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Framing Judgment and Deliverance: Structure and Meaning in 1 Nephi 1

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Framing Judgment and Deliverance: Structure and Meaning in 1 Nephi 1

C. Robb Smith

Abstract: *This study argues that Nephi deliberately arranges his prologue (1 Nephi 1:1–20) so that its structure conveys meaning, using composition not merely to organize events but to guide interpretation. He divides the material into three editorial units, marked by “I Nephi” declarations, and three narrative units recounting his father’s experience. These form two distinct triads—editorial and narrative—each with its own internal progression. Nephi then interweaves these triads into a coordinated parallel structure that preserves their independent sequences while generating additional meaning through correspondence. In this way, the logic enacted in Lehi’s experience is formalized at the editorial level, ultimately establishing covenant deliverance as a governing principle. By aligning editorial framing with narrative enactment, Nephi uses structure not only to organize material but to interpret it, so that meaning emerges through arrangement as well as sequence. Form thus serves persuasion: the composition directs readers to discern divine justice and mercy through an ordered structure culminating in deliverance.*

The opening verses of Nephi’s writing exhibit a level of literary coordination that suggests intentional compositional design rather than simple sequential narration. In Nephi’s prologue, literary structure functions not merely as organizational form but as a deliberate instrument of interpretation. In his opening sentence, Nephi states that he was taught “in all the learning of my father.” Noel Reynolds persuasively argues that this “learning” reflects advanced scribal training and high literacy, including command of Hebrew rhetorical practices such

as parallelism and patterned repetition.¹ By invoking this learning at the outset, Nephi signals his participation in a recognized literary tradition and establishes an expectation of deliberate composition—an expectation borne out by the ordered design and subordinate structures identified in this study.

Nephi organizes his opening material into six clearly delineated literary units—three first-person editorial comments introduced by “I Nephi”² and three narrative units recounting Lehi’s experience—forming two distinct triads, each with its own internal progression. The editorial triad (E1/E2/E3) moves from prophetic preparation and inscription to prophetic composition to covenant witness. The narrative triad (N1/N2/N3) progresses through Lehi’s theophany, doxology, and testimony, each internally structured around a theological center: the “One descending” (v. 9), divine “power and goodness and mercy” (v. 14), and the “Messiah and also the redemption of the world” (v. 19).

Nephi interweaves these two independent sequences—editorial and narrative—into a coordinated arrangement of dual parallel triads that preserves each sequence’s internal progression while reorganizing their units into paired correspondences. Meaning may thus be seen to emerge not only from progression within the original editorial and narrative triads but also from the relationships created between

1. Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–216, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes.

2. Book of Mormon quotations are presented as sense lines, which divide a passage into short units of meaning (sometimes called cola or versets), a practice familiar in biblical scholarship. Each line corresponds to a syntactic or rhetorical unit—whether independent or dependent—so that the internal structure of the passage is more readily visible. Lineation follows sense rather than verse divisions and is intended as a heuristic device: it clarifies patterns of repetition, amplification, or inversion but does not claim to mark every rhetorical feature present in the text. Punctuation is occasionally adjusted to reflect clause-level segmentation and rhetorical structure. Because punctuation in the Book of Mormon is a later editorial addition rather than part of the original inscription, these adjustments are intended only to clarify syntactic relationships and do not alter the lexical content of the text. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from the Yale critical edition, which is also arranged according to sense lines. The sense-line divisions and punctuation in this study occasionally differ (e.g., the opening sentence is divided into two in the Yale edition, improving readability at the expense of rhetorical force). All emphasis is mine unless otherwise noted. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the newly aligned pairs. Through this interlocking structure, Nephi establishes three interpretive domains: the first concerns prophetic inscription and the preservation of sacred record; the second concerns revelation and covenantal response; the third concerns covenant deliverance, pairing Nephi's climactic declaration and covenant witness in v. 20 with Lehi's doxological covenant interpretation in vv. 14–15.

By combining editorial framing with narrative enactment, Nephi uses structure not only to recount events but to guide interpretation across multiple levels. At the macro level, the coordinated triads generate meaning through progression and correspondence; at the micro level, subordinate structures within individual units reinforce and concentrate that meaning. At both levels, structural position carries interpretive weight: central elements concentrate meaning, paired elements inform one another, and concluding elements articulate governing claims. The result is a design in which ordered sequences and parallel correspondences operate together without collapsing into a single progression, generating meaning through coordinated interactions across levels and domains. What follows analyzes this architecture, outlined in table 1, as an integrated act of prophetic persuasion.

Table 1. Nephi's prologue: Editorial framing and narrative enactment
(1 Nephi 1:1–20)³

E1	Editorial: "I Nephi" — Prophetic Preparation and Inscription (vv. 1–3)
N1	Narrative: Lehi's Theophany — Divine Manifestation (vv. 4–13)
N2	Narrative: Lehi's Doxology — Covenant Interpretation (vv. 14–15)
E2	Editorial: "I Nephi" — Prophetic Composition (vv. 16–17)
N3	Narrative: Lehi's Testimony — Prophetic Witness (vv. 18–20)
E3	Editorial: "I Nephi" — Covenant Witness (v. 20)

Part 1 examines the editorial triad (E1–E3), showing how it establishes Nephi's qualifications to make a record, defines his method of composition, and articulates his covenant witness as a governing interpretive principle. Part 2 analyzes the narrative triad (N1–N3),

3. Although 1 Nephi 1:1–20 constitutes a modern chapter, it originally formed only the opening portion of Nephi's much longer first chapter (modern chapter 1–5). For clarity, this study refers to 1 Nephi 1:1–20 as Nephi's prologue, and to modern chapters 1–5 as Nephi's original first chapter (1830 division). Nephi's prologue functions as an internally coherent literary unit, a judgment consistent with Orson Pratt's 1879 decision to designate it as a separate chapter.

tracing the progression of Lehi's theophany, doxology, and testimony from divine manifestation to covenant interpretation to prophetic witness. Part 3 demonstrates how these two independent triads are interwoven into a coordinated parallel arrangement (A/B/C // A'/B'/C') that generates additional meaning through paired correspondence. Part 4 explores the implications these findings have for reading Nephi's broader record. Part 5 concludes by showing how Nephi unites form and message to both generate and govern meaning, using structure to direct readers toward divine justice and mercy as these are disclosed through the ordered presentation of revelation and its reception.

1. Nephi's Editorial Frame (E1–E3)

Nephi's editorial voice appears at three strategically placed points in the prologue: at the opening of the record (E1), at the transition from Lehi's private visions to his public ministry (E2), and in the concluding thesis statement (E3). Each unit performs a distinct function. E1 describes Nephi's prophetic preparation and introduces his record, E2 defines the selective scope and method of his composition, and E3 states the covenant principle by which the narrative—and the larger record—is to be read. Together, these units form an editorial triad that frames the prologue as a deliberate act of covenant witness.

E1: Scribal learning and spiritual knowledge as dual qualifications (vv. 1–3)

Nephi opens his account with editorial comments beginning with the self-referential phrase “I Nephi,” introducing both himself and his qualifications for writing. He presents the conditions and preparation underlying his record-making—lineage, scribal training, life experience, divine favor, and revelatory knowledge—all ordered toward a climactic assertion, “therefore I make a record.” Nephi's opening verse unfolds as a structured progression formed by a chain of participial clauses, each advancing toward that assertion, after which the verb “I make” is repeated five times in close succession. The movement culminates in inscription, where both preparation and revelation converge in written witness.

The verse divisions, though added in 1879 by Orson Pratt, appear to reflect the text's natural syntax and rhetorical boundaries. Verse 1 presents the participial chain that drives the progression toward Nephi's climactic declaration: having been “taught . . . in the learning of my father” and having come to “a knowledge . . . of God”; therefore,

he writes. Verse 2 then specifies how he writes: "in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians." Verse 3 closes with his personal authentication: "I know that the record that I make to be true, and I make it with my own hand . . . according to my knowledge." The passage moves from preparation and knowledge to inscription and authentication, presenting record-making as the fitting expression of revelatory understanding.

