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Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source

S. Kent Brown

The Book of Mormon teems with references to numerous works known by its compilers and authors but not included in its final collection of texts. The documents comprising the brass plates, for instance, are mentioned merely in passing.[1] Further, Mormon alludes to a substantial collection from which he distilled the nearly thousand-year history of his people.[2] These countless unnamed texts, moreover, do not include the so-called "sealed plates" which formed part of what was entrusted to Joseph Smith but which remained untranslated.[3] Among these, interestingly enough, the record of Lehi is singled out by name. It constituted, I argue, both a major source behind and an important influence on the writings of Lehi's two literary sons, Nephi and Jacob.[4] In fact, a surprising amount of information exists which allows us to determine substantially the content and compass of Lehi's record.[5]

At the very beginning of his own record Nephi writes, "I make a record of my proceedings in my days" (1 Ne. 1:1). But a few lines later, after narrating the divine commissioning of his father as a prophet (1 Ne. 1:5–15), he adds the following important notation:

S. Kent Brown is chairman of the Department of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University.

[1]These included, for instance, the books of Moses and Jeremiah's prophecies (see 1 Ne. 5:11–14 and Alma 18:36).

[2]See, for example, Words of Mormon 3–11; Mormon 4:23, 6:6.

[3]Ether 4:1–7, 5:1; see also 2 Ne. 27:6–10.

[4]In an article entitled "Nephi's Outline" (*BYU Studies* 20 [Winter 1980]: 131–49), Noel B. Reynolds argues that a literary framework undergirding the first book of Nephi takes the form of a chiastic balancing of themes throughout. While it may be possible that Nephi indeed succeeded in doing what Reynolds says he did, I believe it possible to demonstrate (1) that Nephi utilized Lehi's record as the basis for his own and (2) that Nephi included a brief outline—a virtual "table of contents"—of his historical narrative in 1 Nephi 19:1b.

[5]As with any study of literary sources, difficulties always remain. The major problem is how to distinguish written reports from oral communications. And this is not easily solved in every instance affecting Lehi. On the one hand, we can be certain that Nephi and Jacob appealed to a written source (1) when they say they have done so and (2) when they quote their father at some length, a case which clearly implies employment of a document. On the other hand, we may in fact be dealing with oral reports in instances in which a written source is neither mentioned nor apparently quoted extensively. While bearing this in mind, I shall deal here with the Lehi materials as if they were largely derived from his written record unless there exist reasons for understanding them otherwise.

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> 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 Ne. 1:16–17)

It is significant that Nephi—notwithstanding his stated intention to "make a record of my proceedings"—opens his own account with the report of his father's calling (1 Ne. 1:5–15), adding immediately thereafter that he is abridging his father's written record. This includes, according to verse 16, (1) the notice of Lehi's call to the prophetic ministry, (2) "many things which he saw in visions and in dreams," and (3) "many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children."[6]

Others have also noticed that Nephi employed a record written by Lehi when compiling his own. For instance, Sidney B. Sperry suggests that the nine opening chapters of 1 Nephi were based upon Lehi's record, Nephi's personal work beginning only with chapter 10.[7] Although the commentary compiled from the work of George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl expresses a similar view regarding the early chapters of 1 Nephi, it indicates that the division between the works of Lehi and Nephi occurs at the end of chapter 8 rather than chapter 9.[8] In a discussion of the early segments of the Book of Mormon, Eldin Ricks basically adopts the position of Reynolds and Sjodahl.[9] A close inspection of these and later chapters, however, indicates that these suggestions must be modified considerably since (1) Nephi includes important material in his opening chapters about himself and (2) both he and Jacob quote and paraphrase their father's words in later chapters.

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[6]As observed in 1 Nephi 1:16, apparently Lehi's record did not include much if anything from Lehi's very brief ministry in Jerusalem (see 1 Ne. 1:18–20). Concerning prophecies, as Nephi details them, Lehi's writings contained primarily those which were directed to his family, in other words "his children."

[7]Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 94.

[8]George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4th printing (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1962), 1:10. It may be important to note that Reynolds and Sjodahl did not collaborate to produce this commentary.

[9]Eldin Ricks, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1953), 110.

To begin with, we know that Nephi inscribed two records on metal plates, the first on the large plates of Nephi[10] and the second on the small plates of Nephi.[11] In each case, Nephi claimed that he had employed a written record of his father. Concerning the large plates, Nephi recounts, "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" (1 Ne. 19:1). Here Nephi writes that, among other things, he drew on Lehi's record for this first account. But the matter goes further, because this verse summarizes (in general outline) the material included both in 1 Nephi and in the first three chapters of 2 Nephi. To illustrate, (a) "the record of my father" corresponds roughly to 1 Nephi, chapters 1 to 10; (b) the "journeyings in the wilderness" appear in 1 Nephi, chapters 16 to 18, beginning with the discovery of the Liahona compass; (c) the "prophecies of my father" would include 2 Nephi, chapters 1 to 3 and, possibly, 1 Nephi 10. This overall scheme is interrupted only by the account of Nephi's dream (1 Ne. 11–15) and Nephi's discourse to his brothers (1 Ne. 19–22), both of which digress from the main story that, notably, focuses primarily on Lehi.

Nephi, after Lehi's death, apparently began the second set of plates, the small plates from which the first six records of the Book of Mormon were translated.[12] Nephi himself states:

> And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my [large] 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 . . . went and made these [small] plates upon which I have engraven these things.

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[10]The relationship between (a) the large plates of Nephi, (b) the book of Lehi which was translated and then lost by Joseph Smith (see the first edition of the Book of Mormon published by E. B. Grandin of Palmyra, N.Y. [1830], p. 1), and (c) the remainder of the Book of Mormon has been carefully and graphically worked out by Eldin Ricks in his short but important study, "The Story of the Formation of the Book of Mormon Plates: An Analysis of the Sources and Structure of the Sacred Record," 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publication Company, 1966). The book of Lehi, translated by Joseph Smith, consisted of an abridgment by Mormon of the record begun by Lehi's son Nephi (ca. 590 B.C.) and continued by succeeding scribes virtually down to the era of King Mosiah II (ca. 130 B.C.). Aside from employing his name honorifically, this work apparently was not written in any part by Lehi and thus does not come within the purview of this study.

[11]See 1 Ne. 19:1–2. Discussions appear in Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 194; Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 16, 43, 282; and Ricks, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 226.

[12]Lehi's death is recorded in 2 Nephi 4:12, just before Nephi wrote that the Lord directed him to make the second, smaller set of plates (2 Ne. 5:30).

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> And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. . . .
>
> And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other [large] plates.
>
> (2 Ne. 5:29–33)

It is clear here that the books of 1 and 2 Nephi comprise Nephi's second record.[13] In the case of this narrative, too, Nephi acknowledges that his father's work formed the foundation. For when Nephi begins to write on the small plates, he notes that he is making "an abridgment of the record" of his father: only "after I have abridged the record of my father," Nephi affirms, "will I make an account of mine own life" (1 Ne. 1:16–17). What can be more plain? It was Nephi's avowed purpose to summarize his father's work in the initial segment of his second composition.

