

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 18 · 2016 · Pages 159-170

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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SAMUEL THE LAMANITE, CHRIST, AND ZENOS: A STUDY OF INTERTEXTUALITY

Quinten Barney

Abstract: During Christ's mortal ministry at Jerusalem, his teachings often drew upon the writings of Isaiah, Moses, and other prophets with whom his audience was familiar. On the other hand, Christ never seems to quote Nephi, Mosiah, or other Book of Mormon prophets to the Jews and their surrounding neighbors, despite being the ultimate source for their inspired writings. It is because of this apparent confinement to Old Testament sources that intertextual parallels between the words of Christ in Matthew 23–24 and the words of Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 13–15 jump out as intriguing. This paper explores the intertextual relationship between these chapters in Helaman and Matthew and suggests that the parallels between these texts can be attributed to a common source available to both Samuel and Christ, the writings of the prophet Zenos.

Discovering Old Testament language and phraseology in the Book of Mormon comes as no surprise to those who are familiar with the book. Having left Jerusalem in 600 BC with the writings of ancient prophets contained on plates of brass, individuals such as Nephi and Jacob would have had no difficulty drawing upon the teachings of Isaiah or the Psalms as they preached among their people.¹ Of greater surprise, however, is the fact that nearly 600 years later, the prophet Samuel the Lamanite is found using a higher concentration of biblical language than nearly every other Book of Mormon prophet.² Upon further study

1 Isaiah is quoted extensively throughout the Book of Mormon, especially by Nephi in 1 Nephi 20–21 and 2 Nephi 12–24. For a more detailed discussion on Nephi and Jacob's use of the Psalms, see John Hilton III, "Old Testament Psalms in the Book of Mormon," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament* (2013 Sperry Symposium), ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 291–311.

2 Indeed, according to WordCruncher, an eBook Reader that aids in the analysis of texts (available at wordcruncher.byu.edu), Samuel uses common biblical

of Samuel the Lamanite's use of biblical language, it was found that, although he does use a lot of Old Testament phraseology, there is an even stronger intertextual relationship between his words and the words spoken by Christ in the book of Matthew. In this paper I provide a closer analysis of these intertextual relationships, arguing that there is evidence that both Samuel and Christ drew upon a common source: the extra-biblical writings of the prophet Zenos.³

To better understand Samuel the Lamanite's use of biblical language, I used WordCruncher to conduct a "phrase compare report," comparing Samuel the Lamanite's words with the prophets from the Old Testament.⁴ The results from WordCruncher's report showed a large number of parallel phrases, particularly between the words of Samuel the Lamanite and the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. For example, when compared to phrases of five words spoken by Samuel the Lamanite, the Book of Jeremiah had twenty-seven phrases in common, Isaiah had twenty-six, and Ezekiel had twenty-four.⁵ This is in contrast to some of the other lengthier books in the Old Testament such as Genesis, which only contained twenty, and Psalms, which only contained twelve phrases in common.⁶

phrases such as "Lord of Hosts" and "signs and wonders" more so than expected when compared to the total words he actually uses in the Book of Mormon. See Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III, "Samuel's Reliance on Biblical Language," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 24 (2015), 31–52.

3 The central arguments presented in this paper rest upon several assumptions. The first is that the scriptural text, as it stands, accurately conveys the words spoken by Samuel the Lamanite, Christ, and others. Thus, it assumes accuracy on the part of the scriptural author in recording the words of the speaker, and I therefore attribute the words of the scriptural text to the speaker, rather than the author. Second, and closely related, is that this paper assumes a Book of Mormon translation process that was "tightly" controlled, with Joseph Smith receiving the revealed text word for word and dictating it to his scribe. Though I am aware that the debate of a "loose" versus a "tight" translation is still ongoing, I have chosen to bracket this argument in the present study.

4 This phrase compare report, along with all the Book of Mormon text in this paper, follows Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

5 These numbers are quite high, considering that Samuel's words are restricted to a mere three chapters in the Book of Mormon.

6 That the closest comparisons of Samuel the Lamanite's phraseology are with Isaiah and Jeremiah suggests that Samuel the Lamanite was well acquainted with the writings of these authors from the brass plates.

