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Adam Clarke and Isaiah in the Book of Mormon

Kent P. Jackson

Abstract: *A recent article alleges that in creating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith copied Isaiah passages out of the Bible commentary of Scottish theologian Adam Clarke. The author of the article alleges that while doing so, the Prophet edited those passages based on suggestions from Clarke's cross references and commentary. This explains the differences between Isaiah in the King James translation and the corresponding Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon. A careful analysis of the Isaiah verses in the Book of Mormon and Clarke's commentary shows that this claim is not true.*

A recent article, “Early Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship and the Production of *The Book of Mormon*,” written by Colby Townsend, deals with the origin of some of the material in the Book of Mormon. The article’s stated thesis is that Joseph Smith was among other lay people in early U.S. history who used biblical scholarship that was then available in print.¹ Townsend sets out to prove his thesis by examining the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon. He believes that those passages show evidence that when Joseph Smith included them in his book, he edited them based on the scholarship

1. Colby Townsend, “Early Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship and the Production of *The Book of Mormon*,” *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 12, no. 1 (2025): 57–84, doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2024-0001. Townsend notes that he prefers to italicize the title of the Book of Mormon (p. 58n2). In academic and nonacademic writing, the titles of sacred religious books are not italicized. The choice to use italics for the Book of Mormon shows that he chooses not to afford the Book of Mormon the respect traditionally given to a religious text like the Bible, a title he does not italicize.

of Scottish theologian Adam Clarke (1762–1832). Clarke’s Bible commentary was available in Joseph Smith’s day, and Townsend believes that the Prophet had access to a copy and drew ideas and words from it to shape the Isaiah quotations to meet his interests.

It can be stated at the outset that Townsend rejects the truth claims of the Book of Mormon. That is not particularly problematic because many others do the same. However, this article hints that there is more involved in his study than merely a dispassionate examination of one nineteenth-century man’s effort to engage with biblical scholarship. I ask myself whether others, dispassionately looking at the same material, could possibly have come to the same conclusions that Townsend reaches. More to the point, I do not know if others looking at the same material would even have pursued the study—there is nothing there. In my view, all of Townsend’s conclusions are the result of wishful thinking, an effort to see in the data what the author wants to see.²

Book of Mormon writers and speakers quote about four hundred verses of Isaiah. About half of those verses are identical to the corresponding verses in the King James translation (KJV), and about half read differently. With that in mind, the words of an angel in 1 Nephi 13 play an important role in Townsend’s thinking. The angel told Nephi of “the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book” (v. 29) and foretold a restoration: “I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb” (v. 34).

Townsend places Joseph Smith inside an American Protestant conversation that included “belief in a corrupted Bible” as well as a “general anti-Catholic sentiment.” “To many Protestants,” he writes, “the corruption of the Bible occurred while the Catholic church handled the texts in late antiquity” (p. 59). Townsend then takes for granted the idea that in revising the Isaiah texts as he placed them in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was correcting those texts and restoring lost words: “*The Book of Mormon* attempts to offer a revised version of much of the book of Isaiah as one sample of what was thought to be lost through the Catholic corruption of scripture” (p. 61).

2. The article was greeted with celebration by people critical of the Latter-day Saint faith. See “Did Joseph Smith Use 19th-Century Bible Scholarship to produce the Book of Mormon?” Mormon Stories, episode 2002, March 18, 2025, youtube.com/watch?v=Vbt5bPaPiQg&t=4389s; “Cracking The Code: Tracing Book of Mormon Origins,” Mormonism Live, Mormon Discussion Inc. YouTube channel, April 2, 2025, youtube.com/watch?v=Eg1nNmXpRzA.

We have no record of Joseph Smith's blaming the Catholic church for the removal of plain and precious things from the Bible; this is Townsend putting words in Joseph Smith's mouth.³ The angel told Nephi that those corruptions would take place before the Bible would go to the world, which was centuries before there was a Roman Catholic church. Nor does the angel tell Nephi that lost *words* would be restored; *truths* would be restored (1 Nephi 13:40), and the Book of Mormon and other latter-day revelations would restore those lost truths.

Townsend claims repeatedly that the variant readings in Book of Mormon Isaiah were Joseph Smith's effort to create a fulfillment of the angel's prophecy (pp. 57, 61–64, 76, 82). We have no record of the Prophet ever claiming that Isaiah in the Book of Mormon restores lost truths, nor does the Book of Mormon ever make such a claim. If that were the case, Joseph Smith could have done a much better job than he did. The variants are typically small wording alterations that have no doctrinal content and do not make much difference in the meaning of the text. I believe that some of them restore original wording, but rarely are the verses of major consequence. Those in the Book of Mormon who quote Isaiah — Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, and Jesus — do not even mention the differences in the words they quote. Those differences are not what Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is about.