Nephi's reference to "the learning of the Jews" signals high literacy and familiarity with Hebrew rhetorical practices. His scribal training is reflected in the construction of the opening participial chain. Each clause appears to advance toward the main assertion, linked by the particles "and," "nevertheless," "yea," and "therefore," which together create escalation and focus. Rather than supplying incidental background information, each contributes a progressively intensifying qualification that moves the structure toward its culminating act of written witness: the creation of a record.

1. "I Nephi having been born of goodly parents"
 - Opening self-identification; ethos grounded in lineage and upbringing.
2. "Therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father"
 - Consequence: parental virtue results in scribal education.
3. "And having seen many afflictions in the course of my days" – Addition: life experience marked by suffering.
4. "Nevertheless having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days"
 - Concessive qualification: affliction reframed by divine favor.
5. "Yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God"
 - Intensification: favor culminates in revelation and knowledge.
6. "Therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days"
 - Consequence: lineage, education, affliction, divine favor, revelation culminate in inscription as an act of covenantal witness.

The sequence functions cumulatively: each clause builds Nephi's ethos and advances the progression toward inscription as covenant

witness, after which he specifies the record's language and medium (v. 2), and then authenticates its truth and authorship (v. 3). Together, his opening verses are more than simple narrative introduction, they present record-making as a deliberate and warranted act of prophetic inscription, an act he later explicitly states was commanded by the Lord (see 1 Nephi 9:3; 19:3).

Alternating parallel pairs layout (A/B // A'/B')

Other structural proposals for this passage are considered in Appendix A. The following arrangement is proposed here as preferable because it preserves the rhetorical momentum of the participial chain while still respecting Nephi's syntax and natural boundaries. Alternating parallels appear to organize his prophetic preparation into paired thematic domains—scribal training and revelatory experience—that converge in inscription and attested witness.

- A ¹I Nephi having been born of goodly parents,
 therefore I was taught somewhat in all the *learning of my father*;
 B 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*.
 A' ²Yea, *I make a record* in the *language of my father*,
 which consists of the *learning* of the Jews and the *language of*
 the Egyptians.
 B' ³And *I know* that the record which *I make to be true*;
 and *I make it with mine own hand*;
 and *I make it according to my knowledge*.

Functional description

The formal arrangement becomes clearer when each unit is described according to its rhetorical function. The first pair presents the two forms of preparation that authorize Nephi's record-making, while the second pair shows those qualifications realized in the production and attestation of the record:

- A Paternal formation (lineage and instruction)
 B Personal formation (affliction, favor, revelation →
 record-making)
 A' Textual inscription (language, scribal method)
 B' Personal attestation (verification and inscription)

This alternating pairs layout is intended to clarify relational correspondences without replacing the governing syntactic progression. It highlights what may be understood as Nephi's dual modes of preparation — scribal education (A/A') and revelatory experience (B/B') — both converging in inscription. Each pair also appears to develop internally: A → A' moves from inherited instruction to textual competence, while B → B' moves from revelatory experience to formalized witness. At the same time, the structure can be read as differentiating qualifications from inscriptional witness: the first half (A/B) begins with his personal preparation and culminates in record-making, while the second (A'/B') moves from record-making to his personal attestation.

These correspondences are suggested by lexical links: "learning," "language," and "of my father" connect A/A', while "knowledge" and the repeated "I make" bind B/B'. These terms reinforce the proposed structural pairings, and their concentration around "I make a record" draws both strands into a single point of convergence — inscription. Together, they clarify the rhetorical drive of the participial chain, suggesting how what is learned and revealed becomes the basis for his written prophetic witness.

E2: Second editorial insertion—Scope and method (vv. 16–17) dual chiasms

After establishing his qualifications, Nephi turns to narrative but quickly interrupts to signal that his record is selective and purposeful. The pattern established in E1 now shifts from Nephi's grounds for writing to his method of prophetic composition as he openly asserts editorial control over what is recorded and how it is transmitted. If E1 explains why he writes, E2 clarifies how he writes.

E2a: Selective use of father's record (v. 16)

The limits Nephi places upon his use of Lehi's record are expressed through a compact concentric arrangement. The outer statements announce his decision not to provide a "full account," while the inner parallel clauses identify the categories of material contained in Lehi's record:

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

Nephi acknowledges the breadth of his father's record but declines to reproduce it in full, signaling deliberate selection. Drawing from visions, prophecies, and teachings, he writes not as a copyist but as an editor, shaping inherited material for his own prophetic and rhetorical purposes. Selection thus precedes and shapes the transmission of the narrative: what is included or excluded is deliberately determined in advance, and structure begins to function as a guide to interpretation.

E2b: Abridgment and original composition (v. 17)

Nephi then describes the compositional sequence by which selected material is incorporated into his own record. The arrangement frames the abridgment of Lehi's record within Nephi's account of his own life and places the handmade plates at the center:

- A But, I shall *make an account of my proceedings in my days*.
 B Behold, I make an *abridgment of the record of my father*,
 C upon plates which I have made with mine own hands.
 B' Wherefore after I have *abridged the record of my father*,
 A' then will I *make an account of mine own life*.

This unit specifies the process of that selection, moving from abridgment of inherited material to Nephi's own composition. The center—"plates which I have made with mine own hands"—echoes E1 (v. 3) and may be understood to identify the material medium as the point where selection, arrangement, and inscription converge.

Taken together, E2a and E2b can be read as an amplification moving from limitation to production—from what is not included to how what remains is transformed into record. The passage appears to establish layered editorial control: delimitation of source material, abridgment, and inscription. It also clarifies sequence: Nephi first abridges his father's record and then composes his own account, thereby structuring both selection and arrangement.⁴

4. Noel Reynolds proposes a single chiasm for E2, yet his analysis identifies a

The correspondence with E1 extends beyond shared language to structural function. Both units move from reception to production: in E1, preparation culminates in inscription; in E2, inherited revelation is transformed through deliberate selection and arrangement into composition. What is established in E1 as prophetic preparation is here enacted as compositional process, presenting the record as mediated rather than transparent.

E2 thus functions as the compositional pivot of the editorial triad. Where E1 establishes the preparation underlying record-making, E2 specifies its method—selection, arrangement, and control—and in doing so repositions the revelation (N1–N2) as mediated record prepared for broader communication. Structurally, E2 occupies the central position within the editorial sequence, where emphasis shifts from preparation and inscription to compositional shaping, preparing for the interpretive witness formalized in E3.

E3: Programmatic thesis and theological keystone (v. 20)

Having defined his scope and method, Nephi resumes Lehi's narrative until his third "I Nephi" declaration, which articulates what may be understood as his governing thesis: that the Lord's tender mercies

dynamic that aligns more naturally with the two-chiasm arrangement proposed here. He writes that it (E2) "emphasizes a distinction between an account of Lehi's proceedings and Nephi's own account. This prepares us for the fact that First Nephi will be divided structurally between these two accounts." Two coordinated chiasms better reflect the bipartite structure of 1 Nephi (Lehi's record in chapters 1–9, and Nephi's in 10–22). E2 thus functions as a structural preview of the larger work, a correspondence unlikely to be incidental. Literary theorists describe this phenomenon as programmatic foreshadowing or structural preview, in which a smaller unit anticipates the organizational logic of a larger composition. In addition, each of the two chiasms proposed here has its own internal logic and editorial function and integrates with and contributes meaningfully to the larger function of E2 and of the prologue as a whole. Donald W. Parry likewise identifies several of the same verbal correspondences in 1 Nephi 1:16–17, though he incorporates them into a broader chiasmic arrangement rather than treating the verses as two discrete structures. His proposal differs both from Reynolds's single-chiasm arrangement and from the two subordinate chiasms proposed here. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 112–13, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/nephis-small-plates-a-rhetorical-analysis. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), 2–3, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/61/.

extend to the faithful “unto the power of deliverance.” With this, the editorial triad is complete. If E1 establishes preparation and inscription and E2 defines compositional method, E3 may be read as articulating its interpretive claim, formalizing through first-person prophetic witness what is first expressed narratively in Lehi’s doxology.

