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Missing Words: King James Bible Italics, the Translation of the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith as an Unlearned Reader

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MISSING WORDS: KING JAMES BIBLE ITALICS, THE TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON, AND JOSEPH SMITH AS AN UNLEARNED READER AND EDITOR OF A VISIONED TEXT

Stan Spencer

Abstract: *Chapters from Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon use the King James Bible as a base text yet frequently vary from it in minor ways, particularly in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon. A disproportionate number of these variants are due to the omission or replacement of words italicized in the KJV. Many of the minor variants were eliminated by the printer for the 1830 edition or by Joseph Smith himself for the 1837 edition, but others remain. Some of the minor variants are easily explained as errors of dictation, transcription, or copying, but others are not so readily accounted for. While some are inconsequential, others negatively affect Isaiah's text by confusing its meaning or violating grammatical norms. Most have no clear purpose. The disruptive character of these variants suggests they are secondary and were introduced by someone who was relatively uneducated in English grammar and unfamiliar with the biblical passages being quoted. They point to Joseph Smith, the unlearned man who dictated the Book of Mormon translation. Even so, it seems unlikely that a single individual would have intentionally produced these disruptive edits. They are better explained as the product of the well-intentioned but uncoordinated efforts of two individuals, each trying to adapt the Book of Mormon translation for a contemporary audience. Specifically, many of these variants are best explained as the results of Joseph Smith's attempts to restore missing words to a text from which some words (those italicized in the KJV) had been purposefully omitted by a prior translator. The proposed explanation is consistent with witness accounts of the Book of Mormon translation that portray Joseph Smith visioning a text that was already translated into English. It is also supported by an 1831 newspaper article that describes Joseph Smith dictating one of the Book of Mormon's biblical*

chapters minus the KJV's italicized words. An understanding of the human element in the Book of Mormon translation can aid the student of scripture in distinguishing the "mistake of men" from those variants that are integral to the Book of Mormon's Bible quotations.

The Book of Mormon quotes entire chapters from Isaiah, following the King James Version almost word for word. Smaller biblical interactions scattered throughout the Book of Mormon also tend to use the wording of the KJV.¹ Even more intriguingly, when the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters differ from the KJV, the differences are often at locations where the KJV has italicized words.² These variants are usually minor but sometimes result in readings that conflict with the larger context of Isaiah's message or create ungrammatical or even nonsensical sentences, particularly in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon.³ In this article, I will briefly review existing explanations for this peculiar pattern of variation and then propose an explanation that not only accounts for the Book of Mormon's Isaiah variants that are associated with the KJV's italicized words, but also for many of the other minor variants in these chapters. I will then assess the consistency of each explanation with various lines of evidence from the Book of Mormon text and manuscripts.

The King James Bible as the Base Text for Bible Interactions

The Book of Mormon uses the King James Bible as a base text for Bible quotations and other interactions. This means that when the Book of

1. For reference to the various biblical quotations, allusions, and echoes in the Book of Mormon, Nicholas Frederick recommends the more generic term, "biblical interactions," especially for KJV language from the New Testament, which, as far as we know, the Nephites did not possess. Nicholas J. Frederick, "Evaluating the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon: A Proposed Methodology," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 2015): 4–10.

2. B.H. Roberts, "Bible Quotations in the Book of Mormon; and Reasonableness of Nephi's Prophecies," *Improvement Era* 7, no. 3 (January 1904): 191.

3. Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 215–25; David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, eds. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 157–234. Also see Royal Skousen's analysis of textual variants in the Isaiah chapters. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, six parts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–2009); <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/atv/>.

Mormon interacts with the Bible, it tends to follow the wording of the KJV rather than that of any other Bible translation. This is the case even at some points where the translation in the KJV is awkward or problematic. (An acceptance of minor translation errors in quoted scripture is also seen when the New Testament quotes the Old.⁴) The use of base texts is a common and accepted practice in translations of the Bible. For example, the translators who produced the King James Version were instructed to use the well-known Bishops' Bible as a base text, diverging from it only when necessary to produce a suitable translation.⁵ By using a well-known prior translation as a base text, translators can produce a new translation that is still somewhat familiar to readers. The use of the KJV as a base text for biblical passages in the Book of Mormon makes sense since it allows for any important differences to be easily seen. A completely independent retranslation of the Isaiah chapters would have differed more in wording than in meaning. The differences in wording would have invited fruitless criticism of the suitability of word choice in the Book of Mormon. The use of wording from the KJV precludes such a diversion of attention from the intended messages of the Book of Mormon. Even for short biblical interactions, the use of KJV wording makes it more clear that the Bible is indeed being quoted or alluded to.⁶ An independent translation of these shorter passages would have

4. John A. Tvedtnes explains: "When New Testament writers included quotations from Isaiah or other Old Testament writings, they often employed the extant Greek translation known as the Septuagint rather than translate anew from the Hebrew text, even when the Greek text included translation errors." John A. Tvedtnes, "Isaiah in the Bible and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 16, no. 2 (2004): 169, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1633&context=msr>.

5. The first of fifteen rules drawn up to guide the King James translators stated that "the ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit." David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7n1.

6. For more discussion of the KJV as a base text for the Book of Mormon, see Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 373–77, 379–81, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/textual-variants-isaiah-quotations-book-mormon>; also Shon D. Hopkin, "Isaiah 52–53 and Mosiah 13–14: A Textual Comparison," in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), 154–62.

differed enough in wording from the KJV that some of these interactions would have been less clear.⁷

The close connection between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, and specifically the King James Version of the Bible, can be clearly seen in 2 Nephi 22, which, at 134 words, is identical to Isaiah 12 of the KJV. At 519 words, 2 Nephi 21 is nearly identical to Isaiah 11 of the KJV. The only differences are two changes in word order (“also of Ephraim” becomes “of Ephraim also” in verse 13, and “shall he” becomes “he shall” in verse 15).⁸ Even these differences may simply be errors of dictation, transcription, or copying of the manuscripts. The close connection with the KJV is also seen in short biblical phrases scattered throughout the Book of Mormon. For example, Alma describes the awful dread of those who rebel against God as a “fearful looking for of the fiery indignation of the wrath of God” (Alma 40:14), which echoes the KJV’s description of the “fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” (Hebrews 10:27). The phrase “looking for of,” although grammatically correct, is so awkward as to be seldom found in English literature except in this passage in the KJV lineage of Bibles (most other Bible versions have “expectation of”).⁹ It is William Tyndale’s odd word choice in translating the Greek. There is no apparent reason for the Book of Mormon to use such awkward and unusual language except to make it clear that it is referencing the Bible. Given the variety of ways a single idea can be expressed in the English language, such a high degree of similarity between the Book of Mormon and the KJV in both entire chapters and scattered phrases cannot be due to chance.

7. For example, there is an obvious interaction between 2 Nephi 9:39 (“Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life eternal”) and Romans 8:6 (“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”). Most modern Bibles translate Romans 8:6 closer to “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (NASB). If the Book of Mormon had used wording similar to this, readers of the standard Bible at the time of the Book of Mormon’s publication, the KJV, would have been less likely to notice this biblical interaction.

8. It also differs from some editions of the KJV by having ‘a highway’ instead of ‘an highway’ in verse 16.

9. To see evidence for this tendency, search the online Google Books database for “looking for of” (without the quotes) using the Ngram Viewer interface (<https://books.google.com/ngrams/>). Nearly all results from the Early Modern Period through the early 19th century either quote or allude to this biblical passage. Instead of “fearful looking for of,” most other Bible translations have something more like “fearful expectation of” or “terrifying expectation of.”

Although the Bible that was used as a base text for the Book of Mormon was certainly the KJV, it was probably not the 1769 Oxford edition, which most King James Bibles today are based on. The text of that edition was not uniformly used in King James Bibles until after the Book of Mormon was translated. Many distinctive American editions of the KJV were printed in the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries, and these, along with the contemporary King James Bibles out of Cambridge, had many minor differences from the Oxford 1769 edition, some of which served to modernize the language. Some of these editions more closely match the Book of Mormon than does the 1769 edition — the 1828 Phinney Cooperstown Bible and the 1819 American Bible Society octavo edition being among the closest. Since it is not known which edition of the KJV the Book of Mormon’s language is based on, for the purpose of textual analysis in this article, I will consider only those variants for which the Book of Mormon differs from most or all of the major editions of the KJV printed by 1828.¹⁰

Two Sample Chapters

As demonstrated above, the Book of Mormon is clearly using the King James Bible as a base text for biblical interactions. The way it uses the KJV as a base text, however, is highly unusual. The concentration of minor variants around the KJV’s italicized words and their often negative effects on the sense, clarity, or grammar of the text are not the expected results of the use of a base text in translating. This unusual pattern of variation from the KJV can be seen in 2 Nephi 16 and 17, which correspond to chapters 6 and 7 of Isaiah. I have selected these chapters for discussion because they are consecutive, of moderate size, and have an intermediate number of variants, most of which are minor. In these chapters, 41 percent of the KJV’s italicized words have been omitted, compared to an average of 37 percent across all Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters.¹¹ These two chapters do not contain any major additions that

10. For those chapters from Isaiah, Malachi, and Matthew that are quoted or adapted in the Book of Mormon, most of the variation in the KJV (except for typesetting errors confined to one or a few editions) is encompassed in three editions: the 1611 edition, the 1782 Aitken Bible, which was the first complete King James Bible printed in America, and the 1819 American Bible Society octavo edition, which uses more modern language than does the 1769 Oxford edition.

11. These statistics are based on a comparison of the KJV with the quoted Isaiah chapters in *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). Isaiah 2–14 is quoted in 2 Nephi 12–24, Isaiah 48–49 is quoted in 1 Nephi 20–21, Isaiah 50–51 is quoted in 2 Nephi 7–8,

might signal editing by Jacob or Nephi, but only the type of relatively minor differences that are common throughout the Book of Mormon's Isaiah chapters and that are the focus of this article.

In the text of these chapters provided below and in quoted passages throughout this article, words that appear in the Book of Mormon but not the KJV are underlined, while those that appear in the KJV but not the Book of Mormon are struck through.¹² Bolding is used to indicate those changes specifically discussed in the text. Capitalization and use of italics follow the KJV. The Book of Mormon text used here and throughout this article is Royal Skousen's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* with punctuation removed, as the original Book of Mormon manuscript was mostly unpunctuated.¹³

Isaiah 6 as quoted in 2 Nephi 16:

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and his train filled the temple 2 Above it stood the seraphims each one had six wings with twain he covered his face and with twain he covered his feet and with twain he did fly 3 And one cried unto another and said Holy holy holy *is* the LORD of hosts the whole earth *is* full of his glory 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried and the house was filled with smoke 5 Then said I Woe ~~is~~ me for I am undone because I ~~am~~ a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean

Isaiah 53 is quoted in Mosiah 14, and Isaiah 54 is quoted in 3 Nephi 22. Much of Isaiah 29 appears in 2 Nephi 27, but this is not presented as a quote from Isaiah but rather as Nephi's own prophecy (see 2 Nephi 25:1,7); hence, it was not included in the analysis. The range of italicized words omitted varies from zero in the Book of Mormon's versions of Isaiah 11, 12, and 53, to 73 percent in the Book of Mormon's version of Isaiah 4. Royal Skousen has determined that, across all Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon, 38 percent of the KJV's italicized words are "linked to differences." Skousen, "Textual Variants," 382.

12. In addition to these variants, the following Book of Mormon variants for Isaiah 6 and 7 are not found in the 1769 Oxford edition but are found in the 1611 edition or the 1782 Aitken Bible, both of which are editions of the KJV potentially available at the time of translation: "then I said" versus "then said I" in Isaiah 6:8, "Rezin king of Syria" versus "Rezin the king of Syria" in Isaiah 7:1, "towards Jerusalem" versus "toward Jerusalem" in Isaiah 7:1, and "he shall eat butter" versus "that he shall eat butter" in Isaiah 7:22.

13. Skousen, *The Earliest Text*. Regarding punctuation, see Royal Skousen, "Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 164. Although I use Skousen's Book of Mormon text, use of the printer's manuscript would have given similar results.

lips for mine eyes have seen the King the LORD of hosts 6
 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me having a live coal
 in his hand *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the
 altar 7 And he laid **it** upon my mouth and said Lo this hath
 touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin
 purged 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying Whom
 shall I send and who will go for us Then I said Here **am** I
 send me 9 And he said Go and tell this people Hear ye indeed
 but **they** understand not and see ye indeed but **they** perceive
 not 10 Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears
 heavy and shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear
 with their ears and understand with their heart and convert
 and be healed 11 Then said I Lord how long And he **answered**
said Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant and the
 houses without man and the land be utterly desolate 12 And
 the LORD have removed men far away **and for there shall** be a
 great forsaking in the midst of the land 13 But yet in it **there**
shall be a tenth and **it they** shall return and shall be eaten as a
 teil tree and as an oak whose substance *is* in them when they
 cast *their leaves so* the holy seed *shall be* the substance thereof

Isaiah 7 as quoted in 2 Nephi 17:

1 And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham
 the son of Uzziah king of Judah **that** Rezin king of Syria and
 Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel went up towards
 Jerusalem to war against it but could not prevail against it 2
 And it was told the house of David saying Syria is confederate
 with Ephraim And his heart was moved and the heart of his
 people as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind 3
 Then said the LORD unto Isaiah Go forth now to meet Ahaz
 thou and Shear-jashub thy son at the end of the conduit of the
 upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field 4 And say unto
 him Take heed and be quiet fear not neither be fainthearted
 for the two tails of these smoking firebrands for the fierce
 anger of Rezin with Syria and of the son of Remaliah 5
 Because Syria Ephraim and the son of Remaliah have taken
 evil counsel against thee saying 6 Let us go up against Judah
 and vex it and let us make a breach therein for us and set a
 king in the midst of it **even yea** the son of Tabeal 7 Thus saith
 the Lord God It shall not stand neither shall it come to pass 8
 For the head of Syria *is* Damascus and the head of Damascus

is Rezin and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken that it be not a people 9 And the head of Ephraim *is* Samaria and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah's son If ye will not believe surely ye shall not be established 10 Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz saying 11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God ask **it** either in the **depth depths** or in the **height heights** above 12 But Ahaz said I will not ask neither will I tempt the LORD 13 And he said Hear ye now O house of David *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men but will ye weary my God also 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign Behold a virgin shall conceive and **shall** bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel 15 Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and **to** choose the good 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings 17 The LORD shall bring upon thee and upon thy people and upon thy father's house days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah **even** the king of Assyria 18 And it shall come to pass in that day *that* the LORD shall hiss for the fly that *is* in the uttermost part of **the rivers of** Egypt and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria 19 And they shall come and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys and in the holes of the rocks and upon all thorns and upon all bushes 20 In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired **namely** by them beyond the river by the king of Assyria the head and the hair of the feet and it shall also consume the beard 21 And it shall come to pass **that** in that day *that* a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep 22 And it shall come to pass for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give he shall eat butter for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land 23 And it shall come to pass in that day *that* every place shall be where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings **it which** shall **even** be for briars and thorns 24 With arrows and with bows shall *men* come thither because all the land shall become briars and thorns 25 And **on** all hills that shall be digged with the mattock there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen and **for** the treading of lesser cattle.

In these two chapters, the KJV has 37 italicized words and 1,021 non-italicized words. In the Book of Mormon’s version of these chapters, 15 (41 percent) of the italicized words have been omitted, compared to only 11 (1 percent) of the non-italicized words. The KJV’s italicized words are missing at a rate approximately 40 times that of its non-italicized words!¹⁴ Such a strong association of variants with the KJV’s italicized words is not attributable to chance.

