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## The Prophets Who Wrote the Book of Omni

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Clifford P. Jones

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# THE PROPHETS WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF OMNI

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Clifford P. Jones

**Abstract:** *The brief accounts written by Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki, taken alone, don't always inspire confidence in their righteousness. Nevertheless, when the specific words used by these men and all relevant context are taken into consideration, it's reasonable to conclude that each of these authors of the book of Omni was a prophet of God.*

The brief small-plate accounts of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki have caused some concern about their faithfulness.<sup>1</sup> Omni's words include his statement, "I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 1:2).<sup>2</sup> Omni's grandson Abinadom says, "I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy" (Omni 1:11). These words and

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1. See Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 2:111–13; Eugene England, "Benjamin the Great King," *Ensign* (December 1976): 26–31, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/12/benjamin-the-great-king?lang=eng>; A. Keith Thompson, "The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015):108–109, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-doctrine-of-resurrection-in-the-book-of-mormon/>; and John S. Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants as Authors," Sorenson, John L, and Melvin J. Thorne. *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991, 55–58, <https://bit.ly/2tKGBIC>; Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008) 3: Enos — Mosiah, 26–27, 35–36, 38–44, and 66–67; and Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 274.

2. All Book of Mormon quotations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). This edition, while sometimes harder to read than the current Latter-Day Saint edition, corresponds more closely with the actual text revealed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

other words written by some of these men (or the fact that some wrote so few words) have raised questions about their spiritual condition.

This paper suggests that Mormon's description of the small plates is accurate. He says, "I found these plates which contained this small account of *the prophets from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin*, and also many of the words of Nephi" (Words of Mormon 1:3). He found these plates after he "had made an abridgment from the [large] plates of Nephi down to the reign of this king Benjamin" (Words of Mormon 1:3). Thus, Mormon found the small plates after studying the large-plate record that covered, presumably in much more detail, the times when the authors of the small-plate record lived. Informed with details unavailable to us today, Mormon identifies all these men as prophets.<sup>3</sup>

This paper begins by analyzing the words of Omni and Abinadom in light of Mormon's words. It proposes that the words written by these men can be harmonized with Mormon's confirmation that they were prophets. It then reviews other Book of Mormon context, beginning with Nephi's account of the creation of the small plates and continuing through the words of Nephi and other small-plate authors. It proposes that all related Book of Mormon context can be read to corroborate Mormon's words that Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki — the authors of the book of Omni — were prophets of God.

### Omni's Words Are Appropriate for a Prophet

Omni's brief record includes the following: "But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done" (Omni 1:2). Some students of the Book of Mormon have suggested that Omni's words of confession would not be the words of a prophet.<sup>4</sup> Omni clearly states that he has sinned,

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3. Reynolds and Sjodahl likewise identify all these men as prophets, probably based on Mormon's words. See George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1962), 1:506–507.

4. See Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 113, which suggests that Omni may not have been "guilty of any gross immorality," but he did not live "according to the Spirit;" Thompson, "The Doctrine," 108, which suggests that Omni "had lived a wicked life" during a time of apostasy; Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 56–58, suggesting that Omni was a "self-professed 'wicked man,'" that Omni and the other authors of the book of Omni were not prophets, that they "fell from prominence, and perhaps from grace," but were not "completely reprobate," as they "manifested humility, honesty, reverence for the sacred, and a common commitment to duty"; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 38–39, suggesting that Omni "is a Nephite because

but his words don't necessarily imply that he is unrepentant. On the contrary, he makes it clear that he ought to have kept the commandments. Those who choose to continue in wickedness don't tend to confess the wrongfulness of their sins. I have searched the scriptures in vain for any words from any unrepentant sinner who confesses that he should not have sinned.<sup>5</sup> The very fact that Omni confesses his sins in his first entry on the small plates (followed in later years by at least one additional entry)<sup>6</sup> suggests repentance relatively early in his life.

Omni's confession begins with the words "I of myself" (Omni 1:2). According to the Oxford English Dictionary,<sup>7</sup> the term *of oneself* often means "by one's own impetus or motion, spontaneously, without the instigation or aid of another."<sup>8</sup> The English term *of oneself* was probably more popular in the early modern period than in the late modern period.<sup>9</sup> It is used several times in the Book of Mormon, where it tends to

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of his allegiance to his community, not because of his religion," who "obviously did not consider himself an expert on spiritual matters."

5. Korihor, for example, was an unrepentant person who acknowledged having done the things he was accused of, but the record doesn't indicate that he ever confessed that he ought not to have done so. He was unhappy about being cursed but showed no desire to change course. Without a recognition of wrongdoing, there is no true repentance. His lack of contrition suggests an appropriate reason for the Lord's choice not to remove the curse.

6. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 38.

7. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), not the 1828 Webster's dictionary, is the best tool available today for ascertaining the meaning of the language of the Book of Mormon. Stanford Carmack and others have shown that 1820s American English is not the source of the English in the Book of Mormon, which is "full of [Early Modern English] ... [and] also contains touches of modern English and late Middle English" (Stanford Carmack, "Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster's 1828)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 65–77, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/why-the-oxford-english-dictionary-and-not-websters-1828/>). In other words, as stated by Royal Skousen, "the text of the Book of Mormon is uniquely archaic and generally dates from Early Modern English. The vocabulary of the Book of Mormon turns out to be one to three centuries older than Joseph Smith's time" (Royal Skousen, *The Nature of the Original Language* [Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2018], 11). The OED shows the meanings of words during the applicable time periods.

8. OED Online, s.v. "of, prep.," at sense 11.b..., September 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130549?rskey=GNbqwB&result=3>. This meaning is corroborated by dozens of instances of "I of myself" shared with the author by Stanford Carmack from a WordCruncher database prepared from 25,367 publicly available Early English Books Online texts (EEBO Phase 1).