Book	Total Words	Total 5-word Phrases	Total Common 5-word Phrases	Common Phrases per 10,000
Isaiah	37,036	36,772	26	7.07
Jeremiah	42,654	42,446	27	6.36
Ezekiel	39,401	39,209	24	6.12
Genesis	38,262	38,062	20	5.25
Psalms	43,760	43,074	12	2.78

The high rate of common phrases alone, however, is not enough evidence for a relation between the texts. An argument for intertextuality gains more strength by comparing additional criteria, such as related contexts of the passages, the length of the passages, and the rarity of words used in the passages. Applying these criteria to the common phrases shared by Samuel and the Old Testament books listed in the above table showed surprisingly little evidence that the common phrases were anything more than coincidental. Rather, they were mostly sporadic parallels with varying contexts and common words.

Comparing Samuel the Lamanite's words with the New Testament, however, yielded completely different results, particularly between the words of Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 13 through 15 and those of Christ in Matthew 23 through 24. There are at least nine examples of close parallels in these passages, including lengthy passages containing words and phrases rare in scripture. The contexts of these passages are also closely related, in that both Samuel and Christ give a message of warning unto a wicked group of people. Samuel the Lamanite and Christ pronounce woe's upon the wicked cities of Zarahemla and Jerusalem, respectively, and upon a wicked people that ultimately wish to kill them.

The Parallels

With both contexts in mind, we can now examine the passages in Helaman and Matthew that, when combined, contain the strongest evidence of intertextuality. Significant similarities between the verses are shown in italics:

Helaman 13

24. Yea, *woe unto this people* because of this time which has arriuen that *ye do cast out the prophets and do mock them and cast stones at them and do slay them* and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time.

Matthew 23

29. *Woe unto you*, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because *ye build the tombs of the prophets*, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

These verses are the beginning of a longer thread of intertextuality between the two texts. Each pronounces a warning upon those who have killed the prophets, beginning with the warning indicator “woe.”⁷ However, while thematically similar, the strongest evidence that these two passages have intertextual relation comes by looking at the verses that immediately follow:

25. And now when ye talk, *ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them and cast them out.*

30. And *say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*

7 “Woe unto,” though found 118 times in scripture, is nevertheless unique in this comparison. WordCruncher uses a custom statistic called a “rating,” which is similar to a chi-square statistic in order to show the relative significance of the differences between actual and expected word and phrase counts. This rating is represented by a number between -10 and 10, with 0 being the expected, and truncating anything beyond these bounds. The phrase “woe unto” is found thirty times in the Old Testament, with a low rating of -3.8. However, the book in the Old Testament with the highest rating is Isaiah, with a rating of 4.4. In the New Testament, the phrase is found in only three books; the Book of Matthew has a rating of 5.9, Luke has a 6.7, and finally Jude has a 0.9. The Isaiah chapters in 2nd Nephi have contributed to a rating of 10 in the Book of Mormon; however, coming in second place is the book of Helaman, with a rating of 2.9. Of the seven instances where this phrase is found in Helaman, six occur within Samuel’s sermon. Thus, while “woe unto” may not be a scripturally unique phrase, these ratings further support the possibility that Samuel, like Christ, may have been well acquainted with the writings of Isaiah.

The similarities between these passages are striking. Samuel the Lamanite and Christ both begin to quote the wicked, who present a hypothetical “if” concerning “the days of [their] fathers” and the claim of not having a part in the death of the prophets. The phrase “in the days of our fathers” followed by “we would not have” are found together in scripture only in these two passages. The allusion to the killing of the prophets in these passages also adds to their uniqueness, strengthening the possibility of a connection between them.

Evidence of intertextuality is further strengthened as the parallels continue, with Samuel the Lamanite and Christ each suggesting where their audience stands in relation to their “fathers” they had previously mentioned:

26. *Behold, ye are worse than* 32. *Fill ye up then the the measure of*
they ... *your fathers.*

Finally, these passages both speak of prophets coming among the wicked, and then the intent to destroy and kill them:

26. ... *if a prophet come among you* 34. ¶ *Wherefore, behold, I send*
and declareth unto you the word of *unto you prophets, and wise*
the Lord, which testifieth of your *men, and scribes: and some of*
sins and iniquities, ye are angry with *them ye shall kill ...*
him, and cast him out and seek all
manner of ways to destroy him ...

The parallels above are concentrated into a small number of words in both Helaman and Matthew, making it unlikely that they are a mere coincidence. However, thus far the majority of evidence for intertextuality has been in relation to the context and thematic progression in these passages. As the contextual parallels continue, more and more scripturally unique phrases and words also begin to stand out between the passages. Pressing forward sequentially through Helaman chapter 13, we can briefly backtrack in Matthew 24 and find a unique term used by both Samuel the Lamanite and Jesus Christ:

29. O ye wicked and ye perverse generation, ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and *blind guides*? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?

