Review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (1990), by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtines

Jerald and Sandra Tanner are two of the best known critics of the Latter-day Saint Church, its doctrines, history, and scriptures. As such, it is strange to see them come out with a book in which they profess themselves to be the “good guys” (my wording) in the anti-Mormon debate. They claim, for example, to have believed in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon as late as 1960, and that they began a sincere search to prove that the book was true, but found more and more evidence that it was not. This, they write, was painful to them (pp. 1, 7).

If these don’t seem to be the Jerald and Sandra you know, read on. They note that they disagree with anti-Mormon critics who “twist the facts to make their arguments stronger” (p. 1) and point out that it is they (the Tanners) who have exposed the fraudulent nature of some anti-Latter-day Saint writings. And, unlike others, they didn’t swallow Mark Hofmann’s story and the documents he forged (p. 5).

Despite these initial departures from their usual pattern, the Tanners are true to form throughout the rest of the book. For example, they frequently cite “Mormon scholars,” with the implication that these scholars were pointing out problems in the Book of Mormon when, in fact, they were writing favorably of it. As usual, they use this book as a vehicle for selling some of their other publications, to which they frequently make reference.

The Tanners are thorough in their research, but frequently wrong in their interpretations of what they have discovered. Thus, the Latter-day Saint scholar, while finding the book interesting, is hard-pressed to take it seriously. On the other hand, those with only a cursory acquaintance with the Book of Mormon may easily believe that the Tanners have, as they claim,

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1 These statements are at variance with what Sandra Tanner once told me about how she came to lose her faith as a teenager, and make me wonder how they can criticize Joseph Smith for making similar “changes” in his story.
amassed a fantastic array of evidence against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

An example of their inability to consider seriously evidence favoring the Book of Mormon is that, in this book, the Tanners denounce the idea of chiasmus in the Nephite record, believing it to be “merely evidence of Joseph Smith’s repetitive style of writing” (p. 31). The rejection out of hand of evidence for chiasmus is typical of their approach, which is to dismiss anything favoring Joseph Smith’s account of his spiritual experiences. They cite John S. Kselman’s unfavorable review of John Welch’s work on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, but fail to note that his review compliments Welch’s work as clean, admirable, and fair (simply stating that he “would draw different inferences from the evidence”), and that several other non-Latter-day Saint scholars have been very impressed by the phenomenon.3

A Pattern of Forgery and Deceit?

A common theme in many of the Tanners’ publications is the idea that the “Mormon” Church is out to hoodwink people. Not content to charge Joseph Smith with fraud and forgery (as they term it) in the case of the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham, they point out that the official History of the Church was not really written by Joseph Smith and that changes in the early records from third to first person have been made “to deceive the reader” (p. 3). They believe that this pattern of forgery is common to Latter-day Saint culture, and point not only to Mark Hofmann’s work, but to the forged Howard Hughes will, leaving a sizeable portion of his estate to the Church, and to Ronald Vern Jackson’s forgery of a document to support Joseph Smith’s story. Having laid this foundation, the Tanners define the Book of Mormon as a “forgery,” i.e., a book

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written by Joseph Smith and falsely claimed to have been written by ancient scribes.

Nature of the "Black Hole"

Most of the first part of the book (pp. 9-46) is devoted to the Tanners’ explanation of their “black hole” theory for the Book of Mormon. Believing Joseph Smith to be the sole author of the Book of Mormon, they propose that when the 116 pages were lost, Joseph became distraught. Knowing that he could not reproduce them exactly as they had been written, he feared that if the pages still existed he could be exposed as a fraud. Following a brief pause in the work, he returned to it and just continued from where he left off. After rejecting several possible replacements for the missing first part, he concocted the story of a second set of “small” plates prepared by Nephi which would cover the same time period as the 116 pages.

In replacing the original 116 pages, however, Joseph Smith had difficulty remembering dates and the names of persons and places. The lack of such details in that portion of the Book of Mormon said to have been taken from the small plates is cited by the Tanners as evidence of what they term “the black hole.” They further cite the fact that Joseph used filler material, mostly from the biblical book of Isaiah.

By the Tanners’ reckoning (p. 36), Joseph Smith waited until after he had completed the bulk of the Book of Mormon (Mosiah through Ether) before coming up with the material he used to replace the 116 pages. But if Joseph had authored the Book of Mormon, wouldn’t he be taking a big risk to rewrite the story of Lehi, even if it was less detailed? And wouldn’t the risk of contradiction with the lost 116 pages increase if he intentionally waited until completing Mormon’s abridgment before proceeding with the writing of the small plates of Nephi? The Tanners reason (pp. 32-33) that Joseph’s delay gave time for Martin Harris and others who had seen the translation to forget enough details to make the deception possible. But how could this be, if Joseph believed that the 116 pages were still out there—as the Preface to the 1830 edition, as well as D&C 10:11, 15-19, 29-32, clearly implies?

Lack of Detail

The relative vagueness in the small plates is seen as an attempt on Joseph’s part to avoid contradicting details he had
included in the 116 pages. There is, however, quite a bit of detail concerning some of the events which occurred during the desert sojourn of Lehi’s family (1 Nephi 1:18). The Tanners argue that Joseph remembered only details about Lehi’s immediate family and forgot only those given after the group’s arrival in the New World (p. 14). To me, it seems more likely that the latter part of the 116 pages would be freshest in his mind. Moreover, there are other parts of the Book of Mormon (notably 4 Nephi and Ether) also lacking in detail that cannot be explained by the necessity to avoid contradictions.

The Tanners claim (p. 17) that Nephi does not mention any New World prophets, though he names three unknown prophets from the Old World, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10). Their concern is unwarranted, however, for Nephi did, in fact, name all of the prophets known among his people during his lifetime, i.e., himself, his father Lehi and his brother Jacob. Nephi probably mentioned Zenos and Zenock by name because they were ancestors of Lehi (3 Nephi 10:16; cf. Helaman 15:11).

The Tanners note (p. 14) that 1 Nephi names only eleven people (aside from biblical personalities) and names only one woman, Lehi’s wife Sariah. Nephi does not mention his wife’s name, nor those of his children or the children of his brothers, nor any of the children of Ishmael. There is, however, nothing suspicious in this. Only one biblical prophet—Hosea—gives his wife’s name (Hosea 1:3) and also names his daughter and two sons (Hosea 1:3-9). Isaiah, while listing his children because the names he gave them relate to his prophecies, refers to his wife only as “the prophetess” (Isaiah 8:3). Though Job’s wife is mentioned in the book of that name (Job 2:9; 19:17; 31:10), she is not named, nor are any of Job’s children. The wife and mother-in-law of Simon Peter are mentioned, but not named, though their names were quite likely known to Matthew (Matthew 8:14), to Mark (Mark 1:30) and to Luke (Luke 4:38).

Vagueness on the matter of names is evident in other parts of the Book of Mormon where there is no hint that Joseph Smith needed to avoid details for fear of contradicting the stolen 116 pages. The book of Ether is notorious for failing to name the brother of Jared (though the place Moriancumer, mentioned in Ether 2:13, was evidently named after him). And while it indicates that he had twenty-two sons and daughters (Ether 6:20), only one son (Pagag) is named (Ether 6:25). Nor do we find the names of their twenty-two friends and their friends’
families (Ether 1:36-37; 2:1; 6:16). Jared’s four sons are named (Ether 6:14) but not his eight daughters (Ether 6:20). The wives of Jared and his brother are also not named. Orihah also had a large family, twenty-three sons and eight daughters, but only one is named (Ether 7:1-3). And so it goes throughout the book of Ether.

On the surface, the lack of names for Nephi’s successors as king (Jacob 1:9-11) appears to be valid evidence that Joseph was avoiding giving details for fear of contradicting the 116 pages he had already written (p. 17). But surely he would have remembered at least the name of Nephi’s successor. After all, the Lehi colony was not yet large enough to make the genealogy sufficiently complicated to cause Joseph to forget the name of the second king. Why, then, did he not supply that name in Jacob, before adding that it was traditional for each king to take the throne-name “Nephi”? The most reasonable explanation is that Jacob was, as he claimed, actually following Nephi’s instructions to stick to sacred matters, and not to get caught up in history. The Tanners object that “it is especially strange that Jacob would not reveal the name of the new king since in chapter 7, he gives a known Antichrist the dignity of a name” (p. 24). But this is not strange at all, for Jacob had personal dealings with the anti-Christ Sherem. The same phenomenon is found in the Bible. For example, neither the Judaean prophet slain by the lion nor the Israelite prophet who hosted him is ever named (1 Kings 13:11-32; 2 Kings 23:16-18), while some false prophets are mentioned by name because they had personal encounters with true prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 28:24-32; 2 Chronicles 18:10, 23).

The Tanners ask why Mosiah, who appears to have been the Nephite king, was not called—following the pattern mentioned by Jacob—something like “Nephi XI” (p. 17). The likely answer is that the system had changed during the four centuries which had passed since Jacob’s time. If Jacob’s statement about the kings being called “first Nephi, second Nephi,” etc., is correct for the early period of Nephite history, then we would expect that this would also be mentioned in the 116 pages, which was taken from the history kept by the kings. If the 116 pages do not contain this information, then Joseph Smith ran the risk of being caught in a contradiction should those who had stolen the pages ever present them for public examination. Had he been the author of the Book of Mormon, he would have been on safer ground had Jacob simply left out
the statement about the title bestowed on the kings. Here, as in other examples, the Tanners’ logic can be turned against their theory as well.

**Imprecision of Dates**

The Tanners contrast the precise dates found in that part of the Book of Mormon which begins at Mosiah with the paucity of such precision in the small plates. They point out that Amaleki failed to give dates in his record (Omni 1:12-30), while in Mosiah 29:46 it is recorded that the second Mosiah died “in the thirty and third year of his reign, being sixty and three years old; making in the whole, five hundred and nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.” They attribute this sudden precision to the fact that the black hole has now been passed (p. 17).