There are 29 differences, or variants, in these two Book of Mormon chapters relative to the KJV. None of these variants has any obvious purpose or value.¹⁵ Certainly, none clarifies Isaiah’s message or substantially improves the grammar.

Of the 29 variants, ten affect the degree of parallelism in the English text but are otherwise of little consequence: the omission of “the rivers of” in 2 Nephi 17:18, the replacement of “answered” with “said” in 2 Nephi 16:11, the addition of “shall” to 2 Nephi 17:14, the addition of “to” in 2 Nephi 17:15, the replacement of “and” with “for” and the addition of “shall” in 2 Nephi 16:12, the omission of “is” in 2 Nephi 17:8, the transposition of “that” in 2 Nephi 17:21, the omission of “that” in 2 Nephi 17:23, and the omission of “for” in 2 Nephi 17:25.¹⁶ The net effect

14. Royal Skousen observed that 29 percent of the differences between the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters and the KJV are linked to italicized words. Skousen, “Textual Variants,” 382.

15. One variant, the omission of “the rivers of” in 2 Nephi 17:18, slightly alters the meaning but without any apparent significance to Isaiah’s or Nephi’s message. I see no apparent purpose or value in any of the other variants, but some others do. For example, Joseph Spencer suggests that Isaiah is so “undone” in 2 Nephi 16:5 that he is dropping words from his sentences. Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 174. In the Hebrew source behind Isaiah’s text, however, Isaiah has not dropped any words, since the KJV’s italicized words have no direct counterpart in the Hebrew. It is only the English that is broken with their omission. Clay Gorton finds significance in the difference between the “commandment” in Isaiah 6:9: “understand not . . . perceive not” and the “condemnatory phrase” in the 2 Nephi 16:9: “they understand not . . . they perceive not” (emphasis added). H. Clay Gorton, *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban: A Comparison of Biblical & Book of Mormon Isaiah Texts* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1994), 201–202. However, this change runs counter to the meaning of the next verse, in which God again dictates impediments to perception and understanding: “make their ears heavy and shut their eyes lest they see . . . and understand.”

16. The replacement of “and” with “for” in 2 Nephi 16:12 (Isaiah 6:12) adds to the set of possible interpretations of this verse (i.e., it adds a possible interpretation that some kind of “forsaking” by the people was the inducement for God’s punishment), but that is not necessarily a beneficial change. It does not eliminate

of these Book of Mormon variants is a loss of parallelism relative to the KJV and to the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) from which the KJV was translated.¹⁷

Of the remaining 19 variants, nine are neutral in their effects on meaning and grammar. One of these consists of the addition of a nonessential word: the addition of “there” in 2 Nephi 16:13. Four consist of the replacement of one word with another word that has more or less the same contextual meaning: the replacement of “it” with “they” in 2 Nephi 16:13, “even” with “yea” in 2 Nephi 17:6, and “depth” with “depths” and “height” with “heights” in 2 Nephi 17:11. Another four involve the omission without replacement of a nonessential italicized word: the omission of “that” in 2 Nephi 17:1 and in 17:22, of “even” in 2 Nephi 17:23, and of “on” in 2 Nephi 17:25.¹⁸

The remaining 10 variants are harmful to the sense or English grammar. Six of these involve the omission of italicized words. In 2 Nephi 16:5, the omission of “is” and “am” from the KJV’s “Woe *is* me for I am undone because I *am* a man of unclean lips and I dwell” makes this sentence ungrammatical and potentially confusing. In verse 7, the omission of “it” from the KJV’s “he laid *it* [a live coal] upon my mouth” produces the illogical, “he laid upon my mouth.” In verse 8, the omission of “am” from “Here *am* I send me” makes the English text awkward, at least. In 2 Nephi 17:17, the omission of “even” could lead the reader to wrongly believe that Judah was king of Assyria. The italicized “even” in that verse in the KJV is important because it discourages such a misinterpretation. Similarly, the italicized “namely” that is omitted in the Book of Mormon from 2 Nephi 17:20 is important in clarifying that the king of Assyria is

the interpretations that were previously possible nor does it make clear which interpretation is the correct one.

17. The first three of these variants (the variants in 2 Nephi 17:18, 16:11, and 17:14) increase the parallelism of the text relative to the KJV, and two of these three (the variants in 2 Nephi 16:11 and 17:14) better reflect the parallelism in the Masoretic Text than does the KJV. The next variant listed (the addition of “to” in 2 Nephi 17:15) has mixed effects, increasing the parallelism within the verse but decreasing it between verses relative to the KJV. The remaining six variants result in a relative decrease in parallelism relative to the KJV and are less reflective of the parallelism in the Masoretic Text. Note that “And it shall come to pass in that day *that*” in Isaiah 7:21 and 7:23 is parallel to this same phrase in verse 18.

18. There is another possible instance of replacement of an italicized word in these Book of Mormon chapters. In 2 Nephi 17:1 of the printer’s manuscript, which is the earliest text for this verse, “&” appears in place of the italicized “that.” Skousen concluded that the insertion of “&” was likely accidental in part because it makes the text difficult to interpret. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 703–706.

not the one hiring a razor; he is the razor. The remaining four variants that are harmful to the sense or grammar do not involve italicized words. In 2 Nephi 16:9, the KJV's "Hear ye indeed but understand not and see ye indeed but perceive not" becomes "Hear ye indeed but **they** understand not and see ye indeed but **they** perceive not." This change results in an awkward switching back and forth between second person and third person and between the imperative and indicative moods. It also alters the meaning contrary to the statement in the next verse, which has God again dictating impediments to understanding and perception. The omission of "it" from "ask it either in the" in 2 Nephi 17:11 implies, illogically, that the asking (not the sign) is to be done in the depths or heights. The replacement of "it" with "which" in 2 Nephi 17:23 muddles the meaning of Isaiah's message. The text as it stands in the KJV makes sense — the deserted land, once fruitful, will be overrun with briars and thorns. With "which" in place of "it," the Book of Mormon appears to instead say, in an incomplete sentence, that briars and thorns will be purchased with a thousand silverlings (i.e., a thousand silver coins).

As shown above, these two Book of Mormon chapters follow the wording of the King James Bible very closely except for minor variants that are strongly associated with the KJV's italicized words, have no clear purpose, result on a net loss of parallelism relative to the KJV and its Hebrew source, and are often disruptive or damaging to the sense or grammar. How can this pattern, which stands in contrast to the sophisticated use of language and biblical understanding elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, be explained?

Three Hypotheses

The odd relationship of the Book of Mormon to the King James Bible, including the association of the Book of Mormon variants with the KJV's italicized words, is not a new discovery. In the 1904 *Improvement Era*, Assistant Church Historian B. H. Roberts acknowledged the reliance of the Book of Mormon on the KJV and attempted to explain the nature of the differences:

There remains to be accounted for the *differences* that exist between these Book of Mormon passages and those which parallel them in the King James' translation.¹⁹

He went on to say:

19. Roberts, "Bible Quotations," 184, emphasis in original.

They unquestionably arise from the fact that the Prophet compared the King James' translation with the parallel passages in the Nephite records, and when he found the sense of the passage on the Nephite plates superior to that in the English version he made such changes as would give the superior sense and clearness. This view is sustained by the fact of uniform superiority of the Book of Mormon version wherever such differences occur. It is also a significant fact that these changes occur quite generally in the case of supplied words of the English translators, and which in order to indicate that they are supplied words, are printed in *Italics*.²⁰

In this quote, Robert correctly notes that the KJV italicizes words that have no direct equivalent in the source text. Roberts attributes the differences in the Book of Mormon to ancient variants in the Nephite plates, presumably reflecting the record on the brass plates, at least in the chapters Nephi and Jacob say they are reading. According to Roberts, the version of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is consistently “superior [in] sense and clearness.” Roberts’s explanation has largely held sway among believers in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.²¹ I will refer to this explanation as the Ancient Variants Hypothesis.

Stan Larson, in his 1991 article comparing versions of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and 3 Nephi, agrees that the Book of Mormon is based on the KJV, but comes to a different conclusion regarding the nature of the differences:

20. Ibid., 191, emphasis in original.

21. Brigham Young University religion professor Richard Anderson expressed this view in a 1977 *Ensign* article in which he quoted fellow religion professor Daniel Ludlow: “Summarizing the view taken by Latter-day Saint scholars on this point, Daniel H. Ludlow emphasizes the inherent variety of independent translation and concludes: ‘There appears to be only one answer to explain the word-for-word similarities between the verses of Isaiah in the Bible and the same verses in the Book of Mormon.’ That is simply that Joseph Smith must have opened Isaiah and tested each mentioned verse by the Spirit: ‘If his translation was essentially the same as that of the King James version, he apparently quoted the verse from the Bible.’” Richard Lloyd Anderson, “By the Gift and Power of God,” *Ensign* 7, no. 9 (September 1977), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1977/09/by-the-gift-and-power-of-god>. Regarding the variants, see Legrande Davies, “Isaiah: Texts in the Book of Mormon,” in *Scriptures of the Church: Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 332; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1981), 1–2, 128; Gorton, *Brass Plates of Laban*.

When Smith came to the KJV italics in the Sermon on the Mount, which he knew indicated that whatever was printed in italics was not in the original Greek, he would often either drop the word or revise it.

... This analysis based on textual criticism confirms ... that the Book of Mormon text of the sermon is not a genuine translation from an ancient language but Smith's nineteenth-century targumic expansion of the English KJV.²²

Larson's idea is similar to Roberts's in that both have Joseph Smith using a physical Bible during the dictation of the Book of Mormon. Larson parts from Roberts, however, in attributing the differences in the Book of Mormon, not to ancient variants, but to Joseph Smith's intentional targeting of the Bible's italicized words as he creates his own revisions of the Bible chapters. David P. Wright, in his 2002 analysis of Book of Mormon Isaiah variants, expands on Larson's idea:

Many of the variants in the [Book of Mormon] Isaiah came about as a revision of italicized words and of their contexts in the KJV text. ... Joseph Smith's suspicion of the italicized words, shared by others of his age, was not well-founded, since in most cases the KJV's italicized words simply supply words necessary for the proper rendering of the text's meaning in English. ... Smith's suspicion of the italicized words led him to produce a text that sought to obviate the supposed problems they created. But his corrections created their own problems and errors.²³

Wright also explains that many of the variants in the Book of Mormon, although not directly corresponding to words italicized in the KJV, are conceptually intertwined with them so that Joseph Smith's revisions of the KJV's italicized words would have "brought in their wake larger contextual revision so that the text would make sense."²⁴

Although we have no record of Joseph Smith expressing the suspicion of italicized words that Wright presumes, a dismissive attitude toward

22. Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 130–31.

23. Wright, "Isaiah," 168–69.

24. Wright, "Isaiah," 168.

the KJV's italicized words was expressed in an article entitled "Errors in the Bible" in a Latter-day Saint newspaper in 1833:

As to the errors in the bible, any man possessed of common understanding, knows, that both the old and new testaments are filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men.²⁵

A similar misunderstanding of the KJV's italicized words had been expressed a few months earlier in the same newspaper:

The book of Mormon, as a revelation from God, possesses some advantage over the old scripture: it has not been tinctured by the wisdom of man, with here and there an Italic word to supply deficiencies.²⁶

As Wright notes, the idea that the italicized words represent deficiencies in the Bible is, in most cases, incorrect. Although these words have no direct equivalent in the source text, their meanings are generally implied or represented in other ways.

I will refer to Larson's idea, as expanded by Wright, as the Italics Revision Hypothesis.

Wright as well as Brant Gardner have provided detailed arguments supporting the idea that Joseph Smith was intentionally interacting with the KJV's italicized words as he translated.²⁷ After discussing the Book of Mormon's dependence on the KJV, Gardner summarizes:

The evidence is strong that, when Joseph translated the Isaiah passages, he was reading from the King James Bible. In the overwhelming majority of the time, the two texts are identical. When they differ, a statistically significant number of the changes involved words italicized in the KJV. Joseph removed those words, then dictated the changes that became necessary to maintain grammatical sentences, a process he could accomplish if he could see which words were in italics. Unfortunately, the evidence also suggests that Joseph didn't read from the Bible.²⁸

25. "Errors of the Bible," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2, no. 14 (July 1833): 106.

26. "The Book of Mormon," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 8 (January 1833): 58.

27. Wright, "Isaiah," 157–234; Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 215–25.

28. Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 304.

Indeed, it is unfortunate for both Roberts's and Larson's ideas that they are not supported by eyewitness accounts of the translation of the Book of Mormon, none of which have Joseph Smith making use of any physical text, including a Bible. The most authoritative witness accounts describe Joseph Smith dictating the Book of Mormon translation with a hat pulled close to his face to exclude the light, which would have made reading from a physical text impossible.²⁹ If Joseph Smith used a physical bible, he would have had to do so frequently, since biblical interactions are scattered throughout the Book of Mormon. Continuously removing his face from the hat to make use of a physical Bible would not have gone unnoticed by those who watched him translate. Both Joseph's wife Emma and David Whitmer asserted that Joseph used no notes or books during translation. Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery reportedly asserted the same.³⁰ An alternative idea — that Joseph Smith had the ability to memorize large portions of the Bible (including, for Larson's explanation, the locations of the italicized words) — also lacks historical evidence. If Joseph Smith referred to a biblical text while translating, it may have been one he saw in vision.³¹ This is essentially the conclusion at which Gardner arrives:

Although the alterations associated with italicized words suggest that Joseph was working with a visual text, the chapter breaks tell us that he was not seeing the KJV with its current chapter divisions. . . . It is at this point that we invoke the divine. The Lord provides the stimulus of the appropriate neural nets, and the brain creates the appropriate visual image.³²

The idea that Joseph Smith's part in translating the Book of Mormon included the visioning of an English text is supported by witness accounts

29. For the principal accounts of translation of the Book of Mormon, see Stan Spencer, "Seers and Stones: The Translation of the Book of Mormon as Divine Visions of an Old-Time Seer," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2017): 32–43.

30. See Daniel Peterson's review of witness statements in Daniel C. Peterson, "A Response: 'What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 2 (2002): 68; <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol11/iss2/9/>.

31. Many of Joseph Smith's early revelations came as visions, and some of these involved seer stone and hat as in his translation of the Book of Mormon. Spencer, "Seers and Stones," 52–56. There are no reports of Joseph having the kind of prodigious memory he would have needed to memorize entire chapters of Isaiah, complete with the locations of the italicized words.

32. Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 306.

of the translation. Firsthand accounts by those who saw Joseph Smith “translate” or heard him describe the process indicate that he would place one or more seer stones in a hat, pull the hat to his face to exclude the light, and then read the English words that miraculously appeared. The words that Joseph saw are described in these witness accounts as appearing “in the hat” (David Whitmer’s 1881 letter) or “in the stone” (William Smith’s 1883 account) or, more specifically, on “something resembling parchment” that “would appear before Joseph” (Whitmer’s 1887 and 1879 accounts).³³ None of the most authoritative accounts claim that the text appeared on the surface of a stone as if the stone were a technological device, as is sometimes assumed. According to David Whitmer, Joseph Smith described the translation as an imaginative vision in which “parchment would appear before Joseph” with writing on it.³⁴ This is reminiscent of how the founding scripture of the Nephites was revealed to the seer Lehi. Lehi read the scriptural text from a book (likely a roll of papyrus or leather) that he saw in imaginative vision (1 Nephi 1:8–13, 16–17; 6:1).³⁵ As the word *seer* implies, seer stones were traditionally used for facilitating visions, and Joseph Smith used both

33. For a discussion of these and other principal accounts of the translation relative to where the translated text appeared, see Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 32–43. I use the term *translate* in the sense that Joseph Smith apparently used it — to produce a translation by whatever means. He produced the translation of the Nephite record by visioning the translated text and dictating it to his scribe.

