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1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole

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Abstract: A common method to scripture study among Latter-day Saints is to search a broad range of verses by topic. While certainly useful, such a fragmented approach does not illuminate thematic elements and patterns that emerge only when surveying entire sections of scripture. To illustrate, the author of this article analyzes the first two books in the Book of Mormon, 1 and 2 Nephi. He suggests that Nephi was following an outline, and he identifies two dominant themes: Nephi's emphasis on record keeping and his constant association between events of his own time and events recorded in ancient scriptures. The author concludes that a more holistic approach to scripture study presents challenges to the reader but has great merit.



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1 And 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole

Frederick W. Axelgard

How inspired do we believe the scriptures to be? Do we justifiably confine ourselves to a verse-by-verse study of their doctrinal or didactic content? Are we missing much of the intended impact if we do not believe that entire sections, chapters, or books were organized under inspiration? In spiritual no less than literary terms, could not the “whole” of a scriptural text amount to more than the sum of its “parts”? These questions suggest an approach to scripture study which seeks to integrate rather than fragment the meaning of scriptural passages. The spirit of this approach pervades the following observation, which comments on those sections of the Doctrine and Covenants revealed in 1831:

As we follow the development from Section to Section, we perceive that there is a plan so grand, so beautiful, and so well adapted to human needs, as to leave no room for doubt concerning its divine origin. Each Revelation, considered by itself, though full of beauty, may be but a stone detached from the building to which it belongs, but seen as a part of the entire structure, it speaks with convincing eloquence of the wisdom, power, and love of the Divine Builder of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

The thrust of this observation, and of the study presented here, is that a deeper appreciation and conviction of scriptural truth can be gained by considering how the passages of a given scriptural text fit together as a whole. Like the Doctrine and Covenants, Nephi’s writings are well suited to such an inquiry because they constitute a discrete, self-contained segment of scripture of considerable size.² We are told that 1 and 2 Nephi come from the small plates of Nephi which Mormon did not edit. These books therefore make up the largest *original* contribution of any single author in the Book of Mormon, amounting to roughly one-fifth of its total text.

Relying on these variables, we undertake in the following pages a holistic analysis of Nephi’s writings. The study begins with an examination of the evidence that Nephi had a basic two-part outline

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in mind when he made his inscriptions on the small plates. We then briefly discuss the possible correlations between the identifiable segments of Nephi's books and the stages of his life in which they were apparently written. This is followed by an extensive analysis of two unifying leitmotifs in Nephi's writing: a pervasive emphasis on record-keeping and a constant association of Nephite events and endeavors with precedents set by ancient scriptural heroes.

As a conclusion, this study argues that there is more to Nephi's writings than meets the eye, that they are characterized decisively and unambiguously by structural and thematic coherence. They possess a pattern of unity and self-consistency which penetrates well below the content of the separate verses which make up 1 and 2 Nephi. Moreover, the sense of the ever-present hand of Nephi which an integrative reading reveals is strong, and at times almost intimate. The overall result is to identify 1 and 2 Nephi as unique and uniquely Nephi's.

NEPHI'S OUTLINE

The search for an overarching framework in Nephi's writing produces three fundamental findings. First, they contain two primary divisions, one heavily historical and the other exclusively spiritual in content. Secondly, Nephi's historical section (1 Ne. 1–2 Ne. 5) appears to have two subsections. A major portion of Nephi's family history is contained in 1 Nephi 1–18. In 1 Nephi 19–2 Nephi 5, Nephi brings in other prophets' writings (Isaiah, Zenock, Zenos, Neum, and Joseph) and focuses on spiritual matters with an intensity that suggests a transitional lead-in to his final, completely spiritual–prophetic segment. Third, Nephi's final section (2 Ne. 6–33) functions as a genuine conclusion. It is devoid of temporal references, contains a major review of Nephi's earlier prophecies, and ends with an outpouring of personal concern and doctrinal climax.

