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## Contents of the 116 Lost Pages and the Large Plates

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## Chapter 6

# CONTENTS OF THE 116 LOST PAGES AND THE LARGE PLATES

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*Now, behold, I say unto you, that because you delivered up those writings which you had power given unto you to translate by the means of the Urim and Thummim, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them. (D&C 10:1)*

Latter-day Saints are generally aware of the loss of the first 116 pages translated from Mormon's abridgement. Martin Harris, under pressure from his wife to demonstrate that he was not wasting his time and money helping Joseph Smith, begged the prophet to loan him the sheets on which the English translation had been written. Martin lost the sheets and the Lord withdrew from Joseph the plates for a time. When, at length, the angel Moroni returned them, the Lord instructed that the portion already translated should not be redone, for those who had taken the handwritten sheets planned to alter their content in an attempt to discredit the work.

In place of the lost material, Joseph was to translate from another set of plates—often called the “small plates”—that had been prepared by Nephi and passed down to the time of King Benjamin. This translation comprises the earliest portion of our present Book of Mormon, from 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon. The story of the loss of the 116 pages is found in sections 3 and 10 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Nephi explained that he had prepared two sets of plates. The larger set contained “a full account of the history of my

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people,” including “an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people.” The smaller set of plates comprised “an account engraven of the ministry of my people” (1 Nephi 9:2-4; see also 1 Nephi 19:1-6; 2 Nephi 5:30-33).

The small plates were passed to Nephi’s brother Jacob, with a charge that he and his descendants write on them only sacred things. Like Nephi, Jacob and his descendant Jarom noted the difference in content of the small and large plates of Nephi (Jacob 1:2-4; 7:26; Jarom 1:14).

In translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith never worked with the large plates of Nephi. Rather, he received from Moroni the abridgment of that earlier record prepared by Moroni’s father, Mormon, along with the small plates, which Mormon had found and which he included with his abridgment (Words of Mormon 1:1-9).

### ***THE BOOK OF LEHI***

Joseph Smith included, in the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon, a preface in which he wrote about the loss of the 116 pages:

I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some persons or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again.

The Book of Lehi probably comprised only part—though perhaps the largest portion—of the contents of the lost pages, for the account in the book of Mosiah begins near the end of the reign of King Benjamin, about four and a half centuries after Lehi left Jerusalem. Mormon must have abridged other records that had

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been written during that interval.

### *HINTS FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON*

Despite the loss of the 116 pages, our current Book of Mormon contains hints as to its contents. Brigham Young University professor S. Kent Brown has noted, for example, items in the writings of Nephi (1-2 Nephi) that seem to be abridged from the record of Lehi.<sup>1</sup>

Later portions of the Book of Mormon provide information that is not in the extant writings of Nephi. For example, Alma described to his son Helaman the device the Lord provided to guide Lehi's family during their travels through the wilderness and across the ocean:

And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness. And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 3, "Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi," in S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998). The chapter is a revised version of his "Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source," *BYU Studies* 24/1 (winter 1984): 9-42.

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day. Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions. (Alma 37:38-42)

Alma's explanation includes information not found in the record kept on the small plates, suggesting that he drew it from the large plates of Nephi, which may therefore have been in the 116 lost pages. For example, while Nephi refers to the device as a "ball" (1 Nephi 16:10, 16, 26-28, 30; 2 Nephi 5:12) or a "compass" (2 Nephi 5:12; 18:12, 21), the term "Liahona" is unique to Alma's account.

Another unique element in Alma's record is the idea that because Lehi's family "forgot to exercise their faith and diligence . . . they did not progress in their journey; therefore they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst" (Alma 37:41-42). Nephi indeed stresses that "the pointers which were in the ball . . . did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them" (1 Nephi 16:28). He further noted that "the ball . . . led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:16). But he never suggests, as does Alma, that their progress in traveling through the wilderness had been impeded or that it was their lack faith in the ball that led to hunger and thirst.<sup>2</sup> Alma probably drew this

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<sup>2</sup> Nephi does note that he was able to "slay wild beasts" for food after his father had consulted the ball, but he never says, in the account on the small plates, that their hunger had resulted from not paying attention to the directions given by the ball. And while it is true Nephi noted that their progress across the ocean was impeded until he was able to consult "the compass" (1 Nephi 18:12-13, 21), Alma's wording suggests that "they did not progress in their journey . . . in the wilderness"

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additional information from the large plates, and it may have been part of Mormon's abridgement of that record, the translation of which Martin Harris lost.

