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“GOD HATH TAKEN AWAY HIS PLAINNESS”: SOME NOTES ON JACOB 4:14, REVELATION, CANON, COVENANT, AND LAW

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *This article examines Jacob’s statement “God hath taken away his plainness from [the Jews]” (Jacob 4:14) as one of several scriptural texts employing language that revolves around the Deuteronomic canon formulae (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 [13:1]; cf. Revelation 22:18-19). It further examines the textual dependency of Jacob 4:13-14 on Nephi’s earlier writings, 1 Nephi 13 and 2 Nephi 25 in particular. The three texts in the Hebrew Bible that use the verb בָּרַח (Deuteronomy 1:5; 27:8; Habakkuk 2:2) — each having covenant and “law” implications — all shed light on what Nephi and Jacob may have meant when they described “plain” writing, “plain and precious things [words],” “words of plainness,” etc. Jacob’s use of Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree as a means of describing the Lord’s restoring or re-“adding” what had been “taken away,” including his use of Isaiah 11:11 (Jacob 6:2) as a hermeneutical lens for the entire allegory, further connects everything from Jacob 4:14 (“God hath taken away”) to Jacob 6:2 with the name “Joseph.” Genesis etiologizes the name Joseph in terms of divine “taking away” (’āsap) and “adding” (yōsēp; Genesis 30:23-24; cf. Numbers 36:1-5). God’s “tak[ing] away his plainness” involved both divine and human agency, but the restoration of his plainness required divine agency. For Latter-day Saints, it is significant the Lord accomplished this through a “Joseph.”*

The biblical double-etiology for the patriarch Joseph’s name roots it in divine action. The etiology characterizes that divine action in terms of two antonymous verbs: “And she [Rachel] conceived, and bare a son; and said, *God hath taken away* [’āsap] *my reproach*: And she called his name *Joseph* [yōsēp]; and said, *The Lord shall add* [yōsēp] to me another son” (Genesis 30:23-24). In other words, the Genesis text depicts Rachel

naming her elder son, Joseph (“may he [God] add”), on the basis that “God ha[d] taken away” or “withdrawn” (< “gathered up”) the shame¹ or stigma of her erstwhile childlessness through Joseph’s birth and her expressed wish that the Lord would “add” her another son in the future (“may the Lord add to me another son”). The latter explanation hints at the birth of Benjamin (*binyāmîn* “son of the right hand”) as that future “son” (*bēn*).

Another, later Pentateuchal text echoes the double-etymology of Genesis 30:23-24 with direct wordplay on the name *Joseph* in terms of the antonymy of “adding” and “taking away.” Numbers 36 details a revelation given to Moses which intends to alleviate concerns about tribal inheritances being “impaired by the permission given to the daughters of Zelophehad to inherit from their father”² (as detailed in Numbers 27). In other words, the heads of the tribe of Joseph worried that their inheritances would be “taken away” and “added to” the inheritances of other tribes:

And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of *the families of the sons of Joseph* [*yôsēp*], came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel: and they said, The Lord commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters. And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be *taken from* [*yiggārēa*'] the inheritance of our fathers, *and shall be put to* [*shall be added to, wěnôsap*] the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubile [jubilee] of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance *be put unto* [*be added to, wěnôsēpâ*] the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance *be taken away* [*yiggāra*'] from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers. And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying, *The tribe of the sons of Joseph* [*yôsēp*] hath said well. (Numbers 36:1-5)

1. See also the use of the idiom *'āsap herpâ* in Isaiah 4:1: “only let us be called by thy name, to take away [*'ēsōp*] our reproach [*herpātî*].”

2. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, ISR: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 174.

The revelation that follows in Numbers 36:6-13 aimed to preserve the overall territorial *status quo* among the tribes in the promised land. Regarding the wordplay on Joseph in Numbers 36:1-5, Moshe Garsiel observes: “The twice-used root *y-s-p* here explicates the name of ‘Joseph,’ which appears both before and after the passage, in verses 1 and 5.”³ The twofold mention of Joseph’s name thus frames the wordplay in a small inclusio. The verb *gāraʿ*, which is synonymous with Hebrew *ʾāsap* in the senses of “take away” or “withdraw,”⁴ emphasizes the etiological connection between the name Joseph and “adding” and “taking away” — here in terms of antonyms *yāsap* and *gāraʿ* — as previously established in Genesis 30:23-24 in terms of antonyms *yāsap* and *ʾāsap*. The wordplay on Joseph here involving *yāsap* and *gāraʿ*, in its totality emphasizes the threat of Joseph’s tribal inheritance being “taken away” from his descendants and “added to” those of the other tribes.

The stark antonymy of “adding” and “taking away” reflected in the double-etymology for Joseph and in the instructions regarding tribal inheritances is mirrored again later in the so-called Deuteronomic canon formulae — i.e., passages intended to maintain the “textual *status quo*”⁵ of the book of Deuteronomy and its divine instruction: “*Ye shall not add [lōʾ tōsipû]* unto the word which I command you, *neither shall ye diminish [wēlōʾ tigrēʾ û]* ought from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2); “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: *thou shalt not add [lōʾ-tōsēp]* thereto, *nor diminish [wēlōʾ tigrāʾ]* from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32 [Masoretic Text 13:1, hereafter MT]). The canon formula of Revelation 22:18-19 and the language of its anticipated misapplication (see 2 Nephi 29:1-10) also echo this antonymy.

I have argued elsewhere⁶ that Nephi’s prophecy in 2 Nephi 28 quotes Isaiah 28:10, 13 (“For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and

3. Ibid.

4. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 74–75, 203–04. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*. Cf. the entries for *grʿ* on pp. 203–04 with those for *ʾsp* on pp. 74–75.

