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Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture

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LABOR DILIGENTLY TO WRITE: THE ANCIENT MAKING OF A MODERN SCRIPTURE

Brant A. Gardner

[Editor's Note: We are pleased to present the fourth installment from a book entitled *Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture*. It is being presented in serialized form as an aid to help readers prepare for the 2020 *Come Follow Me* course of study. This is a new approach for *Interpreter*, and we hope you find it helpful.]

Chapter 9: Nephi Writing

Applying His Training

Noel B. Reynolds noted: “Of course [The Book of Mormon] is a witness for Christ and his teachings. But in addition, it provides reasons why we should believe that the tradition of the Nephites was just and correct. The two messages of the book are tied together in such a way that whoever accepts the teachings of Christ accepts that Nephi was a legitimate ruler, and vice versa.”²³⁷ Politics, science, and religion were interrelated belief systems that were difficult to separate in antiquity.²³⁸ The Book of Mormon — the product of an author reared, trained, and immersed in such a society — is no exception. It is for this reason that when Nephi declares that “these [small] plates are for the more part of the ministry” (1 Nephi 9:4), the text he provides tells both a religious and political

237. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Political Testament,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 220.

238. Prudence M. Rice, *Maya Political Science: Time, Astronomy, and the Cosmos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 19.

history. For Nephi, politics and religion merged into “the more part of the ministry.”

One of the important aspects of the national origin story is the presentation of the legitimacy of their rulers.²³⁹ Nephi was faced with that very task. He had a new people in a new city. As he began to write on the small plates thirty years after he had left Jerusalem, he turned his attention to telling the story of the legitimate right of his people to be a separate people and for Nephi to be their king. Even with this treatise supporting his legitimacy, Reynolds points out that: “[t]hrough a thousand years of Nephite history, both Nephite dissidents and Lamanite invaders would accuse Nephite rulers of usurping the right to rule that belonged to Laman and Lemuel”.²⁴⁰

The ways in which Nephi built his case drew upon his scribal training. One of the underlying structural elements with which he would have been familiar from his study of ancient Near Eastern texts was the cultural formula by which a new nation was justified. Establishing a new people is termed *ethnogenesis*. The texts Nephi would have studied would have modeled the typical origin story of a new people. Ann E. Killebrew lays out the basic form:

Following Hedwig Wolfram’s definition, the process of ethnogenesis that forms the core ideology of a group often comprises three characteristic features: (1) a story or stories of a primordial deed, which can include the crossing of a sea or river, an impressive victory against all odds over an enemy, or combinations of similar “miraculous” stories (e.g., the exodus); (2) a group that undergoes a religious experience or change in cult as a result of the primordial deed (e.g. reception of the Ten Commandments and worship of Yahweh); and (3) the existence of an ancestral enemy or enemies that cement group cohesion (e.g., most notably the Canaanites and Philistines). These basic elements form the key themes in the biblical narrative about the emergence of early Israel.²⁴¹

239. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Political Testament,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 221.

240. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World; Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 152.

241. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149.

Although it is possible this was a subconscious model,²⁴² the skill with which Nephi crafts his story to communicate these acceptable justifications for ethnogenesis points to an educated background that at least taught the texts that exemplified these ideas. Nephi made sure he covered the essential bases in 1 Nephi:

1. Nephi combined the crossing of the wilderness with the crossing of the ocean as the fulfillment of this element. He included miraculous events to emphasize the presence of God in the process.
2. The acquisition of the brass plates functioned parallel to the reception of the ten commandments. The Lord's requirement that they separate from Jerusalem, as well as the declaration that there were missing teachings in the scriptures provided the need for the new religious formulation. Both Lehi and Nephi taught the Atoning Messiah as the new, or restored, element of their religion.
3. Laman and Lemuel are written unsympathetically so that they might serve as the external enemy that enforced Nephite cohesion.²⁴³ The separation into Lamanite and Nephite defined both the "us" and "them," with the Lamanites as the perennial enemy (even when there might not have been any lineal connection to Laman or Lemuel).

In addition to the standard ethnogenetic elements, Nephi had to justify why he should be the ruler instead of Laman. Laman was the oldest son and Nephi the youngest (until Joseph and Jacob are born in the wilderness). Scribes used established texts as they created new ones.²⁴⁴ Nephi therefore

242. Alan Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," in *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 190, discusses how common patterned expectations molded the biography of Abraham Lincoln to the "hero" pattern. See also Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977) for the socially defined structure that underlies Russian folktales.

243. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 33: "The first thing to notice is that Nephi flattens his older brothers by treating them as a single unit rather than as individuals. The only time that Laman does anything independently is when he goes to Laban's house to ask for the plates (1 Nephi 3:9–14); otherwise, he always speaks and acts in conjunction with Lemuel. Lemuel, in turn, never opposes Laman in any way, and never appears without Laman close by."

244. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 137–41, discusses the way that scribes used the established texts in the creation of new ones.

incorporates a parallel to Joseph of Egypt by receiving a revelation that he should be ruler over his brothers (Genesis 37: 5-10). Nephi establishes a divine model, then carefully builds the sequence to provide the revelation, have Laman and Lemuel recognize it, and then to declare it fulfilled.

As Nephi built his ethnogenetic origin story, he did not rely solely upon history, but he made certain to sacralize that history by intentionally modeling it against a known pattern. His family did not simply leave Jerusalem and travel. They enacted a new exodus:

Parallels Between Exodus and 1 Nephi²⁴⁵		
Incident	Exodus	1 Nephi
The call to the responsible leader through a revelation accompanied by fire	Exodus 3:2–4	1 Nephi 1:6
The despoiling of the Egyptians and the taking of Laban's possessions	Exodus 12:35–36	1 Nephi 4:38; 2
Deliverance on the other side of a water barrier	Exodus 14:22–30	1 Nephi 17:8; 18:8–23
An extended period of wandering	Exodus 16:35	1 Nephi 17:4
Complaints along the way	Exodus 15:24	1 Nephi 2:11–12; 5:2–3; 16:20, 25, 35–38; 17:17–22
Outright rebellion	Numbers 16:1–35; 25:1	1 Nephi 7:6–16; 18:9–21
New law that was to govern the Lord's people	Exodus 20:2–17	1 Nephi 2:20–24

The connection between the Exodus story and the departure of the Lehites from Jerusalem was salient for a long time in Nephiite history. S. Kent Brown explains:

245. S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 112. I have reorganized his insights into a table from the original paragraph form.

The memory of Israel's Exodus from Egypt runs so deep and clear in the Book of Mormon that it has naturally drawn the attention of modern students. The chief focus of recent studies has fallen on the departure of Lehi's family from Jerusalem as a replication, almost a mirror image — even in small details — of the flight of the Hebrews. Such interest emerges naturally because Nephite teachers themselves drew comparisons between Lehi's colony and their Israelite forebears. For instance, in an important speech, king Limhi referred to the Israelites' escape from Egypt and, immediately thereafter, drew a parallel to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (Mosiah 7:19–20). Additionally, in remarks addressed to his son Helaman, Alma consciously linked the Exodus from Egypt with Lehi's journey (Alma 36:28–29).²⁴⁶

The new Nephite origin story began with a new exodus. However, both the political right to rule and the right to exercise their religion depended upon the ties between the new Nephites and old Israel. To emphasize this, Nephi again turns to scripture to place his people inside the inherited blessings pertaining to the house of Israel. Nephi certainly understood that the olive tree was a symbol closely tied to Israel (see Hoseah 4:5–9 and Jeremiah 11:16–17). In that context he provided his father's vision of the future:

Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. (1 Nephi 10:12–14)

The two elements of this prophecy that were important for Nephi's people-building document were the scattering of Israel and the

246. Ibid., 111.

gathering.²⁴⁷ Further tying his people to the scattering and gathering, Nephi borrowed a phrase from Isaiah:

When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.

They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea.

Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea. (Isaiah 24:13–15)

Isaiah had tied the olive tree to those who would “praise the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea.” Nephi implicitly includes his own people into those scattered to the isles of the sea, as well as to the promised gathering of the scattered:²⁴⁸

And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea; and whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away. (1 Nephi 22:4)

And it shall come to pass that they shall be gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth; and the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance. (2 Nephi 10:8)

Another very subtle use of a scriptural model comes in Nephi’s use of the story of David and Goliath to serve as a backdrop and perhaps justification for his encounter with Laban. Ben McGuire sees Nephi and Laban as paralleling David and Goliath as antagonists. He sees allusions to Saul and Israel in the murmurings of Laman and Lemuel. McGuire notes:

Both protagonists cite miracles as the basis for their faith. David cites instances from his own life, and Nephi cites one from the history of Israel and one from his own life. They each then

247. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 61, noticed this pattern in Nephi’s paraphrase of his father’s prophecies.

248. The emphasis on the Nephites as “scattered Israel that would be gathered again” is prominent in Nephi and Jacob, and then disappears as an overt theme in the Book of Mormon. By the time Mormon wrote, his interest was in bringing the gospel to his descendants and not their gathering home to a distant Israel.

conclude by remarking that just as God performed those miracles, God will deliver them from the hand of their antagonists....

A second thematic parallel also occurs in David's suggestion that "they servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." This suggests prophetically that what happened to the lion and the bear will also happen to the Philistine. In Nephi's parallel account, he speaks of a similar fate awaiting Laban: "The lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians."...

Another thematic parallel here is that David claims to be killing Goliath so that "all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." In Nephi's account, Laban is killed so that Nephi's posterity will know the God of Israel....

