities in it which betoken a Jewish origin for that work.

Verse 1, (a) "favored of ['by'] the Lord,"—a passive participle in construct relation before the subject of the action; (b) "all my days,"—a Hebraism for "all my lifetime;" (c) "mysteries,"—this word is not here used in its modern sense at all, but in harmony with its ancient Jewish meaning of the revealed work of God. See *Bible Hand Book*, par. 120; (d) "made a record,"—for "write an account," or "history." "Make" thus employed conforms to Jewish usage, see above.

Verse 4. (a) "For"—logically improper, but strictly in place

as introductory to a digression, or a parenthetical remark. *Bible Hand Book*, par. 289. Gen. 35:18; Ex. 9:28; 18:3, 4; 32:25; 34:9. (b.) Construct state of nouns, four involved,—commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah; (c) “(all his days,)”—“all his life.” (d.) An omission such as characterizes Jewish writings so frequently. This verse closes without a statement that Lehi was one of the prophets spoken of. It is so inferred from the context. A resort to the context in Hebrew writings is often necessitated to complete the meaning.

Verse 7. “Cast.” The Hebrew word for “cast” seems to have been a great favorite with the Israelites of old. See any good concordance of the Bible. It (cast) is often used where we would employ other terms.

Verse 11 supplies an example where an infinitive is discarded. Read, “and bade him (to) read,” instead of “and bade him, that he should read.”

Verse 13, (a) “namely,” or a word of similar meaning omitted after “Jerusalem.” The observance of anything like English formality in writing seems to have been repugnant to or unattainable by Jewish authors. (b.) Read, “and that many of the inhabitants thereof should perish by the sword.” As the text stands it offers an example of the severance of associated ideas, as, “and the inhabitants thereof, many should perish by the sword.”

Verse 14. An infinitive again discarded, read, “not suffer those who come unto thee to perish.”

Verse 15. After the word “filled,” the phrase “with joy” may be supplied. Some omissions are Hebraic not Anglican. Verse 16. “Make” for English “write,” twice. Verse 17. “Make” for “write.” Verse 18. “Therefore,”—this word here has the sense of “to resume,” an interruption in the direct line of thought is occasioned by what is said in verse 17.

Verse 20. (a.) “And,” the first word, may be substituted with “but;” (b) an omission, read, “even as (their wicked forefathers were) with the prophets of old.” The text is, “And when the Jews heard these things, they were angry with him, even as with the prophets of old.” (e) An infinitive discarded,—“sought his life, that they might take it away,” for “sought to take his life.”

It must be evident from the Hebraisms and Hebraic analogies reviewed in these remarks, and others also heretofore considered, that the Book of Mormon is invested with a decided Jewish coloring in its general literary aspects. Marks easily interpreted, pointing to an Israelitish origin, are found on almost every page. Indeed, we think it may be said truly that there is not a single one in the whole volume which does not illustrate some Hebraisms or some literary practices of the ancient Jews, and the question of how these things, so unmistakably Judaic, got there is suggested

and shall receive brief notice. Comprehensively, there are only two answers to this question, and they of antagonistic character. 1. That they were put there by a learned Hebrew scholar who conspired with Joseph Smith to deceive mankind; or 2, they occur in the book because the originals were written by Jews, and the Holy Spirit, when giving the translation to the prophet, largely observed the Hebrew idioms and practices.

