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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, 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

211. Gee, “Choose the Things That Please Me,” 68.

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

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 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)

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.”

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 (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 ascendance 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 the 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

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

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:

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"

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

216. Up to this point in 1 Nephi, preaching to "my brethren" has meant Nephi preaching to Laman and Lemuel. That is not the case here. Nephi has stepped out of the narrative-time and into author-voice. He is speaking of the things he taught the people of Nephi.

(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 ... |
| 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 <i>amen</i>) |

- 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

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, sees 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.

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:

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

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.

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

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 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.

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

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

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.

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)

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

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

225. Reynolds, “On Doubting Nephi’s Break Between 1 and 2 Nephi,” 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.”

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 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.

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.”

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.

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

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

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

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.

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 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

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

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

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 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.

234. The Joseph Smith Papers, *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).

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.”