Both narrative units then end with the death of the antagonist and the subsequent removal and keeping of his armor.²⁴⁹

These uses of the scriptural stories show Nephi's mastery of the scriptural texts, a mastery sufficient that he could not only recall the stories but also understand their fundamental aspects well enough to recast them as models for a new historical event. When the occasion warrants, he easily turns to scripture to support his position. When his brothers' resolve fails them in the quest for the brass plates, Nephi turns to a scriptural text that he parallels to their task. He recounts the Lord's destruction of Pharaoh during Israel's Exodus (1 Nephi 4:2-3). Scribes often incorporated previous texts into their new works. Rather than copying, however, they relied on their memory of the texts.²⁵⁰ Although Nephi was writing this long after the actual event, there is every reason to believe that he was capable of such extemporaneous citation and explication of scriptural texts.

Nephi's Interpretation of Scripture

Once a scribal student mastered the fundamental texts, he was trained in the exegesis of those texts.²⁵¹ This tradition is evidenced in the Dead

249. Ben McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 20-22.

250. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 117.

251. *Ibid.*, 58.

Sea Scrolls. Robert Wiseman explains how this attribute of the scribal industry functioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls:

A *pesher* is a commentary — at Qumran, a commentary on a well-known biblical passage, usually from the Prophets, but also from Psalms and sometimes even other biblical books like Genesis, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy. The important thing is that the underlying biblical passage being interpreted should be seen as fraught with significance in relation to the ideology or history of the Scroll Community. Often this takes the form of citing a biblical passage or quotation out of context or even sometimes slightly altered, followed by the words, “*pesher*” or “*pesher ha-diver*,” meaning “its interpretation” or “the interpretation of the passage is.” The text then proceeds to give an idiosyncratic interpretation having to do with the history or ideology of the group, with particular reference to contemporary events.²⁵²

Nephi understood scripture in very similar terms. Where Qumran interpreted scripture in “an idiosyncratic interpretation having to do with the history or ideology of the group,” Nephi similarly declared: “that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23).

When Nephi speaks of likening the scriptures, his intent parallels the Qumran *pesher*.²⁵³ After Nephi inserted multiple chapters from Isaiah, he declared what he intended to do with them:²⁵⁴

Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

252. Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 81.

253. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 65, suggests, specifically for Nephi’s reading of Isaiah: “As a fellow prophet, Nephi may have considered himself capable of providing creative reinterpretations of Isaiah’s words that may never have occurred to the eighth-century bc seer but which were nevertheless divinely inspired and authoritative.”

254. It is not uncommon for LDS scholars to discuss Nephi’s commentary on Isaiah. As Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 65, points out: “Nephi’s general pattern for interpreting scripture is to follow a direct quote — often rather lengthy — with a discussion that incorporates a few key phrases but does not provide a comprehensive or detailed commentary.”

For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations.

Wherefore, I write unto my people, unto all those that shall receive hereafter these things which I write, that they may know the judgments of God, that they come upon all nations, according to the word which he hath spoken.

Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those 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. (2 Nephi 25:1–4)

Isaiah's writings were on the brass plates, and the brass plates were the only record the Nephites ever called scripture. Nevertheless, Nephi indicates that they required interpretation for his people. For them to understand Isaiah, they needed the spirit of prophecy, which Nephi not only declared he had but also declared he would exercise to explain the intent of Isaiah as it pertained to this branch of the house of Israel in a new world. Karel Van der Toorn confirms this was part of Nephi's scribal training: "The true scribe, in other words, has learned to see what others could not see even if they were given the ability to read."²⁵⁵

Nephi uses the difference between his trained understanding and Laman and Lemuel's less sophisticated scriptural understanding as a foil to explain his inclusion of Isaiah 48 and 49 at the end of 1 Nephi (1 Nephi 20, 21). At the beginning of 1 Nephi 22 (VII) we find:

And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?

And I, Nephi, said unto them: Behold they were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are

255. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 106.

all things made known unto the prophets, which shall come upon the children of men according to the flesh.

Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual; for it appears that the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations. (1 Nephi 22:1–3)

How to understand Isaiah relies on the Spirit in this case and on spirit of prophecy at the end of 2 Nephi. The two declarations have the same intent. Nephi's learning allowed him to understand, and his susceptibility to the Spirit allowed him to liken that understanding to their current circumstances.

Chapter 10: Final Considerations about Writing

Paragraphs without Paragraphs

Neither the extant Original Manuscript nor the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon have any indication of punctuation. The dictation was written as it was heard, with no attempt to add the literary niceties of paragraphs and punctuation. The nature of the dictation in English cannot tell us whether the Nephite language had visual clues that helped divide ideas. Based on many early texts, it is safest to assume that it did not.

How can we understand a text that doesn't follow our visual conventions? We can do an experiment and discover how it might work. The following text is from the book of Jarom, verses 1–7:

now behold I Jarom write a few words according to the commandment of my father Enos that our genealogy may be kept and as these plates are small and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites wherefore it must needs be that I write a little but I shall not write the things of my prophesying nor of my revelations for what could I write more than my fathers have written for have not they revealed the plan of salvation I say unto you yea and this sufficeth me behold it is expedient that much should be done among this people because of the hardness of their hearts and the deafness of their ears and the blindness of their minds and the stiffness of their necks nevertheless God is exceedingly merciful unto them and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land and there are many among us who have many revelations for they are not all stiffnecked and as many as are not stiffnecked and have faith have communion with the Holy Spirit which maketh manifest unto the children of men according to their faith and now behold two hundred years had passed away and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land they observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord and they profaned not neither did they blaspheme and the laws of the land were exceedingly strict and they were scattered upon much of the face of the land and the Lamanites also and they were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites and they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts and it came to pass that they came many times against

us the Nephites to battle but our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord and they taught the people the ways of the Lord wherefore we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands and began to fortify our cities or whatsoever place of our inheritance

That is an intimidating block of text, but as we read it, most of us silently vocalize the words. We turn the visual into the internally audible, and then the meaning isn't nearly so difficult as the block of text makes it appear. The reason is that we verbalize meanings in certain ways that can assist meaning. Hervey, Higgins, and Haywood describe this process:

Looking at individual sentences in discourse reveals that they often contain 'markers' signaling how sentences relate to one another, markers whose main role is to give a text a transparent inter-sentential organization. Compare, for instance, these two texts:

I was getting hungry. I went downstairs. I knew the kitchen was on the ground floor. I was pretty sure that the kitchen must be on the ground floor. I don't know why I was certain. but I was. I didn't expect to find the kitchen so easily. I made myself a sandwich.

I was getting hungry. So I went downstairs. *Well ...* I knew the kitchen *was* on the ground floor. *I mean.* I was pretty sure *it* must be *there*. *Actually.* I don't know why I was so certain, but I was. *Still,* I didn't expect to find it so easily. *Anyway.* I made myself a sandwich.

The first text is so devoid of inter-sentential connectives that, if it hangs together at all — that is, if it is *cogent* at all — this is only thanks to the underlying chronological narrative structure. In the second text, however, a rational 'train of thought' is provided by filling in the discourse-connectives (in italics) missing from the first text, which [serve] as markers of a transparent inter-sentential structure. Some of the markers are rather like illocutionary particles, while others are instances of anaphora — that is, the replacement of previously used words and phrases by elements such as pronouns or adverbs that refer back to them; here, the anaphoric elements are 'it' (replacing 'the kitchen') and 'there' (replacing 'on the ground floor'). The place of these markers is in individual sentences. but their function would seem to be *outside* them:

it is an inter-sentential function linking sentences to one another in a larger text.²⁵⁶

While not nearly as colloquial as this example, the language in the Book of Mormon uses similar principles of inter-sentential clarification. The reason is that the Book of Mormon is an artifact of a literature still heavily dependent upon the techniques of oral discourse. As noted in the section “Nephi’s Plausible Training as a Scribe,” early written texts were supposed to be converted into oral texts when the writing was read out loud. While reading a text out loud is often done to provide information to another person or group of persons, even private reading was typically voiced. Silent reading is a much later skill.²⁵⁷

The longer a written text, the more important are markers to assist the target in understanding the text. In modern written texts, these markers take the form of conventions including spacing and punctuation. Punctuation typically marks sentence-level information, where space marks larger concepts. A space between sentences — particularly followed by an indentation — will mark the end of one paragraph and the beginning of another. These inherently visual clues are unavailable when a text is read, so other types of linguistic triggers are required to assist the hearer in comprehension.²⁵⁸

The linguistic triggers in the Book of Mormon are so obvious as to be almost unnoticed. They appear with such frequency that modern readers tune them out as redundant — which they are for reading a written text with its visual clues to coherence.

And

By far the most common linguistic trigger is the simple conjunction “and.” While the examination of “and” in the Book of Mormon has been most often used to suggest that it is the result of the retention of an early

256. Sandor Herveý, Ian Higgins, Louis M. Haywood, *Thinking Spanish Translation: A Course in Translation Method: Spanish to English* (London: Routledge, 1995), 76.

257. Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 90-91.

258. Katrin Menzel, Ekaterina Lapshinova-Koltunski, Kerstin Kunz, “Cohesion and Coherence in Multilingual Contexts,” in *New Perspectives on Cohesion and Coherence*, eds. Katrin Menzel, Ekaterina Lapshinova-Koltunski & Kerstin Kunz (Berlin: Language Science Press, 2017), 2: “One major task involved in the process of translation is to identify the linguistic triggers employed in the source text to develop, relate and change topics.”