But there is another possible explanation for this precision. We are, after all, dealing with Mormon’s abridgment in the book of Mosiah. The dates are therefore probably Mormon’s doing, and hence attributable to the character of the author, rather than to a cover-up by Joseph Smith. Moreover, it is the precision in Mosiah 6:4 or 29:46 that would be Joseph Smith’s undoing had he been the actual author of the Book of Mormon. It is a simple matter to find, by calculating back from Mosiah’s death, that his father Benjamin had abdicated the throne some thirty-three years previously, making it 476 years after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. Would Joseph Smith have been so precise about Benjamin if he thought that this figure might contradict dates already written in the 116 pages?

The thirty years mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:28, contrary to the opinion of the Tanners (p. 18), represents an historical occurrence, for it was when Nephi made the small plates (2 Nephi 5:29-31). They also note (p. 18) the forty-year time period in 2 Nephi 5:34, which marks the journal entry in which he tells us when he wrote the preceding material. Similarly, the reference to fifty-five years in Jacob 1:1 (p. 18) denotes when he received the plates from Nephi. The imprecision in Jacob 7:1-2 (p. 18) is due to the fact that the whole chapter is a journal entry added to Jacob’s record “after some years had passed,” when he was an old man. Jacob had made a formal ending at Jacob 6:13 and evidently had no intention of writing more. As an afterthought, he added the story of Sherem, then updated the preface to his book, where he had—following Nephi’s example—left space for an explanation of the book’s contents.
The increased precision in dates found in the rest of the Book of Mormon can be explained by the fact that the small plates comprise first-person journal entries—each covering several years of history—while Mormon was a chronographer. He was able to reconstruct the time from Lehi to Mosiah (Mosiah 6:4; 29:46). Following Mosiah, years were counted from the institution of government by judges (Alma 1:1). This was changed once again after the sign of Christ’s birth (3 Nephi 2:8). The latter two systems were clearly a departure from the earlier pattern, but there is justification for it. The pattern typically used in the ancient Near East was a short-term calendar, based on the regnal years of each king. Since Lehi’s group left all that behind, they had no system they could use except to count the number of years since their departure from Jerusalem. This became the pattern for the later two systems.

Geographical Imprecision

The Tanners (p. 19) contrast the geographical details found in Nephi’s account of events in the Old World with the lack of such detail after the group arrived in the New World. In the former, there is mention of such geographical and cultural details as Jerusalem, its wall and its king (Zedekiah), the prophet Jeremiah, the Red Sea, the direction of Lehi’s travels, and the building of a ship. When the group arrives in the New World “the account of their landing is very vague” (see 1 Nephi 18:23), and they don’t even give any dates. They could have arrived at “any place from Alaska to the tip of South America.”

Some degree of vagueness is, however, natural enough. Having never seen the place before (and having forgotten to bring their Hammond’s atlas with them), Lehi’s people called it “the promised land” (1 Nephi 18:23). They couldn’t have given a date for the landing. Surely we cannot expect that Nephi would have dated the landing “in the X year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” (which was the Israelite pattern in his day) when, for all he knew, Zedekiah was no longer king.

Indeed, had the Book of Mormon contained more precise details along the lines the Tanners suggest, I have no doubt that this, too, would have been used—with more justification—as evidence that Joseph Smith made it all up! But let’s take it one step further. In the biblical story of Jacob, there are no geographical indications for his travels into Egypt, except for the
name of his point of embarkation and the place where he settled down (Genesis 46:1-28).

The Tanners assert (p. 20) that Nephi never mentions the names of any Nephite or Lamanite cities and that he does not refer to any New World lands by name. But since the two groups were, in Nephi’s day, merely extended families, each living at a single site, there were probably no other “cities” (and no “lands”) to name until a few generations had passed. If there were no large political entities and no other towns involved in the early Nephite history, there would certainly be no reason to mention them. Indeed, the city of Zarahemla may have been their first outside contact.

The Tanners contrast the paucity of place-names and directional indications in the small plates with the large quantity of such data in the rest of the Book of Mormon (over 200 in Alma alone), and cite this as evidence of the “black hole” (p. 20). A simpler explanation is population growth and increased interaction between different settlements—including warfare, which was of interest to Mormon, abridger of the book of Alma and himself a military leader.

By noting the abundance of geographical details in the book of Alma, the Tanners work against their own theory regarding Joseph Smith’s need to be vague about geography in the small plates. It makes little sense that he would be vague in the small plates and then give sufficient detail in Mosiah 7-24 and Alma 17-27 regarding directions and places to enable us to ascertain the approximate geographical relationships between the city of Nephi and other nearby lands and topographical features which would have figured prominently in the history found in the 116 pages. If the small plates were dictated by Joseph after Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates (a proposition the Tanners support—pp. 32-37), then Joseph Smith could have simply drawn city names from the passages in Mosiah and Alma to lend more authenticity to the first part of the Book of Mormon. The fact that he did not do so suggests that he was, as he claimed, merely translating what he found on the small plates.

The Tanners state (p. 21) that the small plates mention no rivers or mountains in the New World. To this, I respond that, in all of Paul’s very extensive travels recorded in Acts 13-28, there is only one mention of a river (Acts 16:13) and only one of a hill (Acts 17:22), with absolutely no mention of valleys or plains. To the Tanners’ note that Nephi, who mentioned no New World towns or rivers, wrote of Bethabara and the Jordan
River (1 Nephi 10:9), we need only reply that this important religious information is in the account of a vision, in a set of plates dedicated to religious rather than geographical and historical matters.

I don’t see how the failure to mention “houses” in the New World in the small plates (p. 20) provides evidence for the “black hole.” The same writers fail to mention clothing, drinking water, knives, and so forth. They were not concerned with such mundane matters and probably assumed that everyone knew they had places to live, clothing, and utensils. Since mentioning houses would not have placed Joseph Smith in danger of contradicting anything written in the 116 pages, he would have had no reason to avoid the word deliberately had he been writing the book himself.4

War Stories

The Tanners believe that Joseph Smith was intensely interested in warfare, and hence included many battle accounts in that part of the Book of Mormon which deals with the period following the “black hole” (pp. 21-23, 27). They further believe that the lost 116 pages must have contained much more information about wars which Joseph, for fear of contradiction, left off the small plates. The difference can just as easily be explained by the fact that Mormon, as a military leader, would have been more prone to speak of warfare than others. (The same is true of his son, Moroni, who included many stories of war in his abridgment of Ether.) Mormon’s purpose was to show how the people had periods of war and peace according to their righteousness—a fact he stressed when discussing the period immediately following Christ’s appearance in the land of

4 Besides, Jacob (7:26), Alma (13:23), and Ammon (Alma 26:36) noted that the Nephites were “wanderers.” It is very possible that, during the period when the small plates were written, they dwelt exclusively in tents or temporary dwellings. When Nephi and his followers separated themselves from those who followed Laman and Lemuel, they took tents with them (2 Nephi 5:7). Even in later times, we find much use of tents among the Nephites. Excluding the use of tents by search parties and armies, we have them mentioned in Mosiah 2:5-6; 18:34; 22:2; 23:5; 24:20. At least some of the Lamanites also lived in tents (Alma 22:28; 27:25). Indeed, the “buildings” mentioned in the Nephite record are very often identified as places of worship (2 Nephi 5:15-16; Alma 16:13; 21:4, 6, 20; 22:7; 31:12-13; 32:5; Helaman 3:9, 14).
Bountiful. The abundance of geographical detail given in the abridgment of the large plates (and lacking in the small plates) was necessary for Mormon’s explanation of military strategy—something in which he was an expert.

Indeed, the lack of such details in all writings except those of general Mormon can be used as evidence to support the idea of multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon. The objections of the Tanners make sense only when one has made the a priori assumption that Joseph Smith was the sole author of the Book of Mormon. Besides, in view of their small numbers, the early battles of the Nephites could have been nothing more than armed gang fights, with a few dozen participants. Taking place in a forest clearing (or some other nondescript place), they can hardly have called for much strategy and troop movement.

By the Tanners’ reckoning (p. 27), Joseph had to substitute more spiritual material for the original bloody war stories when he redid the first part of the Book of Mormon. However, had Joseph Smith been the author of the Book of Mormon, intending to recount war stories, how do we account for the presence of the very spiritual stories in Mormon’s abridgment, such as the mission of the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17-27); the preaching of Alma and Amulek (Alma 5-15, 29-35); Alma’s counsel to his sons (Alma 36-42); Samuel’s prophecy (Helaman 13-15); Christ’s visit and teachings (3 Nephi 11-28); Mormon’s teachings (Mormon 5, 7); plus Moroni’s doctrinal expositions in Mormon 8-9, Ether 4-5, 12, and his own book? In other words, the record is not all “blood and guts” after the small plates.

Old Testament Filler

The Tanners (pp. 23-24) believe that, in order to make up for lack of historical detail which would have contradicted the material contained in the 116 pages, Joseph Smith used filler from the Old Testament, citing a number of chapters of Isaiah. They find it odd that Nephi would quote this material rather than recount the history of his people. In view of the fact that the material is already found in our Bible, the Tanners term its inclusion in the Book of Mormon “ridiculous.” Actually, Nephi’s work in this respect is no less ridiculous than the fact that the Bible repeats the genealogy lists of Genesis 5, 10-11, 36, in the early chapters of 1 Chronicles, that Isaiah 36-39 repeats material already found in 2 Kings 18-20, or that much of
the history found in the books of Samuel and Kings is repeated in the Chronicles, etc. The Tanners use the same tactic as many other anti-Mormon writers, attacking the Book of Mormon in the same manner that unbelievers attack the Bible. This double standard compromises their work.

Nephi used most of the Isaiah quotes as a vehicle to explain the meaning of his own revelations from God. He could not have done this as effectively had he not quoted them for his readers. More to the point, the Book of Mormon also includes extensive quotes from Isaiah and Malachi in Mosiah 14-15 and 3 Nephi 22, 24-25, at places where there can be no supposed "black hole" requiring biblical filler. As with Nephi, Abinadi and Jesus used these quotes as background for explanations (in the surrounding chapters) of doctrinal matters.