34. John L. Traughber Jr., “Testimony of David Whitmer,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (November 15, 1879): 341, https://archive.org/stream/TheSaintsHerald_Volume_26_1879/the%20saints%20herald%20volume%2026%201879#page/n340/mode/1up. *Imaginative* in this sense does not mean *imaginary*. It simply means that a vision is perceived through the brain’s imaginative faculty or the mind’s eye, as one perceives a dream or other vivid mental image, rather than through the physical senses. A piece of parchment appearing out of nowhere would seem to indicate an imaginative vision, unless one surmises that an actual piece of parchment materialized in Joseph Smith’s hat. In our technological world, we might alternatively imagine the seer stone physically projecting an image of a parchment into Joseph Smith’s eyes. Although such a miraculous transformation of stone to projector is plausible, it is not required to explain the witness accounts.

35. The standard books at the time of Lehi and Ezekiel (who also read from a book in vision; Ezekiel 2:8–10) were rolls of papyrus or leather. By the time John envisioned a “little book” (Revelation 10:2–10) writing on sheets of parchment was becoming more common. Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts: A Working Introduction to Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 19–29.

his individual seer stones and the interpreter stones for that purpose.³⁶ It makes sense that a translation obtained by the use of “seer” stones would be revealed in vision, with the seer stone perhaps facilitating the vision by functioning as an aid to faith or as an object of mental focus.³⁷ The idea that translation by seer stone includes a visionary element is also consistent with other scriptures that describe the use of such instruments and the translation of ancient scripture.³⁸ The idea that God provided Joseph Smith with a vision of the English translation does not imply that God was the translator, nor does it imply that the translation was perfect; God could have shown Joseph a translation produced by someone else, whether immortal or mortal.³⁹

36. Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines seer (as in seer stone) as “1. One who sees; as a seer of visions.” *Webster’s Dictionary 1828 Online Edition*, s.v. “seer,” <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/seer>. Scientifically, a vision would be considered a hallucination, which is “an experience involving the apparent perception of something not present.” Lexico.com, Oxford University Press, s.v. “hallucination,” published 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/hallucination>. A visual hallucination (a vision) may or may not have revelatory content (and what is revelatory may not be divine). Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 55–59. The established Christianity of Joseph Smith’s day could not teach him how to see divine visions — it rejected their very occurrence in the modern age. But the art of “seeing” was still alive in folk religion, and Joseph’s use of seer stones to facilitate his early visions reflects that source of training. For the traditional use of seer stones, see “Seer Stone,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed June 1, 2020, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>. For Joseph Smith’s use of seer stones, see Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 52–54. Seers in many cultures throughout history have looked into objects or surfaces to attain a visionary state, including, perhaps, ancient Israel’s high priest with the Urim and Thummim. Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 96n152, 59–64.

37. For an exploration of how seer stones and hats may have functioned in facilitating imaginative visions, see Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 68–72.

38. Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 49–51, 59–68; also, Stan Spencer, “The Faith to See: Burning in the Bosom and Translating the Book of Mormon in Doctrine and Covenants 9,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 219–32. The description of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 27:20 has Joseph Smith reading words that God provides. This could be interpreted as referring explicitly to Joseph Smith’s reading of English words seen in vision (Spencer, “Seers and Stones,” 67), but it could also be interpreted as referring to Joseph’s ability to effectively “read” the words inscribed on the plates. If “give unto thee” in this passage is taken to mean “grant unto thee [to read],” it is then the granting of the authorization or power (not another set of words) that God would provide. For this meaning of give in reference to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, see Mormon 8:15.

39. Accounts of two of Joseph Smith’s other translation projects have him being shown, in vision, parchment or papyrus documents presumably written by mortals

To the explanations proposed by Roberts and Larson, I add another plausible explanation, based on an early source, that is consistent with witness accounts of the translation of the Book of Mormon. In August of 1831, *The Sun* printed the following as part of its report of the origin of the Book of Mormon, based apparently on an interview with Martin Harris:

So, in order to convince Harris that he could read from the plates, Jo deposits them in his hat, applies spectacles, and refers Harris to a chapter in the Bible which he had learned by rote; and which he read from the plates, with surprising accuracy; and what astonished Harris most, was, that Jo should omit all the words in the Bible that were printed in Italic. And, if Harris attempted to correct Jo, he persisted that the plates were right, and the Bible was wrong.⁴⁰

While this is not one of the more authoritative accounts relating to Joseph Smith's dictation of the Book of Mormon, being secondhand at best, it is the only one that makes any mention of italics.⁴¹

This account has Joseph Smith dictating one of the Book of Mormon's biblical chapters to Martin Harris. Joseph Smith's basic method of dictating the Nephite record outlined in this account (by the use of stones and hat) agrees well with witness accounts of translation.⁴²

(see Spencer, "Seers and Stones," 44–45, regarding the parchment of John [D&C 7] and a visioned papyrus of the Book of Abraham).

40. "Mormonites," *The Sun*, August 18, 1831, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/PA/Phil1830.htm>

41. For the more authoritative accounts relating to the translation of the Book of Mormon, see Spencer, "Seers and Stones," 32–43.

42. This account is obviously incorrect in stating that the plates were placed in the hat. This error may have been a result of an interviewer misinterpreting Martin Harris's description. In another interview, when Martin Harris spoke of "placing them in a hat," he was speaking of the interpreters ("spectacles"). The most reliable witness statements agree that the interpreters were used by placing them in a hat like other seer stones, not by wearing them. It is easy to see how an interviewer would assume that spectacles would be worn on the face, and that the "them" that went in the hat was the plates. See Spencer, "Seers and Stones," 35–36, 40–41. The claim that Joseph Smith memorized a chapter from the Bible is likely a conclusion reached by the reporter, not something Harris, a firm believer in Joseph Smith's ability to "see" with a stone and who was apparently sufficiently impressed that he agreed to serve as Joseph Smith's scribe, would have told the reporter. For Martin Harris's beliefs regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, see "Martin Harris Interview with Joel Tiffany, 1859," in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 302–10.

And the literary product described in this account — a Bible chapter quoted quite closely, with the exception of the Bible’s italicized words — agrees fairly well with what we see in the Book of Mormon.⁴³ There are, however, a couple of differences between the dictated biblical chapter described in this account and what we see in the Book of Mormon. This account says that “all the words” italicized in the Bible were missing from the dictated text, while in most of the Book of Mormon’s quoted biblical chapters, some of those words are present. Also, in most of the biblical chapters in the Book of Mormon, there are many words added at locations not associated with the KJV’s italicized words, in contrast to the “surprising accuracy” noted in *The Sun*.

If the biblical chapter described in *The Sun*’s report typifies what Joseph Smith saw in vision as he translated, then the many minor variants in the Book of Mormon’s biblical chapters might be explained as follows. With all of the italicized words omitted, the visioned biblical chapter would have been rough reading. In trying to convince Martin Harris that he was indeed visioning a biblical chapter quoted in the Nephite record, Joseph Smith would have wanted to dictate it as accurately as possible — exactly how he saw it. When actually dictating the full Book of Mormon for the world to read and understand, however, Joseph Smith may have decided to try to smooth the text by adding words whenever words appeared to be missing. Sometimes it would have been obvious what word or words needed to be added to smooth a rough spot. Some of the missing words may have come to his mind because of his familiarity with these biblical passages, either from his own earlier Bible readings or from hearing popular passages read by others. For unfamiliar passages in which the identities of the missing words were not obvious, he would have, by chance, sometimes chosen different words than those used in the KJV. Sometimes he would have added extra words where he perceived rough spots and thought words were missing but no words had actually been omitted. Some instances of omission of italicized words would have escaped his notice or made the text so confusing that he didn’t know how to fix it and so left it alone.⁴⁴

43. The Book of Mormon quotes several chapters of Isaiah chapters, chapters 3 and 4 of Malachi, and chapters 6 and 7 of Matthew quite closely.

44. The question might be asked, “Why, if Joseph thought words were missing, didn’t he just open up a Bible and looked up the missing words?” There could have been several reasons for not considering or taking such a course of action. Being in a visionary state and having his face in a hat could have made stopping and looking through a Bible impracticable. He may not have realized how closely the text he was reading was following the KJV and that looking at a Bible would have been helpful.

For example, when Joseph Smith got to 2 Nephi 17:6 (Isaiah 7:6) in his translation of the Book of Mormon, he would have seen the following text in vision:

Let us go up against Judah and vex it and let us make a breach
therein for us and set a king in the midst of it the son of Tabeal
Thus saith the Lord God It shall not stand

He would have suspected that a word was missing before “the son of Tabeal.” Not knowing the missing word, he guessed “yea,” which is used much more frequently than “even” in the Book of Mormon. Although “yea” is not the word that was missing, it works. A few verses later (v. 20), he would have seen this text:

In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired
by them beyond the river by the king of Assyria the head and
the hair of the feet and it shall also consume the beard And
it shall come to pass in that day a man shall nourish a young
cow and two sheep

Upon reading the first sentence, he would not have noticed any problem, or, if he did, would not have known what to do about it, and left it alone, thus leaving out the clarifying “*namely*” that had been omitted. Upon reading the second sentence, he would have suspected that a “that” was missing after “and it came to pass” and added it since this phrase is usually followed by “that” in the Book of Mormon as well as the Bible. Even though the biblical text does not have a “that” at this location, it works.

In making these changes, Joseph Smith would not have been intending (or pretending) to restore ancient understanding, but rather to correct perceived errors of transmission of the English text. His focus during this process would not have been on the KJV’s italicized words *per se*, nor on intentionally revising the biblical text, but rather on supplying words where he thought they had been mistakenly (in his view) dropped. He was more a reader and editor of the English than a revisor or a translator, as we usually use the term. While Joseph Smith had been commanded to “read” the visioned words (2 Nephi 27:20), his editing of them may have been at his own initiative.

He may not have had a Bible available. He may have been rushed or overconfident in his own reasoned solutions. It is also possible that he was in a general habit of supplying words where he thought they were needed as he dictated throughout the Book of Mormon translation and did not think to adapt his practice in any way when he came to biblical passages.

I will refer to this explanation as the Missing Words Hypothesis.

Why would a presumed prior translator of the Book of Mormon have omitted the KJV's italicized words from the quoted biblical chapters? In the absence of any record of the translator's thoughts on this topic, we can only speculate. I will mention one possible motivation. The words in italics may have been omitted by the translator in order to avoid the confusion, opportunity for derision, and general distraction from the book's message that including them might have caused.

In using the KJV as a base text for the Bible chapters in the Book of Mormon, the translator would have been faced with the question of what to do with the KJV's italicized words. Should they be included but differentiated from the rest of the text as they are in the KJV? Or should they be included but not differentiated? Or should they be omitted altogether?

Perhaps the third option was the least problematic. In the early 19th century, most Protestant readers versed in the KJV would have found the omission of the KJV's italicized words in the Book of Mormon understandable. In realizing that the KJV's italicized words had been omitted, these readers would have been able to surmise that the words were omitted because they represented words that were added by the KJV translators and had no direct correspondence in the ancient source text. The downside of the omission of these words would have been the resulting rough reading in some passages. For smoother reading, readers could supply the missing words from memory if they were familiar enough with the Bible, or by reading the quoted portions side-by-side with a Bible.⁴⁵

Including the KJV's italicized words without somehow distinguishing them from other words, whether as italics or in some other way, would have perhaps been most problematic. Since the purpose of the italicization of these words was to make it clear that they did not have direct counterparts in the original language but had been added by the translators, to leave them undistinguished in a scriptural text would have led many to conclude that (borrowing the words of Adam Clarke, a popular and respected Bible scholar of Joseph Smith's day) "words have been attributed to God which he never spoke."⁴⁶ Although the

45. Encouraging such side-by-side reading of the Book of Mormon and Bible may have even been a secondary objective of the translator, as this practice would have enabled the reader to see any important differences between the two texts.

46. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Applegate, 1856), ix.

practice of distinguishing such words is no longer considered necessary by most translators, it was formerly seen as a matter of transparency on the part of the translators.⁴⁷ For nearly three centuries, Protestant Bibles had distinguished these “added” words from the rest of the text. For Christians, the Bible had been the definition of scripture. The Book of Mormon, in presenting itself as scripture of equal authenticity, would have been broadly expected to follow the same rules and be as forthright in its presentation of the “added” words. To fail to do so would be to invite accusations of dishonesty and be a potential stumbling block to the reader.

The remaining alternative — to include the KJV’s italicized words and distinguish them from the rest of the text — might have also been problematic. Would italicization (or some other method of distinguishing the KJV’s italicized words) have been consistently transmitted through the dictation and manuscript copying processes to finally appear in the printed Book of Mormon? Implementing the consistent transmission of this information may have been too much to expect of the unlearned Joseph Smith, who apparently didn’t even attempt to preserve whatever capitalization or punctuation appeared in the visioned text.⁴⁸ Even if the representation of the KJV’s italicized words were uniformly achieved in the printed Book of Mormon, it would have provided opportunity for confusion and derision. The appearance of words set in italic type in the quoted Bible chapters could have been confusing and seemed inconsistent unless the remainder of the Book of Mormon also distinguished words that lacked direct counterparts in the original language.⁴⁹ One thing that is clear is that the option of distinguishing italicized words was

47. For a discussion of italics in the King James Bible, see Kent P. Jackson, Frank F. Judd Jr., and David R. Seely, “Chapters, Verses, Punctuation, Spelling, and Italics in the King James Version,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 7, no. 2 (July 2006): 41–64, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8e29/e15f1e807572a605c8e813e22e237c3ee0ae.pdf?_ga=2.227749917.1499217316.1590848283-1642248848.1589842705; also Thomas A. Wayment and Tyson J. Yost, “The Joseph Smith Translation and Italicized Words in the King James Version,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 6, no. 1 (2005): 51–64; <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol6/iss1/7/>.

48. Capitalization and punctuation can be immediately lost in dictation of a text unless they are made explicit, since they are not normally spoken. Italicization or underlining have the same vulnerability. The wording and smoothness of a dictated text are more natural objects of focus during dictation.

49. The lack of consistency with the rest of the Book of Mormon would also be an argument against omitting the KJV’s italicized words, although the lack of consistency in that case would have been less obvious.

not chosen by the translator of the Book of Mormon, or if it was, it was not successfully implemented, since the KJV's italicized words that do appear in the printed Book of Mormon are not distinguished from the rest of the text in any way.

The differences between the Ancient Variants Hypothesis, the Italics Revision Hypothesis, and the Missing Words Hypothesis hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

According to the Ancient Variants Hypothesis and the Italics Revision Hypothesis, Joseph Smith was responsible for the English wording of the Book of Mormon and took much of it from an open King James Bible. According to the Missing Words Hypothesis, a prior translator filled that role, with Joseph Smith simply seeing in vision and dictating the work of the prior translator, and making minor edits as he dictated it.

