

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon."* vol 1. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1994. 179 pp. \$6.00.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

Jerald and Sandra Tanner seem to have gotten what they want at last—a debate. For thirty-four years, they complain, the LDS Church never rebutted their work and failed to “refute our allegations” (p. 1). This “conspiracy of silence,” they believe, was broken when several LDS scholars undertook to write reviews of their book, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*. Evidently gearing up for a response to the reviews of their second book, the new volume has been labeled “Volume 1.”

The Tanners’ complaint that the LDS Church and LDS scholars ignored them for so many years struck me as strange. It’s like saying, “We shot cannon at their wall and failed to dent it, but the damned fools don’t have enough sense to shoot back!”

Why is it so important to the Tanners that “Mormon apologists” respond to their writings? Does it give them a sense of legitimacy? of scholarship? of importance? They claim that their work is “having a significant impact upon some Mormon scholars” (p. 1). Who are these scholars? They also complain that Daniel Peterson “was very careful not to mention the fact that our work has had a significant effect upon thousands of members of the church” (p. 2). Perhaps Dan doesn’t know any of these people. I have yet to meet anyone—scholar or no—who has claimed that the Tanners’ work influenced his or her thinking.

Unlike the Tanners, I don’t have the luxury of spending most of my waking hours researching the subjects into which they

Editor’s note: a longer, more complete version of this review can be obtained from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1-800-327-6715.

delve. I have a job to hold down, a family to support, and I have never been paid for any of my reviews of anti-Mormon literature. There are some professional anti-LDS critics, but no professional apologists; all of the apologists earn their living doing other things.¹

For the record, the decision to write a review of the Tanners' *Answering Mormon Scholars* was my own. That decision was made because it became clear that the Tanners have misunderstood, misinterpreted, or misrepresented some of what I wrote in my review of their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*. The majority of my comments in this present review will deal directly with what they have said about my earlier review. For the most part, I shall let the other reviewers deal with what has been said about their work. In some cases, however, I shall add insights that might otherwise be missed and comment on the Tanners' methodology.

The “Conspiracy of Silence”

All of the statements regarding the Church's wish to ignore them are hearsay only. For my part, I can categorically state that, contrary to the Tanners' assertions regarding the LDS Church's actions in regard to them (p. 1), no church leaders have ever encouraged or discouraged me to respond to the Tanners.

According to the Tanners, the LDS Church has conducted a “conspiracy of silence” to ignore their work (p. 1). To me, declining to take the Tanners seriously is not evidence of a “conspiracy.” But in the world of anti-Mormon publishing,

¹ Matt Poulsen has been complaining that, despite the passage of a long period of time, I have not responded to his response to my response to some of his anti-Mormon writings. What he fails to tell people is that he took nearly two years to write his response. My failure to spend more time debating with Poulsen can be attributed to my 40-hour-per-week work schedule and the fact that I have been trying to complete a book and a number of articles. Poulsen is not my top priority, especially when I have no forum in which to publish a reply (F.A.R.M.S. does not publish reviews of privately-circulated correspondence, only of published books).

words like *conspiracy* add to the sensationalism that sells books.² And that is, after all, how the Tanners make their living.

When Latter-day Saints ignore their work, the Tanners believe that we are participating in a “conspiracy of silence.” When we review their work, it shows that we are “concerned.” Either way, the Tanners conclude that the Mormons have something to fear. We’re damned if we do and damned if we don’t. But I don’t think they’re really interested in a dialogue. I believe that nothing short of total capitulation to the Tanners’ view of things would really satisfy them.

The Tanners claim that their book *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* “certainly agitated some of the scholars at the Mormon Church’s Brigham Young University and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies” (p. 1). I cannot speak for others, but I, for one, was not agitated. I was asked to review the book and did so. Moreover, I was never party to a “plan . . . to have a number of scholars simultaneously tear into our work” (p. 2). I had no idea that others had reviewed or would review the book and no one at F.A.R.M.S. knew what I would write. In fact, until I was asked to review the book, I hadn’t even heard of it. I hadn’t followed the Tanners’ work for about two decades.³

On another occasion, I was agitated by a booklet written by Brenton Yorgason, *Little Known Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, which, unlike the Tanners’ work, was supportive of the Book of Mormon. What bothered me about the work was that it

² Joseph McCarthy built his political career using terms like *conspiracy*. The Tanners have built their publishing career using a similar list. Some of their published materials give one the impression that they believe that all Mormons (or at least all General Authorities) are involved in a gigantic conspiracy.

³ Though I have appreciated the fact that the Tanners have reprinted old LDS materials (hence the original name of their publishing concern, Modern Microfilm), I have often found it difficult to take their own works seriously. Several years ago, I noted an article in the Salt Lake *Tribune* announcing that Sandra Tanner would give a class for non-Mormons to help them understand their Mormon neighbors. The article indicated that Sandra was an expert on the Mormons. I had a good laugh and felt sorry for the class attendees, who would not learn anything about their neighbors, but only about Mormon beliefs with which the Tanners disagreed. I wrote a letter to the editor, questioning Sandra Tanner’s motives and her “expertise” on the Mormons, but the *Tribune* declined to publish it.

really contained no valid evidence whatsoever for the Book of Mormon, and I so stated in my review. Though not asked by F.A.R.M.S. to review that work, I sent a review anyway because of my deep concern for its complete lack of scholarship.⁴ So I wasn't just picking on the Tanners. If anything, I was picking on Yorgason's pro-Book of Mormon work. Surely this says something about the fairness with which I approached the subjects and is evidence that I am not a rabid apologist, willing to accept anything favoring the Book of Mormon and reject anything opposing it.

The Tanners seem to believe that F.A.R.M.S. is out to get them because it published negative reviews of their book. But even some of the books published by F.A.R.M.S. have gotten negative reviews in the F.A.R.M.S. *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, including some in the same issue (volume 3) in which the Tanners' book was reviewed. This included one of my articles, a book written by John W. Welch, founder of F.A.R.M.S., and an article by Hugh Nibley. On another occasion, some negative comments were made about an article by Noel B. Reynolds, F.A.R.M.S. president (volume 4). The Tanners draw attention to some of these reviews (pp. 123–24, 145), but don't note the implications. Surely they indicate a measure of fairness in the way books are reviewed by F.A.R.M.S.

The Tanners' claim that the LDS Church has conducted a "conspiracy of silence" to ignore their work. This is what I call a "Brodieism," from the remarkable ability of Fawn Brodie to read the minds of long-deceased historical personages such as Joseph Smith and Thomas Jefferson. Rather than use terms such as "we believe" or "we suggest," the Tanners often make statements of absolute fact about what others are thinking. Thus, to the Tanners, it seems, anyone who disagrees with them must be "upset." "Mormon scholars were very upset with us" (p. 3). In their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, they try the same mind reading technique on Joseph Smith, saying that "he must have become very tired, discouraged and concerned that he

⁴ See John A. Tvedtnes, review of *Little Known Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, by Brenton G. Yorgason, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 260–66 (hereafter *RBBM*).

could not adequately reconstruct the story found in the missing 116 pages” (p. 42).

An Assessment of Joseph Smith

In their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, the Tanners actually introduce two theories. But the “black hole” theory and the “Bible plagiarism” theory are at odds one with the other. The latter assumes that Joseph Smith’s fantastic memory enabled him to recall biblical expressions and incorporate them wholesale into the Book of Mormon.⁵ The former has Joseph Smith “forgetting” what he had written on the 116 lost pages and having to avoid discussing the same topics, lest he contradict what he had dictated earlier. We are left to wonder if the Tanners consider Joseph Smith to be a brilliant charlatan with a near-photographic memory or a dimwitted fool who believed he could foist his inconsistent story on a gullible public.⁶

The Tanners also seem to vacillate between allowing Joseph Smith to borrow from his earlier dictation when it serves their purpose, while denying him the ability to remember what he had already dictated when *that* fits their argument. For example, they have him borrowing from Alma 36:22 in 1 Nephi 1:8 and 1

⁵ On this issue, too, the Tanners unwittingly contradict themselves. On the one hand, they have Joseph Smith recalling vast numbers of phrases from the Bible (see pp. 101–17 in the current work and part 2 of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*). On the other, they write that the lack of accurate information on Old Testament sacrifices in the Book of Mormon indicates that Joseph Smith, whom they see as its author, had no “real understanding of Old Testament sacrifices and other Jewish customs” (pp. 99–100). How could he know the Bible so well and yet not know as much as the Tanners about these subjects? I shall return to a discussion of sacrifices and Jewish festivals later in this review.

⁶ There are, in fact, a number of examples of promises in the Book of Mormon to return to a topic which were fulfilled. If Joseph Smith authored the book, then he had to remember these promises and fill in the details in subsequent passages. The Book of Mormon attributes them to Mormon. See the discussion in my “Mormon’s Editorial Promises,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book & F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 29 n. 31.

Nephi 8:4 (pp. 50–51).⁷ On the other hand, they maintain that Joseph “could not remember exactly what he had written in the last nine books of the Book of Mormon” (p. 53).⁸ Consequently, when he dictated Lehi’s 600-year prophecy in 1 Nephi 10:4, he “seemed totally oblivious to the fact that he had already recorded a prophecy by Samuel the Lamanite regarding the birth of Christ” (p. 53). To believe that Joseph Smith could remember words from an *earlier* part of his dictation (Alma 36:22) but could not remember one of the most outstanding prophecies in the Book of Mormon that was dictated *later* (Helaman 14) stretches the imagination beyond reasonable bounds. Besides, the Tanners seem to want it both ways, for they appear to agree with Brent Lee Metcalfe that Joseph Smith borrowed the 600 years from 3 Nephi 1:1 to write the prophecy in 1 Nephi 10:4 (p. 54).⁹

The Hofmann Affair

The Tanners hyperbolically declare that “all of the Mormon Church’s top scholars accepted the authenticity of the Hofmann documents” (p. 17), despite the fact that they cite a *Los Angeles Times* article that “some Mormons” claimed that the “salamander letter” was a forgery (p. 23). I accepted the Lucy Mack Smith letter and the Anthon transcript as authentic, based on the judgment of others, but I had my doubts about other

⁷ The Tanners hint that the words “methought I saw . . . God sitting upon his throne” in Alma 36:22 were taken by Joseph Smith from a sermon of George Whitefield, published in 1808, in which he declared, “Me thinks I see . . . the Judge sitting on his throne” (p. 50). If Joseph Smith borrowed from Whitefield or other writers of his time or earlier, he must have had either a fantastic memory or kept the books at his side while dictating the Book of Mormon. I repeat the question that I asked in my review of Brent Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*: “How large was the Smith Farm Library, anyway?!”