Clarke's commentary is over 5,000 pages long.⁴ On each page, the text of the King James translation is at the top, followed by a horizontal band of cross references, followed by commentary. About two-thirds to three-fourths of each page consist of commentary. Clarke knew Hebrew and Greek well and engaged frequently in textual criticism. By today's standards, he was far too prone to put faith in dubious Old Testament manuscripts as can be seen in his suggested readings.

3. Townsend, of course, was not the inventor of this idea, which is still common among Latter-day Saints.

4. There were printings both in Europe and in the United States. The following American printings are representative: Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 [Genesis to Joshua] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832); vol. 2 [Judges to Job] (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1828); vol. 3 [Psalms to Isaiah] (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1826); vol. 4 [Jeremiah to Malachi] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832); *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, vol. 1 [Matthew to Acts], vol. 2 [Romans to Revelation] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832). The volume that includes Isaiah can be accessed conveniently in the Hathi Trust Digital Library: babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x004508074.

Nonetheless, his volumes are an impressive piece of scholarship for his time.

Townsend believes that in writing the Book of Mormon, the Prophet had Clarke's Isaiah volume in front of him. He copied the Isaiah text out of that but edited it based on what he read in Clarke's cross references and commentary on the page.

In his article, Townsend identifies several Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon that he believes contain words influenced by Clarke's commentary. In this review, I will examine them all.

King James Bible in the Book of Mormon

As noted, of the four hundred or so verses of Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon, about half have differences in wording from their counterparts in the King James translation. In those verses that are not identical to the KJV, most of the differences are in only a few words, but the rest of the words are the same. Thus, clearly Isaiah in the Book of Mormon *comes from* the King James Bible. It does not just *look like* the King James Bible, and it does not just use King James English. It comes from the King James Bible, with some modifications.

This cannot be accidental. If Nephi transcribed Isaiah passages from the plates of brass onto his own record, and if Joseph Smith then translated them directly from Nephi's transcription, they would read more like they do in Hebrew and less like they do in the King James translation. Instead, the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages reproduce the majority of the King James wording intact, word for word, and include its formalized structure and vocabulary instead of the "plain" writing that is more characteristic of the English of the Book of Mormon.

None of this is new to Latter-day Saint scholars. Some have proposed that during the translation process, the Prophet and his scribe simply transcribed the Isaiah text out of a printed copy of the King James Bible, making changes only when necessary. The idea behind this theory is that because there was already a usable translation available in English, there was no need to make a new one of the same material, and the necessary modifications could be made to that text.⁵

5. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 1976), 141–42; B. H. Roberts, "Bible Quotations in the Book of Mormon; and Reasonableness of Nephi's Prophecies," *Improvement Era*, January 1904, 183–84, 191, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6c8c6c4b-ad14-4442-a81a-9e56d1a62faf/0/0; Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon*

Our best evidence about the translation process makes that explanation difficult to sustain. None of those who witnessed the translation mentioned a Bible being used. One of the scribes, Emma Smith, stated that the Prophet “had neither manuscript nor book to read from. . . . If he had had anything of the kind, he could not have concealed it from me.”⁶ Others who were familiar with the process said the same thing.⁷ This conclusion from witnesses is important for the present article because it contradicts the narrative that Joseph Smith was working out of a biblical text while producing the Book of Mormon.

The reports of the earliest witnesses indicate that the words of the translation were *shown* to Joseph Smith visually by revelation. The Prophet saw English words in the devices he used for the translation—the Nephite interpreters and a seer stone—and he dictated to his scribes the words he *saw*. If the scribes were telling the truth in this, then the English translation had to be in existence and visible “by the gift and power of God” before Joseph Smith saw it. And if this is the case, then the Isaiah passages were shown to the Prophet already in their KJV words, with only the variations that exist.⁸

Why would God want the Isaiah passages to follow the King James translation? We can speculate that because it was the common Bible in the English language in Joseph Smith’s generation and was used by almost all English-speaking Christians, having the Book of Mormon’s Isaiah passages match the words of the King James translation would

(Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1947), 172, archive.org/details/ourbookofmormon0000sidn/page/n5/mode/2up.

6. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, vol. 26, no. 19 (October 1, 1879): 289–90, archive.org/details/TheSaintsHerald_Volume_26_1879/page/n287/mode/2up.

7. See Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, “Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed., Dennis L. Largey, et al. (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 61–79, and sources cited there.