9. See the explanation about the language of the Book of Mormon in footnote 7.

focus more specifically on one's own efforts without taking into account any aid received from the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

The words of Ammon the son of Mosiah exemplify this meaning of the term *of myself*. He says, "I know that I am nothing; as to my strength, I am weak. Therefore I will not boast *of myself*, but I will boast of my God; for in his strength I can do all things" (Alma 26:12). Here Ammon's words *I am nothing* and *I am weak* don't take aid from the Lord into account. With the Lord's help, Ammon "can do all things." A verse earlier, Ammon had explained, "I do not boast in my own strength or in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full. Yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God" (Alma 26:11). Ammon knows the Lord is the source of his strength, and this causes him to rejoice. He later uses the word *glory* to express his joy: "Therefore let us glory. Yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold who can glory too much in the Lord?" (Alma 26:16).

Ammon's brother Aaron teaches that "since man had fallen, he could not merit any thing *of himself*; but the sufferings and death of Christ atoneth for their sins" (Alma 22:14). Aaron is saying that fallen man can't be saved *of himself* — that is, by his own efforts unaided by God. With God's aid, however, fallen man can be saved from his sins.

Nephi the son of Helaman prophesied the destruction of wicked Nephites and then said, "I do not say that these things shall be, *of myself*, because it is not *of myself* that I know these things. But behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God hath made them known unto me; therefore I testify that they shall be" (Helaman 7:29). Nephi couldn't prophesy these things *of himself* — that is, the prophecy came only through the aid of God.

King Benjamin uses this term twice in his speech from the tower as he emphasizes the limits of one's own efforts without the aid of the Lord. He begins by mentioning that he, on his own, is weak. He says, "I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I *of myself* am more than a mortal man" (Mosiah 2:10). He then attributes his successes as king to the aid of God, saying "[I] was

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10. The term *of myself* appears to have basically this meaning in Alma 26:12, 29:9, 36:4–5 and 11; and 38:6; and 3Nephi 21:2 (see also John 7:17, 28; 8:28, 42; 10:18; 12:49; 14:10; and 2Corinthians 12:5). But it appears to be used in a few instances for different purposes. See, for example, 2 Nephi 25:6, where the term *I of myself* appears to mean *I myself*; 3Nephi 5:19, where *of myself* appears to mean *about myself*; and Alma 5:46 and 48; and 34:8 where *of myself* appears to mean *for myself*.

suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people and have been kept and preserved by *his matchless power*, to serve thee with all the might, mind, and strength *which the Lord has granted unto me*” (Mosiah 2:11).

King Benjamin soon explains that his people likewise rely on God, basically for everything. His explanation includes this question and answer: “And now I ask: Can ye say aught *of yourselves?* I answer you: Nay” (Mosiah 2:25). As King Benjamin explains, this need for God’s aid is most relevant in our quest for redemption. He continues, “If ye have known of his [God’s] goodness and have tasted of his love and have received a remission of your sins, ... even so I would that ye should remember and always retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness” (Mosiah 4:11). He then promises, “If ye do this, ye shall always rejoice and be filled with the love of God and always retain a remission of your sins” (Mosiah 4:12). Nephi uses the word *glory* to express this rejoicing: “I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33:6).

The angel who calls Alma to repentance tells him that without the Lord’s aid, he is headed for destruction. In one account, the angel says, “Go thy way and seek to destroy the church no more ... and this even if thou wilt *of thyself* be cast off” (Mosiah 27:16). In a second account, Alma tells his son Helaman, “And he [the angel] said unto me: If thou wilt *of thyself* be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God. ... And ... when I heard the words, if thou wilt be destroyed *of thyself*, I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps that I should be destroyed that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more” (Alma 36:9, 11). Each account emphasizes the fact that without God’s aid, Alma will be destroyed.

The father of that Alma, also named Alma, shares his intent to always remember God’s aid after he received a remission of his own sins. He confesses, “I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me a sore repentance” (Mosiah 23:9). He then notes that, even after this sore repentance, “I am unworthy to glory *of myself*” (Mosiah 23:11). When Alma says this, he has repented and has been forgiven, so according to King Benjamin, he has great cause to rejoice. But, like Nephi and Ammon, he glories (rejoices) in God’s power, recognizing that he is unworthy to glory based only on what he, himself, has done. A repentant Alma who has been saved from his sins through the Atonement can speak of being “unworthy to glory” only because the term *of myself*



modifies the meaning of his words. The term *of myself* requires us to view his worthiness *without taking the Atonement into account*. Despite his redemption and the joy it has brought him, he remembers that on his own merits alone, he has no cause to rejoice.

Similarly, Omni, who speaks of being wicked *of himself*, may also have already received a remission of his sins. His term *of myself* modifies the meaning of his words about wickedness. Omni's statement that he is a wicked man may be true only because the term *of myself* requires us to view his wickedness *without taking the Atonement into account*. If so, Omni's words are true, not only for himself but also for each of us who has sinned and repented. Like Omni, we can say (and should always remember): "I *of myself* am wicked and unworthy" because on our own merits alone — without considering the grace of God — we are all unclean and unworthy.

It seems unlikely that Omni's brief entry on the sacred plates was intended to brand himself as an unrepentant sinner. It needn't be read with that meaning. It seems more likely that the specific words he selected indirectly reflect repentance and a humble gratitude for God's redeeming power. If so, his words align well not only with the words of Ammon, both Almas, and King Benjamin, but also with Nephi's commandments about keeping the small-plate record and with Mormon's statement that Omni was a prophet (see Words of Mormon 1:3).

The Book of Mormon contains confessions of other prophets that are similar to those of Omni and Alma. Omni could have read two of these other confessions in Nephi's small-plate record. Shortly after the death of Lehi, Nephi laments his iniquities: "O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins" (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Similarly, Isaiah responds to a heavenly vision by acknowledging his sinful condition saying, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (2 Nephi 16:5). Omni's few words may allude to very similar sentiments.

Other similar confessions are found in other scriptures. At the time of Peter's calling to the ministry, after his nets are miraculously filled with fish, he falls down at the Savior's feet and says, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Similarly, Joseph Smith, as he describes his vision in the sacred grove, mentions crying for mercy and receiving

forgiveness.<sup>11</sup> Later, Joseph Smith confesses to having been led “into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God” (Joseph Smith — History 1:28).

