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Chapter 11: Book of 1 Nephi

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Chapter 11: Book of 1 Nephi

1 Nephi Chapter I (1–5)²⁷⁶

Nephi begins his book according to traditions he learned in his scribal training.²⁷⁷ He adds a colophon,²⁷⁸ which had two functions: describe the contents of the book and to identify that author. The synoptic header prior to chapter I provides the outline of the events to be covered in Nephi’s first book: the departure of the family from Jerusalem, the journey into the wilderness, the return to Jerusalem for the brass plates, the acquisition of wives from Ishmael’s family, the arrival at Bountiful, the building of a ship, and the journey to the new world. Evidence from Mormon’s use of the synoptic headers suggests that the synopsis was considered a part of the text. There was no apparent difference between the synopsis and the beginning of the text, as there is no evidence of such separation either in the extant original manuscript or in the printer’s manuscript. Separating the synopsis appears to have been the compositor’s choice. It is not unreasonable under modern considerations, and certainly followed typical practices for printed texts of the day.

Included in the basic events listed in the synopsis are hints of the way Nephi intended to tell the tale: “Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews.” This verse tells us more of how Nephi wants to tell the story than it does of the history of the event. Lehi sent the brothers; Nephi did not take them. Nephi was the youngest and therefore would not have been in charge.

276. As introduced in Part 1, I am concerned with the original chapters that represent Nephi and Mormon’s ideas of what formed a chapter. The modern chapters date from Orson Pratt’s revisions for the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon.

277. See the section “Nephi’s Plausible Training as a Scribe,” Chapter 7.

278. John A. Tvedtnes, “Colophons in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Marvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1991), 13.

Nevertheless, even at the introduction to the book, Nephi foreshadows the very personal reason that this event is entered into the text.

Nephi also planned to speak about how: “Nephi’s brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them.” The essential conflict between Nephites and Lamanites is foreshadowed from the very beginning, and the ultimate superiority of the Nephites declared — even before the actual events are discussed.

I see the final line now included in the synoptic head through 1 Nephi 1:3 as declaring the self-identification function of the colophon:

*This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.*²⁷⁹

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, *therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days*. Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians. *And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.* (1 Nephi–1 Nephi 1:3, verse numbers removed, bolding to highlight the essential information about the creation of the text.)

It was possible in scribal tradition that a scribe might be copying a first-person document. Hence the declaration, while redundant in this case, was conceptually required to note that the first-person speaker of the document was the very person who wrote it, rather than it’s being a copy.

As Nephi begins, he very clearly declares that this is his own story. Although he will need to begin his story with some information about his father, it is his own story that is the theme: “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” (1 Nephi 1:1).

279. The italicized verse is set as the last line of the book header in all versions since 1830. However, I see it as a chapter header that is separate from the book header.

The Setup

1 Nephi 1:5–15 describes Lehi’s prophetic call. It is written in the third person, and quotes only Lehi himself in 1 Nephi 1:13. The rest is Nephi’s description of events. While it is possible that Nephi consulted Lehi’s record for this information, it is equally possible that this came from Nephi’s memory of the events. Although they were thirty years in the past, it is certain they had been important enough to Nephi to create a strong memory.

When Nephi finishes this introduction, it occurs to him that it might be confusing that he says this would be “a record of my proceedings in my days” (1 Nephi 1:1). Therefore, he inserts information to clarify what he was doing:

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)²⁸⁰

Just before this insertion, Nephi had been speaking of “the things which he [Lehi] had seen” (1 Nephi 1:15). As he returns, he repeats that general idea: “that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi...” (1 Nephi 1:18). This is the standard form for repetitive resumption, clearly indicating that verses 16 and 17 were an

280. For ease of comparison to the current LDS edition, I have left the verses as they are in the 1983 edition. As noted in Part 1, our modern concepts of paragraphing do not fit with the linguistic markers Nephites used. Were I to try to replicate the way I think the Nephi conceived of his thought-units, I would format these two verses as follows:

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.

aside and not part of the originally planned text. This marks Nephi's return to his father's story.

Verses 1 Nephi 1:18–2:7 describe Lehi's rejection in Jerusalem, the revelation to leave, and the arrival at the first camp. Fittingly, this section ends with Lehi setting up an altar to provide a thanks-offering²⁸¹ to the Lord 1 Nephi 2:7. At the end of 1 Nephi 1:20 Nephi indicates that he “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.” The fulfillment of this promise is immediate, for he records that the Lord spoke to his father in a dream to save them by having them leave Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:1).