The very structure of the early portion of 1 Nephi, chapter 1, shows Nephi's direct dependence on his father's account. In fact, I suggest that we have the opening of Lehi's record itself. It was customary anciently for a prophet to introduce an account of his divine calling near the beginning of his record, coupling it with a colophon about the year of the reign of the local king in order to place his prophetic ministry in its historical context.[14] This is precisely what we find in 1 Nephi 1:4–15: directly after Nephi's brief opening remark about himself (1 Ne. 1:1–3) there is a notation that the beginning of his story fell during the first year of King Zedekiah's reign (1 Ne. 1:4). Next, as expected, we read of God's commissioning of the prophet (1 Ne. 1:5–15). But it is not the call of Nephi that is being related; it is Lehi's call.[15] In light of this, I believe that Nephi inserted the opening of his father's book into 1 Nephi 1:4–15.[16]

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[13]There remains the question as to why the "table of contents" for the large plates (1 Ne. 19:1) seems to correspond so accurately to the contents of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi 1–3, which derive from the small plates. It is clear thus far that Lehi's record underpins both works of Nephi. If only because Lehi's record is reported to underlie both accounts (1 Ne. 19:1; 2 Ne. 5:29–33), the "table of contents" for the large plates would, in my view, approximate the contents of the small plates. Furthermore, since 1 Nephi 19:1 describes so plainly what we find in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, chapters 1 to 3, it seems thoroughly safe to maintain that the two records of Nephi roughly paralleled one another (see again 1 Ne. 1:16–17).

[14]Jeremiah, for example, opens his book by mentioning the kings whose reigns his ministry spanned (Jer. 1:2–3) just before the account of his call (Jer. 1:4–10). Similar juxtapositions occur in Isaiah 6:1ff., Ezekiel 1:1ff., Zephaniah 1:1ff., and Zechariah 1:1ff.

[15]In fact, Lehi's call consisted of two visions which came in rapid succession: In the first, he had a surprising manifestation of a pillar of fire resting on a nearby rock, accompanied by a voice (1 Ne. 1:6). In the second, after returning home bewildered and fatigued by his first vision, Lehi saw the divine council as well as the coming Messiah, who brought him a book containing a prophecy of Jerusalem's fate (1 Ne. 1:8–15).

[16]In addition, Nephi probably altered the opening account of Lehi's visions from first to third person. Nephi's narrative exhibits clear evidences of summarizing his father's report in at least two passages: (a) after a direct quotation in verse 13a, Nephi outlines in verses 13b and 14a what his father had seen in the second vision; (b) verse 15, also, obviously forms a summary of what Lehi said (and sang) in response to his visions.

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WHEN AND ON WHAT DID LEHI WRITE?

Much of Lehi's record must have been completed by the time Nephi began to write his first narrative on the large plates: "upon the [large] plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father" (1 Ne. 19:1). We must ask, then, when and how Lehi's book came into existence. It is plain that soon after arriving in the promised land Nephi drew from several records, including Lehi's account, when writing on the large plates. Further, indications exist that an itinerant record was kept, possibly on perishable material, during the earlier eight-year period that Lehi's family lived in the desert (1 Ne. 17:4). We need now to review the evidence for these observations.

The account of the voyage of Lehi's family to the promised land appears in chapter 18 of 1 Nephi. Next follow Nephi's statements that he made plates for writing by smelting ore (1 Ne. 19:1–2).[17] According to this, he already possessed (1) the record of Lehi, (2) the genealogy of Lehi's fathers, and (3) an itinerary of the family's travels in the desert. Nephi could have obtained the genealogy from the brass plates, but Lehi's narrative and the account of his desert wanderings could not have been found in this source. It seems, then, that when Nephi began his literary activity Lehi's record had reached substantial enough proportions to be employed as a source. Thus, Lehi may have been composing the narrative of his experiences during the period of wandering in the desert and crossing the sea.

Another solid indication that Lehi's family kept a running log of their experiences while traveling is that after relating Lehi's discovery of the Liahona, a unique compass in 1 Nephi 16:10, Nephi begins to narrate the travels of the family through the desert by means of a series of "we" passages.[18] These passages, narrated in first-person plural, bear all the marks of a summary of a diary-like record. That Nephi was evidently summarizing such an account can be seen in 1 Nephi 17:4 where, after mentioning the physical well-being his father's family enjoyed while in the desert (1 Ne. 17:2–3), he compresses

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[17]It may conceivably be urged that Nephi made the plates while still traveling in the Arabian wilderness, before coming to the ocean. In my opinion, however, the phrase "and it came to pass" found at the beginning of 1 Nephi 19:1 indicates that these events followed those recounted in chapter 18, since this expression is equivalent to the Hebrew וַיְהִי which always serves to continue the story. Had Nephi smelted and fashioned this set of plates while still in the desert he would doubtlessly have said so.

[18]1 Ne. 16:11–19, 33; 17:1–6. Sandwiched between these "we" passages are the accounts of how Nephi was able to find food after breaking his bow (1 Ne. 16:20–32) and of what occurred when Nephi's father-in-law, Ishmael, died (1 Ne. 16:34–39), incidents constituting digressions in the travel narrative.

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his story into the words: "We did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness."[19]

We have no way of knowing what material Lehi originally employed for his record keeping. However, Lehi's fifth son, Jacob, makes an incidental remark which may throw light not only on this question but also on the reason Nephi was commanded to keep records specifically on metal plates. After complaining about the difficulty of inscribing on metal, Jacob acknowledges: "We know that the things which we write upon plates must remain; But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away" (Jacob 4:1–2). It is worth noting that Nephi obtained the brass plates before Jacob was born.[20] Their durability must have been self-evident to Jacob since he could read and teach from them after he had become a grown man. Consequently, his remark that what is written "remains" when engraved on metal tablets no doubt derived from his own experience, as did his additional assertion that any other type of material for writing "must perish and vanish away." How had Jacob observed this? The most natural answer is that Jacob and his father's family had written on nonmetallic writing substances. In comparison to the durability of the brass plates, these substances had evidently proven unsatisfactory for a permanent record.

