



Type: Journal Article

Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture, Chapters 6 - 8

Author(s): Brant A. Gardner

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 35 (2020), pp. 107-166

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Abstract: No abstract available.

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 35 · 2020 · Pages 107 - 166

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

Brant A. Gardner

Offprint Series

© 2019 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org. You may subscribe to this journal at InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription.

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

Brant A. Gardner

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

Chapter 6: Mormon, Special Considerations

The Problem of the Lost Pages

Mormon wrote a cohesive book that set out his arguments explaining the destruction of his people and his hope in Christ. Sadly, we have only part of that book. The sculpture known as Venus de Milo is still beautiful without arms, but it must have been even more beautiful before they were lost. So it is with Mormon's book. It is a marvelous work and a wonder, but what wonder might it have been had we all that he wrote.

That became impossible when the only manuscript copy of the translation to date was given to Martin Harris, and it was lost.¹³⁵ Lucy Mack Smith described the scene when Joseph learned of the lost manuscript:

135. Michael Hubbard Mackay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 93–97, discuss the incident of the loss of the 116 manuscript pages. See another account in Matthew Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 66–67.

Oh! My God My God said Joseph clenching his hands together all is lost is lost what shall I do I have sinned it is me that tempted the wrath God by asking him to that which I had no right to do ask as I was differently instructed by the angel — and he wept to like and groaned walking the floor continually¹³⁶

To add to the normal human despair that accompanied the loss of so much work that had been so long awaited, Joseph had to endure the Lord's very specific disapproval. Later appearing as D&C 3, the following comes from the manuscript version recorded in the Revelations Book 1:

Remember Remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated but the works of men for although a man may have many Revelations & have power to do many Mighty works yet if he boast in his own strength & Sets at naught the councils of God & follows after the dictates of his will & carnal desires he must fall to the Earth & incur the vengeance of a Just God upon him behold you have been intrusted with those things but strict was your commandment & Remember also the Promises which were made to you if you transgressed them & behold how oft you have transgressed them Laws of God & have gone on in the Persuasions of men for behold you should not have feared men more then God although men set at naught the councils of God & dispise his words yet you should have been faithful & he would have extended his arm & supported you against all the firey darts of the advisary & he would have been with you in evry time of trouble behold thou art Joseph & thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord but because of transgression thou mayest fall but remember God is merciful therefore repent of that which thou hast done & he will only cause thee to be afflicted for a season & thou art still chosen & will & will again be called to the work & except Thou do this thou shalt be delivered up & become as other men & have no more gift & when thou deliveredst up that Which that which God had given thee right to Translate thou deliveredest up that which was Sacred into the hands of a wicked man who has Set at naught the Councils of God &

136. Lucy Mack Smith, *Lucy's Book. A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 418, taken from Lucy's 1844–45 manuscript.

hath broken the most Sacred promises which was made before God & hath depended upon his own Judgement & boasted in his own arm wisdom & this is the reason that thou hast lost thy Privileges for a Season for thou hast suffered that the council of thy directors to be tramped upon from the begining¹³⁷

The solution was to abandon the book of Lehi entirely.¹³⁸ There was a great fear that if Joseph were to translate again, the first manuscript might reappear and any differences between the first and second translation would be used to discredit the whole process. Specifically, it was thought the first translation might have been modified to guarantee the damning differences. The manuscript for D&C 10 has the Lord saying:

Shall publish it as the Record of Nephi & thus I will confound those which have altered my words I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work yea I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil Behold thy they have only got a part or an abridgement of the account of Nephi Behold there are many things engraven on the Plates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my Gospel therefore it is wisdom in me that ye should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi & send forth in this work¹³⁹

Nevertheless, not everything Joseph had translated was given to Martin Harris. Some small portion was kept for D&C 10:41 records: “Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the Plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained” (D&C 10:41). Because we have the end of Benjamin’s reign in the book of Mosiah, it is probable that some portion of at least our Mosiah chapter 1 was the retained text.¹⁴⁰

137. Joseph Smith, “Revelation Book 1,” The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-book-1/3>.

138. D&C 10:30, “Behold, I say unto you, that you shall not translate again those words which have gone forth out of your hands.”

139. Smith, “Revelation Book 1.” For the full context, see D&C 10.

140. An important hypothesis about the relationship between Words of Mormon and the lost part of Mosiah may be found in Jacob M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 51, no. 4 (2012): 121–36. I have disagreed with their hypothesis; that rebuttal may be found in Brant A. Gardner, “When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson’s

Precisely how much of the book of Mosiah was lost is difficult to determine. Royal Skousen looked at the way chapter numbers were entered on the printer's manuscript and noted that our current chapter I was originally III, with two of the numbers crossed out to leave us with chapter I.¹⁴¹ Thus, there could have been two missing chapters. Skousen speculates that the first chapter would have been the beginning of the reign of Mosiah, including the ascension of Benjamin, with the second chapter dealing with the reign of Benjamin.¹⁴² That speculation is based on two foundational ideas. The first is that there are two missing chapters based on the changed number in Mosiah, and the second is that the chapters would have followed conceptual units based on events that go together. Each premise is problematic.

First, while there has been a change from an original number III to I, that evidence comes from the printer's manuscript, not the original. The original is not extant at this point, so we have no idea what the original numbering might have been. Since the numbers, even in the printer's manuscript, were added later, we are seeing Oliver's ideas more clearly than Mormon's in the numbering of chapters. Indeed, while Mormon created chapters, there is no evidence that he numbered them.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, chapter beginnings for Mosiah are missing in the original manuscript. However, in the book of Alma, we have a good indication that Oliver would write the word "Chapter" and then return to number the chapters. The first appears for Alma XV, and Skousen notes that the number itself is in a heavier ink flow.¹⁴⁴ This would appear to suggest that, as in other cases, the word "Chapter" was written as part of the text, and the number was added at a later point. Similarly, there is an ink flow difference between the word "Chapter" and the number XVI.¹⁴⁵ This tells us that when Oliver scribed, he entered the numbers after the fact. Since all he had ever seen was what we currently have, Oliver had never seen chapter numbers until he added them. This suggests that he had no guide for the beginning of the book of Mosiah and created the numbers based on his reading after the translation was completed. While there is missing content at the beginning of the book

'When Pages Collide,' *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 105–19. See also the section in this book "Words of Mormon."

141. Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 6, no. 1 (1994): 138.

142. *Ibid.*, 139.

143. *Ibid.*, 138.

144. Skousen, *Volume 1: The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 1:267.

145. *Ibid.*, 281.

of Mosiah, we have no way to know how many chapters would have been involved. It appears that the change in the chapter numbers came from Oliver's misreading Omni as chapter I of Mosiah.¹⁴⁶

Skousen is certainly correct that the ascensions of both Mosiah₁ and Benjamin would have been part of the book of Mosiah. While that gives us two logical "chapters," Mormon didn't create chapters according to that type of division. If Mormon recorded any of Mosiah₁'s sermons,¹⁴⁷ the ending of that sermon might have created a chapter even if the story of Mosiah₁ were not finished. Since the evidence from the printer's manuscript cannot tell us about the original chapters, there might have been more than the suggested two chapters.

The Lost Pages: What Must Have Been on Them

If we knew exactly what was on the 116 pages, they wouldn't be lost. Nevertheless, there are some hints and some ways to reconstruct possibilities for what was on them.¹⁴⁸

It is a rare member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who isn't familiar with the beginning of the Book of Mormon: "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents ... " It seems fitting that the first thing we encounter is the identification of the person writing what we will be reading. We have a similar beginning in Mormon 8:1 when Moroni undertakes finishing his father's book: "Behold I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon." When Moroni begins his own eponymous book, he similarly introduces himself: "Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared ... " (Moroni 1:1).

Jacob doesn't have an "I, Jacob" beginning, though he does introduce himself in the first sentence: "Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates" (Jacob 1:1). We then have "I, Enos" (Enos 1:1); "I, Jarom" (Jarom 1:1); "I, Omni" (Omni 1:1); "I, Amaron" (Omni 1:4); "I, Chemish" (Omni 1:9); "I, Abinadom" (Omni 1:10), and "I am Amaleki"

146. Gardner, "When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson's 'When Pages Collide,'" 111–13.

147. I suggest that there was at least one. Benjamin references a speech from Mosiah₁ that spoke of listening to the evil spirit. See Mosiah 2:32–33, 37, and the theme as it is referenced in Alma 3:27.

148. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Rediscovering the Book of Lehi* (forthcoming). It will doubtless be the work to consult when published. Some of Bradley's suggestions are contained in his thesis: Don Bradley, "American Proto-Zionism and the 'Book of Lehi': Recontextualizing the Rise of Mormonism" (thesis, Utah State University, 2018).

(Omni 1:12). Those who wrote their own story on the plates consistently introduced themselves by name.

These personal introductions identify the holographic writer. Both Nephi and Mormon tell us about their youth, and Enos tells a personal story, but most simply identify themselves as the writer. What we don't have is Mormon's introduction of himself as the editor/compiler of the Book of Mormon. Mormon's book was uniquely conceived and executed. Where others recorded history, or what they perceived to fit the mandate of the "more sacred things" (1 Nephi 19:5) for the small plates, Mormon created a work that used history for the overarching purpose that the Jew and Gentile "might not be destroyed" and that they could be convinced that "Jesus is the Christ" (Title Page). There was no precedent for Mormon's work in the brass plates, no precedent in the large Plates of Nephi, and as modern readers we can find, no precedent in either the Old or New Testaments.

What Mormon did was unique, and at some point he needed to tell us what he was doing; it is logical that he would do so. We don't have it. I believe we may safely posit that such an introduction must have existed. In the realm of informed speculation, I offer what might logically have been the original beginning of the Book of Mormon, even prior to the beginning of the book of Lehi:

- There was a "Words of Mormon" preface before the book of Lehi, just as Mormon inserted a "Words of Mormon" as an explanatory introduction to the small plates.
- The first sentence of the original lost text would have begun: "Now I, Mormon, [verb]." This is based on both the beginning of Words of Mormon and the book of Mormon. It is also corroborated by Mormon's strong tendency to begin chapters with "And now," and "And now it came to pass." The latter would not have been used because it requires a continuation of events already discussed, and this was a beginning. Also, the initial "and" would have been left off as there was no preceding text. All the "I, Mormon" statements have a verb following "I, Mormon." He would have included a description of the plates of Nephi as his source. This is based on Mormon's headers that introduce new sources. If he was that careful to designate the alternate sources, he certainly would have introduced his main source at the beginning.
- He would have included a statement about his purpose.

It would be comforting to think that Moroni's title page referenced his father's purposes directly rather than creating some new purpose.

- He would have noted that the spirit had indicated that he should write. If he notes the spirit's influence in Words of Mormon 1:7, he certainly would have at the beginning of the whole record.
- There would have been a statement that he couldn't write the hundredth part of the history. He consistently uses that phrase in "I, Mormon" introductions which also accompany comments about his writing.
- There would have been some admonition to the future readers. It would have made a fitting bookend to his work if he addressed at the beginning some of the same themes he did when he concluded his work in Mormon 7.

Speculating on the book of Lehi, I offer the following suggestions. It must be emphasized that what would have been in the book of Lehi would be what Mormon selected from the large plates. There are certainly times where the small plates recorded the same events as on the large plates, but it is important to remember that Mormon used the large plates. The stories might similarly tell of the Nephite beginnings, but the language would not have been the same.

The evidence for the following suggestions comes mostly from hints in Mormon's extant writing. I have ordered the list according to what I suspect the appearance in the text would have been.