Each of these men, whose words and feelings appear somewhat similar to those expressed by Omni, either was or soon became a prophet of God. Indeed, each of these men expresses these feelings near the beginning of an important ministry. It’s plausible that Omni’s words, which appear to be part of his initial entry on the plates, evince similar penitent humility as he places his imperfect but important engravings onto these plates. Of course, these words of other prophets that acknowledge their sinful natures don’t prove that Omni was also a prophet. They do, however, confirm that this passage could reflect the feelings of a humbly penitent prophet.

Omni’s grandfather Enos also begins his record acknowledging a need for repentance. Enos, however, then adds his conversion story. If Omni also repented of his sins, it may seem odd that he doesn’t share his redemptive story more clearly. We, his readers, would have appreciated the clarification, but Omni’s brief account can leave us wondering. In this respect, his account is somewhat similar to that of Luke, who quotes Peter’s self-description as “a sinful man” without following it with an obvious redemptive story. Luke merely tells us, “And Jesus said unto Simon [Peter], Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him” (Luke 5:10–11). We are left to infer Peter’s repentance from his obedient actions.

Perhaps Omni’s later words imply a similar story. After Omni has kept the small plates for about 40 years (compare Jarom 1:13–15 with Omni 1:3), he ends his brief record by telling us, “I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers, and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end” (Omni 1:3). These few words humbly testify of Omni’s obedience to Nephi’s commandments. This obedience may suggest that he not only confessed but also forsook his sins and served faithfully for decades as a prophet to his people while keeping the plates according to the commandments of his fathers. Omni’s few words may be too ambiguous to affirm a prophetic calling, but they can be read to be in harmony with the words of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 19:4) and Mormon that suggest such a calling.<sup>12</sup>

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11. See “History, circa Summer 1832,” p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1>.

12. But see Tanner, “Jacob and His Descendants,” 56, suggesting that Omni had no religious calling.

A few of Omni's other words are also worth mentioning. Omni begins his record much like his father did, saying he was commanded by his father to "write somewhat upon these plates to preserve our genealogy" (Omni 1:1). It has been suggested that the word *genealogy* in this charge implies a misunderstanding of Nephi's commandments.<sup>13</sup> Omni's words, however, indicate that he, like his father Jarom, who also used this word, fully understood and kept Nephi's commandments. The word *genealogy* appears to fit quite well with Nephi's commandments. A genealogy is "an account of one's descent from an ancestor or ancestors, by enumeration of the intermediate persons."<sup>14</sup> A sacred record passed "from one generation to another or from one prophet to another" that includes at least a brief note designating the family relationship of each successor to his predecessor can certainly be called a genealogy. To keep Nephi's commandments, it was important to record this chain of custody. Doing so necessarily creates a genealogy. Omni's brief words, however, are not limited to such information.

After noting that he was commanded to make a small entry on the plates, Omni mentions that he helped preserve his people from falling into the hands of the Lamanites by fighting with the sword (see Omni 1:2). Although writings on the small plates were not to focus on war (see 1 Nephi 9:4), Nephi's commandments allow such historical matters to be mentioned (see 1 Nephi 9:2 and 19:4 and Jacob 1:2). Indeed, every writer on the small plates from Nephi through Amaleki (except only Chemish) mentions war (see 2 Nephi 5:34; Jacob 7:24–25; Enos 1:24; Jarom 1:13; and Omni 1:2–3, 5–7, 10, and 24). War was a recurring fact of life for these men. Only three of them, Nephi, Omni, and Abinadom, are described as personally fighting with the sword (see Jacob 1:10 and Omni 1:2 and 10), but it's possible, perhaps likely, that others also fought.

The Book of Mormon gives us little reason to infer hardness or wickedness from the fact that someone uses the sword to protect his people. While war can harden some men, it can cause others to "humble themselves before God, even in the depths of humility" (Alma 62:41). Indeed, some of the greatest men in the Book of Mormon protected their people with the sword, including Nephi the son of Lehi, King Benjamin, Alma the son of Alma, Captain Moroni, Helaman, Gidgiddoni, Mormon,

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13. See Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 57, and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

14. OED Online, s.v. "genealogy, n.," at sense 1.a., September 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77484?redirectedFrom=genealogy>.

and Moroni, (see Jacob 1:10; Words of Mormon 1:3; Alma 2:31, 43:16–17, and 53:22; 3 Nephi 6:6; and Mormon 2:1 and 6:12).

Finally, it's easy to imagine the destructive steps the adversary might have attempted if an unrepentant wicked man had gained decades-long access to these sacred plates (see 2 Nephi 26:17, Enos 1:14, and Mormon 6:6). Omni's words needn't be read to suggest such a scenario. If we acknowledge that Omni's confession signals repentance, his words are readily reconciled with those of Mormon, who assures us of a continuous chain of custody by men of God. Had Omni transgressed God's commandments while these plates were in his care, further Book of Mormon context suggests that God would have taken them from him (see Alma 37:14–16; see also Doctrine and Covenants 3:5–11).

### **Context Suggests that Abinadom's Words are Often Misunderstood**

Abinadom, the grandson of Omni, inscribes only 96 words onto the small plates:

Behold, I Abinadom am the son of Chemish. Behold, it came to pass that I saw much war and contention between my people the Nephites and the Lamanites. And I with mine own sword have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defense of my brethren. And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations. *And I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy.* Wherefore that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end. (Omni 1:10–11)

These words have left some students of the Book of Mormon wondering about Abinadom's experience with or even belief in ongoing prophecy and revelation.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, important contextual

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15. See England, "Benjamin," suggesting that these words imply "a haunting commentary on his [Abinadom's] nation's spiritual decline;" Thompson, "The Doctrine," suggesting that they show "that the work of the Holy Spirit among the Nephites had fallen away;" Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 56–57, suggesting that Abinadom had no religious calling and was not a prophet; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 44, suggesting that Abinadom had no new revelations to record and did not focus on spiritual things; and Sperry, "Compendium," suggesting that Abinadom knew of no additional revelation or prophecy to be written. See also Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 111, 113, which leaves Abinadom's worthiness as an open question but assumes he either knows of no new revelation or considers new revelation to be unimportant.

information in Amaleki's account indicates that Abinadom was aware of and obeyed many prophecies and revelations.