Hebrew language on the plates, I am not suggesting that it is descriptive of a particular language but rather of a linguistic feature used when oral cultures begin to write, but that continue to be principally oral.²⁵⁹

Using his understanding of Hebrew, John A. Tvedtnes described one use of “and” in the Book of Mormon:

Hebrew uses conjunctions much more frequently than English does. One clear example of this can be found in lists of items. In English, the conjunction *and* is normally used only before the last item in a list, such as *wood, copper, and brass*. But Hebrew usually uses a conjunction before each item. The Book of Mormon contains many examples of this Hebrew-like usage, such as this one found in 2 Nephi 5:15: “in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores.”²⁶⁰

The function of “and” is a superset of the way it is used in English. The conjunction “and” continues a concept or story. It is a simple ligature that indicates that what comes next is a part of what has come before. It can be better understood when some special cases are examined.

And It Came to Pass/And Now

Both “and it came to pass” and “and now” are textual markers that move a narrative or, in Skousen’s terminology, a narrative connector.²⁶¹ The difference is the location of the story on a conceptual temporal timeline. “And now” marks new information associated with the same time frame as the previous information. “And it came to pass” moves the narrative in time. There is still information related to the previous sentences, but the time frame has shifted and comes later. They are similar to the English markers “with” and “later.”

In the following examples, the verse before the “and now” phrase is given, then the verse following it.

And it must needs be that the power of God must be with him,
even unto his commanding you that ye must obey. But behold,

259. John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 77-91.

260. *Ibid.*, 82.

261. Royal Skousen, *Volume. 3: The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part 3* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2016), 166.

it was not he, but it was the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it.

And now my son, Laman, and also Lemuel and Sam, and also my sons who are the sons of Ishmael, behold, if ye will hearken unto the voice of Nephi ye shall not perish. And if ye will hearken unto him I leave unto you a blessing, yea, even my first blessing.

But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing, yea, even my blessing, and it shall rest upon him.

And now, Zoram, I speak unto you: Behold, thou art the servant of Laban; nevertheless, thou hast been brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and I know that thou art a true friend unto my son, Nephi, forever. (2 Nephi 1:27–30)

Verses 28 and 30 in this example begin with “and now” and mark a separation of the person being addressed, but as part of the same event.

A more interesting series of these statements comes from Jacob’s discourse:

Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, mine anxiety is great for you; and ye yourselves know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world.

And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive. (2 Nephi 6:3–8)

The first “and now” marks the transition from introduction to the topic of the discourse. The second declares that Jacob will read from Isaiah, whereupon the quotation is also introduced with a subject changing “and now.” The final “and now” introduces the commentary on that verse.

Note how the temporal state changes with the phrase “and it came to pass.” Where “and now” often marks movement of ideas during the same event, “and it came to pass” describes sequences. For instance, the following are all of the “and it came to pass” statements from 2 Nephi 5:

And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me. (2 Nephi 5:5)

And it came to pass that we began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land. (2 Nephi 5:13)

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.

And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king.

But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power. (2 Nephi 5:17–18)

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people.

And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.

And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.

And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far.

And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people. (2 Nephi 5:26–30)

Each of these statements is an event, and they are sequenced by the “and it came to pass.” They do not occur simultaneously, nor during the same limited period. The distinction between conceptual movement and movement in time is the reason “and it came to pass,” a phrase used so often in the Book of Mormon, appears only thirteen times in 2 Nephi. Those thirteen occurrences are concentrated in chapters 4 and 5. It also occurs where Isaiah uses the phrase in a context that similarly marks time: “And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham . . . ” (2 Nephi 17:1).

In contrast to its relatively sparse use in 2 Nephi, 1 Nephi uses the phrase 109 times.²⁶² This difference results from the different nature of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, with 1 Nephi being more historical in focus. The two chapters with high concentrations of “and it came to pass” are precisely those that contain the historical data in 2 Nephi. Nephi also uses the combined phrase “and now it came to pass” (1 Nephi 16:1; 17:19, 48; 22:1; 2 Nephi 1:1) to mark the combination of a major change in topic as well as a different time.²⁶³

With no known connection to Hebrew, Maya texts also have verbal markers that indicate similar meanings of *and now* and *and it came to pass*.²⁶⁴ I suggest the similarity results from a similar solution to a similar problem of visually representing speech rather than a connection to any Book of Mormon language.

Behold/And Now, Behold

The first sentence-initial “behold” comes in 2 Nephi IV (current 2 Nephi 5:1), where it marks a transition between a quoted discourse by Lehi and the beginning of Nephi’s personal narrative about the brothers’ separation into two groups. The next two appearances of “behold” are Enos 1:1 and Omni 1:1. Jarom 1:1 has a slight variant: “Now behold.” In each case, “behold” marks a major shift in the topic and, in the last three cases, a change of authors. Furthermore, in the first case, although the author (Nephi) remains the same, the speaker is different; Nephi has been quoting Lehi then resumes his own narrative.

262. I tallied these occurrences using the search function of *Gospelink 2001*, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

263. This section is slightly updated from Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:196–98.

264. *Ibid.*, 1:25.

Zeniff's holographic record does not begin with "behold," but rather with "I, Zeniff" (Mosiah 9:1), a parallel to Nephi's "I, Nephi" (1 Nephi 1:1). "Behold" begins several chapters in Alma but not the beginning of the book of Alma itself. In the 1830 edition of chapter 5 (our Alma 7:1), "behold" marks the beginning of a quoted sermon. In chapter XIV of the 1830 edition (our Alma 23:1), "behold" marks the beginning of a new story line after an inserted explanation by Mormon. The ending of the previous chapter highlights the change of story line: "And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren." In chapter 16 of the 1830 edition (our Alma 30:1), "behold" transitions from the Ammonites to a new story about Korihor.

Chapter XXI of the 1830 edition (our Alma 45) begins the portion that Helaman wrote in Alma's book after Alma's contributions closed (Alma 44:24). Helaman's writings begin with "Behold, now it came to pass ..." (Alma 45:1). As a new writer in the same book, Mormon notes the transition with the "behold" beginning.

Other "behold" beginnings that serve as transitions within the text are in the 1830 edition at Alma XXVIII (our Alma 61:1), Helaman III (our Helaman 7:1), and 3 Nephi VIII (our 3 Nephi 17:1). Interestingly, however, Mormon does not begin new books with "Behold." I hypothesize that Mormon sees his writing as a continuous unit; therefore, his beginning to the books he is abridging are more typically "And now" or "and now it came to pass."²⁶⁵ Extrapolating from the available data, I see "behold" as making a distinct type of transition from one chapter or book to the next, typically either because of quoted texts where "behold" is associated with identifying the original author or else to introduce new authors on the source plates. When Mormon is simply moving through his narrative, he uses the same transitions ("and now," "now," "and now and it came to pass ...") that appear within chapters as well.

There are other occurrences of "behold" which appear to indicate emphasis rather than a new beginning:

Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay.

265. For example, in the book of Mosiah, "and now," "now," or "and now it came to pass" opens nearly all chapters of the 1830 edition. In parentheses is the 1830 chapter number, followed by the location of that verse in our 1981 edition: Mosiah (1) 1:1, (2) 4:1, (3) 5:1, (4) 6:1, (5) 7:1, (7) 11:1, (8) 13:25, (9) 17:1, (10) 22:1, (11) 23:1, (12) 28:1, (13) 28:20.

Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it. (1 Nephi 17:34–35)

Behold, my soul is rent with anguish because of you, and my heart is pained; I fear lest ye shall be cast off forever. Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength. (1 Nephi 17:47)

And now, Zoram, I speak unto you: Behold, thou art the servant of Laban; nevertheless, thou hast been brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and I know that thou art a true friend unto my son, Nephi, forever. (2 Nephi 1:30)

Therefore, we have two ways in which “behold” marks a text: One simply provides emphasis, and the second introduces a new topic. Since the introduction of a new topic is a type of emphasis, it is probable there is an underlying concept that ties these uses together. Of course, a second hypothesis would simply be that we have translated multiple Nephite words with the same English word.²⁶⁶

266. Donald W. Parry, “Why is the phrase ‘and it came to pass’ so prevalent in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* (December 1992), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1992/12/i-have-a-question/why-is-the-phrase-and-it-came-to-pass-so-prevalent-in-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>.

But why does the phrase “and it came to pass” appear in the Book of Mormon so much more often, page for page, than it does in the Old Testament? The answer is twofold. First, the Book of Mormon contains much more narrative, chapter for chapter, than the Bible. Second, but equally important, the translators of the King James Version did not always render *wayehi* as “and it came to pass.” Instead, they were at liberty to draw from a multitude of similar expressions like “and it happened,” “and ... became,” or “and ... was.”

Wayehi is found about 1,204 times in the Hebrew Bible, but it was translated only 727 times as “and it came to pass” in the King James Version. Joseph Smith did not introduce such variety into the translation of the Book of Mormon. He retained the precision of “and it came to pass,” which better performs the transitional function of the Hebrew word.

Wherefore/Therefore

There is no functional difference between the use of *wherefore* or *therefore* in the translation of the Book of Mormon. The use of *therefore* clusters around the translation of the Mosiah to Words of Mormon section of the Book of Mormon as well as the revelations given to Joseph during that period. Joseph appears to have simply made a lexical choice that shifted after that time to *wherefore*.²⁶⁷

Either *wherefore* or *therefore* was used as the most common introduction of the moral of an argument. As a unit, a particular argument typically began with the explanation of a situation and then moved to a *wherefore/therefore* to provide the conclusion to that particular argument.

A simple transition is seen early in Nephi's writing:

And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; *wherefore*, they did as he commanded them. (1 Nephi 2:14)

The statement begins with the event (marked as a new point in time by the "and it came to pass") which describes Lehi speaking to his sons and the action of the Spirit upon them. The clause beginning with *wherefore* shows the conclusion, result, or consequence of the event. In this case, it is the result of the Spirit shaking Laman and Lemuel.

Mormon employs a more complicated thesis/conclusion. One example is from Words of Mormon:

And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi.

267. Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis" in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 410.