- Nephi tells us that he created and wrote the history on the large plates (1 Nephi 9:4, 19:4). The book of Lehi was named in honor of his father, not because his father ever wrote any of it. Nephi, as the writer, probably included some kind of "I, Nephi" beginning on the large plates.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps it was similar to that in 1 Nephi 1:1, but I doubt that Nephi's literary sensibilities would have allowed an exact replication. We can't tell if Mormon would have quoted this beginning. Probably not. Thus, we would have Mormon's description of Nephi rather than the first-person introduction.
- Very early, and probably on the first engraved plate of the large plates, Nephi would have indicated that he made the plates (since he reiterates their creation in the text on the small

149. Nephi uses "I, Nephi" at the beginning of nearly every chapter he wrote on the small plates. We would certainly expect it here.

plates, he certainly would have done so on the large plates). He would have proposed the charter for the plates, that they contain the acts of the rulers and the wars and contentions. Mormon would have wanted to include this information.

- Nephi would have indicated that he had other plates (Doctrine and Covenants 10:38–41). It is unclear whether Mormon would have listed them since he appears to have been surprised to find them (Words of Mormon 1:3).
- After introducing the plates, their creation and their purpose, he would have some way of noting that he was telling the story of his people. This would move the narrative from the author-voice into historical time, and the ability to tell the story of the creation of the Nephite peoples.
- I have suggested that 1 Nephi is an ethnogenetic story that followed a typology known from the Old World.¹⁵⁰ That structure would have been even more important in the large plate record. Therefore, I suggest that many of the events we see in our current 1 Nephi would also have been told, though probably in different words, in the large plate book of Lehi.
- The story of Lehi's call as a prophet and command to depart Jerusalem. This is the beginning of the Nephite nation, and ties them to Yahweh's call. That would have been important.
- At some point, Lehi's six-hundred-year prophecy would be recorded. Mormon references the time at the beginning of 3 Nephi although he doesn't relate it to the prophecy at that time. Nevertheless, the only reason to note it at that time (and not use the date of the departure from Jerusalem in any other part of his edited record after Alma) was that it would be fulfilled in the events he is about to discuss in 3 Nephi. That tells us that Mormon must have recorded the prophecy in his own record.
- The return to Jerusalem for the brass plates. Mormon references the brass plates. They were important, and the story of their acquisition would be important to show the continuity of scripture from the Old World to the New, as

150. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:45. For the structure of ethnogenetic stories, see Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100 BCE.*, *Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies* 9 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 149.

well as to define their place as a part of the sacred set of objects passed from king to king (Mosiah 1:16).

- The incident with Laban. Mosiah 1:16 mentions the sword of Laban, therefore, the story of that sword had to have been known.
- The incident with Zoram. Since there are Zoramites in Mormon's text, their origin story would be important. Doctrine and Covenants 3:17 mentions Zoramites, and at that point it had to refer to the lost pages as the translation had not yet begun again.
- The discovery of the Liahona, including some description of travel setbacks if they didn't heed it (see Mosiah 1:17).¹⁵¹
- At some point, the story mentioned Sariah by name. There was also a mention of the walls around Jerusalem, likely as part of the story of the return for the brass plates (because Emma informed Joseph of the pronunciation of Sariah).¹⁵²
- The story of the return for Ishmael's family.
- The birth of Jacob and Joseph in the wilderness. This would be required when noting their functions in the early community in the New World.
- The arrival in the New World. We don't know what the parameters of this story might have been, but it had to be told.
- Lehi's promise of the land (prosperity upon righteousness, no protection of wicked). Mormon emphasizes this theme. Mormon knows that it is linked to Lehi (Alma 50:19).
- The division into Lamanites and Nephites. This is a foundational element of Nephite society. It is well known in Mormon's text without explanation. The explanation

151. Jolie Griffin noticed that the functioning of the Liahona foreshadows the whole of the Nephite foundational promise. It worked upon faith and didn't work without faith. The Nephite foundational promise similarly "worked" with faithfulness and did not protect them without faithfulness.

152. Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* (Jan. 1916), 454:

When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation, and one time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, 'Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?' When I answered, 'Yes,' he replied, 'Oh! [I didn't know.] I was afraid I had been deceived.' He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.

was in the lost pages.

- The establishment of the land and city of Nephi. The fact that Mormon can easily mention the city of Nephi and the land of Nephi means that he had already introduced them.
- The enthronement of the second Nephi as king (as well as mention of those who followed). This is a supposition since the rule of kings was written on the large plates, and Mormon was pretty faithful in presenting the sequence of the rulers. We would expect that there would be at least some mention of the succession of the Nephite kings. None of them are known from the small plates, so we can't speculate on how many there were.
- Frequent mention of wars and how the Nephites ultimately triumphed. It is probable that on some of them, Mormon moralized using the promise of the land.
- It is probable that the final battle that resulted in the loss of the land of Nephi would have been recorded in the book of Lehi. Mormon tends to set up the story of the new dynasty before beginning the book named for the dynasty (this is different for Helaman because of the desire to fit the beginning of the dynasty to the two-katun, forty-year, date).
- If the pattern seen later in the Book of Mormon helps us understand the way the large plates were written, then the story of finding the people of Zarahemla would have been at the end of the book of Lehi.
- The problems of unification due to language and religion would have been introduced.

Less certain but highly likely is the story of the vision of the Tree of Life. That vision was an important introduction to the Atoning Messiah, a theme that continues to be important throughout Nephite scripture. That vision also included prophecy about the final fate of the Nephites. Both the theme of the Atoning Messiah and the ultimate fate of the Nephites would have matched Mormon's selection criteria. If that story was on the large plates, Mormon included it in his book of Lehi.

Speculation on the book of Mosiah:

- The first story in the book of Mosiah would have been the anointing of Mosiah₁ as king over the city and land of Zarahemla.
- A speech from Mosiah₁ would have been included (discussed below).

- “And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah, there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20). Two points are important here, the first is that there is something that requires translating and the second that it was interpreted by “the gift and power of God.” While that isn’t very descriptive, we see a parallel account in Mosiah 8:12–14. Because Mormon thought that this second description was important to include, it is reasonable to suggest that he would also have included the one referenced in Omni 1:20.
- The story of the translation of the stone is linked with the story of Coriantumr. There is no later reference to this Coriantumr (a different person by that name is a Lamanite general). Mormon doesn’t mention the stone later, and even when he has the plates of Ether that also record Coriantumr’s story, Mormon does not provide details. Perhaps Mormon’s desire to link the descendants of Mulek with the Jaredites suggests that he told the story of Coriantumr.
- “And behold, I have seen, in the days of king Benjamin, a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites. But behold, the Nephites did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:24). Both because of Mormon’s interest in important wars and contentions, and the position of this particular contention as the precursor to king Benjamin’s speech, it is virtually certain that Mormon described this war, and in more detail than this single sentence from Amaleki. This is confirmed by the synopsis we have in Words of Mormon 1: 13–18. Mormon both knew about, and cared about, this conflict.
- The departure of the people of Zeniff for the land of Nephi would be described. Mosiah 7:1 references them, assuming their story to have been known.

During king Benjamin’s great discourse, he mentions one of his father’s sermons: “O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah” (Mosiah 2:32). Benjamin warns his people of something his father had also warned them of. It is possible this reference in Benjamin’s speech was recorded as it was spoken, and Mormon had not included the

referenced speech in the lost chapters of Mosiah. However, Mormon picks up this theme later. At the end of the second invasion, which occurred right after the one involved in the Amlicite rebellion, Mormon moralizes:

26 And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, *according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one.*

27 *For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth. And thus endeth the fifth year of the reign of the judges.* (Alma 3:26–27)

Mormon is intentionally reprising this teaching, to which Benjamin alluded. As it was important enough for Mormon to highlight it in one of his moralizing insertions, it is highly likely it was important enough to include when Mosiah₁ first said it.

Don Bradley has made a few suggestions of what might have been in the book of Lehi. One concerns Aminadi. We get only the briefest of mentions in our text: “I am Amulek; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi; and it was that same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God” (Alma 10:2). Bradley suggests:

Amulek assumed his audience would recognize the name Aminadi and wonder if he spoke of “that same Aminadi” who had interpreted the writing on the temple wall. That the people of Ammonihah could be assumed to know the story of Aminadi is telling. These, after all, are people known to us not for zealously reading the scriptures, but for zealously burning them. If they could be assumed to know this incident from Nephite sacred history, then it was a prominent one indeed and likely included by Mormon in his abridgment of early Nephite history in the lost pages.

Mormon himself felt no need to add an explanation of who Aminadi was for his audience, the latter-day reader. But Mormon could assume his audience, the latter-day reader, would know the

story only if he had told it in a portion of his abridgment not currently available to us — in other words, the lost pages.¹⁵³

It is a reasonable assumption. However, it is also possible that it is a reference without antecedent. That happens in 3 Nephi. Mormon records:

And it came to pass that on the morrow, when the multitude was gathered together, behold, Nephi and *his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy*, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah — now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen — and it came to pass that they went forth and stood in the midst of the multitude. (3 Nephi 19:4)

This is the only mention of Timothy or of any of the rest of the listed names. Specifically, we do not have any story of Timothy being raised from the dead, even though it is a miracle Nephi₃ performed. Mormon mentions it here because Timothy is among the chosen disciples. Mormon clearly knows the story and perhaps intended to tell it. He didn't. These incidents without antecedents suggest it is possible that the story of Aminadi, who interpreted the writing on the wall (Alma 10:2), was also a reference without antecedent in Mormon's text.

The Lost Pages: What Should Not Have Been on Them

There is certainly much of the story we know from 1 Nephi that must have been present in the book of Lehi. However, Nephi specifically notes that the large plates and small plates had significant differences:

Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people. Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people; wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people. (1 Nephi 9:3–4).

153. Don Bradley, "Piercing the Veil: Temple Worship in the Lost 116 Pages," (paper, FairMormon Conference, Sandy, UT, August 2–3, 2012), <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/fair-conferences/2012-fair-conference/2012-piercing-the-veil-temple-worship-in-the-lost-116-pages>.

Knowing there were differences, we would not expect that what Mormon wrote would be identical to what Nephi wrote on the small plates. Even though Nephi himself made and wrote on both sets of plates, it was Mormon who wrote what was translated and lost on the 116 pages. Therefore, we have two levels of difference from the small plates — those things Nephi saw as separately appropriate to the two records and the subset Mormon elected to include for his own didactic purposes.

Nephi was fond of long scriptural quotations, often entering entire chapters of Isaiah.¹⁵⁴ Even had Nephi copied those chapters onto the large plates, which I doubt, Mormon would not have included them. Mormon quotes people's sermons but not *scripture*. The Nephites considered the brass plates to be their scripture, and Mormon simply does not use that source.

Without the long chapters on Isaiah, it is unlikely that Nephi's prophetic midrash on those Isaiah chapters would have been included. There are two reasons. The first is that they are dependent upon the chapters Mormon wouldn't have quoted, and the second is that this section of 2 Nephi appears to have been part of Nephi's work on the separate small plate record. It was a project that seems separate from that which was recorded on the large plates. Mormon wouldn't have seen it at the time he was writing the book of Lehi.

Next, it is unclear how much of Jacob's teachings would have been included. Mormon includes sermons in the context of the wars and contentions — that is, in the context of the political framework that defined the large plates of Nephi. Even though Jacob's sermon arguing against polygamy and costly apparel (Jacob 2–3) had political ramifications, they were not favorable to the ruling class. The story of Sherem at least hints that Jacob was no longer in favor with the political leaders in the city of Nephi.¹⁵⁵ If that reading is correct, the fact that Jacob was outside of the political elite argues against anything from the book of Jacob being recorded in the large plates of Nephi — and therefore Mormon would not have seen them and could not have abridged them. That would mean that the great Olive Tree allegory would also have been missing.

154. In 1879, the “chapters” of Isaiah were made to follow the way chapters appear in the King James Version of Isaiah. They are not entered according to those chapters in Nephi's writings. Rather, they combine several chapters, but are divided on different principles. See John Gee, “Choose the Things That Please Me: Selection of the Isaiah Sections,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, eds. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 68.

155. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:565–67 for a discussion of Sherem as an outsider intending to diminish Jacob's influence in consort with Nephite political leadership.

It is highly unlikely that anything contained in Enos was included. Jarom does mention that there were battles with the Lamanites, and certainly Mormon would have made mention of continuing conflicts. I speculate that Mormon would have recorded wars and contentions, but without significant details. I believe he was not as concerned with details until he comes to the wars in Alma and Helaman. The significance of the final wars in Omni suggest that Mormon might have included more details for them.

