



Type: Magazine Article

Concerning the Charge of Copying

Author(s): T. W. Brookbank

Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 76, No. 36
(3 September 1914)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 568–573

Abstract: This article answers the charge that Joseph Smith copied passages from the Bible into the Book of Mormon by arguing that often the Lord does not repeat laws and prophecies to men verbatim. This is clearly seen in the Hebrew Bible where it is observed that men who lived in the same land and in corresponding time periods recorded events differently as a comparison between passages of the Bible shows.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1914.

EDITORIAL.

CONCERNING THE CHARGE OF COPYING.

THERE are several chapters in the Book of Mormon (see I. Nephi 20 and 21, and II. Nephi 7, 8 and 12-24 inclusive), which, to the casual reader, are word for word the same as certain sections of Isaiah's writings in our common Bible, and it is charged that Joseph Smith copied them from that book. Now, the version authorized by King James did not appear in print until 1611, A.D., and so our opponents contend that the alleged verbal identity of the corresponding chapters supplies all the evidence necessary to demonstrate that Joseph Smith's claim to inspiration from God, is a baseless assumption. The fraudulent character of his work, they say, is too undisguised, too transparent for intelligent people to consider with any degree of seriousness—deserving of contempt only. Yet these wise ones do not think it becomes them to take time and pains to tell us how an alleged fraud, which its author placarded all over in big letters as such, according to their view, can really be an imposture; for when a thing of that nature is palmed off on the people, there must be secrecy, deception and a lot of willful blinding of the eyes of the intended victims practiced. If one should put a nicely executed pound note into circulation—so similar to a genuine bill that not one person in thousands could detect it as a worthless piece of paper, there would be imposture in that case; but if he should give warning in large lettering all over it, that the note was a counterfeit, we hardly think the man could be called a counterfeiter—an impostor in any sense of the word. They allege that Joseph Smith was a deceiver, yet say that everything he did makes that fact so evident that how he can deceive anyone of ordinary intelligence, is a mystery. Just how they can reconcile their allegations against Joseph Smith as a man of deceitful character, with his evident honesty of purpose to unmask himself in a true light to all, does not worry them. From the point of view that he was an impostor, no one has more loudly or surely proclaimed that fact than he himself has done. That, in effect, is the substance of anti-“Mormon” testimony.

But we will leave them with their inconsistencies; for there are other matters upon which we desire more particularly to speak at present, and, in the first place, shall call attention to the fact that

it is not at variance with the work of the Holy Spirit to repeat what has once been given by its inspiration. Sometimes what has been revealed is re-stated in terms that are identical, in other instances some slight variations occur, and again the substance of a former revelation may be given in terms that are quite unlike. For instance, there are two accounts of creation. The Book of Deuteronomy gets its name from the fact that it is largely a repetition of the law. The only texts which need now be cited are found in Exodus 20 and Dent. 5, and relate to the ten commandments. That these laws, identical in substance and largely word for word, were put upon the sacred records of the Jews *twice* BY INSPIRATION, no believer in the Bible will question. Yet why a people should have a code of laws commanded to them twice in a brief time, is, we think, more difficult to explain satisfactorily than why another people who lived in a distant part of the world should be inspired to incorporate certain prophecies of their forefathers which related to themselves, in a book which was written in a language that they could understand, rather than to let them remain hidden away in another record whose language they could not understand, or which, if kept in familiar use, would require a great deal of needless study and waste of time. Let the situation be thoroughly understood. According to the Book of Mormon history, the prophecies of Isaiah were written upon the brass plates which Nephi obtained from Laban at Jerusalem. The characters used were the Egyptian. After he, and the company of which he formed a part, arrived at the promised land (America), the Egyptian hieroglyphics were substituted by a reformed system based on them, and so it is evident that unless BOTH systems were kept up and studied, the time would very soon come when no one could read the brass records, and to avoid this extra study and labor for generations, it was a necessity for Nephi to copy those prophecies in which he and his people were specially interested, and wished to read often, as we may suppose, into his own books, writing them in the characters that were to be used thereafter by the Nephites. It was a matter of studying, on the one hand, for centuries a single system of difficult hieroglyphical writings or of two such systems on the other, and the only common sense course that offered was adopted. These are sound reasons, we think, why those chapters from Isaiah's writings are found in the Book of Mormon, and to re-state them briefly: 1st. They were of special interest to the Nephites; and 2nd. In order to avoid the great amount of extra labor necessary to keep up familiarity with two systems of writing, instead of one only, Nephi had to transcribe or translate these prophecies from a language that was falling into disuse into another that was coming into use. It would be very inconvenient for English speaking people to get along without a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into our own tongue; yet we could manage to do so by making ourselves familiar with the

Hebrew in addition to the English. But we do not put ourselves to all that trouble, vexation and expense. There are versions of the original made for us. Now, circumstances just as imperatively required that a version of the brass plates, or whatever portion of them was needed for any purpose whatever, should be rendered into the familiar language of the Nephite people.

These remarks, however, do not affect the question of how the Book of Mormon version of those prophecies corresponds quite largely in the terms used with the King James' version of them. That point will be considered later. For the present additional proofs will be submitted to show that it is not inconsistent with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to repeat verbatim, or practically so, what has once been given. For examples see Ezra, chapter 2, which reads largely word for word the same as Nehemiah, chapter 7, from the sixth verse, inclusive, to the close. The same is true of II. Kings 19, and Isaiah 37. Of verses that are alike, Psalm 107: 8, 15, 21 and 31, are instances; and each verse in Psalm 136—twenty-six in all—ends with the words, "for his mercy endureth forever." Isaiah 2: 2-4, reads thus: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." These important prophecies are repeated in substance, and largely in terms, in Micah 4: 1-3. Illustrations shall be concluded with a few examples from the New Testament, which show a similar duplication of ideas and terms. "Of the common salvation" (Jude 3). "After the common faith" (Titus 1: 4). "Earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3). "Striving together for the faith" (Phil. 1: 27). "Durst not bring against him a railing accusation" (Jude 9). "Bring not railing accusation against them" (II. Peter 2: 11). "Speak evil of those things which they know not" (Jude 10). "Speak evil of the things they understand not" (II. Peter 2: 12). "Despise dominion and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8). "Despise government, * * * not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (II. Peter 2: 10). Other passages less similar in terms are Jude 2, and I. Peter 1: 2; Jude 4, and II. Peter 2: 1; Jude 6, and II. Peter 2: 4.