An Apparent Inconsistency

The Tanners cite (p. 37) what Brent Metcalfe believes to be an inconsistency in the Book of Mormon, i.e., that while Nephi knew when the Messiah would come (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8), Alma did not have this information (Alma 13:25). They further note that Samuel the Lamanite did not refer to the prophecy of Nephi when he spoke of the imminent advent of Christ (Helaman 14:2). Because these later Nephites knew nothing of Nephi's prophecy of Christ's coming, the Tanners conclude that the story of Nephi's prophecy was not yet in Joseph Smith's mind, since he had not yet invented the "small plates." They support their contention by noting that Alma should have known what Nephi wrote since, in Alma 3:14-17, he quoted Nephi. The words quoted, however, are not in the writings of Nephi from the small plates and must have been on the 116 lost pages. I used the scripture computer search program to determine this, and the Tanners should have done the same.

There is, in fact, no evidence that any of the later Nephites ever referred to the small plates, on which the prophecy in question was written. Mormon noted that he had been unaware

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5 The Tanners (p. 72) consider the sermon in 3 Nephi 12-14 to be a borrowing from Matthew 5-7. Latter-day Saints consider this sermon to be so important that Jesus delivered it to his disciples in both the Old and the New Worlds. For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the two sermons, see John W. Welch, The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990).
of the existence of the small plates until his work of abridgment was well under way (Words of Mormon 1:3). How can we expect that Samuel, who was not a Nephite, should have had access to them? Moreover, it is very doubtful that we can take the “600 years” of Nephi’s prophecy as literal, since Lehi left Jerusalem no earlier than the first year of Zedekiah (1 Nephi 1:4), which would have been 598 B.C.—already too late for the prophecy to have been fulfilled precisely 600 years later. Thus, Alma could have been aware of Nephi’s statement and taken it as an approximation only, rather than as a precise date. It is Mormon’s rewriting of the history which has the birth of Christ occurring in the six hundredth year (3 Nephi 1:1). And it was this same Mormon who acknowledged that there could have been errors in the chronology (3 Nephi 8:1-2).

Amaleki: Beyond the “Black Hole”

The Tanners believe that Amaleki, whose brief account appears in Omni 1:12-30, “was apparently on the other side of the black hole,” and that “his role was to set the stage for the next act—i.e., Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi” (p. 25). I believe this assumption to be incorrect. Had Joseph Smith not taken up the former translation work at the point where he left off, anyone possessing the 116 pages could have shown that he had skipped over part of the story, relegating it to the small plates. Thus, Amaleki’s cursory mention of Benjamin in Omni 1:23-25 leads me to believe that the more complete historical account in the 116 pages should tell us more about this king. But when we encounter him in Mosiah, he is an old man, ready to retire in favor of his son Mosiah. Obviously, quite a bit is missing.

The 116 pages must have had an account of king Mosiah and his son Benjamin. (D&C 10:41 says that Joseph Smith had translated “to the reign of king Benjamin.”) To speak of them in Omni and Words of Mormon, Joseph Smith, had he authored the Book of Mormon himself, would have run the risk of contradicting what he had written in the 116 pages. Here are some of the implications of this reasoning:

1. Clearly, the 116 pages must already have discussed Mosiah’s immigration to Zarahemla, where those who followed him joined with the Mulekites. (There is, after all, very little history of Mosiah in the small plates, so it must have been in the 116 pages, even if Joseph Smith invented the Book of
Mormon.) This being so, the Tanners’ assessment (p. 25) of the story of the immigration as an attempt to place the Nephites in a new geographical environment to avoid contradictory geographical details found in the 116 pages is incorrect. Moreover, as noted above, parts of the books of Mosiah and Alma give geographical details of the land from which Mosiah’s people had fled. Mosiah 11:13 informs us that the hill north of Shilom had played an important role in Mosiah’s exodus from the land of Nephi. Surely the hill would have been mentioned in the 116 lost pages.

2. The story of the Zeniff colony, mentioned by Amaleki (Omni 1:27-30), is, in fact, found in Mormon’s abridgment (Mosiah 7-24). The departure of that group from Zarahemla must have been on the 116 pages, and by referring to it again in Omni, Joseph Smith—had he authored the Book of Mormon himself—would have run the risk of contradicting what he had written earlier.

3. The Tanners comment that “even with Amaleki’s help in getting the Nephites to a new land, the small and large plates of Nephi do not come together in a very smooth manner” (p. 25). This is actually evidence that we are dealing with two separate documents, the small plates and Mormon’s abridgment. But I believe that the juncture between the two sets of plates is quite different from what the Tanners and others believe it to be, and this issue will be discussed below.

As evidence that Amaleki’s entry covers a time period post-dating that of the “black hole,” the Tanners note (p. 16) that he introduces new names and gives new details. This assessment, however, is at odds with the Tanners’ assertion about the lack of dates in Amaleki’s account, and also with the fact that he left a very sparse record. Elsewhere, the Tanners use these latter points as evidence of the “black hole” (p. 25). Joseph Smith seems damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t give details.

In another place, the Tanners note their belief that, “by the time [Joseph Smith] came to the book of Omni . . . he had safely passed the point where he could be trapped by the 116 pages, [so] he rapidly brought the project to a screeching halt” (p. 19). But if Joseph Smith had already passed the terminus a quo of the 116 pages, why then would he rush on a few hundred years in just a short space? If he was already on safe ground, what was the point? On the other hand, if the time of Benjamin was at the end of the 116 pages, as the Tanners suggest early on (p. 11), then their reference to Joseph Smith’s rushing through Omni to
terminate the "small plates" project is totally invalid. Their observation that there seems to be a push to finish off the book of Omni should be contrasted with the explicit statement in that book that the reason for the short entries was the diminishing space available on the small plates (Omni 1:30; cf. Jarom 1:2, 14). The fact is that Amaleki wrote nineteen of the verses in the book of Omni, contrasted with the eleven verses written by his four predecessors. It is not Amaleki's account which was greatly shortened to conclude the story on the small plates.

Words of Mormon

The part of the small plates of Nephi known as the "Words of Mormon" is seen by the Tanners (p. 11) as a contrived transition between the account invented to replace the lost 116 pages and the abridgment by Mormon beginning in Mosiah. This theory falls apart when one understands the true nature of the Words of Mormon.

We note that Mormon wrote that it was after he had "made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin" that he "searched among the records . . . and . . . found this small account of the prophets . . . down to the reign of this king Benjamin" (Words of Mormon 1:3). This prompts the question of why Mormon searched the records at such a propitious time. On the surface, it appears to be contrived, as the Tanners assert (p. 30). But I suggest that his reason for searching through the records was to locate the small plates he had found mentioned in the large plates in connection with king Benjamin (cf. Words of Mormon 1:10). Having found them, he was pleased with their contents and appended them to his abridgment (Words of Mormon 1:6-7).

I further believe that Words of Mormon 1:12-18 is part of the translation from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, and that these verses were not found on the small plates and should therefore not be part of the Words of Mormon. To understand this proposition, we must turn to an examination of the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, copied by Oliver Cowdery from the original manuscript written from dictation (the latter, as far as I can determine, being missing for this portion of the text). The manuscript, as originally copied, does not show a title for the book of Mosiah, presumably because that title appeared on one of the 116 lost pages. Even more important is the fact that there is, on the manuscript, no
original indication of a separation between Words of Mormon and Mosiah. Rather, Mosiah begins with the notation "Chapter II," as if it were a continuation from Words of Mormon. A later correction to the beginning of Words of Mormon added the words "Chapter I," changed "Chapter II" to read "Chapter I," and added the title "The Book of Mosiah" before the latter. I believe that this title was misplaced and should have been after Words of Mormon 1:11. Here are my reasons for this belief:

1. Mormon’s statement that he was “about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni” and had witnessed “almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites” (Words of Mormon 1:1; cf. vs. 2) implies that he was near the end of his abridgment. This means he was not working on the story of Benjamin at the time he wrote these words, explaining how he had come across the small plates, but it may have been a long time since he had discovered them. (Words of Mormon 1:1-11 were, of course, written on the small plates, as we learn in Words of Mormon 1:5.)

2. Mormon wrote that he was going to “finish my record” on the small plates (Words of Mormon 1:5, 9). Since the bulk of his abridgment was written after he wrote of king Benjamin’s time, he could not have “finished” his record by writing about that king in Words of Mormon 1:12-18. How did he finish that record? I suggest that he summed up an explanation of the two sets of plates (Words of Mormon 1:10-11), then wrote the first part of the title page, perhaps only as far as the words “To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.” Moroni evidently added the rest of the title page, as Sidney B. Sperry first suggested many years ago. Joseph Smith indicated that “the title page of the Book of Mormon was taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates.” Presumably, Mormon added the small plates just before this title page, though this is less certain. It would, in any event, explain why Joseph Smith translated the small plates last.

3. Mormon’s concluding remarks in Words of Mormon 1:11 reflect the thoughts he expressed in the last chapter he wrote in Mormon 7. He wrote of the preservation of the records (cf. Mormon 7:1) and of the judgment (cf. Mormon 7:6, 10). In

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6 Sidney B. Sperry, Book of Mormon Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 42.

7 HC 1:71.
Words of Mormon 1:8, he expressed the hope—also given in Mormon 7:5, 10—that his brethren might come to believe in Christ. This makes me wonder if the last part of Mormon (chapters 6-9) may have been written on the small plates. Indeed, Mormon 6:1 begins with the words, “And now I finish my record,” which is reminiscent of Words of Mormon 1:5, 9. In any event, the similarity of words found in Mormon 6-7 and in Words of Mormon 1:1-11 may indicate a temporal proximity of the writing of those two records.

4. There is a smooth flow from Words of Mormon 1:12 through the end of this “book” and into the beginning of Mosiah, which indicates that the record was continuous.

5. Joseph Smith may have chosen to place the title “Book of Mosiah” in its current place because Mosiah 1:1 is where he took up the story after turning over the 116 pages to Martin Harris. If this is true, then Words of Mormon 1:12-18 evidently represent part of the record already translated before the loss of the 116 pages. Joseph may have retained this part (cf. D&C 10:41) because it was on a page which had not yet been filled. The book of Mosiah, in this case, was probably named after the first Mosiah, whose history would have been part of the lost pages; otherwise, one might expect the book to be named after Benjamin. But this is by no means certain.