That Nephi's record is made up of two basic parts can be seen first from its historical content. Everything Nephi has to offer in the way of historical information is presented between 1 Nephi 1 and 2 Nephi 5: his family's travels from Jerusalem to the promised land, the conflicts between Nephi and his brothers, their division into separate colonies of Lamanites and Nephites, and so on. Abruptly and without explanation, Nephi's remaining chapters move on to a sermon by Jacob (2 Ne. 6–10), quotations from Isaiah (2 Ne. 12–24), and Nephi's final prophecies and teachings (2 Ne. 11, 25–33). These passages are all free of temporal references to Nephi's life. Only when he bids farewell at the end of 2 Nephi 33 does one sense that any time has passed since the end of 2 Nephi 5.

Echoes of this “historical versus spiritual” division also occur in certain summaries Nephi makes near the end of his account. In one such passage he declares that because of his record, his descendants would know that their forefathers “came out from Jerusalem” and would have “the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . declared among them” (2 Ne. 30:4–5). Later Nephi again says that his record “maketh known unto [my people] 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 Ne. 33:4). These passages thus give two main purposes for Nephi’s record: one historical, to inform his descendants of their Israelite heritage; and one spiritual, to give them the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The decisive evidence for breaking Nephi’s record into two parts, divided at the end of 2 Nephi 5, is more precise. Nephi gives the definitive clue in a passage in 1 Nephi 19. The following excerpt is taken from his discussion of the small plates:

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 Ne. 19:5)

In this rare glimpse into his organizational thoughts, Nephi promises to give us later an account of his making the small plates. Furthermore, he marks that account as a threshold he will cross before he conveys “more sacred things.” As promised, Nephi describes the creation of the small plates near the end of 2 Nephi 5. This juncture is thus an unmistakable turning point, the gateway to what Nephi calls “the more sacred things [to] be kept for the knowledge of my people.”

Nephi’s History

Let us now focus briefly on Nephi’s first division (1 Ne. 1–2 Ne. 5) and on the thesis that it can be further subdivided. Note first that the historical information contained in these twenty-seven chapters is unevenly distributed. The first eighteen chapters are richly packed with historical detail and have a chronological scope of about ten years. The next nine chapters, however, give little historical data although they cover a longer time period of about twenty years.³

It would seem, then, that 1 Nephi 1–18 contains the most important historical information Nephi wants to convey, namely the Jerusalem origins of his family and their migration to the promised land. On the other hand, the intense prophetic aspect of 1 Nephi 19 to 2 Nephi 5 (with its citations of Isaiah, Zenock, Zenos, Neum, Lehi, and Joseph) suggests it might be a transitional subsection, where

Nephi begins to break away from historical material and move toward spiritual instruction, which soon becomes his only concern.

“More Sacred Things”

Having prepared his readers for an important departure, Nephi did not disappoint them in 2 Nephi 6–33. Here he builds a sense of climax and conclusion in several ways, one of which is to conclude several stylistic and structural patterns he introduces earlier in his work. The best example of this comes, as noted earlier, when he completes the changeover into purely spiritual writing. Another example appears when Nephi, in abridging Jacob’s sermon, carefully achieves perfect continuity with earlier citations of Isaiah. That is, the Isaiah passages in 2 Nephi 7–8 (corresponding to Isa. 50–51) follow directly after those cited in 1 Nephi 20–21 (corresponding to Isa. 48–49). It would appear to be more than mere coincidence that Nephi connects these two important discourses. Nephi’s earlier use of Isaiah’s words to teach and humble his brothers (1 Ne. 15:20; 19–22) and the extraordinary length of his later Isaiah citation (2 Ne. 12–24) leave no doubt that Isaiah plays a dominant role in Nephi’s purposes. This continuum between 1 Nephi 20–21 and 2 Nephi 7–8 skillfully cements portions of Nephi’s record together and helps establish his regard for Isaiah as a dominant feature of his writing.