8. See Royal Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1998), 369–90, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/textual-variants-isaiah-quotations-book-mormon; Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 22–31, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol7/iss1/4/; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness into Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2015), 79–104, 119–39.

make sense. If the translation had been different, it might have drawn attention to unimportant wording matters, rather than to the text's message. Indeed, the differences in the wording in the Book of Mormon are not why the Isaiah passages are in the book. They are in the book because of their powerful teachings about the house of Israel, which is central to the Book of Mormon's own message.

Why are there differences between KJV Isaiah and Book of Mormon Isaiah? Some differences may result from scribal errors, ancient or modern. It is likely that most times an ancient text was copied, the copyist introduced errors into it by skipping material, inadvertently adding to the text, or making accidental or deliberate edits. In addition, the original documents may have sustained physical damage and decay over time, and as scribes made copies, they may have inserted the wrong words to make corrections. That was certainly the case with the book of Isaiah, where some lines make little sense in Hebrew, suggesting that original letters, words, or lines are missing.⁹ In a few cases, the Book of Mormon adds lines that appear to be original to Isaiah; in other places the biblical text has lines that are not found in the Book of Mormon. Differences like these suggest that the copy of Isaiah on the plates of brass may not have been perfect in every place, that the Nephite writers or scribes made copy mistakes, that Joseph Smith's eyes may have skipped material, or that his scribes may have misheard what he dictated. We do not know.

Many of the differences between Old Testament Isaiah and Book of Mormon Isaiah are certainly deliberate. In my study of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST), I have identified several instincts that guided the Prophet in the revisions he made. Those same instincts may have guided the Book of Mormon's writers and speakers when they used Isaiah anciently, and they may have played a role in the modern translation process as the KJV text was used and adapted for the purposes of the Book of Mormon. Among those instincts are a desire to remove ambiguity and to provide more clarity, to refine and

9. Among many other examples, Isaiah 3:11; 5:17; and 52:13–15 are generally recognized as having textual problems. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (Anchor Bible, 2000), 211; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 134, 162; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 373–74; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, vol. 24, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 40; Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 225.

fill in wording, to make metaphor clearer, and to restore missing text.¹⁰ In addition, Book of Mormon Isaiah shows evidence of mistrust of the italicized words in the King James translation, just as the JST does. I believe that the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon likely include some places where the corresponding KJV text was not well translated and thus was not well understood during its modern translation.

Because the evidence shows that the English words of the Book of Mormon were made visible to Joseph Smith, there must necessarily have been a translation process beforehand. My assumption (shared by some others) is that someone in the world of spirits, a faithful but imperfect human like the rest of us, was tasked with translating the words of the ancient Nephites into English. Perhaps it was a group of people. As Joseph Smith taught about the Restoration,

All things whether in heaven or on earth will be in one, even in Christ. The heavenly priesthood will unite with the earthly, to bring about those great purposes; and whilst we are thus united in the one common cause to roll forth the kingdom of God, the heavenly priesthood are not idle spectators.¹¹

Whatever the process of translation was, one thing is made clear by the Isaiah passages: the translator or translators who prepared the English text of the Book of Mormon prior to Joseph Smith used the words of the King James Bible.

Examining the Evidence

The following is my analysis of the passages Townsend believes show evidence of Joseph Smith borrowing ideas or words from Adam Clarke.¹² A question that comes to mind at the outset is: If Joseph Smith really did turn to Clarke's commentary for insights while placing Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, could Townsend not have come up with better examples than these?

10. Kent P. Jackson, *Understanding Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 101–39.

11. "The Temple," *Times and Seasons*, 2 May 1842, 776, capitalization standardized, archive.org/details/GR_4156-1/page/776/mode/2up.

12. These are presented in this section in the order in which they appear in Townsend's article.

Isaiah 11:6**KJV:** The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb**Clarke:** Then shall the wolf [dwell with the lamb]**2 Nephi 30:12:** And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb

In Isaiah 11:6, Adam Clarke suggests adding the word “then” at the beginning of the sentence. The Book of Mormon does the same thing when Nephi quotes the verse in 2 Nephi 30:12. Following the “then,” Clarke reverses the order of the subject and verb, placing “shall” ahead of “the wolf.” The Book of Mormon does the same.

Townsend (pp. 66–68) attributes the Book of Mormon wording to Joseph Smith’s “consulting Clarke’s notations” (p. 67). He calls the reordering of the words “verbatim borrowing” (p. 66), even though there are only four words involved. Moreover, the Book of Mormon adds another word not found in Clarke (the “and” at the beginning of the sentence) making the passage not as “verbatim” as Townsend believes. Perhaps because of that, Townsend concludes that Joseph Smith, “rather than slavishly following his source text [Adam Clarke], . . . reveals a dynamic process of ongoing evaluation, selection, and modification in the way that he articulates his choices” (p. 67). This faint praise is not needed, nor is it accurate.