⁸ But the Tanners note that Joseph Smith was so “repetitious in his writings” in the Book of Mormon that “if Joseph Smith were the author of the book, as we maintain, one would expect to find similar phrases or sentences in both the first and last parts of the Book of Mormon” (p. 52). This blanket statement, with only one example (the final battles of the Jaredites and the Nephites), may be intended to explain instances where early and later passages of the Book of Mormon are in harmony.

⁹ See Brent Lee Metcalfe, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 416–17.

documents, such as the “salamander” letter and the Joseph Smith III blessing.¹⁰ My doubts were not based on the controversial nature of these documents, but on the timing of their appearance. I was unaware that a single person—Mark Hofmann—was the source of all of the documents. Historians sometimes become a little suspicious when two or more letters of different provenance suddenly appear on the scene supporting a new version of an historical event. A second consideration was the very fact that the documents had been preserved. What were the chances, for example, that a letter written by an obscure backwoods New York farmer would have been kept for a century and a half? Had I known, I would perhaps have been suspicious of the others as well.

The Tanners ask why “the Mormon leaders,” as prophets, did not detect the fraud perpetrated on the Church by Mark Hofmann (p. 19). The answer lies in Joseph Smith’s declaration that “a prophet was a prophet only when acting as such.”¹¹ I presume that President Hinckley need not have been exercising prophetic gifts when he made *business* purchases for the Church. Moreover, we have, in the Bible, examples of prophets who believed lies (Joshua 9:3–27; 1 Kings 13:14–19). As human beings, even prophets can make mistakes, though when they act as prophet and president we should accept their word and live accordingly.¹²

¹⁰ I do agree with the Tanners’ assessment (pp. 41–43) of how some scholars dealt with the “salamander” issue. To me, the letter was a possible forgery, but even if authentic it was only secondary evidence for what Joseph Smith had said. To me, the most important fact was that Martin Harris and William W. Phelps had joined the Church despite the contents of the letter and that they never challenged the angel Moroni story told by Joseph Smith. Besides, other early sources spoke of an angel, while only anti-Mormon sources had published the story of a toad, from which, as it turns out, Hofmann got the idea of a salamander.

¹¹ The Tanners’ expectation “that the president of the Mormon Church,” as a seer, should be able to “translate all records that are of ancient date” (quoting Mosiah 8:13) is unrealistic, since the Book of Mormon passage has reference to one possessing the Urim and Thummim. As far as I know, these instruments were not returned to the Church after Joseph Smith gave them back to the angel Moroni. (*HC* 5:265).

¹² It may even go beyond this. I know of at least three cases in which a man guilty of serious sin would not have been caught had he not been called to a position in the Church. In each case, the sin would not have been discovered had the call not been made. I believe that the Lord sometimes uses this to make such

In their discussion of the Hofmann affair, the Tanners repeat what they have long asserted—that the LDS Church is “suppressing” documents it does not want made public by placing them in the First Presidency's vault (p. 24). But placing an historical document in a safe place hardly implies suppression. Burning the document would be a safer way of getting rid of negative evidence. Placing it in a vault only preserves it for future use. We have the example of the Joseph Smith papyri, which lay for decades in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, only to be brought to the Church's attention by a professor doing research there. Yet no one has accused the Metropolitan of “suppressing” these documents! They were their guardian, just as the Church is the guardian of many documents. Recent history has shown us how people like the Tanners misuse such documents—sometimes literally publishing what does not belong to them—to promote their own ends. Consequently, one is not surprised when the Tanners, unable to obtain documents they want, accuse the Church of suppression.

I find it ironic that the Tanners, after condemning Dan Peterson's passing reference (in a footnote!) to Mark Hofmann's opinion of Brent Metcalfe (pp. 17, 21), go on to cite Hofmann's confession to prove that President Hinckley was trying to hide the truth by keeping supposedly dangerous documents out of the hands of the Church's enemies (pp. 29–30). It seems that, to the Tanners, it is all right to use Hofmann's statements as evidence only when it supports their view of the world. Strangely, the minutes the Tanners quote from a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve (p. 31), rather than suggesting a cover-up, indicate that the Church was going to publicly announce the acquisition; clearly, this does not support Hofmann's story.

discoveries known to Church leaders. He may have used the same tactic to trap Mark Hofmann. I realize that the Tanners will see this as a “cop out” and that it will not sit well with many people in the Church. Some may object that the Lord would not have let it get to the point of murder. In response, I suggest reading Alma 14:8–11.

Issues or People?

The Tanners complain that, “instead of just dealing with the issues, Mormon critics have spent part of their energy trying to impugn our motives and belittle our research” (p. 64). This is a kettle/pot issue since, in their long history of writing anti-Mormon literature, the Tanners have typically sought to impugn the motives of those with whom they disagree and have attempted to belittle their research. Motives *are* important, but I agree that issues are *more* important.¹³ I can honestly say that I have tried hard to deal mostly with issues. In my review of their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, I gave the Tanners a fair amount of credit for their work, while disagreeing with many of their conclusions.¹⁴ In this current review, I shall also give them credit where it is due, while showing why I disagree with much of what they have written.

“Proof”

In their publications, the Tanners frequently cite opinions and documents as “proof” for the ideas they present. They are not proof, but evidence, to be considered and weighed in connection with other pieces of evidence. Historiography, like criminology, is

¹³ The Tanners complain (pp. 6–7) that four of the reviewers in vol. 6 no. 1 of *RBBM* attack Brent Metcalfe’s academic qualifications. The implication is that, when LDS apologists turn to such tactics, they must not have anything valid to say about the issues themselves. But what about the ten other reviewers who apparently did not discuss Metcalfe’s lack of academic credentials? I, for example, addressed issues, not personalities.

¹⁴ I also agree with a few of the issues they have presented in their recent book, such as their discussion of whether the Nephites are “Jewish” (pp. 92–94). Latter-day Saints often go overboard in trying to distinguish between Jews and other Israelites. While there was usually a differentiation anciently, most people today consider the terms *Jew* and *Israelite* to be synonymous. Once, when a group of our BYU students went to visit Israel’s chief rabbi in Israel, one of them tried to explain that while Jews were descendants of Judah, Mormons were descendants of Joseph. Rabbi Goren interrupted to say that he, at least, was not a descendant of Judah, but of Joseph. While most Jews do not know their tribal affiliation, it is clear that they include representatives of all or most of the tribes of Israel. Jewish descendants of Levi and Joseph frequently have family traditions tying them to those tribes.

the process whereby all pieces of evidence are examined and a determination of probability is made. It is a lesson that both LDS and non-LDS researchers must learn.

A case in point is the Tanners' declaration, cited from page 23 of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, that "all the evidence points to the fact that Joseph Smith had to be extremely evasive with regard to the war material he had originally prepared in the 116 pages because he could not accurately reproduce it again" (p. 88). "All the evidence" is rather hyperbolic,¹⁵ especially since the evidence of the text itself is that the small plates were not to be used for recording history. The Tanners may choose to reject this latter evidence, but it would nevertheless be more accurate for them to write something like "some evidence leads us to believe" or "based on our examination of the evidence, we conclude." Their *a priori* assumption that Joseph Smith was a charlatan determines what they consider "evidence." To be sure, the same could be said of those who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet and consider only his explanation as valid. For my part, I can say that, having examined the evidence for the Tanners' theory and for Joseph Smith's declarations, I find the former unconvincing and the latter reasonable if one admits the *possibility* of divine revelation. Removing the divine aspects from Joseph Smith's story would make the Book of Mormon untrue, but would not validate the "black hole" theory.

The Book of Abraham

The Tanners devote six pages of their new book to an appendix entitled "Tvedtnes' Attempt to Save the Book of Abraham." Since the book purports to be a response to critics of their "black hole" theory, the appendix seems rather out of place. I can only conclude that it has been included to cast doubts on my abilities as a scholar. I suppose I could simply respond by pointing out that, at the time Richley Crapo and I published our first articles on the subject, I was still an undergraduate student.

¹⁵ We shall see other examples of their hyperbole when we discuss their views about the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence against the Book of Mormon, later in this article.

Since that time, I have earned four degrees and a modest reputation, for which, however, I do not claim infallibility.

Nevertheless, the Tanners have erred in their assessment of my work on the Book of Abraham. It is clear from his statements that Professor Baer did not understand that we were postulating a preexistent Abrahamic text to which a mnemonic key was later added. Otherwise, he could not have said what he did about the insignificance of the word *the* or *this*. Baer made some minor points with which I agree and that I hope to reexamine when time permits. Despite these, the theory is, as Richley and I pointed out, a working theory designed to explain how the Book of Abraham may have come about.

Richley's comments about the study of how students divided the Egyptian words on the small Sensen papyrus do not affect the theory.¹⁶ I did not see that part of the study. The portion of the study that fell into my hands was different in nature and showed that the students in two groups (a test group and a control group) did not reproduce Joseph Smith's work. I would like to see the word-division test performed with a larger group that would provide us some statistical probabilities.

Since I did my work on the Book of Abraham in 1968–71, a lot of new discoveries have been made by me and by others. Some of my own work was presented in detail three years ago in a series of lectures I gave on the Book of Abraham and summaries of the work of several people were presented about two years ago in a F.A.R.M.S. working group. Unfortunately, I don't think that the LDS reading public is going to rush to purchase a new book on the topic.

The “Problem” of Doctrine and Covenants 10 and 132

In *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (pp. 37–38), the Tanners cite the theory of “Mormon scholar Max Parkin” that Doctrine and Covenants 10 is a composite of two different revelations received at two different times, then declare that “the idea of two different dates does not give one a great deal

¹⁶ Richley Crapo, “Etic and Emic Approaches.” in *Book of Abraham Symposium*, ed. John A. Tvedtnes (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Institute of Religion, 1970), 33.

of confidence in *Joseph Smith's methods*." What we're dealing with here is *not* known facts about how Doctrine and Covenants 10 came to be, but Parkin's *conjecture*. I fail to see how an unsubstantiated theory can reflect poorly on Joseph Smith. I know of no evidence whatsoever that Joseph Smith combined two different revelations of different dates to give us Doctrine and Covenants 10.¹⁷

The Tanners respond by saying that their words referred to Parkin's theory, not to the fact that Doctrine and Covenants 10 had been assigned different dates in various editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. However, in the context of their original wording (though not necessarily their intent), repeated on page 69 of the present work, the Tanners' words "the idea of two different dates"¹⁸ still seem to refer to the dates assigned to the revelation in different editions of the Doctrine and Covenants rather than to Parkin's theory, which comprises only part of the paragraph and which is *based* on the different dates. In their new book (p. 70), they admit that they agree with Parkin's assessment. I pointed out in my earlier review (cited by the Tanners without noting the implications) that *both times* the revelation was published under Joseph Smith's direction (1833 Book of Commandments and 1835 Doctrine and Covenants), it bore the date of May 1829 and that the alternate date of "summer 1828"

¹⁷ In my review of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, I indicated that "The Tanners believe (p. 35) that the real date [of D&C 10] was May 1829" (*RBBM* 3 [1991]: 210). In their response, they correct me on this issue (p. 70), indicating that they said no such thing on page 35. I had assumed, from their quote of Parkin as support for their views (p. 34, not 35) that they agreed with his evidence for the 1829 dating. This assumption was bolstered by the fact that the Tanners also appear to have accepted Parkin's conclusion that D&C 10 was an amalgam of two revelations, the later of which was written in May 1829, which would make the whole an 1829 production, especially in view of the suggestion that Joseph Smith may have made changes in the original. I was pleased that, in their response, the Tanners corrected my misreading of their intent and that they quickly returned to the issue they were addressing rather than expanding on my failing eyesight (reading p. 35 instead of 34).