A desire for spiritual climax also appears to influence Nephi’s decision to blend two other voices—Jacob’s and Isaiah’s—with his own at the end of his record. To put Nephi’s selectivity in perspective, one should recall that just a few chapters earlier he quotes no less than six other prophets. With such a wide range of inspired sources to choose from, how does Nephi decide whom to include in the final, “more sacred” portion of his writing? He offers the following explanation:

For he [Isaiah] verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. (2 Ne. 11:2–3)

It appears, then, that Nephi’s desire to impart “more sacred things” compelled him to close out his account with the testimonies of three eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ.

We should remember, however, that at the time of Nephi’s writing, Jacob’s and Isaiah’s words were already part of the historical record. They had been delivered to earlier audiences. Since Nephi’s words in 2 Nephi 11 and 25–33 were presumably written explicitly for the small plates, we should look there for the best revelation of the climactic thrust of his record.

Nephi divides his concluding chapters into two parts, his prophecies and his teachings on the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Ne. 25:4, 31:1–2). Strikingly, Nephi’s final prophecies repeat, in sequence and often in significant detail, the prophecies contained in his earlier tree of life vision (1 Ne. 11–14). Table 1 outlines this pattern of repetition. Why would Nephi engage in such large-scale duplication on his precious small plates? Most likely because, to him, these prophecies are overwhelmingly important and to review them also suits his apparent desire to write a cohesive record.

Another stirring feature that appears in both sections of Nephi’s closing chapters is a strong personal appeal to his readers. In his earlier writings (1 Ne. 1–2 Ne. 5), he rarely refers to any audience he might have in mind. In these later chapters, however, he makes frequent, direct appeals to “my beloved brethren,” “my people,” “my brethren,” and “my children.” In this fashion Nephi seems to strive to narrow the distance between himself and his readers, though he clearly realizes they are far in his future (see 2 Ne. 25:20, 28; 26:1, 23; 28:1; 33:10, 13).

The climax of Nephi’s record comes in 2 Nephi 31–33, where we find his most intense personal appeals coinciding with his teachings on the “doctrine of Christ.” Here he makes noticeably more frequent use of the phrase “my beloved brethren.” In addition, he moves away from the universal, prophetic context of chapters 25–30 and focuses on individual spiritual commitment. His admonition to his readers is to repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, endure to the end, feast on the word of Christ, and pray—all in the spirit of following the example of Christ (2 Ne. 31–32). Then, in his last chapter, Nephi shifts the personalized focus to himself. He expresses his sense of weakness in writing, affirms his deep concern for his readers (“I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them”), and bids farewell (2 Ne. 33:1–3, 13–14).

Each of the three subsections in Nephi’s second major division thus contributes to a rich sense of climax and conclusion. Each offers the testimony of an eyewitness of Christ, knowledge of whom it is here Nephi’s main purpose to convey. Each plays an integrating role by harking back to and building upon earlier portions of Nephi’s writing. And Nephi’s own superlative conclusion provides a personalized appeal and focus on Christ which is truly worthy of his promise to impart “the more sacred things [to] be kept for the knowledge of my people” (1 Ne. 19:5). In short, Nephi effectively interweaves a profound message into a firmly cohesive outline, which inevitably strengthens the spiritual and literary merit of his account.

TABLE 1
A COMPARISON OF THE CONTENT AND ORDER OF NEPHI'S PROPHECIES
IN 1 NEPHI 11-14 AND 2 NEPHI 25-30

Summary of Prophecies	References in 1 Nephi 11-14	References in 2 Nephi 25-30
Future events in Palestine, including birth, ministry, and rejection of Messiah; warning to those who fight against the Messiah, his Apostles, and church	1 Ne. 11:8-36	2 Ne. 25:12-15
Future events in Nephite history, including: destruction after Messiah's death, Christ's visit, subsequent era of righteousness, Nephites' extinction, and decline of Lamanites	1 Ne. 12:1-23	2 Ne. 26:1-11
Gentiles' iniquity in last days, smiting of Lamanites by Gentiles, religious strife and many churches among Gentiles	1 Ne. 13:1-29	2 Ne. 26
Iniquity of Jews and Gentiles in last days and their frustration in fighting Zion, coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the marvelous work and a wonder	1 Ne. 13:32-41 and 1 Ne. 14:7	2 Ne. 27
Contrasting of and conflict between numerous Gentile churches in last days and small number of Christ's true followers	1 Ne. 14:9-14	2 Ne. 28:1-15
Destruction of great and abominable church and fulfillment of God's covenant with the house of Israel	1 Ne. 14:15-17	2 Ne. 28:16-28 and 2 Ne. 29:1-2