Words of Mormon

The translation of the small plates solved one problem and created another. The small plates created a way to begin the Book of Mormon after the beginning had been lost, but they were different in authors, intended content, and transmission lines from the large plates. The juncture of the inserted small plates text had to be reconciled with the remainder of Mormon's work. That problem was not original to the plates but arose only from the loss of the 116 pages. The solution to the new problem was to use — and, I suggest, to modify — Mormon's statement to his future readers about his inclusion of the small plates. Words of Mormon became a pivotal chapter rather than an introduction to an appendix.

Words of Mormon can be easily divided into two sections. Verses 1–9 are an introduction to the small plates. Verses 10–18 cover historical information not on the small plates and not contained in the extant part of the book of Mosiah.

It is the remaining verses, 10–18, that seem out of place. They fit precisely at this point in the text, even though the rest of Words of Mormon has a different purpose entirely. Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson provided one solution to the problem. In the introduction to their article they explain:

Verses 12–18 of the Words of Mormon have always been a bit of a puzzle. For stylistic and other reasons, they do not really fit with verses 1–11, so commentators have tried to explain their presence as a sort of “bridge” or “transition” that Mormon wrote to connect the record of the small plates with his abridgment from the large plates. This paper proposes a different explanation: Rather than being a bridge into the book of Mosiah, these verses were originally *part* of the book of Mosiah and should be included with it.¹⁵⁶

156. Jacob M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide. Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 121, <https://byustudies>.

Theirs is an important argument even though I disagree with it. Those interested in that topic should examine both their paper and my response.¹⁵⁷

I agree with their statement that verses 10–18 do not fit with the first half of Words of Mormon. I offer a different hypothesis; that they were a prophetic expansion on the text of the Book of Mormon, specifically intended to replace information that was lost with the 116 pages and not included in the quick notes about Mosiah₁ and Benjamin from the end of Omni.¹⁵⁸ Based on the information I have been presenting about Mormon, I will look at these verses for any evidence that they follow the style we have developed for Mormon.

The very first verse we have unassailably from Mormon's abridgment is: "And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days" (Mosiah 1:1). Although the phrase that there was no more contention could come either near the beginning or the end of a chapter, were it the beginning we would expect "and now, it came to pass." That is Mormon's favored way to begin chapters (see the section on chapter beginnings). The second verse begins a different topic (Benjamin's sons). That tells us that the "continual peace" phrase was intended as the conclusion to a section, not as a beginning. For both of these reasons, we can clearly conclude that our current book of Mosiah begins somewhere after Mormon's chapter began.

The next important information comes from the two verses on each side of our current division between Words of Mormon and the book of Mosiah:

Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, *did once more establish peace in the land.*

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that *king Benjamin had continual peace* all the remainder of his days. (Words of Mormon 1:18–Mosiah 1:1)

These two verses create a repetition of a phrase that Mormon has used as both an introduction and a conclusion to material he wrote. Mormon has most often used repetition of an important phrase for an insertion, but there is no insertion here. There is only one case where Mormon

byu.edu/content/when-pages-collide-dissecting-words-mormon.

157. Gardner, "When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson's 'When Pages Collide,'" 105–19.

158. Gardner, *The Gift and Power*, 245–46.

has had a repetition this close together, and it was between a chapter break. Although the division between Words of Mormon and the book of Mosiah certainly appears to fit that example, we must remember that we don't have the beginning of the book of Mosiah. There are other anomalies in Words of Mormon 1:12–18 against Mormon's typical practice. In verse 13 we find: "And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban" (Words of Mormon 1:13). It isn't overly surprising for Mormon to give information about a battle without many details, but with the importance of Benjamin's speech to come, we would expect Mormon to describe his participation more fully, particularly if wielding the sword of Laban. When Mormon wrote of Alma₂ leading the Nephites into battle, he includes a lot more information.

The information about false Christs in Words of Mormon 1: 15–16 is very much an important theme for Mormon. He will later provide details for Nehor and Korihor. There is every reason to believe he would have been equally interested in the details of these false Christs, since that becomes one of his themes introducing both apostasy and the results of unrighteousness. Mormon would have written more than these verses, and probably found a way to link them to the lands northward or to the Jaredites.

We have, at the end of Words of Mormon, the ending of what had been a traumatic invasion and then civil war. It was clearly a monumental struggle that is boiled down to verses 17 and 18. This type of event is later elaborated with more detail. There is every reason to believe Mormon selected this type of record for its didactic impact, and these verses would have been much expanded in Mormon's description of these events.

Finally, Lyon and Minson's hypothesis requires that these verses be part of the text that follows. Verse 18, "Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land," concludes an episode, but doesn't fit with the way Mormon ended other chapters. That would mean that there was no Mormon-created break after verse 18. Without a break, then verse 18 would have had to have been connected to our Mosiah 1:1, except that structurally that cannot be. Whatever the ultimate solution to understanding the anomaly of Words of Mormon 1:12–18, it cannot be that it is a retained copy from the book of Mosiah.

That leaves us with one significant remaining question: Where was Words of Mormon physically located on the plates? There are only two possible locations. One would be that it was located precisely where we see it. That solution presupposes that verses 12–18 were written by Mormon and therefore serve as an introduction to the book of Mosiah which follows. That is an unsatisfying solution because there is no way to understand how the first part of Words of Mormon might have been placed inside the book of Mosiah.

The more logical location would be as an introduction to the small plates. That is precisely the function of the verses 1–11. Had we only those verses, there would be no controversy over the location. The small plates would have been conceived as an appendix and added to the end of Mormon's record. Words of Mormon would have preceded those plates to give the reader an understanding of what they were and why they had been added. This makes verses 12–18 even more anomalous, which I consider further evidence that they were Joseph's prophetic addition. While verses 12–18 probably did not translate text from the plates, they did "translate" important information from the plates.

Section 2: Nephi the Writer

Chapter 7: Nephi Preparing

We have the Book of Mormon people because of Lehi. Nephi began the tradition that eventually allowed Mormon to create the Book of Mormon. Lehi led his family to the New World, but Nephi defined his descendants as a record-keeping people. The Nephites were a people of the Book both because Nephi (and his brothers) preserved a record-keeping tradition (the brass plates) and because he began a new one after arriving in the New World. Mormon may be most directly responsible for the Book of Mormon, but the records Mormon used (and many of the organizational structures that Mormon used) began with Nephi.

Our only absolute information about Nephi as a recordkeeper comes from records he created after arriving in the New World. Nevertheless, his story as a recordkeeper and creator began in the Old World. Nephi was born in Jerusalem, but we are not told when. Until the change of the year counts in the book of Alma, all dates depended upon the date when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. The fixed dates that bracket the departure of Lehi's family are the first year of the reign of Zedekiah (1 Nephi 1:4), or 597 BC, and the destruction of Jerusalem Lehi predicted, which occurred in 587 BC.¹⁵⁹ Randall Spackman further clarifies:

This passage provides one of the most important clues for dating the time of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. According to Nephi, the actions taken against Jeremiah and the other prophets were directly connected with the threats on Lehi's life. This argument was not an academic discussion between friendly brothers, but an intense debate involving life and death issues.... Thus, the knowledge of Lehi's sons concerning Jeremiah's imprisonment places the escape of Ishmael's family after the time when the Egyptians invaded the land of Judah [587 BCE].¹⁶⁰

159. For the destruction of Jerusalem, see Frank Moore Cross Jr., "The Cave Inscriptions From Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. James A. Sanders (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 304, quoted in Lamar C. Berrett, "The So-Called Lehi Cave," FARMS Reprint Series (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982), 2–3.

160. Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology," FARMS Reprint Series (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 10.

We can therefore use 587 BC as the earliest departure date from Jerusalem, but we must guess how old Nephi might have been when they left. Early in the journey in the wilderness Nephi says of himself that he was exceedingly young, but large in stature (1 Nephi 2:16). Noel B. Reynolds suggests that he was born in 615 BC, but this date is derived from a departure date of 600 BC, which is thirteen years earlier than the best plausible date of departure.¹⁶¹ The date was likely based on a guess of how young he might have been. Fifteen is certainly young, but when Nephi says he was exceedingly young, it suggests something younger than fifteen. In the ancient world the responsibilities of maturity descended much earlier than in modern societies. Nevertheless, an age of fifteen can be used as an approximation in the absence of any specific evidence. Using the assumption of fifteen years when they left Jerusalem, Nephi would have been born about 602 BC

Nephi doesn't tell us when he began to write, but he does say he didn't receive the command to create his second record, the small plates, until thirty years after their departure from Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:28–30), or 554 BC, Nephi would have been forty-five years old. He also noted the passing of the fortieth year in that same chapter (2 Nephi 34), so ten years passed from the beginning of the creation of the plates to the time he wrote that verse.¹⁶² By the time Nephi began to write Jacob's sermon on the plates of what we know as 2 Nephi, he would have been fifty-eight.

To guess when he began writing on the large plates, we need to eliminate all the time the family spent in the Old World. The command to create plates for a record of his people did not come until after they had arrived in the New World (1 Nephi 18: 25–19:1).¹⁶³ The family's journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful took some unknown time longer than the eight years they spent in the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:4). Perhaps this might add an extra year. Nephi doesn't say how long their ocean voyage took, but certainly less than a year.

The departure from Bountiful and arrival in the New World therefore might have been about 578 BC. That would have been the earliest that Nephi began to write. However, it is unlikely that Nephi began writing

161. Noel B. Reynolds, s.v. "Nephi 1," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1003–5

162. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, eds. Noel B. Reynolds and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center 1982), 54–55. The analysis of the timing for the small plates I have listed comes from Reynolds.

163. It is important to remember that these verses were together in the same chapter in the 1830 edition. They were divided in 1879 and in all subsequent editions.

immediately. The fact that he began with the record of the rulers of the people of Nephi declares that he began the record after he and his people had separated from Laman, Lemuel, and those who stayed with them. However, the pressures of creating a new community in a new land would certainly have required concentrated effort at the beginning of the new community. As a guess, I suggest that perhaps ten years passed before there was a sufficient community established not only to select Nephi as a king but also to have the time required to become stable enough for Nephi's attention to turn to recordkeeping. That guess would have him start creating and writing on the large plates around 568 BC, when he would have been thirty-four years old.

Jacob tells us that Nephi gave him the small plates fifty-five years after their departure from Jerusalem, or 532 BC (Jacob 1:1). In Jacob 1:9 he tells us that "Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings." There is no way to know how much time, if any, passed from the time Nephi charged Jacob with keeping the small plates and the time he appointed his successor as king (presumably a son, but the text never says). The only hint we have is that Nephi understood he was nearing death. If he knew he was dying, those two important actions were fulfilled before he was unable. It would not be unreasonable to assume they occurred in close succession, and that Nephi would have died relatively soon thereafter.

Perhaps Nephi died in the fifty-fifth year from their departure from Jerusalem, which would make Nephi seventy years old when he died. Depending on when in the year he was born, if he lived to the fifty-sixth year, he might still have been seventy, or he could have been seventy-one. Of course, these ages are dependent upon his being fifteen years old when the family left Jerusalem, and there is no firm evidence of his age upon departure.