King Benjamin also seems to have relied on the large plates of Nephi for his account of the "ball or director," for he notes that Lehi's family "did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back, and incurred the displeasure of God upon them; and therefore they were smitten with famine and sore afflictions" (Mosiah 1:16-17).<sup>3</sup> The fact that both Benjamin and Alma used the same words--"progress in their journey"--to describe what happened to Lehi's group, and that these words are not found in Nephi's account on the small plates suggests that they were derived from a common source, the large plates, the source of the abridgement from which the 116 pages were later translated.

### *EARLY RELATIONS WITH THE LAMANITES*

Following the death of Lehi in the New World, Nephi's brothers sought to kill him. To avoid that danger, Nephi took those who would follow him and "did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days," settling in a place they called Nephi (2 Nephi 5:1-8).

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(Alma 37:41-42), thus referring to an earlier time when the family traveled in the desert. Alma does refer to the ocean crossing in Alma 37:44.

<sup>3</sup> Nephi refers to being "driven back" during the ocean crossing while he had been bound by his brothers and was unable to consult the compass (1 Nephi 18:13). While it is conceivable that King Benjamin was referring to this event, Nephi never mentions "famine" (the word used by Benjamin) in connection with that event. One could suggest that the "sore afflictions" and famine in Benjamin's version of the story refers to 1 Nephi 18:19, in which we read that "Jacob and Joseph also, being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother." But this may not have been a general lack of food for the group, only that Sariah's younger sons were not being properly nourished because of their mother's illness (1 Nephi 18:18), perhaps from seasickness due to the storm (1 Nephi 18:15). This may even suggest that one or both of them were still being nursed.

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Despite this geographical separation, the two peoples seem to have maintained some level of contact. By the fortieth year after the group's departure from Jerusalem, they were already engaged in armed conflict (2 Nephi 5:34). But the contacts seem to have gone beyond that level, for Jacob, Nephi's brother, was aware of both the Lamanite sub-tribes (Jacob 1:13-14) and suggested that the Nephites had "done greater iniquities than the Lamanites," whom he called "our brethren" (Jacob 2:35). He especially noted that the Lamanites were monogamous, whereas some Nephites had begun taking wives and concubines, and that the Lamanite "husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children" (Jacob 3:3-7).

Jacob also noted "that many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually" (Jacob 7:24; see also verse 26).

Jacob's son Enos prayed for the Lamanites (Enos 1:11) and also noted:

The people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us . . . And I saw wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days.

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(Enos 1:20, 24)

Enos's son Jarom also recorded details about the Lamanites:

And they were scattered upon much of the face of the land, and the Lamanites also. And they were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites; and they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts. And it came to pass that they came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands, and began to fortify our cities, or whatsoever place of our inheritance . . . And thus being prepared to meet the Lamanites, they did not prosper against us. (Jarom 1:6-7, 9; see also verse 13)

Omni, another of Jacob's descendants, also wrote of the wars with the Lamanites, adding that during an especially "serious war . . . king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:2, 10, 23-24).

Statements such as these suggest that the earliest generations of Nephites were well acquainted with Lamanite culture and that they continued to have contact with them, both in missionary efforts and in acts of warfare initiated by the Lamanites. It is reasonable to assume that the 116 pages included even more detail about these matters than the small plates, particularly in view of the fact that Nephi himself intended that the large plates contain information about "the wars and contentions of my people" (1 Nephi 9:4; 19:4; Jacob 3:13), some of which he had foreseen in vision (1 Nephi 12:3; 2 Nephi 26:2).

The account contained in the 116 pages may also have



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contained information that would clarify the question of whether Lehi's family encountered other people upon their arrival in the New World and whether the Lamanites may have merged with such people.<sup>4</sup>

### ***THE HILL NORTH OF SHILOM***

Mosiah 11:13, describing the construction efforts of King Noah in the land of Nephi, has passing reference to "the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land." This undoubtedly relates to the flight of the first Mosiah and his people from the land of Nephi, described in Omni 1:12:

Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness--And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him. And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla.

The importance of this geographical note is stressed by the fact that a group of Nephites led by Zeniff later returned to the

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion, see John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992).