Other hints, or the lack of them, suggest that initially Lehi's record was kept neither on metallic plates nor on empty leaves (if any) of the brass plates. In the first place, no reason appears for Lehi to have taken tools into the desert with which to inscribe metal plates. It was only after he had left Jerusalem, in fact, that Lehi was instructed by the Lord to obtain the brass plates (1 Ne. 3:2–4). Hence, he would almost certainly have brought no engraving tools for this purpose from Jerusalem. Furthermore, the only item Nephi seems to have brought later to his father from Jerusalem, along with the brass

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[19]The question naturally arises as to why I view the itinerary as the work of Lehi, not of Nephi. The matter cannot be decisively settled, for it remains possible that Nephi himself was largely responsible for the chronicle of "our journeyings in the wilderness" (1 Ne. 19:1). However, a review of the possibilities suggests that Lehi was responsible for the desert itinerary. These are the options: (a) Lehi himself wrote the whole record (in this instance, the question would be solved); (b) Lehi dictated the record to a member of his family who served as scribe (in this case as well, the record would be ascribed to Lehi); (c) Lehi directed Nephi or another family member to keep a desert diary (in this event, it is most probable that the record would reflect the name of the person who commissioned the work, that is, Lehi); (d) Nephi, with permission of and input from his father, wrote the wilderness record (to my mind, there is serious question whether the account would have been ascribed to Nephi even in this instance since it was a record of the desert wanderings of the family of Lehi, he being the patriarch); (e) Nephi kept a diary in the desert without the knowledge of Lehi (a highly dubious proposition).

[20]Nephi mentions only three other brothers when Lehi moved his family into the desert (1 Ne. 2:5). Later, in 2 Nephi 2:1, Lehi calls Jacob his firstborn "in the wilderness." Thus, it is plain that Jacob was born after the departure from Jerusalem.

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plates, was the sword of Laban (2 Ne. 5:14; Jacob 1:10). No tools are mentioned.[21] Finally, we have no account that Nephi, or any in Lehi's family, smelted ore either for plates or for tools while living in the desert. On the contrary, they avoided making frequent fires even for cooking (1 Ne. 17:2, 12). To be sure, Nephi possessed the skill to refine ore and make metal plates, since after crossing the desert he made metal tools for constructing his ship (1 Ne. 17:16).[22] These observations, coupled with Jacob's note regarding nonmetallic writing substances, lead me to postulate that whatever records Lehi and his family kept in the desert were probably written on something other than metal, although we cannot be certain of the substance.[23]

What can we distill from our discussion thus far? In the first place, it is evident that Lehi's record served as a source for both of Nephi's accounts, those on the large and small plates, and specifically underlay a major segment of the opening of 1 Nephi, a text from the small plates. Second, Lehi's record most likely had its essential shape by the time he and his family reached the land of promise since Nephi employed it as a source for his annals on the large plates soon after arriving. Third, we surmise that Lehi's narrative was initially committed to writing on some less durable substance than metal and was possibly first inscribed on metallic leaves when Nephi recorded it on his large plates.

THE SCOPE OF LEHI'S BOOK ON THE SMALL PLATES

Our next task is to determine how extensively Lehi's account was utilized in 1 and 2 Nephi as well as in Jacob. We shall deal first with direct quotations from Lehi and, afterwards, with passages in which Jacob and Nephi appear to paraphrase the account of their father.

Two of the most important and lengthy quotations from Lehi are the account of his vision of the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:2–28) and the report

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[21]Whether Nephi or Lehi would have mentioned engraving tools, even if Nephi had brought them back from Jerusalem along with the brass plates, is certainly open to question. As illustration, the sword of Laban is not mentioned with the annotated list of the contents of the brass plates (1 Ne. 5:11–16)—even though it was brought with them by Nephi; rather, it is noted in contexts widely removed from concerns for records and record keeping (2 Ne. 5:14; Jacob 1:10). It is also possible that any of Lehi's family may have purchased engraving tools along the way.

[22]The problem for Nephi was not how to refine ore but where he should go to find it (1 Ne. 17:9–10). An intriguing though unprovable suggestion is that if Lehi's family traveled through the Aqaba region (at the northern tip of the east arm of the Red Sea), where ore has been refined for millenia, Nephi may have learned his smelting skills there (see Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976], 107, 116).

[23]Ricks (in *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 227) suggests that "Nephi copied his father's record in its entirety from manuscript or scroll form to the durability of metal sheets." But he does not adduce any evidence as to why he believes that Lehi employed a substance other than metal.

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of his last instructions and blessings to his family (2 Ne. 1:4–3:25; 4:3–7, 9, 11).

It is certain that we have the vision of the tree from Lehi's own record. The report in 1 Nephi 8:2–28 is narrated in the first-person singular, an important criterion. Nephi makes it plain by the way he introduces the story that he is quoting from his father: "He [Lehi] spake unto us saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream" (1 Ne. 8:2). In addition, Nephi leaves no doubt when he ceases quoting Lehi, for he adds this summary at the end:

> And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.
>
> But to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron. . . .
>
> (1 Ne. 8:29–30)

There is some question whether the report of Lehi's last blessings and instructions to his family formed part of his record.[24] We cannot be certain, primarily because the scenes occurred close to Lehi's death. It is probable that not many years had passed between Lehi's arrival in the promised land (1 Ne. 18:23) and his death (2 Ne. 4:12).[25] During this period, Nephi had kept a record of his people on the large plates "thus far," as he said (2 Ne. 5:29). Had Lehi also continued to write a record? We cannot be sure. If he did, we would expect his last blessings and instructions to have been included in it. For, as Nephi tells us, "he [Lehi] hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children" (1 Ne. 1:16). In addition, the section of 2 Nephi which includes Lehi's last instructions exhibits the expected first-person singular style of narrating. This characteristic, especially in such a long section, also impels us toward the view that Lehi himself was responsible for the report. Of course, it is equally possible that someone wrote Lehi's words as he spoke and that afterwards his words were included in Nephi's large plates.[26] Whichever

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[24]It would be interesting to compare Lehi's last words to his family with the multiplying testamental literature which claims to record, in rather standardized ways, the last instructions of ancient patriarchs and prophets to their children.

[25]Sperry (in *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 151–52) observes that "we are told neither how old Lehi was at the time of his death nor how many years had elapsed from the time the party had left Jerusalem before he passed away. This we do know—that less than thirty years had passed away after the Nephites left Jerusalem before his death." (See 2 Ne. 5:28.)

[26]In 1 Nephi 2:9–10, Nephi relates: "And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness! And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!" Hugh W. Nibley (in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957], 232) maintains that "Nephi seems to have been standing by, for he takes most careful note of the circumstance. . . . The common practice was for the inspired words of the leader to be taken down in writing immediately."

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the case, Lehi's last words to his family should be understood to continue what he had written simply because they fit, according to Nephi's description, with what Lehi had already recorded.

There exists one other long quotation, preserved by Jacob, which apparently came from Lehi's record. It occurs in Jacob 2:23–33, a discussion of fidelity in marriage. After chastising his people for their pride (Jacob 2:12–22), Jacob complains briefly that "the word of God burthens me because of your grosser crimes" (Jacob 2:23). On this note he continues:

> For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures; for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.

Obviously, a quotation from instructions of the Lord begins in this verse, continuing through verse 33. But instructions received by whom? At first glance it appears that Jacob has begun to repeat what he himself had received, since a few lines earlier he had written:

> . . . as I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people.
>
> (Jacob 2:11)

Was not Jacob carrying out the Lord's instructions by retelling the next day, beginning with verse 23, what he had been told? Not really.[27] A more careful look at chapter 2 of Jacob indicates that the counsel concerning one wife indeed came from the Lord but that Jacob was not the first to repeat it. In fact, Lehi is indicated as the source for these directions. For after what must be a long quotation from the Lord (Jacob 2:23–33), into which Jacob inserts one short comment (Jacob 2:27a), we find this statement:

> And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments [concerning fidelity to one's wife] were given to our father, Lehi: wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.
>
> (Jacob 2:34)

Therefore, Jacob insists, it was Lehi who previously received "these commandments."