Unlike E1 and E2, which frame the narrative externally, E3 is embedded within N3, functioning simultaneously as editorial conclusion and narrative resolution. The editorial progression—preparation and inscription → intentional composition → interpretative witness—thus appears to converge in a single statement in which deliverance operates both as narrative outcome and as an interpretive lens. E3 gathers the trajectories developed across the narrative units—revelation received, interpreted, and proclaimed—and renders their implicit logic explicit. What the editorial voice defines, the narrative voice dramatizes. The result is a unified compositional logic in which the prologue presents both the meaning of revelation and the process of its transmission, thereby suggesting the coordinated interpretive domains that guide the following narrative.

2. Narrative Cores (N1/N2/N3)

The first narrative unit (N1) opens with prophets warning Jerusalem to repent or be destroyed, followed by Lehi’s theophany in which he receives a heavenly book foretelling the city’s fate. The second (N2) records Lehi’s doxological response as he rejoices in God’s mercy toward the faithful, transforming revelation received into confessional witness that Nephi will later second and formalize in his programmatic thesis (E3). After the editorial disclosure of scope and method (E2), Nephi resumes the narrative (N3), where Lehi testifies publicly of what he has seen, heard, and read, provoking opposition. Taken together, these units establish a clear progression: revelation is received (N1), interpreted (N2), and proclaimed (N3).

The narrative units that follow employ patterned parallelism in chiasmic or concentric form. These structures function not merely as formal inversions but as interpretive frameworks that organize narrative content. They may also incorporate subordinate structures, and their centers may take composite or progressive form. The analysis therefore prioritizes functional coherence and interpretive force alongside formal correspondence.

N1: Theophany and heavenly book (vv. 4–13) chiasm

The first narrative core recounts Lehi's theophany. Nephi organizes this unit around Lehi's vision of the Divine Council and the "One descending." The structure of N1 can be represented in compressed form as follows:⁵

- A Prophets prophesying: People must repent or *Jerusalem must be destroyed* (v. 4).
- B Lehi prays: *Pillar of fire* → saw, heard much → *overcome with the Spirit* (vv. 5–7).
- C Heavenly vision: God enthroned → One descending → Twelve following (vv. 8–10).
- B' Commission: *The First* → book given to read → *filled with the Spirit* (vv. 11–12).
- A' Read about *Jerusalem's destruction*, inhabitants perish, captivity (v. 13).

The A lines frame the unit with destruction and prophetic warning, linking proclamation to fulfillment within a structure of covenantal judgment. The B elements form a paired movement, each internally structured:

- B a Lehi *goes forth* and prays with all his heart (v. 5).
- b A pillar of fire appears before Lehi; he sees and hears much (v. 6).
- c He *returns home*, *overcome with the Spirit* (v. 7).
- B' a The One and Twelve *come down and go forth* upon the earth (v. 11).
- b The First stands before Lehi, gives him a book and bids him to read.
- c Lehi is *filled with the Spirit* as he reads (v. 12).

In B, Lehi goes forth, encounters divine manifestation, receives knowledge, and returns "overcome with the Spirit." In B', the heavenly company descends and goes forth, the First commissions Lehi through the heavenly book, and as he reads he is "filled with the Spirit." Together, these movements trace a progression from initial encounter to prophetic witness, as divine revelation and the Spirit transform Lehi from fearful initial recipient—"he did quake and tremble

5. Appendix B displays the full text of N1. The alignment of the proposed chiasmic elements with Orson Pratt's 1879 versification provides partial external support to the idea that they arise from the text's natural rhetorical and narrative boundaries rather than from externally imposed structural symmetry.

exceedingly” —into fearless prophetic witness. Like his son Nephi, Lehi first receives divine witness before bearing witness himself.

The central unit (C) presents a unified heavenly vision with internal progression:

- C a Sees God enthroned, surrounded by angelic concourses (v. 8).
- b Sees One descending, “his luster was above that of the sun at noonday” (v. 9).
- c Sees Twelve following Him whose brightness exceeds the stars (v. 10).

The throne signals divine sovereignty; the descent of the One functions as the structural center; and the twelve extend his authority in ordered following.⁶ The structure appears to concentrate attention on the descending figure as the mediator through whom revelation is transmitted. N1 moves from earthly prayer (B) to heavenly enthronement (C), and from heavenly descent (C) to earthly commission (B'). What begins as visible manifestation from the Lord becomes textual revelation mediated through the prophet-scribe. Authority enthroned above becomes authority enacted below as revelation passes from heaven to prophet through the “One descending.”

The see/hear/read pattern introduced here reappears in N2, where perception becomes praise (v. 14), and then again at the center of N3, where Lehi testifies of “the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book” (v. 19). This patterned repetition suggests a progression: perception leads to interpretation, and

6. In biblical symbolism, the number twelve represents the organized covenant community under divinely structured authority. The twelve sons of Jacob become the twelve tribes of Israel, the foundational expression of Israel's corporate completeness. Twelve also appears in cultic and temple contexts (e.g., the twelve stones on the high priest's breastplate [Exodus 28], the twelve loaves of showbread [Leviticus 24], the twelve stones set up by Joshua [Joshua 4], and the twelve oxen beneath Solomon's bronze sea [1 Kings 7]), where it represents the covenant people before God. In the New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Latter-day Saint tradition, Jesus' selection of twelve apostles similarly signifies restored covenant governance. When twelve appears in throne or temple scenes, it typically signals ordered representation rather than a reference to a specific apostolic quorum or mere numerical abundance. Accordingly, its use here and in Nephi's vision in (1 Nephi 11:28; 12:7), might best be read with dual meaning: literally representing twelve men called at the time (then replaced as needed) and symbolizing structured covenantal representation in the form of an organized church.

interpretation leads to proclamation. The shift to interpretation thus may be understood to mark the transition from N1 to N2.

N2: Doxology as interpreting response (vv. 14–15) chiasm

The second narrative unit records Lehi's doxological response to his visionary experience. Its chiasmic structure translates revelation into worship, making praise the first interpretive act:

- ¹⁴And it came to pass,
 A that when my father had **read** and **saw** many *great and marvelous things*,
 B *he did exclaim many things unto the Lord*, such as:
 C Great and marvelous are thy works,
 D O Lord God *Almighty*.
 E Thy throne is high in *the heavens*,
 F and thy **power and goodness and mercy**
 E' is over all the inhabitants of *the earth*.
 D' And because thou art *merciful*,
 C' thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish.
 B' ¹⁵*And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God*,
 A' a¹ for his soul did rejoice
 ² and his whole heart was filled
 b¹ because of **the things** *which he had seen*,
 ² *yea, which the Lord had shewn unto him.*⁷

7. Noel Reynolds likewise reads 1 Nephi 1:14–15 chiastically and identifies several of the same correspondences: what Lehi had read or seen (A/A'), his words of praise (B/B'), and the theological content of that praise at the center. Reynolds appropriately notes that the passage lacks the straightforward verbal repetition found in some chiasms and therefore rests largely upon conceptual relationships. The arrangement proposed here retains the same general architecture but resolves the central material more finely, particularly by showing how "thy power and goodness and mercy" functions as the central pivot. This pivot mediates between an "Almighty" and "merciful" God whose "throne is high in the heavens" and whose mercy extends "over all the inhabitants of the earth," while also linking his "great and marvelous" works with the assurance that he will not suffer "those who come unto thee" to perish. This more detailed arrangement clarifies how the passage moves from revelation to praise, from divine sovereignty to universal mercy, and finally back to Lehi's transformed response, which itself contains paired synonymous lines describing both his response and its revelatory cause. Donald W. Parry treats the passage differently: rather than isolating vv. 14–15 as a self-contained chiasm, he identifies synonymous parallelism in Lehi's rejoicing and incorporates the closing references to what Lehi had "seen" and what "the Lord had shown unto him" into

The unit is framed by what Lehi has “read and seen” and what the Lord has “shown unto him,” anchoring the hymn in prior revelation. The doxology thus functions as interpretation: what was encountered in vision is articulated in theological form.