This analysis follows my suggestion that the majority of the Book of Mormon is a functional translation, and the specific words are dependent upon Joseph's vocabulary. See Gardner, *The Gift and Power*, chapter 19. This differs from Royal Skousen's opinion of the nature of the translation. It is not the purpose of this book to resolve those differences.

And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass —

Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people. (Words of Mormon 1:3–5)

Verse 3 begins a new topic, marked by *and now*. That topic is “that which I have written.” Mormon speaks about an event that occurred as he was writing, which was the discovery of the small plates. He explains what they were and particularly that they were “pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ” (v. 4).

After expounding the historical situation and the things which he found pleasing, he concludes, using a *wherefore* clause that shows the result of the event. The result was that he included those plates in his record.

Even more complex usages come with the word *therefore* because of the theological emphasis in some of the Alma chapters rather than any intrinsic value of the word *therefore*. For example:

Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case — that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection.

And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?

Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.

Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. (Alma 40:5–9)

Verses 5 and 6 are both introduced with *now*, simply indicating elements of the argument. The *and now* in verse 9 indicates an expansion of the question, and the *therefore* in verse 9 indicates the conclusion. Verse 9's "there is a time" reprises the "there shall be one time" and "a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection." Verse 8 is an aside, and the conclusion comes in 9. That conclusion restates the earlier statements. The circuitous logic simply provides the reasoning behind what might have been simply declared, that "there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection."

Antithetical Construction — But

The word *but* is complicated in its use in the Book of Mormon. Skousen documents Oliver Cowdery mixing up *but* and *and* in the manuscripts.²⁶⁸ In English usage available in Joseph's day, the word *but* might also be used where more modern speakers would use *only*. Webster's 1828 dictionary gives this example: "2. Only. A formidable man, *but* to his friends. There is *but* one man."²⁶⁹ The use of interest here is that of providing a contradiction to the thesis.

A pithy use of the form comes in Moroni's letter to Pahoran:

Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, *but* to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, *but* for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country. (Alma 60:36)

Moroni has two clauses, where he states what he does not wish to do, contradicted by his true goal. A longer example comes from Teancum's second foray into the Lamanite camp:

And it came to pass that Teancum in his anger did go forth into the camp of the Lamanites, and did let himself down over the walls of the city. And he went forth with a cord, from place to place, insomuch that he did find the king; and he did cast a javelin at him, which did pierce him near the heart. *But behold*, the king did awaken his servants before he died, insomuch that they did pursue Teancum, and slew him.

Now it came to pass that when Lehi and Moroni knew that Teancum was dead they were exceedingly sorrowful; for

268. Skousen, *Volume. 3: The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part 3*, 192.

269. Daniel Webster, s.v. "But," *American Dictionary of the English Language: Webster's Dictionary 1828*, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/but>.

behold, he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many exceedingly sore afflictions. *But behold*, he was dead, and had gone the way of all the earth.

Now it came to pass that Moroni marched forth on the morrow, and came upon the Lamanites, insomuch that they did slay them with a great slaughter; and they did drive them out of the land; and they did flee, even that they did not return at that time against the Nephites.

And thus ended the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus they had had wars, and bloodsheds, and famine, and affliction, for the space of many years.

And there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi; nevertheless for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared.

But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility. (Alma 62:36–41)

This example might be clearer if it were reformatted so the *but*, *behold* statements were more clearly parallel in their narrative function. However, in each case, a statement sets an expectation, and *but*, *behold* is used to show the conclusion which is the opposite of what might have been expected in the thesis.

The contrast between thesis and the *but* conclusion can also provide a positive example:

And the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceedingly rich.

But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; *but* they did humble themselves exceedingly before him. (Alma 62:48–49)

In this case, the expectation of Nephites prospering would be that they would begin to gain in pride and return to costly apparel. That

they did not is emphasized with two *but* phrases. The phrase is not a contraction to the first *but*; it is rather an emphasis by repetition.

The frequent repetition of these conjunctive elements allow us to deduce their textual functions. They all mark specific types of linguistic triggers that allow the listener to follow the sense of the topic in the absence of visual markers we provide with modern punctuation. Those modern markers are more subjective than the original linguistic triggers. Two different editors might create paragraphs differently, and even the same person might see the same text differently and produce a different set of paragraphs at different times. For example, Grant Hardy combines verses 4–6 of 1 Nephi 1 into one paragraph, whereas Lynn A. and David L. Rosenvall have 4, 5, and 6 as separate paragraphs.²⁷⁰

Two Men and Their Two Stories

In his introduction to *The Structure of Thucydides' History*, Hunter Rawlings noted:

[There are] two basic methods open to the historian for marshalling his data, the explicit method in which he simply narrates and analyzes the data consecutively is by far the easier and the more common one. The other, more subtle than the first, is the implicit method, in which the historian arranges and characterizes the facts in a matter that brings out or even creates their essential meaning. With this method, the historian judges without seeming to judge, or, even more subtly, the historian makes the reader judge, unconsciously, in the way the historian wants, by leading him to form certain impressions about the material. The historian who masters this method is more than a recorder of facts — he is an artist.²⁷¹

That definition fits both Nephi and Mormon. Both wrote without calling attention to the way they wrote. Nephi wrote from experience but included other sources he named, such as his father's record and various chapters of Isaiah from the brass plates. Mormon wrote some from experience but mostly from other sources. While the tradition of

270. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5-6. Rosenvall and Rosenvall, *A New Approach to Studying The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus*, 29. Jacob M. Lyon, *The Book of Mormon: The Readable Scriptures* (West Jordan, UT: Temple Hill Books, 2015), 5-6, formats verses 5 and 6 together as Hardy does.

271. Rawlings, *The Structure of Thucydides' History*, 3-4.

records called “the plates of Nephi” served as his major source, Mormon left his readers a breadcrumb trail to point to alternative sources.

Both Nephi and Mormon wove events into a story that told more than lists of events.²⁷² Both had overarching concepts in mind, and neither was so simple a writer that he pointed his writing to only one idea. Nephi looked forward to when Yahweh would descend to earth. Mormon knew that not only had it happened but that there were Nephites in and around Bountiful who had witnessed that very event. Nevertheless, Nephi also wrote to establish a new people and his divine appointment to rule them. Mormon lived through the destruction of his people and wrote of the signs that led to that destruction in the hopes his future readers might avoid them.

Both Nephi and Mormon wrote stories. They wrote history as story, not as sequenced events. They selected from the available stories a specific set of stories designed to promote their overarching purposes. While they were faithful to the actions of the events, those actions were molded to be faithful. At the beginning and the end of Nephite civilizations, two consummate artists left their picture of a people striving toward God, sometimes failing and sometimes repenting. While their people may not have continually walked it, they both unflinchingly described the straight and narrow path that led to the Tree of Life.

272. Hardy, “Mormon as Editor,” 25: “The purpose of the Book of Mormon makes the spiritual meaning of history much more important than any specific set of facts.”

PART 2: CREATING THE TEXT

As Nephi began his last chapter, he reflected on what he had done. He wrote:

And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.

But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught.

But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal. (2 Nephi 33:1–4)

Intertwined with his prayers and embodied in his writings is Nephi's lamentation that he was not powerful in writing as he was in speaking. In verse 3 he noted that while he had written, he hoped his prayers would make the text become effective. He prayed that his writing in weakness will become a strength. The image of success came from the spoken word: "and it *speaketh* of Jesus."

As Moroni reflected upon what he presented as the record of Ether,²⁷³ he echoed Nephi's concerns about the effectiveness of the written word:

And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us

273. Moroni introduces this section as his own conclusions based on what he had written in Ether 12:6: "And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things."

mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them;

And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them.

Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. (Ether 12:23–25)

Moroni expanded upon the idea that he was more powerful in speaking than writing by declaring that “Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them.”

From the beginning of the Book of Mormon with Nephi to Moroni’s closing statements, Nephite writing was declared to be less effective than oral discourse. It was certainly a reflection of the primarily oral nature of Nephite culture, where there were fewer who could read and write, but many who might speak by the spirit. The primacy of orality in Nephite culture dictated some of the features we find in the Book of Mormon text.

When a text is encoded from a primarily oral culture, features that function as structural devices to assist in memorization or textual emphasis tend to become codified in the written text. Karel Van der Toorn explained the process from the viewpoint of Old World texts:

Oral cultures dictate a particular style in written texts, In Israel and Babylonia, texts were an extension, so to speak, of the oral performers. This is not to say that all texts were in origin oral artifacts, but that the oral delivery of the texts determined their style, even if they had originated in writing. The traditional texts from Israel and Mesopotamia are full of the stylistic devices of oral performance such as rhythm, repetition, stock epithets, standard phrases, and plots consisting of interrelated by relatively independent episodes.²⁷⁴

William G. Eddington examined the Book of Mormon for evidence of a primary orality:

274. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 14.

Formulaic expressions occur frequently including such expressions as “and it came to pass”, “and now”, “but/and/or behold.” As an aid to memory, oral societies tend to develop meaning through reference to aggregative noun phrases, or word chunks. Thus... oral societies seldom refer to a soldier, rather “a brave soldier.” Likewise, in the Book of Mormon account of Lehi’s dream, it is never just a “rod,” but a “rod of iron.” Two examples of this word chunk occur in the same verse (1 Nephi 8:24, 1 Nephi 8:30), and six uses of this mnemonic chunk of language in eleven verses (1 Nephi 8:19-30). Likewise, in the same account it is never a “building” but always a “great (or large) and spacious building.”²⁷⁵

Part 1 of this book examined the elements that Nephi and Mormon used to create their texts. They are elements that do not represent modern concepts of chapters and paragraphs, but rather respond to different conceptual triggers. This part examines the way Nephi and Mormon used those elements to structure their texts according to their underlying purposes.