The only thing of substance that Clarke and the Book of Mormon have in common is the addition of the word “then.” That insertion is not particularly remarkable because the verse introduces a new thought that seems to follow in sequence what precedes it. With that in mind, some modern translations add “then” at the same place.¹³

The speakers and writers in the Book of Mormon frequently emphasized sequence in events by using “then.” The insertion at Isaiah 11:6 is not alone. The Book of Mormon adds “then” to four other Isaiah passages as well, none of which were revised with any reference to anything Adam Clarke wrote.

- 1 Nephi 21:12 adds “And then, O house of Israel” to Isaiah 49:12.
- 2 Nephi 15:1 adds “And then will I” to Isaiah 5:1.
- 3 Nephi 20:32 adds “then” to Isaiah 52:8.
- 3 Nephi 20:34 adds “Then shall they” to Isaiah 52:9.

13. New American Bible (rev. ed.; NABRE), New Catholic Bible (NCB), New Century Version (NCV), New English Bible (NEB). Different versions of the Bible can easily be found online at sites such as biblegateway.com and others.

Thus, adding the temporal modifier "then" to an Isaiah passage can be recognized as an observable pattern in the Book of Mormon. Because none of those four other additions are suggested in Adam Clarke's commentary, there is no reason to argue that the Book of Mormon obtains the "then" in 2 Nephi 30:12 from Clarke.

The change in word order following "then" — from "the wolf shall" (subject first) to "shall the wolf" (verb first) — is not remarkable in the least. It is almost predictable. Three of the examples in the list above have the verb-first construction. Verb-first is the most common English usage in the scriptures following "then." In the book of Isaiah in the KJV, for example, verb-first construction is two-and-a-half times as common as subject-first following "then." In the Book of Mormon itself, "then" is followed by the verb in 70 percent of the cases. Thus, the wording of 2 Nephi 30:12 is not, as Townsend would have it, an indicator that Joseph Smith used Clarke's commentary in creating the Book of Mormon. It simply reflects standard English usage.

2 Nephi 30:10

For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire.

Townsend understands 2 Nephi 30:10 to be Joseph Smith's addition to Isaiah 11:4 (p. 67), but that is not correct. It is part of Nephi's ongoing discussion in the chapter, placed between verses of Isaiah.

In the early verses of Isaiah 11, Clarke provides two dozen or so cross references. In them, Townsend finds what he feels are correspondences with Nephi's words, and, thus, he concludes that Joseph Smith not only followed Clarke's commentary but also examined Clarke's cross references. Because both Nephi and Adam Clarke were commenting on the same passages of Isaiah, we should not find it noteworthy if there is overlap in the subject matter. But Townsend goes beyond that to look for word connections. What he finds is not impressive. He notes that both 2 Nephi 30:10 and Malachi 4:1 use the word "cometh" (even though Clarke cites Malachi 4:6 and not Malachi 4:1). He suggests that Nephi's phrase "destroy the wicked" somehow "connects" with "break in pieces the oppressor" in Psalm 72:4. And he finds that Nephi's words "destroy . . . by fire" are somehow dependent on Clarke's cross reference to "By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed" in Job 4:9. None of

this free association of random dissimilar vocabulary is to be taken seriously.¹⁴

Isaiah 50:2

KJV: I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because *there is* no water, and dieth for thirst.

Clarke: . . . their fish is dried up . . . [*in place of “their fish stinketh”*]

2 Nephi 7:2: I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst.

Most translators and commentators today reject the alternative reading espoused by Adam Clarke, in which he proposed changing “stinketh” to “dried up.”¹⁵ Even a cursory glance at Clarke’s reading and 2 Nephi 7:2 does not suggest that Joseph Smith invented the wording by reading Clarke (pp. 68–69). Townsend claims that the different reading in the Book of Mormon “all begins with Smith trying to incorporate Clarke’s ‘dried up’ into the text” (p. 69). This is hardly a reasonable explanation for the verse. Clarke’s revisions and the Book of Mormon do not resemble each other at all. In the Book of Mormon, the fish still stink, and they are not “dried up,” as Clarke proposes. And in Clarke the words “dried up” refer to the fish while in the Book of Mormon it is God who dries up the waters. Also, the passage begins with God’s saying he would “dry up” the sea. This revision has no need for Adam Clarke.

14. Townsend cites Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 54, who also concludes that the Book of Mormon can only be explained with the claim that Joseph Smith drew information from contemporary biblical scholarship. It seems inevitable that one must draw such conclusions if one rejects a supernatural origin for the book. I find Perry’s argument unconvincing, in part because we know the timeline of the Book of Mormon’s translation, and the book could not have been produced that quickly using the method Perry proposes. See Kent P. Jackson, “Review of Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 169–72, scripture central.org/archive/periodicals/journal-article/bible-culture-and-authority-early-united-states?searchId=4a25687791c56e4bceb5dd0a7cd2a3dbd30d96b18be2d42c5d855896f6797432-en-v=5a863d2.