In 1 Nephi 2:8–14, Nephi sets up the conflict with Laman and Lemuel. At this point, their conflict is with their father. That changes rapidly. Nephi contrasts his own experience with his brothers, indicating that he had some of the same reservations but took them to the Lord. In 1 Nephi 2:16 he relates that “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.” Nephi now shows himself as one who also communicates with Yahweh, specifically having had Yahweh visit him (without any more explanation than that). Thus, Nephi is aligned with Lehi not only in belief but in their common direct relationship with Yahweh.

Even the conflict with Laman and Lemuel shifts at this point:

And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words.

But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them. (1 Nephi 2:17–18)

Sam recognizes Nephi's new position as paralleling Lehi. Laman and Lemuel did not. They are now in conflict with both of the family's prophets. With Nephi now established as one of the family prophets, Lehi becomes more and more a secondary character. We are now firmly in Nephi's story.

The next recorded event comes without any indication of how it fits into the historical time frame. Coming after the discussion with Sam, Laman, and Lemuel, it might be a second revelation. However, it is possible that Nephi simply moved the specifics of Yahweh's message

281. Also known as Peace offerings. For more information, see S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 2.

to this point in time. It is possible that establishing Nephi as parallel to Lehi in both communication with Yahweh and in conflict with Laman and Lemuel was the first priority. The actual content of the prophecy is essential for all that comes later and perhaps required the established conflict with Laman and Lemuel to be fully understood:

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.

For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.

And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.

(1 Nephi 2:19–24)

Nephi presents the divine revelations that will drive the rest of his narrative up to the end of 2 Nephi 5. Long before Nephi records that his father had received the promise of a new land (2 Nephi 1:5), Nephi declares that the promise of a new land came to him as well. It is probable that part of Lehi's revelation that they leave included the promise of a new land that was to be the goal of their exodus, but Nephi doesn't record it. This is, after all, Nephi's story.

It is important to note that the promise came to Nephi because it foresees that Nephi will be the ruler in the new land. That rulership is specifically noted in 1 Nephi 2:22 where Nephi is prophesied to become a ruler and a teacher over his brethren. The position as ruler will not occur until after they arrive in the New World,²⁸² but Nephi will use

282. Nephi never rules his brothers in the New World, The examples Nephi uses are all from the time before their arrival in the New World.

his record of the Old-World portion of their journey to demonstrate the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Finally, the contention with Laman and Lemuel that Nephi paralleled as their rebellion against their father is now prophetically imposed upon the future. Nephi sets up Laman and Lemuel as quintessential enemies of those who will eventually follow Nephi. The future Nephite conflicts are declared to be the result of prophecy and a divine declaration that “thy brethren” will become “a scourge unto thy seed.” In the requirements of the Ancient Near Eastern origin story, this fulfills the need for “the existence of an ancestral enemy or enemies.”²⁸³ It may not be a coincidence that “thy brethren” is used rather than the expected Laman and Lemuel. By the time the prophecy’s fulfillment is relevant, it wasn’t about specific brothers but rather the generic Lamanites who become the promised enemy.²⁸⁴

One of the interesting features of Nephi’s discussion of family history while they camped in the valley of Lemuel is the frequent repetition of the idea of their father’s dwelling in a tent.²⁸⁵ Nephi uses references to his father’s tent to mark the boundaries of narrative units in the text. The reference tends to come at the end of the unit and notes that a particular story has finished. Perhaps a modern writer would have separated these events into discrete chapters, but that is not the way Nephi uses chapters.

Return for the Brass Plates

The next event Nephi elects to tell is the return to Jerusalem for the brass plates. This story is certainly in an appropriate chronological sequence, but we cannot know what Nephi might have left out. As written, Nephi receives Yahweh’s prophetic blessing and returns to his father’s tent, whereupon Lehi immediately sends the brothers to Jerusalem.

Nephi will use this event as the pivot from his position as younger brother to ruler and teacher over his brothers. This event will not have him as a ruler and teacher but rather as a leader and teacher. Nevertheless, the incident is written to demonstrate both of these changes in his relationship with his brothers.

283. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149. See Part 1 for an expanded explanation of this facet of Nephi’s text.

284. While Nephi doesn’t specifically define *Lamanites* as a generic label, Jacob explicitly does (Jacob 1:14). The prophesied scourge of the Nephites was not two specific brothers but a people descended from or at least associated with Laman and Lemuel.

285. The specific phrase, or at least a mention of coming to the tent of their father, occurs only for the time they spent in the valley of Lemuel. See verses 1 Nephi 2:6, 15; 3:1; 4:38; 5:7; 7:5, 21; 9:1; 10:16; 15:1; 16:6, 10.

