Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon II

Author(s): T. W. Brookbank

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 second part covers the Hebrew 'and.'

Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon

BY THOMAS W. BROOKBANK, ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE MILLENNIAL
STAR

II

2. *Concerning the Use of the Hebrew Conjunction for "and."*

"The Hebrew sedulously avoids all involution of sentences. Consequently, instead of linking its clauses together into a complex whole by conjunctions of various power expressing their precise relation of dependence and subordination, it prefers, where this is possible, to connect them together by means of the simple conjunction *and*, leaving the exact nature of the connection intended to be inferred from the meanings of the clauses themselves. The conjunction may accordingly be employed not only where we would use *and*, but before an *adversative* clause."—Green's *Heb. Gram.*, par. 287. ("Adversative" is italicised by the writer.)

Following these statements, the professor cites an example from Gen. 2:16, 17,—"of every tree thou mayest eat, but of the tree of the knowledge," etc.

If, now, we substitute "and" instead of "but" in this passage, the meaning of what has just been said respecting the use of *and* to connect an adversative clause, will become apparent to our youngest readers. The two clauses will then seem joined together in an unusual, or strange, manner. Let us read them in full thus: "Of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat; and of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." The connecting of clauses in this manner by a word which expresses the relation of addition where that of subtraction or of opposition is involved, is something wholly foreign to English modes of thought or form of expression. It may be denominated a Hebraism of the first water. This double-duty service which the ancient Jews required of their conjunction for *and* accounts in some measure for the frequent occurrence of this word in the Bible. We are all sufficiently familiar with the text of that book to make it unnecessary to quote any passages to recall to mind the fact that it occurs and recurs in some portions of it with great frequency. Readers of the Book of Mormon have all doubtless observed that it, also, is characterized in the same manner. Its great plainness depends largely upon the abundant use which was made of this familiar connective. This latter statement is based on a superficial view of the matter, however, since it does not point

out the real reason why the Book of Mormon is plain and, in general, easily understood; and so it is supplemented by another which does hit the mark, namely: that the writers of the Nephite records, as they came from first hands, compelled by the characteristics of Jewish minds to eschew the involution of sentences and intricate forms for the expression of their thoughts, found themselves bound to the necessity of having frequent resort to the use of their conjunction for *and,* and so we find their writings abounding with it, plainness and simplicity naturally a resultant. These observations relating to what Prof. Greene states in the first portion of the foregoing quotation from his grammar, seemed to fall into place here quite conveniently, and we shall now resume remarks which are more closely connected with the matter in hand where this digression occurred.

We have seen that the Biblical writers sometimes employed the conjunction *and* to connect adversative clauses—a very marked transgression against English usage—nevertheless, the English Book of Mormon is chargeable with the same want of conformity to our idiom, and the fault, if such it be, is often repeated. One example is found in I Nep. 16:2, where it is written: "I said unto them, that I knew I had spoken hard things against the wicked; and [but] the righteous have I justified." Others occur as follows: "And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and [but] destroyeth the nations of the wicked. And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands; and [but] the wicked he destroyeth."—I Nep. 17:37, 38. "Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, and [but] we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath, * * which * * we shall break."—Al. 44:8. "And the law is given unto men. And [but] by the law no flesh is justified."—II Nep. 2:5. "Many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and [but] shall not be suffered to perish."—II Nep. 6:11. "There is nothing which is good, save it comes from the Lord, and [but] that which is evil cometh from the devil."—Om. 1:25. " * * For ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And [but] what know ye concerning the law of Moses?"—Mos. 12:31.

For additional examples see II Nep. 2:7; 6:14; 9:25, 30; 28:28; 30:10; Jac. 5:18, 32, 65, 69, 77; 6:4; 7:7; Enos 1:22; Mos. 2:8, 13; 9:19; 18:34; 19:8, 21; I Nep. 17:48, and often elsewhere.

A few of the passages cited begin with "and," which should be "but," according to the English idiom, and, of course, the connection must be made with the preceding verse or verses.

3. *Concerning the Use of "and" for "or."*

Not only did the ancient Hebrews make frequent use of "and"

for "but," but they also employed it sometimes where the sense requires the disjunctive "or." The failure to recognize this fact occasions difficulty in some cases in the interpretation of scripture, or gives a meaning which is contrary to the law of God or impossible according to natural principles. Thus, as violating the law of God against the offering of human sacrifices, the account given in the Bible concerning the vow made by Jephtha, and its fulfilment in the person of his own daughter, supplies a case in point; for many contend that the reading justifies the conclusion that she was slain as an offering to the Almighty. Destructive, however, of this horrible supposition, is Dr. Hale's exposition of the meaning of Jephtha's vow and the manner of its fulfilment. He says:

"When Jepthah went forth to battle against the Ammonites, he vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou wilt surely give the children of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, *shall either be the Lord's,* OR *I will offer it up for a burnt offering.*"—(Jud. 11:30, 31.) According to this rendering of the two conjunctions   *vau,* in the last clause '*either,*' '*or,*' (which is justified by the Hebrew idiom; thus, 'He that curseth his father *and* his mother,' (Ex. 21:17,) is necessarily rendered disjunctively, 'His father *or* his mother,' by the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, and English, confirmed by Mat. 15:4, the paucity of connecting particles in that language making it necessary that this conjunction should often be understood disjunctively, the vow consisted of two parts: (1) That what *person* soever met him should *be the Lord's*, or be dedicated to his service; and, (2) That what *beast* soever met him, if *clean*, should be offered up for a *burnt offering* unto the Lord."—(*Clarke's Commentary,*—Judg. 11:40.)