5. “The formula makes it clear that its intent is to preclude both literary and doctrinal innovation by safeguarding the textual status quo.” Bernard M. Levinson, “You Must Not Add Anything to What I Command You: Paradoxes of Canon and Authorship in Ancient Israel,” *Numen* 50 (2003): 7.

6. Matthew L. Bowen, “And the Meek Also Shall Increase’: The Verb *YĀSAP* in Isaiah 29 and Nephi’s Prophetic Allusions to the Name Joseph in 2 Nephi 25–30,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 5–42. See especially pp. 29–30.

there a little,” 2 Nephi 28:30)⁷ in order to interpret revelation as divine “adding.” Nephi’s prophecy then declares: “And blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom. For unto him that receiveth *I will give more [I will add]*; and them that shall say we have enough, from them *shall be taken away* even that which they have” (2 Nephi 28:30; cf. also Matthew 13:12; 25:29; Mark 4:25; Alma 12:9–11). This passage should be understood as reflecting the antonymy of divine “taking away” and “adding” of the Joseph etiology in Genesis 30:23–24 and, in an ironic way, against the background of the Deuteronomic canon formula (especially Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32 [MT 13:1]). Nephi’s oracle in 2 Nephi 29:1–10, which begins with a *Gezera Shawa*⁸ on Isaiah 29:14 and 11:11 in terms of *yôsîp/yôsîp*, reflects a similar relationship (cf. also 2 Nephi 25:17, 21) with the foregoing passages.

I have additionally argued⁹ that the Lord’s statement to Moses, as part of the vision preserved in Moses 1, should be understood as employing the language of these so-called canon formulae: “And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught *and take many of them from the book* which thou shalt write, behold, *I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again* among the children of men — among as many as shall believe.” Moses 1:41 thus

7. Book of Mormon references here will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

8. *Gezera Shawa* — also spelled *Gezerah Shawah*, *Gezerah Shavah*, or *Gezera Shava* — literally means “equal ordinance” or “equal statute.” As an exegetical practice, *Gezera Shawa* consists in the joining together of biblical texts from isolated passages on the basis of shared terminology and the interpretation of them in light of each other. Although it received the name *Gezera Shawa* in later rabbinic times, the practice is older. On *Gezera Shawa*, see H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 18–19. Jesus uses a clear example of *Gezera Shawa*, as preserved in Matthew 22:36–40, when he combines what he calls the first commandment “And thou shalt love [*wě’āhbtā*] the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5) with the second lesser-quoted commandment “but thou shalt love [*wě’āhbtā*] thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18), declaring that “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Jesus’s *Gezera Shawa* exegesis makes one commandment of two separate commandments in the Torah. For additional examples of this practice in the Book of Mormon, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73.

9. Matthew L. Bowen, “And They Shall Be Had Again”: Onomastic Allusions to Joseph in Moses 1:41 in View of the So-called Canon Formula,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 297–304.

constitutes a prophecy of the “rais[ing] up” one “like unto Moses” named Joseph (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-22; 2 Nephi 3:6-16), through whom the Lord’s words “shall be had again” — or re-“added.”

The evident thematic relationship between 2 Nephi 28:27-30; 29:3-10; and Moses 1:41 and the canon formulae in Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 [MT 13:1], viewed against the backdrop of the “Joseph” etiologies (Genesis 30:23-24), raises the question: how do other prophetic passages that describe the “adding to” and “taking away” from divine teaching and the repository of divine teaching in “canonical” scripture relate to these same biblical texts? One such prophetic text is 1 Nephi 13 with its emphatic predictions that a Gentile “great and abominable church” would “take away” many “plain and precious things” and covenants (see especially 1 Nephi 13:26-40).¹⁰ Another related prophetic text is Jacob’s prologue to his quotation of Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree:

But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people, and *they despised the words of plainness* and killed the prophets and sought for things [words] that they could not understand. Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for *God hath taken away his plainness from them*, and delivered unto them many things [words] which they cannot understand because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it that they may stumble. (Jacob 4:14)

In this short article, I explore the meaning of Jacob’s interconnected phrases “they despised the words of plainness” and “God hath taken away his plainness from them” in Jacob 4:14 and their textual dependency on Nephi’s descriptions of the “plainness” of divine words and writing in 1 Nephi 13:26-35, 40; 16:29; 2 Nephi 25:4-7, 20, 28 and elsewhere. Jacob’s assertion that “God hath taken away his plainness” should be understood as language that harks back to and revolves around the language of the Deuteronomic canon formula (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 [MT 13:1]). Though the agents appear to differ in each case, the “taking away” of God’s “plainness” among the Jews invites comparison with the Gentiles’ “taking away” of “plain and precious things” in 1 Nephi 13:26-29, 40, inasmuch as both result in the “stumbling” of many (cf. Malachi 2:8). Both situations required divine action: the divine re-adding or restoration of divine words in their plainness — scriptures and covenants — in order to “take away” stumbling blocks (1 Nephi 14:1; cf. Jacob 4:14-15), and

10. Separate study forthcoming.

to enable both Jew and Gentile to “build” upon the “sure foundation” (Jacob 4:17; cf. the title-page of the Book of Mormon).