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[27]On this occasion, in Jacob's discussion of pride, the other major topic (Jacob 2:13–22), it does not once appear that he quotes directly what the Lord told him the night before (Jacob 2:11). Instead, he paraphrases the Lord's words and intermingles with them his own observations. Only in verses 23–33 does he repeat directly the Lord's words, those pertaining to having one wife.

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An equally compelling passage occurs a few lines later in which Jacob says in summary manner:

> Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.
>
> (Jacob 3:5)

Except for punctuation, this verse was written thus in the printer's manuscript.[28] In every printed edition of the Book of Mormon the word *commandments* in this passage has been changed to the singular and—except in the most recent edition of 1981—the word *father* has appeared as plural. Significantly, the printer's manuscript demonstrates unequivocally that these "commandments" were given to Jacob's "father," Lehi. Consequently, we can conclude that in Jacob 2:23–33 we find instructions the Lord gave to Lehi. Jacob, in his sermon, quotes them to his people, presumably from Lehi's record.

The other direct quotations from Lehi's record are shorter, and all occur in 1 Nephi. They consist of an extract Lehi read from the book he was shown in the second vision of his call (1 Ne. 1:13); his exclamation at having read this book (1 Ne. 1:14b); words of the Lord spoken to Lehi in a dream (1 Ne. 2:1b); Lehi's remark to his son Laman (1 Ne. 2:9b) and the following comment to his son Lemuel (1 Ne. 2:10b); his instructions to Nephi to return to Jerusalem for the brass plates (1 Ne. 3:2b–6)[29]; Sariah's complaint against her husband Lehi (1 Ne. 5:2b) and his conciliatory conversation with her (1 Ne. 5:4b–5)[30]; a further extract from Lehi's vision of the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:34); and, finally, what the Messiah's forerunner would say about the Messiah (1 Ne. 10:8). Caution, however, must be observed

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[28]See Stanley R. Larson, "A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon Comparing the Original and Printer's Manuscripts and the 1830, the 1837, and the 1840 Editions" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 95–96. The printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon was copied by Oliver Cowdery from the one originally dictated by Joseph Smith. The copy made by Oliver Cowdery was taken to the printer, E. B. Grandin, and became the basis for the first printed edition of the Book of Mormon. The original manuscript written at Joseph Smith's dictation is no longer extant for the passage in question (Jacob 3:5).

[29]Perhaps Nephi simply remembered what his father related to him and later wrote it down in this passage. However, since we possess no indication that Nephi was keeping a detailed record during the wilderness period, but that Lehi was (1 Ne. 19:1–3), it seems more likely that 1 Nephi 3:2b–6 derives from Lehi's account.

[30]Sariah's complaint and Lehi's consoling response, found in 1 Nephi 5, may also go back to Nephi's memory. Even though Nephi was not in camp to witness his mother's distress, he certainly learned about it later (1 Ne. 5:1–9). In fact, the narrative exhibits signs of his attempting to reconstruct what had happened during his absence when he writes: "And after this manner of language had my mother complained" (1 Ne. 5:3) and "after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah" (1 Ne. 5:6).

in attributing these quotations to Lehi's record, however, since they may be based on the memory of one or another family member.

As one might expect, the paraphrases from Lehi outnumber the quotations. With two exceptions (2 Ne. 1:1b–3; Jacob 3:5b), all of the restatements which may go back to Lehi's record appear in 1 Nephi. The two visions associated with Lehi's call must of course be included since Nephi has apparently recast the account from first person to third person (1 Ne. 1:4–12, 13b–14a, 15). This report, as already noted, is sprinkled with direct quotations, presumably from Lehi's original narration (1 Ne. 1:13a, 14b). Then follows a summary which indicates that Nephi is paraphrasing his father's chronicle:

> 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 . . .
>
> (1 Ne. 1:16)

Much of chapter 2 may also go back to Lehi's narrative; verses 1a, 2–9a, 10a, and 14–15 all speak directly of Lehi. Mixed with these lines, too, are repetitions of Lehi's very words (1 Ne. 2:1b, 9b, 10b) as well as Nephi's own observations both about his brothers' attitudes at having to leave Jerusalem (1 Ne. 2:11–13) and about a revelation that he himself received (1 Ne. 2:16–24). At the end of the portion summarized from Lehi, Nephi concludes by saying, "And my father dwelt in a tent" (1 Ne. 2:15).

Another important paraphrase occurs in chapter 8, summarizing the remainder of Lehi's dream and his consequent exhortation to Laman and Lemuel (1 Ne. 8:30–33; 8:35–9:1). Nephi introduces the paraphrase by saying that he cannot repeat "all the words of my father" (1 Ne. 8:29) and closes it thus:

> 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 [small] plates.
>
> (1 Ne. 9:1)

Nothing in this passage specifically states that Lehi wrote what Nephi recapitulated in the preceding chapter. But the nature of Lehi's dream and the consequent exhortations to his family fit so well with Nephi's description of his father's writings (1 Ne. 1:16) that I feel confident in believing that all of chapter 8, except Nephi's inserted remarks, goes back to Lehi's written record.

In 1 Nephi 10:1–16 there is another very important summary from Lehi's record, which Nephi prefaces by saying:

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> 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 Ne. 10:1)

After a synopsis of Lehi's prophecies to his sons regarding the coming Messiah and the scattering and gathering of his people, Nephi concludes:

> And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren, and also many more things which I do not write in this book; for I have written as many of them as were expedient for me in mine other book.
>
> And all these things, of which I have spoken, were done as my father dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel.[31]
>
> (1 Ne. 10:15–16)

Interestingly enough, as in the instance noted before, Nephi here does not say he is paraphrasing Lehi's prophetic words from a written source, although he does acknowledge he had included them earlier in his "other book" (i.e., large plates) from which he likely summarized the material in chapter 10, verses 1 to 16. However, remembering Nephi's characterization of his father's record as containing "many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children" (1 Ne. 1:16), it would be surprising indeed if Nephi were not here ultimately dependent upon Lehi's own written account.