The Title Page of the Book of Mormon provides a synopsis of the overarching purpose of the text:

Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever — And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. (Title Page)

Neither Nephi’s nor Mormon’s writings can or should be summarized so simply. Each writer had complex intents that can be discerned by examining the way in which they carefully constructed their texts to meet those purposes. Also instructive are the triggers that send each author into tangential information that was perhaps not part of the original design.

275. William G. Eggington “‘Our Weakness in Writing:’ Oral and Literate Culture in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Reprint (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 13-14. (Internal references to tables silently removed).

Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece, Key Themes in Ancient History*, eds. P.A. Cartledge and D.A.S. Garnsey, rev. ed. (1992; repr., New York: University of Cambridge, 1999), 29-51 provides an overview of the work on oral poetry and its manifestation through written texts. Importantly, she cautions (p. 49): “Formulae lie at the heart of the discovery that the Homeric poems were composed orally, and the idea that the composition of oral poetry is mechanically traditional. It is the formulaic system that helps an oral poet improvise in performance.”

Note to the Reader

This part follows Nephi and Mormon's writings, providing explanations of how they constructed each of their chapters. The text of the Book of Mormon is not included, though I do provide a few scriptural selections. For a fuller understanding, I recommend having the Book of Mormon available to see how the explanations fit with the whole of the written text in each chapter.

Section 3: Making Nephi's Books

One of the most important statements Nephi made about writing what we know as the books of 1 and 2 Nephi comes at the end of his historical section in 2 Nephi:

And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.

And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far.

And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people.

Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things.

And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon these plates.

And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.

And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren.
(2 Nephi 5:28–34)

The framing of this information with an indication of years tells us that what we read from 1 Nephi 1 to 2 Nephi 5:34 took nearly ten years to complete. Some of that time was required for actually making the plates (2 Nephi 5:31). The presence of these verses at the end of this chapter in 2 Nephi also tells us that Nephi did not begin writing until all the events covered to this point in both books had already occurred. We are not reading a journal, but a retrospective life. That fact must influence our reading of his text.

The opportunity for a reflective retrospective allowed Nephi to use his text to establish the divine and political charter for his new people, providing the essential evidence that Nephi was destined to be the king and progenitor of a new Israel in a new world. Understanding that this is a story Nephi is constructing for a purpose rather than an event-driven autobiography allows us to examine his selection of events and the construction of his work to see how it advances his overall design.

Chapter 11: 1 Nephi

1 Nephi Chapter I (1–5)²⁷⁶

Nephi begins his book according to traditions he learned in his scribal training.²⁷⁷ He adds a colophon,²⁷⁸ which had two functions: describe the contents of the book and to identify that author. The synoptic header prior to chapter I provides the outline of the events to be covered in Nephi's first book: the departure of the family from Jerusalem, the journey into the wilderness, the return to Jerusalem for the brass plates, the acquisition of wives from Ishmael's family, the arrival at Bountiful, the building of a ship, and the journey to the new world. Evidence from Mormon's use of the synoptic headers suggests that the synopsis was considered a part of the text. There was no apparent difference between the synopsis and the beginning of the text, as there is no evidence of such separation either in the extant original manuscript or in the printer's manuscript. Separating the synopsis appears to have been the compositor's choice. It is not unreasonable under modern considerations, and certainly followed typical practices for printed texts of the day.

Included in the basic events listed in the synopsis are hints of the way Nephi intended to tell the tale: "Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews." This verse tells us more of how Nephi wants to tell the story than it does of the history of the event. Lehi sent the brothers; Nephi did not take them. Nephi was the youngest and therefore would not have been in charge. Nevertheless, even at the introduction to the book, Nephi foreshadows the very personal reason that this event is entered into the text.

Nephi also planned to speak about how: "Nephi's brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them." The essential conflict between Nephites and Lamanites is foreshadowed from the very beginning, and the ultimate superiority of the Nephites declared — even before the actual events are discussed.

276. As introduced in Part 1, I am concerned with the original chapters that represent Nephi and Mormon's ideas of what formed a chapter. The modern chapters date from Orson Pratt's revisions for the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon.

277. See "Nephi's Plausible Training as a Scribe" in Chapter 7.

278. John A. Tvedtnes, "Colophons in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Marvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1991), 13.

I see the final line now included in the synoptic head through 1 Nephi 1:3 as declaring the self-identification function of the colophon:

*This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.*²⁷⁹

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, *therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days*. Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians. And *I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.* (1 Nephi–1 Nephi 1:3, verse numbers removed, bolding to highlight the essential information about the creation of the text.)

It was possible in scribal tradition that a scribe might be copying a first-person document. Hence the declaration, while redundant in this case, was conceptually required to note that the first-person speaker of the document was the very person who wrote it, rather than it's being a copy.

As Nephi begins, he very clearly declares that this is his own story. Although he will need to begin his story with some information about his father, it is his own story that is the theme: “and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days” (1 Nephi 1:1).

The Setup

1 Nephi 1:5–15 describes Lehi's prophetic call. It is written in the third person, and quotes only Lehi himself in 1 Nephi 1:13. The rest is Nephi's description of events. While it is possible that Nephi consulted Lehi's record for this information, it is equally possible that this came from Nephi's memory of the events. Although they were thirty years in the past, it is certain they had been important enough to Nephi to create a strong memory.

279. The italicized verse is set as the last line of the book header in all versions since 1830. However, I see it as a chapter header that is separate from the book header.

When Nephi finishes this introduction, it occurs to him that it might be confusing that he says this would be “a record of my proceedings in my days” (1 Nephi 1:1). Therefore, he inserts information to clarify what he was doing:

And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life. (1 Nephi 1:16–17)²⁸⁰

Just before this insertion, Nephi had been speaking of “the things which he [Lehi] had seen” (1 Nephi 1:15). As he returns, he repeats that general idea: “that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi...” (1 Nephi 1:18). This is the standard form for repetitive resumption, clearly indicating that verses 16 and 17 were an aside and not part of the originally planned text. This marks Nephi’s return to his father’s story.

Verses 1 Nephi 1:18–2:7 describe Lehi’s rejection in Jerusalem, the revelation to leave, and the arrival at the first camp. Fittingly, this section ends with Lehi setting up an altar to provide a thanks-offering²⁸¹ to the Lord 1 Nephi 2:7. At the end of 1 Nephi 1:20 Nephi indicates that

280. For ease of comparison to the current LDS edition, I have left the verses as they are in the 1983 edition. As noted in Part 1, our modern concepts of paragraphing do not fit with the linguistic markers Nephites used. Were I to try to replicate the way I think the Nephi conceived of his thought-units, I would format these two verses as follows:

And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams. And he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children (of which I shall not make a full account), but I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days.

Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father upon plates which I have made with mine own hands. Wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

281. Also known as Peace offerings. For more information, see S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 2.

he “will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.” The fulfillment of this promise is immediate, for he records that the Lord spoke to his father in a dream to save them by having them leave Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:1).

In 1 Nephi 2:8–14, Nephi sets up the conflict with Laman and Lemuel. At this point, their conflict is with their father. That changes rapidly. Nephi contrasts his own experience with his brothers, indicating that he had some of the same reservations but took them to the Lord. In 1 Nephi 2:16 he relates that “I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father.” Nephi now shows himself as one who also communicates with Yahweh, specifically having had Yahweh visit him (without any more explanation than that). Thus, Nephi is aligned with Lehi not only in belief but in their common direct relationship with Yahweh.

Even the conflict with Laman and Lemuel shifts at this point:

And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words.

But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them. (1 Nephi 2:17–18)

Sam recognizes Nephi’s new position as paralleling Lehi. Laman and Lemuel did not. They are now in conflict with both of the family’s prophets. With Nephi now established as one of the family prophets, Lehi becomes more and more a secondary character. We are now firmly in Nephi’s story.

The next recorded event comes without any indication of how it fits into the historical time frame. Coming after the discussion with Sam, Laman, and Lemuel, it might be a second revelation. However, it is possible that Nephi simply moved the specifics of Yahweh’s message to this point in time. It is possible that establishing Nephi as parallel to Lehi in both communication with Yahweh and in conflict with Laman and Lemuel was the first priority. The actual content of the prophecy is essential for all that comes later and perhaps required the established conflict with Laman and Lemuel to be fully understood:

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands.

And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.

And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.
(1 Nephi 2:19–24)

Nephi presents the divine revelations that will drive the rest of his narrative up to the end of 2 Nephi 5. Long before Nephi records that his father had received the promise of a new land (2 Nephi 1:5), Nephi declares that the promise of a new land came to him as well. It is probable that part of Lehi's revelation that they leave included the promise of a new land that was to be the goal of their exodus, but Nephi doesn't record it. This is, after all, Nephi's story.

It is important to note that the promise came to Nephi because it foresees that Nephi will be the ruler in the new land. That rulership is specifically noted in 1 Nephi 2:22 where Nephi is prophesied to become a ruler and a teacher over his brethren. The position as ruler will not occur until after they arrive in the New World,²⁸² but Nephi will use his record of the Old-World portion of their journey to demonstrate the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Finally, the contention with Laman and Lemuel that Nephi paralleled as their rebellion against their father is now prophetically imposed upon the future. Nephi sets up Laman and Lemuel as quintessential enemies of those who will eventually follow Nephi. The future Nephite conflicts are declared to be the result of prophecy and a divine declaration that "thy brethren" will become "a scourge unto thy seed." In the requirements of the Ancient Near Eastern origin story, this fulfills the

282. Nephi never rules his brothers in the New World, The examples Nephi uses are all from the time before their arrival in the New World.

need for “the existence of an ancestral enemy or enemies.”²⁸³ It may not be a coincidence that “thy brethren” is used rather than the expected Laman and Lemuel. By the time the prophecy’s fulfillment is relevant, it wasn’t about specific brothers but rather the generic Lamanites who become the promised enemy.²⁸⁴

One of the interesting features of Nephi’s discussion of family history while they camped in the valley of Lemuel is the frequent repetition of the idea of their father’s dwelling in a tent.²⁸⁵ Nephi uses references to his father’s tent to mark the boundaries of narrative units in the text. The reference tends to come at the end of the unit and notes that a particular story has finished. Perhaps a modern writer would have separated these events into discrete chapters, but that is not the way Nephi uses chapters.