“Stiffnecked People[s]”

Jacob’s prologue to Zenos’s allegory (Jacob 4:14) begins with the statement “But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people ...” This description of ancient Judahites needs to be considered first in light of biblical statements that describe ancient Israelites as a “stiffnecked people” (see, e.g., Exodus 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9 and Deuteronomy 9:6, 13).¹¹ Second, it should also be viewed against the backdrop of Nephi’s earlier description of his own people as a “stiffnecked people,” a text from which Jacob borrows heavily in Jacob 4:

And now behold, my people, *ye are a stiffnecked people*. Wherefore *I have spoken plainly unto you*, that *ye cannot misunderstand*. And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you, for they are sufficient to *teach* any man the right way. For the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not, for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law. (2 Nephi 25:28)

In addressing his own people, Nephi appears to quote Exodus 33:5: “For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, *Ye are a stiffnecked people* [’*attem* ’*am-qěšēh-’ōrep*]” (cf. the similarly worded description “thou art a stiffnecked people,” Exodus 33:3; Deuteronomy 9:6). Jacob’s son, Enos, would describe the Nephites of his time in polyptonic¹² fashion as “a *stiffnecked* people [’*am-qěšēh-’ōrep*], *hard* [*qāšēh*] to understand” (Enos 1:22). It is significant that Jacob specifically correlates ancient Judahite “stiffneckedness” with their failure to “understand” divine truth as embodied in Jesus Christ (“[they] sought for things which they could not understand,” “many things which they cannot understand”). Nephi, Jacob, and their successors recognized that such obduracy made “understanding” impossible.

“The Words of Plainness”

Jacob next mentions that ancient Judah-Israel “*despised the words of plainness* and killed the prophets and sought for things [words] that they

11. See further Deuteronomy 31:27 and Judges 2:19.

12. *Polyptoton* is a wordplay involving terms derived from the same root. On polyptoton see further Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 117.

could not understand” (Jacob 4:14). For Jacob, these things constituted symptoms of general spiritual “blindness.” This spiritual blindness had devastating consequences not only to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah in 586 BCE but also in the first century CE: “Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall” (Jacob 4:14). It should be noted that not all of Jesus’s Jewish contemporaries were, in Jacob’s words, “looking beyond the mark.” All of Jesus’s first followers, including all of the apostles, were Jewish. All of the earliest “Christians” — to use that term somewhat anachronistically — were Jews. In fact, the earliest church members saw themselves within Judaism, not outside of or apart from it.¹³ Nevertheless, as Jacob states elsewhere, “because of priestcrafts [cf. the Sadducees and many ‘chief priests’] and iniquities they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified” (2 Nephi 10:5). Jesus himself wept over Jerusalem,¹⁴ and he lamented: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not [or, you were not willing]!” (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34).¹⁵ What was “plain” to some was not plain to all.

At this point it becomes necessary to identify as nearly as possible what Jacob meant by the “words of plainness” that God’s covenant people despised. To help one get a fuller sense of what Nephi and Jacob may have meant, writing in the sixth century BCE, by “plain” writing, “plain and precious things [words],” and “words of plainness” at least three passages from the Hebrew Bible offer some insight.

First, Deuteronomy 1:5 reports the following regarding the body of instruction that Moses gave to Israel just before their entry into the

13. See, e.g., Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 552. Nanos writes, “Paul saw himself wholly within Judaism, as one who was assigned a special role in the restoration of Israel and the nations (Rom 11:1–15; Gal 1:13–16).”

14. “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou kindest not the time of thy visitation.” Luke 19:41–44, KJV.

15. Cf. Also 3 Nephi 10:4–6.

promised land: “On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare [*bē’ēr*, make plain] this law, saying. . . .” The key term in this verse is the verb *b’r*, which here means “to explain, to elucidate (a law).”¹⁶ Robert Alter suggests that the use of *b’r* in Deuteronomy 1:5 “provides a central rationale for the whole book [of Deuteronomy]” as a repetition of previously enunciated divine law.¹⁷ The Book of Deuteronomy, on some level, *makes plain* the Lord’s instruction — or “law” — through Moses.

The second relevant text occurs toward the end of the Book of Deuteronomy after most of the “instruction” or legislation. There the verb *b’r* occurs for the second and only other time in the entire corpus of the Pentateuch, as Deuteronomy further records the Lord’s commandment given to Moses regarding this “law”: “And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law *very plainly* [*ba’ēr hētēb*]” (Deuteronomy 27:8). In the context of writing, including the writing of scripture, *b’r* takes on the meaning “to write down clearly.”¹⁸ The use of *b’r* at the outset of Moses’ reiteration and explication of the Lord’s instruction or law and at or near its end creates a kind of inclusio or envelope figure demarcating the “plain” content. Moreover, what began as “plain” spoken words in Deuteronomy 1:5 becomes “plainly” written covenant *tôrâ*.

A third passage now warrants our consideration. Beyond its use in forming the inclusio at Deuteronomy 1:5 and 27:8, the verb *b’r* occurs in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible a third and final time in the written prophecies of Habakkuk, a prophet active around 612 BCE, whose writings may have been on the brass plates and thus may have influenced Lehi and Nephi. Habakkuk records: “And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, *and make it plain* [*ûbâ’ēr*] upon tables, that he may run that readeth it (Habakkuk 2:2, KJV). “Write the vision; *make it plain* [*ûbâ’ēr*] on tablets, so that a runner may read it” (Habakkuk 2:2, NRSV). From Habakkuk’s vision we have one of the plainest meristic¹⁹ statements of what Nephi called “the doctrine of Christ” in scripture: “but the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

16. HALOT, 106.

17. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible, Volume 1: The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019), 617.

18. HALOT, 106, glosses *b’r* as “to write down clearly” for Deuteronomy 27:8 and Habakkuk 2:2.

19. *Merismus* is a rhetorical device in which a whole is referred by one or several of its constituent parts. On meristic references to the doctrine of Christ in the Book of Mormon, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical *Merismus* in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 106–34.

