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## Scripture Update: Lehi as a Visionary Man

One of the complaints leveled against Lehi by his rebellious sons Laman and Lemuel and his wife, Sariah, was that he was a “visionary man” (1 Nephi 2:11; 5:2). Although this term does not appear in the King James translation of the Bible, it accurately reflects the Hebrew word *hazon*, meaning divine vision.<sup>1</sup> Although this Hebrew term appears in connection with true prophets of God, it is also sometimes written with a negative connotation, describing false prophets, especially in the writings of Lehi’s contemporary Jeremiah (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16).

In Jeremiah 23, the prophet refers to certain opponents who cried peace in contradiction to his true message of repentance and the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote, “They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:16). They deceptively cried peace for Jerusalem “unto everyone that walketh after the imagination of his own heart” (Jeremiah 23:17). The Lord drew a distinction between true prophets and the false prophets of his day. “For who hath stood in the *counsel* of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it? . . . But if they had stood in my *counsel*, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from their evil doings” (Jeremiah 23:18, 22, emphasis added). The Hebrew word rendered “counsel” in this passage is *sod*, meaning a “council” or “assembly.” In contrast to these false prophets, Jeremiah had received his mes-

sage in the heavenly council of God (Hebrew *sod*), while the false prophets had not.<sup>2</sup>

In a revelation to Jeremiah that some biblical scholars date to the early reign of Zedekiah<sup>3</sup> the Lord said, “I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour. . . . The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully” (Jeremiah 23:25–28).

While we do not know whether these revelations of Jeremiah would have been known to Laman and Lemuel at the time, the charges they leveled against Lehi seem to reflect similar views. “For behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a *visionary man*. . . . And this they said he had done because of the *foolish imaginations of his heart*” (1 Nephi 2:11). Later, they leveled the same false accusation against Nephi (1 Nephi 17:20). In light of the controversies reflected in Jeremiah, it seems likely that when Laman and Lemuel described their father as a “visionary man,” they were not simply suggesting that he was an old fool. They were accusing him of being a false prophet who was leading their family astray.

Nephi, on the other hand, who knew that those accusations were false, countered them by noting that (1) Lehi (like Jeremiah) had stood in the divine council and received his message from the Lord (1 Nephi 1:8–14); (2) unlike the false prophets who had a message of peace, Lehi preached that the


### Submissions Welcome

Scripture Updates are brief (no more than 600 words), well-written summary reports of work dealing with LDS scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, that has been completed or is ongoing. They are intended to keep our readers current on new insights, developments, and discoveries relating to the scriptures. Touching on issues such as the language of scripture, literary composition, the history of the texts, translation matters, and comparisons with other scriptures or writings, as well as issues that emerge from various expositions of particular passages or teachings in the texts, they represent work that is being pursued by scholars in a number of relevant fields of study—textual and literary studies, linguistics, history, cultural studies, and so forth. The goal of these Scripture Updates is to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the scriptures of the restoration.

We invite readers to contribute to Scripture Updates by sending an e-mail to the attention of Matt Roper: [matt\\_ropor@byu.edu](mailto:matt_ropor@byu.edu).

people must repent or be destroyed (1 Nephi 1:13); (3) unlike the false prophets who claimed dreams but did not reveal their content or call the people to repentance (Jeremiah 23:28), Lehi openly declared the messages he received from the Lord to the Jews (1 Nephi 1:18) and to his family (1 Nephi 8:2–38). In his account of his father's visions, Nephi seems to be responding in some measure to his brothers' accusation that Lehi was a false visionary.

In this light, Lehi's gentle response to his wife's accusation is also interesting. He affirmed, "I know that I am a [true] visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren" (1 Nephi 5:4). This was a knowledge that the false prophets in Jerusalem did not have. "For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sot-tish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jeremiah 4:22). Lehi's declaration that he knew of "the goodness of God" reflects what he had learned in his vision of the heavenly council, where he "had read and seen many great and marvelous things" and learned of God's "power, and goodness, and mercy" (1 Nephi 1:14). Like the false

prophets at Jerusalem, Laman and Lemuel were ignorant of the Lord and his ways (1 Nephi 2:12; 15:3). The false visionaries would not hearken to the message of Jeremiah and were cast out of God's presence (Jeremiah 23:39). A similar judgment awaited Lehi's sons if they continued to reject the teachings of true visionary men like Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 2:21). 

Matthew Roper

#### Notes

1. John A. Tvedtnes, "A Visionary Man," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 29–31.

2. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45/179–80 (1944): 151–57; S. B. Parker, "Council," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 204–8; John W. Welch, "The Calling of a Prophet," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 35–54.

3. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* (New York: Anchor Bible and Doubleday, 2004), 211.

## Reformatted Text of Book of Mormon Enhances Study

Just in time for the study of the Book of Mormon in the 2008 churchwide Sunday School courses, the Maxwell Institute recently released an updated and expanded edition of Donald W. Parry's *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text*.

This new edition seeks to enhance study of the Book of Mormon and features many improvements upon the first edition, which was released in 1992 under the title *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted*. In this edition, Parry observes, "new examples of chiasmus, parallelisms, and figures of speech have been added to the volume," and it also "features a glossary of terms, chapter and verse headings on each page, and an index that lists the various forms, parallelisms, and figures, together with scriptural references. All of these additions and enhancements are designed to make this new edition more user friendly to the reader."

Parry notes that since the publication of the first edition, he has "received many affirmative communications from individuals as to how [his] work on poetic parallelisms in the Book of Mormon had positively impacted them," prompting him to issue a new edition. However, he reminds us "that there is no poetic, parallelistic, repetitious form or figure of speech that should become more important than the Book of Mormon's chief message, which is to convince 'the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God' (Book of Mormon title page). Rather, all of these forms and figures are designed to present this message regarding Jesus Christ and his gospel in an unforgettable, understandable, artistic, and fascinating way."

*Poetic Parallelisms* is now available at the Maxwell Institute Web site ([maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu)). 