This segment, which speaks of Lehi's teachings about the coming Messiah and the scattering and gathering of Israel (1 Ne. 10:1–16), may well have continued, in Lehi's original record, the account of his vision and exhortation to his sons (1 Ne. 8:2–9:1). This is evident from two observations. In the first place, just a few lines separate these two sections (1 Ne. 9:2–6). Apparently Nephi's mention of "these [small] plates" in 1 Nephi 9:1 gave him an opportunity to discuss them briefly in verses 2–6 before resuming his father's account in chapter 10. Second, when we compare the content of these two units with the content of Nephi's own analogous dream of the tree of

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[31]This is the third time Nephi mentions the fact that his father "dwelt in a tent." The other occurrences are in 1 Nephi 2:15 and 9:1. One is tempted to suggest that, since these three instances all mark conclusions to sections in which Nephi has summarized Lehi's record, Nephi may be using the phrase "dwelt in a tent" as a literary device to indicate a return to the narrative about himself. In support of this observation, I note that Nephi speaks of his father's tent twice more in 1 Nephi, the second instance underscoring my point. In the first case, Nephi merely relates that he returned there after his own vision of the tree of life (1 Ne. 15:1). But in the second instance, Nephi's mention of the tent again forms part of a clear literary transition between two segments of his narrative (1 Ne. 16:6). (Compare Ps. 78:55, 60; also compare M. Dahood, *Psalms III*, the Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1970], 445.)

life (1 Ne. 11–14), it seems plain that the two pieces belong together. For, although it is not apparent from the narrative of Lehi's dream of the tree (1 Ne. 8:2–9:1) that the prophecies regarding Israel's destiny and the Messiah (1 Ne. 10:1–16) go with it, it becomes obvious from the way in which Nephi relates his parallel dream that these concepts belong together. Hence we conclude that the segment in 1 Nephi 9:2–6 stands between two sections which likely were continuous in Lehi's narrative.

The last paraphrase requiring discussion is the desert itinerary (1 Ne. 16:11–17, 33; 17:1–6). As I suggested previously, it is possible Nephi himself was responsible for the log kept in the desert. One observation, however, inclines me towards the view that the itinerary was Lehi's. Nephi mentions the desert journal twice in chapter 19 of 1 Nephi, in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1, when listing the sources he used for the large plates, Nephi includes "the record of my father, and also [the record of] our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father." It is worth noting that Nephi mentions the desert journal *between* the items from Lehi. Only after stating what sources he employed from his father does Nephi say, "and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them" (1 Ne. 19:1). Verse 2 presents a similar picture. Once again Nephi announces what sources he used in composing his record on the large plates: "the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness." Again Nephi associates the "proceedings" of the desert period with his father's account. Consequently, the itinerary almost certainly came from Lehi's pen.

It would seem, then, that the following segments of 1 Nephi likely are paraphrases from Lehi's record: Lehi's two visions at his call (1 Ne. 1:4–12, 13b–14a, 15); Lehi's departure into the desert (1 Ne. 2:1a, 2–9a, 10a, 14–15); a part of Lehi's vision of the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:30–33; 8:35–9:1); Lehi's prophecies concerning Israel and the Messiah (1 Ne. 10:1–16); and the desert itinerary (1 Ne. 16:11–17, 33; 17:1–6). There are others shorter in length, almost all occurring in 1 Nephi: Lehi's prophecies and subsequent rejection in Jerusalem (1 Ne. 1:18–20a); his prophecies regarding the brass plates (1 Ne. 5:17–19)[32]; Lehi sending for Ishmael and his family (1 Ne. 7:1–2); Nephi's interpretation for Laman and Lemuel of Lehi's words concerning Israel's destiny (1 Ne. 15:17–18)[33]; the Lord's command

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[32]It may well be that the "table of contents" of the brass plates (1 Ne. 5:11–16) also derives from Lehi's work.

[33]In 1 Nephi 15, we find several references to Lehi's dream as Nephi relates how he interpreted it for his brothers (see vv. 12–18, 21, 23, 26–30).

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to Lehi to move on and the discovery of the compass (1 Ne. 16:9–10)[34]; and the revelation to Lehi by means of the compass (1 Ne. 16:25–27).

Finally, the number of mere references or allusions to what Lehi did and said are too many to list and discuss. In most of these instances it is difficult to determine whether we are dealing with something which goes back to Lehi's writings. Many such references doubtless came from the memories of Nephi and Jacob.

CHARACTER OF LEHI'S RECORD

To describe the character of Lehi's record is a formidable task since we are dealing with only fragments and summarized accounts. Consequently, we run the risk of overstatement or underestimation. But it is possible to form some tentative ideas, at least. In the analysis so far, we have observed three easily discernible categories: prophecies, visions, and teachings.

Nephi informs us that his father included many prophecies among his writings (1 Ne. 1:16; 19:1). Although Lehi prophesies on several occasions about his family (1 Ne. 7:1; 2 Ne. 29:2), one great opportunity comes when he blesses and instructs them before his death (2 Ne. 1:1–4:12). Here Lehi mentions first the promised land "which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever" (2 Ne. 1:5). He goes on to relate that dwelling in this land is conditional upon obedience to the Lord and his principles. In this connection, Lehi prophesies of a time when his posterity will reject their "Redeemer and their God" (2 Ne. 1:10). In that day, he says, the Lord "will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten" (2 Ne. 1:11). Although this prospect saddens Lehi deeply, he remains convinced that the Lord's "ways are righteous forever" (2 Ne. 1:19).

Even in the face of such difficulties, Lehi assures his family that their descendants will survive these most vexing times (2 Ne. 4:7, 9). This agrees with the promise made to the Joseph sold into Egypt that his posterity would be preserved (2 Ne. 3:16), a promise recorded on the brass plates (2 Ne. 4:2). In fact, much of the prophecy which Lehi quotes from this Joseph (2 Ne. 3:6–21) deals with a special seer (2 Ne. 3:7, 11) who will carry the word of the Lord both to Joseph's

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[34]The references to the commands to Lehi to move his camp may have derived from the itinerary (see 1 Ne. 2:2; 16:9; 17:44; 18:5).

seed (2 Ne. 3:7) and to the house of Israel (2 Ne. 3:13).[35] Then Lehi prophesies to his own son named Joseph that this seer will be

> . . . an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.
>
> (2 Ne. 3:24)

One aspect of Lehi's prophecies about his descendants is the promise that their records will come forth to the world (2 Ne. 29:2). A similar assurance had come to Joseph of Egypt. To him, in a passage quoted from the brass plates, the Lord had said regarding the seer:

> . . . I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins . . .
>
> . . . And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust . . .
>
> (2 Ne. 3:18–19)

Lehi had simply obtained the *same* promise given to Joseph that the writings of his posterity would cry out as if "from the dust" to others of his descendants (2 Ne. 3:19).

Because he knows of the destiny of his posterity, Lehi compares his family to an olive tree whose branches have been broken off (1 Ne. 10:12–14; 15:12–13). The idea for this comparison doubtless arose from the prophet Zenos's allegory of the olive tree, also found in the brass plates, which is quoted at length in the fifth chapter of Jacob. In this allegory, the house of Israel is compared to an olive tree whose branches are removed and grafted elsewhere but eventually restored to the main trunk of the tree. Such a prophetic concept must have had a powerful impact on Lehi as Nephi relates that his father spoke

> . . . concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.
>
> Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.
>
> (1 Ne. 10:12–13)

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[35]The prophecy of Joseph came from the brass plates (2 Ne. 4:2). Lehi had access to more than this one prophecy by Joseph since he speaks of "the prophecies which he [Joseph] wrote."