O. Palmer Robertson recommends that “rather than envisioning a placarded statement so large that a person running by might read it, the context of the prophetic vision on tablets for the ages to come suggests the ‘running’ of a messenger to ‘proclaim’ the vision.”²⁰ It is interesting to consider the image of a vision or revelation “ma[d]e ... plain on tablets [or plates], so that a runner may read it” in the context of latter-day prophets and missionaries running with a “plain” message originally written on metal tablets or plates in ages past for future generations.²¹ Robertson cites several examples of “prophetic” running from the Hebrew Bible: the “running” of the false prophets who were not authorized to run with a divine message (Jeremiah 23:21, the opposite of authorized running), Gehazi running for the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:26), and Zechariah hearing the Lord command a divine messenger to “run” with a message (Zechariah 2:4).²²

Moreover, regarding the Lord’s instructions to Habakkuk regarding his vision, Robertson writes: “The context suggests an intentional allusion to the inscribing of the original ‘ten words’ of the book of the Covenant (Exod. 31:18; 32:15–16; Deut. 9:10). Originally, Israel also had been directed to ‘inscribe’ on whitewashed stones all the words of the law, and to ‘make very plain’ (*ba’er hêtēb*) this inscription (Deut. 27:28). Habakkuk is directed to *make it plain [ba’er] on the tablets* the vision being given him” (emphasis in the original).²³ The Hebrew term *lūah*, plural *luhôt*, “tablets” (i.e., “wooden, stone, or metal tablet[s]”)²⁴ can just as well mean “plates.”²⁵ Making divine instruction “plain” on metal “tablets” or plates appears to be what Isaiah is doing after Isaiah 8:1, when he is instructed to write *bēhereṭ ’ēnôš* (“with a human [engraving] stylus”),²⁶ on a large *gillāyôn*, which in Isaiah 3:23 clearly constitutes

20. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 169.

21. My thanks to Jeff Lindsay for this added insight. Moreover, I would further note that Mormon has preserved for us (on metal plates) the image of Abish doing a prophetic type of running: “she ran forth from house to house making it [i.e., the theophanic events in Lamoni’s palace] known unto the people” (Alma 19:17) as part of a message that we too now “run” to “proclaim.”

22. Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 169.

23. *Ibid.*, 168.

24. *HALOT*, 522–23.

25. Cf. BDB, 531–32. 1 Kings 7:36 states that Hiram carved cherubim, palm trees, and lions on the “plates [*halluhôt*] — its ledges [literally, ‘hands’]” (my modification of the KJV) or “plates of the stays” (JSP Tanakh 1917, ASV, ERV).

26. H.G.M. Williamson, *Isaiah 6–12: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2018), 193–203. It should be further noted

something like a metal mirror (i.e., a metal plate used as a mirror, *wēhaggilyōnīm*). Making divine instructions “plain” on metal “tables” — i.e., “tablets” — or plates is precisely what we find Nephi, Jacob, and their successors doing.

Where ancient Israel had been commanded not to “add to” or “diminish from” Yahweh’s “law” (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32 [MT 13:1]), the writing of Habakkuk’s vision constitutes a strong example of Yahweh adding to — or updating — his own “law.” Robertson further notes: “Reflecting the long-established pattern of inscribing a fresh copy of covenant law as an essential step in covenant renewal, Habakkuk’s instructions include inscribing his vision on the tablets.”²⁷ This insight seems particularly significant when we consider the function of Nephi’s small plates as both a political²⁸ and religious document. Doctrine and Covenants 84:57 designates the entire Book of Mormon, including the small plates, as “the new covenant,” a phrase ultimately derived from the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” — i.e., an added or re-added covenant. When Nephi, Jacob, and their successors wrote their visions, revelations, and the doctrine of Christ, they did just what Moses and Habakkuk did: they “made [them] plain” on covenant “tablets” or plates (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 25:7 and below). Their “plain” writings would become a part of a covenant and eventually “canon.”

“God Hath Taken Away His Plainness ... and Delivered unto Them Many Things Which They Cannot Understand”

In Jacob 4:13–14, Jacob makes an important general statement regarding prophecy, the function of the Holy Ghost, and the type of revelation that they were to record or “make plain” on plates. He then segues into commentary on how “plainness” can be retracted through divine agency. Moreover, Jacob appears to refer to his father Lehi’s rejection as a prophet at Jerusalem, including the attempts on Lehi’s life, and the heavenly book that Lehi read which “manifested plainly” of Jesus Christ:

JACOB: Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men, for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore it speaketh of things as

that the *heret* used to shape the golden calf in Exodus 32:4 clearly constitutes an engraving tool.

27. Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 168.

28. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15–37.

they really are and of things as they really will be. Wherefore *these things are manifested unto us plainly* for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old. But behold, *the Jews* [ancient Judahites] were a stiffnecked *people*, and *they despised the words of plainness* and *killed the prophets and sought for things* [words] *that they could not understand*. Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for *God hath taken away his plainness from them*, and delivered unto them *many things* [words] *which they cannot understand*, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it *that they may stumble*. (Jacob 4:14)

NEPHI: And it came to pass that *the Jews did mock him* because of the things [words] which he testified of them, for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations. And he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and *also the things* [words] *which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah* and also the redemption of the world. *And when the Jews* [ancient Judahites] *heard these things* [words] *they were angry with him*, yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain. And *they also sought his life* that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord is over all those whom he hath chosen because of their faith to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance. (1 Nephi 1:19-20)

What, then, did Jacob mean by the statement “God hath taken away his plainness from them [the ancient Judahites], and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand” in Jacob 4:14? Evidence from the text of Jacob 14:13-18 suggests that he refers to at least three things: (1) the complexity of ancient Israelite prophetic writings in general and those of Isaiah in particular without “the key of knowledge,”²⁹ (2) the enigmatic nature of the law of Moses and its types, shadows, and rituals, and (3) the withdrawal of the Holy Ghost.