**Multiple Sets of Plates**

The Tanners wonder “why so many plates were made which covered the same period of Nephite history” (p. 45). We have Mormon abridging the Nephite history from the large plates of Nephi, while the small plates of Nephi overlap the history covered by both the large plates and Mormon’s abridgment (represented by the 116 lost pages). And Lehi’s genealogy is said to be found not only on the brass plates, but in Lehi’s own book as well as in the larger account prepared by Nephi (1 Nephi 3:3, 12; 5:14, 16; 6:1; 19:2; Alma 37:3). But this is not so unusual. The Bible has many examples of such parallel histories. Most of the stories in the books of Samuel and Kings (which, the majority of scholars agree, are a single history) are repeated in Chronicles, a post-exilic attempt to rewrite the history. Moreover, we are frequently reminded in Samuel and Kings that the information contained therein originally came from the chronicles of David, of the kings of Judah, and of the kings of Israel, as well as from records kept by various early
prophets whose works have been lost to us. Parts of Jeremiah and Isaiah repeat some of the history from 2 Kings, and the genealogies at the beginning of 1 Chronicles repeat information recorded earlier, mostly in Genesis. Parallel histories are nothing new to the world of holy writ.

The Plates of Lehi

The Tanners believe (p. 10) that Joseph Smith contradicted himself regarding the contents of the lost 116 pages. Thus, in the preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon, he wrote that the lost pages contained his translation of "the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon," while in D&C 10:44 he wrote that the missing pages contained "an abridgment of the account of Nephi." Why should Joseph thus contradict himself? If he was a charlatan, couldn't he do a better job than this? And wouldn't the people who stole the pages be able to prove him wrong by producing the original pages?

In Mosiah 1:6, where Joseph took up the Book of Mormon story again, we read of the "plates of Nephi," but not the "plates of Lehi." Surely at that early stage Joseph must have remembered from which plates Mormon had been abridging. The fact that the "plates of Lehi" are mentioned only in Joseph's 1830 preface may indicate that this was an error for "plates of Nephi," or that Mormon abridged plates from both Lehi and Nephi. In any event, the fact that Lehi's plates are not mentioned anywhere in the Book of Mormon text except perhaps by allusion in 1 Nephi does not bode well for the Tanners' theories. The absence of references to these plates further reinforces the idea that there could have been "small plates of Nephi" also not mentioned in Mormon's abridgment.

Abridgment from the Plates of Nephi

The Tanners believe that Joseph's earlier intention was to replace the lost 116 pages abridged by Mormon from Lehi's record with "an account abridged by Mormon from another large set of plates which were prepared by Lehi's son, Nephi, and his descendants" (p. 40). This theory rests on the assumption that the 116 pages were Mormon's abridgment from the plates of Lehi and that Joseph Smith intended to replace them with Mormon's abridgment from a parallel account made by Nephi. The theory further rests on the assumption that the title page,
submitted for copyright on June 11, 1829, before the translation work was completed, records Joseph Smith’s plan prior to coming up with the idea of a set of “small plates.” The theory fails, however, on several points:

1. The Tanners’ assumption that the title page was written as a description of the contents of the Book of Mormon as Joseph Smith conceived it in June 1829 is unwarranted. It was clearly intended to describe Mormon’s abridgment only, and not the small plates which became an addendum to his work. Consequently, the abridgment “taken from the plates of Nephi” refers not to the intended replacement for the 116 pages, but to Mormon’s work in general.

2. In D&C 10:39, we read that in the record contained on the 116 pages “it was said ... that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi.” Since Joseph Smith believed that the 116 pages still existed, we must conclude that the stolen account actually spoke of the “plates of Nephi” from which Mormon was abridging his record. Indeed, in D&C 10:44, we read that those who stole the 116 pages “have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi.”

3. The Tanners try to support their thesis by noting that none of the authors of the small plates is named in the title page. But this absence of names proves nothing. Another notable absentee should make this clear: While the title page mentions the Jaredite record, it doesn’t name Moroni, the abridger of Ether, despite the fact that, even by the Tanners’ reckoning (p. 45), Moroni’s work with the book of Ether had already been dictated by Joseph Smith by the time the title page was written. If Moroni was not named, why should it name the authors of the books on the small plates? The answer, again, is that the title page was written principally as a description of Mormon’s abridgment, with a later addition by Moroni. There is a strong thread of consistency here, which the Tanners ignore.

4. If Joseph’s original intention was to present the Book of Mormon as Mormon’s abridgment from the “plates of Lehi,” subsequently intending to use a parallel abridgment from the “plates of Nephi” to substitute for the missing 116 pages, why didn’t he continue this claim in Mosiah through Mormon? Instead, that part of the Book of Mormon frequently affirms that it is taken from the “plates of Nephi.” Why should Joseph Smith complicate matters? If he was clever enough to produce a fraud, why didn’t he do it right?
5. That Joseph Smith did not, as the Tanners believe, invent the “plates of Nephi” after completing his work through Ether (or Moroni) is evidenced by the fact that the plates of Nephi are mentioned as early as Mosiah 1:6, 16; 28:11. In Alma 37:2; 44:24, we read that Alma kept a record on the plates of Nephi passed down to him. At a point long before Joseph Smith dictated the small plates, by best evidence, Mormon noted that he had taken his record from the plates of Nephi (3 Nephi 5:10). Some of his wording implies that he was abridging from those plates (Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 26:6-11; Mormon 6:6). Indeed, Mormon made both a complete account of the events of his days on the plates of Nephi and then abridged his own account for “these plates” (Mormon 2:18), meaning his abridgment.

The Plates of Nephi

D&C 10, which the Tanners believe was written in 1829, before Joseph produced the small plates, is seen by them (p. 35) as Joseph Smith’s means of explaining his inability to reproduce the missing 116 pages. They point to the lack of reference to two sets of plates by Nephi, or to the “small plates” of Nephi in D&C 10:38-42, 44-45, as evidence that Joseph was going to replace the lost 116 pages by a translation of “the plates of Nephi” (p. 43). They reason that if the small plates were meant, the large plates should also be mentioned. But since the large plates of Nephi were not part of the collection Mormon passed to Moroni to be completed and buried (Mormon 6:6), while the small plates were appended by Mormon to the abridged records (Words of Mormon 1:3-6), the only “plates of Nephi” which came into Joseph Smith’s hands were the “small plates.”

Another point brought out by the Tanners (pp. 44-45)—and one which has confused many Latter-day Saints—is the fact that D&C 10 indicates that Joseph Smith should “translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin” (D&C 10:41) and that he “should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work” (D&C 10:45). The small plates, of course, have a beginning (with 1 Nephi) and an end (with Omni, plus the Words of Mormon). All evidence indicates that we

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That Moroni was not an “afterthought,” as the Tanners believe, is shown by the fact that Moroni 2 fulfills a promise made by Mormon in 3 Nephi 18:36-37.
have a translation of all of these plates, not just of the "first part." A logical conclusion reached by the Tanners is that either Joseph Smith disobeyed the Lord, going beyond the "first part" of Nephi's record, or that he originally intended to translate the first part of a longer record by Nephi, then changed his story when he realized that such an account would have such detail that it might contradict the missing 116 pages.

But there is a simpler explanation, i.e., that the words "first part" in D&C 10:45 refer to the first part of the Book of Mormon, not to the small plates of Nephi, and that the word "of" is to be read in the sense of "from"—a usage not unknown to Joseph Smith. Hence, he was told to provide, as the first part of the Book of Mormon, a translation from the "engravings of Nephi." Besides, if Joseph Smith was changing his story as he went along, why didn't he modify the wording of D&C 10 before publishing it?

The Small Plates of Nephi

The Tanners believe (p. 41) that Joseph Smith, finding himself confronted with the problem of needing to avoid detail in that part of the Book of Mormon which would substitute for the lost 116 pages, changed his mind about having this part represent an abridgment by Mormon from the "plates of Nephi" (as they misread the title page) and, instead, had the authors of the small plates apologize for the lack of details due to the necessity to stick to religious matters and point out that there was a second, more complete record kept by the Nephite kings. There are problems with this theory, too:

1. The Tanners contend (p. 42) that the small plates started out as a supposed abridgment of Nephi's plates by Mormon and that it was only in 1 Nephi 9 that Joseph Smith switched to his "small plates" story. However, since Nephi wrote in first person from the beginning of his work (1 Nephi 1:1), with no hint that it was an abridgment by Mormon, the most logical conclusion is that it was intended from the beginning to represent firsthand accounts.

2. Had Joseph authored the book himself, he could just as easily have had Mormon, in his abridgment of Nephi's plates, make apologies for the lack of material on the plates of Nephi (and refer to the more complete record by Lehi).

3. The theory further fails when, as we have seen above, we realize that it is the major portion of the Book of Mormon
(Mosiah through Mormon) which claims to be an abridgment from the plates of Nephi! The Tanners have obviously misunderstood the construction of the Book of Mormon.

The Tanners suggest that "if the book of Nephi had been written first, it seems reasonable to believe that Joseph Smith would have told about these small plates being handed down from father to son throughout the entire Book of Mormon" (p. 42). They contrast the frequent mention of the double sets of plates in the early part of the Book of Mormon with the fact that Mormon knew nothing of them until he discovered them (pp. 42-43). The fact is that the small plates were not mentioned after Benjamin’s time because no more was written on them. Mormon didn’t know of their existence because the larger plates perhaps didn’t mention the smaller ones or, as I suggested above, mentioned them only in connection with their receipt by King Benjamin. The small plates were, after all, briefer and referred to the necessity to the more complete history for further details. This phenomenon is also found in the Bible. Throughout the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 Chronicles, we are referred to more complete accounts in the chronicles (annals) of the kings.

Since the small plates had already been virtually filled by the time Amaleki turned them over to Benjamin, there was no reason to pass them on, except for archival purposes. The existence of such archives is, in fact, mentioned in Mormon’s abridgment from the large plates (Helaman 3:13-16). There are, moreover, several references to the fact that the large plates of Nephi were being passed down from generation to generation, in order that records might be added to them by each successive historian (Alma 37:2; 44:24; 3 Nephi 5:10; 26:7, 11).