Return for the Brass Plates

The next event Nephi elects to tell is the return to Jerusalem for the brass plates. This story is certainly in an appropriate chronological sequence, but we cannot know what Nephi might have left out. As written, Nephi receives Yahweh’s prophetic blessing and returns to his father’s tent, whereupon Lehi immediately sends the brothers to Jerusalem.

Nephi will use this event as the pivot from his position as younger brother to ruler and teacher over his brothers. This event will not have him as a ruler and teacher but rather as a leader and teacher. Nevertheless, the incident is written to demonstrate both of these changes in his relationship with his brothers.

The story begins with Lehi’s noticing and declaring Nephi’s obedience as contrasted to his brothers’ murmuring (1 Nephi 3:5–6). Although Lehi notes his faithfulness, the story is inexorably shifting to Nephi. Therefore, Nephi makes the distinction more personal with his own declaration of obedience to the Lord (perhaps pointedly not to Lehi in this context). When the story begins, we note that: “And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 3:9). I suspect

283. Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300-1100 b.c.e.*, Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 149. See Part 1 for an expanded explanation of this facet of Nephi’s text.

284. While Nephi doesn’t specifically define the Lamanites as a generic label, Jacob explicitly does (Jacob 1:14). The prophesied scourge of the Nephites was not two specific brothers but a people descended from or at least associated with Laman and Lemuel.

285. The specific phrase, or at least a mention of coming to the tent of their father, occurs only for the time they spent in the valley of Lemuel. See verses 1 Nephi 2:6, 15; 3:1; 4:38; 5:7; 7:5, 21; 9:1; 10:16; 15:1; 16:6, 10.

that it is intentional that Nephi places himself in the leadership position, even before the excursion begins.

At the beginning of the attempt for the brass plates, the brothers cast lots, and Laman is appropriately chosen.²⁸⁶ That attempt fails, and Nephi takes the position of instructing his brothers in the reasons for continuing the attempt (1 Nephi 3:15–21). Explaining the failure to his brothers puts Nephi in the position of a teacher over his brothers. Nephi proposes that they collect their riches from their land of inheritance and purchase the plates. It doesn't go well.

The anger that followed this attempt was broken by the appearance of an angel. Nephi had taught, but that didn't work. To set up the third attempt, it wasn't Nephi's teaching but the angel's declaration that made the difference. Important to the way Nephi is developing his message, the angel specifically says: "Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you...?" (1 Nephi 3:29). The divine declaration of Nephi's position is now delivered to Laman and Lemuel through a heavenly messenger.

Even with the declaration that Nephi would be a ruler, Nephi still provides justification by relating another incident where he taught his brothers. This time, he cites the scriptural story of Moses escaping the powerful Egyptians as a model for Yahweh's allowing them to escape the powerful Laban. Nephi writes: "Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 4:4). Laman and Lemuel do not necessarily change, but they *follow*. Even with the conflict remaining with his brothers, those brothers implicitly accept his leadership (if not the prophesied rulership).

The discovery of a drunken Laban and his subsequent beheading is obviously placed in the text intentionally. It is not recorded because killing Laban was an easy decision. Nephi specifically records that it was the Spirit which commanded the action and that Nephi was initially reluctant (1 Nephi 4:10–17). Most importantly, verse 11 notes that "the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands." This appears to be a reference to Exodus 21:12–14:

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

286. The randomness of the lots allowed for the expression of Yahweh's will. Laman, as the eldest, should have borne the responsibility and the Lord allowed him that opportunity. For using lots as a means of divining Yahweh's will, see Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 95.

And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver *him* into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

Nephi would certainly have heard the phrase “delivered him into thy hands” as a reference to the legal definition of when one might legally take a life. Of course this depends upon Nephi’s understanding, but the probability of his scribal training combined with the ways in which he uses scripture to support his textual themes suggests that he understood it in just that way.

Similarly, if Ben McGuire correctly reads the allusions in this story, Nephi intentionally crafted this story to parallel the story of David and Goliath. In that story, a young David beheads Goliath and later is elevated to king. A young Nephi would be implying that his story would similarly end with his enthronement.²⁸⁷

The end of the story of the brass plates comes when they return with them to Lehi’s tent. Lehi reads them, and Nephi recounts their basic contents. Nephi had understood that one of the reasons for slaying Laban and obtaining the plates was for the benefit of future generations. In Nephi’s record, Lehi confirms this. He sees how he is connected to the past (an essential link to the house of Jacob and specifically Joseph of Egypt, 1 Nephi 5:14–16) and then connects the records to the future by means of prophecy (1 Nephi 5:17–19). Once again, we are reminded that the small plates are written for Nephi’s purposes when he states: “And it came to pass that thus far *I and my father* had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded *us*” (1 Nephi 5:20).²⁸⁸

287. Ben McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 18, no. 1 (2009): 25. He concludes (27): “It has been the intent of this paper to demonstrate that the number of parallels between the texts and the structural connection between the two texts suggest that the Book of Mormon contains a literary allusion to the biblical narrative of David and Goliath. It is, however, the rhetorical purpose served by this allusion — a purpose that fits the internal statements of purpose and intent and enhances an understanding of the Book of Mormon narrative on a larger scale — that provides an indication that our hypothesis is correct.”

288. Allen Wyatt suggests that the phrase “thus far” may foreshadow the coming time when even Lehi will murmur against the Lord when all are hungry (1 Nephi 16:20). Personal communication.

The end of this chapter marks the end of the section about the brass plates. The final sentence states the conclusion: “Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise” (1 Nephi 5:22).

1 Nephi Chapter II (6–9)

I suggest that after Nephi finished writing chapter I, he stopped. There is an unstated break in time. With that lapsed time, Nephi was no longer focused on where he intended to go with the story but had to reread what he had written in order to pick up the text again. As he read about his father’s finding his genealogy on the record, he adds a tangent that occupies the entirety of our current chapter 6. In it, Nephi shows that it was the idea of genealogy and connections to Israel that triggered the aside:

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.
(1 Nephi 6:1–2)

As a topic triggered by what had been written and later read, this short section was not part of Nephi’s original plan. The shift also triggered the closing of chapter I and the beginning of chapter II. As Nephi reenters his intended text, he repeats the idea of journeying toward the land of promise. It isn’t a direct return, however, because he will pause for the important story of returning for Ishmael’s family. Nevertheless, he ties his return to the outlined text to the previously intended ending by repeating the idea of looking forward to the land of promise (1 Nephi 7:1).

There are two important events portrayed in chapter II. The first is the return for Ishmael’s family and the second is Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life.

Returning with Ishmael’s Family

Certainly, the return to Jerusalem for Ishmael’s family was important, but that isn’t really the story Nephi tells. He tells the story of their return. After Ishmael has agreed to bring his family into the wilderness, Nephi notes a division among Ishmael’s family that mirrored the division in Lehi’s family:

And it came to pass that as we journeyed in the wilderness, behold Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us; yea, against me, Nephi, and Sam, and their father, Ishmael, and his wife, and his three other daughters.

And it came to pass in the which rebellion, they were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem. (1 Nephi 7:6–7)

This is the same rebellion that Laman and Lemuel instigated against their father. The implication is that they also fomented this rebellion in Ishmael's family. Although no marriages have taken place, by implication the two daughters who followed Laman and Lemuel would have been those destined to be their wives. Although plausibly historical, this event allows Nephi to provide further indication that he was to be the teacher and leader over his brothers. In his opening statement, Nephi reiterates the reversal of cultural expectations that would have the younger brother as teacher and leader over his elder brothers: "Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?" (1 Nephi 7:8).

Nephi's lecture is about prophecy to be fulfilled. He reminds them that they are going to a land of promise (1 Nephi 7:13). He reminds them of their father's prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:13–14). This further angers his brothers. Nephi makes certain to link this incident to the story of the attempted fratricide of Joseph. Both Joseph and Nephi had been chosen to rule over their brothers. Both suffered the wrath of their brothers. Joseph was to be killed but was instead thrown into a pit. His coat was taken and dipped in the blood of a goat so it would appear he had been killed by wild beasts. Nephi was bound and was to be left for wild beasts.²⁸⁹

This incident ends with Nephi's forgiving his brothers and then immediately noting that "and it came to pass that we did come down unto the tent of our father... and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto [Yahweh]" (1 Nephi 7:22).²⁹⁰

289. For Joseph's story, see Genesis 37:17–31. Nephi's story is found in 1 Nephi 7:16–18.

290. Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 3, notes that the addition of the burnt offering suggests that this was not just a thanks-offering as recorded when Lehi first built the altar but also a sin offering. That addition might have been occasioned by the attempted fratricide on the return with Ishmael's family.

Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life

Separating Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life into a different chapter, as Orson Pratt did for the 1879 edition, has a modern logic. It appears to be unrelated to the first incident, of returning with Ishmael's family. However, since Nephi put them in the same chapter, it is important to notice what Nephi tells of that vision as opposed to what he leaves out.