The structure unfolds through paired correspondences. Divine attributes are paired (“Almighty” / “merciful”), cosmic scope is established (“heavens” / “earth”), and divine action is defined (“great and marvelous works” / preservation of those who come unto him). At the center, “power and goodness and mercy” may be understood as serving as the interpretive key, explaining how divine authority operates: sovereign power is expressed through covenantal mercy, resulting in preservation and deliverance. The radiant authority of the descending figure in N1 is here rendered in theological terms, transforming visual manifestation “above that of the sun at noonday” into a confession of God’s loving kindness: his “power and goodness and mercy.”

The final A' extends the framing into response and is organized using synonymous parallelism into two bicola: a₁/a₂ describe Lehi’s internal response—Lehi’s *soul rejoices* and his *heart is filled*; b₁/b₂ provide the cause—because of what *he has seen*, what the Lord has *shown him*. Perception is subordinated to divine initiative as revelation is interpreted and expressed in praise. This inward filling of the heart corresponds to the earlier filling of the Spirit in N1 (v. 12), suggesting a progression from encounter and commission to understanding. The doxology thus concludes the theophany while also articulating the theological basis for Nephi’s later programmatic declaration in E3, when what is confessed here is formalized there as a governing principle of deliverance.

Together, N1 and N2 can be read as forming a deliberate pair: revelation and response; divine manifestation and worshipful praise. N1 presents revelation in visionary and mediated form; N2 interprets that revelation through praise. This movement from revelation to interpreting response helps establish the foundation for Lehi’s prophetic proclamation in N3.

a broader chiasmic arrangement extending through the succeeding editorial and narrative material. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi’s Dream, Nephi’s Blueprint: How Nephi Uses the Vision of the Tree of Life as an Outline for 1 and 2 Nephi,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 245–46, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/lehis-dream-nephis-blueprint-how-nephi-uses-the-vision-of-the-tree-of-life-as-an-outline-for-1-and-2-nephi; Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 2–3.

N3: Testimony, rejection, and deliverance (vv. 18–20) chiasm

After pausing the narrative for E2, Nephi resumes Lehi's story with his public testimony. This resumption is marked by the deliberate echo, "after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father Lehi," which restores the progression from N2 and signals continuity.⁸ Its continuation—"concerning the destruction of Jerusalem"—reaches back to the framing elements of N1, linking present proclamation with prior warning. What was seen, heard, and read is now proclaimed, as the rhetorical mode shifts from worship to witness, completing the sequence: revelation (N1) leads to interpretation (N2), and interpretation to proclamation (N3) revealing the contrasting responses to that revelation—faithful obedience or hostile rejection. The structure of N3 can be represented in compressed form as follows:⁹

- A *"I would that **ye** should know . . ." marvelous things = destruction of Jerusalem (v.18)*
- B *Lehi prophesies to the Jews concerning the things he saw and heard*
- C The Jews mock him because of what he testified (v. 19)
 - D a He testified of their wickedness and abominations
 - b He testified the things he saw and heard, and read in the book
 - c Manifest plainly of the coming of a Messiah and the redemption of the world
- C' The Jews are angry with him because of his testimony of the Messiah
- B' Like prophets of old, they sought his life. (v. 20)
- A' *"I Nephi will shew **you** . . ." tender mercies of the Lord, over the faithful, unto deliverance*

8. The resumption phrase in N3 performs a dual function. Its opening—"after the Lord had shewn so many marvelous things"—draws together language from N2's framing elements (A—"read and seen many great and marvelous things" / A—"things . . . the Lord had shewn unto him"), reinforcing their correspondence. Its continuation—"concerning the destruction of Jerusalem"—reaches back further to the framing elements of N1. Although N2 does not explicitly restate "destruction," it presupposes it as what was "seen" and "shewn." The transition from N2 to N3 thus mirrors the one from N1 to N2: in both cases, the framing elements of the preceding unit are carried forward in the opening element to sustain narrative progression.

9. Appendix C displays the full text of N3. The alignment of the proposed chiasmic elements with Orson Pratt's 1879 versification provides partial external support that they arise from the text's natural rhetorical and narrative boundaries rather than from externally imposed structural symmetry.

The A elements frame the unit with Nephi's address, juxtaposing destruction and deliverance while moving from disclosure ("I would that ye should know") to demonstration ("I will show unto you"). The B elements situate Lehi within the prophetic tradition: he proclaims revelation and encounters the same rejection faced by earlier prophets. The C elements trace escalating resistance, moving from mockery to anger as Lehi's message shifts from the people's wickedness to the Messiah.

At the center (D), Lehi's testimony unfolds as a progression grounded in revelation: he declares the people's wickedness (a), affirms that his message derives from what he has seen, heard, and read (b), and proclaims the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the world (c). Both judgment and redemption are anchored in revelation, and the movement progresses from moral exposure to redemptive disclosure. Revelation—mediated through prophetic testimony—may be seen to stand at the interpretive pivot where condemnation gives way to redemption through the Messiah.

This progression appears to complete a pattern established across the framing elements and interpretive centers of the narrative cores. N1 is framed by destruction: the prophetic warning and its confirmation in the heavenly book. N2 reframes that destruction through Lehi's doxology, where what was seen as judgment is interpreted through divine power, goodness, and mercy as deliverance for the faithful. N3 then brings both elements into a single structure: it opens with destruction and closes with deliverance, placing the Messiah at the center of that tension. The unit may thus be understood as constructed so that the Messiah stands between judgment and redemption as mediator. The "One descending" of N1, whose authority is interpreted in N2 as "power and goodness and mercy," is here presented as the Messiah—the one through whom destruction gives way to deliverance.

N3 thus completes the narrative arc. What begins as revelation (N1) and is interpreted in praise (N2) is now publicly proclaimed revealing two contrasting responses. The pattern of seeing, hearing, and reading culminates in Lehi's faithful testimony, while Jerusalem's mockery, anger, and attempted violence disclose its rejection of the revealed word. The movement from judgment to deliverance is carried through each stage—announced, interpreted, and proclaimed—even as the two outcomes remain correlated with the two opposing covenantal responses. On this reading, the tension is resolved not by eliminating

judgment but by presenting the Messiah as the source of redemption and deliverance for those who respond faithfully.

The A' element performs a dual function. It closes the narrative unit while introducing Nephi's programmatic declaration (E3): that the Lord's tender mercies extend to the faithful "unto the power of deliverance." The narrative thus culminates by foregrounding deliverance—not merely as outcome but as what may be read as its governing logic. Destruction and deliverance remain opposed covenant consequences, but Nephi's terminal declaration directs interpretive priority toward the Lord's mercy and power to deliver the faithful. This same logic appears to extend across the narrative triad: what is revealed, interpreted, and proclaimed is consistently oriented toward deliverance.

This resolution gathers the three narrative centers into a single interpretive claim: the One revealed in vision (N1), confessed in divine attributes (N2), and proclaimed as Messiah (N3) may be understood as the mediator through whom judgment gives way to deliverance. As E3, this claim is formally articulated within the editorial frame, where it functions as the governing interpretive principle of the prologue.

Narrative progression toward macro-structure

Across N1–N3, Nephi traces what may be understood as a coherent progression from revelation to interpretation with consequent contrasting responses: faithful proclamation and hostile rejection. This movement progressively orients the narrative toward deliverance while preserving destruction as the consequence associated with rejection. At the same time, this progression is sustained through deliberate structural linkage between units, making it both sequential and rhetorically consequential. Each narrative unit carries forward elements from the one preceding it: N2 interprets what was "seen" and "shewn" in N1, while N3 resumes that sequence after the interruption of E2, reactivating it through repetition and extending it into public proclamation and the response that proclamation elicits. The result is a movement that reads as continuous rather than as a series of discrete narrative episodes.