The Tanners (p. 41) find it strange that Nephi did not mention the existence of two sets of plates until 1 Nephi 9. They conclude (pp. 42-43) that it was at this point that Joseph Smith decided to change his story and invent the small plates to cover up the "black hole," so that he could avoid giving details (in a longer account by Nephi) that would conflict with the story on the 116 pages. What they fail to note is that 1 Nephi 9 marks the end of Nephi’s first journal entry, as denoted by the concluding words, "And thus it is. Amen." (See other such entries in 1 Nephi 14:30 and 22:31.) Nephi saved this explanation for the end of the initial journal entry, which is a perfectly logical thing to do. The colophon in 1 Nephi 9 begins with an explanation that the foregoing eight chapters comprised
all that “my father [Lehi] did see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates.” That is, the first part of 1 Nephi is evidently an abridgment from the record of Lehi, made by Nephi (rather than Mormon, whose abridgment of that record was lost with the 116 pages). Indeed, in 1 Nephi 1:16-17, Nephi informs us that he was abridging his father’s account, after which he would “make an account of mine own life.” It is significant that it was immediately after the colophon in 1 Nephi 9 that he wrote, “And now, I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren” (1 Nephi 10:1).

The mention of Nephi’s “reign and ministry” here may seem strange, in view of the fact that Nephi did not become king until some years later, as recorded in 2 Nephi 5:18.9 But it is precisely in this latter chapter (2 Nephi 5:28-34) that Nephi informs us of the preparation of the second (small) set of plates in the thirtieth year, and tells us that the journal entry he has just written was made in the fortieth year. Nephi’s large plates had been prepared years earlier, soon after the group’s arrival in the New World (1 Nephi 19:1-6). The Tanners’ suggestion (p. 41) that the beginning of 1 Nephi should have mentioned the second set of plates on which the record was being written is ludicrous. Why begin an account by stating that it is written on a secondary set of plates and that it has predecessors? The way in which Nephi handled it is much more logical.

Another “Plate” Theory

The Tanners, building on their theory of an evolving solution in Joseph Smith’s mind to the problem created by the loss of the 116 pages, add another plan to the growing list (p. 44), based on their examination of Words of Mormon 1:3. Because Mormon records that the small plates “contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of

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9 The book of 2 Nephi was evidently not a separate work by Nephi, despite the fact that it has a title and preface. In the original manuscript, it is preceded by the notation “Chapter VIII,” showing it to be a continuation of 1 Nephi. This was changed, however, in both the original and the printer’s manuscript, and the word “second” was added for the 1830 edition.
this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi,” they conclude that Joseph Smith had, at one point, intended to put forth a collection of small plates which were authored by Jacob and his descendants, and only after a moment’s hesitation added that the plates also contained “many of the words of Nephi.” They suggest that “this statement may have come from a section of material which was prepared by Joseph Smith before he decided to make Nephi the main character in the book” (p. 44) evidently meaning that Joseph Smith dictated Words of Mormon before the preceding books on the small plates. This suggestion contradicts their theory that the Words of Mormon were deliberately prepared in a manner which enabled Joseph Smith to tie the story in the small plates to those taken from Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates. It is one of several examples of how the Tanners try to support multiple and conflicting theories. 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.

**D&C 10**

Part of the Tanners’ “black hole” theory rests on the difficult issues of dating D&C 10 and whether the printed version (first appearing in the Book of Commandments in 1833) represents the original wording (pp. 37-38). The Latter-day Saint Church has variously dated the revelation to May 1829 or to the summer of 1828,\(^{10}\) with the latter view currently reflected in the editorial notes in the Doctrine and Covenants. The Tanners believe (p. 35) that the real date was May 1829 and that the revelation was Joseph Smith’s means of explaining why he

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\(^{10}\) After pointing out that the Book of Commandments dates the revelation to May 1829, while the 1989 edition of the Doctrine & Covenants dates it to the summer of 1828, the Tanners remark that “the idea of two different dates does not give a great deal of confidence in Joseph Smith’s methods.” What they fail to tell the reader is that the first edition (1835) of the Doctrine & Covenants, prepared under Joseph’s direction, also gives the date of May 1829. The change was made by later editors, not by Joseph Smith. But the Tanners are so convinced that Joseph Smith was a charlatan that they overlook such facts when they blurt out accusations against the Mormon founder.
could not reproduce the 116 lost pages, thereby laying the foundation for the replacement of those pages.\textsuperscript{11}

The Tanners (p. 34) use Max B. Parkin’s interpretation of D&C 10 as evidence that Joseph Smith had “begun” the translation again where he had left off at the time of king Benjamin by the time he received the revelation. This they take as evidence that Joseph didn’t concoct the story of the “small plates” until after having done a considerable amount of work on the book from the point where the 116 pages left off. But the passage in D&C 10:3 could just as easily be interpreted that he had “begun” with the book of Lehi and went down to the first part of Mosiah, but had not yet resumed the work at the time of the revelation. The word “retained” in D&C 10:41 is not, as Parkin and the Tanners take it, solid evidence that Joseph had already completed the translation of the plates of Mormon before receiving the revelation in D&C 10. It is much more logical to read this as meaning that at the time Joseph Smith gave Martin Harris the 116 pages, he “retained” some of that translation, and that it was to this point that he would be translating the small plates. We have already noted evidence that Words of Mormon 1:12-18 may have been part of that early translation from Mormon’s abridgment.

I believe that D&C 10, in mentioning the plates of Nephi, has reference to all the plates prepared by Nephi. If this assumption is correct, then, from the wording of verses 39-41, 44-45, it would appear that both the small and the large plates of Nephi must have been more detailed than the 116 pages. To test whether this is true, I noted that one of the pages from the original manuscript, which contains the account covered in 1 Nephi 4:20-37,\textsuperscript{12} is represented by 7.5 column inches in the

\textsuperscript{11} That the correct date for D&C 10 is 1828 is evidenced by the fact that, at the time of its writing, the gift to translate had just been restored to him (D&C 10:3). Since Oliver Cowdery’s attempt to translate is dated to April 1829 (D&C 8-9), the plates must have been returned by then, and not in May of that same year. D&C 5:30, written in March 1829, clearly shows that Joseph Smith had already returned to the translation by that time. He was told to stop “for a little season,” then he resumed when joined the following month by Oliver Cowdery as scribe.

\textsuperscript{12} This page is illustrated in Stan Larson, “‘A Most Sacred Possession,’ The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon,” Ensign September 1977): 86.
1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Since each page in the 1830 edition is 6 column inches, the 116 handwritten pages would have produced 145 pages of text had they been published in that edition. This compares favorably with the content of the small plates, which cover 147.5 pages in the 1830 Book of Mormon (page 5 through the middle of page 153). This is reduced to 122.5 pages if we discount the 25 pages of Isaiah passages found in 1-2 Nephi in the first edition. Still, that is a fair amount of material, and supports the idea found in D&C 10 that the plates from which Joseph Smith would translate were more detailed, at least when it came to Nephi’s account. If Joseph intended to publish a more detailed account from Nephi to replace the 116 pages, as implied in D&C 10:39, this seems very audacious indeed, for it would give more opportunity for potential contradictions, were he the author of the Book of Mormon.

The Tanners cast doubts on D&C 10 on other grounds as well. They note that “it would be almost impossible to alter the manuscript without detection,” making the premise in D&C 10:10-19 invalid (p. 10). I know too little of the paper and ink used by Martin Harris to judge this matter. But I do know that palimpsests from ancient times are known, in which the original has been erased and replaced with a new text. Some of these were not discovered until modern techniques such as ultra-violet photography and computer digital scans were available. But the question that the Tanners’ theory brings up is why Mrs. Harris didn’t expose Joseph Smith (whose revelation in D&C 10:10-19, 29-32, said the 116 pages still existed) by saying that she had burned the documents. Or, if she didn’t burn them, why didn’t she produce them to prove that Joseph’s contention that they had been altered was false? If Joseph were involved in a fraud, Mrs. Harris had ample opportunity to refute his claims. Why didn’t she do so?

The Tanners write that D&C 10:7-8 reflects Joseph Smith’s belief that Martin Harris was part of a conspiracy to destroy him and that Joseph later “concluded that Harris had nothing to do with the theft” of the 116 pages (p. 33). If the

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13 I chose to calculate page length based on the 1830 edition because it has only text, while the current edition has footnotes which vary in size from page to page.

14 These are represented by 3.5 pages (pp. 52-56) for 1 Nephi 20-21, 2.5 pages (pp. 75-78) for 2 Nephi 7-8, 16 pages (pp. 86-102) for 2 Nephi 12-24, and 3 pages (109-112) for 2 Nephi 27.
revelation contained false suppositions by Joseph Smith, why did Martin Harris not proclaim him a phony and go merrily on his way? Why stick with him and continue to support the “false prophet” decades after his death?

Two-Way Evidence

The Tanners, following Brent Metcalfe’s lead, note that while Joseph Smith used the word “therefore” frequently in revelations dated prior to June 1829, those dated after this time tend to use the word “wherefore.” They claim that this same phenomenon appears in the Book of Mormon, where the word “therefore” predominates in the books of Mosiah through Mormon, with the word “wherefore” predominating in Ether and Moroni, as well as in the books said to derive from the small plates. This, they believe (p. 35-36), is evidence that the small plates were translated last, after Joseph Smith had begun using “wherefore” instead of “therefore.” While this may be true, there is another possible explanation, i.e., that “therefore” is peculiar to Mormon, since it predominates only in those books which he abridged. The change to “wherefore” in Moroni’s work could be evidence of different authorship for Ether and Moroni, and, of course, for the small plates. I am not proposing that this interpretation is right and that of the Tanners wrong. My point is that this statistical data is inconclusive.

“Missing” Items in the Book of Mormon

Having discussed their “black hole” theory, the Tanners move to a discussion of other criticisms of the Book of Mormon. Though they don’t seem to realize it, their basic concepts are at variance one with another. Part II of the book, for example, accuses Joseph Smith of “plagiarizing” the Bible because so many biblical expressions appear in the Book of Mormon. At the same time, the latter portion of Part I (pp. 46-63) attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon by showing that it contains too few biblical words. They seem so anxious to prove the Nephite record false that they move in opposing directions to prove their point.

The lack of certain biblical words, according to the Tanners, proves that the Book of Mormon was written by a single author, who must have been Joseph Smith. Their claim “that the entire Book of Mormon is also lacking a significant number of important things that should be there if the book were
really a history of ancient Jewish people in the New World” (p. 46) is presumptuous. They set themselves up as judges of what such a record should contain, then denounce the Book of Mormon because it does not meet their criteria.