¹⁸ If, instead of "the idea of two different dates," the Tanners had written "the combining of two revelations from different dates," I might have grasped their meaning. But even their real intentions make no sense, since they are discussing Parkin's theory which, unless proven to be factual, cannot possibly reflect on Joseph Smith's work.

was added by *later editors*.¹⁹ Parkin's theory is therefore not even based on Joseph Smith's own indications of the date. To judge Joseph Smith on the basis of such guesswork is hardly fair.

The Tanners also fault Joseph Smith for assigning a date of 12 July 1843 to the revelation on plural marriage (D&C 132), when it is clear that he had been engaged in the practice for several years (pp. 69–70). (This is hardly news; it has been noted in LDS records since the mid-nineteenth century.) Indicating that the “same sort of methodology” was used in this case as in that suggested by Parkin for Doctrine and Covenants 10, the Tanners imply that Joseph Smith is being deceptive in assigning an 1843 date to the revelation. The fact is that Joseph did not record a revelation when he was first told to practice plural marriage. He wrote the 1843 revelation only after Emma insisted that she would no longer support the principle unless she had the revelation in writing.²⁰ A divine revelation need not be written, only obeyed.

The Tanners, again following Parkin, take Joseph Smith to task for changing some of the wording in Doctrine and Covenants 10 after its original publication. This “really bothers us,” they declare (p. 70). They have long been bothered by this and other changes to some of Joseph's revelations. Strangely, these changes seem to have not concerned Joseph Smith's early followers, who were acquainted with both the “before” and the “after” versions. They readily accepted the idea that God was the source of the revelations and that he could reword them at will. This may be too simplistic for the Tanners, but it fits the pattern of at least one Bible prophet, Jeremiah, who redictated his earlier book, burned by order of the king, and added more information to the second edition (Jeremiah 36:32).²¹

¹⁹ *RBBM* 3 (1991): 210, n. 10.

²⁰ See the footnotes to the discussion of D&C 132 in Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1985), 347–49. This was not the only time that early Latter-day Saints, based on their Protestant heritage of adherence to the written “word of God,” insisted on a written document before believing revelations declared by Joseph Smith.

²¹ Compare the apocryphal story of how Ezra, with divine assistance, restored lost Bible books to compile what we now call the “Old Testament” (4 Ezra 14:18–48).

The Book of Lehi “Problem”

Repeating what they wrote in *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, the Tanners see problems with Joseph Smith’s statement, in the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, that the 116 pages came from the “book of Lehi.” They point out that “the Preface was completely removed from later editions” (p. 65), implying that the removal was necessitated by the fact that the preface contradicted the assertion in Doctrine and Covenants 10:44 that the 116 pages were from “an abridgment of the account of Nephi.” (On p. 38 of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, they say that “it was embarrassing to the church and is no longer included in the Book of Mormon.”) That the 116 pages had to comprise more than just the account of Lehi (or an abridgment thereof) is clear from the fact that, by the time those pages were taken, Joseph Smith had already reached the time of King Benjamin (D&C 10:41), who lived four centuries after Lehi. This fact alone argues against the idea that Joseph Smith changed his story in midstream.

In *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (p. 38), the Tanners wrote, “Since Joseph Smith could not accurately reproduce the material which he claimed Mormon had abridged from Lehi’s plates, he found it necessary to have Lehi’s son, Nephi, create an entirely different set of plates, known as the ‘plates of Nephi.’ These plates also passed down to Mormon who abridged them in the same way he did the ‘plates of Lehi.’ □ That Joseph Smith didn’t invent the plates of Nephi after the 116 pages were lost is clear from Doctrine and Covenants 10:38–39 where, referring to “those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands” (the 116 pages), the Lord tells Joseph, “You remember it was said *in those writings* that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi.” Clearly, the 116 pages had to have mentioned the plates of Nephi; otherwise, Joseph Smith would have been placing himself in a position of being exposed for fraud, since (1) Martin Harris would have known whether those pages spoke of such plates, and (2) Joseph believed that the pages could be produced by those who had possession of them.

The Tanners suggest that, when the 116 pages were stolen, Joseph Smith aborted a plan that had Mormon abridging the plates of Lehi (p. 65). If he gave up this plan, why did he even mention the supposedly “earlier” plan by speaking of the book and plates of Lehi in the preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon? Wouldn’t that work against him? And why speak in the small plates of “the record which has been kept by my father” (1 Nephi 6:1)? Surely by the time Joseph Smith dictated this chapter, if he were making up the story as he went along, he would have gotten straight in his mind how he would explain the material. Why add items that the Tanners or others could readily show to be “inconsistent”?

The Tanners’ insistence that “the plates of Lehi” were the source from which, according to Joseph Smith’s 1830 preface, Mormon abridged the book of Lehi, is hardly evidence that the Prophet changed his story and had Mormon abridging the “plates of Nephi” instead. As I pointed out in my original review, the “plates of Nephi” are mentioned as the source of Mormon’s work several times in that part of the Book of Mormon dictated after the 116 pages, beginning as early as Mosiah 1:6, 16. If Joseph changed his story that early, why would he include the information about Lehi in the preface, which he obviously wrote later, perhaps after dictating the whole book? And if the 116 pages claimed to have been taken from the “plates of Lehi” (as separate from Nephi’s work), then wouldn’t Joseph Smith be opening himself to exposure as a fraud by having the rest of Mormon’s abridgment claim to have been taken from the “plates of Nephi”? Had someone made the 116 pages public, he would have been caught in a lie.

That there is no real contradiction in speaking of both the “plates of Lehi” (in the 1830 preface) and the “plates of Nephi” (in D&C 10) is indicated in the fact that the small “plates of Nephi” (1 Nephi 9:2) are later called “the plates of Jacob . . . made by the hand of Nephi” (Jacob 3:14), though several others also wrote on them. Nephi copied his father’s record onto the large plates (1 Nephi 19:1–2).

If, as the Tanners believe, the 116 lost pages contained only the “Book of Lehi,” then where did Nephi write the things to which he refers in the small plates. He says that *he* (not his father

Lehi) had written a history, including stories of warfare, on his “other plates” (1 Nephi 9:2–4; 19:4). If the 116 pages still existed in Joseph Smith's day, would he not be jeopardizing his work by making such references in the small plates—references that could be shown to be incorrect simply by producing the 116 pages?

The Small Plates

This brings us to what the Tanners have to say about Mormon's declaration that the small plates comprised a “small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this King Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi” (Words of Mormon 1:3). The fact that Nephi is not mentioned at the beginning of this statement prompted the Tanners to suggest that this is evidence that Joseph Smith may have, at one time, considered deriving the small plates from a set of plates kept by Jacob and the prophets. That suggestion, however, makes sense only if Words of Mormon was written before 1 Nephi through Omni, at a point where, in the Tanners' “black hole” theory, Joseph Smith had not yet settled on his final plan for replacing the 116 lost pages. If Words of Mormon was written last, as the manuscripts suggest, then it seems unlikely that Joseph Smith could have forgotten that he had just dictated the small plates, most of which comprised Nephi's record. Had Joseph Smith been the author of the Book of Mormon, would it not be more logical that he list Nephi first? But if Mormon had read the small plates along with all the other materials that had come into his possession, he might very well have spoken of the line of “the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this King Benjamin,” in whose hands the plates remained for most of the time during which their writings were engraved.

The Tanners fault me for writing in my review that “it is much more logical to assume that Mormon singled out Jacob because most of the writings on the small plates were by his descendants and because the plates were passed down in that line.”²² I am not so ignorant of the size of Nephi's writings compared to the others on the small plates as to suggest that the

²² *RBBM* 3 (1991): 210.

writings of Jacob and his descendants covered more pages. Yet this is what the Tanners accuse me of, repeating their count of the chapters (p. 68). It was not more chapters that Jacob and his descendants wrote, but more *separate entries or books*. Had I used the singular “writing,” I would have been wrong. But my words “most of the *writings*” should not be interpreted as “most of the *chapters*,” as the Tanners have done.²³

The Timing of Christ’s Birth

The Tanners devote pages 45–49 of their new book to what they see as a fatal discrepancy in the Book of Mormon account. Since Lehi and Nephi knew that Christ would be born some 600 years after they left Jerusalem, it is inconceivable, to the Tanners, that Alma could indicate that “we know not how soon” Christ would come and wish “that it might be in my day” (Alma 13:25). They point out that Tom Nibley, Matt Roper, and I have responded to this “problem” in three different ways. Nibley and Roper, for example, pointed out that verse 24 made it clear that Alma was referring not to Christ’s birth, but to “his coming in his glory.” Roper and I both suggested that the 600 years of 1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 25:19 is an approximation—six centuries, not precisely six hundred years. I suggested that Alma may not have been aware of the prophecies of Nephi and Lehi. All of these can, in fact, be true simultaneously. The Tanners may accuse me of “trying to ride two [or three] horses at the same time,” as they did on a related subject (p. 49). But since there is nothing mutually exclusive in the three approaches, it is a non-issue. The Tanners are merely following their usual ploy of pitting LDS scholars against each other, describing differences of approach rather than of real facts.

The Tanners note that when Alma said of Christ's coming, “would to God that it might be in my day” (Alma 13:25), he held a belief that the “event might occur in his day” (p. 46). Actually, the *opposite* is true. There are two Hebrew expressions that the King James translators rendered “would [to] God that”

²³ The current chapters are a late division of the Book of Mormon. To count them makes as much sense as counting pages. I was not discussing the number of pages, but the number of entries or books.

or “would that.”²⁴ In all but one case that I found in the Bible (Genesis 30:34),²⁵ the situation being described is clearly one that is *impossible* of fulfillment. Note the following:

- “Would to God we had died” (Exodus 16:3); “would God that we had died” (Numbers 14:2 [twice]; 20:3); “would God I had died for thee” (2 Samuel 18:33); the speakers obviously hadn't died.
- “Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29); unfortunately, they were not.
- “Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan” (Joshua 7:7); they had, however, crossed the river.
- “Would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech” (Judges 9:29); the speaker did not govern the people.
- “I would there were a sword in mine hand” (Numbers 22:29); there wasn't.