## THE HILL NORTH OF SHILOM

land of Lehi and settled there under Lamanite suzerainty, but, after suffering much oppression, they fled once again. We read that they traveled “around the land of Shilom,” then “bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren” (Mosiah 22:8, 11). Clearly, Shilom was on a direct line between Nephi and Zarahemla, and was the course taken by the earlier group led by Mosiah.

Not wanting the Lamanites to see their departure, the group led by Ammon did not take the direct route, but “did depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds, and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness,” then corrected their course after they were at a safe distance from the Lamanite city of Shemlon, which was near Shilom (Mosiah 11:12; 24:1; Alma 23:12).

One wonders how the hill north of Shilom served as “a resort” to Mosiah’s group when they fled from the land of Nephi. It is likely that the answer would have been found in the 116 lost pages.

## ***THE CITY AND LAND OF NEPHI***

We have already noted that the city of Nephi was built in the time of the original Nephi and named after him (2 Nephi 5:8). We have also noted Mosiah’s flight from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla, where they merged with the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12-19). Two generations later, a group of Nephites led by one Zeniff decided to return to Nephi.

While the records of this time period always denominated it “the land of Nephi” (Omni 1:27; Mosiah 9:1, 14-15; 19:15, 19, 22, 24; 20:7; 21:21, 26; 23:35-38; 27:16), the city is sometimes called Nephi (Mosiah 20:3; 21:1, 12) and sometimes Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:1-3, 21; 9:6, 8). It is possible that the Lamanites who had moved into the city following Mosiah’s departure changed the name to Lehi, not wanting to commemorate the name of the hated Nephi. But the Nephites continued to call it Nephi, though they

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often merged the Lamanite and Nephite names in the form Lehi-Nephi.<sup>5</sup> The 116 pages may have described the Lamanite takeover of the city and the name change.

Zeniff readily convinced the Lamanite king to move his people out of the cities of Lehi-Nephi and to allow the newly-arrived Nephites to settle in their place (Mosiah 9:6-7). One might wonder why the Lamanites would so readily desert their houses and lands. The answer probably lies in the fact that they were still principally a nomadic people (Enos 1:20; Alma 22:28). They had evidently not kept the former Nephite cities in repair, for Zeniff's people were obligated "to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom" (Mosiah 9:8).

### ***THE EARLY NEPHITE KINGS***

Nephi noted that, "Upon the other [large] plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the *kings*, and the wars and contentions of my people" (1 Nephi 9:4, emphasis added). Consequently, the writers of the small plates said very little about their kings, referring their readers to "the larger plates" which spoke of "the reigns of their kings" (Jacob 3:13). Jacob noted in passing the appointment of Nephi's successor, without naming him (Jacob 1:9, 15). He informs us that, in memory of Nephi, their first king (2 Nephi 5:18; 6:2), the people conferred the name Nephi on each of their kings (Jacob 1:10-11).

This practice was discontinued some time before the ascension of the first Mosiah to the throne (Omni 1:12). He and his son and grandson (Benjamin and Mosiah) were the last of the Nephite kings and all were known by their given names rather than the throne-name Nephi.

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<sup>5</sup> After the arrival of the sons of Mosiah II to teach the Lamanites, the Nephite record never again uses the compound name Lehi-Nephi, but refers to the then-Lamanite capital by its original name, Nephi.

## THE EARLY NEPHITE KINGS

We do not know when the practice ceased, but there may be a clue in the wording of Mosiah 18:4, in which we read of the mission of Alma the elder:

And it came to pass that as many as did believe him did go forth to a place which was called Mormon, having received its name from the king, being in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts.

On the surface, one might suspect that it was King Noah, who reigned in Nephi in Alma's time, who had given the name Mormon to the site. But there is another possibility. In an unpublished paper, Charles Eads has suggested that the king from whom the place received its name was a man named Mormon and that he was one of the Nephite kings who reigned in the land of Nephi before the departure of Mosiah. Eads draws attention to the Nephite practice described in Alma 8:7:

Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

If Mormon was, indeed, the name of an early Nephite king, he would surely have been mentioned in the 116 lost pages.