Among the “missing” items listed are women, measurements, colors, commercial terms, and others. The absence of specific words proves little, however. One could just as well ask why the word “dew,” found in the Old Testament, is nowhere to be found in the New. Dew is known to have existed in that part of the world anciently, and even today. Did it mysteriously “disappear” during the time of the New Testament? More likely, the New Testament was written for a different purpose, hence leaving out some words. The Book of Mormon should be given at least as much latitude in its failure to use words which the Tanners believe should be found therein. But rather than gloss over this subject, it behooves us to examine the major “missing” categories listed by the Tanners, who determined the lack of words by means of a computer search.

We start out with their criticism (pp. 50-51) that the Book of Mormon has almost no references to such colors as red, blue, brown, crimson, green, purple, and yellow. Of these, only red, green, and purple are really common in the Bible, though even they are not found in every book. None of the other colors they name even occurs in the New Testament. The word “brown” appears four times in one chapter only (Genesis 30), while “yellow” is also found only four times, three of these being in the book of Leviticus and the other in Psalm 68. The color “crimson” is mentioned three times in 2 Chronicles (chapters 2-3) and once each in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Most occurrences of the word “blue” are in the book of Exodus, with a few also in Numbers, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Jeremiah (once), and Ezekiel. Color words, therefore, are not of frequent occurrence in the Bible, and many biblical books don’t mention any colors at all.

In the area of measurements, the Tanners performed computer searches on words such as “measure/measured/measuring” (in only eight Bible books), “balance(s)” (in only twelve Old Testament books and Revelation 6:5) and concluded that the Bible contained “a great deal of information” about such matters (p. 48). Some of the measurements, such as “hin” and “log” are Hebrew words and are found only in the Old Testament, and only in connection with the tabernacle or the temple. That is, they were not everyday measuring cups, such as would be found in ancient Nephite kitchens! Two of the units
of measurement listed by the Tanners are found only in the New Testament and are likewise not to be expected in the Nephite record. These include “firkins” (only in John 2:6) and “bushel” (only in the synoptic gospels). Other words in the Tanners’ list have limited occurrence in the Bible, such as “acre(s)” (twice), “scales” (once), “omer(s)” (six times, all in Exodus 16), “bath(s)” (only in 1 Kings chapter 7, 2 Chronicles chapters 2 and 4, Ezra chapter 7, Isaiah chapter 5, and Ezekiel chapter 45), “homer(s)” (once each in Leviticus, Numbers, and Isaiah, in chapter 45 of Ezekiel and in only one verse of Hosea). Of the 39 books of the Old Testament, “ephah” appears in only eighteen, and is absent from the New Testament.

Even some relatively common biblical measurements are completely missing in a number of books of the Bible. “Cubit(s),” for example, is not used at all in nineteen books of the Old Testament and is found only four times in the New Testament. “Span” is found in only five Old Testament books and is not found at all in the New Testament.

Closely related to measurements is the concept of money. Before stamped coins were invented in the late sixth century B.C. (nearly a century after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem), pieces of precious metals of varying weight were used as a medium of exchange. It is undoubtedly in this context that we must read of the Nephite monetary system in Alma 11. The most common unit of weight was the shekel, deriving from the verb meaning “to weigh.” The word is found in less than half (17) of the Old Testament books and is not used at all in the New Testament, though archaeological evidence has shown that the shekel, in coin form, was in use at that time. Most occurrences of “shekel” are in Exodus through Numbers, with the heaviest concentration in the latter book. The term “gerah,” denoting a smaller piece of money, is found only in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. Indeed, “gerah” and “shekel” are terms usually found in texts relating to the tabernacle or the temple. The word “pound(s),” aside from its occurrence in the New Testament books of Luke and John, is found only four times in the Old Testament, and only one of these is in a book (1 Kings) written prior to Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. “Talent,” in addition to its New Testament occurrences in Matthew and Revelation, is found in nine Old Testament books, of which only four existed in Lehi’s time. As for the Tanners’ complaint that the word “money” is rare in the Book of Mormon, while plentiful in the Bible, we
must note that the Hebrew word rendered "money" in the Old Testament of the King James Version really means "silver" (the way it is most often translated),\textsuperscript{15} and that this latter word is of frequent occurrence (53 times) in the Book of Mormon.

One of the areas in which the Tanners see a deficiency in the Book of Mormon is in commercial terms. They note the infrequent mention of trade and purchasing words. As with other words in their list, however, many of these are scarce or of restricted occurrence in books of the Bible. For example, words based on the root "market" are found only in Ezekiel chapter 27 in the Old Testament and in the gospels and Acts of the New Testament. "Trade" words are found in only two Old Testament books (Genesis chapters 34 and 46, and Ezekiel chapter 27) and once each in only three New Testament books (Matthew, Luke, Revelation). Words relating to "traffic" are found once each in the books of Genesis, 1 Kings, and Isaiah, and three times in Ezekiel.

Another item the Tanners consider critical but "missing" from the Book of Mormon is reference to Jewish festivals. In this, they appear to be unaware of the fact that I published, in 1978, a rather detailed article showing that the Nephites practiced the Feast of Tabernacles. That work has since been considerably enlarged and was again published in 1990.\textsuperscript{16} Some five or six years ago, I participated in a F.A.R.M.S. round-table discussion in Provo in which scholars who had been following up on my earlier work presented their most recent findings. All of the Old Testament festivals have now been identified in the Book of Mormon from their particular characteristics.\textsuperscript{17}

The Tanners, after citing the lack of women's names in the small plates as evidence that Joseph Smith was omitting detail to avoid contradiction with the 116 pages, point out that this

\textsuperscript{15} Six different Greek words are translated "money" in the KJV New Testament.


evidence is weakened by the fact that women are extremely rare in the Book of Mormon anyway (p. 14). They do, however, find it strange that the Bible should name so many women, while the Book of Mormon names almost none (p. 15). In reply, we note that the Bible, as a whole, has a longer history, and includes books by a wide variety of authors, some of whom did not mention women. A quick glance through the books of the minor prophets in the Bible shows that most include no feminine names. Indeed, most of the women named in the Bible are found only in genealogical listings, rather than as characters in the stories. Since the Book of Mormon barely touches on genealogy, the paucity of women’s names does not “throw a serious cloud of doubt” over the ancient origin of the Book of Mormon (p. 15). Nor does this provide evidence “that the Book of Mormon was written by only one author.” Nevertheless, we must note that it is true that a single author—Mormon—produced most of the book. The only portion of the Book of Mormon which is comprised exclusively of firsthand accounts is the small plates, a work dedicated to religious matters.

The Tanners note (p. 15) that Paul mentioned the names of women in some of his epistles. Perhaps the Nephites did the same, but the Book of Mormon contains no epistles of this nature. The only extant letters deal with military matters or were written by Mormon to his son Moroni, rather than to a group of people to whom it would have been appropriate to send greetings.

The list of “missing” Bible words goes on, with the same kinds of results. It seems unreasonable to expect the Book of Mormon, most of which was written by a single man (Mormon), and which is so much smaller than the Bible, to use all of the biblical terms the Tanners think an authentic ancient Israelite book should contain. More serious, however, is the fact, mentioned above, that when the Tanners do find biblical terms in the Book of Mormon, they accuse Joseph Smith of “plagiarism.”

**New Testament “Plagiarism”**

Early in their book (p. 1), the Tanners argue that the Book of Mormon should not use the same language as the Bible, since it was translated from a different tongue. They expand on this in Part II (pp. 75-164), which comprises parallel columns of passages from the Book of Mormon and from the New
Testament, showing how Joseph Smith "plagiarized" the New Testament. They particularly object to the fact that the Book of Mormon, when using biblical passages, employs the form found in the King James Bible.

My response to this criticism is that Joseph Smith deliberately used the King James Version wording because it corresponded to the Bible known to his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{18} His work would undoubtedly not have been well-received had he done otherwise. But this takes us away from our current study, which involves apparent New Testament quotes found in the Book of Mormon.

There is, of course, no problem if the Book of Mormon quotes from Old Testament books written prior to Lehi's departure, which presumably were found on the brass plates obtained from Laban (1 Nephi 4:16; 5:10-14; 13:23; 19:21-23; 2 Nephi 4:15; Omni 1:14; Alma 37:3). Nor can there be a problem with passages from later books which Jesus revealed to the Nephites, such as Malachi 3-4 (3 Nephi 24-25), or in the fact that Jesus delivered essentially the same sermon to his disciples in both the Old World (Matthew 5-7) and the New (3 Nephi 12-14).\textsuperscript{19}

The same cannot be said of quotes from the New Testament, which was written long after Lehi's time and could not have been known to the Nephite historians. It is these quotes which the Tanners see as strong evidence against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Some Latter-day Saints have responded to such objections by saying that God could surely reveal the same ideas to people in different parts of the world. The Tanners agree with that concept, but believe it unlikely that he would use the same words found in the King James translation of the Bible in such revelations. The use of precise New Testament phraseology is not negative, however, as long as the idea fits the passage. After all, Joseph Smith rendered the Book of Mormon in English theological terms of his day, most of which derived from the King James Bible. Because of their extreme bias against Joseph Smith, the Tanners find themselves in the ironic position of believing him brilliant


\textsuperscript{19} The Tanners object (p. 72) that here, too, the King James wording is used.
enough to write the Book of Mormon but stupid enough to believe that he could get away with using New Testament quotes in Book of Mormon passages supposedly from pre-Christian times.

The Tanners used the computerized scripture search program distributed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to find the New Testament passages from which they propose certain Book of Mormon passages borrowed. Their use of the computer to perform word searches is admirable, and I commend it to everyone.

Old Testament Phrases in the New Testament

What concerns me most, however, is that the Tanners neglect to tell us that many of the Book of Mormon concepts and phrases which they claim were borrowed from the New Testament are also found in the Old Testament. While some of them are merely common phrases found in Jewish culture, in some cases, the New Testament is actually quoting from the Old. Here are a few examples of both kinds:

The Tanners claim that the words “the mysteries of God” in 1 Nephi 1:1 were taken from 1 Corinthians 4:1. In the Bible, the word “mystery” appears only in the New Testament. This is because different parts of the King James Bible were translated by different committees, and the Old Testament translators chose to use the word “secret.” The term “secret of God” appears in Job 15:8; 29:4.