The Ancient Variants Hypothesis would explain many differences between the Book of Mormon and the KJV as reflections of differences on the brass plates, at least for those chapters that Nephite prophets say they are reading from their records or copying from the brass plates.⁵⁰ Although the Missing Words Hypothesis does not exclude the possibility that some variants in the Book of Mormon reflect differences on the brass plates, it would explain a greater number of the differences as resulting from the excision of the KJV's italicized words by the prior translator followed by Joseph Smith's compensatory editing as he dictated the visioned text. The Italics Revision Hypothesis would explain many differences as Joseph Smith's intentional revisions to the Bible prompted by his suspicion of its italicized words. According to the Ancient Variants Hypothesis, Joseph Smith's departures from the KJV text were based on his inspired thoughts. According to the other two hypotheses, his editing was mostly based on his own logic and limited understanding of the Bible.

All three hypotheses would also allow for unintentional errors by Joseph Smith or his scribe during dictation, transcription, or copying of the original manuscript. They would also allow for intentional editing by Joseph Smith's scribe, as well as adaptation of Biblical quotations by Nephi, Jacob, or other Book of Mormon characters since they are all silent on those topics. Intentional modernization of words or expressions

50. For example, Nephi reads Isaiah 48 and 49 from the brass plates (1 Nephi 19:22–24; 22:1), Jacob reads Isaiah 49:22 through Isaiah 52:2 (2 Nephi 6:4–5, 9:1), Nephi copies Isaiah chapters 2 through 14 from the brass plates (2 Nephi 4:14, 11:8), and Abinadi reads from Exodus (Mosiah 13:11).

by Joseph Smith would be consistent with the Missing Words Hypothesis but would be unexpected under the Ancient Variants Hypothesis and the Italics Revision Hypothesis. Although neither of the latter hypotheses explicitly excludes the possibility that Joseph Smith intentionally modernized portions of the text, they assume that he was responsible for the overall style of the English of the Book of Mormon, which is characterized by archaic word forms and expressions. The Missing Words Hypothesis does not have this assumption since the overall style of language of the Book of Mormon would have been determined by the prior translator and not by Joseph Smith.

I will now evaluate various aspects of the text of the Book of Mormon as a test of the explanatory power of each hypothesis. Although there are other aspects of the text, not evaluated here, that would also serve to test these hypotheses, it would be impossible to evaluate all in an article of reasonable size. This article addresses a few that seem to most clearly distinguish among the hypotheses.

Accounting for the Variants in 2 Nephi 16 and 17 (Isaiah 6 and 7)

How well does each hypothesis explain the 29 Book of Mormon Isaiah variants in 2 Nephi 16 and 17?

Errors of Transmission, or Modernization — 7 Variants

Seven of the variants can be most easily explained under all three hypotheses as errors of transmission made by Joseph Smith or his scribe during dictation, transcription, or copying of the original manuscript, or possibly as intentional modernization of a phrase:

the uttermost part of ~~the rivers of~~ Egypt (2 Nephi 17:18)

a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings ~~it~~ which shall (2 Nephi 17:23)

Then said I Lord how long And he ~~answered~~ said (2 Nephi 16:11)

Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God ask ~~it~~ either in the ~~depth~~ depths or in the ~~height~~ heights above (2 Nephi 17:22)

for the sending forth of oxen and ~~for~~ the treading of lesser cattle (2 Nephi 17:25)

In his analysis of textual variants, Royal Skousen notes that the phrase “the rivers of” could have been easily lost from 2 Nephi 17:18 when the scribe’s eyes skipped from the “of” preceding this phrase to the “of” ending the phrase as he copied from the original to the printer’s manuscript (the original manuscript is not extant for this verse).⁵¹ This kind of error (parablepsis) frequently occurs in the copying of manuscripts.

The replacement of “it” with “which” in 2 Nephi 17:23 may be due to the scribe’s mishearing of “it shall” /it ʃæl/ as “which shall” /wɪtʃ ʃæl/. Except for the initial /w/ of “which,” which can be relatively difficult to hear, these two phrases are pronounced the same unless carefully enunciated.

The other variants listed above are typical of the kinds of errors frequently made in reading and dictating. Stan Larson compared a recording of an oral recitation of the Book of Mormon with the printed text used in the recitation. He classified the errors in the recitation into three categories:

- Misreading a word as one of similar appearance. For example, the recording had “enemies” instead of “armies” (1 Nephi 17:27), “trust” instead of “visit” (Enos 10), “Israel” instead of “Ishmael” (Alma 17:21), “resurrection” instead of “restoration” (Alma 41:10), “forfeited” instead of “fortified” (Alma 62:42), “appointed” instead of “anointed” (Ether 9:15), and “caused” instead of “ceased” (Moroni 8:28).
- Misreading a word as another word found in the immediate context, either before or after the misread word. For example, the recording had “word” instead of “world” (Jacob 4:9), “commandments” instead of “judgments” (Alma 8:15), “toiled” instead of “fought” (Alma 56:16), “fallen” instead of “fled” (Moroni 9:17), and “dust” instead of “dead” (Moroni 10:27).
- Misreading a word or phrase by adding or deleting letters or words. For example, the recording had several instances of singular words replaced by plurals or plural words replaced by singulars by adding or dropping an *s*.⁵²

Larson’s second category could easily explain the replacement of “answered” with “said” in response to the appearance of “said” earlier in the passage in 2 Nephi 16:11.

51. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 715.

52. Stan Larson, “Textual Variants in Book of Mormon Manuscripts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 4 (1977), 27–28.

Larson's third category could account for other four variants listed above. They are also typical of errors made during transcription and copying. The omission of "it" in 2 Nephi 17:11 is probably best explained under all three hypotheses as an error of transmission since none of the hypotheses provides any justification for its omission, which results in damage to the sense of the English text.⁵³ The omission of "for" from 2 Nephi 17:25 is probably also best explained under all three hypotheses as an error of transmission since it doesn't provide any benefit besides slightly shortening the text. As a small, unnecessary word, it could have easily been skipped inadvertently during dictation by Joseph Smith or during transcription or copying by his scribe.⁵⁴ The replacements of "depth" with "depths" and "height" with "heights" in 2 Nephi 17:11 could be the result of the unintentional addition of *s* to these words by Joseph Smith during dictation or by his scribe during transcription or copying of the original manuscript.⁵⁵ Oliver Cowdery sometimes unintentionally added *s* to nouns as he took down Joseph's dictation, and he may have also done so while copying from the original to the printer's manuscript.⁵⁶

Unintentional changes during dictation or copying would be consistent with all three hypotheses. The replacement of both "depth" and

53. Skousen points out that "it" in Isaiah 7:11 has no direct counterpart in the Hebrew text behind the KJV. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 712. This does not speak to a question of ancient variants, but only to whether or not "it" should be italicized.

54. There is an apparent example of such an unnecessary word skipped during transcription in 3 Nephi 12:11 (compare Matthew 5:11). In copying from the original manuscript to the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery initially wrote "& say all manner of evil against you falsly [sic] for my sake," skipping over the "shall" that precedes "say" in the KJV. He came back and wrote "shall" above the line. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2001), 816.

55. The Hebrew behind "depth" and "height" in the KJV can be translated in either the singular or the plural, so either form could be considered correct.

56. For examples of Oliver Cowdery's accidental addition of *s* to nouns during dictation, see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 415–16 ("prophets"), 452 ("wines"), 774 ("multitudes"), and 2221–22 ("traditions"). For examples of Cowdery's addition of *s* to a noun as he copied from the original to the printer's manuscript, see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 88–89 ("commandments"), 105–106, 112 ("walls"), 117 ("commandments"), 317–18 ("things"), 444 ("waters"), 1108–109 ("records"), 1264–65 ("mights"), 2518 ("bloodsheds"), and 2777–78 ("mights"). See also Skousen's discussion of "cursings" in 976–78.

“height” together, however, suggests that Joseph or his scribe may have been intentionally modernizing the language of this passage. Intentional modernization of the language by Joseph Smith would be unexpected under both the Ancient Variants Hypothesis and the Italics Revision Hypothesis but is consistent with the Missing Words Hypothesis.

The 22 remaining variants would be explained differentially by the three hypotheses; thus, they will be more helpful in determining which hypothesis best accounts for the overall pattern of variation in these chapters.

Italicized Words Omitted — 12 Variants

Twelve variants in these chapters consist of the omission, without replacement, of the KJV’s italicized words:

Then said I Woe *is* me for I am undone because I *am* a man of unclean lips (2 Nephi 16:5)

And he laid *it* upon my mouth (2 Nephi 16:7)

Then I said Here *am* I send me (2 Nephi 16:8)

And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel went up (2 Nephi 17:1)

For the head of Syria *is* Damascus and the head of Damascus *is* Rezin (2 Nephi 17:8)

The LORD shall bring upon thee and upon thy people and upon thy father’s house days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah *even* the king of Assyria (2 Nephi 17:17)

In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired *namely* by them beyond the river by the king of Assyria (2 Nephi 17:20)

And it shall come to pass for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give he shall eat butter (2 Nephi 17:22)

And it shall come to pass in that day *that* every place shall be where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings it which shall *even* be for briars and thorns (2 Nephi 17:23)

And *on* all hills that shall be digged with the mattock there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns (2 Nephi 17:25)

How would the three hypotheses explain these 12 instances in these two chapters in which the KJV's italicized words are simply omitted?

The Ancient Variants Hypothesis, as expressed by Roberts, does not provide a valid reason for the omission of the KJV's italicized words. Although italicized words have no direct counterpart in the underlying Masoretic Text from which the KJV was translated, they are usually needed to convey the full meaning of the Hebrew into English and are therefore an essential part of the translation. Omitting such words would generally do damage to the "sense and clearness" valued by Roberts. One might propose that the Book of Mormon (assuming it is based on a source text very similar to the Masoretic Text at the locations of the missing words) is providing a more literal translation by omitting these words, but this is not true for the reason just stated. The words are necessary for a complete translation, however literal it may be.

The Italics Revision Hypothesis explains the omission of the italicized words as resulting from Joseph Smith's supposed belief that, since these words had no direct counterpart in the Hebrew, he had license to alter or remove them.

The Missing Words Hypothesis also explains the omission of the 12 italicized words quite well. The words were already missing from the text that Joseph Smith visioned; he simply dictated what he saw.

Italicized Words Transposed — 1 Variant

One variant consists of the transposition of an italicized word to a location earlier in the verse:

And it shall come to pass that in that day *that* a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep (2 Nephi 17:21)

Since "that" has no direct counterpart in this verse in the underlying Hebrew, and since there is no change in sense or increase in clearness, the Ancient Variants Hypothesis does not provide an explanation for the transposition. The Italics Revision Hypothesis would explain this variant as Joseph Smith's response to encountering an italicized word,

although it is not apparent what would have motivated him to make such an inconsequential change.

The Missing Words Hypothesis better accounts for this variant. Upon reading in vision the KJV text minus the italicized “*that*,” Joseph Smith would have suspected that a “that” was missing somewhere in this sentence. The most obvious place to put “that” would have been after “and it came to pass,” since that phrase is usually followed by “that” in the Book of Mormon as well as in the Bible.

Italicized Words or Phrases Replaced or Expanded — 4 Variants

How would each hypothesis explain the four instances in which italicized words are replaced or italicized phrases are expanded?

And the LORD have removed men far away and for *there shall be* a great forsaking in the midst of the land But yet in it *there shall be* a tenth and *it they* shall return and shall be eaten (2 Nephi 16:12–13)

Let us ... set a king in the midst of it *even yea* the son of Tabeal (2 Nephi 17:6)

In the first two instances, the Book of Mormon replaces italicized “*there be*” and italicized “*shall be*” both with “there shall be.” According to the Ancient Variants Hypothesis, Joseph Smith made these changes so the text would better express the meaning in the Nephite record. This explanation is not entirely satisfactory, since the difference in meaning is so minor that it would not seem to justify departing from the base text. According to the Italics Revision Hypothesis, Joseph Smith would have seen an opportunity to revise the KJV’s italicized phrases and taken it. But it is not clear what he would have been intending to accomplish in doing so. One could propose that he was trying to modernize the reading, but that motive would be unexpected under both of these hypotheses. The Missing Words Hypothesis provides a clear motive for these two variants. While translating, Joseph Smith would have seen the KJV text with the italicized words omitted:

And the LORD have removed men far away and a great forsaking in the midst of the land But yet in it a tenth

He would have been able to tell that a verb had been omitted either before or after “a great forsaking” and again either before or after “a tenth.” Since the context sets these events in the future, adding “there shall be” would have been an obvious option at both locations. Other

options would have been to add something like “shall occur” after “a great forsaking” or “shall remain” after “a tenth.” His decision to add “there shall be” may have been influenced by the fact that it fit well at both locations.

The Italics Revision Hypothesis would explain the next two variants, the replacement of italicized “*it*” with “they” and the replacement of italicized “*even*” with “yea,” the same. Understanding that the italicized words had no direct counterpart in the original language, Joseph Smith felt free to change them. He preferred to use “they” and “yea,” perhaps believing they were more correct, even though the replacements don’t actually change the meaning of the text. The Missing Words Hypothesis explains both variants well. While “translating” the first of these two passages, Joseph Smith would have seen this text:

a tenth and shall return and shall be eaten

He would have been able to tell that a noun or pronoun was missing before “shall return.” Since the previous verses refer to groups of people, he guessed “they,” which worked well enough, so he inserted it. When he got to the second passage, he would have seen this text:

set a king in the midst of it the son of Tabeal

Once again, he would have been able to tell that a word was needed before “the son of Tabeal.” “Yea” came to mind and worked well enough, so he inserted it. The Ancient Variants Hypothesis would explain the replacement of “it” with “they” as reflecting either a difference on the brass plates or an interpretation that was more clear. This hypothesis fails to provide a reason for the replacement of “*even*” with “yea,” however, since the two words are synonyms in this context and convey the sense of the passage with equal clarity.

Non-italicized Word Replaced — 1 Variant

One variant consists of the replacement of a non-italicized word (“and” with “for”):

And the LORD have removed men far away **and for** *there shall*
be a great forsaking (2 Nephi 16:12)

None of the three hypotheses provide an obvious explanation for the replacement of “and” with “for” since “and” is not italicized and the replacement does not substantially change or clarify the meaning.⁵⁷ This

57. Under the Ancient Variants Hypothesis, the source text presumably indicated “for” instead of “and” or had a word that could be translated as either

variant is probably best viewed in conjunction with the nearby addition of “shall” to italicized “*there be*.” It may have been an inadvertent or even intentional part of the revision at this location under any of the hypotheses. Similar replacements adjacent to italicized words are found elsewhere in the Book of Mormon’s biblical quotations, such as in the duplicate quotations of Exodus 20:4 in Mosiah 12:36 and Mosiah 13:12, discussed below.

Words Added — 4 Variants

The remaining four variants in these chapters each consist of the addition of a single word.

The first two instances of added words, in 2 Nephi 16:9, seem to muddle Isaiah’s message:

And he said Go and tell this people Hear ye indeed but **they** understand not and see ye indeed but **they** perceive not

The inclusion of “they” makes the reading somewhat awkward, with switching back and forth between second and third person and between the imperative and indicative moods. The most obvious potential reason for these two Book of Mormon variants is theological. As this passage reads in the KJV, the Lord is telling the people not to understand the truth. Such language in scripture is unexpected and could have motivated the additions of “they” to resolve the perceived problem. The Book of Mormon ultimately fails to provide a solution to this theological difficulty, however, since the next verse (v. 10), which is left unchanged in the Book of Mormon, has God doing the same thing. The Ancient Variants Hypothesis does not explain such an incomplete and awkward solution. Nor does the Italics Revision Hypothesis, since there are no italicized words in this verse to prompt editing by Joseph Smith.