Nephi's Life and the Development of His Record

With this overall picture of Nephi's record in mind, let us consider its parallels with the stages of Nephi's own life. For as they are described above, the segments of that record appear to reflect the circumstances under which Nephi indicates they were written. These circumstances, described mainly in 2 Nephi 5, were as follows. Nephi began the small plates at least thirty years after leaving Jerusalem, apparently shortly after the death of Lehi and the separation of his children into distinct camps of Nephites and Lamanites. The first 60 percent of the record, through 2 Nephi 5, was written during the following decade, when Nephi was busy establishing, building up, and defending the new Nephite colony. Nephi apparently completed the last 40 percent (the "more sacred" portion) of his record over the course of about fifteen years (2 Ne. 5:28–34; Jacob 1:1). This was a period, late in his life, when his temporal burdens were presumably lighter and he was at the height of his spiritual stature.

Now to the possible parallels between this history and the structure of Nephi's account. It is noteworthy that Nephi wrote the more incident-filled, historical segment of his record during a hectic and potentially distracting period of his life. The more spiritual portion of the record, with its carefully crafted elements of climax, is apparently the product of calmer circumstances, more conducive to a deliberate and intensely spiritual piece of work. Moreover, Nephi's first segment relies a good deal more on his personal writings, perhaps a result of unstable times when effective integration of others' writings would be difficult. Later, presumably under more relaxed circumstances, he quotes much more extensively from other prophetic writings.

Other possible parallels suggest themselves. At the beginning of his record Nephi devotes a great deal of attention to his father, Lehi. His opening verses of his book reflect this preoccupation, as does the fact that his first eight chapters appear to be an abridgment of a record kept by Lehi (see 1 Ne. 1:16–17, 9:1). This preoccupation may be in part a reflection of Nephi's grief at the then-recent death of Lehi. Furthermore, the repeated juxtaposition of the many parallel experiences Lehi and Nephi had (for example, their visions of the tree of life) might also reflect Nephi's sense of indebtedness to his father's example and the feeling of loss at his death. On the other hand, the Lehi–Nephi parallels might also imply that Nephi, experiencing challenges to his leadership during the difficult years of establishing the Nephite colony in its new wilderness home, wants to strengthen and legitimize his leadership by identifying himself with the past leader, Lehi.

“Do you read the scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago?” Brigham Young asked. “Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so.”⁴ It is in the spirit of this challenge that we have tried to stand in Nephi’s shoes and consider how the circumstances of his life might have influenced the writing of his record. And while the observations made in this discussion are necessarily speculative and inconclusive, they tend to suggest that Nephi’s record is circumstantially self-consistent, in addition to being structurally and (as we will see below) thematically cohesive.

THE THEMATIC UNITY OF 1 AND 2 NEPHI

In addition to the structural aspects of unity in Nephi’s writings discussed so far, other meaningful thematic threads or leitmotifs can be seen to weave throughout and strengthen the cohesion of 1 and 2 Nephi. Two such patterns, a “records theme” and the use of archetypes, are elaborated below.

The Records Theme

If so inclined, one could interpret 1 and 2 Nephi as a nonstop commentary on the importance of records. An urgent emphasis on records infects the whole of Nephi’s writings. It is first demonstrated by Nephi’s commitment to obtaining the brass plates from Laban; it is sustained by his repeated descriptions of the important records to be revealed in the last days (1 Ne. 13:35–41, 2 Ne. 27); and it is confirmed by his reverent reliance on other prophets’ writing in piecing his own record together.