In addition to Alma 13:25, the Book of Mormon uses the expression “would to God” in two other passages, both of which reflect an impossibility of fulfillment:

- “Would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God” (Jacob 1:8); they couldn't.
- “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime” (Alma 39:7); the crime had already been committed.

The Tanners indicate that Samuel's declaration about the coming of Christ “appeared to be a startling new prophecy” and that if Lehi and Nephi had really foreseen his coming in 600 years, as the small plates indicate, “the Nephites should have already known exactly when Christ would come into the world,”

²⁴ Neither Hebrew idiom mentions God. The King James translators similarly added the divine title in another Hebrew expression, changing “may the king live” to “God save the king,” to correspond to the formula used in the British coronation ceremony (1 Samuel 10:24; 2 Samuel 16:16; 2 Kings 11:12; 2 Chronicles 23:11).

²⁵ Even this may have been intended by Laban as an expression of impossibility.

so Samuel's five-year prophecy would be of no value (p. 53; see also p. 51). But since the Nephites of Samuel's day were wicked, we should not expect that they were well-versed in the scriptures, even in prophecies of Christ's coming.²⁶ Besides, the *new* element in Samuel's prophecy is *not* the five years, but that he gives *signs* of Christ's coming. It was because they had not yet seen the signs—not because someone had watched the calendar to see when 600 years had passed—that the nonbelievers decided to execute the believers unless Samuel's prophecy came to pass (3 Nephi 1:5–9).

The “Black Hole”

According to the “black hole” theory, Joseph Smith had to replace the lost 116 pages with material that he pretended came from another source, which he called the “small plates of Nephi.” In composing the story, he had to avoid details that might conflict with what was on the 116 pages, lest they be produced and thereby prove him a liar. But an examination of the Book of Mormon shows that material taken from Mormon's abridgment (notably Mosiah and Alma) reflects information that is also found on the small plates. Since, according to the Tanners' theory, Joseph Smith had not yet conceived of the idea of the small plates, we must presume that this information was included in the 116 pages. In this case, if Joseph were the author of the Book of Mormon, rather than its translator, wouldn't he be placing himself in the same danger by including this material in later portions of the Book of Mormon? I refer to the following passages:

- Mosiah 1:16–17 contains information about things, such as the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, that are mentioned in the small plates.
- Mosiah 10:12–16 discusses events in the life of Nephi that are also reported in 1–2 Nephi.

²⁶ Metcalfe does note that Helaman 8:22 indicates that Lehi and Nephi and others had prophesied the coming of Christ (*New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 417). But he, like the Tanners, who cite him (pp. 53–54), does not recognize the importance of that statement in the light of the fact that such prophecies were subsequently dictated by Joseph Smith from the small plates.

- Mosiah 11:13 speaks of a tower north of Shilom that “had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land” of Nephi. The flight obviously refers to the departure of Mosiah₁ from his homeland, which is mentioned on the small plates in the book of Omni. In this case, Mormon’s abridgment includes details not known from the small plates and which, consequently, had to be on the large plates and most probably included in the abridgment that formed the 116 lost pages.
- Alma 3:6–17 speaks of the skin curse imposed on the Lamanites, which is known from the small plates. Significantly, it includes words uttered by the Lord to Nephi (verses 14–17) that are not found on the small plates.

If these items were not recorded on the 116 lost pages, they would have made little or no sense in the books of Mosiah and Alma. Were Joseph Smith the author of the Book of Mormon, he would have placed himself in danger of being caught in his fraud by talking about these items in the small plates, where he might have contradicted what he had dictated earlier. This is particularly true of the detailed descriptions of the liahona (1 Nephi 16:10, 27–29) and the sword of Laban (1 Nephi 4:9). All of this suggests to me that there is no “black hole.”

One of the most unconvincing parts of the Tanners’ “black hole” work has been their insistence that “important material that should be found on the small plates of Nephi is missing” (p. 75). But the list of what “should be found” is their own. The fact that the express purpose of the small plates is said to be religious, rather than historical, in nature, is unacceptable to the Tanners.

Missing Festivals

The Tanners find fault with the Book of Mormon for not naming any of the Jewish festivals of the Old Testament. Why they should insist on the very names and ignore the evidence for the observance of some of these festivals is beyond me. Their mathematical game doesn’t really shed any light on the matter. Most of the Old Testament references to the festivals are found in the law of Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy), where they are instituted. One cannot compare this legal code with the Book of Mormon, which is mostly prophecy, preaching, and history. It

would be more reasonable to compare Mormon's abridgment with the main history of the Israelites, found in Joshua through 2 Kings. Most Bible scholars agree that the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings were compiled or redacted at the same time and comprised the essential history of ancient Israel from the time of the conquest of the promised land down to the exile therefrom.²⁷ In this sense, it is roughly parallel in nature, though not in time, with the Nephite record.²⁸

Noting that Passover is mentioned 77 times in the Bible (I found only 45 in the Old Testament) and unleavened bread 43 times, the Tanners write, "We would expect, therefore, to find a significant number of references to that festival in the Book of Mormon," along with references to its associated Feast of Unleavened Bread (p. 94).²⁹ In their count, they fail to tell us that

²⁷ For example, note the similar phraseology found in Judges 3:7; 6:25–30; 1 Kings 14:15–16, 22–23; 16:31–33; 2 Kings 13:6; 17:10–12, 16; 21:3.

²⁸ 1–2 Chronicles are a later rewriting of the books of Samuel and Kings, which they contradict at many points. Prepared by priests and designed to reflect post-exilic Judaism, the Chronicles, while useful and sometimes incorporating materials from other sources, are not as reliable as the earlier records. Since the Chronicles reflect Jewish beliefs that postdate Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, they are, along with the New Testament, less instructive about how the Nephites would have seen the festivals. The books of Chronicles in our Bibles are *not* the ancient "chronicles of the kings" of Judah and Israel sometimes referred to in 1–2 Kings as a source of additional information. Of interest to Latter-day Saints is the fact that the books of Samuel and Kings (which are termed 1–4 Kings in the Septuagint) are evidently abridgments of earlier contemporary annals of the kings. In this respect, they are a precedent for the two sets of records kept by Nephi (one a shorter version with emphasis on spiritual matters) and the abridgment prepared by Mormon.

²⁹ The Tanners note that the feast of unleavened bread and possibly the Sabbath are mentioned on ostraca from Elephantine (p. 132). Might we find the same kind of thing on Nephite ostraca? They also note that since the Nephites were "orthodox" in following the law of Moses, while the Jews at Elephantine were "heterodox," "one would expect to find much more detailed material in the Book of Mormon relating to Jewish religious practices than in the Elephantine papyri" (p. 129). A lot of assumptions are being made here. By all accounts, Lehi found himself differing with the Jews at Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:18–20), who drove him out of Jerusalem because he taught of the Messiah to come (Helaman 8:22). As for the Jews of Elephantine, I suspect that they viewed themselves as orthodox Jews, despite what those at Jerusalem might have thought of their wayward practices and beliefs.

some biblical references to “unleavened bread/cakes” are not in the context of a festival and are simply mentioned as things eaten (Genesis 19:3; Judges 6:19–21; 1 Samuel 28:24; 1 Chronicles 23:29).

Most references to the two festivals of Passover and unleavened bread are found in the law of Moses. But in the main history portion of the Old Testament (Joshua through 2 Kings), there are only two references to them. Joshua and the Israelites celebrated the two feasts after crossing the Jordan river into the land of Canaan (Joshua 5:10–11). It is likely that this was the first time they had celebrated the feasts since the exodus. Joshua 5:2–9 expressly states that, prior to the celebration, they circumcised all Israelite males for the first time since leaving Egypt. (In Exodus 12:43–48, we read that uncircumcised males cannot participate in the Passover feast.) Later, we read that when a copy of the law (Deuteronomy, according to most Bible scholars) was inadvertently discovered in the time of King Josiah, he and his people celebrated the Passover with unleavened bread (2 Kings 23:9, 21–23; 2 Chronicles 35:1, 6–9, 11, 13, 16–19). In both cases, we are dealing with the *reinstitution* of the festival, *not* an annual observance. The chroniclers later credited King Hezekiah with a similar celebration (2 Chronicles 30:1–2, 5, 15, 18, 21), but this may have been an attempt to build up Hezekiah, who was highly revered in post-exilic times.³⁰ In this case, too, we are dealing with a reinstitution of the festival, of which, we are informed, there had not been “the like in Jerusalem” “since the time of Solomon” (2 Chronicles 30:26).

In the historical text of Joshua through 2 Kings, there is no mention of the feast of Tabernacles or of booths. Indeed, when it was reinstated in the days of Ezra, it was noted that the feast had not been celebrated “since the days of Jeshua [Joshua]” (Nehemiah 8:17). The only reference to circumcision in Joshua–2 Kings is the one performed in conjunction with the celebration in Joshua 5, noted above. Almost all the other references to circumcision are in the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy). The Tanners cite Moroni 8:8, which speaks of the abolition of circumcision by Christ, and declare that it is “a very

³⁰ Later Jewish tradition makes Hezekiah a prime candidate for the Messiahship.

strange statement because there seems to be no evidence in the Book of Mormon that it was ever practiced” (p. 95). We could say the same of the historical record of the Israelites, with the sole exception of Joshua. Moreover, the very fact that circumcision is mentioned in Moroni 8:8 shows that Joseph Smith, if he authored the Book of Mormon, was aware that it should have been a normal practice among an ancient Israelite group. Why, then, would he avoid mentioning it earlier in the Book of Mormon? My answer, which will undoubtedly not satisfy the Tanners, is that he *did not author* the Book of Mormon and that its true authors, like the author(s) of Joshua–2 Kings, accepted circumcision as a given and saw no need to explain it. As for the complaint that the only other references to circumcision in the Book of Mormon are to circumcision of the heart (p. 95), we should point out that this concept began with Moses (Deuteronomy 10:16) and was repeated by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4), a contemporary of Lehi.