The Missing Words Hypothesis provides a more rational explanation for these two variants. Since there are no italicized words in this verse, Joseph Smith would have visioned the text as it stands in the KJV:

And he said Go and tell this people Hear ye indeed but understand not and see ye indeed but perceive not

Confused by the theology implied in this passage, and knowing that words were frequently missing from the text he visioned, Joseph

“for” or “and.” It is unclear, however, why such a minor difference would be included in the Book of Mormon when it deviates from the base text (the KJV) and reduces the parallelism within the verse without providing any substantial change in or clarification of meaning. See note 16.

Smith would have suspected missing words as the cause of the apparent theological problem. He would have then made his best guess of what words were missing and supplied them. Since he was not using a physical Bible, he might not have been able to look ahead to verse 10 to see the context that might have discouraged him from making these edits.⁵⁸ When Joseph Smith got to verse 10 he would have been confronted with the same theological difficulty, but since it read smoothly, without any words apparently missing, he would have dictated it just as he saw it. In making emendations to the visioned text, according to the Missing Words Hypothesis, Joseph Smith was not trying to revise the biblical text, but rather to restore words he believed had been somehow dropped.

The other two instances of added words, in 2 Nephi 17:14–15, both serve to make adjacent phrases more parallel:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign Behold a virgin shall conceive and **shall** bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and **to** choose the good

The effect of increasing parallelism does not, by itself, point to a satisfactory explanation for these variants, since the net effect of Book of Mormon variants in these two chapters is to decrease parallelism, not increase it. The Ancient Variants Hypothesis fails to provide an explanation for these variants, since they neither change nor clarify the meaning. The Italics Revision Hypothesis fails to explain them since there are no italicized words that might have prompted editing by Joseph Smith. The Missing Words Hypothesis provides a clear motivation. Joseph Smith would have visioned the KJV text:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good

58. The firsthand accounts of two individuals who were familiar with Joseph Smith's method of translating suggest that he could see only a line or two of text at a time. Joseph Knight recorded that "a sentence . . . would apper [sic] . . . he would tell the writer and he would write it. Then . . . the next sentance[sic] would Come and so on." "Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, Circa 1835–1847," in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 4, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 17–18. David Whitmer recorded that Joseph's gift of translation was to "see the sentences in English, when he looked into the hat." David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO: printed by the author, 1887), 37.

Having an expectation that there were words missing from the text he was visioning, Joseph Smith would have scanned the text for locations where words might have been omitted. There are only two obvious locations in this passage: before “call” and before “choose.” The identities of the words he imagined to be missing, “shall” and “to,” would have also been obvious based on their occurrence in the parallel phrases. The addition of these words at locations unassociated with the KJV’s italicized words suggests that Joseph Smith was not reading from a physical Bible. If he had been reading from a physical Bible, even one that had the italicized words struck through, he would have known that there were no words missing before “call” and “choose.”

Overall, the Missing Words Hypothesis best explains the 29 variants in these two chapters, particularly in suggesting specific motives for editing of the KJV’s words.

Accounting for Italicized Words Retained in these Chapters

Each of the three hypotheses must not only explain why the KJV’s italicized words and phrases are often omitted, replaced, or expanded upon in the Book of Mormon, but also why in other instances they are left unchanged. There are 16 instances in the two sample chapters in which italicized words are left unchanged: “*is*” twice in 2 Nephi 16:3; “*which*” in 2 Nephi 16:6; “*there be*” in 2 Nephi 16:12; “*shall be*,” “*is*,” “*their leaves so*,” and “*shall be*” again in 2 Nephi 16: 13; “*is*” in 2 Nephi 17:8; “*is*” twice in 2 Nephi 17:9; “*is it*” in 2 Nephi 17:13; “*that*” and then “*is*” twice in 2 Nephi 17:18; and “*men*” in 2 Nephi 17:24.

The inconsistent treatment of the KJV’s italicized words is especially apparent with *be* verbs (usually appearing in the form of *is* or *am* in quoted Isaiah chapters). In his *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Skousen notes that the KJV’s italicized *be* verbs are often, and apparently intentionally, omitted in the Book of Mormon.⁵⁹ Yet in most cases, italicized *be* verbs are left unchanged. One might propose that the Book of Mormon omits the italicized word when it isn’t essential to the grammar or meaning and retains it when it is. But such is not always the case in the two sample chapters. For example, consider the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 6:3, in which the italicized *be* verbs are retained:

59. Regarding the omission of the KJV’s italicized *be* verbs, see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 692–93, 670–71.

And one cried unto another and said Holy holy holy *is* the LORD of hosts the whole earth *is* full of his glory (2 Nephi 16:3)

The two instances of “*is*” in this verse could be omitted without doing too much damage to the grammar or sense of the text:

And one cried unto another and said Holy holy holy the LORD of hosts the whole earth full of his glory

Compare this hypothetical text to verse 5 of the same chapter, which omits two italicized *be* verbs (“*is*” and “*am*”) at greater cost:

Then said I Woe me for I am undone because I a man of unclean lips and I dwell (2 Nephi 16:5)

The Ancient Variants Hypothesis provides no help in explaining why the *be* verbs would be retained in verse 3 but omitted in verse 5. The Italics Revision Hypothesis also fails to explain such inconsistency in omitting italicized words. That hypothesis would have Joseph Smith intentionally omitting the italicized words in verse 5, causing obvious damage to grammar and sense, while keeping the italicized words in verse 3 that are less essential.

The Missing Words Hypothesis provides a rational explanation. If all of the italicized words were already omitted from the text Joseph Smith visioned, then their absence was the default situation. It required no intentionality on Joseph Smith’s part. The two italicized word are missing from verse 5 because Joseph Smith simply dictated what he saw without taking any action to revise it. This lack of action could have been due to any one of a number of factors such as lack of attention, momentary indifference born of fatigue, confusion as to what the missing words were or where they should go, or a momentary change of heart and decision to let the revealed word stand as it was given instead of trying to correct it.

The Book of Mormon’s inconsistency in handling the KJV’s italicized words is also evident in the next chapter. Verses 8 and 9 of Isaiah 7 begin with parallel statements, each with two instances of italicized “*is*” that serve the same functions in the two verses. Yet, the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 17:8–9) treats these two verses differently, dropping the second instance of “*is*” from verse 8 while retaining the parallel “*is*” in verse 9:

For the head of Syria *is* Damascus and the head of Damascus ~~*is*~~ Rezin (2 Nephi 17:8)

And the head of Ephraim *is* Samaria and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah's son (2 Nephi 17:9)

Similarly, italicized "*that*" serves an identical function in verses 18, 21, and 23 of Isaiah 7, which begin with parallel statements in both the English and the underlying Hebrew of the Masoretic Text. Yet, the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 17:18, 21, and 23) treats these three parallel statements differently, retaining the KJV's "*that*" in the first, transposing it to an earlier location in the second, and dropping it altogether in the third:

And it shall come to pass in that day *that* the LORD shall hiss (2 Nephi 17:17)

And it shall come to pass that in that day *that* a man shall nourish (2 Nephi 17:21)

And it shall come to pass in that day *that* every place shall be (2 Nephi 17:23)

These apparent edits are not only unhelpful and inconsistent, but they also needlessly reduce the parallelism among these phrases relative to the KJV and its underlying Hebrew. Once again, such inconsistency is acceptable under the Missing Words Hypothesis, but runs counter to the expectation, under the Ancient Variants Hypothesis, that Joseph Smith would be producing a text with "superior sense and clearness." The Italics Revision Hypothesis doesn't point to any obvious reason for such inconsistency.

While the Missing Words Hypothesis readily explains the inconsistency in the Book of Mormon's treatment of the KJV's italicized words in these two chapters, it has a greater challenge explaining the exact retention of some of the KJV's italicized words and phrases that would at first glance seem to be difficult to recall or guess correctly. The following is the latter part of 2 Nephi 16:13, which is identical to the KJV of Isaiah 6:13:

as a teil tree and as an oak whose substance *is* in them when they cast *their leaves* so the holy seed *shall be* the substance thereof

According to the Missing Words Hypothesis, Joseph Smith would have had to recall from memory or correctly guess all of the italicized words in this passage. The italicized "is" should have been fairly easy to guess, since some form of *be* is obviously required at this location,

and the third person singular present best fits the context. It would have been more difficult to supply the phrase, “their leaves so.” Although it is possible that Joseph Smith was familiar enough with this verse from his previous experiences with the Bible that he was able to recall these words from memory, it seems unlikely, since this is not a well-known passage. There are, however, clues in the text that could have enabled him to guess this phrase. First, the trees in this passage are casting something. To our ears, it is not obvious whether they are casting acorns, leaves or even the “holy seed.” In Joseph Smith’s day, however, what a tree typically “cast” was leaves, so that would likely have been Joseph Smith’s first thought.⁶⁰ Second, the need for the word “their” could have been discerned given that “they” were doing the casting. Third, the word “as” that appears twice at the beginning of this passage suggests the possibility of “so” in the final clause. The italicized “shall be” should not have been difficult to guess, since the non-italicized phrase “shall be eaten” earlier in the verse sets this event in the future and provides a model for phrasing.

Another italicized phrase that at first might seem difficult to guess but that appears correctly in the Book of Mormon is in 2 Nephi 17:13 (Isaiah 7:13):

And he said Hear ye now O house of David *Is it* a small thing
for you to weary men but will ye weary my God also

A person who was not familiar with this passage would tend to guess “It is” instead of “Is it” as the missing italicized phrase. But Joseph Smith had probably heard this verse many times and easily reconstructed it while translating, since it introduces one of the most quoted passages in Christendom: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive.” Even if he had failed to recall the correct word order, his scribe could have remembered it and made the correction.

There is one other case of an italicized word appearing correctly in these two chapters that might at first glance seem improbable under the

60. To see evidence for this tendency, search the online *Google Books* database for “cast their leaves, cast their fruit, cast their seeds” (without the quotes) using the *Ngram Viewer* interface: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=cast+their+leaves%2C+cast+their+fruit%2C+cast+their+seeds&year_start=1800&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20leaves%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20fruit%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20seeds%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20leaves%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20fruit%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Ccast%20their%20seeds%3B%2Cc0.

Missing Words Hypothesis. The KJV’s italicized “which” is retained in 2 Nephi 16:6 (Isaiah 6:6):

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me having a live coal in his hand *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar

With this italicized word missing from the text Joseph Smith saw, how would he have known to use the relative pronoun “which” rather than “that”? There are at least three plausible explanations for his use of “which” in this instance. It could have been a lucky guess. Since there are only two relative pronouns that fit, he would have had a fifty percent chance of getting the right one just by guessing. But there is a pattern in the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters that better explains Joseph Smith’s correct choice of “which.” “Which” tends to be used at the locations of KJV italics and added words whenever the antecedent is not a person or persons.⁶¹ Seen through the lens of the Missing Words Hypothesis, this pattern indicates that Joseph Smith used “which” at this location because of the antecedent “coal” and his preference to use “which” in cases of non-human antecedents. It is also possible that Joseph Smith (or his scribe) was familiar enough with this verse from previously reading or hearing it that he remembered which relative pronoun was used.

Compared to these italicized words and phrases, the remainder of the KJV’s italicized words that appear correctly in the Book of Mormon’s version of Isaiah 6 and 7 would be relatively easy to guess for someone having any familiarity with the language of the King James Bible.

Implications of Later Editing of these Chapters

During typesetting for the initial printing of the Book of Mormon, the typesetter eliminated three of the variants in these two chapters, probably by reference to an open Bible. He restored “it” to “he laid *it* upon my mouth” (2 Nephi 16:7/Isaiah 6:7) and to “ask *it* either in the” (2 Nephi 17:11/Isaiah 7:11) and removed the added “that” from “it shall come to pass that in that day” (2 Nephi 17:21/Isaiah 7:21). When Joseph Smith edited the Book of Mormon for the 1837 edition, he apparently

61. “That” is replaced with “which” in 2 Nephi 7:11 (Isaiah 50:11) and 2 Nephi 12:14 (Isaiah 2:14); “which” is retained in 2 Nephi 16:6 (Isaiah 6:6), 2 Nephi 20:1 (Isaiah 20:1), and 2 Nephi 10:3 (Isaiah 20:3); “it” is replaced with “which” in 2 Nephi 17:23 (Isaiah 7:23); and “which” is used in an added sentence in 1 Nephi 20:14 (Isaiah 48:14). The one exception to this trend is the retention of “that” as the antecedent for “eggs” in 2 Nephi 20:14 (Isaiah 10:14). Joseph Smith’s use of “that” in this instance may have been influenced by the appearance of “that” as a relative pronoun in reference to “none” in the same sentence.

either did not notice these reversals or did not object to them. In fact, his own editing restored four more of the italicized words that had been omitted from these Isaiah chapters. He restored “is” to “Woe *is* me” (2 Nephi 16:5/Isaiah 6:5), “am” to “I *am* a man” (2 Nephi 16:5/Isaiah 6:5) and “Here *am* I” (2 Nephi 16:8/Isaiah 6:8), and “*that*” to “*that* Resin king of Syria” (2 Nephi 17:1/Isaiah 7:1). His restoration of the italicized words suggests that the omission of these words was not appropriate (contra the Ancient Variants Hypothesis) and that he had not intended to omit them (contra the Italics Revision Hypothesis), but had simply failed to notice their absence when he first dictated these passages (in agreement with the Missing Words Hypothesis).⁶²

Ancient Manuscripts Support for Variants in these Chapters

John Tvedtnes conducted a study in which he investigated the Book of Mormon’s Isaiah variants for parallels in ancient manuscripts of Isaiah.⁶³ These ancient manuscripts included the Hebrew Masoretic Text from which the KJV was translated; Hebrew scrolls found at Qumran; ancient translations from the Hebrew, including the Aramaic

62. Editing for later editions of the Book of Mormon further reduced the variants in the Isaiah chapters, although most of the original variants are still present in the current (2013) edition. For example, in the earliest Book of Mormon text, italicized “*is*” was omitted from all six instances of the phrase “his hand *is* stretched out” in Isaiah quotations (in 2 Nephi 15:25; 2 Nephi 19:12, 17, and 21; 2 Nephi 20:4; and 2 Nephi 24:27). The “*is*” was restored in 2 Nephi 19:12 for the 1937 edition, and in all of the other passages for the 1920 edition. In contrast, in 2 Nephi 13:18 (corresponding to Isaiah 3:18), all 6 of the KJV’s italicized words were omitted in the earliest Book of Mormon text: “In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of *their* tinkling ornaments *about their feet* and *their* cauls and *their* round tires like the moon.” The first “*their*” was restored for the 1837 edition, but the other omitted words are still absent from the current edition.

63. Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants*, 20–21. Carol F. Ellertson also did a study of Book of Mormon Isaiah variants, which she presented in her master’s thesis, “The Isaiah Passages in the Book of Mormon: A Non-aligned Text” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2001), 43–178. Her approach and conclusions relating to ancient manuscript are similar to those of Tvedtnes. Donald W. Parry compares some Book of Mormon Isaiah variants with Isaiah of the Masoretic Text and the Great Isaiah Scroll, in “Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Scriptures,” *Maxwell Institute Publications* 40 (2001), 55–60, 269–70, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/40>. He does not identify any support in these sources for the Book of Mormon variants. Parry more recently published a work in which he compares the variants in various ancient manuscripts of Isaiah. Donald W. Parry, *Exploring the Isaiah Scrolls and Their Textual Variants* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). This work does not discuss the Book of Mormon variants.