These explicit references, however, give only a partial picture of the “records theme” in Nephi’s writings. First, one should consider the passages where Nephi describes the role of records in his own personal development. At the outset, Nephi states that his “goodly” father taught him in all his learning. From this and other passages (1 Ne. 1:1, 16–17; 19:1), a strong impression emerges that Nephi’s education (both literary and spiritual) stems from Lehi and his record and that this precedent helps inspire Nephi to make a record of his own proceedings in his father’s language (1 Ne. 1:1–3). One finds repeatedly that reviewing or rehearsing the contents of sacred records leads Lehi and Nephi to great spiritual experiences. Lehi, after reading from the brass plates, is filled with the Spirit and led to great prophesying (1 Ne. 5:10–22). Similarly, Nephi is filled with the power of God after reciting the scriptural account of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Ne. 17:23–55). Nephi further

experiences “workings in the spirit” following his recitation of the teachings of Zenock, Zenos, and Neum (1 Ne. 19:10–20).

Another valuable message about records is indirectly conveyed by the faith and devotion Nephi shows in the task of record keeping. We learn early on that these duties require Nephi to abridge Lehi’s record and keep not one but two records of his own (1 Ne. 1:16–17; 6:1; 9). We later discover that on his second record Nephi must laboriously rewrite much of what he has already written on his first record, notwithstanding the fact that he has only a vague idea of the second record’s purpose (1 Ne. 19:1–2; 9:5). Furthermore, Nephi compiles this heavily repetitive second record during the extremely busy years which follow his colony’s separation from the followers of Laman and Lemuel (2 Ne. 5:28–34).

Given Nephi’s busy schedule, the manual and literary difficulty of record keeping, and Nephi’s serious attitude about this work, one might well expect him to experience periodic and even poignant moments of frustration. Indeed, it appears that he did. Evidence of this is found in the middle of Nephi’s most extensive comparison of the large and small plates, shortly after he affirms that everything he has written thus far on the small plates has already been described in greater detail in his other record (1 Ne. 19:1–2). In other words, after years of painstaking work under stressful circumstances, Nephi is admitting that what he has written on the small plates is neither unique nor complete—and this appears to trouble him.

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.

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.
(1 Ne. 19:5–6)

One perceives here an element of tension in Nephi’s saying that a later portion of his record will contain “more sacred things” while he also maintains that everything he has written on plates is sacred. This tension between “sacred” and “more sacred” things and between “these plates” and Nephi’s first record is evidently related to the fact that he is not fully aware of the precise purpose of the small plates (1 Ne. 9:5). A further indication that this is the source of some dissonance is that Nephi apparently feels compelled to discuss the relationship between the two sets of plates no less than six times in his precious small account (1 Ne. 1:16–17; 6; 9; 19:1–6; 2 Ne. 4:14–15; 5:28–33). This costly repetition seems to suggest that Nephi’s own mind is not clear on the matter.

Additional evidence of Nephi's self-doubt about his performance as a record keeper is found in the phrase "And now, if I do err." This suggestion of self-criticism should not be exaggerated, inasmuch as Nephi qualifies it by saying that "even did they [the ancient prophets] err of old." Nevertheless, Nephi's twinge of doubt takes on concrete meaning when he apparently decides to change his mode of record keeping, for he immediately changes the content of his writing and shifts to transcribing excerpts from the brass plate writings of Zenock, Zenos, Neum, and Isaiah (1 Ne. 19–22), thereby adding an entirely new dimension to the small plates.

Nephi's Heroes

Nephi's reverence for records is indicative of a profound interest in the religious past of his people. Records were intended to preserve not only the commandments of the Lord (1 Ne. 4:15), but also an awareness of the Nephites' ancestors and a realization of their foreknowledge of the Nephites' destiny (1 Ne. 19:21–22). As we shall see below, the intertwining of Nephite experience with the lives and prophecies of the ancients is a central feature of Nephi's writing.