Alongside this progression, a thematic trajectory unfolds. The destruction of Jerusalem, announced and read in N1, is reframed in N2 within a theological register as part of the Lord's "great and marvelous works," where divine power, goodness, and mercy are directed toward preservation. In N3, destruction is reintroduced explicitly and

paired with deliverance, creating a structural tension as judgment and redemption are brought into deliberate relation within the unit's concentric design, which also places the Messiah centrally between them. The Messiah thus stands as the source of redemption and deliverance for the faithful, even as destruction remains the opposing covenant consequence of rejecting him.

These movements suggest that the narrative does more than recount events; Nephi deliberately reconfigures the narrative's meaning. What is revealed is interpreted, what is interpreted is proclaimed, and what is proclaimed is rejected with hostility, even as deliverance comes into increasing clarity. This development is anchored in the progression of the narrative centers: the divine figure revealed ("the One"), interpreted through divine attributes ("power and goodness and mercy"), and proclaimed as Messiah and Redeemer.

The sequence thus integrates narrative progression, thematic development, and structural continuity into what may be read as a unified movement oriented toward a deliverance-centered resolution. With this progression in place, the narrative provides the experiential unfolding that corresponds to the editorial logic defined in Part 1, thereby preparing the way for the coordinated macro-design examined in Part 3, where these two independent trajectories may be seen to converge in Nephi's programmatic declaration of deliverance.

3. Nephi's Macro-Design: Literary and Rhetorical Intentions

Macro-structural analysis operates at a different scale than the analysis of individual units and therefore requires broader criteria: coherence, proportional balance, and thematic integration. The question is not simply whether symmetry can merely be observed, but whether a proposed structure preserves and explains the boundaries, balance, and momentum already present in the text. With these criteria in view, we may now examine the larger compositional architecture of Nephi's prologue.

Six macro-units, three editorial and three narrative, have been identified through internally marked boundaries — discourse markers, shifts in voice, syntactic transitions, and thematic closure. Each unit, with the partial exception of E3 due to its integrative role, exhibits its own internal structure and rhetorical logic. Together, these divide into editorial and narrative triads based on voice and function, each with its own internal progression. It follows that any proposed macro-design

should ideally account not only for correspondence between units, but also for the preservation of these independent sequences.

A central question, then, is why these sequences are interwoven rather than presented sequentially, and whether a macro-structure can adequately account for both their internal integrity and their coordinated interaction. A natural starting point is the deliberate alternation between editorial and narrative units and whether this pattern may reflect a larger ordered design.

Five-part chiasm: Alternating editorial and narrative sections

One possible way to organize the alternating sequence is as a five-part chiasm. In this arrangement, the three editorial units occupy the opening, central, and closing positions, while the first two narrative units are combined to correspond with the final narrative unit:

- A (E1) "I Nephi" introduction (1:1–3)
- B (N1/N2) Narrative: Lehi's theophany/doxology (1:4–15)
- C (E2) "I Nephi" scope and method (1:16–17)
- B' (N3) Narrative: Lehi's testimony and rejection (1:18–20)
- A' (E3) "I Nephi" programmatic promise (1:20)

This arrangement has initial appeal: the boundaries are clear and the pairings are thematically coherent. However, it appears to be proportionally uneven and functionally misaligned. E2 seems to function not as a structural climax but as a compositional clarification, subordinate to both the revelatory material preceding it and the programmatic declaration that follows.

More significantly, the model does not appear to account for the independent progressions of the editorial and narrative sequences. The editorial units move from prophetic preparation and inscription to compositional method to interpretive witness, while the narrative units progress from revelation to interpretation to proclamation. These trajectories cut across the proposed chiastic boundaries, suggesting that alternation alone cannot fully account for the design. The model also mislocates interpretive force: rather than residing at the structural center, it instead appears to converge at the terminal declaration (E3), where the interpretive claim is explicitly articulated.

Alternation without symmetry? A pragmatic reading

A more cautious reading treats the alternation between editorial reflection and narrative as practical rather than architectonic. On this view, the pattern reflects compositional flow: Nephi introduces his record

(E1 → N1–N2), pauses to explain his method (E2), resumes the narrative (N3), and concludes with a programmatic declaration (E3).

Yet this explanation seems incomplete. While alternation accurately describes the surface pattern, it does not fully account for the density of internal correspondences or the coordinated progression of the editorial and narrative sequences. The placement of E3 as an interpretive capstone also seems to suggest intentional design rather than compositional convenience. Alternation is therefore not merely descriptive but may also serve as evidence of a deeper structural coordination requiring further explanation.

Reynolds's macro-structural model

Noel Reynolds proposes that the first twenty verses form a comprehensive chiasmic macro-structure, pairing twenty elements into a single symmetrical pattern centered on Lehi's vision of God and the descending One.¹⁰ In this reading, the sequence moves from Nephi's autobiographical introduction through Lehi's vision and returns to Nephi's concluding editorial declaration, producing a concentric structure in which Nephi's editorial voice forms the outer frame and Lehi's visionary narrative the inner core. The result is visually and conceptually coherent.

However, the model also introduces what appear to be methodological tensions. As the structure expands, it collapses the distinction between editorial and narrative units and seems to obscure the authorial shifts that mark them. It also may extend subordinate structures beyond their natural boundaries in order to sustain the macro-symmetry. This is especially evident in N1 and N2, whose internally complete designs are carried across unit boundaries to preserve the concentric pattern.

The following diagram reproduces Reynolds's proposed chiasm with the present study's literary units overlaid, illustrating how editorial and narrative materials are incorporated into a single structure:

10. Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates," 112–13.

- E1 a Nephi . . . the learning of his father (1)
 - b Nephi's many afflictions (1)
 - c the goodness and mysteries of God (1)
 - d Nephi's record . . . his own hands (2–3)
- N1 e Many prophecies (4)
 - f Lehi prays . . . with all his heart (5)
 - g Lehi saw and heard much . . . trembles (6)
 - h Lehi overcome with the Spirit (7)
 - i The heavens opened to Lehi (8)
 - j He sees God (8)
 - k He sees one descend (9)
 - j' He sees twelve (10)
 - i' The Lord opens a book to Lehi (11)
 - h' Lehi filled with the Spirit (12)
 - g' Lehi reads much . . . doom of Jerusalem (13)
 - N2 f' Lehi's whole heart filled . . . praises God (15)
 - E2 e' Lehi records other prophecies (16)
 - d' Nephi's record . . . his own hands (17)
 - N3 c' the Messiah and redemption of the world (19)
 - b' Lehi's afflictions (20)
 - E3 a' Nephi's teaching (learned from his father) (20)

In addition, several proposed correspondences depend on broad thematic associations that, while suggestive, are less tightly constrained by structural or syntactic markers. As the distance between paired elements increases, their evidentiary force may diminish. Privileging certain elements by elevating them to structural status may also have the effect of diminishing material that carries clear structural prominence at a local level—including verses 14 and 18, which function as key markers within their local structures. As a result, internally cohesive units—particularly those exhibiting clear local structure—may be subordinated to more diffuse parallels within the larger pattern.

The issue, therefore, is not the presence of symmetry, but whether extending that symmetry adequately preserves the integrity of the text's most clearly defined structures. A persuasive macro-design should ideally account for both correspondence and constraint: it must explain relationships between units without overriding the boundaries

and internal progressions that govern them. While Reynolds's model captures genuine structural features, it mislocates their structural function: those features are arguably better explained by coordination than by a single concentric inversion.

Two coordinated triads: A parallel correspondence proposal

These considerations point toward coordination rather than inversion: independent literary units that form two coherent and concurrent progressions yet are interwoven to create two corresponding sequential triads. Rather than collapsing into a single concentric axis, the paired parallel triads generate meaning through relationships that operate across the prologue.

Such a structure operates on two levels. The original editorial and narrative triads retain their internal progression, while the coordinated arrangement of their constituent units generates a second set of relationships through correspondence. The result is not a new combined progression but an additional layer of meaning operating alongside the original sequences.