16. Woe unto you, ye *blind guides*...

24. Ye *blind guides*, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

There are only four instances where the term “blind guides” is used in scripture.⁸ Three of those times are cited above, and the last one is in D&C 19:40.⁹ Progressing further through both chapters, we come upon another instance of unique parallelism:

33. O that I had repented *and had not killed the prophets and stoned them and cast them out*

...

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee ...*

Aside from these passages, the words “kill,” “prophet,” and “stone,” in their various forms, appear together in only two other verses of scripture. One of those verses is in 3 Nephi 8:25, where a direct quotation of the phrase in Helaman is given to illustrate the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy. The other instance is in Luke 13:34, which is Luke’s account of the same events described in Matthew.

The final two examples of intertextuality come in the beginning of Helaman 15, but jump around a bit in Matthew between chapters 23 and 24:

Helaman 15:1

1. ...I declare unto you that except ye shall repent, *your houses shall be left unto you desolate.*

Matthew 23:38

38. Behold, *your house is left unto you desolate.*

What makes these passages unique is that these are two of only three places where “left unto you desolate” occurs in the scriptures.

⁸ In Matthew 24 of the 1526 Tyndale Bible, verses 16 and 24 use “blynd gides” and blinde gydes,” respectively.

⁹ Romans 2:19 uses a similar phrase, “thou thyself art a guide to the blind.”

The third instance is found in Luke 13:35, where we again find Luke's account of the same sermon recorded by Matthew. Our final parallel passages are found in the next verse of Helaman 15, and back to chapter 24 in Matthew:

Helaman 15

2. Yea, except ye repent, *your women shall have great cause to mourn in the day that they shall give suck.* For ye shall attempt to flee and there shall be no place for refuge. Yea, and *woe unto them which are with child,* for they shall be heavy and cannot *flee.* Therefore, they shall be trodden down and shall be left to perish.

Matthew 24

19. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!*
 20. But pray ye that your *flight* be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

The context for these passages is the same as the examples cited earlier, namely, the destruction that would occur with either the coming or going of the Savior to the earth. The warnings given to nursing and pregnant women in these verses are unique. Aside from the account in Helaman, they only occur in scripture in the same context as found in Matthew.¹⁰

A Common Source

Looking at each of the examples cited above and viewing them together as a whole, we are presented with compelling evidence that there is some sort of relation between these texts. In addition to the similar context, the unique phrases and total concentration of parallels all within a few chapters adds even further evidence of a connection. However, the possibility of either of them quoting one another presents itself as somewhat problematic for several reasons.

The first reason relates to time and distance. The prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite found in the book of Helaman were not only given several years before the birth of Christ, but on the other side of the globe. This would have made it impossible for him to have the writings of Matthew, seeing as they had not yet been recorded. And, although it is by no means beyond the abilities of Christ to quote from a prophet like Samuel during his earthly ministry, it would arguably be the only instance in which the

10 See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:16; Luke 21:23; Mark 13:17.

Jesus of the New Testament had quoted from a Book of Mormon prophet. Had Christ been quoting from Samuel, we would be left to wonder why we don't find the words of Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, or other Book of Mormon prophets in the New Testament. Thus, though not impossible, it appears unlikely that Christ would be drawing upon the sermon given by Samuel the Lamanite.

Additionally, though Samuel the Lamanite indicates that he is speaking "whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart" (Helaman 13:4-5), as well as things that an "angel of the Lord hath declared" to him (Helaman 13:7), each of the passages compared above fall within a portion of his speech where he seems to be giving his own commentary rather than an actual quotation from the Lord or an angel.¹¹ Thus, if we are correct in assuming that Samuel and Christ are both speaking independent from one another, we are left to wonder as to how they come up with much of the same material in their sermons.

It is here that I would suggest that in order to answer that question, we need look no further than the brass plates. We already know that the brass plates contained the writings of Old Testament prophets such as Moses and Isaiah. We know also that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament both referred to and drew upon their writings during his ministry in Jerusalem.¹² Christ, as the premortal Jehovah, rarely, if ever, took the credit for what they wrote.¹³ It wouldn't be too much of a stretch then to imagine that other Old Testament period writings contained on the brass plates, such as those of Zenos, Zenock, or Neum, could also

11 Samuel the Lamanite uses the phrase "saith the Lord," along with the personal pronoun "I," in reference to the Lord to indicate when this type of quotation is taking place. However, beginning with Helaman 13:21 Samuel the Lamanite begins to use his own commentary by referring to the Lord by using the third-person pronoun "he" rather than "I." The personal pronoun "I" is not used in reference to the Lord again until the last two verses of Helaman 15, where Samuel begins to quote the Lord again. Thus, the majority of text that lies in between Helaman 13:21 and 15:15 is a continuation of Samuel's speech where he provides his own commentary concerning what the Lord and an angel had spoken to him. Interestingly, each of the passages compared with the text in Matthew fall within this "commentary" portion of Samuel the Lamanite's speech.