The story begins with Lehi's noticing and declaring Nephi's obedience as contrasted to his brothers' murmuring (1 Nephi 3:5–6). Although Lehi notes his faithfulness, the story is inexorably shifting to Nephi. Therefore, Nephi makes the distinction more personal with his own declaration of obedience to the Lord (perhaps pointedly not to Lehi in this context). When the story begins, we note that: "And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 3:9). I suspect that it is intentional that Nephi places himself in the leadership position, even before the excursion begins.

At the beginning of the attempt for the brass plates, the brothers cast lots, and Laman is appropriately chosen.²⁸⁶ That attempt fails, and Nephi takes the position of instructing his brothers in the reasons for continuing the attempt (1 Nephi 3:15–21). Explaining the failure to his brothers puts Nephi in the position of a teacher over his brothers. Nephi proposes that they collect their riches from their land of inheritance and purchase the plates. It doesn't go well.

The anger that followed this attempt was broken by the appearance of an angel. Nephi had taught, but that didn't work. To set up the third attempt, it wasn't Nephi's teaching but the angel's declaration that made the difference. Important to the way Nephi is developing his message, the angel specifically says: "Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you...?" (1 Nephi 3:29). The divine declaration of Nephi's position is now delivered to Laman and Lemuel through a heavenly messenger.

Even with the declaration that Nephi would be a ruler, Nephi still provides justification by relating another incident where he taught his brothers. This time, he cites the scriptural story of Moses escaping the powerful Egyptians as a model for Yahweh's allowing them to escape the powerful Laban. Nephi writes: "Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 4:4). Laman and Lemuel do not necessarily change, but they *follow*. Even with the conflict remaining with his brothers, those brothers implicitly accept his leadership (if not the prophesied rulership).

The discovery of a drunken Laban and his subsequent beheading is obviously placed in the text intentionally. It is not recorded because

286. The randomness of the lots allowed for the expression of Yahweh's will. Laman, as the eldest, should have borne the responsibility and the Lord allowed him that opportunity. For using lots as a means of divining Yahweh's will, see Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 95.

killing Laban was an easy decision. Nephi specifically records that it was the Spirit which commanded the action and that Nephi was initially reluctant (1 Nephi 4:10–17). Most importantly, verse 11 notes that “the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands.” This appears to be a reference to Exodus 21:12–14:

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver *him* into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

Nephi would certainly have heard the phrase “delivered him into thy hands” as a reference to the legal definition of when one might legally take a life. Of course this depends upon Nephi’s understanding, but the probability of his scribal training combined with the ways in which he uses scripture to support his textual themes suggests that he understood it in just that way.

Similarly, if Ben McGuire correctly reads the allusions in this story, Nephi intentionally crafted this story to parallel the story of David and Goliath. In that story, a young David beheads Goliath and later is elevated to king. A young Nephi would be implying that his story would similarly end with his enthronement.²⁸⁷

The end of the story of the brass plates comes when they return with them to Lehi’s tent. Lehi reads them, and Nephi recounts their basic contents. Nephi had understood that one of the reasons for slaying Laban and obtaining the plates was for the benefit of future generations. In Nephi’s record, Lehi confirms this. He sees how he is connected to the past (an essential link to the house of Jacob and specifically Joseph of Egypt, 1 Nephi 5:14–16) and then connects the records to the future by means of prophecy (1 Nephi 5:17–19). Once again, we are reminded that

287. McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath,” 25. He concludes (27): “It has been the intent of this paper to demonstrate that the number of parallels between the texts and the structural connection between the two texts suggest that the Book of Mormon contains a literary allusion to the biblical narrative of David and Goliath. It is, however, the rhetorical purpose served by this allusion — a purpose that fits the internal statements of purpose and intent and enhances an understanding of the Book of Mormon narrative on a larger scale — that provides an indication that our hypothesis is correct.”

the small plates are written for Nephi's purposes when he states: "And it came to pass that thus far *I and my father* had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded *us*" (1 Nephi 5:20).²⁸⁸

The end of this chapter marks the end of the section about the brass plates. The final sentence states the conclusion: "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).