15. See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 316; and English Standard Version (ESV), New International Version (NIV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and others.

Townsend provides a lengthy explanation for why the reading in the Book of Mormon is so different from the Clarke proposal. He tries to explain how Joseph Smith could take his ideas for this verse from Adam Clarke yet produce something so utterly unlike it. The attempt is not successful.

Isaiah 2:10

KJV: Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty.

Clarke: . . . when he ariseth to strike the earth with terror.
[Added at the end of the verse.]

2 Nephi 12:10: O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty shall smite thee.

Adam Clarke believed that the phrase “when he ariseth to strike the earth with terror,” which is found in verses 19 and 21, belongs in verse 10 as well, so he reconstructed it there. Townsend believes that Joseph Smith changed the verse as he did based on his reading of Clarke’s commentary (pp. 69–73). This is even though the two revisions are not at all alike. They share no words in common; moreover, the subjects, the verbs, and the direct objects of the two revisions are different. Then, however, because the Book of Mormon does not do as Clarke recommended, Townsend claims that Joseph Smith “seems to have misunderstood” (p. 70) what Clarke wrote. Below is a better translation of the Hebrew verse (author’s translation):

Enter into a rock,
hide in the ground
from before the terror of the Lord
and from the splendor of his majesty.

The verse is not well translated in the KJV, and the variant reading in the Book of Mormon perhaps resulted from its awkward wording. In modern English, including elsewhere in the KJV, we hide *from* things, but in this verse the KJV uses hide *for*.¹⁶ Because of that, the Book of Mormon’s English translator(s) may have understood the first *for* not as a preposition but as the conjunction *for*, meaning “because.” If “for” means “because” here, something must be missing in the text. “The

16. Example of “hide from” in the KJV are numerous, for example, Genesis 18:17; Psalm 55:1.

fear of the Lord” becomes the subject of the clause, and the clause needs a verb to accompany the subject. Hence the addition of words at the end of the verse. Revisions based on misleading KJV translations like this are not uncommon in the JST, and there are similar cases in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.¹⁷

Townsend does not mention the Book of Mormon’s addition of the words at the beginning of the verse, which have no counterpart in Clarke’s commentary.

Isaiah 2:13–16

Yea and the day of the Lord shall come
 upon all the cedars of Lebanon,
 for they are high and lifted up;
 and upon all the oaks of Bashan;
 and upon all the high mountains,
 and upon all the hills,
and upon all the nations which are lifted up,
and upon every people;
 and upon every high tower,
 and upon every fenced wall;
 and upon all the ships of the sea,
 and upon all the ships of Tarshish,
 and upon all pleasant pictures.

Above we see 2 Nephi 12:13–16 in its poetic lines. Townsend notes that the Book of Mormon fleshes out the metaphor in this passage, which foretells the bringing low of things that represent the pride and the proud works of humankind. The Book of Mormon strengthens the passage by adding an impressive parallel couplet in verse 14: “upon all the nations” and “upon every people.” These words may be original to Isaiah, or they may be an inspired English addition to make the metaphor more concrete. But Townsend thinks they are dependent on Clarke. The reason? Clarke’s discussion includes the words “kings, princes, potentates of the highest rank” and “kingdoms, republics, states, cities.” To Townsend, the Book of Mormon’s words “upon all the nations” and “upon every people” could not have come without the influence of those words of Adam Clarke. This conclusion is incomprehensible.

17. For example, 1 Nephi 21:8 (Isaiah 49:8); 2 Nephi 12:19, 21 (Isaiah 2:19, 21).

Isaiah 9:3

KJV: Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and not* increased the joy

Clarke: [Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and*] increased *their* joy

2 Nephi 19:3: Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased *the* joy

In his analysis of Isaiah 9:3, Townsend misses Clarke's point entirely and misrepresents what Clarke wrote (pp. 73–74). He states, "Citing the work of biblical scholars, Clarke argues 'not' is a mistranslation of 'lo' and provides his translation that removes 'not' from the verse" (p. 73). This is not true. Clarke is not citing biblical scholars; he is referencing Hebrew manuscripts, some of which have *lô* ("to it") instead of *lô'* ("not"). Nor does Clarke think there is a mistranslation involved, nor does he remove the word from the verse. Instead, Clarke selects the alternative reading and chooses *lô* instead of *lô'*; he prefers "to it" over "not." Many modern translations do the same.¹⁸ Clarke thus reconstructs the Hebrew to, literally, "Thou hast increased the joy to it," which he translates as "Thou has increased their joy." The *lô* formation represents ownership, hence, "its joy." He changes the wording from the singular to the plural, presumably because all the surrounding subjects and verbs are plurals. Doing so is unnecessary, but other translations do the same.¹⁹ A better translation would be (author's translation):

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy.