Nephi relates his father's vision of the Tree. He provides the basic elements of the path, the tree, the river and a spacious building. As told, it is a vision of a few who partake of the fruit, and the majority who do not. The end of the story is the reason Nephi tells only this much of it:

And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them. (1 Nephi 8:35–37)

Nephi warned his readers that he wasn't telling all of what his father said during the description of the vision (1 Nephi 8:29). He ends the chapter noting that Lehi "also prophesied unto them of many things" (1 Nephi 8:38). None of those things are told. Nephi will elaborate on what else his father saw when he relates his own vision of what his father saw. At this point, however, the emphasis on Laman and Lemuel is what ties this vision to the incident as they returned from Jerusalem with Ismael's family. That incident becomes the solid foundation upon which the prophetic vision of Laman and Lemuel refusing the fruit is based. Lehi, as a good father, might hope to change them, but their destiny is prophesied.

The Aside

Unlike the previous aside triggered when Nephi returned to his text, this aside (at the end of chapter II, but separated to become the modern chapter 9) is triggered by what Nephi wrote: "And all these things did my father 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" (1 Nephi 9:1). This summary put Nephi into author-voice, and triggered an

author-voice insertion about the plates upon which Nephi was writing. He noted: “And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates” (1 Nephi 9:2). He last spoke of them in 1 Nephi 6:1–6, which was similarly an inserted aside. In this aside, Nephi mentions that he wrote two sets of plates and provides the basic charter for each (1 Nephi 9:2–4). Nephi concluded:

Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.

But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 9:5–6)

When Nephi testified that he knew the Lord was behind the creation of this new set of plates, the Amen ending forced an end to the chapter. It is possible the intended ending of Chapter II included the text we have from 1 Nephi 10:2–15. Those verses conclude the story of Lehi’s vision (with 1 Nephi 10:1 being a required transition sentence to return to the planned narrative). They could not follow in the same chapter because of the testificatory *Amen*. Therefore, the ending events come at the beginning of the next chapter. The subject of that chapter (after finishing the topic from the previous chapter) was Nephi’s vision, not Lehi’s.

1 Nephi Chapter III (10–14)

Before the testificatory *Amen* required the chapter to end, Nephi had been discussing the plates upon which he was writing. He wasn’t finished. As the new chapter begins, Nephi apparently realized two things. One, he had diverted from his plan, and two, he hadn’t finished an important description of the aftermath of his father’s vision. Nephi resolved both issues in the opening sentence of the next chapter: “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 the plates makes the connection to the ending of the previous chapter, but also notes that he had deviated from the intended discussion. His plan for chapter III was to talk about his own vision, but the early ending of the previous chapter meant he still had some information to tell about his father’s vision. Thus “I must speak somewhat of the things of my father.” Nephi couldn’t ignore this discussion of what his father had seen because it was related to the most important part of the vision, the mission of the mortal Messiah and the future of the house

of Israel. Nephi apparently does not elaborate this part of his father's vision because he knew that he would spend a great deal of time on those details when he discussed his own vision of those same future events. Verses 1 Nephi 10:2–16 provide the material that had been planned for the end of chapter II. The intended topic of chapter III begins with 1 Nephi 10:17, takes a slight detour at 10:18–22, and returns to the topic in 1 Nephi 11:1 where Nephi's vision will occupy the rest of chapter III (to the end of our chapter 14).

In 1 Nephi 10:17, Nephi noted that he “was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things.” He also wrote “the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old and in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.” That phrase pulled Nephi into an aside on the nature of God. Verses 18–22 were an unplanned extemporaneous addition to his text. To return to the planned topic, Nephi echoes 1 Nephi 10:17 with “after I had desired to know of the things that my father had seen” (1 Nephi 11:1). Having returned to the intended topic, Nephi begins his own story of his experience with the things his father had seen.

When Nephi ends the account of his vision, he writes:

And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the Spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 14:28–30)

Although there were specific things that Nephi was not to write because John the Revelator was to write them (1 Nephi 14:24–27), the general statement that he could not write everything is a common theme among many of those who wrote on plates. Even had the Nephite record-keepers had an infinite quantity of plates upon which to keep their records, no writer can record everything he knows or experiences about a topic. It is the nature of writing that experience must be distilled, and Nephi and Mormon, at least, made their choices for divinely directed reasons (even if the methods of fulfilling the divine instructions followed their own understandings and choices).

This vision understandably made an impact on Nephi. That impact was strong enough that at the end of his second book, he will rewrite what he saw, couching the events of the vision against Isaiah's prophecies to demonstrate that there were multiple witnesses (Lehi, Nephi, and even Isaiah). To end the vision, Nephi testifies: "and I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw," and "the things which I have written are true." To that testimony, he added *Amen* and ended the chapter.

1 Nephi Chapter IV (15)

That Nephi received the vision his father had seen placed him parallel to his father as one who communicated with Yahweh. Next, Nephi used his new understanding to teach his brothers. This continues to fulfill prophecy by showing Nephi in the role of teacher over his brothers.

The subject of the teaching is still the vision. With Nephi's new divine understanding of his father's vision, he can teach with authority. Nephi highlights that new authority when he asks of his non-understanding brothers: "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 15: 8). Nephi had done just that. When the brothers respond: "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us." (1 Nephi 15: 9), Nephi begins to teach. He can teach precisely because he did ask, and Yahweh did make it known to him.

Nephi expounds how the plan of the gospel was represented in the symbols of the dream and ends with "and thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen" (1 Nephi 15: 36). That *Amen* bears testimony to this divinely revealed information he taught to his brothers. It also creates the end of a chapter.

1 Nephi Chapter V (16–19:21)

As with the end of chapter II, the *Amen* ended chapter IV before the end of the event Nephi was discussing. It appears at the beginning of chapter V (1 Nephi 16:1–5). Nephi wanted to assure his readers that he had been an effective teacher. That happens in these verses, ending with "And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness" (1 Nephi 16:5).

Nephi now turns to the essentials of his family's story. They marry the daughters of Ismael (1 Nephi 16:7), and Lehi receives word that the family should leave the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 16:9). Nephi provides the basics of the preparation for their journey. They gather seeds and other foodstuffs to carry with them, and Yahweh provides the Liahona.

The need for food is one of the reasons Nephi mentions the bows and arrows. Nephi notes:

And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

And it came to pass that we did travel for the space of many days, slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings. (1 Nephi 16:14–15)

Although the families' needs for food might have been sufficient reason to note that they hunted for food along the way, Nephi's purpose was not so mundane. The mention of the bows leads into the story of the broken bow. That this story is about Nephi rather than the family is evidenced by Nephi's introduction of the broken bow and the problem of lack of food (1 Nephi 16:18). He notes the problem with his bow before mentioning that his brothers' bows had already lost their springs (1 Nephi 16:21). The food crisis would not have been so dire had the brothers' bows still been functional. It was the loss of all of them and perhaps Nephi's last (rather than first) which precipitated the crisis.

This incident doesn't show Nephi as a teacher but rather as the leader and provider. Nephi increasingly places himself in a leadership role for the whole family, particular when Lehi is also murmuring at this time. Nevertheless, Nephi does not explicitly take over his father's role. He presents himself to his father for instruction in where to hunt.

Although this story is not directly related to kingship, the concept of a leader caring for his people is implied in the story. Evidence that these themes continue to inform the events Nephi writes about comes when the brothers again murmur in Nahom. Note that now they murmur not only against Lehi, but "they did murmur against my father, and also against me" (1 Nephi 16:36). Very specifically, "Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren" (1 Nephi 16:37). Only the voice of the Lord (1 Nephi 16:39) is able to restrain their murderous intent.

Rather than return to Jerusalem as Laman and Lemuel desired, the entire family continues their journey in the wilderness. The modern

attempts to trace the families' journey through the wilderness has them leaving the better-traveled portion of the Incense Trail and traveling through very difficult terrain. Nephi only briefly references those difficulties. Even though he doesn't mention specifics, it is clear they went through hard times and suffered much. Nephi simply says that: "And it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did bear children in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 17:1).

Perhaps writing only that much but remembering how difficult the journey was prompted Nephi to enter another aside. He reflects:

And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings.

And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness. (1 Nephi 17:2–4)

The eight-year sojourn in the wilderness is covered ever so briefly. Apparently, nothing occurred that furthered Nephi's story of how he developed as the teacher and ruler over his brothers. Nevertheless, reflecting upon those hard times led Nephi to extract the blessing that came from it. They endured hard times and survived. Nephi credits Yahweh with strengthening them to meet the task but does not blame Yahweh that the hardships occurred.

After this brief description of the events that covered eight years, Nephi has the families arriving in Bountiful and begins to describe the building of the ship. At this point, Nephi is being elevated to the prophet for the New World. When it comes time to prepare to journey to their land of promise:

And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain.

And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain,
and cried unto the Lord.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou
shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee,
that I may carry thy people across these waters. (1 Nephi 17:7–8)

When Nephi wrote of the incident of the bow, he noted that he still deferred to his father to discern where to go to find food. Now, at this singularly important juncture in the story, Lehi is entirely absent. Nephi's position of leadership is boldly affirmed when Yahweh directs Nephi rather than Lehi to build the ship.

Of course, there is still enmity with his brothers. Their murmuring allows Nephi another teaching opportunity. Nephi specifically references the Israelite exodus from Egypt (as he also did in 1 Nephi 4: 2–4). Nephi recounts the exodus story, including the selection of Moses as their leader, the crossing of the Red Sea, miraculous food and water, and the murmuring of the people before reaching their land of promise (1 Nephi 17:23–43). These events intentionally link Lehi's clan's exodus from Jerusalem to their land of promise to Israel's exodus from Egypt to their land of promise. It also firmly links their story to the elements of the Near Eastern ethnogenetic story form.²⁹¹

Nephi's clear affiliation with Yahweh is confirmed as Nephi describes having been filled with Yahweh's presence: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them" (1 Nephi 17:52). His brothers had to admit, however temporarily, "we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us" (1 Nephi 17:55). The temporary reconciliation with his brothers (or their acquiescence to Yahweh's will) allowed the ship to be built.