1 Nephi Chapter II (6–9)

I suggest that after Nephi finished writing chapter I, he stopped. There is an unstated break in time. With that lapsed time, Nephi was no longer focused on where he intended to go with the story but had to reread what he had written in order to pick up the text again. As he read about his father's finding his genealogy on the record, he adds a tangent that occupies the entirety of our current chapter 6. In it, Nephi shows that it was the idea of genealogy and connections to Israel that triggered the aside:

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.
(1 Nephi 6:1–2)

As a topic triggered by what had been written and later read, this short section was not part of Nephi's original plan. The shift also triggered the closing of chapter I and the beginning of chapter II. As Nephi reenters his intended text, he repeats the idea of journeying toward the land of promise. It isn't a direct return, however, because he will pause for the important story of returning for Ishmael's family. Nevertheless, he ties his return to the outlined text to the previously intended ending by repeating the idea of looking forward to the land of promise (1 Nephi 7:1).

There are two important events portrayed in chapter II. The first is the return for Ishmael's family and the second is Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life.

288. Allen Wyatt suggests that the phrase "thus far" may foreshadow the coming time when even Lehi will murmur against the Lord when all are hungry (1 Nephi 16:20). Personal communication.

Returning with Ismael's Family

Certainly, the return to Jerusalem for Ishmael's family was important, but that isn't really the story Nephi tells. He tells the story of their return. After Ishmael has agreed to bring his family into the wilderness, Nephi notes a division among Ishmael's family that mirrored the division in Lehi's family:

And it came to pass that as we journeyed in the wilderness, behold Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us; yea, against me, Nephi, and Sam, and their father, Ishmael, and his wife, and his three other daughters.

And it came to pass in the which rebellion, they were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem. (1 Nephi 7:6–7)

This is the same rebellion that Laman and Lemuel instigated against their father. The implication is that they also fomented this rebellion in Ishmael's family. Although no marriages have taken place, by implication the two daughters who followed Laman and Lemuel would have been those destined to be their wives. Although plausibly historical, this event allows Nephi to provide further indication that he was to be the teacher and leader over his brothers. In his opening statement, Nephi reiterates the reversal of cultural expectations that would have the younger brother as teacher and leader over his elder brothers: "Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?" (1 Nephi 7:8).

Nephi's lecture is about prophecy to be fulfilled. He reminds them that they are going to a land of promise (1 Nephi 7:13). He reminds them of their father's prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:13–14). This further angers his brothers. Nephi makes certain to link this incident to the story of the attempted fratricide of Joseph. Both Joseph and Nephi had been chosen to rule over their brothers. Both suffered the wrath of their brothers. Joseph was to be killed but was instead thrown into a pit. His coat was taken and dipped in the blood of a goat so it would appear he had been killed by wild beasts. Nephi was bound and was to be left for wild beasts.²⁸⁹

This incident ends with Nephi's forgiving his brothers and then immediately noting that "and it came to pass that we did come down

289. For Joseph's story, see Genesis 37:17–31. Nephi's story is found in 1 Nephi 7:16–18.

unto the tent of our father... and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto [Yahweh]" (1 Nephi 7:22).²⁹⁰

Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life

Separating Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life into a different chapter, as Orson Pratt did for the 1879 edition, has a modern logic. It appears to be unrelated to the first incident, of returning with Ishmael's family. However, since Nephi put them in the same chapter, it is important to notice what Nephi tells of that vision as opposed to what he leaves out.

Nephi relates his father's vision of the Tree. He provides the basic elements of the path, the tree, the river and a spacious building. As told, it is a vision of a few who partake of the fruit, and the majority who do not. The end of the story is the reason Nephi tells only this much of it:

And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them. (1 Nephi 8:35–37)

Nephi warned his readers that he wasn't telling all of what his father said during the description of the vision (1 Nephi 8:29). He ends the chapter noting that Lehi "also prophesied unto them of many things" (1 Nephi 8:38). None of those things are told. Nephi will elaborate on what else his father saw when he relates his own vision of what his father saw. At this point, however, the emphasis on Laman and Lemuel is what ties this vision to the incident as they returned from Jerusalem with Ismael's family. That incident becomes the solid foundation upon which the prophetic vision of Laman and Lemuel refusing the fruit is based. Lehi, as a good father, might hope to change them, but their destiny is prophesied.

290. Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 3, notes that the addition of the burnt offering suggests that this was not just a thanks-offering as recorded when Lehi first built the altar but also a sin offering. That addition might have been occasioned by the attempted fratricide on the return with Ishmael's family.

The Aside

Unlike the previous aside triggered when Nephi returned to his text, this aside (at the end of chapter II, but separated to become the modern chapter 9) is triggered by what Nephi wrote: “And all these things did my father see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates” (1 Nephi 9:1). This summary put Nephi into author-voice, and triggered an author-voice insertion about the plates upon which Nephi was writing. He noted: “And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates” (1 Nephi 9:2). He last spoke of them in 1 Nephi 6:1–6, which was similarly an inserted aside. In this aside, Nephi mentions that he wrote two sets of plates and provides the basic charter for each (1 Nephi 9:2–4). Nephi concluded:

Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.