Upon Plates Which I Have Made (1 Nephi 1:17)

After Lehi established a camp three day's journey outside of Jerusalem, he received a dream-vision in which the Lord commanded him to send his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain "the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass" (1 Nephi 3:3). Metal plates were certainly not the typical medium for creating records. Scrolls were much easier to make and to write upon. Pieces of broken pots often served as the ancient equivalent of a notepad. However, extremely important texts were, at times, engraved upon

metal.¹⁶⁴ John A. Tvedtnes has collected examples of ancient records upon plates. The thread binding the examples is the importance of the text and therefore the desirability to have it on an imperishable medium. In Hittite tradition, an inscription on metal became a talismanic blessing on a house or a temple: “As this copper is firm and sound, so may the house (temple) be firm and sound.”¹⁶⁵ Tvedtnes notes that: “Isaiah 8:1 speaks of writing on a polished metal plate with an engraving tool; the terms are mistranslated ‘roll’ and ‘pen’ in the King James Bible.”¹⁶⁶

Perhaps most relevant for the brass plates are texts that describe records on bronze plates:

The *Cologne Mani Codex* says that an angel appeared to Sethel (biblical Seth), son of Adam and told him secrets that he was to “write upon bronze tablets and store them up in the desert land.” A similar story is told in the *Apocalypse of Enosh*, cited in the *Cologne Mani Codex*. The angel instructed Seth’s son Enosh (Enos in the King James Bible) to write “hidden things upon bronze tablets and deposit (them) in the wilderness.”¹⁶⁷

164. Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1969), 207–8:

Clay tablets were the commonest vehicles of written communications in Mesopotamia for many centuries, whereas in Egypt it was papyrus which claimed this distinction from about 3000 BC. Because of the abundance of stone in Egypt it was customary to carve hieroglyphic texts on *stelae* and on the walls of innumerable temples and tombs. Metal was much less commonly used as writing material than either stone or lay, although cuneiform inscriptions in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Old Persian have been discovered on objects made of gold, silver, copper, and bronze. Gold is mentioned in Exodus 28:36 as a writing-surface; stone is also referred to several times in the Old Testament in this connection (Exod. 24:12; 34:1; Deuteronomy 4:13; 27:sf.; Joshua 8:32; Job 19:24). The use of broken pottery as writing material was widespread throughout the ancient Near East, although potsherds were of limited value of the Mesopotamian, since they could only be utilized for a script like Aramaic, which was written with pen and ink rather than with a stylus. Wood in one form or another was employed as a means of receiving writing (Numbers 17:2f.; Ezekiel 37:16f.; cf. Isaiah 8:1; 30:8; Hab. 2:2), as were leather and parchment.

165. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness Unto Light* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 149.

166. *Ibid.*

167. *Ibid.*, 149–50.

Archaeology has not found examples of this kind of longer text on bronze plates, but a very important find was a biblical inscription on small rolled up strips of silver. These likely served as sacred talismans, preserving quotations from Numbers 6:24–26 which speak of protection from evil that Yahweh provides.¹⁶⁸ These small silver scrolls are the earliest attestations of a biblical text.¹⁶⁹

William J. Hamblin notes that there was apparently a tradition of important writing on bronze which remains attested only in linguistic references:

Walter Burkert, in his recent study of the cultural dependence of Greek civilization on the ancient Near East, refers to the transmission of the practice of writing on bronze plates (Semitic root *dlt*) from the Phoenician to the Greeks. “The reference to ‘bronze *deltoid* [plates, from *dlt*]’ as a term [among the Greeks] for ancient sacral laws should point back to the seventh or sixth century [BC]” as the period in which the terminology and the practice of writing on bronze plates was transmitted from the Phoenicians to the Greeks. Students of the Book of Mormon will note that this is precisely the time and place in which the Book of Mormon claims that there existed similar bronze plates which contained the “ancient sacred laws” of the Hebrews, the close cultural cousins of the Phoenicians.¹⁷⁰

Ironically, few examples of writing intentionally committed to an imperishable medium have survived. However, the texts that do survive provide a time-appropriate cultural context for the brass plates. The brass plates became the physical and spiritual model of a sacred record that crossed the ocean with Nephi and became the model for Nephi’s record creating and keeping.

The plates delivered to Joseph Smith consisted of the record Mormon created, but also included of a set of plates Nephi himself had made (1 Nephi 9:3, the small plates of Nephi). The modern witnesses who handled the plates describe them as a uniform set (not varying in their dimensions). Nevertheless, they contained plates physically created nearly a thousand

168. William J. Adams, “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Silver Plates,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, eds. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 24–25.

169. William J. Adams, “More on the Silver Plates from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, 28.

170. William J. Hamblin, “Metal Plates and the Book of Mormon,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, 21.

years apart. The ancient world typically had no concept of standard sizes, yet the two sets of plates apparently fit together without noticeable division. I hypothesize that Nephi's original plates established a tradition followed by later historians, archivists, and plate-makers. When Nephi made plates for his new record I suspect he intentionally modeled his plates on the brass plates that had formed such an important part of his Old World life. The size would have become the Nephite standard size.

The material upon which Nephi wrote was not brass, but probably a New World alloy called *tumbaga*, which combines gold, silver, and sometimes other metals into a metal lighter than solid gold but retaining the golden color.¹⁷¹ An interesting concatenation of information occurs across one of the new chapters Orson Pratt created for the Book of Mormon — a concatenation that strengthens the possibility that some version of *tumbaga* was used to create Nephi's plates (and those which came after):

And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.

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

Nephi's mention that his people discovered both gold, silver, and copper leads directly to his making the plates. The two may have been related. Although we use the shorthand "gold plates" to refer to the plates Joseph received, they were likely not pure gold. Historian Matthew B. Brown notes:

Joseph Smith did not say that the plates of the Book of Mormon were made of pure gold, but rather that they "had the appearance of gold." Oliver Cowdery is likewise reported as saying in 1830 that the Book of Mormon was "written on golden plates, or something resembling golden plates."

171. Robert F. Smith, "The Golden Plates," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 276.

A secondhand statement by David Whitmer in 1831 says that “the leaves were plates of metal of a whitish yellow color.”¹⁷²

Another clue that we are not dealing with pure gold is the weight of the plates, according to witnesses. In addition to the descriptions of the material and color, there are various descriptions of the size and weight of the plates, as Robert F. Smith describes:

Joseph himself gave us the length, width, and thickness of the whole set of plates as 6” x 8” x 6” in his famous Wentworth Letter. On separate occasions, David Whitmer gave larger dimensions of 7” x 8”, and 6” x 9”, and 8” x 10”; Martin Harris claimed a smaller set at 7” x 8” x 4.” Following Joseph’s dimensions would amount to .1666 cubic foot (.005 cubic meter)...

As shown many years ago by metallurgist/blacksmith Reed H. Putnam, hammered plates of pure twentyfour karat gold would probably not weigh more than about 50 percent of the solid dimensions, i.e., 100.4 pounds (45.2 kilograms).¹⁷³

However, even one hundred pounds contradicts the testimony of those who handled them: “William Smith, a brother of the Prophet who had handled and hefted the plates in a pillowcase, claimed on several occasions that the set of plates weighed about sixty pounds, as did Willard Chase, while Martin Harris said that they weighed forty to fifty pounds.”¹⁷⁴

If not pure gold, then of what were they made? William Smith suggested that the plates were “a mixture of gold and copper,”¹⁷⁵ though how he might have known that cannot be determined. Nevertheless, Nephi’s suggestion that finding gold, silver, and copper might have led directly to the creation of the plates provides the hypothesis that an alloy of those metals was used.

Orson Pratt provides an interesting description of the characters on the plates. He says:

Eight other witnesses testify that Joseph Smith showed them the plates, and that they saw the engravings upon them, and

172. Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 148.

173. Smith, “The Golden Plates,” 275–76.

174. *Ibid.*, 276. The evidence that he handled them while in a pillowcase is not consistent with being able to describe the composition. The description of the composition comes either from a different occasion or from hearing Joseph describe them.

175. *Ibid.*

that they had the appearance of ancient work and curious workmanship. They describe these plates as being about the thickness of common tin, about eight inches in length, and from six to seven in breadth. Upon each side of the leaves of these plates there were fine engravings, which were stained with a black, hard stain, so as to make the letters more legible and easier to be read.¹⁷⁶

Jerry Grover suggests that there are two possibilities that account for the black color of the engraved characters: it is the byproduct of corrosion, or there was a material purposely placed in the engraved character depressions.¹⁷⁷ After a discussion of the possible methods, he settled on depletion gilding. He had an experiment conducted to discover the alloy ratios and processes that might yield the blackening of the characters:

As part of a small research project that experimented with various New World depletion gilding techniques and parameters, one depletion gilding technique involved sequential washing and then heating with a torch. This technique was used on ternary alloy plates consisting of 37.5% gold, 57.5% silver, and 5% copper with various designs engraved on their surfaces. Areas where depletion gilding was not desired were covered with a resist, and to give variations in the color of the enriched surface the resist was applied in different stages of the heating and washing cycles. The surface was burnished and was finally heated in the presence of ammonium sulphide or sulfur to give a brown-black surface color or patina to the undepleted regions. [One] experimental plate ... [was found that] would most approximate the description given for the Book of Mormon gold plates with black filled engravings, and was produced using known pre-Columbian New World depletion

176. Orson Pratt, "Evidences of the Bible and Book of Mormon Compared," in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 7:30–31. Orson did not see the plates, but certainly spoke with those who did. In 1844, W. I. Appleby described the characters as being filled with "black cement." W. I. (William Ivins) Appleby, "A Dissertation on Nebuchadnezzar's Dream," (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Gilbert, 1844), 23. Appleby did not see the plates. As with Orson Pratt, his information must have come from conversations with the witnesses, or with others who had spoken with them. Both Pratt's and Appleby's comment about the black letters have no other known corroboration, but their separate witness without apparent copying suggests that it was a detail that had been under-reported.

177. Jerry Grover, *Ziff, Magic Goggles, and Golden Plates: Etymology of Zyf and a Metallurgical Analysis of the Book of Mormon Plates* (Provo, UT: Grover, 2015), 74.

gilding techniques. It was thought that the color was caused by the formation of silver and copper sulfides.¹⁷⁸

Although the known New World techniques post-date Nephi in the region posited for the Book of Mormon,¹⁷⁹ examples from the Old World suggest that such techniques were known, and therefore potentially available to Nephi.¹⁸⁰ Significant in Grover's experiment is the combination of gold, silver, and copper — the very metals Nephi mentioned just prior to discussing his creation of the original set of plates. Grover's research cannot tell us that the plates were made of just such an alloy, but the ability of that combination of metals to produce plates matching the description of not only the color and weight of the plates, but also the blackening of the characters, provides an important foundation of plausibility.

Nephi's Plausible Training as a Scribe

After leading those who would follow him to a new part of the land (2 Nephi 5:5–9), Nephi created plates and wrote upon them “a full account of the history of my people” (1 Nephi 9:2). We know very little of what was on those plates, save that it was an account of “the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions” (1 Nephi 9:4) of the Nephites. These were the plates that Mormon abridged and incorporated into his Book, but what Mormon chose from them vanished with the 116 manuscript pages that were lost (though I speculate on the lost pages in section “The Problem of the Lost Pages”). At some point after he had been recording the full account of the history of his people, the Lord instructed Nephi to create a second type of record (1 Nephi 9:4), which we know as the small plates of Nephi. As the founder of the recordkeeping tradition, understanding Nephi's contribution should set the trajectory that eventually arrives at Mormon's creative use of that tradition.

How did Nephi come to be a record creator? Inspiration is too simple an answer. Inspiration had to act upon an existing ability to both create metal plates and write a complex, long text. How did Nephi come to have the basic skills necessary for each of those two tasks?

Creating the plates required skill in metalworking. There is abundant information in the text that attests to Nephi's familiarity with metal working, and the logical source of that knowledge was his father, Lehi.

178. *Ibid.*, 81

179. There is a growing consensus among scholars with training in archaeology and anthropology that Mesoamerica best fits the textual requirements for geography, geology, and cultural complexity.

180. Grover, *Ziff, Magic Goggles, and Golden Plates*, 76–80.

Lehi and his family were quite wealthy, as attested by the ability of the brothers to amass a substantial bribe, consisting of “our gold, and our silver, and our precious things” (1 Nephi 3:22). It was large enough to buy Laban’s envy, even if not his cooperation.