I believe that the Nephites, like the ancient Israelites, accepted the festivals, the sabbaths, and other ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses as a given and therefore found no need to mention them at every turn in the road. That they did, indeed, practice unnamed ceremonies is confirmed in Mosiah 19:24, where we read, “And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi.” The fact that “the ceremony” is mentioned only in passing and is not described suggests that it was such a normal thing that there was no need to explain it. I believe that these Nephites, who had just slain their king and perhaps others in battle, underwent the purification required under the law of Moses for those who had touched dead bodies. I have submitted an article on this subject, entitled “The Nephite Purification Ceremony,” to the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.³¹

The Tanners criticize John Welch for suggesting that the “trump of God” in Alma 29:1 shows that the Nephites practiced

³¹ Like my feast of Tabernacles work, I happened upon the ideas given in this article. I was not looking for “evidence” to support the Book of Mormon. Rather, when, on an occasion more than a decade ago I was reading the passage, I suddenly realized the implications of the word *ceremony*.

the blowing of the *shofar* at the new year.³² They write, “It is hard for us to understand how the mention of the ‘trump of God,’ which appears about 120 pages after King Benjamin’s speech in the Book of Mormon,³³ provides evidence” for this practice (p. 123). Anyone unacquainted with the use of the *shofar* would naturally be confused. It is necessary to understand that, for the Jews, the blowing of the *shofar* at the so-called “new year,” the first day of the month of Tishre, is considered an announcement to mankind to repent and prepare for the judgment, which is precisely what Alma is saying in Alma 29:1. That judgment, they believe, takes place on *Yom kippur*, the “day of atonement,” nine days later, when the names of the righteous are “sealed” in heaven.³⁴ Four days after that, when the danger of damnation is past, the people celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles

There is abundant evidence in Mosiah 1–6 that the Nephites, on this occasion at least, observed the feast of Tabernacles. Yet the Tanners state, “We are so certain that these six chapters contain nothing concerning the Feast of Tabernacles or any other Jewish festival that we are including the entire text in this response” (p. 100).

Simply *saying* that there is no evidence that Mosiah 1–6 has a relationship to the feast of Tabernacles is not enough. I wrote two lengthy articles on this subject, detailing features shared by the Jewish and Old Testament feast of Tabernacles and the Nephite

³² John W. Welch, *King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals* (F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985), 21–23.

³³ Only the Tanners can tell us the relevance of the “120 pages” that separate King Benjamin’s speech from Alma’s declaration. Welch did not indicate that Alma was discussing king Benjamin’s assembly. I suspect that this is just another way of emphasizing what the Tanners see as the absurdity of the situation. Following such reasoning, we should perhaps count the number of pages that separate Moses’ declaration about the special prophet to come (Deuteronomy 18:15) from its fulfillment in Christ (Acts 3:22).

³⁴ Hence the Jewish new year greeting, *hatimah tovah*, literally, “a good sealing.”

assembly under King Benjamin.³⁵ Unless the Tanners can show that these shared features do *not* exist, they should refrain from their strong assertions. They have *completely failed* to address the evidence.

The following is a list of features associated with the ancient Israelite feast of Tabernacles that are also found in connection with the Nephite assembly under King Benjamin.

- The people assemble at the temple
- The king or political leader presides from a raised platform
- People dwell by families in booths or tents
- Special sacrifices are offered
- Exhortations addressed to the adults specifically exclude children
- The law is read (especially the “paragraph of the king”)
- God’s mercy and salvation are mentioned
- Recitation is made of God’s dealings with his people
- Recitation is made of the commandments of God
- Recitation is made of the curses and blessings of the law
- The people are exhorted to love and serve God
- The people are promised prosperity if they obey God
- The people, in chorus, make a covenant of obedience
- The people prostrate themselves to worship
- Sometimes the coronation of the king is involved
- Sometimes the names of the covenanters are taken
- The king blesses the people

It should be readily apparent that the Nephite assembly parallels the feast of Tabernacles in a large number of features. By contrast, only a few of these features can be found in the nineteenth-century camp meetings to which the Tanners compare Mosiah 1–6 (pp. 134–35). Indeed, some of these may not have been typical of such meetings. For example, the fact that families

³⁵ John A. Tvedtnes, “The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles,” in *Tinkling Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, ed. John W. Welch (privately published by John W. Welch, 1978), and “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in *By Study and Also by Faith, Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist & Stephen D. Ricks, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990).

brought their tents to one meeting, as cited by the Tanners (p. 135), is not evidence that this always happened and, indeed, from other contemporary descriptions, this appears not to be the normal thing to do. (I suppose it depended on how far away the meeting was from the settlements.) The building of the platform for the camp meeting speakers seems to be a logical thing to do, in view of the large numbers of people who had to be addressed. From this standpoint, Joseph Smith, had he authored the Book of Mormon, could have used the same logic or simply described what he saw in camp meetings. But the fact that the Book of Mormon says Benjamin had a *tower* constructed moves us from nineteenth-century America to ancient Israel, where the Hebrew term for the platform constructed for the feast of Tabernacles is, in Nehemiah 8:4, called *migdal*, the normal Hebrew word for “tower” (which is the way it is usually translated in KJV).

Metcalf suggested that aspects of the camp meetings were drawn from the biblical feast of Tabernacles.³⁶ To be sure, this would have made it easier for Joseph Smith to borrow the idea from preachers of his time. But if he knew that they were copying the feast of Tabernacles, why didn't he use that term in the Book of Mormon? More important, however, is the fact that Benjamin's assembly includes features of the Feast of Tabernacles not mentioned by the Tanners or Metcalfe in connection with the camp meetings.³⁷ This includes the references to parts of Deuteronomy (notably the paragraph of the king in Deuteronomy 17:14–20) used anciently in the liturgy of the feast of Tabernacles, the fact that the king (rather than the high priest) presided, the coronation ceremony, the assembly at the temple (camp meetings typically being in the countryside), and the fact that, during the meeting, each family remained in its own tent.

One piece of evidence given by the Tanners to refute the idea that King Benjamin presided at a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles is that he had to call the people together (Mosiah 1:10), whereas the ancient Israelites “knew when these festivals took place and automatically gathered to worship the Lord” (p.

³⁶ Brent Metcalfe, *New Approaches*, 421, n. 31.

³⁷ I noted this in my review of Metcalfe in *RBBM* 6/1 (1994): 48.

118).³⁸ But in New Testament times, when we have more information about the festivals, people awaited word from Jerusalem to declare the beginning of the month with the appearance of the new moon. Fire signals were lit on hilltops across the country (and into Babylon) to send the message, later to be replaced by runners.³⁹ For festivals like Passover/Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, which each began at sundown on the fourteenth day of the month (i.e., at the full moon), people had about two weeks' warning. We do not know what the procedure was in Old Testament times, but it is likely that people didn't have calendars hanging on the wall by which they could check the dates of the festivals. Indeed, after Joshua's conquest of Canaan, the only Old Testament festival celebrations in Israel were *declared by the king* (2 Kings 23:1–99, 21–23; 2 Chronicles 30:1–2) or other political leaders (Nehemiah 8:13–15), just as in the Book of Mormon. We cannot reject these parallels simply because they denote a restoration of a discontinued practice; for all we know, King Benjamin may have reinstated the feast in his day.

Firstlings of the Flock

The Tanners, citing M. T. Lamb, point out that, under the law of Moses, the firstborn of the flocks belonged to the Lord and were turned over to the high priest and, while they could be offered as a peace offering, were never used as a sin or burnt offering. Consequently, they say, Mosiah 2:3 is wrong in saying that the Nephites “also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (p. 96). Various responses to this dilemma have been given, including the one cited by the Tanners (p. 99) in which L. Ara Norwood indicates that the word *firstling* could have been a mistake made by Mormon in his abridgment.⁴⁰ While this is not impossible, I think there is a simpler answer. Since the Nephites were not descendants of Aaron, there were no Aaronic priests to

³⁸ I discussed this in “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 2:234, n. 65.

³⁹ Mishnah *Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:2–4.

⁴⁰ *RBBM* 3(1991): 160–61, 165–66.

whom the firstlings could be given. In Genesis 4:4, we read that Abel, who lived long before Aaron and consequently could not deliver his animals to priests of that line, brought “of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” and offered sacrifice to the Lord. In the case of the Nephites, since there were no Aaronic priests to whom the firstlings could be given, it probably made perfectly good sense to offer them directly to the Lord as burnt offerings, as had been done in earlier generations. This is perfectly logical, in view of the fact that they, as Israelites but not descendants of Aaron, would not have been permitted to consume the firstlings or make other use of them. (The law of Moses even forbade working a firstborn bullock or shearing the wool of a firstborn sheep).

Bible Plagiarism

The Tanners repeat some of their earlier assertions that Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible to compose the Book of Mormon. Some LDS writers believe that the Lord revealed the translation of the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages and Jesus’ sermon in the language of the King James Bible (KJV). If one accepts the principle of divine revelation, that is certainly an acceptable possibility. For my part, I have no problem with Joseph Smith using the Bible directly and making changes only when there were serious differences.⁴¹ Not having been present at the time, I do not know if he had a Bible with him when he dictated the Book of Mormon to his scribes. The fact that he usually eliminated words that in the KJV of Isaiah are italicized hints that he may have used the Bible itself. But it is not impossible that the Lord had him eliminate these words, which, after all, represent English words added to the text to make more sense out of the underlying Hebrew.

I am convinced, at any rate, that had Joseph Smith given a totally new rendition of Isaiah for these passages, the Book of Mormon would not have been as well accepted as it was. When Robert Lisle Lindsey began his work with the gospel of Mark in Israel, he initially translated it “into simple modern Hebrew from

⁴¹ The Tanners note that this was the view of B. H. Roberts and Sidney B. Sperry (p. 158).

the Greek text. The text was then distributed to Hebrew-speaking readers and comments invited.” Many of those who reviewed the work expressed “the desire that the Gospels, as ancient works, should be read in Old Testament Hebrew style.”⁴² His biblical Hebrew translation subsequently received great reviews. I suggest that the same thing would have happened had Joseph Smith rendered the Isaiah passages into early nineteenth-century English.⁴³ Indeed, it was not until the turn of that century that scholars were even prepared to modify the KJV text and even after they did so, many people (even today) found it hard to accept.⁴⁴

In explaining their position on biblical “plagiarism” in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners note that, while they are not opposed to the use of Bible passages *per se* in the Book of Mormon, “what we do object to is [Joseph] Smith appropriating Bible verses and stories into his own works . . . and claiming that he is translating from ancient documents” (p. 140). Ironically, what they describe is precisely what the translators of the King James Bible did.⁴⁵

Written instructions to the King James Bible translation committee told them to revise the Bishop’s Bible (largely a revision of William Tyndale’s translation) rather than to begin a new translation, but to make any necessary corrections based on the Hebrew and Greek. After the work had begun, the translators were given permission to consult the translations of Tyndale, Coverdale, and Geneva, and to use their wording “when they agree better with the text” of the Hebrew and Greek. They were

⁴² Robert Lisle Lindsey, in his Introduction to *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Baptist House, n.d.), 76; see also 78–79.