Jacob’s prologue to Zenos’s allegory in Jacob 4:13-18 contains specific lexical links to the prophecies of Isaiah. For example, the stone (*’eben*)

29. I.e., the “key of knowledge” mentioned in Luke 11:52. See further along in this section.

mentioned in Jacob 4:15-16 alludes directly to Yahweh as the “stone of stumbling [*ûlē'eben negep*] and for a rock of offence [and for a rock of stumbling, *ûlēšûr mikšôl*] to both the houses of Israel” in Isaiah 8:14 and the foundation “stone” in Isaiah 28:16 (see also Psalms 118:22). The phrases “they must needs fall,” “that they may stumble,” (Jacob 4:14), “the stumbling of the Jews” (4:15), and “stumble because of my anxiety for you” (Jacob 4:18), all refer to Isaiah 8:15 (“And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken”) and Isaiah 28:13 (“But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, *and fall* [and stumble, *wĕkāšĕlû*] *backward*, and be broken, and snared, and taken”). Jacob’s use of “safe foundation” (Jacob 4:15) and “sure foundation” (4:16-17, 2 times) allude to and quote the collocation “sure foundation [*mûsād mûsād*]” from Isaiah 28:16.

That Jacob has Isaiah’s words in mind in Jacob 4:14 finds confirmatory evidence in that fact that in Jacob 4:13-14 he also employs the prophetic language of his brother Nephi writing about the words of Isaiah and their “plainness”:

JACOB: Behold, my brethren, *he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men, for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore it speaketh of things [words] as they really are, and of things [words] as they really will be. Wherefore these things are manifested unto us plainly for the salvation [*yĕšû'at*] of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old. But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people, and they despised the words of plainness and killed the prophets and sought for things [words] that they could not understand. Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things [words] which they cannot understand because they desired it. And because they desired it, God hath done it that they may stumble.* (Jacob 4:14)

NEPHI: Wherefore hearken, O my people which are of the house of Israel, and *give ear unto my words, for because that the words of Isaiah [*yĕša'yāhû*] are not plain unto you — nevertheless they are plain unto all they that are filled with the spirit of prophecy,*

But I give unto you a prophecy according to the Spirit which is in me — wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father. For behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn. Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things [words] of the Jews. And I know that the Jews do understand the things [words] of the prophets. And there is none other people that understand the things [words] which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things [words] of the Jews. But behold, I Nephi have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I of myself have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about. And I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them. But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy according to my plainness, in the which I know that no man can err. Nevertheless in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass. (2 Nephi 25:4-7)

Terms translated “spirit”; “plainly,” “plain,” “plainness”; “prophecy,” “prophesieth,” “prophets,” “prophecy,” “prophecies”; “understand,” “understanding”; “hath spoken,” “speaketh”; “words”/“things”; “Jews”; God,” and “people” establish clear, firm lexical links between Nephi’s adumbration of his hermeneutical keys³⁰ to Isaiah in 2 Nephi 25:1-7 and Jacob’s statement on “plainness” in Jacob 4:13-14. Moreover, one can perhaps detect Jacob using an allusive wordplay on the names Isaiah (*yěša’yāhū*, “Yahweh is salvation”) and Jesus (*yěšū’a*, “salvation”) in the expression “for the salvation [*yěšū’at* (*lišū’at*)] of our souls” (Jacob 4:13).

In 2 Nephi 25 and Jacob 4:13-14, Nephi and Jacob both emphasize the importance of the Holy Ghost as the key to understanding prophecy, including the written prophecies of the “prophets of old” (Jacob 4:13).³¹ Those writings clearly included what Nephi designates as the “words of Isaiah” or “prophecies of Isaiah,” Nephi and Jacob both knew that which (2 Nephi 25:1-8),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 47-65.

31. Jacob’s use of this idiom in the context of the obduracy of ancient Jews toward their own prophets may have some reference to what Nephi mentions near

Isaiah had received his prophetic commission, the Lord had commanded to make the message difficult for his hearers: “And [the Lord] said: Go and tell this people — Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceived not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes — lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed” (2 Nephi 16:9-10, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10). Jacob quotes Isaiah acknowledging, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season unto thee, O house of Israel, when ye are weary” (2 Nephi 7:4, quoting Isaiah 50:4). The message of Isaiah and the messages of all the Israelite “prophets of old” required the Holy Ghost — the spirit of prophecy bearing testimony of Jesus (Revelation 19:10) — to “manifest [them] plainly” or to making them “plain.”

Jacob’s statement “God hath taken away his plainness from them” echoes an earlier divine statement regarding “adding” and “taking away” recorded by Nephi: “For unto him that receiveth I will give more; and them that shall say we have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have” (2 Nephi 28:30; cf. 2 Nephi 29:3-10). Jacob’s words also recall Nephi’s repeated description of the “taking away” of “plain and precious things [words],” including divine scripture, doctrine, and covenants, by “the great and abominable church” as described in 1 Nephi 13:26-40.