But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 9:5–6)

When Nephi testified that he knew the Lord was behind the creation of this new set of plates, the Amen ending forced an end to the chapter. It is possible the intended ending of Chapter II included the text we have from 1 Nephi 10:2–15. Those verses conclude the story of Lehi’s vision (with 1 Nephi 10:1 being a required transition sentence to return to the planned narrative). They could not follow in the same chapter because of the testificatory *Amen*. Therefore, the ending events come at the beginning of the next chapter. The subject of that chapter (after finishing the topic from the previous chapter) was Nephi’s vision, not Lehi’s.

1 Nephi Chapter III (10–14)

Before the testificatory *Amen* required the chapter to end, Nephi had been discussing the plates upon which he was writing. He wasn’t finished. As the new chapter begins, Nephi apparently realized two things. One, he had diverted from his plan, and two, he hadn’t finished an important description of the aftermath of his father’s vision. Nephi resolved both issues in the opening sentence of the next chapter: “And now I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren” (1 Nephi 10:1).

The mention of the plates makes the connection to the ending of the previous chapter, but also notes that he had deviated from the intended discussion. His plan for chapter III was to talk about his own vision, but the early ending of the previous chapter meant he still had some information to tell about his father's vision. Thus "I must speak somewhat of the things of my father." Nephi couldn't ignore this discussion of what his father had seen because it was related to the most important part of the vision, the mission of the mortal Messiah and the future of the house of Israel. Nephi apparently does not elaborate this part of his father's vision because he knew that he would spend a great deal of time on those details when he discussed his own vision of those same future events. Verses 1 Nephi 10:2–16 provide the material that had been planned for the end of chapter II. The intended topic of chapter III begins with 1 Nephi 10:17, takes a slight detour at 10:18–22, and returns to the topic in 1 Nephi 11:1 where Nephi's vision will occupy the rest of chapter III (to the end of our chapter 14).

In 1 Nephi 10:17, Nephi noted that he "was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things." He also wrote "the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old and in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men." That phrase pulled Nephi into an aside on the nature of God. Verses 18–22 were an unplanned extemporaneous addition to his text. To return to the planned topic, Nephi echoes 1 Nephi 10:17 with "after I had desired to know of the things that my father had seen" (1 Nephi 11:1). Having returned to the intended topic, Nephi begins his own story of his experience with the things his father had seen.

When Nephi ends the account of his vision, he writes:

And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the Spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 14:28–30)

Although there were specific things that Nephi was not to write because John the Revelator was to write them (1 Nephi 14:24–27), the

general statement that he could not write everything is a common theme among many of those who wrote on plates. Even had the Nephite record-keepers had an infinite quantity of plates upon which to keep their records, no writer can record everything he knows or experiences about a topic. It is the nature of writing that experience must be distilled, and Nephi and Mormon, at least, made their choices for divinely directed reasons (even if the methods of fulfilling the divine instructions followed their own understandings and choices).

This vision understandably made an impact on Nephi. That impact was strong enough that at the end of his second book, he will rewrite what he saw, couching the events of the vision against Isaiah's prophecies to demonstrate that there were multiple witnesses (Lehi, Nephi, and even Isaiah). To end the vision, Nephi testifies: "and I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw," and "the things which I have written are true." To that testimony, he added *Amen* and ended the chapter.

1 Nephi Chapter IV (15)

That Nephi received the vision his father had seen placed him parallel to his father as one who communicated with Yahweh. Next, Nephi used his new understanding to teach his brothers. This continues to fulfill prophecy by showing Nephi in the role of teacher over his brothers.

The subject of the teaching is still the vision. With Nephi's new divine understanding of his father's vision, he can teach with authority. Nephi highlights that new authority when he asks of his non-understanding brothers: "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 15: 8). Nephi had done just that. When the brothers respond: "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us." (1 Nephi 15: 9), Nephi begins to teach. He can teach precisely because he did ask, and Yahweh did make it known to him.

Nephi expounds how the plan of the gospel was represented in the symbols of the dream and ends with "and thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen" (1 Nephi 15: 36). That *Amen* bears testimony to this divinely revealed information he taught to his brothers. It also creates the end of a chapter.