Targumim, the Syriac Peshitta, the Old Latin, the Latin Vulgate, and the Greek Septuagint; and quotations from the Septuagint in the New Testament. Of the 21 Book of Mormon variants in 2 Nephi 16 and 17 that he investigated, he found what he believed to be ancient manuscript support for only two: the addition of “they” before “understand” in 2 Nephi 16:9 and the addition of “they” before “perceive” later in the same verse.⁶⁴ The addition of “they” before these two verbs in the Book of Mormon requires that they be read in the indicative mood (“they perceive not”) rather than in the imperative mood (“Perceive not!”) of the KJV. The Septuagint, like the Book of Mormon, has “understand” and “perceive” in the indicative mood. Tvedtnes sees this parallel as ancient manuscript support for the Book of Mormon variants. There are reasons to believe, however, that these two variants in the Book of Mormon are independent changes unrelated to the variants in the Septuagint.

First, the Septuagint does not change the mood of “understand” and “perceive” in isolation. It has corresponding changes in the mood of “hear” and “see”: “Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.”⁶⁵ The Book of Mormon lacks these corresponding changes.

Second, the actual difference between the Book of Mormon and the KJV here is one of pronouns — the addition of “they” — not of verbs. The addition of “they” primarily changes the point of view from second person (implied “ye”) to third person, and only secondarily changes the mood of the verbs. If the Book of Mormon were paralleling the Septuagint, it would have produced the indicative mood while keeping the point of view unchanged by adding “ye” instead of “they.”⁶⁶

64. Tvedtnes does not address nine of the 29 Book of Mormon variants: the omission of italicized “*am*” in Isaiah 6:5, the omission of italicized “*it*” in Isaiah 6:7, the replacement of “answered” with “said” in Isaiah 6:11, the omission of “it” in 2 Nephi 17:11, the addition of “shall” to 2 Nephi 17:14, the addition of “to” in 2 Nephi 17:15, the omission of “the rivers of” in 2 Nephi 17:18, the transposition of “that” in 2 Nephi 17:21, and the replacement of “it” with “which” in 2 Nephi 17:23. Except for the variants in 2 Nephi 17:18 and 7:23, which can readily be explained as errors of transmission of the English text, these Book of Mormon variants are generally consistent with the Hebrew behind the KJV. For “it” in relation to the underlying Hebrew of Isaiah 7:11, see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 689–90.

65. This is the Septuagint as quoted by Paul in Acts 28:26. See also Matthew 13:14.

66. Although some New Testament adaptations of this verse use the third person, they are derived from the Septuagint, which uses the second person.

Third, the use of the indicative mood in 2 Nephi 16:9 of the Book of Mormon sets up a contradiction between that verse and the next, where the imperative mood of the KJV is retained. There is no such conflict in the Septuagint, which extends its use of the indicative into verse 10. This suggests that the use of the indicative in verse 9 in the Book of Mormon is secondary and unrelated to the use of the indicative in the Septuagint.

Fourth, the Hebrew underlying the Septuagint of the Isaiah chapters is widely believed to have been very close to the Hebrew underlying the KJV, with the Septuagint of Isaiah being, in places, a rather free translation of the underlying Hebrew.⁶⁷ Such appears to be the situation with Isaiah 6:9, which suggests that there may be no real Hebrew variant reflected in the Septuagint of this verse to contrast with the KJV, but only a varying translation of the same Hebrew that underlies the KJV.⁶⁸

Tvedtnes notes one other instance in these two chapters where there may, at first glance, seem to be ancient manuscript support for a Book of Mormon variant. The KJV has the active verb, “convert,” in 2 Nephi 16:10, while the Book of Mormon has the passive verb, “be converted.” The Septuagint and its New Testament derivatives, like the Book of Mormon, have the passive verb. That seeming support is illusory, however, since the Book of Mormon originally agreed with the KJV in having “convert.” Joseph Smith changed “convert” to “be converted” in his editing for the 1837 edition, probably either to make it parallel to “and be healed,” which immediately follows, or to better conform to modern usage. This false positive is a reminder that every parallel between the Book of Mormon and an ancient manuscript does not indicate derivation from a common textual source. Some parallels are to be expected by chance alone. In looking for Book of Mormon parallels in ancient sources, we must use the same methodological rigor and interpretative caution that we ask of those who look for Book of Mormon parallels in modern texts.

In addition to his search for variant support in ancient manuscripts, Tvedtnes addressed the possibility that Book of Mormon variants might reflect superior translation of the Hebrew behind the KJV. He found only one instance in these two chapters that he saw as superior translation in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon adds “shall” to “*there be a great forsaking*” in 2 Nephi 16:12, giving “there shall be a

67. Mirjam van der Vorm-Crouchs, *The Old Greek of Isaiah: An Analysis of its Pluses and Minuses* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 1–14.

68. David C. L. Driedger, “Read Carefully but do not Understand: Isaiah 6:9–10 and the Ethics of Reading” (master’s thesis., Providence Theological Seminary, 2004), 50–65.

great forsaking.” Tvedtnes asserts that “by using a finite verb, BM [the Book of Mormon] is closer to MT [the Masoretic Text],” which can be translated more literally as “the forsaking shall be great.”⁶⁹ David Wright disputes Tvedtnes’s assertion that the Book of Mormon version is a better translation of the Hebrew behind the KJV.⁷⁰ In any case, the idea of superior translation would explain only one of the 29 Book of Mormon variants in these chapters, and the variant that it would explain is trivial.⁷¹

Based on the results of Tvedtnes’s analysis, there is little if any support from ancient manuscripts for the Book of Mormon variants in these two Isaiah chapters.⁷² This does not mean that there were no variants on the brass plates from which Nephi quoted. It is possible that any such variants were simply not preserved in any of the ancient manuscripts that Tvedtnes consulted. It could also be that it is not the Book of Mormon’s purpose, in quoting Isaiah, to present minor departures from the KJV that may have been present on the brass plates.

Advancements in Bible Translation

We can also address the question of whether Book of Mormon Isaiah is a superior translation by assessing its treatment of passages in the KJV that Bible translators have revised due to advances in biblical scholarship since the KJV was translated. The first major revision of the KJV was the Revised Version (RV), of which the New Testament was published in 1881 and the Old Testament in 1885. British and American scholars from various denominations contributed to the revision. Their objective was to “introduce as few alterations as possible into the Text of the Authorized

69. Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants*, 42.

70. Wright, “Isaiah,” 194.

71. The idea that the Book of Mormon provides an independent and superior translation of Isaiah would also need to account for the fact that Book of Mormon Isaiah does not generally provide solutions for the more substantial and problematic translation difficulties in the KJV. An example from these chapters is 2 Nephi 17:15. The KJV has “Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good.” This implies that eating butter and honey would instill moral discernment. Most modern translations render the Hebrew to avoid this absurdity.

72. For analysis of ancient manuscript support for variants in other chapters, see Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants*. Tvedtnes provides a shorter version in “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 165–78. Wright offers a critical response to Tvedtnes’s analysis in “Isaiah,” 157–234. Tvedtnes reviews Wright’s response in “Isaiah in the Bible,” 161–72.

Version consistently with faithfulness,” making only such revisions to the KJV that would more correctly or fully interpret the meaning of the source text, render parallel passages in a more uniform manner, or replace archaic vocabulary that was liable to be misunderstood. The revision of the Old Testament continued to rely on the Masoretic Text, but advances in biblical scholarship over the centuries since the KJV was produced, including improved understanding of Hebrew, presented the opportunity for a more accurate translation.⁷³ The most substantial revisions made to the KJV text of Isaiah 6 and 7, as given in the RV, are the following:

And the ~~posts of the door~~ foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, (Isaiah 6:4)

and ~~there be a great forsaking~~ the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land (Isaiah 6:12)

But yet in it ~~shall be a tenth, and it shall return and shall be eaten~~ And if there be yet a tenth in it, it shall again be eaten up (Isaiah 6:13)

as a ~~teil tree terebinth~~, and as an oak, whose ~~substance is in them, when they cast their leaves~~ stock remaineth, when they are felled: so the holy seed shall be the substance is the stock thereof (Isaiah 6:13)

Butter and honey shall he eat, ~~that he may know when he knoweth~~ to refuse the evil, and choose the good (Isaiah 7:15)

For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land ~~that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings~~ whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken (Isaiah 7:16)

upon all thorns, and upon all ~~bushes~~ pastures (Isaiah 7:19)

~~there shall not come thither the~~ thou shalt not come thither for fear of briers and thorns (Isaiah 7:25)

73. *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments; Translated Out of the Original Tongues: Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Compared with the Most Ancient Authorities and Revised* (Oxford, 1887), v-vi, x; <https://books.google.com/books?id=hqXYAAAAMAAJ>.

Most of these revisions have been retained in subsequent Bible translations in the KJV lineage of Bibles, such as the ESV, NASB, and NRSV, and are also supported by the most respected independent translations of the Masoretic Text, such as the NIV and NJPS.⁷⁴ The RV is essentially a corrected version of the KJV. If the Book of Mormon's rendering of Isaiah 6 and 7 constituted a more accurate translation than the KJV, it would be expected to differ from the KJV in ways that parallel at least some of these revisions. It does not. In every case it more closely follows the KJV. This suggests at least that the Book of Mormon's purpose in quoting Isaiah was not to correct translation errors in the English Bible. In particular, this assessment fails to support Roberts's belief that the many minor variants in Book of Mormon Isaiah are due to Joseph Smith's comparison of the KJV with his own translation from the plates and selection of the translation that gave "the superior sense and clearness."

General Book of Mormon Manuscript Evidence from the Critical Text Project

The remainder of this article will look more broadly at the Book of Mormon manuscript evidence beyond 2 Nephi 16 and 17.

As editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, Royal Skousen has spent much of the last three decades analyzing the original and printer's manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. Summaries of some of his findings are available online.⁷⁵ The findings generally support the witness accounts of translation. Specifically, there is ample evidence in the manuscripts of the following:

1. The original manuscript, including the quoted Bible chapters, was written from dictation rather than copying of another document.

74. The ESV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, and NJPS are more similar to the RV in all of these passages except for the following: in Isaiah 6:4, the NJPS is closer to the KJV, and the NIV is intermediate between the KJV and the RV; in the first half of Isaiah 6:13, the ESV, NASB, and NIV combine elements of the KJV and RV, and the NJPS is closer to the KJV; and in Isaiah 7:25, the NJPS is closer to the KJV.

75. Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 25–31, <http://criticaltext.byustudies.byu.edu/how-joseph-smith-translated-book-mormon-evidence-original-manuscript>; and Royal Skousen, "The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 25, no. 5 (2005): 2–6, <http://criticaltext.byustudies.byu.edu/archaic-vocabulary-book-mormon>.

2. Joseph Smith's dictation included precise and sometimes unusual spellings, suggesting that words were revealed to him, not merely ideas.
3. The vocabulary appears to derive mostly from the 1500s and 1600s, not from the 1800s, and includes word usage from this period that is not found in the King James Bible. Stanford Carmack has also presented evidence that the text is, for the most part, Early Modern English and is not the result of Joseph Smith's attempt to imitate the language of the King James Bible.⁷⁶
4. The manuscripts include consistent phraseology that suggests Joseph Smith was reading from a carefully prepared text rather than composing the English translation based on thoughts or impressions as he dictated.

Skousen summarizes his findings:

These new findings argue that Joseph Smith was not the author of the English-language translation of the Book of Mormon. Not only was the text revealed to him word for word, but the words themselves sometimes had meanings that he and his scribes would not have known, which occasionally led to misinterpretation. The Book of Mormon is not a 19th-century text, nor is it Joseph Smith's. The English-language text was revealed through him, but it was not precisely in his language or ours.⁷⁷

Skousen's findings suggest that Joseph Smith was not the translator of the Book of Mormon in the usual sense of the word, but dictated from a translation that had already been prepared by someone else. Applied to the Isaiah chapters, this would mean that Joseph Smith was not composing the text by reconciling his spiritual impressions with the text of an open Bible (as in the Ancient Variants Hypothesis) or working out his own revision of the Bible (as in the Italics Revision Hypothesis) but was more likely reading an adaptation of Isaiah that had already been prepared by someone else. These major findings are most consistent with the Missing Words Hypothesis.

76. See, for example, Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209–62, and Stanford Carmack, "Joseph Smith Read the Words," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 41–64.

77. Skousen, "Archaic Vocabulary," 6.

Variants Involving English Polysemy

There are at least 15 variants in the Book of Mormon’s Isaiah chapters that require that an English word from the KJV be reinterpreted in a way that is not consistent with the meaning of the Hebrew source from which the KJV was translated. (These variants are discussed in the following sections.⁷⁸) In other words, the English word is polysemous (has multiple meanings) in a manner that the Hebrew source of the KJV is not. Since these Book of Mormon variants are reliant on an alternate meaning of an English polysemous word, they are most reasonably interpreted as direct alterations to the English text rather than as variants in the ancient source text. In the biblical quotations from the Book of Mormon below, the polysemous English words are in small capital letters and the Book of Mormon variants that rely on their non-biblical meanings are in bold.

1 Nephi 20:3 (Isaiah 48:3) — 1 variant

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

In this passage in the KJV, “did” means “performed.” In the Book of Mormon’s quotation of the passage, “did” is an auxiliary verb without independent meaning.

1 Nephi 20:16 (Isaiah 48:16) — 1 variant

I have not spoken in secret from the beginning from the time that it **WAS** ~~there~~ ~~am~~ **declared** have I spoken and

In this passage in the KJV, “was” means “took place.” In the Book of Mormon’s quotation of the passage, “was” is an auxiliary verb without independent meaning.

2 Nephi 7:2 (Isaiah 50:2) — 3 variants

WHEREFORE when I came **was** **there** was no man when I called yea **was** **there** was none to answer ... behold at my rebuke I dry up the sea I **MAKE** the rivers a wilderness and their fish stinketh to stink

78. Except for the variant in 2 Nephi 18:19 (Isaiah 8:19), these variants are all discussed in Wright, “Isaiah,” 174–76. The variant in 2 Nephi 23:3 (Isaiah 13:3) is also discussed in Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 222–23.

There are two polysemous words in this passage: “wherefore” and “make.” In this passage in the KJV, “wherefore” means “why.” In the quotation in the Book of Mormon, it means “therefore.” In the KJV, “make” means to transform something into something else. As quoted in the Book of Mormon, it retains this meaning relative to “river,” but gains the meaning of “cause” relative to “to stink.”

2 Nephi 12:10, 19, 21 (Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21) — 5 variants

Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust **FOR** the fear of the LORD and ~~for~~ the glory of his majesty **shall smite thee** ... And they shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth **FOR** the fear of the LORD **shall come upon them** and ~~for~~ the glory of his majesty **shall smite them** when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth ... To go into the clefts of the rocks and into the tops of the ragged rocks **FOR** the fear of the LORD **shall come upon them** and ~~for~~ the glory of his majesty of his glory **shall smite them** when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth

In this passage in the KJV, the three instances of “for” all mean “because of” (a preposition). In the Book of Mormon, they mean “because” (a conjunction).

2 Nephi 15:4 (Isaiah 5:4) — 1 variant

What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it **WHEREFORE** when I looked that it should bring forth grapes **it brought it** forth wild grapes

In this passage in the KJV, “wherefore,” once again, means “why.” In the Book of Mormon, it means “therefore.”