Jacob 4:14 exhibits a number of additional, significant lexical connections to 1 Nephi 13. Shared terminology between Jacob 4:14 and 1 Nephi 13:29 abounds:

JACOB: But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people, and *they despised the words of plainness* and killed the prophets and *sought for things [words] that they could not understand*. Wherefore because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for *God hath taken away his plainness from them* and delivered unto them *many things [words] which they cannot understand*, because they desired it. And because they desired it, God hath done it *that they may stumble*. (Jacob 4:14)

NEPHI: *And after these plain and precious things [words] were taken away [by the Gentile “great and abominable church”],*

the outset of his record: “And when the Jews heard these things, they were angry with him, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out and stoned and slain” (1 Nephi 1:20).

it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles. And after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters — which thou hast seen — with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, and thou seest because of *the many plain and precious things* [words] *which have been taken out of the book*, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God — and *because of these things* [words] *which are taken away* out of the gospel of the Lamb, *an exceeding great many do stumble*, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them. (1 Nephi 13:29)

Paul Hoskisson, writing on the meaning of the phrase “looking beyond the mark” in Jacob 4:14, offers the following important insight: “Given that Jesus Christ is the general and specific subject of the chapter, a priori it can be expected that Christ and the mark are one and the same. Indeed, one verse in particular in chapter 4 seems to provide a hint on how to read verse 14.”³² He cites Jacob 4:5 as the relevant verse: “Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him.”³³ Hoskisson sees archery imagery at work in the metaphor of “the mark,” but relatedly the broader idea of arrows as pointers and guides³⁴ to divine instruction leads us back to the Liahona.

As I have proposed elsewhere,³⁵ Jacob uses a wordplay on the meaning of *tôrâ* (“law,” or better “instruction”) in terms of the verb **yry/yrh*, “instruct, teach,”³⁶ which appears to have had the original sense of “stretching out the finger, or the hand, to point out a route.”³⁷ In other words, Jacob is playing on the idea of the Law of Moses as a corpus of divine instruction that teaches by pointing: “And for this intent we keep the law [*tôrâ*] of Moses, it pointing [cf. *yry/yrh*] our souls to him”

32. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Looking Beyond the Mark,” in *A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Andrew C. Skinner (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 149–64, <https://rsc.byu.edu/witness-restoration/looking-beyond-mark>.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Hugh W. Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” *Improvement Era* 64, no. 2 (February 1961): 87–89, 104–11.

35. Matthew L. Bowen, “Scripture Note: ‘Pointing Our Souls unto Him,’” *Religious Educator* 20, no. 1 (2019): 165–71.

36. *HALOT*, 436.

37. *HALOT*, 1710.

(Jacob 4:5; see also Alma 34:14). Here the imagery and terminology pertaining to the Law of Moses and the Liahona converge.

All of the foregoing helps us appreciate the significance of Nephi's description of the Liahona with its pointers as a means of delivering divine instruction, teaching, or "law" through writing thereon: "And there was also written upon them [the pointers] *a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it.* And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things" (1 Nephi 16:29). This instruction was "law" — instruction by pointing — and scripture for Lehi and his family, every bit as much the law of Moses and the words and prophecies of the "prophets of old."

When God "[took] away his plainness" and "delivered unto them [the ancient Judahites] many things [words] which they cannot understand" he retracted the guidance of the Holy Ghost which made the writings of Isaiah and other prophets "plain." Thus its absence left what would otherwise have been "the words of plainness" to remain "hard saying[s]"³⁸ to the eyes and ears of the obdurate, especially those of "the builders" (Psalms 118:22; cf. "build" in Jacob 4:15-17) — the religious leadership. Moreover, the Lord had "take[n] away" the fulness of the priesthood ("I will *take away* the priesthood *out of their midst* [cf. the Hebrew idiom *hāsîr X miqqereb*, "take away ... from the midst"],³⁹ JST Exodus 34:1; see also D&C 84:25).

The apostle Paul, who called the Law of Moses "holy" and its commandments "good,"⁴⁰ also averred that initially "the law [*nomos*] ... was added [*prostithē*]"⁴¹ because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19). JST Exodus 34:1 states that the Lord instructed Moses to "hew" a second set of tablets "like unto the first," and promised that he would "write upon them also, the words of the law, according as they were written at the first on the tables which thou brakest; but it shall not be according to the first." This "added" law would be "after the law of a carnal commandment" (JST Exodus 34:2). Not only would he "take away the priesthood" — i.e., his "holy order and the ordinances thereof" — but they would lose access to his immediate "presence" ("my presence shall

38. Cf. John 6:60.

39. For some examples of *hāsîr X miqqereb*, see Exodus 23:25; Joshua 7:13; and Zephaniah 3:11. The idiom used in Isaiah 58:9 is similar.

40. Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8.

41. *Prostithēmi* is the verb same verb used in the LXX versions of the canon formula Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1 and in Revelation 22.

not go up in their midst,” JST Exodus 34:1). For those ancient Israelites who “hardened their hearts” and did not “enter [the Lord’s] rest,”⁴² the “tak[ing] away of [God’s] plainness” involved both divine subtraction and addition.

The “taking away” of God’s “plainness” also involved human agency. The obduracy of religious leaders before, during, and after Jesus’s time created further obstacles to understanding. Jesus criticized the lawyers (Gk. *nomikoi*) — i.e., the scripture scholars — for hindering rather than helping their fellow Israelites. Luke records Jesus declaring, “Woe unto you, lawyers [*tois nomikois!*] for *ye have taken away [Greek *ērate*] the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered*” (Luke 11:52). The Joseph Smith Translation of this verse identifies “the key of knowledge”: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for *ye have taken away the key of knowledge, the fulness of the scriptures; ye enter not in yourselves into the kingdom; and those who were entering in, ye hindered*” (JST Luke 11:53). Joseph Smith may have conceived of this “key of knowledge” as “the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God” as administered by the “greater priesthood” (i.e., Melchizedek priesthood) that the Lord had “take[n] away” from their midst (JST Exodus 34:1; D&C 84:25). To this same greater priesthood also pertained the “sealing or binding power” as “the keys of the kingdom, which consist in the key of knowledge” (D&C 128:14).