The Tanners claim that the words “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty” (1 Nephi 1:14) were taken from Revelation 15:3. But that New Testament verse says that these words derive from “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” The Bible contains a few songs attributed to Moses (Exodus 15:1-19; Deuteronomy 31:19-22; 31:30-32:44; Psalm 90—see preface). Wording similar to that of Revelation 15:3-4, however, appears in several Old Testament passages, as the following comparison shows:

"Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." (Revelation 15:3-4)
“Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without inquiry, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

“Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone. Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.” (Psalm 86:8-12)

“O Lord, how great are thy works!” (Psalm 92:5; cf. Psalm 40:5)

“Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy. The king’s strength also loveth judgment . . . worship at his footstool; for he is holy. Moses and Aaron among his priests; . . .” (Psalm 99:3-6)

These biblical passages have much more in common than most of the Book of Mormon passages listed by the Tanners have with the New Testament passages to which they are compared. Two of the examples listed above (the ones from Exodus and Deuteronomy) are from songs attributed to Moses, while the rest are from songs (Psalms) attributed to David. The one closest to the passage in Revelation 15 is found in Psalm 86, which may have been attributed by earlier people to Moses, just as nearby Psalm 90 is. It is perhaps no accident that Psalms 86, 92, and 99 are in close proximity to Psalm 90 in the Bible, and this may have led to the attribution to Moses in Revelation 15:3.

The Tanners believe that the idea of Lehi being warned “in a dream” to flee (1 Nephi 2:1-3) was taken from the story of Joseph in Matthew 2:13. But the Lord’s use of dreams need not be questioned. He said to Moses, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.” (Numbers 12:6; cf. Jeremiah 23:28). While most divinely inspired dreams in the Old
Testament were prophetic, there are cases in which the Lord came in dreams to give instructions (e.g., Genesis 20:3, 6; 31:24). Indeed, in Genesis 31:11-13, he appeared to Jacob in a dream and told him to leave his home, just as he later warned Lehi and Joseph.

It is true, as the Tanners point out, that the phrase “being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts” (1 Nephi 2:18) is nearly identical to that found in Mark 3:5. However, the idea, in both cases, probably derives from an Old Testament passage, where we read, “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart.” (Psalm 95:10; quoted in Hebrews 3:10). The idea of being hard-hearted is, of course, common in the Old Testament. (Note that the Tanners also compare the words “the hardness of their hearts” in 1 Nephi 14:7 with Mark 10:5.)

The Tanners compare the first part of 1 Nephi 5:8 with some of Peter’s words in Acts 12:11. Though the stories are quite different, some of the same expressions are used. But these are common Old Testament expressions and should not be suspect. For example, in Genesis 15:13, one finds the words “know of a surety,” while variants are found in 1 Samuel 28:2 and Ecclesiastes 8:12 (cf. also John 17:8). The expression “deliver out of the hand(s) of” is found 77 times in the Old Testament, while in nine instances the same Hebrew expression is rendered “deliver from the hand(s) of.”

The Tanners compare small parts of 1 Nephi 8:10, 13, with Revelation 22:1-2, whence they believe Joseph Smith took them. But since the topic is the tree of life in both cases, we should not be surprised to find that both passages describe it as near a river and bearing fruit. Indeed, the Book of Mormon would be more suspect if its description of the tree differed from that of the Bible. As for the expression “river of water,” which the Tanners seem to think is found only in these two passages, compare Psalm 65:9, “the river of God, which is full of water.” The Tanners also list Revelation 2:7 as the source of the words “the tree of life” in 1 Nephi 11:25. The expression, of course, appears first in Genesis (2:9; 3:22, 24) and is also found in Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4. The concept of the “fountain of living waters,” in the same Book of Mormon passage, found in a variant form (“living fountains of waters”) in Revelation 7:17, is from the Old Testament. Zechariah (14:8) wrote of the “living waters” (cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12), and Jeremiah (2:13; 17:13) wrote of “the fountain of living waters,” which is identical to the
1 Nephi wording rather than to the wording of Revelation 7. In the Song of Songs (4:15), we read of “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters.” Jesus referred to himself as the source of “living waters” (John 4:10). The idea of the living waters being near the tree of life is, of course, paralleled in the story of the garden of Eden, where we have not only the tree, but also the river (Genesis 2:9-10).

The “rod of iron” in 1 Nephi 8:19 need not come from Revelation 12:5. The expression appears first in Psalm 2:9, which is quoted in Revelation 2:27 and then reappears in Revelation 12:5 and 19:15. I quite easily discovered this using the same computer search the Tanners claim to have used. Since the Tanners must have seen the Old Testament use of the term, why did they cover up this fact? From some of the material presented above, they seem to have covered up such evidence on a number of occasions. If not, then their attention to detail is surely to be questioned.

The Tanners compare the words “those who diligently seek him” (1 Nephi 10:17) with the nearly identical “them that diligently seek him,” in Hebrews 11:6. They then compare “he that diligently seeketh shall find,” two verses later (1 Nephi 10:19) with “he that seeketh findeth,” in Matthew 7:8. The fact that the expression is found in such diverse writings as Matthew and Hebrews should have told them that it is relatively common. Indeed, it is likely that the New Testament passages are based on the idea found in these Old Testament verses:

“But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” (Deuteronomy 4:29)

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13, paraphrasing Deuteronomy 4:29)

“Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.” (Proverbs 7:15)

“Those that seek me early shall find me.” (Proverbs 8:17)

The Tanners maintain that “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1) was borrowed from Acts 8:39, while the words “into an exceedingly high mountain” they believe to have
been taken from Matthew 4:8. However, Ezekiel has similar imagery. In 37:1, he wrote, “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley.” And in 40:2, the prophet wrote, “In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain.” Ezekiel was a contemporary of Lehi, and so should be expected to use similar language. In Ezekiel, the prophet noted that he was carried to Jerusalem by a spirit (Ezekiel 8:3) and that the Lord spoke to him (Ezekiel 8:4-5) and cried with a loud voice (Ezekiel 9:1). Thus, when the Tanners indicate Matthew 27:46 as the origin of the words “cried with a loud voice” (1 Nephi 11:6), we must point to the Ezekiel passage and further note that the expression is found ten times in the Old Testament. The Tanners compare the words “blessed art thou” (1 Nephi 11:6) with the same words in Luke 1:28. However, these very words appear twice in the Old Testament, while “blessed be thou” is found six times.

The Tanners indicate that the words “descending out of heaven” (1 Nephi 11:7) derive from John 1:32. They could just as well be related to the same expression found in Matthew 28:2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. That is to say that the expression is so common as to evidently not be unique to John. The verb “descend” was not used by the King James Version Old Testament translators, who preferred to render it “come down.” Consequently, “come/coming down from heaven” appears eight times in the Old Testament. Especially note the following from Daniel 4,20 where the context is similar to that of 1 Nephi:

“an holy one came down from heaven” (verse 13)

“an holy one coming down from heaven” (verse 23)

The Tanners note that while, in 1 Nephi 11:34, it is “the multitudes of the earth” that “were gathered together to fight,” in Revelation 19:19 (which they see as the source for the Book of Mormon passage), it is “the kings of the earth” which were “gathered together to make war.” What the Tanners fail to note is that the Hebrew word “army” derives from the verb meaning

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20 While it is true that Daniel was written after Lehi left Jerusalem, the two men were contemporaries and should be expected to use similar language.
“assemble, gather,” and that armies always “gather together to fight” (twice in the Old Testament) or “gather together to war” (three times in the Old Testament). So this is the normal Hebrew way of describing preparations for war and should not be counted as a borrowing from the New Testament.

The Tanners’ idea that the quaking and rending of rocks in 1 Nephi 12:4 derives from Matthew 27:51 is weakened by the fact that, in the Book of Mormon passage, the word “quaking” appears long after the rending of the rocks, while in Matthew they are together. The idea is not unique to Matthew, however, and is found in 1 Kings 19:11. The Tanners believe that the listing of “lightnings . . . thunderings . . . earthquakes” in the same Book of Mormon passage derives from Revelation 8:5. But such combinations are found in the Old Testament as well. We have thunder and earthquake in Isaiah 29:6 and lightning and earthquake in Psalm 97:4. The words “thunder” and “lightning” are found together in four Old Testament passages. In a fifth, they are, like the passage in 1 Nephi and Revelation, listed with earthquake (Psalm 77:18). One could argue that both Nephi and John drew upon the Psalm for the imagery.

The idea of the Holy Ghost falling upon people (1 Nephi 11:7) is said by the Tanners to come from Acts 11:15. But in Ezekiel 11:5, we read, “the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me.” And in two Old Testament passages (Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10-11), we read of the “holy spirit.” The Tanners also believe that the words “ordained of God, and chosen” are merely a variant of the words of Jesus found in John 15:16. But these two verbs are, in fact, used together in 1 Chronicles 9:22. It is true that this Old Testament book was composed after Lehi left Jerusalem, but it is based on older records, including, it appears, court records from the time of King David.

The Tanners point to Revelation 2:24 (“the depths of Satan”) as the source for the words “the depths of hell” in 1 Nephi 12:16. But the words “depths of hell” are found in Proverbs 9:18. It is much more likely that, if the Book of Mormon is copying biblical idioms, it took this one from the Old Testament book—which, of course, may have been available to the Nephites. By the same token, one could argue that John borrowed the Old Testament expression for the book of Revelation.

The Tanners believe that the words “vain imaginations” (1 Nephi 12:18) derive from Romans 1:21, “vain in their imaginations.” But it is more likely that both passages borrowed
the idea from Psalm 2:1, which is also quoted in Acts 4:25. (Actually, Helaman 16:22 is closer to the wording of Romans 1:21 and even includes the word “foolish.” But the Tanners don’t list this one.)

And so it goes. We must conclude that the comparisons given by the Tanners would be valid if the ideas were unique to the New Testament. But most of them are from the Old Testament. There are, however, some exceptions, and we must deal with these.