That these words had been spoken prophetically becomes clear from Nephi's summarizing remark a few lines later: "And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren" (1 Ne. 10:15).[36]

Another major theme of Lehi's prophecies concerns the coming Messiah. Almost predictably, on the occasion of his last blessings to his family, Lehi prophesies concerning the Messiah, specifically mentioning him to his next-to-youngest son Jacob and explaining the Messiah's mission as redeemer from the Fall and mediator of eternal life (2 Ne. 2:26–28). An earlier prophecy about the Messiah appears in Lehi's preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem (1 Ne. 1:19). The inspiration for his prophesying there arose from his vision of a book (1 Ne. 1:8–14). At first Lehi does not seem to recognize the "one descending out of the midst of heaven" whose brightness "was above that of the sun at noonday" (1 Ne. 1:9). Earlier in the vision, Lehi had been rather certain that the one he saw "sitting upon his throne" is God (1 Ne. 1:8). But this second figure who descends, followed by "twelve others," apparently remains unknown to Lehi until he has read in the book brought to him. Note this sense in Nephi's summary: "and also the things which he [Lehi] read in the book manifested plainly the coming of a Messiah" (1 Ne. 1:19). At the same time, Lehi learned of the impending destruction of Jerusalem because of the Jews' wickedness (1 Ne. 1:13).[37] This, along with the prediction of the Messiah's coming, make up his prophecy to the people in the city (1 Ne. 1:19).

Lehi also discusses the Messiah at length when he tells his family about his vision of the tree of life (1 Ne. 10:4–11), much of what he prophesies probably deriving from this vision. This vision of the tree and the Messiah appears to have considerably expanded Lehi's knowledge of the Messiah's ministry. In an earlier vision (1 Ne. 1:8–13), Lehi had certainly learned of his coming for "the redemption of the world" (1 Ne. 1:19). Whether Lehi had learned

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[36]A similar point is made in 1 Nephi 15:12 as Nephi attempts to explain what Lehi meant. His brothers had not understood Lehi's comparison of themselves with the olive tree (1 Ne. 10:12–14). So Nephi declares to them: "Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold, are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?" This is the reading of 1 Nephi 15:12 in the original manuscript, after adding punctuation. Beginning with the printer's manuscript and continuing through the printed editions of the Book of Mormon, an *s* had been added to the word *father*. The reading of the original manuscript makes it clear that it was Lehi who was moved by the Spirit to apply the olive tree comparison to his family and posterity, and this sense is recognized in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, where the singular spelling has been restored (see Larson, "Some Textual Variations," 59).

[37]On the Nephites' learning of the fulfillment of this prophecy, refer to 2 Nephi 1:4 and 6:8.

more about the Messiah on this occasion remains uncertain since Nephi offers only a sketchy summary (1 Ne. 1:14, 19). In 1 Nephi 10:4–11, Lehi relates many more specific details about the Redeemer than we find in Nephi's earlier paraphrase in chapter 1.

There is a point worth making here regarding Lehi's terminology for the Messiah. Whether his words are paraphrased or quoted directly, Lehi is never reported to have used the Greek title *Christos* or *Christ* when speaking of the Messiah.[38] Nor does he ever call him *Son of God* or something similar.[39] Titles of this nature are employed only by Lehi's sons Nephi and Jacob.[40] To be sure, the designation *Son* would have been known to Lehi from the writings of Zenos and Zenock which appeared on the brass plates.[41] But in the few quotations from these latter two prophets, which Alma purposely brings forward when speaking of the coming Messiah (Alma 33:11, 13, 16), nowhere do Zenos and Zenock expand the title to *Son of God* or something related.[42]

What can we say about this situation? Did Lehi not know titles such as *Son of God* and *Christ*? Regarding both the term *Christ* and

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[38]The titles *Christ* (Greek) and *Messiah* (Hebrew) mean the same thing: "anointed." It is possible, of course, that Joseph Smith—while translating—used the title *Christ* in contexts which dealt with the Messiah. But see notes 39 and 40.

[39]The terms which Lehi does employ to designate the Messiah are *Lamb of God* (1 Ne. 10:10); *Holy One of Israel* (2 Ne. 1:10; 3:2); *God* (2 Ne. 1:10, 22, 24, 26–27; 2:2–3, 10); *Lord God* (2 Ne. 1:17); *Holy Messiah* (2 Ne. 2:6, 8); *Messiah* (1 Ne. 1:19; 10:4ff.; 2 Ne. 1:10; 2:26; 3:5); *Lord* (1 Ne. 10:8, 14; 2 Ne. 1:15, 19, 27); *Prophet* (1 Ne. 10:4); *Savior* (1 Ne. 10:4); *Redeemer* (1 Ne. 10:5–6, 14; 2 Ne. 1:10; 2:3); *One* (1 Ne. 1:9); *firstfruits* (2 Ne. 2:9); *Holy One* (2 Ne. 2:10); *Mediator* (2 Ne. 2:28).

[40]Nephi and Jacob use several titles which apparently go beyond what they could have found in the brass plates, assuming the brass plates included the full Pentateuch and many of the prophets' writings (see 1 Ne. 5:11–13; 19:21–23. Verse 23 of chapter 19 presents an interesting problem: In all the printed editions, except the most recent, we find the reference "the book of Moses." The original manuscript has it "the books of Moses." When Oliver Cowdery copied down the manuscript for the printer, he accidentally made *books* singular. This misreading persisted until the edition of 1981 [see Larson, "Some Textual Variations," 67–68]). The following titles and names used by Nephi seem more at home in a later era such as that of the New Testament or of early Christianity: *Beloved Son* (2 Ne. 31:11); *Beloved* (2 Ne. 31:15); *Son of the living God* (2 Ne. 31:16); *Son of righteousness* (2 Ne. 26:9 [should this be *Sun of righteousness? Sun* is the word used in Malachi 4:2]); *Son of the most high God* (1 Ne. 11:6); *Son of God* (1 Ne. 10:17; 11:7, 24; 2 Ne. 25:16, 19); *Only Begotten of the Father* (2 Ne. 25:12); *Jesus* (2 Ne. 26:12; 31:10; 33:4, 6); *Jesus Christ* (2 Ne. 25:19–20; 30:5); *Christ* (2 Ne. 11:4, 6–7; 25:16, 23–29; 26:1, 8, 12; 28:14; 30:7; 31:2, 13, 19–21; 32:3, 6, 9; 33:7, 9–12); *true vine* (1 Ne. 15:15); *light* (1 Ne. 17:13). The following names from Jacob fit the same situation: *Only Begotten Son* (Jacob 4:11); *Christ* (2 Ne. 10:3, 7; Jacob 1:4, 6–8; 2:19; 4:4–5, 11–12; 6:8–9; 7:2ff., 17, 19); *Jesus* (Jacob 4:6).