Abinadi explained why the Law of Moses was given to ancient Israel and why ancient Israel found the Law with its vast array of performances, ordinances, and types so enigmatic:

And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even *a very strict law* [*tôrà qāšâ mē’ōd*]. For they were *a stiffnecked people* [*‘am-qěšēh-‘ōrep*], quick to do iniquity and slow to remember the Lord their God. Therefore there was a law given them, yea, *a law of performances and of ordinances*, a law which they were to observe *strictly* from day to day to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him. But behold, I say unto you that *all these things were types of things to come*. And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you: Nay, *they did not all understand the law — and this because of the hardness of their hearts*. For they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God. (Mosiah 13:29–32)

42. See Psalms 95:8–11.

The performances, ordinances, and types of the Law of Moses (*tôrat mōšeh*) reflect the method of divine “teaching” (cf. Hebrew *yry/yrh*) through symbolism, found in visions (e.g., Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1, 10; the Book of Revelation), and eminently in Jesus’s parables. The allegory of the olive tree reflects this type of teaching as an extended parable or an extended symbolic narrative.

We find another excellent example of how the Lord uses symbolism to teach in Lehi’s dream as recounted in 1 Nephi 8. Nephi writes that his father Lehi received this vision because of his “faith on the Son of God — and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come” (1 Nephi 10:17; see further 1 Nephi 11:1-7). Nephi, for his part, then declares, “I Nephi was desirous also that I might see and hear and know of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 10:17). Lehi and Nephi both saw or looked to “the mark.” Of him, they both bore witness after they saw him (see 1 Nephi 10:4-11; 11:7; etc.).

When Nephi sees “the things which [his] father saw” he also attains to an understanding of what its symbols meant (e.g., the rod of iron = the word of God⁴³ = Christ; the tree of life and = the love of God = Christ,⁴⁴ etc.). His brothers attained to no such understanding. Upon Nephi’s return from seeing this vision, his brothers were fighting about their father’s dream and its symbolism (“And it came to pass that I beheld my brethren, and they were disputing one with another concerning the things which my father had spoken unto them,” 1 Nephi 15:2). They could not see the symbolism and thus could not see “the mark”: “For he truly spake many great things unto them which was hard to be understood save a man should inquire of the Lord. And they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought” (1 Nephi 15:3).

In short order, Lehi would find the Liahona to be another type, shadow, and means of giving “plain” writings as “instruction” or “law” (1 Nephi 16). It taught the family the need to “look to God and live” (Alma 37:38-47, especially vv. 46-47). If the etymology and meaning of Liahona — Egyptian *l/r* (“to”) + *yhw* (“Yahweh,” “the Lord”) + *i nw* (> Coptic *anau*, look!),⁴⁵ “see that ye look to God and live,” Jacob’s use

43. 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:23-25; JST Revelation 2:27; Helaman 3:29; cf. 1 Nephi 17:26, 29. See, e.g., Matthew L. Bowen, “What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?” *Insights* 25, no. 2 (2005): 2-3.

44. 1 Nephi 11:14-25.

45. Matthew L. Bowen, “Look to the Lord!: The Meaning of *Liahona* and the Doctrine of Christ in Alma 37-38,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma*

of the phrases “it pointing our souls to him” and “looking beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14) beyond a reference to Law of Moses (i.e., *tôrâ* — “instruction [by pointing]”) has some reference to the *Liahona* and the one to whom the *Liahona* “pointed”⁴⁶ — Jesus Christ himself. As Jesus himself said: “Behold, I am the law [*hattôrâ*], and the light. *Look unto me*, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9; cf. Alma 34:14).

Since all spiritual blindness and apostasy results, as did Nephite apostasy, in the Lord “tak[ing] away his word” and “withdrawing [his] spirit,” as Samuel the Lamanite put it (Helaman 13:8), both the Lord’s “word” and his “spirit” are precisely what must be “had again among the children of men” (Moses 1:41) — or re-added — in order for the conditions of apostasy to be reversed.

“He Shall Add ... to Recover His People”: The Prophetic Framing for Zenos’s Allegory

The dual realities that “God ha[d] taken away his plainness from” ancient Israel and Judah and that the “great and abominable Church” among the Gentiles had “taken away” many “plain and precious things” (including covenants) from Jewish scripture resulted in “an exceedingly great many” Gentiles “stumbl[ing]” (1 Nephi 13:29) and “the stumbling of the Jews” (Jacob 4:14–15).

The collective human “stumbling” from all that had been “taken away” necessarily required divine, prophetic “adding.”

On the back side of his quotation of Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5), Jacob uses Isaiah 11:11 as a closing frame and a hermeneutical lens through which to view the entire allegory, and especially the Lord of the vineyard’s saving action: “And in the day that *he shall set* his hand *again* [Hebrew *yôsîp*, “he shall add”] the second time to recover his people [Isaiah 11:11] is the day — yea, even the last time — that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power to nourish and prune his vineyard; after that the end soon cometh” (Jacob 6:2). I have posited elsewhere that Isaiah’s use of *yôsîp* Isaiah 11:11 provided Jacob the key lexical link

36–42 (*The 48th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*), ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Salt Lake City, Provo, UT; RSC/Deseret Book, 2019), 275–95.