Abinadom, like his ancestors before him, was charged with the task of recording on the small plates of Nephi the "heads" of any "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying," touching upon them "as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake and for the sake of our people" (Jacob 1:4). However, every account on the small plates before that of Abinadom is shorter than the preceding one. Because the room on the small plates had diminished, Abinadom was faced with the dilemma of how to preserve the revelation and prophecy of his day without filling up the small plates. His words, though sometimes misunderstood, suggest how he resolved this dilemma. He complied with Nephi's commandment but did not specifically mention this commandment in his brief account. Before we return to his words, we will look ahead at how his son Amaleki solved a similar dilemma in his day. Amaleki's lengthier account provides much of the context needed to clarify Abinadom's words.

Amaleki, the last writer on the small plates, closed the small-plate record, so he knew he wasn't filling precious space that might be needed by a subsequent prophet. His record, while brief, is longer than the combined records of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom. Amaleki had no descendant to receive the small plates. He knew, however, that King Benjamin, who was charged with keeping the other, large plates, was "a just man before the Lord" (Omni 1:25), so he planned to deliver the small plates to King Benjamin, a worthy prophet.

Before turning the small plates over to King Benjamin, Amaleki filled the remaining space on the small plates with an account replete with revelations, prophecies, and sacred events. Providentially, Amaleki's relatively lengthy account describes how his father, Abinadom, was obedient to many important revelations.

Amaleki tells us he "was born in the days of Mosiah" (Omni 1:23). This means that Amaleki and Mosiah's son Benjamin (who became king) were contemporaries — both were born in the days of Mosiah. It also means their fathers, Abinadom and King Mosiah, were contemporaries.

Amaleki's account of the journey of Mosiah's people to the land of Zarahemla (and subsequent events) is written in the third person after a first-person introductory comment by Amaleki (see Omni 1:12–22). Amaleki mentions his own birth afterwards as he begins his first-person narrative that follows his third-person account of those events. The fact that Amaleki's third-person account doesn't include himself as

a participant in those events, together with the fact that Amaleki refers to his own birth and begins a first-person narrative only after his account of those events, likely suggests that Amaleki was born in the land of Zarahemla after those events had taken place.<sup>16</sup> At the very least, since Abinadom and King Mosiah were contemporaries, Amaleki's account describes many events that took place while Abinadom was an adult.

It therefore appears that Abinadom, like King Mosiah, was an adult when “as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord” (Omni 1:12) left the land of Nephi and went into the wilderness, where “they were led by many preachings and prophesyings, and they were admonished continually by the word of God, and they were led by the power of his arm through the wilderness, until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:13). So as we read Abinadom's brief account, we can read it with the realization that Abinadom hearkened to the voice of the Lord and was obedient to many prophecies and revelations received in his day.

Because Amaleki's account confirms that Abinadom knew of — and obeyed — many revelations and prophecies received in his day, Abinadom's reference to the record “engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations” (Omni 1:11) takes on new importance. Just as Abinadom's son Amaleki would rely on King Benjamin to include the future spiritual history of the Nephites on those large plates, Abinadom apparently had personal knowledge that King Mosiah's large-plate record adequately accounted for all revelations and prophecies received in his day.<sup>17</sup>

The space on the small plates, however, was limited, so Abinadom's brief small-plate account doesn't repeat any of these revelations and prophecies. Instead, Abinadom's brief account testifies that all the many prophecies and revelations he has known are duly recorded on the large plates. He says, “The record of this people is engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations. And I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy. Wherefore that which is sufficient is written” (Omni 1:11). We don't have direct access to the

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16. Similar analysis suggests that Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, was with Paul at certain times (see Acts 16:10–18, 20:4–21:19, and 27:1–28:30) and that Alma the younger was born (or somehow became of age) shortly after his father's people escaped from the land of Helam (see Alma 5:5).

17. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 44, suggesting that Abinadom was isolated from political power and that his knowledge of the large-plate record would have been based only on the common knowledge at the time.

records engraved upon those plates, but Abinadom is certain that all of the many revelations and prophesies that affected his life are sufficiently recorded there. Like Nephi, Abinadom may have assumed his readers would also have access to the large-plate record (see 1 Nephi 6:1).

Both King Mosiah and Abinadom were record keepers. Abinadom kept the small plates of Nephi, while Mosiah kept the large plates. Their sons became sufficiently acquainted with each other for Amaleki to know that King Benjamin was “a just man before the Lord” (Omni 1:25) and for King Benjamin to accept the small plates from Amaleki. Although Mosiah was in charge of the large plates, it’s not clear that he always wrote on them personally. Three generations earlier, Jarom had noted that the large plates contained “the writings of the kings, or that which they caused to be written” (Jarom 1:14). It may be that the practice of sometimes delegating to others the actual work of engraving on plates continued in Abinadom’s day. If so, it’s not out of the question that Abinadom, who had the requisite skills and apparently had access to the large plates, had some role in engraving a portion or all of the record kept by the kings about revelations received in his day.

With this possibility in mind, it’s interesting to note that the portion of Amaleki’s account preceding the account of his birth is not only written in the third person but also is an account about the reign of a king. Given these facts, one might speculate an interesting provenance for this portion of Amaleki’s small-plate record. Amaleki might have chosen to include in his small-plate record an abridgment of the portion of the large-plate record (the record of the reigns of kings) that covered the days of his father Abinadom (which were similar to the days of King Mosiah). He may have done so specifically to verify the righteousness inherent in his father’s brief account. This would suggest that Amaleki, like his father, had access to the large-plate record. The large-plate source for the record Amaleki added to the small plates could be the very record that Abinadom assures us can be found on the large plates. There is even a chance this large-plate record was engraved onto those plates by Abinadom. So this could plausibly be Amaleki’s abridgment of the large-plate record made by his father.<sup>18</sup>

In any event, Amaleki’s account of events that occurred while his father Abinadom was an adult helps to clarify that Abinadom was very much aware of and valued “many preachings and prophesyings.”