The *lô'* ("not"), as in the King James translation, is widely recognized as a scribal error.²⁰ The word negates the meaning of Isaiah's verse and makes no sense in its context. It is thus significant that the Book of Mormon does not have it. I suspect that the *lô'* was not present on the plates of brass, or that in the translation process into English, it

18. English Standard Version (ESV), Jewish Publication Society Bible (JSP), and many others.

19. Such as the New American Standard Bible (NASB), New English Translation (NET), and New International Version (NIV).

20. If it is a scribal error, it is a very ancient one, as it is present in the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran, which dates to four centuries after the time of Lehi. For different approaches to how some scholars have dealt with it, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 246; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 240; Watts, *Isaiah* 1–33, 129–31.

was recognized as an error and simply removed, without any effort to emend the text to an alternative reading, such as Clarke did. Thus, whatever the source of that change is, in taking it out without replacing it, the Book of Mormon is clearly *not* following the lead of Adam Clarke.

A pattern is evident in Townsend's examples so far. In seeking evidence for his thesis that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon with Adam Clarke's commentary in hand, Townsend comes upon instances in which a word from one source vaguely resembles a word or two in the other. Then he invents an explanation for how and why Joseph Smith copied the words or the ideas from Clarke. The problem is that none of them work. So far, none that we have examined are convincing, nor are the ones yet to be examined convincing. I suspect that using the same methodology, one could argue relationships between any two texts on a common topic, no matter what their origins. Moreover, with all the impressive things that Clarke wrote, and with all the thousands of recommendations he made for revising the text, why would Joseph Smith choose such unimportant material to draw from? Why would he copy Clarke's least interesting and least important textual recommendations to put into the Book of Mormon? None of that makes sense.

Isaiah 14:3–4

KJV: And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt . . .²¹

Clarke: [And it shall come to pass] in that day [that the Lord shall . . .]

2 Nephi 24:3–4: And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall give thee rest, from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve. And it shall come to pass in that day, that thou shalt . . .

Adam Clarke argued that a Hebrew word is missing in the first line of Isaiah 14:3 and recommended changing “in the day” to “in that day.” Even though Clarke called the matter “of no great consequence,”

21. Townsend transcribes this KJV verse inaccurately, placing an extra “that” before “in the day.” He also transcribes Clarke's Hebrew quotation incorrectly (75).

Townsend believes that Joseph Smith thought it was important enough that he was influenced by Clarke to revise the passage *twice*.

Although we cannot say with confidence why the 2 Nephi passage is different, there is no reason to think of Clarke as its source. Townsend reliably ignores the broader contexts in which Book of Mormon variants appear, but the context here is important. When referring abstractly to the future day of God's great work, KJV Isaiah uses "in that day" over forty times. My guess is that the familiarity of that wording may have caused the variant, or it may be the restoration of a better Hebrew original.

Nothing in Clarke suggests doing what the Book of Mormon does. It divides the sentence in two and inserts a whole additional clause. Townsend believes that Joseph Smith added "And it shall come to pass in that day" at the beginning of verse 4 to "ensure" that Clarke's word change was instituted. Clarke, a knowledgeable text critic, would not have been pleased with the extra clause added in the Book of Mormon. Yet the added clause is, in fact, consistent with words added in several other Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon that emphasize sequence (like the "then" in 2 Nephi 30:12), that keep the readers connected to the subject matter, or that move the message along.²²

Isaiah 14:32

KJV: the messengers of the nation

Clarke: the ambassadors of the nations

2 Nephi 24:32: the messengers of the nations

The Masoretic Text (the traditional Hebrew Bible) has "nation" (singular) in Isaiah 14:32, as does the earliest Hebrew Isaiah text in existence, the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran. Some other ancient sources, including the Greek Septuagint, have the plural, "nations." All the English precursors to the KJV have the plural, but the KJV translators opted for the singular.²³ Modern translations are divided between the two options.

Clarke's commentary prefers the plural although he views the singular to be a viable option. The words of 2 Nephi 24:32 from the dictated Book of Mormon manuscript are no longer extant, but the

22. See, for example, 1 Nephi 20:15 (Isaiah 48:15); 21:1, 12 (Isaiah 49:1, 12); 2 Nephi 12:10, 11, 13 (Isaiah 2:10, 11, 13); 2 Nephi 15:1 (Isaiah 5:1); etc.

23. Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1560), Bishops Bible (1568), and various editions and printings.

manuscript taken to the printer clearly has the plural.²⁴ No explanation for the Book of Mormon word seems apparent. The words “the nation” appear twelve times throughout the KJV Old Testament, whereas “the nations” appears 165 times. The variant may have resulted during the translation or dictation process simply because of the familiarity of the words, or it may have resulted from Oliver Cowdery’s mishearing or transcribing incorrectly. It also may represent what was written on the plates of brass.

This wording is obviously of minor importance, not affecting Isaiah’s message in any way. Townsend’s conclusion that Joseph Smith “made the change because it restores part of the text lost to history, again reversing the adverse effects of time on the Bible described in 1 Ne. 13:29” (p. 76) is forced and overly dramatic.

Isaiah 48:11

KJV: for how should *my name* be polluted?

Clarke: for how would my name be blasphemed?

1 Nephi 20:11: for I will not suffer my name to be polluted

It is obvious that there is no connection between Clarke’s small word choices and the reading in the Book of Mormon. The words “my name,” italicized in the KJV, are not in the Masoretic Text but are in the Greek Septuagint. This is considered a legitimate reconstruction and is included in many responsible translations.²⁵ Seemingly in search of a connection between the Book of Mormon and Adam Clarke, Townsend turns to a comment Clarke made that the Syriac and Vulgate translations have “that I may not be blasphemed.” Townsend’s argument, surprisingly enough, is that because the Syriac/Vulgate reading and the Book of Mormon both share the word “I,” that is “strong evidence that Clarke’s notes in the commentary were [Joseph Smith’s] steppingstones” for making the revision (p. 77). It is difficult to know how to respond to this kind of thought process. How can this be considered “evidence” at all, let alone “strong evidence?”

24. “Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa August 1829–circa January 1830,” p. 80, *Joseph Smith Papers*, [josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/2#facts](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/2#facts).

25. For example, English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Version (NASB), New English Translation (NET), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Einheitsübersetzung, and others.

Isaiah 49:1

KJV: Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far

Clarke: Hearken unto me, O ye distant lands [and hearken, ye people, from far]

1 Nephi 21:1: Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye people from far

As can be seen, the reading in 1 Nephi is identical to that in the KJV Bible, aside from the modern punctuation. The Book of Mormon does not change these words. Townsend begins his discussion of Isaiah 49:1, like I do, by showing the three passages together—the KJV, Clarke’s suggested revision, and the Book of Mormon. But instead of showing the equivalent 1 Nephi phrase (as I have above), Townsend substitutes for it different words: “And again, Hearken, O ye house of Israel.” It is an erroneous and misleading comparison.

Nephi adds forty-eight words at the beginning of Isaiah 49:1 but leaves the rest of Isaiah’s words untouched. In his discussion, Townsend (pp. 77–79) does not deal with the equivalent lines of Isaiah 49:1–2 and 1 Nephi 21:1–2, which are the same, but compares those lines of Isaiah with words in the new lines of text that Nephi added before the verse, words that have no biblical counterpart. Thus, his comparison has no real meaning. Townsend writes that Joseph Smith, “analyzing the content” of Clarke’s commentary, was “making continuous adjustments” (p. 78) to Isaiah. No, Joseph Smith did not change a single word of Isaiah in this instance. Townsend claims that the Prophet substituted “distant lands” for “house of Israel,” an “alteration” that “can be further explained by Clarke’s notes.” No, “distant lands” is still there in the verse, untouched and unaltered.

This is not careful scholarship.²⁶

Isaiah 29:11

KJV: And he saith, I cannot; for it *is* sealed.

Clarke: [And he saith,] I cannot read it; for it is sealed up

26. At the very end of his analysis of this verse, Townsend adds two final sentences: “However, [Joseph Smith] does not replace the original text. Instead, he adds his interpretation and retains the original text so that they both appear together.” This, along with the misleading line at the top of his discussion and his analysis of the wrong words, convinces me that Townsend did not know he was dealing with the wrong text until after he had written his analysis.

2 Nephi 27:15–18: And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them.²⁷ And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God. And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed. Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.

In 2 Nephi 27 Nephi quotes, paraphrases, and weaves vocabulary from Isaiah 29 into his revelatory sermon of over 1,400 words about the future of his people's sacred record. In all its many words, Townsend can only find two tiny items that he believes show that Joseph Smith was dependent on the commentary of Adam Clarke (pp. 79–81). He fails with both.