[41]In 1 Nephi 19:10–17, Nephi summarizes points from the writings of Zenock, Neum, and particularly Zenos. In verse 21 of that chapter he indicates that these teachings were on the brass plates (also see Alma 33:12).

[42]It may be urged that in the Book of Mormon we have mere hints and glimpses from the writings of Zenock and Zenos and that, consequently, it is not possible to draw very firm conclusions. In my view, however, Alma (in Alma 33:11, 13, 16) brought together the passages from the writings of these two men which proved a point about the Son of God. Zenos and Zenock called the Messiah *Son* whereas Alma called him *Son of God* (Alma 33:14, 17ff.). Had Alma known of a passage in which either Zenock or Zenos mentioned the *Son of God*, he surely would have used it to make his point to the Zoramites.

the name *Jesus*, the answer is a definite no. According to 2 Nephi 10:3, the title *Christ* was made known to Jacob by an angel only after Lehi's death. And Nephi makes use of this title only after narrating this experience of Jacob (2 Ne. 11:4). In addition, Nephi mentions the name *Jesus* for the first time only near the end of his own writings (2 Ne. 26:12), and Jacob uses it but once in the latter half of his work (Jacob 4:6). Therefore, we can safely conclude that Lehi did not know these names. In the case of the term *Son of God* and related titles, we cannot be sure Lehi did not know them, but at least he did not use them.[43]

Besides Lehi's reported prophecies, seven of his visions and inspired dreams are known to us, if we include the instructions given him by means of the compass (1 Ne. 16:26–27). Nephi indicates that Lehi had included a number of dreams and visions in his record: "He [Lehi] hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams" (1 Ne. 1:16). In one direct quotation, Lehi himself admits that he is "a visionary man" (1 Ne. 5:4). For Lehi there appears to have been little difference between the terms *dream* and *vision*.[44]

The earliest vision is that with which Lehi's own record likely began. Nephi recounts this experience:

> And it came to pass as he [Lehi] prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.
>
> And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.
>
> (1 Ne. 1:6–7)

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[43]The first to adopt such a title is Nephi in his narration of how he had sought to receive the vision which his father had seen of both the tree of life and the Messiah (1 Ne. 10:17). Curiously, as soon as Nephi inscribes the title *Son of God*, he adds the parenthetical explanation, "and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come." When did Nephi initially learn this title, especially since Lehi apparently did not use it? The only clear hint occurs at the beginning of his own parallel vision of the tree of life which he begins narrating a few lines later, starting in chapter 11. On that occasion, he was told by the Spirit that after he had seen "a man descending out of heaven" he was to "bear record that it is the Son of God" (1 Ne. 11:7). In Nephi's account on the small plates, this is the first recorded notice of Nephi's having heard the title *Son of God* (he had apparently learned from the Spirit the expanded form—*Son of the most high God*—just before this [1 Ne. 11:6]). It might be argued that Nephi knew such titles but had not utilized them in 1 Nephi until now. Against this, I should point out that thus far, when speaking of the Messiah, Nephi has consistently employed the language of his father. Then in 1 Nephi 10:17, when he made use of the term *Son of God*, he even adds a note of explanation. Since seemingly the first being ever to mention that title to Nephi was the Spirit in the vision (1 Ne. 11:6–7), we are left to presume that before this experience Nephi did not know the term.

[44]The term *dream* is clearly to be understood in the inspired sense. Of the seven dreams and visions of Lehi, three are called dreams (1 Ne. 2:1–2; 3:2; 8:2). In the final instance, Lehi himself equates dream with vision: "Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Ne. 8:2).

Brown: Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source

That Lehi's experience constituted a vision can be seen in the emphasis on what he saw, even though he was not carried away in vision. In fact, what he "saw and heard" must have been revealed on the spot. Remarkably, Nephi recapitulates nothing of the vision's content. It certainly must have included Lehi's calling to prophesy. And it is not unlikely that some of the content coincided with what Lehi saw immediately following in the vision of the book. Nephi possibly thought that the close juxtaposition of the two visions would indicate corresponding content. We come to expect this, realizing Nephi must have abbreviated as much as possible owing to the difficulty of writing on metal plates.

Nephi begins his summary of Lehi's second vision, the vision of the book, by describing how Lehi was caught away by the Spirit:

> And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.
>
> (1 Ne. 1:8).[45]

Lehi then saw "one descending out of the midst of heaven" and "twelve others following him" (1 Ne. 1:9–10). Nephi continues:

> . . . the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.
>
> And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.
>
> (1 Ne. 1:11, 13)

This passage captures what was no doubt the warning of Lehi's vision: Jerusalem had become iniquitous and was to be destroyed by Babylonians. This warning, of course, formed the core of the messages of other prophets contemporary with Lehi at Jerusalem.[46] Although Nephi does not mention it here, at some point in the vision Lehi had also learned about the coming redemption through the Messiah. Nephi's summary of Lehi's preaching in Jerusalem reads:

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[45]This type of vision is the standard motif of the prophet or seer being introduced into the council of the Lord. Isaiah, for example, experienced this when he received his call (Isa. 6:1, 8. See also Jer. 23:18, 22; Rev. 4:2–4).

[46]In 1 Nephi 1:4 we read that "many prophets" had come to Jerusalem "prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed." Among those prophets would have been Jeremiah, who had already been saying this for twenty-five years, and Habbakkuk, who was prophesying and writing between 608 and 598 B.C. See also Zephaniah, chapter 1.

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> . . . and he [Lehi] testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.[47]
>
> (1 Ne. 1:19)

In narrating his father's third vision, Nephi includes words of assurance from the Lord:

> . . . 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 Ne. 2:1)

In this same vision Lehi also received a charge to leave Jerusalem, the first step in a very long journey:

> And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.
>
> (1 Ne. 2:2)

Lehi's response to this command eventually led him and his family to the distant land of promise.

Lehi's fourth vision concerns the return of his sons to Jerusalem for the records on the plates of brass (1 Ne. 3:2–6). Nephi writes the account using the very words of Lehi:

> And it came to pass that he [Lehi] spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.
>
> For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.
>
> (1 Ne. 3:2–3)

Nephi and his brothers were to go to Laban and "seek the records, and bring them down hither" (1 Ne. 3:4), even though his brothers had already complained about the task. Notably, Lehi received this vision only after he and his family had arrived at a spot near the Red Sea (1 Ne. 2:5–9).

The fifth vision has to do with the tree of life and with the Messiah (1 Ne. 8:2–28). As we have seen, this constitutes a long direct quotation from Lehi's record. There were two elements of the vision, however, which Lehi apparently missed recording. The first

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[47]Nephi's employment of the phrase "saw and heard" may be intended to recall what Lehi "saw and heard" in the very first vision (used twice in 1 Nephi 1:6). If so, it becomes very likely that Lehi had learned something about the coming Messiah in this first experience. It is impossible, however, for us to recover exactly what and how much was revealed to him on this occasion concerning the Messiah, since Nephi does not elaborate.