1 Nephi Chapter V (16–19:21)

As with the end of chapter II, the *Amen* ended chapter IV before the end of the event Nephi was discussing. It appears at the beginning of chapter V (1 Nephi 16:1–5). Nephi wanted to assure his readers that he had been an effective teacher. That happens in these verses, ending with "And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch

that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness” (1 Nephi 16:5).

Nephi now turns to the essentials of his family’s story. They marry the daughters of Ismael (1 Nephi 16:7), and Lehi receives word that the family should leave the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 16:9). Nephi provides the basics of the preparation for their journey. They gather seeds and other foodstuffs to carry with them, and Yahweh provides the Liahona.

The need for food is one of the reasons Nephi mentions the bows and arrows. Nephi notes:

And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

And it came to pass that we did travel for the space of many days, slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings. (1 Nephi 16:14–15)

Although the families’ needs for food might have been sufficient reason to note that they hunted for food along the way, Nephi’s purpose was not so mundane. The mention of the bows leads into the story of the broken bow. That this story is about Nephi rather than the family is evidenced by Nephi’s introduction of the broken bow and the problem of lack of food (1 Nephi 16:18). He notes the problem with his bow before mentioning that his brothers’ bows had already lost their springs (1 Nephi 16:21). The food crisis would not have been so dire had the brothers’ bows still been functional. It was the loss of all of them and perhaps Nephi’s last (rather than first) which precipitated the crisis.

This incident doesn’t show Nephi as a teacher but rather as the leader and provider. Nephi increasingly places himself in a leadership role for the whole family, particular when Lehi is also murmuring at this time. Nevertheless, Nephi does not explicitly take over his father’s role. He presents himself to his father for instruction in where to hunt.

Although this story is not directly related to kingship, the concept of a leader caring for his people is implied in the story. Evidence that these themes continue to inform the events Nephi writes about comes when the brothers again murmur in Nahom. Note that now they murmur not only against Lehi, but “they did murmur against my father, and also

against me” (1 Nephi 16:36). Very specifically, “Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” (1 Nephi 16:37). Only the voice of the Lord (1 Nephi 16:39) is able to restrain their murderous intent.

Rather than return to Jerusalem as Laman and Lemuel desired, the entire family continues their journey in the wilderness. The modern attempts to trace the families’ journey through the wilderness has them leaving the better-traveled portion of the Incense Trail and traveling through very difficult terrain. Nephi only briefly references those difficulties. Even though he doesn’t mention specifics, it is clear they went through hard times and suffered much. Nephi simply says that: “And it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did bear children in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:1).

Perhaps writing only that much but remembering how difficult the journey was prompted Nephi to enter another aside. He reflects:

And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings.

And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness. (1 Nephi 17:2–4)

The eight-year sojourn in the wilderness is covered ever so briefly. Apparently, nothing occurred that furthered Nephi’s story of how he developed as the teacher and ruler over his brothers. Nevertheless, reflecting upon those hard times led Nephi to extract the blessing that came from it. They endured hard times and survived. Nephi credits Yahweh with strengthening them to meet the task but does not blame Yahweh that the hardships occurred.

After this brief description of the events that covered eight years, Nephi has the families arriving in Bountiful and begins to describe the building of the ship. At this point, Nephi is being elevated to the prophet for the New World. When it comes time to prepare to journey to their land of promise:

And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters. (1 Nephi 17:7–8)

When Nephi wrote of the incident of the bow, he noted that he still deferred to his father to discern where to go to find food. Now, at this singularly important juncture in the story, Lehi is entirely absent. Nephi's position of leadership is boldly affirmed when Yahweh directs Nephi rather than Lehi to build the ship.

Of course, there is still enmity with his brothers. Their murmuring allows Nephi another teaching opportunity. Nephi specifically references the Israelite exodus from Egypt (as he also did in 1 Nephi 4: 2–4). Nephi recounts the exodus story, including the selection of Moses as their leader, the crossing of the Red Sea, miraculous food and water, and the murmuring of the people before reaching their land of promise (1 Nephi 17:23–43). These events intentionally link Lehi's clan's exodus from Jerusalem to their land of promise to Israel's exodus from Egypt to their land of promise. It also firmly links their story to the elements of the Near Eastern ethnogenetic story form.²⁹¹

Nephi's clear affiliation with Yahweh is confirmed as Nephi describes having been filled with Yahweh's presence: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them" (1 Nephi 17:52). His brothers had to admit, however temporarily, "we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us" (1 Nephi 17:55). The temporary reconciliation with his brothers (or their acquiescence to Yahweh's will) allowed the ship to be built.

291. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149.