### ***TEACHINGS AND REVELATIONS OF LEHI AND NEPHI***

Some of the teachings of Lehi and Nephi were recorded on the large plates. Nephi wrote:

For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them, according to his word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon

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mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates. (2 Nephi 4:14)

S. Kent Brown has noted that one of the teachings of Lehi that is not mentioned until after that prophet's death was that his family should not engage in plural marriage (Jacob 3:5).<sup>6</sup> The precise words delivered to Lehi (see Jacob 2:34) are evidently the ones cited by Jacob in Jacob 2:23-33. Presumably, they were recorded on the large plates of Nephi and may have been included in Mormon's abridgement thereof and, consequently, in the 116 lost pages.

### *THE LAMANITE CURSE*

In his account written on the small plates, Nephi recorded the curse that had come upon the Lamanites:

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done. (2 Nephi 5:21-23)

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<sup>6</sup> S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*, 43-44.

## THE LAMANITE CURSE

Centuries later, Alma discussed this curse (Alma 3:6-17), but includes verbiage not found in Nephi's account:

Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them. And again: I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also. And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed. And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed. (Alma 3:14-17)

Because Alma cites precise words of the Lord to Nephi that are not found in the account on the small plates, it seems evident that he must be reporting what was found on the large plates. Again, assuming that Mormon included some of those words in his abridgement, they may have been lost with the 116 pages.

### ***THE PROMISE OF PROSPERITY***

The Lord promised Lehi and Nephi that their descendants would prosper in the land if they kept his commandments, but that they would be cut off if they disobeyed him (1 Nephi 2:20; 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:9, 20; 4:4). Subsequent generations frequently cited this promise (Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22, 31; Alma 9:13; 36:30; 37:13; 38:1; 48:25). The Lord's precise words are recited twice on the small plates: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my command-

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ments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 1:20; 2 Nephi 4:4).<sup>7</sup>

But the words of the promise “which he [God] spake unto Lehi” (Alma 50:19) are recorded differently in Alma 50:20: “Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.” Presumably, this verbiage was drawn from the large plates, and hence may have appeared in the lost 116 pages.

### *NEPHITE RULES OF BATTLE*

In the time of Alma and Moroni, the Lamanites attacked the Nephites, who fought hard “for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church” (Alma 43:45).

And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands,

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<sup>7</sup> The two passages are identical except that 2 Nephi 4:4 uses “and” where 2 Nephi 1:20 employs “but.” The original Nephite record would not have reflected this difference, however, since the Hebrew conjunction *w-* can be translated either way (as in the King James Bible). In this case, the contrastive “but” is appropriate, though “and” is more literal.

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their country, and their rights, and their religion.  
(Alma 43:46-47)

From D&C 98:32-44, we learn that this commandment had been given to “Nephi, and thy fathers, Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and all mine ancient prophets and apostles . . . that they should not go out unto battle” unless commanded, and that they should thrice “lift up a standard of peace” to aggressors before they would be justified in taking action (see also verses 23-31). This would explain the reference to the first and second offenses in Alma 43:46.

Though the Lord told Joseph Smith that Nephi had received this commandment, it is nowhere recorded in 1-2 Nephi. The account of the Lord’s words in Alma must therefore have been drawn from the large plates of Nephi translated as part of the 116 pages lost.

### *OTHER POSSIBLE EXAMPLES*

Near the end of his ministry, Alma blessed his son Helaman and pronounced a curse on the land.

And he said: Thus saith the Lord  
God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land,  
unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,  
unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they  
are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for  
this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon  
the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with  
the least degree of allowance. (Alma 45:16)

While it is possible that Alma was reporting the Lord’s words to him, it is also possible that he was citing an earlier divine declaration. Certainly the concept was known to both Lehi and Nephi. While blessing his children, Lehi declared,

Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him



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whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever. (2 Nephi 1:7)

Two of Lehi's sons, Nephi (1 Nephi 17:38) and Jacob (Jacob 2:29; 3:3) expressed the same thought, and the Lord said something similar to Jacob's son Enos (Enos 1:10). None of these is worded the same as Alma's quote of the Lord. If Alma was citing an earlier revelation, he may have read it on the large plates of Nephi. During an earlier discourse, Alma cited another revelation that may have come from the same source:

For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them. (Mosiah 7:29)

### *CONCLUSION*

From various passages found throughout later Book of Mormon accounts, especially concerning the life of Lehi and his immediate family, we can glean a few insights into the contents of the large plates of Nephi. Some, if not all, of these elements, likely made it into Mormon's abridgement of the large plates and were part of Joseph Smith's translation of the 116 pages lost when he loaned them to Martin Harris.