In the Book of Mormon I. Nephi 10: 8, we find the reading, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight, for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; he is mightier than I, whose shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose." The

ideas in this verse are the same as some that are found in Luke 3: 4, John 1: 26, 27, and Matthew 3: 11, and it is charged that this passage was derived in substance and in terms, as well, from the cited texts; but from what we know of the Holy Spirit's work in inspiring the ACKNOWLEDGED servants of the Almighty with the same ideas, and in practically the same words more than once, in numerous instances, the charge is not sustained by any means. If it could be shown that the Holy Spirit never did give God's servants a duplication of any portion of His revealed word, the matter would assume a very serious aspect for us; but with the many Biblical precedents at hand, our faith in the Book of Mormon as inspired, is not at all disturbed because there are some examples of the same kind connected with it.

We shall next proceed to demonstrate by a comparison of texts that Joseph Smith did not, in the true sense of the term, COPY the text of the King James' version of Isaiah's writings into the Book of Mormon.

"I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass" (Isa. 48: 3).

"They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them" (verse 7).

"Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (verse 10).

"All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The Lord hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans" (verse 14).

"I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous" (verse 15).

"There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (verse 22).

"Behold, I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them. I did shew them suddenly" (I. Nephi 20: 3).

"They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not, they were declared unto thee, lest thou shouldst say, Behold I knew them" (verse 7).

"Behold I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (verse 10.)

"All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; who among them hath declared these things unto them? The Lord hath loved him; yea, and he will fulfil his word which he hath declared by them; and he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans" (verse 14).

"Also, saith the Lord; I the Lord, yea, I have spoken; yea, I have called him to declare, I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous" (verse 15).

"And notwithstanding he hath done all this, and greater also, there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (verse 22).

"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; the Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name" (Isa. 49: 1).

"Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted" (verse 13).

"Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away" (Isa. 50: 1).

"O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isa. 2: 5).

"For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is his name" (Isa. 48: 2).

"* * * Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand" (Isa. 3: 6).

"And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not" (Isa. 2: 9).

"Thou hast multiplied the nation, and NOT increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil" (Isa. 9: 3).

"And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out, because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel. Listen, O isles," etc. (I. Nephi 21: 1).

"Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; for the feet of those who are in the east shall be established; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for they shall be smitten no more; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted" (verse 13).

"Yea, for thus saith the Lord: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off for ever? For thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you?" etc. (II. Nephi 7: 1).

"O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways" (II. Nephi 12: 5).

"Nevertheless they call themselves of the holy city, but they do NOT stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is His name" (I. Nephi 20: 2).

"* * * Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let NOT this ruin come under thy hand" (II. Nephi 13: 6).

"And the mean man boweth NOT down, and the great man humbleth himself NOT, therefore, forgive him not" (II. Nephi 12: 9).

"Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil" (II. Nephi 19: 3).

The small capitals in the last quotations are ours.

Many other examples where variations occur in the respective texts can be found readily by the reader; for altogether, they are numerous, and in some of the texts there is all the difference in meaning that can be expressed by an affirmative on the one hand and a negative on the other. We notice, also, in these latter examples that the context and sense manifest that in all of these instances the rendering, as it is given in the Book of Mormon, is clearly justified. The only possible exception that can be made consistently with the context is in regard to the changed meaning that is given to Isaiah 2: 9, and the question there hinges on whether it is meant that the mean man bowed down to and humbled himself to idols, or that he failed to do so before God as one of His worshippers. The eighth verse seems to favor the first view; the verses which follow the text to the close of the twelfth sustains the Book of Mormon version.

Attention has now been called particularly to some of the variations that occur in the respective texts, and, as already stated, they altogether are many; and their number, amplitude and character effectually demolishes the objection to the Book of Mormon as an inspired record which is founded on the assumption that Joseph Smith COPIED the chapters in question into that book. It is apparent that he had no intention of copying them verbatim.

But it is objected that the verbal similarities in the respective texts is proof, notwithstanding the variations, that he did use the authorized version as a base for his work of alleged inspired translation. In reply, it is observed that we do not know in what manner, even allowing that Joseph Smith had the Urim and Thummim, the translation of the originals of the Book of Mormon was given. Neither he nor the ancient Jews have supplied us with any definite information on this point. Elder B. H. Roberts, who has given a great deal of study to the subject, is of the opinion, based on certain statements in the Doctrine and Covenants, that there was a great deal of mental exertion and study required—that is, that the ideas only rather than the words were made known, and hence, viewing the authorized version as the most faithful and elegant of any that Joseph Smith was familiar with, and very likely the one used in the family of which he was a member, it would have been a most natural thing for him to use that text to the fullest extent that was possible. Accepting it as the standard of purity among all the versions of the Jewish scriptures, and as the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, he was justified by the Spirit of inspiration in using it. Assuming that he did so, his action in view of the position of this Church in regard to that same version is perfectly consistent. Thus the charge that Joseph Smith COPIED Isaiah's prophecies as cited, from our common Bible, is shown to be baseless, and the evident verbal similarities are rationally accounted for.

T. W. B.