⁴³ The Tanners reject Dan Peterson’s suggestion (*RBBM* 5 [1993]: 51–2) that nineteenth-century Bible readers would expect that scriptural works would be written in the KJV language (p. 138).

⁴⁴ Whenever someone asks me why Latter-day Saints continue to use the KJV rather than a more modern English translation of the Bible, I refer them to statements by the First Presidency and add that were we to abandon the KJV, the Bible parallels in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants would no longer make sense. The Tanners will probably like this one!

⁴⁵ There is “plagiarism” in the ancient Bible texts as well. Anyone who knows the Bible well is aware that Isaiah 2:2–4 parallels Micah 4:1–3. We cannot be sure which of these prophets was quoting the other, but it is significant that neither gives credit to the other. Should we apply the Tanners’ standards for plagiarism to these Bible passages as well?

also instructed to retain familiar passages “as they were vulgarly used.” But the committee also referred to Spanish, French, Italian, and German translations, as also to the Vulgate and other Latin versions, the Syriac New Testament and the Aramaic Targum, and even to the new English Catholic Rheims-Douay Bible, from which they took some Latin terms (e.g., “firmament”) that had been left untranslated from the Vulgate.

Though archaic, Tyndale’s English was retained in the King James Bible, of which 90% comes from Tyndale (e.g., “lylies of the field” in Matthew 6:28, despite the fact that lilies are not meant). In some cases, Tyndale’s wording was kept but some key terms changed (e.g., “love” changed to “charity”). In other cases where the Bishop’s Bible had changed Tyndale’s wording, KJV returned to the original. So the King James Bible is blatant “plagiarism.” The revised Bible versions produced at the turn of the century in the U.S. and Great Britain were produced in the same manner. So Joseph Smith did nothing different from what the KJV translators had done. Having laid this foundation, let us now turn to some of the Book of Mormon’s borrowings of KJV language.

The Tanners note that there are a number of occurrences of the expression “the Holy One of Israel” in 2 Nephi 9 (verses 11–12, 15, 18–19, 23–26, 40–41, 51) and conclude that it was picked up from Isaiah 50:1–52:2,⁴⁶ cited in the two preceding chapters, 2 Nephi 7–8. It is hardly news that Jacob used terminology drawn from Isaiah’s writings; I thought everyone had noticed. However, the expression, though it is used 26 times in Isaiah (including Isaiah 49:7), is not used in the Isaiah passages (49:22–52:2) quoted in this portion of the Book of Mormon.⁴⁷ The Tanners predictably conclude that “there can be little doubt that Joseph Smith picked up these words from the prophet Isaiah” (pp. 121–22). It is quite possible that the words were adopted from Isaiah, but, in order to assume that Joseph Smith picked them up, one must *a priori* believe that he is the author of the Book of Mormon. If, on the other hand, one believes, as 2 Nephi

⁴⁶ Actually, earlier in the same discourse, Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 6:6–7) and Isaiah 49:24–26 (2 Nephi 6:16).

⁴⁷ It is also found in 2 Kings 19:22 and three times in Psalms. A variant form, “the Holy One of Jacob,” is found in Isaiah 29:23.

6:1 reports, that all of 2 Nephi 6–9 is a discourse by Nephi’s brother Jacob, then one can conclude that it was Jacob who borrowed the words from Isaiah. The Tanners’ “little doubt,” like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

The Tanners conclude that, since 2 Nephi 9 “is actually supposed to be Nephi’s report of a speech by his brother Jacob[,] we would expect, then, that when we come to the actual book of Jacob, it would be filled with this phrase . . . in fact, Jacob never uses this expression in any part of his book” (p. 122). They gloss over the fact that, in 2 Nephi 9:1 (also 6:8), Jacob makes reference to what he had just read from Isaiah, then proceeds to give an explanation of the passage. Since he was expounding on chapters 49–52 of Isaiah, we should think it very unusual if he did *not* use words from the prophet whose writings he was explaining.⁴⁸ But in the book of Jacob, he was not explaining passages from Isaiah, so we should not require him to use the term “Holy One of Israel” there. Similarly, were I to give a public address on the Fourth of July, I might use words such as *independence*, *patriot*, *founding fathers*, and the like—words that you probably won’t find in any of my other writings.

After having noted the distribution of the term “Holy One of Israel,” the Tanners note that, in another of his discourses, Jacob uses the term “Lord of Hosts” six times (Jacob 2:28–30, 32–33). While noting that “these words are found 47 times in the book of Isaiah,” they fail to tell us that they are common in other parts of the Bible as well (252 times), and that it is one of the oldest of the divine titles. To the Tanners, “it is interesting to note that Jacob never uses these words in any other part of his book,” and that, in his quote from the prophet Zenos in Jacob 5, Jacob uses the term “the Lord of the vineyard” thirty-three times, though the term, also found in Mark 12:9, is not used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, (p. 122). They conclude, “From the above we can see that Joseph Smith sometimes latched on to a biblical expression, used it for a short time and then abandoned it for another phrase which caught his attention” (p. 122). They make similar statements in regard to the term “the Lord God Omnipotent,”

⁴⁸ Indeed, in anticipation of his reading of the Isaiah passage, he used the term “Holy One of Israel” three times in chapter 6 of the same discourse (2 Nephi 6:9–10, 15).

known from the book of Revelation, noting that “Joseph Smith used the words . . . only in the portion dealing with King Benjamin’s speech.” Similarly, the term “Lamb of God,” found only in John 1:29, 36, shows up “35 times in the Book of Mormon, but . . . 28 are located in the first two books of Nephi.” The Tanners see, in these examples, “cases where [Joseph Smith] became fascinated with some word or expression he plagiarized, used it a number of times and then suddenly dropped it” (p. 121).

I suppose that’s plausible, if one assumes that he was thumbing through a Bible. But let’s look at the distribution again. “Holy One of Israel” is frequently used by Jacob in a discourse explaining Isaiah passages. “Lord of Hosts” is used extensively in another discourse by Jacob on a *different* subject. “Lord of the vineyard” is found *only* in the prophecy of Zenos. “The Lord God Omnipotent” is found *only* in King Benjamin’s speech. “Lamb of God” is used *almost exclusively* in Nephi’s writings. This looks suspiciously like evidence for *independent authorship* of Nephi, Zenos, Jacob, and King Benjamin’s speech.

As part of their discussion of the assembly over which King Benjamin presided, the Tanners quote all of Mosiah 1–6, comparing some brief passages with New Testament passages from which they believe Joseph Smith plagiarized the words (pp. 101–17).⁴⁹ While they admit that some of these could be “only a coincidence,” an examination of the text suggests not that Joseph Smith deliberately used King James Bible wording, but that it was part of his vocabulary and therefore naturally came to be used in the translation. To illustrate, let’s do a similar study of the first two paragraphs of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.⁵⁰

Gettysburg Address

King James Bible

⁴⁹ The words said to have been taken from the Bible are, for the most part, not specific, but simple expressions of normal speech. In some cases, the New Testament is clearly quoting from the Old Testament (e.g., Mark 12:30 derives from Deuteronomy 6:5, which is repeated in Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:13; Joshua 22:5, and paraphrased in Deuteronomy 13:3; 30:6).

⁵⁰ My selection of the Gettysburg Address for this comparison was prompted by the Tanners’ mention of this document (p. 140).

<p><i>Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth</i></p> <p>on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty and <i>dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.</i></p> <p>Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing <i>whether that nation</i> or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. <i>We have come</i></p> <p><i>to dedicate a portion of that field,</i></p> <p>as a final <i>resting place for those</i> who here <i>gave their lives</i> that that nation <i>might live.</i></p> <p>It is altogether fitting and proper <i>that we should do this.</i></p>	<p>fourscore and seven (1 Chr. 7:5) their fathers, which brought forth (2 Chr. 7:22)</p> <p>dedicated unto the (1 Chr. 18:11) that all men (Job 37:7; John 1:7; 5:23) that all men were (1 Cor. 7:7) all men are (Psalm 116:11) a man mine equal (Psalm 55:13)</p> <p>if that nation (Jer. 18:8)</p> <p>we would have come (1 Thes. 2:8) we . . . are come to (Matt. 2:2) to dedicate (2 Chr. 2:4) the portion of the field (2 Kings 9:25) a portion of (Deut. 33:21) a resting place for them (Num. 10:33) gave their life (Psalm 78:50) might live (Gen. 17:18; Deut. 4:42; Gal. 1:19; 1 John 4:9)</p> <p>that they should do (Neh. 5:12)</p>
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that ye should do that (2 Cor.
13:7)

Now, I don't believe for a moment that Abraham Lincoln was deliberately "plagiarizing" passages from the King James Bible, though it is clear that there are some very close parallels here. In fact, there are *many more* parallels by volume of text than the ones shown by the Tanners for Mosiah 1–6 and the KJV.⁵¹ To what, then, can we attribute Lincoln's use of these expressions that seem so clearly to be biblical? There are two obvious factors: (1) Both Lincoln and the King James translators spoke English. (2) Lincoln, as a Bible-reading man, would have these expressions as part of his vocabulary. What is important here is that the Bible words were used to describe *entirely different circumstances*, and yet were appropriate to those circumstances. I suggest that the same can be said of Book of Mormon passages that resemble the Bible. If, as I have suggested, Joseph Smith deliberately used the King James style so the Book of Mormon would sound like scripture, there is even more reason to find such parallels between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Using language and expressions also found in the King James Bible is *not* plagiarism.

Bible Names in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners note that they found, in the Elephantine papyri, 26 biblical names, while the Book of Mormon had only one, Isaiah, in 3 Nephi 19:4 (pp. 126–27). They excluded, of course, references in these documents to known Bible characters such as Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., which is right, since they are comparing only actual Book of Mormon characters. I find it ironic that they should consider it important that Book of Mormon people have names known also from the Bible; usually, critics of the Book of Mormon point to such parallels as evidence that Joseph Smith just copied from the Bible. But, as the Tanners point out, extrabiblical documents such as the

⁵¹ In a few cases (e.g., "men are created equal" vs. "a man mine equal"), I have gone beyond the exact words to find a parallel, just as the Tanners did. But the parallels are at least as close as the ones the Tanners list and most of them are identical.