The interpretation thus given to Jephtha's vow and the manner of its fulfilment, is perfectly consistent with the character of God, and with his law which made provision for the consecration of either men or women to his service. This harmony is effected by simply observing the use which the ancient Hebrews sometimes made of a copulative conjunction instead of one having a disjunctive meaning. Respecting the other example given by Dr. Hale's, the original, if understood according to the English meaning of "and", would require that the punishment (death) could not be inflicted on a culprit unless he should curse both his parents, while, we may be sure, the penalty would be incurred if either his father or his mother should be cursed by him.

BOOK OF MORMON EXAMPLES

Instances in which "and" is used for "or" in the Book of Mormon are quite numerous; but only some of those which manifest most plainly a disjunctive sense shall be submitted. "Now they had sworn in their hearts that they would return to the land of Nephi, and if their wives and their children were slain, *   *

that they would seek revenge, and [or] also perish with them."—Mos. 19:19.

Doubtless, since the love of life is strong in all human beings, these men swore only to seek revenge; for who can think that they would not have saved their own lives, if they could, after effecting the revenge they sought?

"If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness, and [or] if they be evil to the resurrection of endless damnation."—Mos. 16:11.

"But this much I tell you; what you do with me after this, shall be a type and [or] a shadow of things which are to come." —Mos. 13:10.

"Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught, and [or] revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth."—II Nep. 28:16.

What they thus say is not at all applicable to the first clause, and so a disjunctive should separate the second one from it. "But Alma, with his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites, until he slew, and [or] drove them back."—(Al. 2:33.) To drive the slain back is not possible; but by interpreting "and" in the sense of "or", according to the Hebrew idiom, this text presents no difficulty. "And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and [or] the chains of hell, * * were they loosed? I say unto you, yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand."—(Al. 5:9.) The answer here given can refer only to the loosing of the chains of hell, and the disjunctive "or" is the proper English connection.

"They durst not lay their hands on Aaron and [or] his brethren."—Al. 22:20.

"Moroni being in the course of the march, therefore Jacob was determined to slay them, and [or] cut his way through to the city of Mulek."—Al. 52:34.

"And he denieth none that come unto him, black and [or] white, bond and [or] free, male and [or] female."—II Nep. 26:33. "None" in this text has its usual signification of "no *one*" and unless the Hebrew idiom being illustrated is made to apply in this case, the meaning of the passage is that God will deny no one, let him or her be black and white, bond and free, or male and female. There are creatures who make texts like the one just passed upon —texts that are not constructed according to our idiom—subjects for ridicule, and, by holding them forth to the derision of the unthinking masses, bring contempt in some degree upon the Book of Mormon, though what is thus often ridiculed through ignorance is simply a testimony, or testimonies, that that book was written by Hebrews.

The conjunction "and" is also made to do service instead of

"for" in II Nep. 25:29. "And now, behold. I say unto you, that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not, and [for] Christ is the holy one of Israel." So also for "while," as, "And those men again stood to scatter their flocks; but Ammon said unto his brethren, encircle the flocks round about that they flee not; and [while] I go and contend with these men."—Alma 17:33. The writer has at hand no Biblical references showing a corresponding use of "and" for "while" and "for," but these examples serve to illustrate the Hebraic practice—often repeated—of uniting propositions together by "and" instead of some more appropriate connective.

4.   *Concerning the Use of "and" for "when."*
The Hebrew conjunction for "and" may also be used before a clause expressing a co-existing act or condition, as, "Noah was six hundred years old, and [*i. e.* when] the flood was upon the earth."—Gen. 7:6.—*Heb. Gram.*, par. 287:1.

BOOK OF MORMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

"And it came to pass that they were about to return to the land of Nephi, and [when] they met the men of Gideon."—Mos. 19:22.

"And Gideon pursued after him, and was about to get upon the tower to slay the king, and [when] the king cast his eyes round about towards the land of Shemlon."—Mos. 19:6.

"And it came to pass that a long time had passed away, and [when] the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant."—Jacob 5:29.

Nothing further shall at present be remarked concerning the uses which the Book of Mormon makes of the conjunction "and." Sufficient, and more, has already been brought forth to manifest that in this respect that book is far more Hebraic than English. It employs this conjunction in various constructions which the idiom of our language does not provide for, or directly antagonizes.   (TO BE CONTINUED)

The Most Perfect

You may sing of great pretentions,
    Or of bards and poets grand;
Of great men with great inventions,
    Whom we honor in the land.
But the being most perfected,
    Through the ages as they roll,
Is the life that is protected
    With a chaste and moral soul.

RAYMOND, CANADA   O. F. URSENBACH.