12 Throughout the New Testament, Christ demonstrates his familiarity with Old Testament texts and quotes them frequently, both with and without indicating that he is doing so.

13 On the contrary, Christ would often give credit to the Prophets for what they had written or spoken. For example, see Mark 7:6, 10; Matt. 13:14; 15:7, and John 7:19.

have survived in ancient Israel up into the time of Christ and be used by him just as had the writings of Moses or Isaiah.

Samuel's Use of the Brass Plates

While quoting from writings contained on the brass plates is certainly a possibility, there is strong evidence that this is in fact taking place in the case of Samuel the Lamanite. The first and obvious evidence is Samuel's indication of his own awareness of some of the writings found on the brass plates. In Helaman 15:11, Samuel the Lamanite references "the time ... which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets." Additionally, there are parallels between the words of Zenos as recorded by Nephi in 1 Nephi 19:10–17 with the language used by Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 14:20–27. These parallels are shown in the chart below.

1 Nephi 19		Helaman 14	
1 Nephi 19:10	...the three days of darkness...	Helaman 14:20, 27	...no light...for the space of three days... ... darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days...
1 Nephi 19:10	...a sign given of his death...	Helaman 14:20	...a sign of his death...
1 Nephi 19:11	...thunderings and the lightings of his power, by tempest...	Helaman 14:21, 23, 26, 27	...thunderings and lightnings... ...there shall be great tempests... ...thunderings and lightnings... ...while the thunder and the lightning lasted, and the tempest...

1 Nephi 19:11	...by mountains which shall be carried up...	Helaman 14:23	...there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains...
1 Nephi 19:12	...and the rocks of the earth must rend...	Helaman 14:21-22	...and the rocks which is upon the face of the earth ... shall be broken up. Yea, they shall be rent in twain...

The shared context and number of words common in both passages above strongly suggest that Samuel the Lamanite was drawing heavily upon the words of Zenos as he prophesied concerning the death of Christ.¹⁴ It is also worth noting that, apart from Samuel the Lamanite, Zenos is the only other known prophet to have prophesied concerning “the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death.”¹⁵

Did Christ Draw Upon the Record of Zenos?

To say that Christ had access to the writings of Zenos and drew upon them is admittedly quite a claim. Some LDS scholars are under the impression that the writings of Zenos had disappeared prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ, while others have argued that some of his writings have survived among the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁶ Though no definitive statement can presently be made as to whether his writings survived into the time of Christ, there are several parallels between the words of Zenos and those of Christ in Matthew 24:

14 Mormon also indicates that Zenos had spoken on the topic of the death of Christ. See 3 Nephi 10:16.

15 1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 14:27.

16 See Dana Pike, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Latter-day Saints: Where Do We Go From Here?” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, 2 (2010), 43-44, and Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, FARMS, 1988), <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1113&index=12>.

1 Nephi 19		Matthew 24	
1 Nephi 19:12	...all these things must surely come...	Matthew 24:6	...All these things must come to pass...
1 Nephi 19:14	...be hated among all nations...	Matthew 24:9	...be hated of all nations...
1 Nephi 19:16	...will I gather in ... from the four quarters of the earth	Matthew 24:31	...they shall gather together his elect from the four winds...

Admittedly, the first two comparisons differ in context, and the common phrases in these passages do not necessarily contain scripturally unique ideas. However, when coupling these parallels with the parallels that Samuel the Lamanite has with both Christ and Zenos, we are left with the assumption that these parallels are not coincidental. Further, the parallels between Samuel the Lamanite and Zenos fall right in the middle of the parallels found between Samuel and Christ.

The Book of Mormon makes clear the greatness of the words of Zenos, including his prophecies relating to both the life and death of the Savior Jesus Christ. The possibility that both Samuel the Lamanite and Christ drew upon the record of Zenos in their own teaching further amplifies the greatness of Zenos's prophecies. Though we are left with no complete record extant of the writings of Zenos, the combination of the evidence presented above lends both the possibility and even probability that the record of Zenos survived in ancient Israel at least up into the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I offer a big thanks to John Hilton III, who provided encouragement and help in the writing process of this paper.

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