To preserve both structural layering and internal progression, the prologue is therefore best understood as two coordinated parallel triads: A/B/C // A'/B'/C'. Each element corresponds to an original editorial or narrative unit (E1–N1–N2 // E2–N3–E3), ensuring that established boundaries and internal structures remain intact. Correspondence is thus achieved through balance rather than inversion, linking paired units without collapsing their internal progression.

On this reading, the macro-design is best understood not as a single inverted structure, but as a coordinated arrangement of parallel movements whose relationships generate three broader interpretive domains: covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance. These domains provide a coherent theological framework for reading the prologue as an integrated whole, emerging from the interaction of progression within the original triads and correspondence across the paired parallel triads rather than from a single concentric pattern.

Parallel units and correspondence

The two parallel triads align corresponding units into three paired relationships (A/A', B/B', C/C'), each marked by lexical, thematic, and functional relationships. These correspondences operate across

the structure, generating meaning through alignment rather than sequence.

It is therefore helpful to distinguish between the two triadic systems operating simultaneously within the prologue. The original editorial and narrative triads generate meaning through progression, while the paired parallel triads generate meaning through correspondence. The former govern the sequential development of the text; the latter guide its interpretive alignment. Progression governs sequence; correspondence guides interpretation.

The macro-structure also reflects the convergence of trajectories already developed within the narrative sequence. Across N1–N3, revelation is received, interpreted through covenantal response and witness, and ultimately proclaimed, while destruction and deliverance are introduced, reframed, and brought into structured tension. The editorial units prepare for and culminate in the formalization of these trajectories, which are rendered explicitly as interpretive principle and prophetic witness in E3. The macro-design therefore does not merely align corresponding units but coordinates meaning on two levels: through progression within the original editorial and narrative triads and through correspondence across the paired parallel triads, so that correspondence and convergence together shape interpretation.

A/A'—Editorial domain (covenant record)

The first correspondence joins Nephi's two principal statements about the making of his record. Both units begin with the self-referential designation "I Nephi," connect his writing to what he has received from his father, and emphasize his personal responsibility for composition and inscription. E1 describes the prophetic preparation from which the record proceeds, while E2 shows that preparation exercised through selection, abridgment, and original composition:

A (E1, 1:1–3)

"I Nephi": record-making; learning of my father; knowledge of God; authorship ("I make a record of my proceedings in my days . . . I make it with mine own hand").

A' (E2, 1:16–17)

"I Nephi": record-making; abridgment of father's record; personal account ("I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days . . . upon plates . . . made with mine own hands").

At the micro level, this correspondence is already suggested in E1, where alternating parallels distinguish what Nephi receives from what he records. E2 extends this same relationship through its dual chiasms, distinguishing inherited source material from Nephi's own prophetic inscription.

These elements correspond through repeated lexical and conceptual markers:

- Authorial re-entry: "I Nephi" . . . "I Nephi"
- Record-making: "I make a record" . . . "I make an abridgment / make an account"
- Material authorship: "with mine own hand" . . . "plates . . . made with mine own hands"
- Personal scope: "my days . . . my proceedings in my days" . . . "my proceedings . . . mine own life"
- Paternal source: "learning . . . of my father" . . . "record of my father"

Prophetic preparation and inscription in A culminate in prophetic composition in A', as instruction and revelation lead to a covenant record. Direct lexical repetition marks continuity, while functional shift marks development—from preparation to inscription to deliberate composition. Together, these elements establish the domain of covenant record, through which revelation is preserved and transmitted as mediated prophetic witness.

B / B'—Narrative domain (revelation and response)

The second correspondence links revelation with two contrasting responses. N1 presents Lehi receiving revelation, while N3 shows his response proclaiming it and demonstrating his covenant fidelity, as well as the people's rebellious response in their hostility to it. The movement is therefore from revelation received and accepted on the one hand, to received and rejected on the other. Lehi's willingness to testify of what he has seen, heard, and read demonstrates his faith and obedience; Jerusalem's mockery and attempt to kill him expose its continued resistance to God's revealed word:

B (N1, 1:4–13)

Prophetic warning; Lehi's prayer; visionary encounter; throne theophany; One descending; book revealed and read; destruction foretold.

B' (N3, 1:18–20a)

Lehi faithfully proclaims what he saw, heard, and read—wickedness, destruction, and the coming Messiah; the people mock, reject, and seek his life.

These elements correspond through continuity of content, prophetic role and response, and covenant function.

- Content continuity: “saw and heard” / “read” . . . saw, heard, and read
- Judgment content: “abominations” / “destruction” . . . wickedness, abominations, destruction
- Prophetic continuity: revelation received . . . revelation proclaimed / revelation received and rejected (“as with the prophets of old”)
- Contrasting response: Lehi responds with acceptance and testimony . . . Jerusalem responds with rejection, mockery, anger and attempted violence
- Covenant function: revelation received . . . response reveals covenant faithfulness

Revelation received in B generates two contrasting responses in B'. Lehi responds through obedient prophetic witness, while Jerusalem responds by rejecting both the message and the messenger. The correspondence therefore moves beyond revelation and its proclamation to dramatize the covenant division it produces.

C / C'—Interpretive domain (covenant deliverance)

The third correspondence joins Lehi's interpretation of revelation with Nephi's formal statement of the covenant principle it discloses. In C, Lehi responds to what he has seen, heard, and read by praising God's power, goodness, and mercy and by affirming the preservation of the faithful. In C', Nephi converts that doxological interpretation into the programmatic claim that will govern his record: the Lord's tender mercies deliver those whom he has chosen because of their faith:

C (N2, 1:14–15)

Lehi's doxology: rejoicing in what he has read, seen, and heard; confession of divine “power and goodness and mercy”; assurance of preservation.

C' (E3, 1:20b)

Nephi's programmatic thesis: "I Nephi, will shew unto you" that the Lord's tender mercies deliver the faithful.

These elements correspond as covenant interpretation and formalized covenant witness:

- "power and goodness and mercy" . . . "tender mercies . . . deliverance"
- preservation . . . deliverance
- doxological praise . . . programmatic declaration

Covenantal interpretation in C becomes formalized in C' as covenant witness: what is expressed in praise becomes the governing interpretive principle through which revelation culminates in covenant deliverance.

Coordinated domains

Through these correspondences, the structure may be seen to establish three coordinated domains:

- Covenant Record A/A' — revelation preserved and inscribed as prophetic composition
- Revelation and Response B/B' — revelation received, responded to, and proclaimed thus eliciting a further response
- Covenant Deliverance C/C' — revelation interpreted and formalized as covenant deliverance

These domains emerge from repeated lexical and thematic clustering and function as organizing categories that help guide interpretation across the structure. The coordinated domains themselves may also be understood as forming a higher-order progression. Covenant record provides the authorized and enduring medium through which prophetic revelation is preserved and transmitted. Revelation, encountered through that record, summons a covenantal response: acceptance expressed through faith, obedience, and testimony, or rejection expressed through mockery and opposition. Those contrasting responses are then interpreted in relation to their covenant consequences, with rejection oriented toward destruction and acceptance toward the Lord's mercy and power of deliverance. The macro-design therefore moves from covenant record and the mediated revelation it

contains, through the response it requires, to the covenant outcome that gives that response its ultimate significance.

Structural function

Nephi's interweaving of the original independent triads is both structural and rhetorical. The editorial sequence defines the covenantal framework, the narrative sequence enacts the reception, interpretation, proclamation and rejection of revelation, and their alignment integrates prophetic inscription in covenant record, revelation and contrasting covenantal response, and deliverance, all into a unified interpretive structure. The prologue thus presents in compressed form an interpretive framework that guides the narrative that follows:

- The editorial triad preserves, shapes, and interprets revelation
- The narrative triad receives, interprets, and proclaims revelation while also dramatizing its opposed covenant responses and outcomes
- The parallel triads align these movements into coordinated covenantal domains

Structural advantage of the model

This model is intended to be explanatory rather than merely descriptive. It accounts simultaneously for internal progression, marked boundaries, and cross-unit correspondence. The result is a coordinated architecture in which covenant record preserves revelation, revelation elicits acceptance or rejection, and these contrasting responses lead toward covenant deliverance or destruction. Meaning may be seen to emerge not from sequence alone but from the coordinated interaction of these domains across the structure. Interpretive weight appears to converge at the terminus (E3), where the logic articulated in N2 is formalized as a governing principle. Although the prologue holds deliverance and destruction in structured tension, it ultimately orients the reader toward deliverance as its central interpretive claim. The structure therefore not only presents meaning but may be understood to generate it.