First, based on a Hebrew manuscript and the Septuagint, Clarke believed that “read it” needed to be inserted after “I cannot.” But at the location where Clarke wanted those words inserted, the Book of Mormon inserts “Bring hither the book, and I will read them,” followed by several lines of new text anticipated neither by the KJV nor by Clarke. Then, after the next “I cannot,” Nephi inserts “bring the book, for it is sealed.” At the end of the new text, we finally see the words “read it.” Based on that, and despite the lengthy insertion and the changes in speakers, Townsend believes that the “read it” was influenced by Joseph Smith's following Adam Clarke (pp. 79–80).

Next, Townsend notes that Clarke used the words “sealed up” in his suggested revision. The Book of Mormon, however, follows the KJV here with “sealed” and does not follow Clarke. There is no change there. That does not deter Townsend. Because elsewhere in this chapter the Book of Mormon has “seal/sealed up” (2 Nephi 27:8, 22), Townsend believes Joseph Smith must have been influenced by Adam Clarke.

I suspect that Clarke wrote “sealed up” instinctively because it was the idiom of the day, and it was probably the idiom in Joseph Smith's world as well. The Prophet used “seal/sealed up” in his sermons and writings; it is also found elsewhere in the King James Bible and in the Book of Mormon, including in passages translated before 2 Nephi 27.²⁸

27. The “them” refers to “these words,” mentioned earlier in the verse.

28. For example, Deuteronomy 32:34; Job 14:17; Revelation 10:4; 2 Nephi 26:17; Ether 3:28; 4:5; Moroni 10:2; “Discourse, 11 June 1843–A, reported by Willard Richards,” p. 243, *Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-11-june-1843-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/4.

We need not conclude that this is something Joseph Smith learned from Adam Clarke.

Conclusions

We have seen Adam Clarke's name cited before as a source for Latter-day Saint sacred writings. In two articles published in 2020, a proposal was set forth that Joseph Smith used ideas and language from Clarke's commentary in his translation of the Bible.²⁹ My own investigation of the matter and my analysis of every JST passage proposed as being influenced by Clarke led me to the conclusion that not a single bit of evidence exists that Joseph Smith used Adam Clarke as a source.³⁰ Nor is there any real evidence that he ever saw Clarke's commentary.³¹

The same is true regarding Townsend's effort to find Clarke's ideas in the Book of Mormon. None of his proposed borrowings from Clarke can be sustained. My arguments against Clarke's influence in the JST apply to Townsend's Book of Mormon theory as well. Rather than

29. Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, "A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith's Bible Translation," in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard Mackay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 262–84; Wayment, "Joseph Smith, Adam Clarke, and the Making of a Bible Revision," *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 3 (July 2020): 1–22.

30. Kent P. Jackson, "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60; journal.interpreterfoundation.org/some-notes-on-joseph-smith-and-adam-clarke/. See also Kurt Manwaring and Kent P. Jackson, "The Joseph Smith Translation: An Inspired Version of the Bible," *From the Desk* (website), 23 November 2020, fromthedesk.org/10-questions-kent-jackson/. As I noted in my analysis, it would not be problematic had Joseph Smith turned to Clarke or to any other informed source while working on the JST. But no evidence exists that he ever turned to Adam Clarke.

31. See Jackson, "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," 55–57. Clarke was a Methodist. As a reason for why Joseph Smith would turn to Methodist Bible scholarship, Townsend states that Joseph Smith "was first attracted, through his wife Emma's family, to Methodism." He cites as a source Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 69–70. Bushman, however, does not suggest at all that the Prophet was "attracted" to Methodism while living in Harmony; his interaction with the Methodists there was largely hostile. Joseph Smith was already familiar with Methodism before the First Vision (Joseph Smith—History 1:8).

repeating the discussion here, I refer readers to selected pages in my response to the previous Adam Clarke attempt.³²

I ask, if Joseph Smith did obtain ideas from Adam Clarke, what could explain why he would overlook the many meaningful comments Clarke made while fixating on small, unimportant word changes like the ones Townsend proposes? Further, because taking ideas from Clarke cannot explain the scores of other ways Isaiah in the Book of Mormon differs from Isaiah in the Bible, why would we believe Townsend's examples? Also, if Joseph Smith had been pretending to restore "plain and precious things" by means of editing Isaiah, why did he turn to small word changes like these instead of passages that could be categorized as "plain and precious?" The explanations provided by Townsend to bolster his claim show to what lengths he is willing to go to look for evidence for his idea. I suspect that he checked every Book of Mormon Isaiah variant against Clarke's commentary, and this was the best he could do. None of his examples work; all can be explained in better ways. This is not an academic project but a search for ways to justify a predetermined conclusion. It is not serious scholarship.



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32. "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," especially pages 15–17, 23–28, 53–58. My judgment was that Wayment's analysis was a good-faith effort to understand how Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible was made. I cannot say the same about Townsend's project.

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