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18. For similar analysis identifying Nephi’s abridgment of Lehi’s record, see Clifford P. Jones, “The Record of My Father,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019):19–26.

Abinadom and other obedient subjects of Mosiah were “admonished continually by the word of God, and they were led by the power of his arm” (Omni 1:13). Indeed, Abinadom, a prophet of God, probably participated in the preaching, prophesying, and admonishing.

### **The Small Plates Contained a Brief, Selectively Written, Carefully Safeguarded Record**

The greater context of the Book of Mormon harmonizes better with an understanding that Omni, Abinadom, and the other writers of the book of Omni were prophets than with the assumption that they were not devout disciples of Jesus Christ. The Lord knew from the beginning that the small-plate record, including their words, would become the first part of the Book of Mormon (see Doctrine and Covenants 10). It would appear the Lord’s plan for these plates required a relatively small record with its few words focused on sacred things. This is basically how Mormon describes the completed small-plate record (see Words of Mormon 1:3–6). Nephi’s record indicates that the Lord commanded him to make the small plates before telling him about the special, limited record they would contain. Nephi says:

And after that I 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, which should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord. (1 Nephi 19:3)

Presumably, the first commandment mentioned here, the commandment to make these plates, like the commandment to build a ship (see 1 Nephi 17:8), was as specific and detailed as necessary to accomplish the Lord’s purposes. Nephi’s own writings on these small plates and the words of those who later wrote on these plates were limited (by the second commandment mentioned here) to the “more plain and precious parts of” “the ministry and the prophecies.”

Nephi included all his father’s record in his other book, the large plates of Nephi, but included only an abridgment of that record on the small plates. Early in his small-plate record, as Nephi explains his choice to omit some of his father’s words, he implies that this smaller set of plates had a finite, limited amount of room. He chooses not to include his father’s words on these plates, “for *I desire the room* that I may write



the things of God” (1 Nephi 6:3). If these plates, like the large plates, were designed to grow to accommodate more writing over time, Nephi would not have needed to conserve “the room” on the plates.

Because Nephi’s writings on the small plates are so much longer than those of his successors, we may think Nephi was unaffected by the smallness of the plates. However, near the end of his record, he acknowledges a need to limit his own record:

And now I Nephi make an end of my prophesying unto you, my beloved brethren. And I cannot write but a few things which I know must surely come to pass, neither can I write but a few of the words of my brother Jacob. Wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ. (1 Nephi 31:1–2)

These words suggest that the smallness of these plates constrained even Nephi’s relatively long entry. Nephi’s commandments to his successors reflect both the continuing need to carefully consider the content of the plates and the importance of maintaining a prophetic chain of custody to safeguard the record. Nephi commanded his people to hand “these plates” (the special small-plate record on which he is writing)<sup>19</sup> down “from one generation to another or *from one prophet to another* until further commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:4). Some students of the Book of Mormon, perhaps believing the words of Omni

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19. Noel Reynolds has suggested that, in 1 Nephi 19:4, the term *these plates* refers to the large plates of Nephi. (See Noel B. Reynolds, “On Doubting Nephi’s Break Between 1 and 2 Nephi: A Critique of Joseph Spencer’s An Other Testament: On Typology,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 92–93, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/on-doubting-nephis-break-between-1-and-2-nephi-a-critique-of-joseph-spencers-an-other-testament-on-typology/>.) There appears to be better support in the context for the conclusion that this term, used six times across this passage (see 1 Nephi 19:1–5), refers consistently to the small plates — the plates on which Nephi is writing at the time — and that, in this passage, Nephi consistently uses other terms to refer to the large plates — including *the plates which I made*, *those first plates of which I have spoken*, *the first plates*, and *the other plates*. This same consistency is found in an earlier passage (1 Nephi 9:1 through 1 Nephi 10:1). Compare especially the use of the terms *the other plates* and *these plates* in 1 Nephi 9:4 and 1 Nephi 19:4. That earlier passage also refers to the large-plate record as “an account of the reign of the kings.” This description of the large-plate record suggests that it is to be kept and passed down, not from prophet to prophet, but from king to king (while the Nephites are governed by kings). This idea finds support in Words of Mormon 1:10, Jarom 1:14, and Omni 1:11. Compare Words of Mormon 1:3.

and Abinadom indicate that the small plates were not handed down from one prophet to another, have construed this commandment as an either-or proposition that doesn't mandate prophetic succession.

It appears, however, that Nephi is commanding his people to pass these plates only from prophet to prophet. This reading harmonizes much better with the reason for the commandment. Both the Lord and Nephi commanded that this unique record focus on prophecies and related spiritual matters (see 1 Nephi 9:3, 19:3, and Jacob 1:1–4). A record always kept by prophets stands the best chance of being focused on such matters. Although the words of Omni and Abinadom are sometimes misconstrued, it appears, both from Mormon's words about these plates and from the words written thereon, that these plates were in fact always kept by prophets.

The intended meaning of this passage (1 Nephi 19:4) depends in part on the intended meaning of the word *or*. This word can be used “to coordinate two (or more) sentence elements between which there is an alternative.”<sup>20</sup> It can also be used “connecting two [terms] denoting the same thing.”<sup>21</sup> If Nephi's commandment presents alternatives, he is describing two different options, generational succession or prophetic succession, either of which would suffice. If his commandment connects two similar terms, he is using the two terms jointly to denote one thing — prophetic succession.

Nephi sometimes uses the word *or* to present two different options. For instance, he explains that people in Jerusalem “must repent *or* the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:4). Similarly, he says that “the final state of the soul of man is to dwell in the kingdom of God *or* to be cast out” (1 Nephi 15:35). He explains that the house of Israel will be scattered among all nations “sooner *or* later” (1 Nephi 22:3). In each of these cases, the word *or* indicates alternate possibilities. (See other examples in 1 Nephi 11:15; 13:20; 14:4; 15:31, 35; and 2 Nephi 9:23; 10:23; and 28:19.)