Together, the editorial and narrative triads, re-aligned and woven together as parallel triads, establish three coordinated interpretive domains: covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance. As these domains develop through progression, interact through correspondence, and converge in E3, the structure itself

participates in the interpretation it presents. The prologue therefore not only narrates the transmission of revelation through prophetic inscription, covenant interpretation, and contrasting covenant responses, but also generates its theological meaning coordinating those responses with the opposed outcomes of deliverance and destruction.

4. Implications for Reading Nephi's Record

If Nephi's prologue establishes a compositional logic through coordinated parallel triads, that logic may not be confined to the prologue but may extend into the remainder of Nephi's original first chapter (1 Nephi 1–5) and possibly beyond. The prologue appears to coordinate three recurring domains — covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance — and thereby establishes categories through which the subsequent narrative may be read. What Nephi sets forth structurally at the outset may therefore function not as a rigid template to be reproduced in identical form, but as an interpretive framework whose categories, relationships, and priorities recur in different literary configurations.

Several implications follow:

First, the patterns of covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance appear to be programmatic rather than merely episodic. The remainder of Nephi's original first chapter may thus be read not simply as narrative progression but as repeated developments of these domains. Divine revelation elicits response: individuals manifest either covenant alignment through faith and obedience or rejection through unbelief, rebellion, and opposition to prophetic witness. Those contrasting responses, in turn, disclose opposed covenant outcomes of deliverance and destruction. The prologue therefore provides a framework by which subsequent narrative developments may be interpreted and tested.

This progression also implicates Nephi's audience. By inscribing Lehi's revelation, Nephi places later readers in a position analogous to those who originally encountered Lehi's testimony. The record preserves not only the content of revelation but also its demand for response. Lehi's faithful witness and Jerusalem's hostile rejection present contrasting possibilities, while Nephi's terminal declaration identifies the promised outcome for those who respond in faith. Covenant record thus becomes the means by which revelation is preserved and renewed as a covenantal encounter for subsequent readers.

Second, the interweaving of editorial and narrative material in the

prologue suggests that Nephi's later narrative may likewise operate on multiple levels simultaneously. Events are not merely recounted but selected, arranged, framed, and interpreted. Meaning therefore emerges not only through explicit commentary and sequential narration but also through literary organization: repeated markers, parallel correspondences, subordinate structures, transitions, and the coordination of smaller units within larger ones. Nephi's first-person editorial voice may continue to guide interpretation within the narrative, while structural relationships may further shape and constrain the meaning of the events he records.

Third, the prioritization of deliverance as the prologue's interpretive resolution suggests that subsequent tensions — opposition, danger, displacement, and apparent loss — should be examined within the theological framework established at the outset. Although the prologue holds deliverance and destruction in tension, Nephi's final declaration directs particular attention toward the Lord's power to preserve the faithful. Later episodes of conflict may therefore function not merely as historical contingencies but as contexts in which revelation is given, covenant response is manifested, faith and obedience are tested, and the opposed consequences of deliverance and destruction are progressively disclosed.

Finally, the prologue's integration of covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance raises the possibility that Nephi's broader work functions as a sustained prophetic witness and warning. Just as Lehi's experience is selected, structured, and interpreted through Nephi's editorial voice, the ensuing narrative may exhibit a similar coordination of event and interpretation. The record would then serve as the medium through which revelation is preserved, prophetic witness is transmitted, covenant response is exposed, and its consequences are interpreted.

Structure is therefore not ancillary but integral to meaning. In this sense, Nephi's prologue may function not only as an introduction to his record, but also as a hermeneutical key. It establishes categories, priorities, and an interpretive logic whose recurrence can be tested across the units that follow. Whether and how extensively this logic governs the remainder of Nephi's first original chapter requires further analysis. Nevertheless, the prologue does more than introduce Nephi's record: it establishes an interpretive framework through which the subsequent literary architecture may be examined.

5. Conclusion: Structure as Covenantal Argument

Nephi's prologue reveals a writer who understands form as persuasion. Across six units—three editorial and three narrative—he constructs a literary architecture in which structure and doctrine are closely integrated. Each unit serves a distinct rhetorical purpose and is internally arranged to focus attention on that purpose. Both the narrative and editorial triads exhibit coherent progressions that generate meaning through sequence, while the dual parallel triads generate additional meaning through paired correspondence. From individual units to their sequential development to their coordinated domains, meaning is intentionally layered and deliberately shaped at multiple levels. Nephi does not merely recount events; he also directs interpretation through their arrangement.

Together, all these triads articulate what may be understood as a unified prophetic logic. The narrative sequence moves from divine manifestation to covenant interpretation to prophetic witness, while the editorial sequence progresses from divine preparation to prophetic inscription to covenant witness. Then, when interwoven, the additional parallel triads establish three coordinated domains—covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance—through which the material is intended to be understood. The original triads retain their internal progression yet, through structured alignment, the parallel triads help guide interpretation at the macro level. Structure thus operates programmatically, on this reading: revelation is preserved through covenant record, elicits a response of acceptance or rejection, and leads to the opposed covenant outcome of deliverance or destruction.

The design proposed here also clarifies the relationship between Nephi and Lehi. Lehi's doxology provides the theological foundation that Nephi formalizes in his programmatic promise, while Nephi's editorial framing interprets and extends Lehi's witness. Each prophet testifies through a distinct but coordinated mode—Lehi through the faithful reception, interpretation and proclamation of revelation, Nephi through prophetic inscription and arrangement. Together, their witness traces a movement from inspired confession to interpretive principle, transforming personal testimony into a framework for reading the prologue as a whole. Jerusalem's contrasting response further exposes the covenant division produced by the revealed word of God.

Nephi's prologue therefore functions not only as an account of his prophetic preparation and witness but also as a theological

framework for the record that follows. It establishes three governing domains—covenant record, revelation and response, and covenant deliverance—not as abstract themes but as structured patterns of meaning that anticipate later enactment throughout Nephi's narrative. The priority of sacred record-making, the reception of divine revelation and the contrasting responses it elicits, and the resulting movement toward either deliverance or destruction all recur as organizing principles in the composition of his record. The prologue thus presents in compressed form the conceptual architecture of Nephi's work, introducing the interpretive logic that will continue to unfold across the narrative that follows.

In this way, structure is not ornament but argument. By aligning editorial framing with narrative enactment, Nephi turns form into testimony and directs the reader toward the Savior and His work. Meaning emerges not from symmetry alone but from the coordinated interaction of these domains across the structure. The "tender mercies of the Lord" and the promised deliverance of the faithful are therefore not merely proclaimed but structurally realized, becoming the interpretive resolution toward which the entire composition moves, while destruction remains as the opposing covenant consequence for those who reject his message of mercy.

Appendix A: Methodological Criteria and Structural Alternatives (1 Nephi 1:1–3)

Structural analysis can illuminate literary design, but pattern alone cannot determine structure or authorial intent. Because segmentation and hierarchy determine rhetorical function, proposed structures must be evaluated according to four criteria: (1) syntactic continuity and progression, (2) internally marked textual boundaries, (3) rhetorical hierarchy, and (4) proportional coherence. The most persuasive readings are those that preserve these features together rather than privileging symmetry at their expense.

In 1 Nephi 1:1, Nephi constructs a chain of participial clauses that function adverbially, each advancing toward the main assertion: "therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days." The sequence follows a deliberate progression—lineage → education → affliction → favor → knowledge → inscription—in which each clause builds toward the climactic act of record-making. The cumulative protasis resolves in the

apodosis, and the linking particles (“and,” “nevertheless,” “yea,” “therefore”) reinforce escalation, contrast, and causal development.