The Book of Revelation

The Tanners note a number of parallels between the wording of 1 Nephi 11:14 and that found in the book of Revelation. In view of the fact that Nephi was shown the very same vision as John (see 1 Nephi 14:19-27), it should not be surprising that they described the vision in similar terms. Many Bible scholars have noted the dependence of the book of Revelation on such Old Testament works as Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel, as well as on the pseudepigraphic book of Enoch. Most of the phrases the Tanners claim Joseph Smith borrowed from Revelation are also found in these other works. I have come to believe that all of these men, along with certain others (Adam, Moses, Abraham and Joseph Smith among them), saw the same basic vision, which I have come to call “the primordial vision.” I hope to make this the subject of a future work.

Special Cases

The Tanners note the similarity between the olive tree/vineyard parable of Jacob 5 and Paul’s statements in Romans 11:17-24, which they see as the source of the parable, along with Luke 13:6-8 and Isaiah 5:1-5. The tie has long been known among Latter-day Saint scholars, who have assumed that Jesus, Paul and Jacob used a common source, Zenos. We could also compare Matthew 7:17; 12:33; and 21:33 (which appears to be patterned on Isaiah 5). From known pseudepigraphic works, it appears that the parable was widely used anciently.

An early text from which Paul (1 Corinthians 12-13), Mormon (Moroni 7), and Moroni (Moroni 7, 10) quoted dealt with the gifts of the spirit and the importance of faith, hope, and charity/love. Indeed, the faith-hope-charity list is so pervasive in the scriptures that one is tempted to suggest that quite a number of prophets quoted from the same source. I hope to find
time to deal with both the olive tree parable and the faith-hope-charity scriptures in future works.

Alma 19

The Tanners compare four verses (Alma 19:1, 5, 8, 12) from the account of the raising of King Lamoni with the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, from whence they believe it was plagiarized. There are, to be sure, some similarities, since, in each case, someone was brought back from the dead. But the Tanners have gone too far. Even a cursory glance at their schematic comparison (p. 76) shows that the order of events is quite different in the two accounts. There are also substantive differences. For example, while Lamoni had been lying (presumably dead) on his bed for two days and two nights (Alma 19:1), Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days (John 11:17). The Tanners' use of selected verses from both accounts stacks the evidence of plagiarism in their favor. When one compares the complete accounts from Alma and John, the parallels seem insignificant indeed.

Nevertheless, one can say that if the parallels are all valid, because of their number alone, they could be taken as prima facie evidence that the account in Alma 19 was taken from John 11. It behooves us, therefore, to examine each of the supposed parallels to determine their validity.

The Tanners point, for example, to the fact that Lazarus had "lain in the grave" (John 11:17) and that the people were about to "lay [Lamoni's body] in a sepulchre" (Alma 19:1). But where else would one lay a dead body? (Or do they expect Joseph Smith to have written "toss it"?!) If Joseph Smith copied from John, why didn't he use the word "grave," rather than "sepulchre"? The Tanners go even farther afield by comparing the word "laid" in John 11:34 with "laid" in Alma 19:5, without noting that, in these passages, Lazarus was laid in a tomb, Lamoni on a bed. Indeed, in a few Old Testament passages we find a dead person laid on a bed (1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:21, 32; 2 Chronicles 16:14).

The idea of the dead stinking (Alma 19:5; John 11:39) is not exclusive to John; it is found in Isaiah 34:3. So, too, the use of the term "sleep" in the sense of "die" (Alma 19:8; John 11:11) is found in several Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 1:21; Psalms 13:3; Jeremiah 51:39, 57; Daniel 12:2).
The words “he shall rise again,” common to Alma 19:8 and John 11:24, are the only strong point in the Tanner’s case. Though the phrase is used six times in the Old Testament, it is never used of the dead. But its very existence in pre-Nephite texts weakens the case for plagiarism from John 11.

There are several weak parallels which are made even weaker by virtue of the fact that the ones we have noted above are invalid. For example, the Tanners mark the simple phrase “he is dead” (Alma 19:5) as suspicious because John 11:14 reads “Lazarus is dead.” In 2 Samuel 12:19, 23, we also read “he is dead.” It would be ludicrous to conclude that John 11 took the phraseology from 2 Samuel, since this is a simple declarative sentence which must have been uttered in biblical times nearly every time a man died.

The Tanners make a point of the wording “go in and see” (Alma 19:5) and “come and see” (John 11:34), the latter appearing but once in the Bible in the imperative form. But the phrase would presumably have been such a common one that it is absurd to suppose that Joseph Smith took it from John 11, unless the other correspondences hold, which they do not.

The Old Testament contains two stories in which a young boy was raised from the dead by a prophet. In 1 Kings 17:17-24, we read of Elijah restoring life to the son of a woman of Zarephath. We note that the boy “fell sick” (1 Kings 17:17; cf. John 11:3, 6) and died. Elijah “laid him upon his own bed” (1 Kings 17:19; cf. Alma 18:43; 19:5) and prayed God to revive him (1 Kings 17:20-21; cf. John 11:41-42). When his prayer was answered, he announced to the mother, “thy son liveth” (1 Kings 17:23; cf. John 11:23-26). In 2 Kings 4:18-37, we find that Elijah’s disciple Elisha brought to life the son of a Shunammite woman. We are informed that “he ... died” (2 Kings 4:20, 32; cf. John 11:14; Alma 19:5) and that his mother “laid him on the bed” (2 Kings 4:21, 32; cf. Alma 18:43; 19:5). She then went to get Elisha (2 Kings 4:22-27; cf. John 11:3; Alma 19:2). Elisha’s servant reported that “the child is not awakened,” thus tying death to sleep (2 Kings 4:31; cf. John 11:11; Alma 19:8). Elisha, like Elijah, prayed God to revive the child (2 Kings 4:33; cf. John 11:41-42). The reaction of the mother, at seeing her son alive again, was to fall down at the

21 However, the idea of going to see is found in Genesis 37:14; 2 Kings 7:14; 9:34, while coming to see can be found in 2 Kings 10:16; Psalm 66:5; Isaiah 66:18.
prophet’s feet (2 Kings 4:37; cf. John 11:32). We could further compare the declaration of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:24) with that of Martha (John 11:27)

**Miscellaneous Issues**

The Tanners quote J. N. Washburn, who noted that Mormon’s abridgment is complex in that it pyramids stories upon stories “without premeditation or apparent design” (pp. 26-27). Actually, there is great evidence that Mormon planned all this.22 Indeed, in only two cases did he radically digress from his story (e.g., Alma 11:4-19; Alma 22:27-34), and in each case it was to provide background information necessary to the story he was about to tell. In each case, he returned to the account in a smooth manner. Mormon had to pyramid parallel stories, such as those of the Limhi and Alma colonies, the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah, etc. Cf. 1-2 Kings, in the Bible, where the story keeps jumping back and forth between the two kingdoms. Mormon did a better job. Besides, if Joseph Smith were the author, why would he return to the land of Nephi to recount stories, some of them dating perhaps from before the “black hole” proposed by the Tanners? Wouldn’t this be a literally dangerous expedition, leaving more chance for self-contradiction with the lost 116 pages?

The Tanners (pp. 45-46) find it strange that while Joseph Smith claimed that Moroni informed him that the record to be translated was “written upon gold plates” (JS-H 1:34), nowhere in the Book of Mormon itself does one read that the plates prepared by Nephi were made of gold. However, there is evidence from early non-Mormon sources that as early as the fall of 1827 there was talk of Joseph Smith finding a “golden Bible.” From this, it appears obvious that the idea of plates of gold was not a late-breaking idea in the development of the book. The Tanners are clutching at straws.

The Tanners note (p. 27) that there are a number of word combinations in the Book of Mormon which reflect what they believe to be Joseph Smith’s own peculiar style. They further note (p. 28) that these same unusual word combinations are used by a variety of supposed authors of books in the Book of

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Mormon (e.g., Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Moroni, and Mormon). This, they believe, is evidence that the book was written by a single author. It could just as easily be evidence that it was translated by a single translator, who used terms familiar to him! By the same token, the appearance of New Testament expressions, which the Tanners attribute to Joseph Smith, could be evidence that the translator used them because they were familiar to him, with no intent to plagiarize.

The Tanners (p. 28) compare the style of D&C 10 and of Joseph Smith’s preface to the first edition of the Book of Mormon with the text of the book itself and conclude that all four were authored by the same person. I suspect that had they gone to a modern writer who has also done translation work, they would find that the style of his own writings compares rather closely with that of the translations in many respects. Regarding D&C 10, they note that “although it was supposed to be a revelation from ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God,’ the style was found to be remarkably like that [of] . . . Joseph Smith.” What they fail to realize is that divine revelations always reflect the language of the prophet who received them. Thus, Isaiah’s writings are different from those of Jeremiah or Hosea, though each wrote what the Lord revealed to him. It would be unreasonable to expect that Joseph Smith would not write the Lord’s word in his own style! Attempts such as those of the Tanners to prove that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon cannot be fruitful. If they want to find evidence against Joseph Smith’s work, it will have to be in other ways. My guess is that, reading my words, they will contrast them with those of the stylistic computer studies of the scriptures done at Brigham Young University and in Berkeley, California. I have my own reasons for rejecting those studies, however, and hope to express them elsewhere.

Since the Tanners presume to give evidence that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon and that the book contains many expressions found in the New Testament, may we conclude that Joseph Smith also authored the New Testament? The fallacy in such a statement, of course, lies in the fact that the New Testament clearly predates Joseph Smith. But this fallacy is no greater than the false assumptions made by the Tanners.
Conclusion

The "black hole" theory offered by the Tanners, while intriguing, is unconvincing in the light of serious scrutiny. One cannot accuse them of not trying, however. They have put a lot of effort into this work. I am particularly impressed by the fact that they have turned to the use of the computerized scripture search program. I recommend it to all serious students of the scriptures, with one word of caution: Because the Old and New Testaments and the Book of Mormon were not originally written in English, a more complete view of parallel passages cannot be grasped by anyone unacquainted with Hebrew and Greek, due to the varying ranges of meaning of the words behind the English text. We are fortunate now to have a rising generation of Latter-day Saint scholars who possess these and other tools necessary for thorough investigation of the scriptures. It is the work of these scholars, along with the reading of the scriptures themselves, which I commend to all who seek a knowledge of God's word to man.