Nephi also uses the word *or* to connect two similar terms that jointly denote only one thing. For instance, he ends the introduction to his first book by saying, “This is according to the account of Nephi, *or* in other words, I Nephi wrote this record.” Later, he quotes Lehi, who says, “I have dreamed a dream, *or* in other words, I have seen a vision” (1 Nephi 8:2). In a similar passage, he refers again to Lehi's “dream *or* vision” (1 Nephi 8:36). “Similarly, Nephi refers to Jesus Christ as “a Messiah, *or* in other words, a Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:4), and later as “this

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20. OED Online, s.v. “or, conj.1” at sense 1, September 2019, <https://bit.ly/34EMckr>.

21. Ibid, at sense 4a.

Messiah of which he [Lehi] hath spoken, *or* this Redeemer of the world” (1 Nephi 10:5). In each instance, the word *or* connects two similar terms to denote just one thing. In most instances, the second term provides additional information so that the joint meaning is more definitive than that of the first term alone. (See other examples in 1 Nephi 10:14; 14:23; 15:17, 20; 17:41; 19:4; and 2 Nephi 4:34; 5:12; 27:1; and 28:31.)

In some instances, the second term in a joint description provides essential clarification that avoids confusion that might have occurred had the first term been used alone. For example, Nephi says, “[The Lord] shall be rejected of the Jews *or* of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 15:17). This pair of terms connected with the word *or* indicates that Nephi’s term *the Jews* refers not just to the descendants of Judah or to the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah but to all the house of Israel, whose scattered remnants will reject the Savior. In a very similar passage, Nephi follows this pattern again with the same terms: “[Isaiah] spake concerning the restoration of the Jews *or* of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 15:20). In each of these instances, the second term adds crucial meaning that would be missing with only the first term. The use of the second term clarifies the fact that the term *the Jews* is intended to describe the entire house of Israel. This broad meaning of the term *the Jews*, somewhat unusual in our day, isn’t limited to these two passages. Nephi also uses the term *the Jews* to refer to the entire house of Israel in 1 Nephi 3:3; 13:23, 39–42; and 2 Nephi 9:2).

It appears that in 1 Nephi 19:4, the verse we are considering, Nephi again uses the word *or* to connect two similar terms that describe only one thing, and again the second term provides essential clarification that avoids confusion that might exist had the first term been used alone. In this verse, Nephi is saying in essence, “that these plates [the small plates] should be handed down from one generation to another or [in other words] from one prophet to another until further commandment from the Lord.” The intended similarity between these two terms, like the similarity between the terms *the Jews* and *the house of Israel*, isn’t apparent at first glance. It becomes clearer as we review other Book of Mormon passages. In several other passages, the context indicates that the terms *from one generation to another* and *from generation to generation* refer to prophetic succession rather than succession from father to son (see, for example, 2 Nephi 9:2; Mosiah 28:14, 20; Alma 37:4 and 63:13; and 4 Nephi 1:48). In 1 Nephi 19:4, the word *or* appears to provide similar context by connecting these two terms. This meaning is consistent with the content Mormon found on these plates.

Nephi's commandment to Jacob, set forth at the very beginning of Jacob's record, repeats both that the limited contents of this record should be focused on spiritual things and that the record is to be preserved across the generations by trustworthy men:

Nephi gave me Jacob a commandment concerning *these small plates* upon which these things are engraven. And he gave me Jacob a commandment that I should write upon these plates *a few* of the things which I considered to be *most precious*, that I should not touch save it were lightly concerning the history of this people, which are called the people of Nephi. For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed from generation to generation. And if there were *preaching which were sacred*, or *revelation which was great*, or *prophesying*,<sup>22</sup> that I should engraven *the heads of them* upon these plates and *touch upon them as much as it were possible*, for Christ's sake and for the sake of our people. (Jacob 1:1–4)

Jacob's restatement of the commandment to preserve the plates from generation to generation doesn't repeat the more specific language about passing them from prophet to prophet. Perhaps Jacob doesn't feel the need to repeat this clarification, which already appears on these plates in Nephi's initial commandment. Perhaps, as in other passages cited above, Jacob considers the term *from generation to generation* to imply passage from prophet to prophet. In any event, Jacob and his descendants who kept these plates consistently refer to plural *commandments* of their fathers, suggesting that they viewed these commandments jointly. Mormon's words in Words of Mormon 1:1–3 indicate that the practice of Jacob and his descendants was to pass this prophecy-focused record from prophet to prophet.

This commandment also indicates that writings on these plates need to conform to the small size of the plates. These small plates weren't intended even for all preaching or revelation but only "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying." And even then, only

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22. It appears Nephi uses the word *or* here to list three different types of information, the heads (chief or principal points) of which are to be touched upon as much as may be possible (given the small size of the plates).

the “heads” of them (the chief or principal points)<sup>23</sup> should be engraved on these plates. Jacob adds that these most important points should be touched upon “as much as it were possible.” These words, including their subjunctive mood, suggest full elaboration might not always be possible.

Jacob’s small-plate record is substantially shorter than Nephi’s. This doesn’t necessarily mean Jacob was less of a prophet than Nephi, or that he had fewer important things to say. Jacob’s primary ministry was to speak the word of God to his people (see Jacob 4:1), but he also labored to “write a few words upon plates” (Jacob 4:2) to benefit future generations. Nothing in the small-plate record suggests it is the sole plate-based record kept by Jacob or his successors. Multiple records were kept at other times (see, for example, 3 Nephi 5:9–10). The writing skills of these men may suggest they also kept other records. Jacob suggests that because of the small-plate size limitations, some of the proceedings of the people that might otherwise be appropriate for the small plates were written on the large plates. He says, “A hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, which now began to be numerous, cannot be written upon these plates; but many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates” (Jacob 3:13). Jacob then continues with words about writing *upon plates* that aren’t necessarily limited to *these plates* (the small plates). He says, “We can write a few words *upon plates*, which will give our children and also our beloved brethren a small degree of knowledge concerning us or concerning their fathers. Now in this thing we do rejoice, and we labor diligently to engraven these words *upon plates*, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts” (Jacob 4:2–3).