Elephantine papyri show that we should expect names like this to show up among expatriate Israelites. Nevertheless, their count comes up short, for there are quite a number of Book of Mormon characters who have a biblical name. The following descendants of Lehi have names that are also found in the Old Testament: Aaron (two men), Amos (two men), Benjamin, Enos, Gideon, Helem, Ishmael, Jacob (two men), Jeremiah, Joseph, Lemuel, Noah, Samuel, Shem, and Zedekiah. In addition, we have Ishmael, whose daughters married Lehi's sons, and Laban, from whom the brass plates were taken, both of whom bear biblical names. In all, I found seventeen Old Testament names (including Isaiah, which the Tanners mention) in the Nephite record. In addition, we have three instances of Lehi and his descendants bearing the same name as a place or a people in the Bible (Ammon, Helam, Lehi). The distinctions blur even more when one realizes that some Bible names were transliterated in different ways by different King James translators. For example, for the Hebrew name normally rendered *Isaiah* in English, we have, in the KJV, the variants *Jesaiiah* (1 Chronicles 3:21; Nehemiah 11:7) and *Jeshaiah* (1 Chronicles 20:3, 15; 26:25; Ezra 8:7, 19). Keeping this in mind, we can compare *Mulek* (Mosiah 25:2) with the biblical personal names *Melech*, *Melchiah*, *Melchishua*, *Melchi-zedek*, *Abi-melech*, and *Ahi-melech*, all from the root meaning "king," and *Nehor* (Alma 1:15) with *Nahor* (Genesis 11:22–29).

A very large number of the names in the Book of Mormon can be explained in terms of Hebrew or Egyptian etymology and, in a few cases, of other ancient Near Eastern names. The evidence is much too extensive to include in this review. Some of the nonbiblical names in the Book of Mormon have also been found in other ancient Near Eastern documents.

Isaiah Quotes in the Book of Mormon

In *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (p. 23–24), the Tanners complained about Joseph Smith's use of Isaiah passages as "filler" on the small plates because he had run out of ideas. "The fact that we already have the same material in our Bible makes the situation even more ridiculous." I responded that this is no more ridiculous than the fact that the Bible itself repeats information in various books. Among my examples, I

noted that Isaiah 36–39 contains material found in 2 Kings 18–20.⁵² In their new book, the Tanners say that “there is far more to this issue.” Ignoring what I had said in my review, they add their inability to believe that Nephi would copy chapters from Isaiah onto plates, since it was so hard to engrave words on plates. Referring to my statement that they applied a double standard, allowing the Bible to repeat earlier passages but denying this right to the Book of Mormon, they note that they had, on pages 79–80 of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, openly noted that Isaiah and 2 Kings shared material. But they still don't get the point. They clearly term “ridiculous” the repetition in the Book of Mormon while accepting it in the Bible, yet proclaim that “there was no double standard used with regard to the repeated material” (p. 136). They then quote from *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (p. 80) a criticism that 1–2 Nephi quote works not yet in existence in Nephi's time. While this is certainly a valid topic for discussion, it has no relevance to their comments about the repetition of Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, since Isaiah clearly predates Nephi. This changing of subject, hopping from one topic to another, and not dealing with the issue at hand, gives the appearance of subjectivity but is wholly inadequate. It gets a little old seeing the Tanners changing the subject to avoid the issue.

What surprised me is that, after the run-around when responding to my comments on how the Tanners treat the Bible and Book of Mormon repeats differently, they return, in their discussion of Craig Ray's review, to the same old thing. In their response to Ray, they write that they have no objection to the Book of Mormon quoting from Bible books that existed prior to Lehi's time, but add that “the extensive quotations from the Book of Isaiah, however, seem to serve no useful purpose, and the use of King James language in these chapters points strongly to the conclusion that they were actually plagiarized from a nineteenth-century Bible, not from ancient plates” (pp. 137–38). I have dealt with the King James language earlier in this review, so let's look at whether the Book of Mormon Isaiah quotes are gratuitous or

⁵² *RBBM* 4 (1992): 197–98.

whether they serve a purpose and, if the latter, whether that purpose is consistent with Nephi's purpose for the small plates.

In 1 Nephi 20–21, Nephi quotes Isaiah chapters 48–49, introducing them with an explanation that, as a remnant of Israel, the Nephites could liken these passages to themselves (1 Nephi 19:23–24). After quoting the two chapters, he expounds on them, speaking of the scattering and gathering of Israel (1 Nephi 22:3–12, 24–25) and of his vision of the scattering of Lehi's seed in the New World and the restoration (1 Nephi 22:7–11). During his explanation, he alludes to the following passages that he had just quoted: Isaiah 49:1 (1 Nephi 22:4), and Isaiah 49:22–23 (1 Nephi 22:6; also v. 8, which includes part of Isaiah 29:14), Isaiah 49:26 (1 Nephi 22:12; cf. Isaiah 60:16, which also has parallels with Isaiah 49:23). He also alludes to some of Isaiah's other writings: Isaiah 29:14 (1 Nephi 22:8), Isaiah 29:18 (2 Nephi 22:12; cf. Isaiah 58:10; 59:9), Isaiah 52:10 (2 Nephi 22:10–11), and Isaiah 60:16 (1 Nephi 22:13).

In a lengthy discourse (2 Nephi 6–10), Jacob quotes from Isaiah 49:24–52:2 (2 Nephi 6:16–8:25). In an earlier part of his discourse, he had quoted Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 6:6–7) and paraphrased Isaiah 29:6 (2 Nephi 6:15), explaining that he would read passages “concerning all the house of Israel” that could be “likened unto” the Nephites (2 Nephi 6:4–5). He explained that the people of Jerusalem had, in fact, been taken captive (2 Nephi 6:8), but that they would, as Isaiah had prophesied, ultimately be gathered (2 Nephi 6:9–11). He expounds on the comments about the Gentiles in Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 6:12–13), adding information from Isaiah 49:24–26 (2 Nephi 6:14, 16–18). Other Isaiah passages used by Jacob in 2 Nephi 6 to discuss the scattering and gathering of Israel include Isaiah 29:8 (1 Nephi 6:13) and Isaiah 29:6 (1 Nephi 6:15). After quoting another lengthy Isaiah passage (Isaiah 50:1–52:2 in 2 Nephi 7:1–8:25), Jacob again expounds on the subject of the gathering found in the passage (2 Nephi 9:2), then turns to the subject of Christ and the atonement (2 Nephi 9:4–42). This is precisely what Abinadi later did when he was asked to explain Isaiah 52:7–10 (Mosiah 12:20–24; 13:3), except that Abinadi quoted all of Isaiah 53 (Mosiah 14) and explained how it referred to Christ (Mosiah 15). Jacob adds a quote from Isaiah 55:1–2 (2 Nephi 9:50–51), then

returns to the subject of the destruction and scattering of Israel and the promised gathering (2 Nephi 10:6–13). In this, he refers to both Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 10:8–9) and Isaiah 60:12 (2 Nephi 10:13, 16).

After recording Jacob's discourse, Nephi noted that he would record “more of the words of Isaiah” (2 Nephi 11:2), saying that his readers could “liken them unto you and unto all men” (2 Nephi 11:8). Then follows the very lengthy extract from Isaiah 2–14 (2 Nephi 12–24). Nephi then proposes to speak about the words of Isaiah that he had recorded (2 Nephi 25:1). Like Jacob, he refers to the scattering and gathering of the Jews (2 Nephi 25:9–11), then goes on to add that there will be wars and speaks of the coming of Christ among the Jews (2 Nephi 25:12–14). He notes that the Jews will be scattered and gathered a second time after Christ's appearance among them (2 Nephi 25:14–17) and that they must ultimately come to believe in the Messiah (2 Nephi 25:18–20). His prophecy of Christ continues into the next chapter.

In short, both Nephi and Jacob, after quoting from the words of Isaiah, draw upon those words to expound prophecies of the future, including items only hinted at by Isaiah or of which Isaiah may not have had a full understanding, such as the fact that Christ is the Holy One of Israel. There is purpose behind the use of Isaiah in each of these cases.

Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners downplay the importance of my study of the “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon.”⁵³ Regarding the shorter version published in a book edited by Monte Nyman, they write, “We would assume that Tvedtnes has given his best examples in this book” (p. 144). Actually, I tried to select a *variety* of some of the most supportive parallels to illustrate what I had done, but not all of the best examples. I now have additional

⁵³ See my article in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, and Bookcraft, 1984). This paper is a much abbreviated version of a longer study by the same name that is distributed by F.A.R.M.S.

supportive material that I will, when time permits, add to my earlier study.

Regarding the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners dogmatically declare that “the evidence, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, points to the unmistakable conclusion that Nephi was a fictional character and that Joseph Smith himself was plagiarizing these words from the King James Version” (p. 140). This hyperbolic statement is totally unwarranted by the evidence.

Wesley P. Walters is essentially correct in saying that the text of the main Dead Sea Scrolls Isaiah, discovered near Qumran in Cave 1 and hence named 1QIs^a, follows the Hebrew text from which KJV was translated. However, the passage from his book that the Tanners quote (p. 144) fails to note that it does not always agree and that this longer Isaiah scroll is more at variance with the Masoretic text behind KJV than the more fragmentary 1QIs^b. In Isaiah 52:13–53:12 alone, 1QIs^a has 34 variants with the Masorah. The Tanners note that “John Tvedtnes does not even refer to the evidence that the Dead Sea Scrolls provides (*sic*) regarding this matter in either of his two studies” (p. 144). In fact, I dealt only with the variant passages, not with the entire text of Isaiah, which would have been beyond the scope of a study entitled “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon.”

Referring to my article in Nyman, the Tanners wrote that I “referred to the Masoretic text forty-two times; the Septuagint Version of the Bible twenty-one times and the Isaiah material in the Dead Sea Scrolls only sixteen times. This seems to indicate that he found less to discuss in the extremely ancient texts found at Qumran than in the Septuagint Version and the Masoretic text” (p. 144). They then claim that the same pattern follows in my longer F.A.R.M.S. study and indicate how “strange” it is “that Tvedtnes devoted so much of his attention to the Masoretic text but had little to say about the material from Qumran. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls are about a thousand years older, one would think that they would play the predominant role in his study” (p. 144).

Though having the outward appearance of valid arguments against my work with the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners' words lack substance,⁵⁴ for the following reasons:

1. While I may have mentioned the Masoretic text (MT) more often (since it is the basis of the King James translation), I did *not* use it as evidence more often. I reread my article in Nyman and found that I referred to MT as evidence for the Book of Mormon version of Isaiah only six times, two of which were variant Hebrew manuscripts. On the other hand, I listed support from 1QIs^a (the more complete of the Dead Sea Isaiah scrolls) fourteen times—more than twice as many times as MT. I also noted support from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) in seventeen of my examples. While I have not made a count from my longer study, I suspect that a similar pattern exists there. Simply put, the Tanners misrepresented the numbers.

