



Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 4 - Alma 21-55

Royal Skousen

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Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, the fourth volume in Professor Royal Skousen's ongoing Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, represents the central task of the project: the attempt to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Volume 4 considers every significant textual change that has occurred in the English Book of Mormon over the 175 years since Joseph Smith first dictated it to his scribes; it also considers a number of conjectured revisions for specific passages.

Professor Skousen draws on the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the printer's manuscript prepared by Oliver Cowdery and two other scribes, and 20 significant printed versions ranging from the 1830 edition to the current standard editions published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Where applicable, he marshals additional evidence of language usage from dialectal and earlier English, as well as data from the King James Bible and the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek.

Like its predecessors, part 4 attempts to recover the original text of the Book of Mormon by identifying variations in the text that have been introduced through scribal, typesetting, and editing errors and inconsistencies. Part 4 examines 996 cases of variation (or potential variation) in the text. For 423 of these cases, the critical text proposes readings that differ from the standard text (the current edition). Of these proposed alternate readings, 150 have never appeared in any standard printed edition of the Book of Mormon, while 56 readings make a difference in meaning that would show up in any translation of the English text of the Book of Mormon into another language. In addition, 16 readings make the text fully consistent in phraseology or usage, while 4 readings restore a unique phrase or word choice to the text.

Each massive volume in the critical text averages nearly 670 oversize pages of research and analysis that reward careful examination with expanded views of the founding text of Mormonism. In seeking to recover the original English-language text, this ambitious project has identified many variant readings and yielded new insights into the translation process and the systematic nature of the text. These findings will keep serious students of the Book of Mormon profitably engaged in assessing the ramifications for many years to come. As an essential scholarly tool, the critical text promises to boost the professional rigor and overall quality of Book of Mormon scholarship to a new level.

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