John A. Tvedtnes was the first to suggest that Lehi’s wealth was the result of metalsmithing.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, most of Tvedtnes’s evidence concerns Nephi’s familiarity with metalworking, not Lehi’s. Nephi was given detailed instructions on how to build a ship, but there is no similar set of instructions on how to make the tools with which to build it. Nephi simply asks the Lord “whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?” (1 Nephi 17:9). He did not seem to need to ask how to create the tools once he knew a source for the ore. After he arrived in the New World, he listed useful animals and also “all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper” (1 Nephi 18:25) — presumably because the metals were also useful. He taught his New World people metalworking (2 Nephi 5:15–17).¹⁸²

Although the evidence for metalworking in the family is heavily based on information specific to Nephi, it still points to Lehi’s occupation.¹⁸³ Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Associate professor of Church History at Brigham Young University, adds important information that more surely demonstrates Lehi’s involvement:

Lehi left behind gold and silver, two precious metals likely to have been used in expert jewelry smithing. While the population at large often utilized silver as money, in the form of cut pieces and small jewelry (no coins were in use in Judah during Iron Age II), to possess gold was very rare — gold was not used as a medium of common monetary exchange. For Lehi to possess both gold and silver suggests that he worked with gold, which in turn suggests gold smithing.¹⁸⁴

181. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone, 1999), 94–95.

182. *Ibid.*, 94–95.

183. *Ibid.*, 88–98.

184. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, eds. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 114. Chadwick proposes ten reasons to see Lehi as a metalsmith (114–17), all but the first of which deal with Nephi rather than Lehi. We simply have better information for Nephi and the best explanation for Nephi’s expertise is that of his father.

With evidence pointing to metal working as his father's profession, Nephi's knowledge would have come from his father and the family business. It is not surprising that a son would understand and have some training in his father's craft. However, while the family business explains how Nephi learned metal working, it may not be sufficient to understand Nephi's preparation. No matter how well Nephi learned the business, it was not going to be his. It would be earmarked for the first son, Laman. I believe that evidence also points to specific training in a different occupation: after Nephi used his experience with his father's occupation to create the golden plates, he used his education as a scribe to create the text.¹⁸⁵

The most important evidence that Nephi was trained as a scribe is so obvious that it is easily missed: Nephi could read and write. Even among those who could read, the nature of what they could read differed. Some might be able to read and write simple texts, but only a few were able to both read and write more complex, literary texts.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps more surprising for modern readers is that many could read, but not write.¹⁸⁷

It is difficult to ascertain the level and nature of literacy in ancient Israel. Some level of literacy may have been fairly extensive, with at least rudimentary reading and writing being taught in the villages.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, while Israel might be argued to have a slightly higher literacy rate than its neighbors, their rates were so low as to suggest that we should be cautious in assuming widespread literacy in Israel. Karel van der Toorn notes:

The great civilizations of antiquity were oral cultures. Though the figures differ depending on place and period, literacy was always restricted to a small segment of society. The Mesopotamians were the first humans to write, but less than 5 percent of the population was actually literate. In Egypt the rate of literacy was slightly higher than in Mesopotamia, but even

185. Brant A. Gardner, "Nephi as Scribe," *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 45–55.

186. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11.

187. Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece, Key Themes in Ancient History*, eds. P.A. Cartledge and D.A.S. Garnsey, rev. ed. (1992; repr., New York: University of Cambridge, 1999), 10.

188. Michael D. Coogan, "Literacy in Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 438.

the most generous estimates put it at no more than 7 percent of the population. In the classical world the situation was not much different. Greece had an overall literacy rate of about 10 percent, yet it was still predominantly an oral culture, rhetoric being the foundation and eloquence the aim of education.¹⁸⁹

Hebrew culture was similarly heavily oral. In Hebrew as well as several other languages, the word for “to read” meant “to say aloud.”¹⁹⁰ An interesting example of the borders between literacy and orality is found in one of the Lachish Letters. The Lachish letters were ostraca (scraps of pottery used for writing) written to and from military leaders apparently preparing for Nebuchanezzar’s invasion (around 590 BC). That invasion eventually resulted in the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, and of course, Lehi and his family’s departure for the New World. A military commander sent the following response to his superior:

Your servant Hoshayahu (hereby) reports to my lord Ya’ush. May YHWH give you good news And now, please explain to your servant the meaning of the letter which my lord sent to your servant yesterday evening. For your servant has been sick at heart ever since you sent (that letter) to your servant. In it my lord said: “Don’t you know how to read a letter?” As (Y)HWH lives, no one has ever tried to read *me* a letter! Moreover, whenever any letter comes to me and I have read it, I can repeat it down to the smallest detail.¹⁹¹

That letters were exchanged clearly points to some literacy. However, the commander’s expectation was that the recipient might not be able to read. Rather, it was assumed the letter would be read to the recipient. The subordinate’s reply reflected justifiable pride in his ability to read, but it also highlights the continuing emphasis on orality. The subordinate also declares that when “I have read it, I can repeat it down to the smallest detail.” There is no indication that the record itself would be referenced, but rather that the function of the writing was to provide the information that would then be remembered without the written copy.¹⁹²

189. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew*, 10.

190. Coogan, “Literacy in Ancient Israel,” 437.

191. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville, KY: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 418.

192. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 12: “In order for a written communication to reach its destination, however, the written text needed a voice. Texts were for the ears rather than the eyes Even such a mundane form of written communication as the letter usually required the

Karel van der Toorn suggests for Israel that “even if basic reading skills were more common in certain places and periods than generally assumed, it is doubtful whether this constituted widespread literacy. The ability to decipher a letter, for instance, does not amount to an active command of the written tradition of a culture. ‘High Literacy’ was confined to a small group.”¹⁹³

This is precisely the point at which Nephi’s training becomes most obvious. Perhaps all of Lehi’s family could read and write at a basic level. However, even in our modern society with very high literacy rates, there is a gap between writing a short note and composing a longer, more complicated text. What we know as First Nephi¹⁹⁴ is much closer to van der Toorn’s “High Literacy” than a simple letter would be, not only for its length but because of the artistry in its construction.

Nephi’s writings are far beyond writing or deciphering a letter. At least in the text we know as 1 Nephi, we have a remarkably well-crafted document. We have in 1 Nephi the “high literacy” van der Toorn suggests was confined to a small group. Untrained semi-literacy would not have been sufficient to attempt such a record.¹⁹⁵

Being a scribe was much more than simply learning to read and write. It was a specific type of education following similar lines in each of the Middle Eastern traditions. The great civilizations of Egypt

intervention of someone who read its contents to the addressee. A messenger did not deliver the letter like a mailman; he announced its message, and the written letter served as aide-mémoire and means of verification.”

193. Ibid., 10–11.

194. Skousen, *Volume 1: The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 1:104; Robert F. Smith, *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 3 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 1:164, indicates that the break between First and Second Nephi must have been the same as what Joseph saw/understood as a chapter break. Prior to entering the text, the scribe wrote “Chapter VIII” (the previous chapter was chapter seven). When the dictation began, the first line is “The Book of Nephi An account of the death of Lehi” Later, in superscript, we have added “second” to give us “The Second Book of Nephi,” and also an addition of “Chapter 1.” It appears that in Nephi’s manuscript, the two books of Nephi were both named “The Book of Nephi,” with the distinction coming in the following text giving the basic outline of what the book would contain. This is the same naming that we see later for what we know as Third Nephi and Fourth Nephi. Both were originally simply “The Book of Nephi,” with the distinguishing information being the sentence indicating the author.

195. Perhaps we see the result of less training near the end of the small plate record with the number of writers in the book of Omni. Perhaps as much as not having much to say, the brief entries may also indicate that the writers did not the training that would have provided them with more to say.

and Mesopotamia had scribal schools.¹⁹⁶ Indirect evidence confirms the presence of scribal education in Israel and Judah.¹⁹⁷ Pragmatically, only the higher social classes were acceptable sources of scribes.¹⁹⁸ The combination of metalsmithing and rents from ancestral lands in Samaria would have Lehi and his family approaching Jerusalem's upper class, giving reason to believe that Nephi might have been accepted into one of those schools.¹⁹⁹

The scribal schools' curriculum covered a range of topics, from languages, classic texts, the interpretation of texts, to public speaking. Karel van der Toorn, President of the University of Amsterdam and scholar of religion and Ancient Near Eastern languages, describes the language component of such training:

Instruction in the idiom of particular professions and written genres could be seen as part of the larger program of language instruction. The linguistic skills of the scribes would normally have included the mastery of one or more foreign languages. Around 700, the officials of King Hezekiah were able to conduct a conversation in Aramaic, which to the common people was incomprehensible (2 Kings 18:26). In addition to Aramaic, the scribal program may have taught other languages as well, such as Egyptian and, later, Greek. In the words of Ben Sira, the accomplished scribe "will travel through the lands of foreign nations" to increase his knowledge (Sir 39:4). Such exploits presume that training in foreign languages was part of the scribal education.²⁰⁰

That such skill in linguistics and writing systems existed in Israel receives confirmation through a number of artifacts exhibiting Egyptian hieratic writing which have been found in Canaan. One suggestion stemming from these findings is that there were Egyptian scribes in

196. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 68–69.

197. *Ibid.*, 96–104.

198. *Ibid.*, 105: "In view of their social-economic situation, the Levitical scribes can be likened to civil servants with no financial worries. They could apparently afford to pay for the education of their children; for them, a tuition fee consisting of a large sum of silver was not prohibitive. While it is conceivable that mere copyists and lower clerks were drawn from the lower strata of society, scribes belonged to what we would call the upper middle class." Internal quotation silently removed.

199. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 117.

200. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 100.

Canaan who were training local scribes in the art. John S. Thompson, a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania quotes Orly Goldwasser, head of Egyptology at the Hebrew University Jerusalem:

[A]fter the decline of the Egyptian Empire ... many Egyptians, or Egyptian-trained Canaanite scribes lost their means of existence, and may have offered their scribal and administrative knowledge to the new powers rising in the area, first to the Philistines and then the Israelites We would like to suggest that these Egyptian or Egyptian-trained scribes, cut off from their homeland, well acquainted with Egyptian decorum as well as the Canaanite language, educated local scribes, who in turn passed on their knowledge to their successors.²⁰¹

The text on an artifact found at Lachish contains the Egyptian title “scribe.” This bolsters the idea that there was an Egyptian scribal tradition in Judah.²⁰²

The presence of a scribal tradition dealing with both the Egyptian language and one (or more) of its writing systems may provide a specific cultural background to explain the enigmatic references in Nephi’s introduction:

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, *which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians* (1 Nephi 1:1 – 2).

Hugh Nibley first noticed and highlighted that Nephi’s proficiency with Egyptian was the result of having been *taught*.²⁰³ Many LDS scholars

201. Orly Goldwasser, “An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms,” *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 248–53, quoted in John S. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 266–67.

202. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” 266.

203. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 13. Nibley references Mosiah 1:4, which specifically speaks of Lehi having been taught. While the text has Lehi as the one receiving this education, I suggest that this is due to the late reference. Mosiah is using this example over 400 years later. It would not be surprising that the reference had been passed to the Old World patriarch rather than to the New World king, Nephi.

have suggested that “a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” may have been an Egyptian script encoding Hebrew language.²⁰⁴ Evidence does exist to indicate that this kind of mixing of script and language did take place. John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks (professor of Hebrew at Brigham Young University) provide some examples:

[There] are Israelite documents from the ninth to sixth centuries BC, from which we learn that the Israelites adopted the Egyptian hieratic numerals and mingled them with Hebrew text. More important, however, are Hebrew and Aramaic texts — languages used by the Jews of Lehi’s time — that are written in Egyptian characters. One of these is *Papyrus Amherst 63*, a document written in Egyptian demotic and dating to the second century B.C. The document had, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, been preserved in an earthen jar and was discovered in Thebes, Egypt during the second half of the nineteenth century. For years Egyptologists struggled with the text but could make no sense of it. The letters were clear, but they did not form intelligible words. In 1944, Raymond Bowman of the University of Chicago realized that, while the script is Egyptian, the underlying language is Aramaic.²⁰⁵

Although understanding that Nephi may have been trained as a scribe does not entirely clarify what he meant by the *learning of the Jews* and the *language of the Egyptians*, it does provide a context in which those two aspects of language fit naturally together in a written document, and where a single person might have the necessary linguistic skill to creatively use a script to represent the phonetics of a different language. One might expect one who was minimally literate to be able

204. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985), 75–76. John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 443. Sorenson does note (507n121) that both Hugh Nibley and Robert F. Smith see the language as Egyptian as well as the script. Daniel C. Peterson, “Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 150–52. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 22–24. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites*, 15, however, does not follow that idea.