2 Nephi 18:19 (Isaiah 8:19) — 1 variant

And when they shall say unto you Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto wizards that peep and ~~that~~ mutter should not a people seek unto their God **FOR** the living **TO hear from** the dead

There are two polysemous words in this passage: “for” and “to.” In the KJV, “for” means “on behalf of” and “to” means “unto.” As the passage is quoted in the Book of Mormon, “for” serves as a function word to indicate the purpose, and “to” is an infinitive marker.

2 Nephi 23:3 (Isaiah 13:3) — 1 variant

I have commanded my sanctified ones I have also called my mighty ones **FOR** mine anger *even* **is not upon** them that rejoice in my highness

In this passage in the KJV, “for” means “because of.” In the Book of Mormon’s quotation, it means “because.”

2 Nephi 27:30 (Isaiah 29:19) — 2 variants

The meek also shall **INCREASE** **and** *their* joy **shall be** in the LORD

In this passage in the KJV, “increase” means “make greater” (a transitive verb). In the Book of Mormon’s quotation, it means “become greater” (an intransitive verb).

The Explanatory Power of Each Hypothesis

Of the 15 variants in these biblical quotations, four involve the KJV’s italicized words or depend upon variants at those locations (one in 1 Nephi 20:16, two in 2 Nephi 7:2, and one in 2 Nephi 23:3). They are thus explained, at least in a general way, by the Italics Revision Hypothesis as products of Joseph Smith’s presumed belief that the italicized words had no counterpart in the original language and that he was, therefore, free to revise them. The other 11 variants are unexplained by the Italics Revision Hypothesis.

None of the 15 variants is easily explained by the Ancient Variants Hypothesis since they rely on peculiarities of the particular English words selected by the KJV translators.

Fourteen of the 15 variants involve the addition of words or the transposition of italicized words (only the variant in 2 Nephi 15:4 does not). They are thus explained, in a general way at least, by the Missing Words Hypothesis as products of Joseph’s belief that words were missing and needed to be supplied. Furthermore, the Missing Words Hypothesis illuminates specific motivations for supplying the presumed missing words. For example, while dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 2:19, he would have been looking at this text in vision:

And they shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for fear of the LORD and for the glory of his majesty when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth

If Joseph Smith interpreted “for” as meaning “because” rather than the less common “because of,” it would have seemed obvious to him that a predicate was missing after “fear of the LORD” and again after “glory of his majesty.” He supplied phrases that seemed reasonable — “shall come upon them” and “shall smite them.” He then would have needed to add “the” after the first “for” and remove the second “for” in order to make the passage read smoothly. Since he would have been doing all this in his head instead of on paper, he may not have even been conscious of making the latter two edits. A misinterpretation of “for” would similarly explain the nearby variants in verses 10 and 21. His misinterpretation of polysemous words in the other passages, combined with an expectation of missing words, may have similarly motivated him to add words in the remaining passages.⁷⁹

79. While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 8:19, Joseph Smith would have been looking at this text in vision (possibly without the punctuation): “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?” The final phrase of this passage is awkward in the KJV, which could have prompted Joseph Smith to suspect that words were missing, and particularly that a verb was missing. The most obvious place for a verb would have been after the “to,” interpreted as an infinity marker. Given the context, “hear” would have been a reasonable guess for an expected missing verb at this location. While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 13:3, he would have been looking at this text in vision: “I have commanded my sanctified ones I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger them that rejoice in my highness.” If Joseph Smith had, again, interpreted “for” as meaning “because” rather than the less common “because of,” it would have seemed obvious that a verb phrase was missing after “mine anger.” He made a reasonable guess and inserted “is not upon” as he dictated the passage. While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 29:19, he would have been looking at this text in vision: “The meek also shall increase joy in the LORD.” If Joseph Smith interpreted “increase” as meaning “become greater” rather than “make greater,” it would have seemed to him that words were missing both before and after “joy.” He made reasonable guesses and inserted “and their” and “shall be” as he dictated the passage. While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 48:3, Joseph would have been looking at this text in vision: “I have declared the former things from the beginning and they went forth out of my mouth and I shewed them I did suddenly and they came to pass.” It would have seemed obvious to him that one or more words were missing after “did.” He guessed “shew.” This guess was reasonable (but wrong) based on the presence of “shewed” earlier in the passage. While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 48:16, Joseph Smith would have been looking at this text in vision: “I have not spoken in secret from the beginning from the time that it was there I and now the Lord God.” He would have guessed that words were missing somewhere around “there I,” although it would not have been obvious what the

Only the variant in 2 Nephi 15:4 (Isaiah 5:4) — the change from “brought it” to “it brought” — is unexplained by any of the three hypotheses. It could, of course, be an unintentional error of dictation, transcription, or copying of the manuscript. Alternatively, it may have been an intentional edit by Joseph Smith or his scribe to “correct” the text after interpreting “wherefore” to mean “therefore” instead of “why.”

Overall, the Missing Words Hypothesis best explains the variants reliant on polysemy of English words. The fact that several of these variants (five in 2 Nephi 12 and one in 2 Nephi 18) consist of words added at locations that are not associated with the KJV’s italicized words suggests that Joseph Smith was not reading from a physical Bible as he dictated. If he had been reading from a physical Bible, even one that had the italicized words struck through, he would have been able to see that there were no words missing at these locations and would have therefore

missing words were. He came up with a satisfactory solution and a reading that made better sense by replacing “there” with “declared have” and adding “spoken” after “I.” While dictating the Book of Mormon’s quotation of Isaiah 50:2, Joseph Smith would have been looking at this text in vision: “Wherefore when I came no man when I called none to answer ... behold at my rebuke I dry up the sea I make the rivers a wilderness their fish stinketh.” He would have suspected that words were missing after “I came” and “I called.” If he interpreted “wherefore” as meaning “therefore” (which it usually means in the Book of Mormon) instead of “why,” it would have then seemed obvious that the missing words at both locations were “there was.” Incorrectly believing that “make” refers to “fish” as well as “rivers,” he would have suspected that a connecting “and” was missing before “their fish” and seen a need to change “stinketh” to “to stink” in order to conform the text to his misinterpretation of “make.” There is a third apparent misinterpretation of “wherefore” in the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 9:51 (compare Isaiah 55:2). The Book of Mormon’s repeated misinterpretation of “wherefore” in these Bible quotations presents an additional problem for both the Italics Revision Hypothesis and the Ancient Variants Hypothesis. It suggests that the person responsible for these edits to the KJV’s language was not familiar with the usage of *wherefore* as an interrogative. (It also suggests the possibility that punctuation, including question marks that would have identified *wherefore* as an interrogative, was lacking from the text Joseph Smith was reading.) Yet, elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, *wherefore* is used as an interrogative (see 2 Nephi 29:08; and also 1 Nephi 4:3 as a possible instance of this usage), suggesting that the person responsible for the overall language of the Book of Mormon *was* familiar with this usage. In other words, there were two translators of the Book of Mormon, with one of them having a better understanding of this word than the other. The involvement of two people of differing language ability (the unlearned Joseph Smith and a prior translator) is consistent with the Missing Words Hypothesis but unexpected under the other two hypotheses.

had no reason under the Missing Words Hypothesis to add words. As noted above, the other two hypotheses, which assume an open Bible, provide no obvious explanation for these additions.

Repeated Quotations of Isaiah

Cases in which the Book of Mormon quotes the same biblical passage more than once can also serve as tests of the explanatory power of the three hypotheses. The Isaiah passages quoted multiple times in the Book of Mormon are presented below.⁸⁰ Differences from the KJV as well as the KJV's italicized words are indicated.

Isaiah 11:5–9 in 2 Nephi 21: 4–9 and 2 Nephi 30:9–15 — 3 variants

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them And the cow and the bear shall feed their young ones shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den⁸¹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (2 Nephi 21: 4–9)

80. These are all of the repeated quotes from Isaiah based on Skousen's list of Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon in "Textual Variants," 369–71, 385–86, excluding Christ's obvious adaptations of Isaiah 52 in 3 Nephi 20 and 21 and Abinadi's short quote or paraphrase from Isaiah 53:7 in Mosiah 15:6. The latter is so short (14 words) that it is not clear whether it is intended as a quote or a paraphrase, especially since it differs from the way Abinadi had just quoted the same passage a few verses earlier. Neal Rappleye organizes the repeated Isaiah quotations in a blog post. Neal Rappleye, "Isaiah Variants within the Book of Mormon," *Studio Et Quoque Fide* (blog), January 9, 2014, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2014/01/isaiah-variants-within-book-of-mormon.html>.

81. Although the 1769 KJV has "cockatrice' den" in Isaiah 11:14, some other KJV editions have "cockatrice's den" including the American Bible Society Bibles stereotyped by E. and J. White in New York from 1818 to 1829.

But And with righteousness shall **he the Lord God** judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked ... And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins **And then shall The wolf also shall** dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them And the cow and the bear shall feed their young ones shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (2 Nephi 30:9–15)

**Isaiah 49:22–26 in 1 Nephi 21:22–26 and 2 Nephi 6:6–7, 16–18
— 7 unique variants (9 total)**

Thus saith the Lord GOD Behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles and set up my standard to the people and they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers they shall bow down to thee with *their* face **toward towards** the earth and lick up the dust of thy feet and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me **For** Shall the prey be taken from the mighty or the lawful captive delivered But thus saith the LORD Even the **captives captive** of the mighty shall be taken away and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered for⁸² I will contend with him that contendeth with thee and I will save thy children And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh **and** they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine and all flesh shall

82. Immediately after “prey of the terrible shall be delivered for” in 2 Nephi 6:17, the Book of Mormon adds “the mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord.” Although this could be interpreted as a variant in Isaiah, the resumptive “for thus saith the Lord” suggests that it is rather an interruption in the quotation for commentary. I have therefore omitted it from the quotation as presented here. There is a much longer interruption after “they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

know that I the LORD *am* thy Savior and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob (1 Nephi 21:22–26)

Thus saith the Lord GOD Behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles and set up my standard to the people and they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers they shall bow down to thee with *their* **face faces toward towards** the earth and lick up the dust of thy feet and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me [*interruption in the quotation*] **For** Shall the prey be taken from the mighty or the lawful captive delivered But thus saith the LORD Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered for [*interruption in the quotation*] I will contend with **him them** that contendeth with thee **and I will save thy children** And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine and all flesh shall know that I the LORD *am* thy Savior and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob (2 Nephi 6:6–7, 16–18)

Isaiah 52:1–2 in 2 Nephi 8:24–25 and 3 Nephi 20:36–37 — 2 unique variants (3 total)

Awake awake put on thy strength O Zion put on thy beautiful garments O Jerusalem the holy city for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean Shake thyself from the dust arise **and** sit down O Jerusalem loose thyself from the bands of thy neck O captive daughter of Zion (2 Nephi 8:24–25)

Awake awake **again and** put on thy strength O Zion put on thy beautiful garments O Jerusalem the holy city for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean Shake thyself from the dust arise **and** sit down O Jerusalem loose thyself from the bands of thy neck O captive daughter of Zion (3 Nephi 20:36–37)

Isaiah 52:8–10 in Mosiah 12:22–24, Mosiah 15:29–31, and 3 Nephi 16:18–20 — 2 variants

Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice with the voice together shall they sing for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD shall bring again Zion Break forth into joy sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem For the LORD hath comforted his people he hath redeemed Jerusalem The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Mosiah 12:22–24)

Thy watchmen shall lift up **the their** voice with the voice together shall they sing for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD shall bring again Zion Break forth into joy sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem For the LORD hath comforted his people he hath redeemed Jerusalem The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Mosiah 15:29–31)

Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice with the voice together shall they sing for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD shall bring again Zion Break forth into joy sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem For the LORD hath comforted his people he hath redeemed Jerusalem The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of **our** God (3 Nephi 16:18–20)

The Explanatory Power of Each Hypothesis

There are 14 unique variants in these quotations of Isaiah. How well do the three hypotheses explain these variants?

The repeated Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon are a powerful test of the Ancient Variants Hypothesis. If the variants in these quotations reflected ancient differences on the brass plates, the same variants should appear in an Isaiah passage each time it is quoted. Such is not the case. Only three of the 14 variants are consistently present in repeated quotations of an Isaiah passage: the replacement of “toward” with “towards” and the addition of “for” to the quotes from Isaiah 49, and the omission of italicized “and” from the quotation from Isaiah 52. But even these variants provide little if any support for the Ancient Variants Hypothesis. The replacement of “toward” with “towards” is not likely to reflect an ancient variant since the two words are equivalent in

meaning. Nor is it likely that the omission of italicized “*and*” reflects an ancient variant, since the italicization of this word indicates it has no direct counterpart in the Hebrew source of the KJV.

Only the addition of “for” potentially supports the Ancient Variants Hypothesis. Even in that case, however, there is reason to doubt that “for” represents an ancient variant from the brass plates. “For” in 1 Nephi 21:24 appears as a supralinear edit in the original manuscript.⁸³ Although it is possible that Joseph Smith included the “for” in his original dictation of the passage but Oliver Cowdery accidentally omitted it and then made a correction, it is also possible that “for” was not part of the original dictation but was added as an afterthought by either Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery to increase the connectedness with the prior sentence.⁸⁴ In that case, “for” would not be an ancient variant but rather a modern edit. The corresponding added “for” in 2 Nephi 6:16 is readily explained as an adaptation of the quotation by Jacob to connect it to his own words. In fact, it may not be part of the Isaiah quotation at all, depending on how the passage is punctuated. The passage can be punctuated to exclude “for” from the quotation:

And they shall know that the Lord is God the Holy One of Israel. **For** “shall the prey be taken from the mighty ... and all flesh shall know that I the LORD *am* thy Savior and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob”

In quoting Isaiah, Jacob may have used “for,” not as part of the quotation, but rather as a transition word to introduce the quotation as supportive evidence for his assertion in the previous verse that “they shall know that the Lord is God the Holy One of Israel.” “For” is often used in the Book of Mormon in similar situations.⁸⁵ In fact, Jacob seems to be using “for” in this way just three verses later, at the beginning of 2 Nephi 7. He first presents a question in the voice of the Lord: “Have I put thee away or have I cast thee off forever?” He then answers it by

83. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 449.

84. But see Skousen’s evaluation in *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 449.

85. For examples of similar use of “for” as a conjunction at the beginning of a sentence or verse in the chapter just prior to the Isaiah quotation, see 1 Nephi 19:11 (“For thus saith the prophet, The Lord God surely”), 1 Nephi 19:20 (“For hath not the Lord been merciful”), 1 Nephi 19:21 (“For he surely did shew”), and 1 Nephi 19:24 (“For after this manner hath the prophet written”). For some other cases where “for” may have been added to Isaiah to provide connectedness, see 1 Nephi 20:10, 1 Nephi 20:12, 1 Nephi 21:15, and 2 Nephi 7:1.

quoting Isaiah chapters 50, 51, and part of 52, with “for” providing the connection between question and answer:

For “Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement ... sit down O Jerusalem loose thyself from the bands of thy neck O captive daughter of Zion.”

It is also possible, of course, that Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery added “for” to increase the connectedness not only in 1 Nephi 21:24, but at this location as well. Thus, “for,” which is one of the most commonly used words in the Book of Mormon, may occur at both locations, not because it is an ancient Isaiah variant, but because it was added to the two passages independently. In any case, the Ancient Variants Hypothesis fails to explain almost all of the variants in these passages.