46. 1 Nephi 16:26–29; Alma 37:40.

to Zenos's evident and replete use of the Hebrew "do something again" idiom (Hebrew *yāsap/yôšîp*).⁴⁷

Evidence in Nephi's use of Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 in 2 Nephi 25:17 (cf. 2 Nephi 25:21; 29:1) and Mormon's use of Isaiah 11:11–12 in 3 Nephi 5:23–26 suggests a longstanding paronomastic⁴⁸ association between the name *Joseph* and Isaiah's aforementioned prophecies of restoration in Nephite thought.⁴⁹ As noted above, the basic meaning of the verb *yāsap/yôšîp* — the key verb in Isaiah 11:11 is to "add."⁵⁰ With "God ha[ving] taken away his plainness" from the Jews and the Gentiles having "taken away" the "plain and precious things ... according to the plainness which is in the Lamb" from the Jewish scriptures, how appropriate that the Lord himself would undertake to "add" them again. And Jacob, like Nephi, may even have had implicit reference to the name *Joseph* ("may he [God] add") when he prophesied, using Isaiah 11:11, that the Lord would "set his hand again [*yôšîp*]" — or "add" — "to recover his people" (Jacob 6:2). Appropriately, the raised-up seer through whom much of the re-"adding" of lost "plainness" would be a "Joseph" (see 2 Nephi 3:5; JST Genesis 50:33), the one biblical Hebrew name etiologicalized in terms of divine "adding" and "taking away" (see again Genesis 30:23–24).

Conclusion

Jacob's assertion that "God hath taken away his plainness" (Jacob 4:14) should be regarded as part of a family of scriptural texts (e.g., Moses 1:41; 1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 28:27–30; 2 Nephi 29:1–10) with language echoing the etiology offered for the name Joseph in Genesis 30:23–24 in terms of antonyms *'āsap* ("take away") and *yāsap*. This language also revolves around the prohibitions in the Deuteronomic canon formulae

47. Matthew L. Bowen, "I Have Done According to My Will': Reading Jacob 5 as a Temple Text," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2016), 247–48. See also Matthew L. Bowen and Loren Spendlove, "'Thou Art the Fruit of My Loins': The Interrelated Symbolism and Meanings of the Names Joseph and Ephraim in Ancient Scripture," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 273–98.

48. *Paronomasia* is a wordplay involving similar sounding, but etymologically unrelated words.

49. Mathew L. Bowen, "'He Shall Add': Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 30, no. 2 (2010): 2–4; Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon," 255–73.

50. HALOT, 418.

(Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 [MT 13:1]) against human “adding” to and “diminishing from” that instruction.

Three texts in the Hebrew Bible that use the verb *b’r* (“make plain”) — Deuteronomy 1:5; 27:8 and Habakkuk 2:2 — shed important light on the covenant and scriptural implications of what Nephi and Jacob may have meant by “manifest plainly,” “[God’s] plainness,” “plain and precious things,” “words of plainness,” “writing . . . plain to be read,” etc. The inclusion of Deuteronomy 1:5 and 27:8 marked the Deuteronomic legislation as the Lord’s “plain” instruction. In Habakkuk 2:2, the Lord commanded Habakkuk to “write his vision” and “make it plain upon tablets [plates].” Nephi and Jacob followed a similar practice upon Nephi’s small plates as they recorded the added revelation they received in “plainness.”

Jacob’s broader statement that the ancient Judahites had “despised the words of plainness” and that consequently “God hath taken away his plainness from them” should be considered in light of Nephi’s earlier statements on “plain” writing, “plainness,” and “plain and precious things” in 1 Nephi 13:26–35, 40; 16:29; 2 Nephi 25:4–7, 20, 28 and elsewhere. In 1 Nephi 13, in particular, Nephi describes the “taking away” of “plain and precious” words, covenants, and doctrine from scripture by the “great and abominable church” formed among the Gentiles as a result of which “an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them” (1 Nephi 13:29). The prophet Malachi describes a similar situation among the post-exilic Judean exiles and the priests who had failed in their responsibilities to teach the law of Moses (cf. Mosiah 13): “But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 2:8). The failure of Judah’s pre- and postexilic religious leadership, in particular, contributed to what Jacob described as “the stumbling of the Jews” (Jacob 4:14–15) and the withdrawal of God’s “plainness.”⁵¹

Thus, God’s “tak[ing] away his plainness” involved both divine and human agency. During his own time, Jesus asserted that the “lawyers” had “*taken away* the key of knowledge, *the fulness of the scriptures*” and thereby had “hindered” those whom they should have helped. (JST Luke 11:53). “Because of wickedness” the fulness of the scriptures, including the fulness of Moses’s record, was “not had among the children of men” (Moses 1:21). Nevertheless, as the Lord promised, “in

51. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both describe similar circumstances before and during Judah’s exile. See Jeremiah 2:8; 10:21; 12:10; 23:1–2; 50:6; Ezekiel 24:1–10. See also 1 Nephi 21:1. Cf. also Isaiah 56:9–12. Zechariah further mentions the failure of Judah’s spiritual leadership (see Zechariah 10:2–3; 11:3–5, 15–17).

a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and *take many of them* from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and *they shall be had again* among the children of men — among as many as shall believe” (Moses 1:41). Jacob uses Zenos’s allegory of the olive trees to describe the reversal of God’s having “taken away his plainness from [the Jews]” (Jacob 4:14). Jacob uses Isaiah’s description of divine adding in Isaiah 11:11 as the hermeneutical lens through which he gives his audience a view of the Lord’s acting to remedy the situation described in Jacob 4:14. Immediately following Zenos’s allegory, Jacob writes: “And in the day that *he shall* set his hand *again* [yôšîp] the second time to recover his people is the day — yea, even the last time — that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power to nourish and prune his vineyard; and after that the end soon cometh” (Jacob 6:2). In conjunction with divine “adding” — the bringing forth of the sealed book described in Isaiah 29:14 — this is the divine re-“adding” of the “plainness” that God (and humankind) had “taken away” as described in Jacob 4:14.

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