205. John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, “Jewish and other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 159–60.

to write with their native language with their native script, but not to exhibit the learning necessary to combine the phonetics of one language with a symbolic representation typically used for a different language.

In addition to languages, the curriculum of a scribal school included studying important cultural texts. Essentially the same Mesopotamian list of texts has been found in diverse locations, suggesting that they formed a standard curriculum for different scribal schools.²⁰⁶ Egyptian scribes similarly worked with and often memorized many of their classic texts.²⁰⁷ For the Israelites, van der Toorn notes: “The scholars of Israel were no exception to the common pattern: they were scribes who had specialized in the classic texts, which in their case made them scholars of the Torah.”²⁰⁸

Perhaps Nephi’s love of and frequent citation of Isaiah was a direct result of a scribal school’s emphasis on Isaiah. Van der Toorn suggests that the presence of multiple copies of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms among the Dead Sea Scrolls is an “indication of their position in the scribal curriculum.”²⁰⁹ Everything Nephi wrote attests to his intimate familiarity with Isaiah, a familiarity that may have been the result of his study of Isaiah as a classic text.

It appears that the New World scribal training may have been even more limited to the social elites. While we do hear of writing, it is also clear that Nephite culture remained predominantly oral. Nephi himself noted:

And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men (2 Nephi 33:1).

For Nephi, the power of the Spirit was more markedly present in oral discourse. Modern readers may perhaps have felt spiritual promptings as we read scripture, but Nephi expected that it would be more prevalent, more powerful, through oral communication.

At the end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni appears to underline that same primacy of oral communication when he declares: “The Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty

206. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 57–58.

207. *Ibid.*, 68.

208. *Ibid.*, 81.

209. *Ibid.*, 102.

in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them” (Ether 12:23).

When Nephite writers wrote, they often followed conventions that came from oral literature rather than conventions dependent upon the written word.²¹⁰

210. See William G. Eggington “‘Our Weakness in Writing:’ Oral and Literate Culture in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Reprint (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 12–23, and Brant A. Gardner, “Literacy and Orality in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9 (2014): 29–85.

Chapter 8: Nephi Organizing

As the author of these two books on the small plates as well as the beginning of the book of Lehi on the large plates, Nephi began the Nephite record-keeping tradition. Principles that Nephi used to create his text were copied and continued until Mormon's time.

Nephi Ending Chapters

As with the analysis of Mormon's chapters, the important question for Nephi is when he elected to stop writing. The beginnings of chapters will be simple and mostly predictable. There is a greater variation in what triggered Nephi to stop writing a chapter.

Nephi uses the testificatory *amen* as a trigger to close a chapter (a practice Mormon continued, as noted in the section on Mormon's chapter endings). Chapter II (6–9) ends with a testificatory *amen*. A testificatory *amen* also ends Chapter III (10–14), Chapter IV (15), and Chapter VII (22, this is also the end of the book of 1 Nephi). In 2 Nephi, the testificatory *amen* ends chapters I (1–2), II (3), III (4), VI (9), VII (10), XIII (31), and XV (33, the end of the book of 2 Nephi). The copied Isaiah chapters did not have an original *amen*, nor was one added. Unlike the presence of the word *amen* in Mormon's writing, we have no anomalous appearances. Whenever there is an *amen* used by Nephi, it ends a chapter. This might be due to comparatively fewer pages from Nephi than Mormon, or more likely because Nephi is typically writing his own story and not copying, editing, and inserting information. Also similar to Mormon's chapter endings are Nephi's chapters where a quotation triggers an end of a chapter. This method of chapter ending occurs in 1 Nephi VI (19:22–21) and 2 Nephi XI (25–27).

When Orson Pratt created new chapters in 1879, one of his goals was to assist readers to match Book of Mormon quotations of chapters from the Bible. Therefore, in the extensive quotations from Isaiah (and in the later extensive quotations from the Sermon on the Mount), he made chapters that matched the way chapters appear in modern Bibles. However, that was not the way chapters were created in antiquity, and not the way the Isaiah material in 2 Nephi was broken into chapters. Early manuscripts of Isaiah did not mark paragraphs, punctuation, and often not chapters.²¹¹ John Gee has commented:

When quoting lengthy passages, Book of Mormon prophets intentionally start and stop in certain specific places,

211. Gee, "Choose the Things That Please Me': Selection of the Isaiah Sections," 68.

reflecting natural breaks in Isaiah’s text. Nephite writers normally marked breaks in passages through a syntactic or phrasal marker at the beginning of a new section. One of these is a statement of acknowledging the presence of a quotation; such statements are common in ancient authors and we will refer to them as “inquit” statements after the most common Latin phrase *inquit*, “he said”

Jacob chose with care the long Isaiah passage that he quotes in 2 Nephi 6:6–8; 25 (see 2 Nephi 6:4); he is not simply rambling on until he gets tired. Inquit statements mark the boundaries of the passage he quotes. The selection Jacob quotes from Isaiah contains four sections, each of which begins with the phrase “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 49:22, 25; 50:1; 51:22; parallel to 2 Nephi 6:6, 17; 17:1; 8:22), and the final sections ends just before a fifth “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 52:3).

Nephi also quotes part of this passage (1 Nephi 21:22–26; parallel to Isaiah 49:22–26), but he stops earlier. The words immediately after his stopping point are “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 50:1; parallel to 2 Nephi 7:1), and he began with a phrase just as distinctive: “Hear ye this, O house of Jacob” (Isaiah 48:1; parallel to 1 Nephi 20:1).²¹²

The chapter endings for the quoted Isaiah material correspond to the *inquit* beginnings. Interestingly, Gee points out that the Isaiah chapters were triggered by a beginning statement rather than by an ending. This is probably due to the presence of those divisions on the brass plates which were copied. Thus, there was no triggering of an ending. They were copied, not created.

The Anomalous Chapter Endings

The break between chapters I (1–5) and II (6–9) does not occur at one of the more common triggers, nor at a clear break in the narrative. Once Nephi finishes with his introduction and begins his story (1 Nephi 1:4), he continues in narrative-voice through the end of the chapter. Chapter II begins with an author-voice comment on what Nephi will and will not write. Although the shift from narrative-time to author-voice describes the end of Chapter I and the beginning of Chapter II, that shift did not trigger the end of Chapter I. Not long after Chapter I begins, Nephi

212. Ibid., 68–69. Internal subheadings silently removed.

breaks into author-voice: “*And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account*” (1 Nephi 1:16). It is a direct parallel to the opening of Chapter II: “*And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God*” (1 Nephi 6:3).²¹³ That shift in narrator/author perspective did not trigger a chapter ending, so the similar change between chapters I and II is unlikely to have been triggered by that shift.

Nephi is telling a complex story that necessarily begins with the revelation to his father of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. At the beginning of the story, Nephi clearly places his father at the head of the family, and at the head of the prophetic tradition. However, the point of the book of 1 Nephi is to justify Nephi’s position as rightful ruler, not Lehi. In Chapter I Nephi opens with his father receiving revelation (1 Nephi 1:6–15). He closes the chapter with a revelation through Lehi (1 Nephi 5:4–5).

After the first revelation, Nephi adds:

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

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

Immediately after his father’s vision, Nephi informs his reader that he really isn’t writing about his father, but he is writing his own story. After briefly noting the revelation to flee into the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:1–3), the story leaves Lehi and turns to the story of the brothers returning to Jerusalem for the brass plates. That story is the major focus of Chapter I, and prominently features Nephi. Nephi contrasts his murmuring brothers (1 Nephi 2:11–14) with his first experience with the Lord

213. Note that there is a missing negative, here inserted: “And it mattereth not to me that I am [not] particular to give a full account of all the things of my father.”

(1 Nephi 2:16). That revelatory experience sets up one of the subthemes of 1 Nephi, which is Nephi's right of rule. The Lord declares:

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

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

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

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

(1 Nephi 2:19–22)

Amazingly, the first time Nephi mentions the promise of a new land is when the Lord makes the promise to Nephi. We read that Lehi obtained the land of promise only near the end of Chapter I (1 Nephi 5:5). Although Nephi brackets Chapter I with revelations to his father, he is clearly setting up the shift from Lehi as the prophet/leader to Nephi as the leader/prophet. Note how he ends the chapter:

And it came to pass that thus far *I and my father* had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us.

And *we had obtained the records* which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that *we could preserve* the commandments of the Lord unto our children.

Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise. (1 Nephi 5:20–22)

Where the chapter began with Lehi, it ends with a team. Tellingly, both Nephi and Lehi received the promise of a new land, and Nephi ends the chapter with “as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise.” The *we* is intentional, and means Lehi and Nephi, not the entire family.

Chapter I ends because it is the end of the story of Lehi as the leader. From this point on, Nephi continues to shift the narrative to his own story. Even though it is Lehi who receives the command for his sons to return for Ishmael and his family, the story emphasizes how Nephi continues

his ascendancy over Laman and Lemuel. Not only is Nephi the one who supports his father, but the story has him teaching his older brothers. Remember that Nephi was promised that he would be a “ruler and teacher” (1 Nephi 5:22) over them. Nephi is not yet the ruler, but he emphasizes his role as teacher, a reversal of cultural expectations. It should have been the elder brothers who taught, but Nephi emphasizes the fulfillment of that part of the prophecy. What triggered the end of Chapter I? It was the end of the structural introduction of Lehi as the prophet leading them from Jerusalem and the introduction of Nephi’s future status. Future chapters continue to increase Nephi’s presence and diminish Lehi’s.

Chapter V (16–19:21) has a non-standard ending that has a contextual explanation. Chapter IV (15) ended with a testificatory *amen*. Because the *amen* created the chapter ending, the essential story of that chapter had not been finished. Our 1 Nephi 16:1–6 should be considered the ending of the events for the previous chapter. The chapter begins with the departure from their temporary encampment in the valley called Lemuel. In it, we have the stories of the marriages of the brothers, finding the Liahona, the incident of the broken bow, the sojourn in the wilderness, arrival in Bountiful, the building of the ship and the arrival in the New World. That is a lot of history to pack into a single chapter. With the arrival in the New World, all the events listed in the book’s synoptic header have been discussed. I suggest that it was Nephi’s intent to end the first book of Nephi with the arrival in the New World.

What happened as Nephi wrote the ending of Chapter V led to the addition of two more chapters, which flowed directly from the end of Chapter V, but not from the historical intent or plan for the book of 1 Nephi. To understand what came later, we need to pay attention to a critical transition:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed *again towards the promised land*.

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

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

And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. *And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.*

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them.
(1 Nephi 18:22–19:1)

Chapter I ended with “Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness *towards the land of promise*” (1 Nephi 5:22). Both Nephi and Lehi had received the notice that they were to go to a land of promise, and Nephi clearly points out — by repeating the phrase three times — that they fulfilled the Lord’s promise and arrived in the land of promise.

After arriving in the New World, Nephi indicates that it was indeed a land of promise because they could grow food, and that there were animals of prosperity in the land. He ends the list of good things in the land with a recounting of ore. As I have noted before, there was no chapter break at the point in Nephi’s original chapter. The making of plates followed immediately upon the finding of the ore.

It is possible Nephi’s intent for the first book of Nephi ended with the first sentence of our chapter 19: “And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people” (1 Nephi 19:1). What follows is an expansion of the concepts behind the creation of the plates. I suggest that after the simple statement, he made the plates and a record and that he began to add more information about the records he made and upon which he had written. Thus:

And I knew not at the time when I made them that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the

things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first plates.

And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.