In addition to any other records they may have kept, Jacob and his descendants were commanded to keep the small-plate record, but they were commanded to keep things brief and to write down only the extraordinary. They were obedient to Nephi’s commandments and carefully selected the few words they added to this record. Shorter small-plate records don’t devalue these men as instruments in the Lord’s hands. We should resist the temptation to assume less zeal on the part of those with shorter small-plate records — especially shorter records that suggest obedience to Nephi’s commandments. These commandments are a mandate not only to write but also to make difficult, inspired choices to limit each account in furtherance of the Lord’s wise purposes. The limiting smallness of the plates is mentioned repeatedly by Jacob

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23. OED Online, s.v. “head, n.1”, at sense 30, September 2019, <https://bit.ly/2EXmFHP>.

(see Jacob 4:2 and 7:27) and by several of his successors (see Jarom 1:2, 14, and Omni 1:4, 9).<sup>24</sup>

### Jacob, Enos, and Jarom were Prophets

Prophetic succession prior to the book of Omni provides additional context for the words of the writers of Omni. Jacob was the first prophet selected by Nephi to preserve the small-plate record. Jacob's spirituality and status as a prophet are clear even in Nephi's own record, five chapters of which are devoted to Jacob's teachings (see 2 Nephi chapters 6–10). In addition, Nephi confirms that Jacob, like Nephi, has seen the Lord (see 2 Nephi 11:3).

Near the end of Jacob's life, he handed the small-plate record down to his son Enos and charged him to keep it according to Nephi's commandments. Some of Jacob's final words corroborate his earlier words about the brevity of the record he kept in compliance with Nephi's commandment (see Jacob 7:27). The small-plate record of Enos is much smaller than that of Jacob. His record includes some but clearly not all of the revelations received by himself and other prophets in his days (see Enos 1:5–19, 21–23, and 26). The limitations caused by the small size of the plates became more acute as the plates filled up. An estimate based on the length of the English translation indicates that Nephi filled about 81% of the small plates with 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. Jacob and Enos combined to fill another 16% of the plates, leaving only about 3% (about six pages of English text) to be shared among Jarom and all successors.

Limited space on the plates was an important consideration for Jarom. He begins his account saying, "I Jarom write a few words" and then continues with a reference to the commandment passed on to him by his father Enos, "according to the commandment of my father Enos, that our genealogy may be kept" (Jarom 1:1). It has been suggested that the use of the word *genealogy* in this charge implies a disappointing change in course.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned earlier, obedience to Nephi's commandments required each author to add at least a brief message to verify that the record had passed to the prophet of the next generation. The series of such messages was indeed a genealogy.

At the same time, Jarom's few words clarify that he understood Nephi's commandments entailed more than merely mentioning family

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24. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 27, suggesting more plates might have been added but for a lack of resources.

25. See Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants," 57, and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

relationships.<sup>26</sup> “And as these plates are small and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore it must needs be that I write a little” (Jarom 1:2). Even though Jarom had prophesied and received revelations for his people, he shares only the fact that revelations continue in his day. He says, “I shall not write the things of my prophesying nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written, for have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you: Yea; and this sufficeth me” (Jarom 1:2). In this choice not to detail his own prophecies, Jarom is like his father Enos, who, after recording the revelatory experience by which he received a remission of his sins, repeatedly mentions his further preaching and prophesying (see Enos 1:23, 26) but doesn’t fill the small plates with these prophecies.

The word *sufficeth* means “to be enough for; to meet the desires, needs, or requirements of (a person); to satisfy.”<sup>27</sup> In light of Jarom’s multiple references to the smallness of the plates and the few words he could add, his use of the word *sufficeth* appears to indicate that under the circumstances, he feels his short entry, together with the words of his predecessors, would be sufficient. As mentioned earlier, Nephi uses the same word with similar intent (see 1 Nephi 31:1–2). This word also applies when records are limited for other good reasons (see 1 Nephi 14:28 and Ether 3:17).

The choices of Enos and Jarom not to record all their prophecies onto these particular plates needn’t suggest that the spirit of the Lord was waning among the Nephites.<sup>28</sup> Nephi’s commandment limits writings on these plates to the judicious mention of “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great” (Jacob 1:4). Jarom’s writings appear tailored to meet that requirement.

Jarom approvingly refers his readers to the “other plates of Nephi,” which were kept pursuant to Nephi’s commandment (see 1 Nephi 19:4) and which were not required to remain small. Jarom tells us that on those plates “the records of our wars are engraven according to the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written” (Jarom 1:14). This reference to the other plates of Nephi may suggest that Jarom was aware of their contents. The righteous kings of his day invited others to write on those plates. We can’t rule out the possibility that Jarom and his descendants, who clearly had the requisite skills, may have left records on those other plates.

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26. But see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 26.

27. OED Online, s.v. “suffice, v.,” at sense 5.a, September 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193537?redirectedFrom=suffice>.

28. But see Thompson, “The Doctrine,” 108.

It has been implied that Jarom’s reference to writings about wars on the large plates suggests Jarom’s lack of spirituality,<sup>29</sup> but it seems at least as likely that this reference points to a spiritual message on the large plates. Jarom has told us earlier that “our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands” (Jarom 1:7). The writings of these kings (or those who wrote for them) likely clarified how faith led to success in battle.

Indeed, the righteousness of Nephite kings during the small-plate period provides helpful context for the efforts of the small-plate authors. We no longer have the large-plate record of the Nephite kings during this period, but we can piece together some information about them from the limited small-plate record. We don’t know how many kings served across the seven generations of Jacob’s line during the small-plate period, but none of these kings are described in the small-plate record as unrighteous.<sup>30</sup> As noted earlier, Jarom says, “Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord” (Jarom 1:7). His use of the plural word *kings* identifies at least two righteous kings, perhaps more. Two more righteous kings, the first King Mosiah and King Benjamin, are mentioned by Amaleki, the final writer on the small plates. Thus, while the record is silent about some kings, we know that at least four were righteous. The one consistent fact we have about all these kings is that the other record commissioned by Nephi, the large-plate record, was preserved across all their reigns.