The first heroic forebear revealed in Nephi's writing is his father Lehi, with whom he spares no effort to identify himself. His first-mentioned aspiration is to keep a record as Lehi did. He recounts his pouring out his soul in prayer and receiving a prophetic calling immediately after his account of Lehi doing the same things (1 Ne. 1–2). Nephi sees the tree of life vision entrusted to Lehi (1 Ne. 8, 11–14) and receives the same vow from the Lord that he would be led to a promised land (1 Ne. 2:20; 5:5; 2 Ne. 1:5). Finally, Nephi flees into the wilderness from Laman and Lemuel, just as Lehi fled from Jerusalem.

Nephi also knew that he and Lehi fit into a broader pattern, one set by earlier prophets who kept records, prayed, and went into the wilderness to gain a promised land. For example, he makes repeated reference to Moses as a prophetic prototype. Just prior to the final attempt to acquire the brass plates from Laban, Nephi compares this challenge to Moses dividing the waters of the Red Sea (1 Ne. 4:2) in seeking to persuade his brothers that the Lord would empower them to accomplish their appointed task. His account gives compelling proof of his argument, for after invoking the Mosaic model of faith, Nephi penetrates Jerusalem and finds Laban by being "led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do" (1 Ne. 4:6). A near carbon copy of this experience occurs later, when Nephi rebukes Laman and Lemuel for not helping construct a ship. Here Nephi recalls Moses' difficulties in the Exodus, likening his

brothers to the rebellious Israelites and identifying himself with Moses. Significantly, immediately after he rehearses that archetypal story, Nephi is filled with the same power of God which he has just described in Moses, and thoroughly confounds his defiant brothers (1 Ne. 17:23–55).

But of all the ancient prophets he cites, Joseph is probably the most important to Nephi. This judgment rests primarily on Nephi's written references to Joseph, but it is reinforced by the uncanny parallels that connect them. Both Joseph and Nephi were young sons with wicked elder brothers, in a culture that favored firstborn males. Yet both were promised they would rule over their elder brothers and were hated for it. After divine intervention saved Nephi and Joseph from death at the hands of their brothers, they each led their families out of their homeland to preserve them from destruction and famine, respectively. Finally, both families sought internal reconciliation through blessings bestowed by dying patriarchs.

Nephi's unique identification with Joseph is underscored by the exclusive nature of his first references to Joseph, inserted poignantly into his account of Lehi reading the brass plates. Here Lehi learns he is a descendant of Joseph "who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine" (1 Ne. 5:14). This synopsis of Joseph's ministry sticks out in Nephi's record because it calls to mind the very similar mission that Nephi would fulfill for his family. Secondly, it is injected into a very sweeping context. Lehi's reading about Adam and Eve and the prophets down to Jeremiah, followed by his prophecies about the ultimate future of the brass plates and his descendants, endow these verses (10–19) in 1 Nephi 5 with a scope that encompasses virtually the entire history of the earth. Of all the prophets who could have been mentioned, only Joseph's special mission is referred to. It must therefore be no coincidence that Nephi gives exclusive honor to Joseph when he summarizes Lehi's genealogy by saying, "It sufficeth me to say that we are a descendant of Joseph" (1 Ne. 6:2, 1920 ed.).

Nephi's longest reference to Joseph occurs near the end of the "historical" segment of his record. It, too, involves Lehi, as he gives his dying blessing to his youngest son who was named Joseph. This chapter, 2 Nephi 3, is perhaps best known for Lehi's prophecies of a "choice seer" to be raised up who would be named Joseph. Latter-day Saints believe this to be a specific prophecy about the mission of Joseph Smith. But to Nephi, Lehi's blessing seems to be equally important for its purposeful bonding to the great Joseph in the Nephites' past.

It is clear from Lehi's blessing that his son Joseph embodied a connection with Joseph of old to which Lehi ascribed great significance.