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

And an account of my making these plates shall be given hereafter; and then, behold, I proceed according to that which I have spoken; and this I do that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of my people.

Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself. (1 Nephi 19:2–6)

The first set of plates are those we call the large plates of Nephi. What we are reading is on the second set, the small plates of Nephi. Nephi has already written this history on the large plates, and here it begins to reflect on the reason for writing on the small plates. What is important for understanding what comes after is that when Nephi mentions creating plates in the timeframe of the arrival in the New World, it is for the large plates. He did not begin writing on the small plates until later. Therefore, he notes that “an account of my making *these plates* shall be given hereafter” (1 Nephi 19:5). That explanation, coming in a more appropriate timeframe, is found in 2 Nephi 5:

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

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

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

Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things. (2 Nephi 5:28–31)

That Nephi would note that there would be an account of the creation of the small plates given later means that he intended to discuss them within their more appropriate timeframe. It also suggests that he had not planned to speak of them at this point. As Nephi wrote, *what* he wrote triggered new and unplanned information.

The first of the new information was the creation of the small plates. The second was the different nature of the information to be recorded on the small plates, the very plates upon which he was writing. To this point in his record, Nephi had certainly provided some spiritual lessons, but most of the historical story was designed for other purposes. At this point, however, Nephi begins thinking upon the more spiritual things. He specifically declares: “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” (1 Nephi 19:5–6).

Ruminating on what the sacred might be, Nephi displays his understanding of the most sacred things he can write. He begins to speak of the God of Israel (1 Nephi 19:7):

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

And behold *he cometh*, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem.

And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.

And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 19:7–10)

Although current LDS terminology makes a distinction between God the Father and Jesus Christ, for Nephi, Yahweh was his God, and Yahweh would descend from heaven to be known as Jesus.²¹⁴ Note that as Nephi continues on this track, he quotes from prophets found on the brass plates. These quotations continue until Nephi ends the chapter:

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

Wherefore, I speak unto all the house of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things.

For behold, I have workings in the spirit, which doth weary me even that all my joints are weak, for those who are at Jerusalem; for had not the Lord been merciful, to show unto me concerning them, even as he had prophets of old, I should have perished also.

And he surely did show unto the prophets of old all things concerning them; and also he did show unto many concerning us; wherefore, it must needs be that we know concerning them for *they are written upon the plates of brass*. (1 Nephi 19:18–21)

Nephi finished his long aside and ended the chapter, but he wasn't finished with the theme. When Chapter VI (19:22–21) opens, he picks up with brass plate scripture. To introduce Isaiah 48, he notes²¹⁵:

214. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:214–22.

215. When Orson Pratt created new chapters, he specifically made quoted chapters line up with the way they appeared in the Bible. Thus, he removed the beginning of Chapter VI in which Nephi introduced Isaiah and added it to the end

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren²¹⁶ these things; and it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old.

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

Wherefore I spake unto them, saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off; hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the house of Israel, and liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off; for after this manner has the prophet written. (1 Nephi 19:22–24)

The combined desire to preach of the coming Christ and the previous quotations from the brass plates led to his selection of Isaiah chapters 48 and 49, both of which were written into Nephi’s Chapter VI, which ends with the conclusion of the quotation from Isaiah 49. When Nephi introduced Isaiah 48 and 49, he indicated: “that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Chapter VII (22) is Nephi’s specific likening of these Isaiah chapters to his own people.

Nephi Beginning Chapters

Nephi did not use a standard beginning for his chapters, but there is very little variation:

1 Nephi

Chapter I (1–5)	I, Nephi, having been born ...
Chapter II (6–9)	And now I, Nephi, do not give ...
Chapter III (10–14)	And now I, Nephi, proceed ...

of the previous chapter (our chapter 19). This allowed our current chapter 20 clearly match with Isaiah 48.

- Chapter IV (15) And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away ...
- Chapter V (16–19:21) And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end ...
- Chapter VI (19:22–21) Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach ...
- Chapter VII (22) And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read ...
- 2 Nephi**
- Chapter I (1–2) And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made ...
- Chapter II (3) And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Lehi speaking. The previous chapter was ended by an Amen, hence this picks up with Lehi still speaking.
- Chapter III (4) And now, I, Nephi, speak ...
- Chapter IV (5) Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry ...
- Chapter V (6–8) The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi (an inserted sermon)
- Chapter VI (9) And now, my beloved brethren, I have read ... (still Jacob — the previous chapter was ended by the end of a quotation)
- Chapter VII (10) And now I, Jacob, speak unto you again ... (previous chapter ended with *amen*)
- Chapter VIII (11–15) And now, Jacob spake many more things to my people at that time; nevertheless only these things have I caused to be written, for the things which I have written sufficeth me. *And now I, Nephi*, write more of the words of Isaiah ... (The first sentence ends the event of the previous chapter — which ended with *amen*, creating the need for this material to begin the next chapter. When Nephi begins his own chapter, he returns to the formula)
- Chapter IX (16–22) Isaiah
- Chapter X (23–24) Isaiah

Chapter XI (25–27)	Now I, Nephi, do speak ...
Chapter XII (28–30)	And now, behold, my brethren, I have spoken unto you ...
Chapter XIII (31)	And now I, Nephi, make an end ... And I cannot write but a few things ...
Chapter XIV (32)	And now, behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose ...
Chapter XV (33)	And now I, Nephi, cannot write ...

The 2 Nephi chapters which quote Lehi, Jacob, or Isaiah do not have Nephi as the author of the chapter beginning. When we do have Nephi, the typical formula is “And now” then “I, Nephi,” followed by a verb. 2 Nephi XII and XIV have “I,” but lack the specific “I, Nephi.”

The prevalence of “I, Nephi” contrasts with the much rarer occurrence of “I, Mormon” in the rest of the text. Mormon does not use the self-identification to begin chapters — and should not, because he was not the ultimate author.

Opening chapters with the self-identifying “I, Nephi” shows one place where Nephi uses that self-introduction, but chapter beginnings account for only a small number of the times it is used. In 1 Nephi, “I, Nephi” opens every chapter, but accounts for only seven instances. In 2 Nephi, we see “I, Nephi” less in the chapter openings (six of fifteen chapters). Subtracting the thirteen chapter-beginning instances still leaves seventy-five more times where Nephi adds the self-identifying phrase inside a chapter. As a text written in the first person, we can expect a heavy usage of the pronoun “I.” Note how it appears in just a single verse:

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

After beginning with an “I, Nephi” opening in 1 Nephi 1:1, Nephi tells his father’s story and discusses his father’s vision of the future of Jerusalem. Then, in 1 Nephi 1:16 we have “And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written....” Nephi follows this statement with an aside where he indicates that he will later give an account of his own life (1 Nephi 1:16–17). He returns to his father’s story, noting that he was mocked in Jerusalem and that there they sought to take his life.

Next, Nephi writes:

But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. (1 Nephi 1:20–2:1)

This section continues until the end of Lehi’s exhortation to Lemuel in the Valley of Lemuel. The transition from the end of that section to the “I, Nephi” statement is:

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

And my father dwelt in a tent.

And it came to pass that *I, Nephi*, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. (1 Nephi 2:14–16)

After examining all of the occasions where we find “I, Nephi” in the text, it appears that Nephi uses that phrase to make transitions. Sometimes there is a longer section between the phrases than others. We find the phrase in 1 Nephi 3:7, then again in 1 Nephi 3:9. In all cases but one, Nephi uses the self-identification as a separation between sections of his story.

The exception is found in two contiguous sentences:

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that I, Nephi, and my brethren, should again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness.

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did again, with my brethren, go forth into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.
(1 Nephi 7:2–3)

What is interesting here is that these verses are essentially duplicated.²¹⁷ Unlike other uses of “I, Nephi,” there is nothing between the statements that is being set off from what went before and after. It is true that what follows the second occurrence begins the story of the journey to Ishmael’s house. The preceding story is Lehi’s revelation that they should return for Ishmael and his family. This particular duplication has no structural reason, nor any poetic reason.

My best guess is that we are seeing a type of repetitive resumption, but in this case we have a temporal disjunction rather than an aside or other intervening text. Perhaps Nephi was writing and ended for a time at 1 Nephi 7:2. When he returned, he picked up where he left off and intentionally, or perhaps even unintentionally, repeated the sentence as he started the new story.

Making Two Books

Nephi is the only writer to provide two separate books. The books of Omni, Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman all demonstrate that there may be more than one individual writing in a named book, but Nephi is unique in being a single author with two books.²¹⁸ One of the interesting responses from LDS scholars has been to minimize or relocate the break between the two books.

In 1986, Frederick W. Axelgard suggested that while we have two books, there was a more important division into two themes:

217. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007), 13, see this as a chiasm. In spite of the fact that most of the phrases are repeated in the same order, Parry finds a way to make it appear to be a chiasm. I believe that it is very obviously a parallel and not a chiasm. Unfortunately, some chiasms are the result of the scholar’s imposition of order rather than the author’s.

218. Mormon edits multiple books, and authored both the book of Mormon and Words of Mormon. Words of Mormon is more of an introduction than a book. A closer possibility is 3 and 4 Nephi, which are about the same person. However, 3 Nephi is from his personal journal, not a book on the large plates. 4 Nephi comes from the large plates, and probably indicates a new political dynasty, but the intents and original locations of the two writings do not parallel the kind of division that Nephi made on the same record, speaking of the same events.

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 Nephi 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."²¹⁹

Joseph Spencer reemphasized Axelgard's essential structural conclusion:

Nephi ... identifies for his readers a basic structural division in his record, one he apparently imposed on it consciously and of which he wanted his readers to be aware. Nephi's record divides into two major parts: (1) the twenty-seven chapters stretching from 1 Nephi 1 to 2 Nephi 5, leading up to the account of the physical production of the small plates; and (2) the twenty-eight chapters stretching from 2 Nephi 6 to 2 Nephi 33, following the account of the physical production of the small plates.²²⁰

Both scholars make a division between historical and spiritual content, and neither explains how that structure explains the hard division between two books. Nevertheless, Axelgard specifically notes that these two books come from the small plates which contain holographic writings.²²¹ As the original writer, it was Nephi himself who divided the books.

Noel B. Reynolds examined the general idea originally proposed in Axelgard and supported in Spencer. He discusses his reasons for rejecting

219. Frederick W. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," in *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 55.

220. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 34–35.

221. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," 55.

their notion of the conceptual division. Reynolds finds that “[t]he most obvious and probably most egregious offense introduced by Axelgard and followed by Spencer is their disregard for Nephi’s division of his writing into two books. While they do offer an argument for seeing another division between 2 Nephi 5 and 6, neither of these writers even pauses to recognize the clear facts of Nephi’s two-book division and the enormous interpretive burden they have assumed in disregarding the evident intention of the author and asserting a different one as his true intention.”²²²

One of the interpretive problems modern readers impose upon the text is the assumption that our categories informed Nephi’s categories. Spencer makes the astonishing suggestion that: “Because Nephi only begins to ‘fulfill the commandment’ concerning the small plates with 2 Nephi 6, the break between 2 Nephi 6–30 and 2 Nephi 31–33 turns out to be important: it allows one to identify 2 Nephi 6–30 as the core of Nephi’s record.”²²³ If this were true, Nephi would have essentially wasted the ten years from the beginning of making the small plates to the end of 2 Nephi 5 (2 Nephi 5:28, 34).

It is therefore important to understand what Nephi thought he had done in those ten years before he began what Spencer suggested was the core of his record:

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

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

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

And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.
(2 Nephi 5:30–33)

222. Noel B. Reynolds, “On Doubting Nephi’s Break Between 1 and 2 Nephi: A Critique of Joseph Spencer’s *An Other Testament: On Typology*,” in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2007): 91. Reynolds specifically critiques Spencer, but the criticism applies to Axelgard, and Axelgard is the earlier elaboration of the idea.

223. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 36.