At the end of Jarom’s record, he passes the plates to his son Omni, still subject to Nephi’s commandments: “I, Jarom, do not write more, for the plates are small. . . . And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers” (Jarom 1:14–15). Jarom’s reference to the commandments of

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29. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 35.

30. During the reign of the king called Second Nephi, the people “began to grow hard in their hearts” (Jacob 1:15). Their hardness, however, doesn’t require an unrighteous king any more than wickedness among the Nephites during the reigns of King Benjamin and King Mosiah (see Words of Mormon 1:15–18 and Mosiah chapters 26 and 27) suggests their unrighteousness. Jacob’s limited record is almost silent and somewhat inconclusive about Second Nephi. Apparently, this king did nothing to prevent Jacob from preaching and prophesying, but Jacob doesn’t mention any direct cooperation either. Near the end of Jacob’s life, God helped the righteous Nephites conquer their enemies, perhaps under the leadership of a righteous king (see Jacob 7:25). Jacob’s record says little about the king or kings of his day, but it doesn’t clearly identify any king as unrighteous.



his fathers (plural) indicates that Jarom was well aware of and believed in honoring these commandments engraved onto the small-plate record (even if his own father's charge was somehow insufficient).

Jarom's small-plate record filled only about 1% of the small plates, but that left only 2% (fewer than four pages of English text) to be shared among all five subsequent writers. It appears that as a group, these five writers of the book of Omni kept the sacred plates for roughly 200 years. Each of the first four of these men (Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom) adds a brief entry without knowing how many additional writers would need space on the plates. Their four combined records on these plates occupy just over one page of English text. We can assume the Lord was aware of and planned for the severe space restrictions on this particular set of plates, for which he had a specific long-term plan. His plan didn't require longer accounts from these men. Their main role was to preserve the record and pass it on, accounting for their links in a sacred chain of custody. Doing this honored Nephi's commandments.

### **The Accounts of Other Writers in the Book of Omni Also Honor Nephi's Commandments**

We have already reviewed the words of Omni and Abinadom, two of the writers in the book of Omni. Amaron's brief small-plate message, which comes after that of Omni, recounts that the Lord visited the wicked among the Nephites in great judgment while delivering the righteous out of the hands of their enemies. Amaron states that this destruction and deliverance confirms prophecies made by his fathers. It appears that Amaron felt the available room on the plates allowed only this brief testimony of the Lord's justice and mercy. He records nothing about his own ministry to his people. His additional words tell us only that he "did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish" (Omni 1:8). Amaron's brief message may be the ultimate example of keeping Nephi's commandment to touch as much as possible (given the limited space) on the most important points. Amaron appears to be keenly aware not only of Nephi's commandment to write but also his commandment to make difficult choices to keep the record small.

It should be added that the destruction of the wicked among the Nephites during the lifetime of Amaron doesn't tell us anything about the quality of the prophetic leadership at the time. Wicked Nephites were destroyed during the ministries of several great prophets, including Alma the son of Alma (see Alma chapter 16), Nephi the son of Helaman

(see Helaman chapter 4), Nephi the son of Nephi (see 3 Nephi chapter 8), and Mormon (see Mormon chapter 6).

Despite Amaron's apparent effort to write according to Nephi's commandments, Amaron is the first writer on the small plates who doesn't expressly acknowledge obedience to Nephi's commandments. It appears that Amaron's brother Chemish, realizing this omission, does his best to rectify it in his own brief small-plate entry. Chemish attests that he was a personal witness to what his brother wrote and asserts, in the first-person plural, that both he and his brother (we) kept the records in a manner that was "according to the commandments of our fathers" (Omni 1:9). This apparent brotherly assist is all Chemish inscribes onto the sacred plates.

Of course, our curiosity begs for more information about all the decades during which these men kept these plates. It appears, however, that each of these writers felt compelled, perhaps inspired, to write less than his predecessor on this set of plates to save space for future writers. Because the size of the small plates was fixed, more words from earlier writers would mean fewer words from Amaleki, whose brief but longer record provides us with essential information.<sup>31</sup> The brevity of earlier writers preserved precious space on which Amaleki shares his message. This brevity needn't suggest that Amaleki's predecessors were not interested in the spiritual theme of the small plates or that they disliked writing.<sup>32</sup> It's likely each exercised great restraint to comply with Nephi's commandments — leaving precious room on these plates to be well used generations later by an important "concluding speaker."

We have already discussed some of the words of Amaleki, the small-plate "concluding speaker." While his record covers many events, including events that happened before his birth, it shares very little about his own life. He doesn't mention his own revelations or prophecies, but he exhorts his readers to come unto Christ and be saved (see Omni 1:25–26). As mentioned earlier, Mormon's record suggests that all small-plate writers were prophets. In addition, Mormon's discussion about the reign of King Benjamin may allude to Amaleki's efforts as a prophet. Mormon

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31. See Sperry, "Compendium," 273, 277; and England, "Benjamin."

32. But see Sperry, "Compendium," 273, 277, suggesting these men may not have enjoyed writing; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 35, 44, suggesting that Jarom had plenty of space but that wars may have been more interesting to him and that the others before Amaleki had nothing to say. See also Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 111, which theorizes that the limited records may be due to a lack of spiritual preparation, a lack of effort, or perhaps a lack of space on the plates.

tells us multiple “prophets” and “holy men” helped King Benjamin overcome false prophets and teachers and establish peace in the land (see Words of Mormon 1:16–18). Because Mormon has already identified Amaleki as a prophet, it seems likely that Amaleki was among those who participated in this effort.

### Conclusion

Nephi commanded that the small plates be handed down “from one prophet to another” (1 Nephi 19:4). Mormon confirms that this commandment was kept when he refers to Jacob’s descendants who wrote on these plates as prophets (see Words of Mormon 1:3). The brief accounts left by Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki, when read in light of applicable scriptural context, support Mormon’s statement that these men were prophets of God.

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