Respecting the first of these proposed answers to the question in hand, it must be remembered that the conspiracy, assuming there was one, was so planned that the unlearned Joseph Smith should be, and in the execution of the plot actually was, held forth to the world as the sole and only human agent in producing the book; while the real author who did compose it, if a fraud as alleged, should not be, and was not known in connection with it at all. Under these circumstances, to give the work the semblance of probability, on its face, that Joseph Smith—an unschooled youth—did write it, some quite noticeable errors in the use of language were scattered through it here and there. Accordingly we find that this alleged hidden conspirator, Sidney Rigdon, by name,—wise and learned above the common run of his fellows, put a few signs in his work to make people believe that the other conspirator—the unlearned Joseph Smith—was its author; but at the same time filled his writings with marks, signs and tokens on every page which, he must have known, would proclaim the fact that, in his own power, Joseph Smith could not possibly be the writer of such a work. As alleged impostors these two men knew that the Book of Mormon was a fraud, and they also knew who was the author of that work on the assumed grounds. They knew, too, that in the text there were abundant evidences to prove conclusively, that the unschooled Joseph Smith did *not* write it, and these very same evidences were all there to show that *some one learned in the Hebrew did do the work*; yet, after Joseph Smith was martyred and the question of his successor was being discussed, why, we ask, in the name of common sense, did not Sidney Rigdon come forward and show that since Joseph Smith certainly *could not* be the author of the book, he himself just as certainly was, and cite the Hebraisms and other Jewish signs in the text to support his claim,—to demonstrate his authorship right there and then—provided, of course, that he knew sufficient about the Hebrew not to entrap himself? He certainly coveted the leadership of the “Mormon” people, and the shortest way to reach the goal of his ambition was undoubtedly to prove conclusively, that he was the author of the Book of Mormon. If such he was, he had plenty of proof at hand for that purpose, or at least an abundance to demonstrate that Joseph Smith was not its author. Yet he did not open his mouth to claim his reward—doubtless the very reward for which, if an impostor, he entered

into the conspiracy. Some may say that the shame of being known publicly as an impostor sealed his mouth. But as such had he not already on every page of the Book of Mormon disclosed his true character,—proclaimed himself a falsifier, a fraud? and what shame would such a wretch experience, when, unable to attain the presidency of the Church, he could have wreaked a sweet revenge on those more successful than himself, by simply referring to the proofs of the imposture, if such it were?

Sidney Rigdon's silence on that occasion is astonishing—accounted for on the safe ground that he said nothing in this respect because he had nothing to say.

A digression is here made to call attention to the absurdity of an alleged strong point, which has been made by the enemies of this work against the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. It was claimed that the foundation of that book was a romance written by an author named Spaulding. The manuscript of this story, so it was alleged, fell into the hands of Joseph Smith, and from that, as a base, he fabricated the Book of Mormon imposture. Once in a while some one yet makes himself a laughing stock for his wiser fellowmen by repeating this story as truth.

However, this was the main stock in trade of the enemies of this Church for many years in their attempts to account for the origin of the book just named, and they held to it, loved it, and blazoned it throughout the world, though the *Hebraic* character of that record ought to have shown them plainly that Joseph Smith could not possibly, with his unschooled power, have written it, not even if he had had a dozen such Spaulding stories upon which to base his writings. But though the enemies of this work have found the "refuge of lies" swept from them, time and time again, in one way or another, as soon as some aspiring and inventive genius propounds some other false theory to account for the origin of the book in question, they embrace it with eagerness, though seemingly they ought to be more cautious from past experiences.

Respecting the second answer to the question as to the source of the Hebraisms, etc., in the Book of Mormon, it is observed that what the "Mormon" and the non-"Mormon" Christian world unitedly recognize as the word of God—the Bible—given by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, does this very thing of expressing celestial and revealed thought according to the idioms and literary practices of the Hebrews, though at the same time some of the individual characteristics of the inspired writers are allowed to appear in the composition also. When, therefore, we consider that these Hebraic forms of expression were *originally inspired* and given to Jews, it appears plausible that the Spirit of God would not desire to make changes in them further than was necessary when giving a *translation* of them. Some things, doubtless, are sacred in the sight of God as well as in that of men. Respect-

ing the errors in language, it would be strange if the Holy Spirit had suppressed Joseph Smith's individuality entirely, since it was not done with other inspired writers whose works are acknowledged as sacred by all professed Christians.

The claim of inspiration for the Book of Mormon, or for "Mormonism" in general, has, of course, to be made good, say our opponents. Well, is it not being done? About the only evidence which we need of this fact is the alarm which its growth is causing in some quarters, or the bluster which the world as a whole is making in vain efforts to stop its progress. The work of trying to convince the people that the Book of Mormon is a fraud, has been going on for a generation; but success in this direction is further off now than ever before, for the people are buying that book in these times by the thousands altogether.

Good material wears well. No part or portion of this work is getting threadbare, no part rusty. Nothing about its foundation, principles needs to be substituted by something more modern and "up-to-date;" and we thank God for this gospel just as it stands.

(THE END.)