Axelgard had suggested that Nephi's writings "contain two primary divisions, one heavily historical and the other exclusively spiritual in content."²²⁴ Nevertheless, at the end of the section that Axelgard deemed historical, Nephi himself felt that he had written according to the Lord's command and had already written "that which is pleasing unto God." Attempts to split Nephi's work into a distinction between historical and spiritual reflect our modern understandings of the two terms.²²⁵ More productive for understanding Nephi is to attempt to understand why Nephi thought that what we deem historical, he felt fulfilled the commandment to write "an account... of the ministry of my people" (1 Nephi 9:3).

First, it is important to understand that Axelgard, Spencer, and Reynolds are all interested in structures that might be found within Nephi's writings.²²⁶ Reynolds describes my position with respect to Nephi's structures: "The primary goal of scholarly interpretation of ancient scripture is to improve our understanding of the messages intended by their authors."²²⁷ Nephi left a very clear understanding of what he intended to write. He laid out his intentions in outline headers for each of his two books.

The header for the first book of Nephi reads:

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity and they seek to destroy his life. He taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family. Nephi

224. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," 54.

225. Reynolds, "On Doubting Nephi's Break Between 1 and 2 Nephi: A Critique of Joseph Spencer's *An Other Testament: On Typology*," 93; analyzes Axelgard and Spencer's interpretation of 1 Nephi 19:5 as referring to the discussion of the plates in 2 Nephi 5 as the time when the "more sacred" discussion will begin. Reynolds (93–94) concludes (and I agree): "The phrases 'sacred things,' 'more sacred things,' and 'more plain and precious parts' all refer generally to the contents of the small plates and not to some distinct section within Nephi's writings in the small plates."

226. *Ibid.*, 85: "A few contemporary Book of Mormon scholars are increasingly convinced that the internal structures of Nephi's writings provide important guidance for would-be interpreters of his teachings. Joseph Spencer and I are two who are working on this issue currently."

227. *Ibid.*, 98. Reynolds also warns, in the paragraph preceding the statement quoted: "Any interpretation of Nephi that needs to resort to esotericism will more likely be drawing on the interpreter's own theses and philosophical positions than on teachings and clues deliberately embedded in the text by Nephi himself."

taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews. The account of their sufferings. They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife. They take their families and depart into the wilderness. Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness. The course of their travels. They come to the large waters. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship. They call the name of the place Bountiful. They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth. This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.

The header for the second book of Nephi is much shorter: "An account of the death of Lehi. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness. His journeyings in the wilderness, and so forth." As with the discussion of the outline headers for Mormon, these headers in Nephi preceded the writing of the books themselves. Thus, they provide Nephi's general outline of what would be included. The header for 1 Nephi therefore shows the major events that would be discussed, ending with the family's arrival in the New World.

The header for 2 Nephi continues with the theme of what a modern reader would consider historical events. Those events include the separation of the people of Nephi from Laman and Lemuel after Lehi's death. Then it stops, even though we have some discussion of the early settling of the city of Nephi that was not described in the header.

What do these headers tell us? First, they tell us what Nephi's outline was for his two books. Regardless of our interpretation of what Nephi meant when he said he was commanded to write about "the more part of the ministry" (1 Nephi 9:4), Nephi believed that information to have been couched in what our modern sensitivities label history.

The second thing that the headers tell us is that Nephi intended to have two books. It wasn't an accident. He had a book that began with the vision to leave Jerusalem and ended with the arrival in the New World. His second book began in the New World. The hint that his second book was to include: "Nephi's brethren rebel against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness. His journeyings in the wilderness, and so forth" suggests that Nephi was creating a New World parallel to the Old World story of his people. Thus, there were two books. One book told the Old World origin story. The second book concentrated on the New World origin story, and one that Nephi intended his readers see as parallel to the story from the Old World. It was a plan that began with Lehi's prophetic blessings that predicted the rise of Nephite dominance over the Lamanites.

That was Nephi's plan. His plan was short-lived. In his second book, the first three chapters (our 2 Nephi 1–4) continue the detail we saw in 1 Nephi. After Nephi wrote of his father's death he engraved the moving section known as Nephi's Psalm. It is an emotional and poetic response to his father's passing, one spontaneous rather than planned.²²⁸

Then we get chapter IV (5). In only thirty-four verses of our modern edition, Nephi takes his story from the death of his father to the separation of the Nephites and Lamanites to his current time: "and it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away" (2 Nephi 5:34). For all of the care Nephi took in telling his story up to the beginning of chapter IV (5), he rushes through the rest of his history and abruptly ends. In the next chapter he changes focus entirely. His next chapter isn't even about Nephi, it is about his brother, Jacob. Understanding this stark change in the nature of Nephi's story-telling requires that we see more of what happens in his chapter IV (5).

I suggest that we owe the abrupt change to two factors. The first is that Nephi may have been facing his own mortality. I have suggested that Nephi stopped recording his sermon in 2 Nephi XIV (32) in order to begin writing his final farewell in 2 Nephi XV (32).²²⁹ The second is that Nephi's departure into a different type of record was allowed because he had finished most of his outline for Nephite history.²³⁰ This occurs in a whirlwind tour through the events of his last almost thirty years.

The beginning of the end comes when Nephi wraps up the historical/political purposes he had for the small plates:

And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power.

228. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:84–85.

229. *Ibid.*, 2:456.

230. This analysis suggests that, contrary to Axelgard and Spencer, Nephi did not have an overarching plan for 2 Nephi that originally included the material from 2 Nephi 6 to the end of the book. It is also contrary to Noel B. Reynolds, "On Doubting Nephi's Break," 89, who notes: "In Axelgard's case, the whole exercise ironically brings him to a general conclusion that I would strongly support for different reasons than those he advances. Nephi's writings do constitute an inspiring whole — contrary to the prevailing academic opinion in the 1980s that 2 Nephi was a random collection of leftovers."

I see a change in the way Nephi wrote, but rather than random additions, I see them as having been triggered by previous content.

And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher. Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life. (2 Nephi 5:18–19)

Nephi reports that he had been made king. The impact of that statement was not self-aggrandizing, but to show that “the words of the Lord had been fulfilled.” Having mentioned prophecy and his brothers, he turns to the next fulfilled prophecy:

Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

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.

And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction. (2 Nephi 5:20–25)

Having underscored the fulfillment of prophecy, Nephi provides a simple “and it was good” type of description of his people:

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

And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness. (2 Nephi 5:26–27)

With this, Nephi finishes the story of the creation of the Nephite people. The ethnogenetic story is complete. However, he does have an editorial promise to fulfill. Nephi describes the making of the plates upon which he is writing:

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

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

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

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

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

And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates. (2 Nephi 5:28–33)

The next verse gives the date again. Ten years have passed since the previous date. We cannot tell whether Nephi wrote the fulfillment of the prophecy right after noting the passage of thirty years, however, it is certainly possible. A reasonable reconstruction has Nephi ending his book, and then realizing that he had not written the explanation of the creation of the small plates. He noted that thirty years had passed, and added it. Then he stopped. Ten years later he returned to his text, perhaps intending to continue the history of his people. He therefore began a new section:

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

This is speculative, but I suggest that this verse was not intended to be an ending. When he puts this sentence in his record he clearly sets the stage to discuss something about wars and contentions. Except he stops. Speculation doesn't allow for any understanding of why Nephi stopped

at this point, but I suggest that there was some reason why Nephi stopped writing after this sentence, and some time passed before he wrote again.

When Nephi wrote again, I suggest that he reviewed what he had written and knew that he had intended to speak of wars and contentions. I believe that he decided to examine contentions but decided to change the way he had been writing. Rather than narrate a story of contentions, he entered a sermon from Jacob that was designed and delivered to ease the contentions. I have suggested that Jacob's sermon makes the most sense in a situation where there are Old World Israelites and New World peoples merged into the same city. The tensions that might have arisen between the groups would explain why Isaiah's description of the Gentiles saving the house of Israel would have been a present need rather than a sermon that only related to a distant future.²³¹

There is certainly a dramatic break between the end of Chapter IV (5) and V (6–8), but the subject that Nephi treats was triggered by the last sentence of Chapter V. Jacob's sermon covers Chapters V–VII (6–10). Nephi closes Chapter VII with Jacob's testificatory *amen*. At the beginning of the next chapter, Nephi adds information about Jacob that the testificatory *amen* had closed. After finishing with Jacob, Nephi indicates: "And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men" (2 Nephi 11:8).

Orson Pratt separated our chapter 11 from 12 so that chapter 12 would be directly parallel to Isaiah 2 as found in the Bible. Nephi had no break at this point. Nephi's intent was to follow Jacob's sermon with a set of chapters from Isaiah. I suggest that this addition was also a triggered addition. Jacob's sermon was based on Isaiah, and Nephi intended to add his vision of the future that would be grounded in the chapters of Isaiah that he added.

Although it is easy for modern readers to make a division between the historical and spiritual, and to therefore see 2 Nephi 6–33 as the "more spiritual" content,²³² doing so suggests that Nephi spent at least ten years writing on the small plates before he ever got around to fulfilling

231. Brant A. Gardner, "A Social History of the Early Nephites," (paper, FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 2001), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2001/a-social-history-of-the-early-nephites>. See also John Gee and Matthew Roper, "I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us': Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for 'Others' in the Land," in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 51–65.

232. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," 55. Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 34.

the reason for which they were written. Noel B. Reynolds provides an appropriate rule for analyzing an ancient text: “The reader must allow the author to guide his interpretation through explicit statements, culturally recognized rhetorical devices, and textual organization. The reader should not twist the text to accommodate philosophical, doctrinal, or historical theses or insights the reader has brought to the exercise.”²³³

The Synoptic Header for 1 Nephi

In the section discussing Mormon’s outline headers, I noted that the printer’s manuscript marked a difference between the header and the beginning of the book itself, and that this is also attested in the only remaining book header from Mormon’s edited sections on the original manuscript. It is not the case that the outline headers for either 1 or 2 Nephi have any clear indication of the separation between the header and the beginning of the book. There is no line clearly indicating the division. This becomes interesting because John H. Gilbert, the compositor for Grandin Press, was the one who made the decision. In the case of 1 Nephi, I suggest that he made an error, and that the intent of Nephi’s book began a sentence earlier than it does now.

The current header is:

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity and they seek to destroy his life. He taketh three days’ journey into the wilderness with his family. Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews. The account of their sufferings. They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife. They take their families and depart into the wilderness. Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness. The course of their travels. They come to the large waters. Nephi’s brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship. They call the name of the place Bountiful. They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth. *This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.*

As with all other outline headers, the header is in the third person. In this header only, there is a shift to a first-person declaration. That does not

233. Reynolds, “On Doubting Nephi’s Break,” 90.

occur in any other record. For that reason alone, I might suggest that the final sentence should rather be the first of the book of Nephi. However, there is another hint. The ending of the preceding sentence is “and so forth,” which Gilbert wrote out from the printer’s manuscript’s “.&C.”²³⁴ The header for 2 Nephi also ends in “.&C.,” written as “and so forth.”²³⁵

The evidence suggests to me that we should move the final sentence of the header. However, placing it with the first verse is also awkward:

This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record. I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (Header–1 Nephi 1:1)

I suggest that rather than the book header, or part of the first verse, we should see this sentence as a chapter header. Thus, it would be part of the chapter, but separated from the text. Grant Hardy suggests a similar change for 2 Nephi 6. In his Maxwell Institute Study Edition of the Book of Mormon he has moved 2 Nephi 6:1 from text to header.²³⁶

Understanding that Nephi used a chapter header in 2 Nephi 6 confirms that he understood the concept. That reinforces the probability that this is what we are seeing in 1 Nephi 1. The chapter headers also appear to serve a bibliographic function. They introduce the sources. Essentially, that is what we have in this sentence: “This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.”

Brant A. Gardner (MA, State University of New York Albany) is the author of *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* and *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, both published through Greg Kofford Books. He has contributed articles to *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl* and *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community*. He has presented papers at the FairMormon conference as well as at Sunstone.

234. Smith, *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3: Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 1:20–21.

235. *Ibid.*, 1:110–11.

236. Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Christ*, rev. ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018).