Nephi tells no more stories from the building of the ship. He notes the preparations to set sail. He apparently realizes that he has forgotten to mention the birth of his brothers Joseph and Jacob and so quickly adds the information (1 Nephi 18:7). They set sail, and all is well for a time.

When problems arise, it is again the *leitmotif* of Nephi's right to rule. Nephi places this incident in the context of the brothers neglecting proper religious rites to Yahweh (1 Nephi 18:9). Nephi specifically notes: "they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us" (1 Nephi 18:10). They bind Nephi.

The situation becomes dire. Laman and Lemuel will not listen to Lehi (1 Nephi 18:17). They would not listen to the women (1 Nephi 18:19). Nephi declares: "there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts" (1 Nephi 18:20). A modern reader might simply assume that the great storm was a natural phenomenon, but ancient Israelites knew Yahweh as having power over and in the storms.²⁹² Thus, the storm was a clear message from Yahweh to the rebellious brothers. "When they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented" (1 Nephi 18:20). Confirmation that Yahweh was behind the storm came in the rapid calm after they freed Nephi: "And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm" (1 Nephi 18:21). The rest of the journey passes without remark. The next story told is of their arrival on the land of promise.

The arrival in the New World simply notes that they landed and went forth onto the promised land, which had all the necessities for life:

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.

292. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, *Biblical and Judaic Studies* 8, ed. William Henry Propp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 258–75.

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. (1 Nephi 18:23–25)

To better understand Nephi’s way of thinking, I have moved the final sentence of our verse 25 to the beginning of the next verse:

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

The finding of the ore leads directly to the creation of the plates. These three metals may have made up the alloy used to create the plates.²⁹³ The connection between finding the ore and creating the plates would therefore be logical and quite direct. However, it was probably unplanned. I think Nephi intended to end his first book with chapter V, and that chapter was intended to end with the families’ arriving in the New World and finding they were in a land of promise.

The final event listed in the synoptic header at the beginning of 1 Nephi is: “They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth.” Nephi’s header had listed most of the other major historical events and ended with the arrival in the New World. The probable Old World/New World division between 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi also suggests that the conceived end of the first book could have come when they arrived. Why didn’t it?

Whether or not Nephi intended to write about finding the ore along with finding the animals “which were for the use of men” (1 Nephi 18:25) cannot be known. What we can surmise is that when Nephi added the finding of the ore, it triggered the statement that he used the ore to create plates. The discussion of the plates triggered an unplanned addition to his book that resulted in two additional chapters that have nothing to do with the historically-framed contents of 1 Nephi.

As with other asides, Nephi’s addition was not only triggered by what he had just written, but it followed immediately upon the triggering

293. See the section “Upon Plates Which I Have Made (1 Nephi 1:17),” Chapter 7.

idea without creating an intervening chapter break. The additional text hinged on the mention of the plates, which triggered Nephi to discuss both the plates upon which he was writing as well as the first plates he made after arriving in the New World:

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.

And I knew not at the time when I made them [large plates] that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these [small] 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. (1 Nephi 19:1–2)

Having introduced the small plates, Nephi continues to discuss the ways in which the second set of plates was to be different from the large 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” (1 Nephi 19:3).

This shift into author-voice shifts his focus as well. Up to this point, Nephi’s audience was implicit. It is completely unclear if the audience is assumed to be his contemporaries or the far future modern readers. The nature of the author-voice directs at least this portion of his writings to his contemporaries, or “my people.”

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*. (1 Nephi 19:4–5)

What does Nephi consider to be the “more sacred things”? The contents of the small plates up to this point contain a history with a theological function. When Nephi attempts to answer what the most sacred things are, we can watch as he shifts from his descriptions of his writing to an elaboration on what is most sacred:

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.

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. (1 Nephi 19:6–8)

Clearly, the most sacred — that which would “be of great worth” — was the atoning mission of the Messiah. It was that future time when “the very God of Israel” would come to earth.²⁹⁴ Having begun to speak of the future fulfillment of the most sacred event, Nephi provides his vision of the future. As witness to the conceptual shift in Nephi’s thinking from what he had written before, Nephi now does not address his brothers, but “my people.” His perspective is no longer looking back to the Old World, but his concern is in his present, for his New World people:

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

294. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:214–22 for a discussion of how the Nephites saw Yahweh as their God, and as the very God who would descend to earth.

Wherefore, I speak unto all the house of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things. (1 Nephi 19:18–19)

As part of what he taught, he taught his people using scriptures from the brass plates: “And he surely did show unto the prophets of old all things concerning them; and also he did show unto many concerning us; wherefore, it must needs be that we know concerning them for they are written upon the plates of brass” (1 Nephi 19:21). With that statement, Nephi closed his chapter V.