2. Since 1QIs^a is essentially the same text as MT, I did not elicit support from the Dead Sea Scrolls Isaiah except where it *differed* from MT. In reexamining my article, I found that in three of the examples in which I indicated that MT supports the Book of Mormon version against KJV, 1QIs^a agrees. So we can add these to the fourteen examples already listed in the article. Since the Tanners know full well that 1QIs^a and MT are essentially the same text (as they note in their quote of Walters, p. 144), I can only surmise that they deliberately avoided counting these other examples in their pseudostatistical study of my article.

3. While mentioning the antiquity of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Tanners do not tell their readers that the Greek Septuagint (LXX) was translated from the Hebrew Old Testament in the third century B.C. While it is true that we have no copies of LXX that go back that far, the Greek *text* was translated from an earlier Hebrew text that in many cases disagrees with MT and 1QIs^a. First-century B.C. Greek LXX versions of Leviticus and Numbers were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. In addition, some of the Hebrew manuscripts in that corpus are closer to LXX. For example, while

⁵⁴ Their declarations can be seen as either willfully deceptive or as ignorant of the nature of the texts. I prefer to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that the latter is correct. Neither the Tanners nor Walters, whom they quote, are qualified to deal with the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Bible texts, not having the linguistic tools necessary for such a study.

the Masoretic version of Jeremiah was found at Qumran, one Hebrew text of Jeremiah (4QJer^b) follows the shorter Septuagint version. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls Exodus scrolls (4QEx^a) reflects LXX, while another (4QEx^d) is closer to the Samaritan version than to MT. Similarly, one Hebrew copy of Numbers (4QNum^b) is closer to the Samaritan than to MT and closer still to LXX. One of the Samuel scrolls (both comprise 1–2 Samuel), 4QSam^a, is also closer to LXX than to MT. The other Samuel scroll (4QSam^b), thought to have been written no later than 200 B.C. and hence one of the oldest scrolls found at Qumran, is a variant of the Hebrew version from which LXX was translated, having many variants from MT.

We should note that the Tanners misunderstand the nature of the transmission of Bible books. They evidently presume a linear progression, with the Qumran scroll that generally agrees with MT being in the genealogy. In truth, however, there were already divergences, as LXX and 1QIs^b and other Qumran texts show. In my longer study of the “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” I note that there are times when some of the ancient versions disagree with both MT/KJV and Book of Mormon and that this is to be expected. We shall not always find support for the Book of Mormon, nor shall we always find support for KJV, in ancient texts, because variants existed already in very early times. Because of this, the brass plates of Laban, though closer in time to the original, need not always represent Isaiah’s original intent.

At one point, the Tanners take me to task for noting the Septuagint’s partial support for 2 Nephi 12:16 (=Isaiah 2:16). They cite Wesley P. Walters regarding the Septuagint parallel in 2 Nephi 12:16 saying that it “did not come from the *Septuagint*, but from a well-known Bible commentary written by Thomas Scott” (p. 144). They then add, “John Tvedtnes used the example set forth by Sperry as evidence for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity [but] failed to mention” that the Dead Sea Scrolls don’t support it. There are, however, really two issues here. The first is whether the variant is represented in the Septuagint, the second whether the Dead Sea Scrolls support the variant. The latter point is really irrelevant, since various ancient versions often disagreed with each other. In this particular case, 1QIs^a agrees with the Masoretic text and, consequently, with the King James

Bible. The Tanners and Walters notwithstanding, I have correctly represented the Septuagint wording in my article and in the longer study on the Isaiah variants. I did not get the idea from Sperry and only discovered what he had done some time after I wrote the original draft of the study. I have never seen Scott's commentary.

This brings us to the question of Walters, who, based on the Tanners' report of his words, has grossly misrepresented a number of things. They quote him as saying that he "checked" the Isaiah text from the Dead Sea and found that it follows the Hebrew text underlying the King James Bible (p. 144). If this is correct, then Walters must not have done a very good job or must not have known Hebrew. While it is true that, in the main, 1QIs^a has the same Hebrew text as the Masorah from which the King James Bible was translated, there are a fair number of variants. An Israeli scholar, Yehezke'el Kutscher, wrote a rather lengthy study of these variants, and other scholars have discussed some of them in various books and articles.⁵⁵ Anyone who compares the two texts can see the variants (indeed, different Masoretic documents vary in some respects). One need go no farther than the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* to find some of the Qumran variants in its footnotes for the book of Isaiah. (Unfortunately, this revision of Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* was not available when I did my study; it would have made things much easier.)

Saying of my Isaiah variants work that "the oldest Hebrew manuscript of the Isaiah text does not sustain his theory" (p. 144), the Tanners accuse me of following a "double standard" by covering up and then accusing them of the same things. Since I have no "theory" to support, I wasn't looking for evidence to sustain it. The fact is that the Isaiah text in question supports the Book of Mormon version at several points. I have never covered up the fact that it does not lend support for each and every variant. Indeed, in my longer study, I clearly noted the variants for

⁵⁵ See for example Yehezke'el Kutscher, *Ha-lashon We-ha-reqa' Ha-leshoni Shel Megilat Yesha'yahu Ha-shelemah Mi-megilot Ya Ha-melahf* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of Hebrew University, 1959); Millar Burrows, "Variant Reading in the Isaiah Manuscript," *BASOR* 1/11 (Oct. 1948): 10–24 and 1/13 (Feb. 1949): 24–32; and Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll: A Literary Analysis; A Comparison with the Masoretic Text and Biblia Hebraica* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970).

which the Book of Mormon has no version support. Since 1QIs^a is mostly like the Masoretic text, I didn't mention it except where it *differed* from MT and supported the Book of Mormon. Consequently, in all other cases, MT and 1QIs^a have the same reading. Because I am aware that ancient manuscripts often disagree among themselves, this doesn't bother me as it does the Tanners.

The Tanners are wrong when they assert that Isaiah scrolls from Qumran provide no support for the Book of Mormon (p. 141). The longer scroll (1QIs^a) supports the Book of Mormon Isaiah text in a number of cases. Their inclusion of comments from LDS writers who expressed a belief that the scrolls would not prove valuable to Latter-day Saints (pp. 141–44) is totally unwarranted, since most of these comments deal not with the Isaiah variants but with such issues as the “plain and precious parts” that Latter-day Saints would like to see show up in newly-discovered documents. The Tanners credit Sidney B. Sperry with “a painstaking study of the Dead Sea Scrolls” (p. 141). I did not know Sperry personally, but I have heard from several LDS scholars who know Hebrew that Sperry had only a superficial acquaintance with the language. From the few examples I have seen of his work on the Isaiah variants, it is clear to me that he could not have examined the Dead Sea Scrolls carefully or he would have noted some of the same variants I found.

The Tanners also write that “for years Mormon scholars . . . have attempted to show parallels between the text of Isaiah found in the Book of Mormon and that found in some ancient manuscripts. In our book, *Mormon Scriptures and the Bible*, pp. 9–11, we show that these parallels are of little value” (p. 141). In fairness, I should perhaps read that book (of which I had not previously heard) before passing judgment. But knowing that the Tanners lack the linguistic skills to judge the kind of work I did with the Isaiah variants, I suspect that it would be more lay hyperbole and less scholarship than the subject deserves.

New Testament Passages in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners repeat that “our main problem with plagiarism in the Book of Mormon is the material taken from the New

Testament” (p. 140). They gave a large number of examples of such parallels in part II of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* and cite others in their current work. When I began looking into the subject after reading their book, several thoughts came to me:

1. Many of the supposed New Testament borrowings could just as easily come from the Old Testament; indeed, in a number of cases, it was clear that the New Testament passage was actually a quote (a “plagiarism,” I suppose, since credit is not always given) from the Old Testament.

2. Many of the parallels were just common idioms and phrases that could not be said to be specifically New Testament, although found in that scripture.

3. If the terminology was truly part of Joseph Smith’s vocabulary, as the Tanners sometimes imply, then it should not be surprising to see him use it in his translation, provided the meaning of the Nephite text was reflected in the English.

I originally considered responding to each and every one of the suggested “borrowings” and, indeed, checked on a fair number of them using the computer. It soon became obvious that it would require an entire book to discuss this large corpus. Meanwhile, the reader can consult my earlier review to see a sampling of the kinds of problems I found with the Tanners’ list.

I must respond, however, to one of the Tanners’ statements from *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* that they repeat in the follow-up book: “It should be obvious that the presence of many portions of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon is more out of place than to find the following words in a speech attributed to George Washington: ‘Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation□□□ These words alone would be enough to prove the speech a forgery. While less than a century separated George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, in the Book of Mormon we have Lehi quoting from the New Testament book of Revelation almost seven centuries before it was written!’” (p. 140). The hyperbolic words “more out of place” are clearly not supported by the example they give. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address includes a date (“four score and seven years” after the “fathers,” including Washington, “brought forth . . . a *new* nation”), while

the New Testament passages they compare with the Book of Mormon do not. Were the datable elements not part of the speech, one might just as easily suggest that Lincoln borrowed the speech from Washington after discovery of a document attributing the words to Washington.

Similarly, many New Testament passages are known from earlier Jewish works (some of them pseudepigrapha of the second century B.C.) which may have quoted from still older writings. The fact that a passage in one of Paul's epistles, for example, is also found in the Book of Mormon does not prove that Joseph Smith put it there. Both sources could have borrowed from earlier documents, some of them no longer extant. Some evidence for this has been elicited in a number of Book of Mormon studies and we can look forward to more.⁵⁶

More to the point, however, is that King James language was known to both Joseph Smith and his contemporaries. With this, the Tanners would agree. Where we disagree is that they see Joseph Smith expropriating Bible texts to compose the Book of Mormon, while I consider that Joseph Smith, like any other translator, would naturally render an ancient text in language familiar to the audience for whom he is translating. A more recent parallel to the Book of Mormon is the way the British scholar Robert Henry Charles imitated KJV language in his translation of ancient Jewish documents in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913).

Conclusions

I am even less impressed with the Tanners' latest effort than with their original book on the "black hole" theory. Most of it is a rehash of what was said in their earlier work, rather than a real "response to criticism" of that work. Mere repetition and avoiding the issues by dwelling on insignificant items is not going to make their case. I am particularly concerned with the way in which they address things for which they have no expertise. For

⁵⁶ Again, the Tanners will see this as a "cop out." But the evidence for such quotes in the New Testament, commonly accepted even among non-LDS scholars, shows that one cannot reject the Book of Mormon out-of-hand on such grounds.

example, their pontification about the Dead Sea Scrolls, of which they know virtually nothing, marks the work as lacking in any real understanding of scriptural and documentary issues.

Nevertheless, I should be somewhat grateful to the Tanners for writing both books. Each time, I have had to examine the evidence a bit more closely and, in doing so, have come away more convinced than before that we have, in the Book of Mormon, a translation of an ancient document that has stood the test of time and criticism. Were I not so swamped with other projects, I would look forward to volume 2 of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon."*