This structure is progressive rather than recursive. Its forward movement carries interpretive weight: Nephi’s prophetic preparation culminates in prophetic inscription. Verses 2–3 extend this movement: Nephi specifies the nature of his record (language and scribal tradition) and then authenticates it (“I know that the record . . . is true,” “I make it with mine own hand”). Together, these verses form an authorizing prologue in which inscription is presented as the means through which revelation is preserved and prophetic witness transmitted.

Structural alternatives

Alternative readings identify genuine patterns within these verses but prioritize different features. Noel Reynolds emphasizes conceptual correspondences and rhetorical design, proposing a combination of alternating parallelism and compact chiasm.¹¹ Donald W. Parry, by contrast, emphasizes lexical repetition and formal symmetry, organizing the passage into a chiastic structure based on repeated phrases.¹²

Both approaches identify meaningful correspondences but differ in methodological priority: Reynolds privileges conceptual coherence and rhetorical function, while Parry privileges formal symmetry and repetition. The present study likewise reflects deliberate prioritization, selecting among available features to preserve syntactic continuity and rhetorical hierarchy. Structural analysis is therefore an exercise in constraint as much as in discovery.

An anonymous reviewer proposed a modification to Parry’s chiasm, noting the difficulty of determining authorial intent where multiple structural possibilities exist and the need for clear justification of methodological preference. The following synthesized arrangement illustrates how readily the passage lends itself to chiastic organization when evaluated primarily by formal symmetry and lexical correspondence:

11. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Small Plates,” 111.

12. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 1.

- A yea, *having had a great **knowledge*** of the goodness and the mysteries of God,
 B therefore *I make a record* of my proceedings in my days.
 C ²Yea, *I make a record*
 D in the language of my father,
 E which consists of *the learning of the Jews*
 D' and the language of the Egyptians.
 C' ³And I know that the record which *I make* to be true.
 B' And *I make it* with mine own hand,
 A' and *I make it* according to my **knowledge**.

This structure exhibits features characteristic of a well-formed chiasm — balanced inversion, clear parallelism, and a defined central element — and, considered independently, is rhetorically persuasive. However, it is not independent. Situated within a larger literary context, it disrupts the participial sequence that governs the unit and reassigns the function of “therefore I make a record,” shifting it from the climactic resolution of that sequence to an internal structural hinge. In doing so, it alters the rhetorical hierarchy of the passage, relocating the syntactic climax and redistributing emphasis across the unit. Elements that appear subordinate within the grammar are consequently elevated beyond their immediate function; phrases such as “learning of the Jews,” embedded within dependent clauses, become structural focal points. The issue, therefore, is not whether the proposed chiasm is internally coherent, but whether the structural gains achieved by the inversion justify the rhetorical and syntactic costs required to produce it.

Evaluation and methodological implications

This example illustrates a broader methodological principle: even a formally compelling chiasm should not override syntax. Where the two are in tension, syntax should take priority, since it reflects the author’s grammatical construction rather than an inferred pattern of correspondence. On this reading, the passage is therefore best understood as progression rather than inversion, with the observed correspondences functioning descriptively rather than structurally. Chiastic arrangements may illuminate relationships within a text, but they should remain subordinate to the syntax, progression, and boundaries that govern it. Otherwise, symmetry risks displacing causal development, altering rhetorical hierarchy, and elevating structural elegance above authorial design.

More broadly, segmentation governs emphasis and therefore meaning. Even minor shifts in segmentation can redistribute interpretive

weight and alter perceived relationships between elements. Structural proposals must therefore be evaluated not by the density of correspondences they produce, but by how well they preserve syntactic continuity, marked boundaries, and rhetorical momentum.

Structural analysis necessarily involves interpretive judgment, but such judgment is most persuasive when constrained by the text's own signals — syntax, boundaries, and rhetorical hierarchy. Distinguishing between intentional structure and analyst-generated pattern therefore requires sustained attention to these constraints. The task of structural analysis is not to maximize symmetry but to explain how meaning is organized within the text itself. Where correspondence and textual signals diverge, the latter should take precedence, since they provide the clearest evidence of authorial design.

Appendix B: The Full Text of N1 (1 Nephi 1:4–13)

Lineation marks corresponding elements and reflects what appears to be natural textual divisions — boundaries that arise from the narrative's syntactic and rhetorical transitions. Their alignment with Orson Pratt's 1879 versification¹³ suggests that these divisions correspond to naturally perceived textual boundaries. Verse numbers appear in superscript.

- A ⁴For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father Lehi having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days;) and in that same year there came *many prophets*, prophesying unto the people, that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.
- B a ⁵Wherefore it came to pass, that my father, Lehi, as he *went forth*, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart in behalf of his people.
- b ⁶And it came to pass, as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a **pillar of fire** and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he **saw** and **heard** much; and because of the things which he **saw** and **heard**, he did quake and tremble exceedingly.
- c ⁷And it came to pass that *he returned to his own house* at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit . . . things which he had **seen**;

13. *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, trans. Joseph Smith, with division into chapters and verses and references by Orson Pratt (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Printing, 1879), 1, archive.org/details/bookmormonanacc00pratgoog/page/n20/mode/2up.

- C a ⁸And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought **he saw God** *sitting upon his throne*, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels . . . singing and praising their God.
- b ⁹And it came to pass that **he saw one** descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his lustre was above that of the sun at noon-day.
- c ¹⁰And he also saw **Twelve** others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament;
- B' a ¹¹And they *came down and went forth* upon the face of the earth;
- b And **the first** came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should **read**.
- c ¹²And it came to pass that as he **read**, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.
- A' ¹³And he read saying, Wo, wo unto Jerusalem! for I have **seen** thine abominations; yea, and many things did my father **read** concerning Jerusalem, that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof . . . perish by the sword . . . carried away captive into Babylon.

Appendix C: The Full Text of N3 (1 Nephi 1:18–20)

Lineation marks corresponding elements and reflects what appears to be natural textual divisions — boundaries that arise from the narrative's syntactic and rhetorical transitions. Their alignment with Orson Pratt's 1879 versification suggests that these divisions correspond to naturally perceived textual boundaries. Verse numbers appear in superscript.¹⁴

14. Previous analysts have proposed several overlapping inverted structures within 1 Nephi 1:18–20, with considerably different boundaries: The present analysis differs by treating 1:18–20 as a coherent narrative movement whose internal correspondences contribute to the larger organization of N3 and its transition into Nephi's concluding editorial declaration in E3. For the broader rhetorical function of 1:20, see Noel B. Reynolds, who identifies Nephi's promise to show the "tender mercies of the Lord" as the programmatic thesis of 1 Nephi. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 2 (1980): 131–49, byustudies.byu.edu/article/nephis-outline; Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 3; and the BYU Studies Chiasmus Index under 1 Nephi 1:18–20, byustudies.byu.edu/chiasmus/index.

- A ¹⁸Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had **shown** so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the **destruction** of Jerusalem,
- B Behold he went forth among the people, and *began to prophesy and to declare* unto them concerning the things which he had both **seen** and **heard**.
- C ¹⁹And it came to pass that the *Jews did mock him*, because of the things which he testified of them;
- D a For he truly testified of *their wickedness and their abominations*;
- b And he testified that the things which he **saw** and **heard**, and also the things which he **read** in the book,
- c Manifested plainly of the *coming of a Messiah*, and also the *redemption of the world*.
- C' ²⁰And when the Jews heard these things, *they were angry with him*;
- B' Yea, *even as with the prophets of old*, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away.
- A' But behold, I, Nephi, will shew 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*.



C. Robb Smith is an independent researcher whose work examines the literary structure, editorial practice, and rhetorical strategies of the Book of Mormon. His research focuses on narrative framing, typology, and how prophetic writers use editorial design and structure to present historical narrative and guide interpretation across the text.

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