Nephi is less predictable in his chapter endings than Mormon will be, except when a testificatory *Amen* becomes a chapter end. The end of chapter I was more thematic, indicating a completion of an idea. I believe that this chapter ends for a similar reason. By referencing the brass plates, Nephi can close out his Old World story. He ended the discussion of his plates, but they were those upon which Nephi wrote. Now he shifts again to the brass plates as he begins to elaborate his contention that the mission of the atoning Messiah will be the most sacred thing for his people.

1 Nephi VI (19:22–21)

At the beginning of chapter VI, Nephi speaks of teaching his brethren again. Continuing his author-voice consciousness from the end of chapter V, these brethren are not his elder brothers, but the people of the City of Nephi over whom Nephi has become king and by extension, teacher:

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren 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. (1 Nephi 19:22–23)

First, this continuation of author-voice suggests that Nephi wrote this chapter right after finishing the previous one. Second, Nephi is letting his shift in focus open an entirely new discussion. He is no longer speaking of his own story but rather of the things that should be most sacred to his people. He has tried to teach those things to his people

and reprises the fact that the brass plates hold much of this information. Nephi taught from the brass plates, and he specifically mentions Isaiah. Note what he says about Isaiah: “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.” The goal was to teach of the coming Redeemer, and Nephi did this by reading Isaiah. However, he read Isaiah not in an Old-World context, but according to the needs and understanding of his New World people.

Having mentioned Isaiah, he copies two Isaiah chapters, 48 and 49, into his record. The end of Isaiah 49 ends chapter VI. The chapter ends after the quotation of Isaiah, and the next chapter will begin Nephi’s application of those chapters to the understanding of his people. The final chapter is Nephi’s “likening” of Isaiah 48 and 49.

1 Nephi VII (22)

As Nephi begins this chapter, it appears that he realizes he has strayed from his original plan and needs to return to his historical context. He shifts back from author-voice to narrative-voice, using Laman and Lemuel as his foil: “And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh? And I, Nephi, said unto them....” (1 Nephi 22:1–2). This device allows Nephi to return to narrative-time and to provide the explanation of the Isaiah texts he added as part of his author-voice aside.

Of course, it is possible that Nephi actually gave this speech to Laman and Lemuel. However, it is more likely that this is a literary device that allows Nephi to provide an explanation in context. There is no historical context for this discussion, particularly since Nephi is recording the events 30+ years after they occurred. There is no event that precipitates it, and there will be no denouement at the end. The author-voice context is an aside triggered by what Nephi wrote — not a question asked.

The final chapter of 1 Nephi (chapter VII/22) is Nephi’s *peshar*²⁹⁵ on Isaiah 48 and 49. Nephi uses his people as a literary foil to present the *peshar* by having them ask: “What meaneth these things which ye

295. A *peshar* was an interpretation of scripture. The interpretation used scripture as the base, but expanded upon its meaning. For Nephi, it would be very similar to his concept of *likening* the scriptures.

have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh? (1 Nephi 22:1). This allows Nephi to use those chapters to discuss the future he sees and has seen for his people. He emphasizes the scattering of Israel (and implicitly includes his people among those scattered) in verses 3 and 4. He teaches that there will be those among the scattered who would harden their hearts (1 Nephi 22:5, a comment on the Lamanites?). In verse 6 he notes that they would be saved by the Gentiles (perhaps, again, a commentary on the infusion of non-Israelites among the Nephites). Finally, he sees the gathering of Israel (1 Nephi 22:11–12).

As he ends his book, he admonishes his people to follow God:

Wherefore, my brethren, I would that ye should consider that the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God.

Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified, and also taught them. Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 22:30–31)

When Nephi concludes “wherefore, my brethren,” it is deliciously ambiguous. This entire trope began with an aside where “my brethren” were explicitly author-voice rather than narrative-voice (thus “my people” rather than “my brothers”). To conclude the book, Nephi moves back to historical time, but uses “my brethren” as a dual function address. It works for both the narrative-voice to which he is trying to return as well as the author-voice that is, perhaps, his real focus for this prophecy of the future. It should be noted that this is the second time Nephi’s vision of the future appears in his text. The first followed the vision of the Tree of Life; this second is part of a pesher on Isaiah. The third will be a much longer discourse on that same vision and based again on Isaiah. It is possible the connections he made in this spontaneous linking of Isaiah to that vision are what lead to that more complete version at the end of 2 Nephi.