The Italics Revision Hypothesis doesn’t fare any better in explaining the 14 variants. It would account, in a general way, for only one of the 14 distinct variants: the omission of italicized “*and*” from Isaiah 52:2. None of the other variants in these quotations are explained by the Italics Revision Hypothesis since none involves italicized words. This hypothesis also falls short in another way. Presumably, according to this hypothesis, Joseph Smith intended his own revisions of Isaiah’s text to be believable as ancient variants. The lack of the consistent presence of most of the 14 variants in repeated quotations is certainly not the expected outcome of such an intended deception.

The Missing Words Hypothesis fares slightly better. It would explain three of the 14 distinct variants. It would readily explain the omission of italicized “*and*” from the quotations of Isaiah 52:2, since all italicized words would have already been omitted. It would also explain the addition of “again and” to one of the quotations of Isaiah 52:1 and the addition of “for” to both quotations of Isaiah 49:24 as Joseph Smith’s additions in response to his belief that words were missing at these locations.⁸⁶

The Missing Words Hypothesis, which assumes that all of the KJV’s italicized words were omitted from the text Joseph Smith visioned, would also need to explain how Joseph Smith could have correctly guessed,

86. In dictating a quotation of Isaiah 52:1, it is easy to see why Joseph Smith would have thought that “and” was missing after “awake awake” and needed to be added, but the addition of “again” is not as easily explained. It may have been a result of miscommunication between him and his scribe. After dictating “awake awake” he may have said “again,” not as part of his dictation, but to alert his scribe that there were actually two instances of “awake” in the text and he was not just repeating himself.

twice, the five italicized words that are still present in the repeated quotations. All are in the quotations from Isaiah 49:

they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers they shall bow down to thee with *their* face/faces ... and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD for they shall ... and all flesh shall know that I the LORD *am* thy Savior and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob

According to this hypothesis, while dictating these quotations, Joseph Smith would have been provided with the following text in vision:

they shall bring thy sons in arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon shoulders And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers they shall bow down to thee with face ... and thou shalt know that I the LORD for they shall ... and all flesh shall know that I the LORD thy Savior and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob

The identities of the first four missing italicized words would have likely been obvious. The fifth missing italicized word, the “*am*” before “thy Savior,” might have been more difficult to discern. It would have probably been clear enough that “*am*” had been omitted from one of three possible locations: before “the LORD,” before “thy Savior,” or before “the Mighty One of Jacob.” How would Joseph Smith have known to put “*am*” in the second position? It’s possible that he was already familiar enough with this passage that the second location sounded better to him. Or he may have thought that the second position made better narrative or logical sense (people would be convinced that the Lord saves, rather than that the entity in question was the Lord or the Mighty One of Jacob). His placement of “*am*” at the second rather than the first possible location may also reflect a tendency to accept the visioned text as far as it made sense and delay the addition of words until a need became apparent, thus favoring later rather than earlier locations for insertion. Since “I the Lord” makes sense and is a common phrase in scripture, he would not have been inclined to alter it.

Overall, the Missing Words Hypothesis has greater explanatory power than the other two hypotheses, since it explains more variants.

Unexplained Variants

The remaining 11 variants in these repeated quotations, although not specifically explained by any of the three hypotheses, are not necessarily inconsistent with them.

The replacement of “face” with “faces,” “toward,” with “towards,” and “captives” with “captive” in the quotations from Isaiah 49 are typical of the kinds of errors of transmission that Stan Larson enumerated (specifically, his third category). Alternatively, they may have been attempts by Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery to modernize the wording (in the case of “toward”) or increase internal consistency (in the case of “captive”) or correct a perceived disagreement in number (in the case of “their face”). The replacement of “him” with “them” in one quotation from Isaiah 49 may have been a result of the scribe’s mishearing of “with him” as “with them.” In his analysis of Book of Mormon variants, Skousen notes that Joseph Smith, in dictating the Book of Mormon, “often pronounced unstressed ‘him’ and ‘them’ indistinguishably as / əm/.”⁸⁷ The omission of “and” from one of the quotations from Isaiah 49 and the replacement of “the” with “their” and omission of “our” from quotations from Isaiah 52 are also typical of the kinds of errors of transmission categorized by Larson (specifically, his first and third categories).

The variants in the quotation from Isaiah 11 in 2 Nephi 30 — the replacement of “But” with “And,” “he” with “the Lord God,” and “The wolf also shall” with “And then shall the wolf” — are probably best explained as Nephi’s adaptation of this passage. These variants are not in a quoted chapter that Nephi is reading from the brass plates, but rather in a smaller segment of Isaiah that he is integrating into his own prophecy. As such, it would not be unexpected that he would adapt the quotation to its new context.⁸⁸

87. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 656–60.

88. The “And” replacing “But” is at the very beginning of the quoted passage. At this location, “And” could be considered a transition word introducing the quotation rather than part of the quotation itself. In its context in Isaiah 11 in the KJV, the quoted passage begins with “But,” which is the appropriate conjunction to indicate contrast with the previous phrase: he will not judge “after the hearing of his ears **But** with righteousness shall he judge” (emphasis added). In the context of Nephi’s prophecy, however, “But” is not a suitable conjunction since the previous phrase does not have a contrasting meaning, so Nephi begins (or introduces) the quotation with “And” instead. In quoting the Isaiah passage, Nephi also replaces “he” in Isaiah’s text with “the Lord God” in order to identify the subject of Isaiah’s prophecy with “the Lord God,” who is the subject of Nephi’s

There are at least two reasonable explanations for the omission of “and I will save thy children” from the quotation from Isaiah 49 in 2 Nephi 6:⁸⁹

that contendeth with thee ~~and I will save thy children~~ And I will feed them that oppress thee

Joseph Smith’s eye (while dictating) or his scribe’s eye (while copying the original manuscript) may have skipped from the “and I will” that begins this phrase to the “and I will” that immediately follows it, with the result that the intervening text was lost. It is also possible that Jacob omitted this portion of Isaiah because he did not feel a need to quote it.

Other Repeated Biblical Quotations

Besides the repeated quotations from Isaiah, there is one other obviously repeated biblical quotation in the Book of Mormon. In Mosiah 12:36, Abinadi quotes the second of the ten commandments, following Exodus 20:4. A few verses later, in Mosiah 13:12, he quotes the commandment again. He introduces his second recitation by saying that he is repeating himself (“And now ye remember that I said unto you...”). Yet, as they appear in the Book of Mormon, these repeated quotations differ from

prophecy. In his prophecy, Nephi is outlining a sequence of future events. By replacing “The wolf also shall” with “And then the wolf shall,” Nephi is able to properly set the conditions mentioned in this passage (peace and universal gospel knowledge) beyond the time of the conditions that he had just described (division and destruction). While the adaptation of quotations in this way is often signaled by the use of square brackets in modern literature, there was no such tool anciently. Nor did the ancients have the same expectation of precision in quoting that we have now. As Christopher Stanley notes in his study of Paul’s adaptation of Old Testament passages, “Modern notions of the inviolability of an author’s original text simply cannot be transferred to the ancient world.” Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 274. See pp. 267–337 for more on the common ancient practice of incorporating interpretive elements into quotations. For surveys of different ways Old Testament passages are used in the New Testament, see Martin Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis.” *JETS* 51, no. 2 (June 2008): 353–81; E. Earle Ellis, “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 199–219; and Richard C. Oudersluys, “Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament,” *Reformed Review* 14, no. 3 (1961), 1–12.

89. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 576–78 for more discussion of this omission.

each other as well as from the KJV, with the differences concentrated at the locations of the KJV's italicized words:⁹⁰

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of *any thing* ~~that is~~ in the heaven above or ~~that~~ things ~~which~~ is in the earth beneath (Mosiah 12:36)

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of *any thing* ~~that~~ things ~~which~~ is in heaven above or ~~that~~ which is in the earth beneath (Mosiah 13:12)

The fact that these two Book of Mormon passages are explicitly presented as duplicate quotations yet differ from each other suggests that there has been some secondary editing of one or both passages.

The Ancient Variants Hypothesis provides no obvious explanation for the variants in these passages. If the variants reflected ancient variants from the brass plates, the same variants would appear at the same locations in both passages. They do not. Also, once again, these changes depart from grammatical norms and do nothing to clarify or change the meaning.

Although the variants in these two quotations from Exodus are broadly consistent with both the Italics Revision Hypothesis and the Missing Words Hypothesis due to their involvement of the KJV's italicized words, they provide greater support for the Missing Words Hypothesis for at least two reasons. First, if Joseph Smith were making intentional revisions to the biblical text, as the Italics Revision Hypothesis proposes, one would expect that he would try to be consistent, making the same revisions each time he quoted the same passage. This would be particularly expected in this instance, where the two quotations are explicitly presented as duplicate quotations and are near enough together that he could have easily compared them. In contrast, under the Missing Words Hypothesis, each time Joseph Smith saw a repeated passage, he would have made his best guess of what words were missing, and would not have necessarily guessed the same way each time, or come up with the same way to smooth the text. Second, the Italics Revision Hypothesis does not explain the addition of "the" before "heaven" in the

90. In the overall quotations from Exodus, as in the Isaiah quotations, variants tend to be concentrated at the locations of the KJV's italicized words. For example, in Mosiah 13:18, three of four italicized words are omitted: "but the seventh day ~~is~~ the sabbath of the Lord thy God ~~in it~~ thou shalt not do any work thou nor thy son nor thy daughter thy manservant nor thy maidservant nor thy cattle nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates."

first instance of this passage, since the change has no connection with the KJV's italicized words. Under the Missing Words Hypothesis, Joseph Smith may have suspected a missing "the" at this location since "the" occurs before the parallel "earth" later in the passage.

The replacement of non-italicized "that" with "which" in both passages must also be explained. These replacements are not expected under the Ancient Variants Hypothesis since they do not change the sense or increase the clearness. Similarly, no motivation for these replacements is obvious under the Italics Revision Hypothesis.⁹¹ The Missing Words Hypothesis suggests a possible reason for these replacements. Under this hypothesis, Joseph Smith would have been making ad hoc edits in his head.⁹² He didn't have the luxury of a Bible to mark up or pen and paper to carefully compose an edit that he could then compare against the unedited text. Without these tools, it would have been difficult for him to ensure that he was not making unintentional changes, and he may not have even realized he was replacing "that" with "which" as he integrated new words into these verses.

The inconsistent editing of the two repeated quotations, along with the replacement of words with synonyms, suggests that the editing was ad hoc and not reflective of ancient variants on the brass plates or of a systematic attempt at Bible revision. The edits are most compatible with the Missing Words Hypothesis.

Conclusions

In this article, I have assessed the explanatory power of three hypotheses relative to the many minor variants in quoted biblical passages in the Book of Mormon. The Ancient Variants Hypothesis is the most widely accepted explanation for these variants among believers in the Book of Mormon. The Italics Revision Hypothesis is the dominant competing explanation described in Book of Mormon literature. The Missing Words Hypothesis is a newly presented explanation. The Missing Words Hypothesis best explains the variants in the two Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters that were sampled for this analysis, as well as the variants that

91. It could be argued that "that" was replaced with "which" in order to impart a more archaic sound to the text. But presumably, the objective of using archaic-sounding words would be to make the Book of Mormon more like the KJV, not less, as this instance does.

92. The other two hypotheses also leave open the possibility that he would have been editing in his head, although they provide an opportunity for marking up and then reading from a printed Bible.

are dependent on polysemy of English words and the variants in biblical passages that are quoted more than once. This hypothesis is also most compatible with descriptions of the translation process in the firsthand accounts of individuals who were present as Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon, as well as with the principal findings of Royal Skousen’s monumental study of the Book of Mormon manuscripts. It is supported by an early historical source.

The results of this analysis do not support the idea that the many minor differences between Isaiah in the Book of Mormon and the KJV represent ancient variants from the brass plates. Nor do they suggest that Joseph Smith was working from an open Bible in which he could see the locations of the italicized words. Rather, they are more consistent with the idea that he was making ad hoc edits as he read and dictated a text from which he believed words were missing, and from which the KJV’s italicized words had in fact been omitted by someone else. This idea, better than the other two hypotheses, explains the odd way the Book of Mormon treats the KJV’s italicized words — omitting italicized words that are grammatically important in English, treating the same italicized word in parallel phrases differently, and replacing italicized words with synonyms. It also explains why many other words and short phrases have been inserted into the biblical quotations — Joseph Smith believed that words were missing but didn’t always know the precise locations, so he sometimes added words at the wrong locations or overcompensated and added words when none were in fact missing.

The lack of support for the Ancient Variants Hypothesis in this study does not mean that there are no ancient variants in the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters. Some of the longer Isaiah variants, such as the thematic additions to Isaiah 49 regarding “ye that are broken off ... that are scattered abroad...” (1 Nephi 21:1) and “the feet of them which are in the east...” (1 Nephi 21:13) are too long and complex to be readily explained as Joseph Smith’s ad hoc editing in response to a belief that words were missing. Nor are they readily explained as attempts to modernize the language or as errors of dictation, transcription, or copying of the original manuscript. They are better explained as either ancient variants in Isaiah or as interpolations made by Nephi in order to liken the scriptures to his people and reinforce his theme of the scattering and restoration of Israel.⁹³

93. Just before quoting Isaiah 48 and 49, Nephi said that he was likening the scriptures to his people and invited us to liken them unto ourselves (1 Nephi 19:23–24). Nephi introduces Isaiah 48 and 49 as applying to those who are “broken off”

On the other hand, the Missing Words Hypothesis handily accounts for some of the more problematic variants in the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters such as the addition of “red” before “sea” in 2 Nephi 19:1 (Isaiah 9:1), the replacement of italicized “*things*” with “sons” in 2 Nephi 8:19 (Isaiah 51:19), and the addition of “not” to 2 Nephi 12:9 (Isaiah 2:9), as well as some of the more salient instances of nonstandard grammar, such as “them that . . . remaineth” in 2 Nephi 14:3 (Isaiah 4:3) and “they dieth” in 2 Nephi 7:2 (Isaiah 50:2).⁹⁴ These, like the other variants discussed in this article that negatively affect the grammar, logic, or clarity of Isaiah’s message, may be among the “mistakes of men” referred to in the title page of the Book of Mormon. Their existence supports the Book of Mormon’s own portrayal of Joseph Smith as an unlearned reader of a revealed text (2 Nephi 27:19–20). The Book of Mormon invites us to acknowledge such mistakes and their human sources without condemning the “things of God” — the Book of Mormon as a whole.

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(1 Nephi 19:24). These variants fit well into the Book of Mormon’s theme of the restoration of the Jews (perhaps “them which are in the east”) and those of the House of Israel who are “broken off” and “scattered abroad,” and their establishment in their lands of promise (see, for example, 1 Nephi 10:12; 14:14; 15:7–20; 22:3–8; 2 Nephi 3:5; 9:2; 10:22; Jacob 5:30; Alma 13:22; 3 Nephi 5:24; 20:11–13; 29:1).

94. For a discussion of 2 Nephi 19:1, see Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants*, 45, 115. For 2 Nephi 8:19 and 12:9, see Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 219–22; and Wright, “Isaiah,” 166–67, 177–78. The additions of “not” after “boweth” and after “himself” in 2 Nephi 12:9 are retained in the 2013 edition of the Book of Mormon but are rejected by Skousen as a likely unintentional error and an unnecessary emendation, respectively. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 656–60. Some of the other grammatical errors of agreement in number in the Book of Mormon Isaiah were more likely caused by the scribe’s mishearing of Joseph Smith’s dictation — for example, a mishearing of “with him” as “with them” in 2 Nephi 6:17 (Isaiah 49:25) and a mishearing of “have” as “hath” in 2 Nephi 8:16 (Isaiah 51:16).