The intimacy of the connection is suggested by Lehi's mention of his son Joseph's birth "in the days of my greatest sorrow" (v. 1); this suggests that naming the baby after Joseph of old may have been a heartfelt effort to give meaning to the great suffering Lehi's family experienced in the wilderness. That is, the boy would be a reminder that, as Lehi goes on to say in his blessing, the earlier Joseph "truly saw our day" and prophesied that a "righteous branch" would be broken off from the house of Israel and would play an important role in the Lord's latter-day work (v. 5). By reproducing Lehi's full blessing in his record, Nephi demonstrates his own deep affinity for Joseph. His intent is to show that Joseph made unsurpassed prophecies and received remarkable promises from the Lord, and that the Nephites figured in both (2 Ne. 3:23–24, 4:2), all of which reinforces the prophetic necessity of the Nephite exodus from Jerusalem.

The points made in Lehi's blessing are brought home with climactic emphasis in Nephi's final reference to Joseph. The passage in question draws some of its power from its location amidst the dynamic, concluding chapters of Nephi's record. Furthermore, having already dwelt on Nephi's painfully intense commitment to keep a meaningful record, we can appreciate deeply his triumphant declaration:

Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand. (2 Ne. 25:21)

This passage is a classic archetypal statement. Nephi clearly believes that his entire life's work fits into a line of purposeful action which extends back to a great hero of old, Joseph, and forward to the end of the world. Nephi sees the enduring contribution of his life, his writings, as intimately connected with Joseph since in the end they will be preserved because of Joseph's promise from the Lord.⁵ If the transcendent tone of his final chapters is any indication, Nephi obviously reveled in the spiritual assurance that this promise gave him.

In summary, one can discern readily that Nephi consistently sought to associate his life and work with ancient prophecies and prophetic precedents. In concert with the "records theme," this pattern can only compound the effect of unity and coherence embodied in the outline of 1 and 2 Nephi identified earlier.

CONCLUSION

By proposing a holistic view of 1 and 2 Nephi, this study has argued that we underestimate Nephi's work if we take it only at face value, that is merely as a collection of instructive but unrelated

incidents, doctrines, and prophecies. Delving into the integrative patterns in Nephi's writing, we obtain a deeper conviction of his authorship of these books and a greater appreciation of his inspiration and intensity as a prophetic writer.

This is not, however, to say that a reader must perceive the underlying elements of unity described here in order to understand Nephi's main messages. Indeed, Nephi's repeated emphasis on plainness and simplicity in writing would seem to preclude his use of complex or intricate methods in order to convey his main points: "for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn" (2 Ne. 25:4). Nevertheless, even though awareness of the unity and internal consistency of 1 and 2 Nephi is not a prerequisite to obtaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon, it is essential to perfecting a testimony of Nephi's authorship of the portion ascribed to him.

It is hoped that the study presented here has demonstrated some of the merit in a holistic approach to the study of scriptural texts. The wide application of this approach seems to face something of an uphill battle. The emphasis of almost all LDS scriptural commentaries, study guides, and lesson plans, as well as reference tools such as the "Topical Guide" inserted in the recent LDS edition of the Bible, is to focus on short passages, phrases, or even single words of scripture. Rarely is the reader guided toward contemplation of thematic developments in or the organizational structure of a given chapter, section, or book of inspired writing. Thus, while these study helps play a necessary and valuable role, extra effort is required (to paraphrase an earlier quotation) to grasp a view of the separate stones of inspired writing as parts of a broader, more eloquent, and more convincing structure. Nevertheless, any number of horizons in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants can afford such a view and promise to justify the required labor.

NOTES

¹Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1951), 429.

²Not by coincidence, Nephi's writings are also the focus of Noel B. Reynolds's contribution to broad-gauged scriptural analysis. He analyzes 1 Nephi chapters 2–18 using chiasmus to see whether Nephi had an outline which guided his writing in these chapters. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 53–74.

³Compare the chronological footnotes to 1 Ne. 18:23 and 2 Ne. 5:34. It should also be noted that the vast majority of historical data given in this subsection is concentrated in a few verses in 2 Ne. 4–5.

⁴*Journal of Discourses* 7:333.

⁵It is significant that Moroni, writing some nine hundred years after Nephi, also invokes the archetypal figure of Joseph: "For as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there; wherefore, the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not, even as he was merciful unto the father of Joseph that he should perish not" (Ether 13:7).