Nephi tells no more stories from the building of the ship. He notes the preparations to set sail. He apparently realizes that he has forgotten to mention the birth of his brothers Joseph and Jacob and so quickly adds the information (1 Nephi 18:7). They set sail, and all is well for a time.

When problems arise, it is again the *leitmotif* of Nephi's right to rule. Nephi places this incident in the context of the brothers neglecting proper religious rites to Yahweh (1 Nephi 18:9). Nephi specifically notes:

291. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149.

“they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us” (1 Nephi 18:10). They bind Nephi.

The situation becomes dire. Laman and Lemuel will not listen to Lehi (1 Nephi 18:17). They would not listen to the women (1 Nephi 18:19). Nephi declares: “there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts” (1 Nephi 18:20). A modern reader might simply assume that the great storm was a natural phenomenon, but ancient Israelites knew Yahweh as having power over and in the storms.²⁹² Thus, the storm was a clear message from Yahweh to the rebellious brothers. “When they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented” (1 Nephi 18:20). Confirmation that Yahweh was behind the storm came in the rapid calm after they freed Nephi: “And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm” (1 Nephi 18:21). The rest of the journey passes without remark. The next story told is of their arrival on the land of promise.

The arrival in the New World simply notes that they landed and went forth onto the promised land, which had all the necessities for life:

And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land.

And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance.

And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. (1 Nephi 18:23–25)

292. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, Biblical and Judaic Studies 8, ed. William Henry Propp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 258-75.

To better understand Nephi's way of thinking, I have moved the final sentence of our verse 25 to the beginning of the next verse:

And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper. And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them." (1 Nephi 18:25–19:1)

The finding of the ore leads directly to the creation of the plates. These three metals may have made up the alloy used to create the plates.²⁹³ The connection between finding the ore and creating the plates would therefore be logical and quite direct. However, it was probably unplanned. I think Nephi intended to end his first book with chapter V, and that chapter was intended to end with the families' arriving in the New World and finding they were in a land of promise.

The final event listed in the synoptic header at the beginning of 1 Nephi is: "They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth." Nephi's header had listed most of the other major historical events and ended with the arrival in the New World. The probable Old World/New World division between 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi also suggests that the conceived end of the first book could have come when they arrived. Why didn't it?

Whether or not Nephi intended to write about finding the ore along with finding the animals "which were for the use of men" (1 Nephi 18:25) cannot be known. What we can surmise is that when Nephi added the finding of the ore, it triggered the statement that he used the ore to create plates. The discussion of the plates triggered an unplanned addition to his book that resulted in two additional chapters that have nothing to do with the historically-framed contents of 1 Nephi.

As with other asides, Nephi's addition was not only triggered by what he had just written, but it followed immediately upon the triggering idea without creating an intervening chapter break. The additional text hinged on the mention of the plates, which triggered Nephi to discuss both the plates upon which he was writing as well as the first plates he made after arriving in the New World:

293. See Part 1, chapter 7, "Upon Plates Which I Have Made."

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them.

And I knew not at the time when I made them [large plates] that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these [small] plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first plates. (1 Nephi 19:1–2)

Having introduced the small plates, Nephi continues to discuss the ways in which the second set of plates was to be different from the large plates: “And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:3).

This shift into author-voice shifts his focus as well. Up to this point, Nephi’s audience was implicit. It is completely unclear if the audience is assumed to be his contemporaries or the far future modern readers. The nature of the author-voice directs at least this portion of his writings to his contemporaries, or “my people.”

Wherefore, I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates, which gives an account, or which gives a greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions of *my people*. And this have I done, and commanded *my people* what they should do after I was gone; and that these plates should be handed down from one generation to another, or from one prophet to another, until further commandments of the Lord.

And an account of my making these plates shall be given hereafter; and then, behold, I proceed according to that which I have spoken; and this I do that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of *my people*. (1 Nephi 19:4–5)

What does Nephi consider to be the “more sacred things”? The contents of the small plates up to this point contain a history with a theological function. When Nephi attempts to answer what the most sacred things are, we can watch as he shifts from his descriptions of his writing to an elaboration on what is most sacred:

Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.

For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words — they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels.

And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem. (1 Nephi 19:6–8)

Clearly, the most sacred — that which would “be of great worth” — was the atoning mission of the Messiah. It was that future time when “the very God of Israel” would come to earth.²⁹⁴ Having begun to speak of the future fulfillment of the most sacred event, Nephi provides his vision of the future. As witness to the conceptual shift in Nephi’s thinking from what he had written before, Nephi now does not address his brothers, but “my people.” His perspective is no longer looking back to the Old World, but his concern is in his present, for his New World people:

And I, Nephi, have written these things unto my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer.

Wherefore, I speak unto all the house of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things. (1 Nephi 19:18–19)

As part of what he taught, he taught his people using scriptures from the brass plates: “And he surely did show unto the prophets of old all

294. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1: 214–22 for a discussion of how the Nephites saw Yahweh as their God, and as the very God who would descend to earth.

things concerning them; and also he did show unto many concerning us; wherefore, it must needs be that we know concerning them for they are written upon the plates of brass” (1 Nephi 19:21). With that statement, Nephi closed his chapter V.

Nephi is less predictable in his chapter endings than Mormon will be, except when a testificatory *Amen* becomes a chapter end. The end of chapter I was more thematic, indicating a completion of an idea. I believe that this chapter ends for a similar reason. By referencing the brass plates, Nephi can close out his Old World story. He ended the discussion of his plates, but they were those upon which Nephi wrote. Now he shifts again to the brass plates as he begins to elaborate his contention that the mission of the atoning Messiah will be the most sacred thing for his people.

1 Nephi VI (19:22–21)

At the beginning of chapter VI, Nephi speaks of teaching his brethren again. Continuing his author-voice consciousness from the end of chapter V, these brethren are not his elder brothers, but the people of the City of Nephi over whom Nephi has become king and by extension, teacher:

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old.

And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. (1 Nephi 19:22–23)

First, this continuation of author-voice suggests that Nephi wrote this chapter right after finishing the previous one. Second, Nephi is letting his shift in focus open an entirely new discussion. He is no longer speaking of his own story but rather of the things that should be most sacred to his people. He has tried to teach those things to his people and reprises the fact that the brass plates hold much of this information. Nephi taught from the brass plates, and he specifically mentions Isaiah. Note what he says about Isaiah: “that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which

was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.” The goal was to teach of the coming Redeemer, and Nephi did this by reading Isaiah. However, he read Isaiah not in an Old-World context, but according to the needs and understanding of his New World people.

Having mentioned Isaiah, he copies two Isaiah chapters, 48 and 49, into his record. The end of Isaiah 49 ends chapter VI. The chapter ends after the quotation of Isaiah, and the next chapter will begin Nephi’s application of those chapters to the understanding of his people. The final chapter is Nephi’s “likening” of Isaiah 48 and 49.

1 Nephi VII (22)

As Nephi begins this chapter, it appears that he realizes he has strayed from his original plan and needs to return to his historical context. He shifts back from author-voice to narrative-voice, using Laman and Lemuel as his foil: “And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh? And I, Nephi, said unto them....” (1 Nephi 22:1–2). This device allows Nephi to return to narrative-time and to provide the explanation of the Isaiah texts he added as part of his author-voice aside.

Of course, it is possible that Nephi actually gave this speech to Laman and Lemuel. However, it is more likely that this is a literary device that allows Nephi to provide an explanation in context. There is no historical context for this discussion, particularly since Nephi is recording the events 30+ years after they occurred. There is no event that precipitates it, and there will be no denouement at the end. The author-voice context is an aside triggered by what Nephi wrote — not a question asked.

The final chapter of 1 Nephi (chapter VII/22) is Nephi’s *pesh*²⁹⁵ on Isaiah 48 and 49. Nephi uses his people as a literary foil to present the *pesh* by having them ask: “What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh? (1 Nephi 22:1). This allows Nephi to use those chapters to discuss the future he sees and has seen for his people. He emphasizes

295. A *pesh* was an interpretation of scripture. The interpretation used scripture as the base, but expanded upon its meaning. For Nephi, it would be very similar to his concept of *likening* the scriptures.

the scattering of Israel (and implicitly includes his people among those scattered) in verses 3 and 4. He teaches that there will be those among the scattered who would harden their hearts (1 Nephi 22:5, a comment on the Lamanites?). In verse 6 he notes that they would be saved by the Gentiles (perhaps, again, a commentary on the infusion of non-Israelites among the Nephites). Finally, he sees the gathering of Israel (1 Nephi 22:11–12).

As he ends his book, he admonishes his people to follow God:

Wherefore, my brethren, I would that ye should consider that the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God.

Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified, and also taught them. Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 22:30–31)

When Nephi concludes “wherefore, my brethren,” it is deliciously ambiguous. This entire trope began with an aside where “my brethren” were explicitly author-voice rather than narrative-voice (thus “my people” rather than “my brothers”). To conclude the book, Nephi moves back to historical time, but uses “my brethren” as a dual function address. It works for both the narrative-voice to which he is trying to return as well as the author-voice that is, perhaps, his real focus for this prophecy of the future. It should be noted that this is the second time Nephi’s vision of the future appears in his text. The first followed the vision of the Tree of Life; this second is part of a pesher on Isaiah. The third will be a much longer discourse on that same vision and based again on Isaiah. It is possible the connections he made in this spontaneous linking of Isaiah to that vision are what lead to that more complete version at the end of 2 Nephi.

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