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concerns an item which he had overlooked when he saw the vision. It was Nephi who, after recounting his experience with the corroborating vision, adds this curious note:

> . . . the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water. (1 Ne. 15:27)

When one examines Lehi's narration, what Nephi says proves true. Lehi describes the water simply as "a river of water" (1 Ne. 8:13), adding no indication that it appeared muddy or clear. In contrast, Nephi's report is very explicit about its appearance, calling it "the fountain of filthy water . . . and the depths thereof are the depths of hell" (1 Ne. 12:16). Lehi also learned the time of the Messiah's coming, but neither Lehi nor Nephi relates this detail in their accounts of their visions—at least not in the record as we have it from the small plates. It is only afterward that Nephi brings forward this particular; in a later recollection of the vision (1 Ne. 19:7–10), Nephi says about the coming of the Messiah: "And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jersusalem" (1 Ne. 19:8). If "the angel" in this passage is the same as the "man . . . dressed in a white robe" of Lehi's vision (1 Ne. 8:5)—and this seems apparent—then we can assume the likelihood that Lehi not only was told what Nephi was told but was also informed as to when the Messiah would come.

In my reckoning, the revelation written on the compass constituted Lehi's sixth vision (1 Ne. 16:26). Incidentally, Nephi explains later that "from time to time" writing would appear on the compass to give directions to Lehi's family while still in the desert (1 Ne. 16:29). On this occasion, however, Lehi had prayed to know where Nephi should go to find food. In his response, the Lord chastized Lehi and his family for complaining because of their hardships in the wilderness (1 Ne. 16:24–25). Nephi writes that "when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives" (1 Ne. 16:27). Like the Urim and Thummim among the ancient Israelites, the compass-ball served as a means of revelation.[48]

The last recorded vision of Lehi is related in 2 Nephi 1:4:

> For, behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished.

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[48]On the Urim and Thummim in Old Testament usage, see Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65.

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That Lehi was granted a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem should not surprise us. Other prophets saw similar happenings. For example, Lehi's son, Jacob, recounts that he also saw "that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive" (2 Ne. 6:8). Nahum, too, saw a similar vision of Nineveh under siege and finally falling (Nahum 2:1–3:3, 10–15). Ezekiel, as well, was transported in vision from Babylon to Jerusalem where he saw the abominable practices of the priests and the consequent departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple before the fall of the city (Ezek. 8:3–10:19).

Among the important doctrinal ideas taught by Lehi, in addition to those already discussed tangentially, three stand out. The first pertains to fidelity to one's spouse, a principle discussed in connection with the question of plurality of wives. Jacob, we recall, quotes at some length the relevant words of Lehi (Jacob 2:23b–26, 27b–33). The occasion on which Lehi had received this injunction from the Lord remains unknown. Nonetheless, according to Jacob, the Lord had told Lehi that "this people begin to wax in iniquity . . . for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms" (Jacob 2:23). Lehi's people had sought "to excuse themselves" on scriptural grounds, "because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son." God, through Lehi, was very specific that no "man among you [shall] have save it be one wife" (Jacob 2:27). Only God himself could reverse this prohibition against plural marriage: "For if I will, saith the Lord, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people" (Jacob 2:30). What had angered the Lord was having "seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people . . . because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands" (Jacob 2:31). In Lehi's account of it, fidelity to one's marriage partner was so crucial to the Nephite's presence in the promised land that if it were not observed faithfully God would curse "the land for their sakes" (Jacob 2:29).

A second significant teaching of Lehi concerns the notion of "opposition in all things." Lehi's ideas thereon are part of his last instructions to his son Jacob (2 Ne. 2:11–13). Lehi begins by indicating that the judgment leads either to "punishment which is affixed" or to "happiness which is affixed" (2 Ne. 2:10). He then reasons: "It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad" (2 Ne. 2:11). Lehi indicates that without opposition we have no power to be righteous or unrighteous. Note the dramatic result that Lehi says would arise:

"And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation" (2 Ne. 2:13). According to Lehi, the totality of existence would cease if opposition were removed. He says this again in a different way:

> . . . all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.
>
> Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. . . .
>
> (2 Ne. 2:11–12)

The observation that all existence would become utterly wasted if no antithetical relationships existed leads Lehi to say: "Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God" (2 Ne. 2:12). Since Lehi has just previously been dealing with the redemption which is to come through the Messiah (2 Ne. 2:6–10), we should probably understand this series of passages in terms of the Redeemer's work. That is, if there exists no opposition, there is no reason for a redeemer who can bring about God's mercy *and* justice.

A third element of Lehi's teaching is closely related to his concerns for the role of the Redeemer and for opposition in all things. It has to do with the role of Adam in the drama of salvation (2 Ne. 2:15–27). Lehi insists that two ingredients were mixed with Adam's situation—a choice, along with the freedom to make the choice: "It must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life. . . . Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Ne. 2:15–16). For Lehi, the opposition facing Adam was necessary so that the choice could be made—the forbidden fruit versus the tree of life. In fact, had not Adam been enticed to make the choice which brought both mortality and the capability of parenthood, the earth would never have been peopled, thus frustrating God's plan:

> And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. . . .
>
> And they would have had no children . . .
>
> Adam fell that men might be . . .
>
> (2 Ne. 2:22–23, 25)

The whole point is that had Adam not fallen mankind would never have existed. But since he did fall,

> . . . the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever . . .
>
> . . . to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil . . .
>
> (2 Ne. 2:26–27)

The reasons for opposition, then, are (1) to perpetuate existence—and Adam's fall led to this—and (2) to bring about God's plan, which is to save mankind through the Messiah's redemption.

These three major elements of Lehi's instruction—fidelity to spouse, opposition as an essential ingredient of existence, and the Adam–Redeemer relationship in the plan of salvation—are supplemented by other themes which, in the available sources, receive less emphasis. But even when reviewed briefly, their richness and variety become obvious: Lehi's teachings which focused on the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:2–35), the fall of Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Ne. 1:13, 19; 9:3), the coming of the Messiah (e.g., 1 Ne. 1:19b; 10:4–11; 2 Ne. 2:6–9), the scattering and gathering of Israel (e.g., 1 Ne. 9:3; 10:3, 12–14), and the important ministry of the seer of the latter days who is to take God's message to Lehi's descendants (2 Ne. 3:6–21).

CONCLUSION

Thus, a strong case exists that Lehi's written record underlay a good deal more in the writings of Nephi and Jacob than others have thought. The most persistent problem, to be sure, is whether a particular quotation or paraphrase indeed goes back to a written source. Nephi's brief characterizations of his father's writings (1 Ne. 1:16; 19:1–2) help us to see important clues regarding the nature of Lehi's work. Yet in the final analysis, we can be certain about only a portion; the rest remains merely suggestive. Far from being a futile exercise, however, the analysis has made it abundantly clear that their father Lehi's writings and teachings deeply influenced both Nephi and Jacob, a fact which gives measure to the positive influences of Lehi—the man and the prophet.