

## "By the Spirit of Prophecy" - Poetry

Because “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10), a book subtitled “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” would be expected to contain much prophecy. As Susan Easton Black has affirmed in *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon*, the book is indeed “Christ-centered.”<sup>1</sup> But because the Book of Mormon is published wholly as prose, we may not recognize that much of the prophecy in the book actually is poetry.<sup>2</sup>

It has long been known that about a third of the Old Testament, especially Psalms, Job, and the prophetic books, is poetry; what is just being discovered is that a significant portion of the Book of Mormon is poetry as well.<sup>3</sup> Although Book of Mormon poetry appears in many places of elevated discourse, such as sermons and instructions, a close examination of the text will show that often when a Book of Mormon prophet says or implies, “Thus saith the Lord,” the passages that follow will be poetic.<sup>4</sup>

*Prophecy* means “to utter by divine interpretation,” and so we would expect the prophetic message to be of an elevated nature. Poetry helps the message reach beyond the surface by adding rhythmical repetitions that touch the soul. That accords with David Noel Freedman’s view of the correlation between poetry and prophecy: In “communication or action between heaven and earth, the appropriate language is that of poetry. Prose may be adequate to describe setting and circumstances and to sketch historical effects and residues; only poetry can convey the mystery of the miraculous and its meaning for those present.”<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter agrees: “Since poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implications, it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry.”<sup>6</sup> Latter-day Saint poet Orson F. Whitney put it simply, “The highest poetry is prophetic; there is always in it a suggestion of infinity.”<sup>7</sup> Through poetry, according to T. R. Henn, prophecies exalt the heart; both words and imagery acquire depth by repetition, and there is a peculiar exaltation proper to the chant.<sup>8</sup> Or as Edgar Allan Poe put it in another context: “Without a certain continuity of effort—without a certain duration or repetition of purpose—the soul is never deeply moved. There must be the dropping of the water upon the rock.”<sup>9</sup>

In any language, the appeal of poetry is similar to the appeal of music. Through its rhythms, sounds, and images, poetry touches our feelings and enlightens our understanding. It is no wonder, then, that the first use of language was poetic (“Every word was once a poem,” Emerson says.<sup>10</sup>) and that many of the world’s greatest writers, such as Homer, Virgil, Sophocles, Dante, Petrarch, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, should have chosen poetry as their primary medium of imaginative expression.

A simple but effective instance of poetry in the Book of Mormon is Lehi’s memorable teaching:

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (2 Nephi 2:25)

Here the second line repeats the word *men* and shows that the fall of man actually allows for joy.

Another poetic passage is the beginning of Nephi’s parting testimony in which he repeats the phrase “I glory” in building one affirmation upon another:



As with the poetry of the Old Testament, Book of Mormon poetry helps give emphasis, unity, and memorability to the utterances in which it is found. Further, in Robert Alter's words, the "poetic vehicle of parallelistic verse offered a particularly effective way of imaginatively realizing inevitability, of making powerfully manifest to the listener the idea that consequences he might choose not to contemplate could happen, would happen, would happen without fail."<sup>16</sup> We should also keep in mind the virtues of poetry in the world from which Lehi and his family came. According to Moshe Greenberg,

Poetry was the form taken by sapiential observation and speculation throughout the ancient Near East. With its engagement of the emotions and the imagination, it was the usual mode of persuasive discourse. Through its compression, poetry allows stark, untempered expression that, while powerful in impact, awakens the kind of careful reflection that leads to the fuller apprehension of a subject. Moreover, the density of poetic language, compelling the reader to complement, to fill in gaps, fits it peculiarly for representing impassioned discourse, which by nature proceeds in associative leaps rather than by logical development.<sup>17</sup>

Having just quoted from Isaiah (in the passage from 2 Nephi 8:5–6, which we analyzed above), Jacob employs poetry himself to help sustain the high level of the previous discourse (consider especially 2 Nephi 9:17–18, 41–43). Though Jacob's poetry may not be as vivid as Isaiah's, it contains some of the same elevation of expression and richness of comparisons. In the example that follows, Jacob integrates Isaiah effectively into his own sermon.

Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God.

Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat;                   5 yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Harken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken;                   10 and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness.

Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God;                   15 pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice. (2 Nephi 9:49–52; compare Isaiah 55:1–2)<sup>18</sup>

The Hebraic parallelism in Jacob's poetry is clear. Jacob's soul abhors sin, and his heart, a synonym for soul, positively delights in righteousness. At the end of the passage, Jacob uses parallel ideas that contain both synonyms ("pray unto him" and "give thanks unto his holy name") and antonyms ("day" and "night").

Parallelism is the dominant characteristic of poetry in the Bible and Book of Mormon, but it is not the only one. In the last stanza above, for example, a poetic element is the rhythmic intensity of the action Jacob calls for. First, he simply asks his listeners to behold—that is, hear him. Then he wants them to remember, followed by the actions of praying and giving thanks (the humble and grateful element of prayer). For its part, parallelism is not only a poetic element; it can be found as well in prose passages. Further, there are no sharp distinctions between scriptural prose and poetry.<sup>19</sup> Rather, one can flow into and out of the other. Preceding the passage quoted above, Jacob speaks in prose but sets up two opposite situations, holiness and unholiness: "Behold, if ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but as ye are not holy, and ye look upon me as a teacher, it must needs be expedient that I

teach you the consequences of sin” (2 Nephi 9:48). Then he moves into a more rhythmic and exalted expression with “Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, / and my heart delighteth in righteousness.”

### Nephi’s Psalm

For his part, Nephi expresses some of the most powerful poetry in the Book of Mormon in what has been called the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:15–35), a title given prominence by Sidney B. Sperry.<sup>20</sup> The psalm presents feelingly the conflicting emotions Nephi experienced after the death of his father, Lehi. He responds to the anger directed against him by his brothers Laman and Lemuel and their families—an animosity that soon after causes Nephi and his people to flee into the wilderness to escape destruction. On the other hand, Nephi expresses the joyful intensity of his trust in the Lord. His psalm is both a supplication (“a poetic cry of distress to the Lord in time of critical need”<sup>21</sup>) and a psalm of praise:

For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children. Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard. 5 Nevertheless,

notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. 10 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the

sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; 15 and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep. He

hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh. He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me. 20 Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath

given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime. And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me. 25

And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them. O then, if I have seen so great things, 30 if the Lord in his condescension

unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow,

and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? 35 Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have

place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. 40 Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken

my strength because of mine afflictions. Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the

rock of my salvation. 45 O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is

contrite! 50 O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road! O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! 55 Wilt thou make my path straight before me!

Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way— but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy. O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee

forever. 60 I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm. Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; 65 therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. 70 (2 Nephi 4:15–35)

As with the passages from Isaiah and Jacob, the dominant poetic feature of the psalm of Nephi is parallelism. An idea expressed in one line is completed, amplified, contrasted, or reversed in the subsequent line or lines. Both completion and contrast are evident in lines 17 through 20:

He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh. He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

The second line completes the thought begun in the first line; similarly, the fourth line completes the third. Taken together, the third and fourth lines contrast with the first two lines.

Contrast with intensification is found in lines 21 and 22:

Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime.

“Nighttime” contrasts with “day”; the intensification comes in the greater detail of the second line.

Both the opposition and the repetition of an idea in a reverse order are found in these lines:

Wilt thou *make my path straight* before me!

Wilt thou not place a *stumbling block* in my way— but that thou wouldst *clear my way* before me, and *hedge not up my way*, but the ways of mine enemy.

Intensification of thought and feeling are especially evident in lines 14 through 16. Here there is movement through space, first through the wilderness and then over the ocean. That is joined with divine aid, which increases from support through guidance to preservation:

My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

A more intricate intensification is found in lines 39 through 45:

Awake, my *soul*! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my *heart*, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions. Rejoice, O my *heart*, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my *soul* will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

The powerful effect of the first line is amplified in the second; the last expands the significance of both preceding lines. The appeals to the soul and heart say what not to do (“no longer droop,” “give place no more”), the mirror use of *heart* and *soul* affirms what to do: “praise” and “rejoice.”

This and essentially all of the poetry in the Book of Mormon testifies of Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation. It helps invite and entice the reader to Christ<sup>22</sup> by appealing to him or her on many levels. It especially reaches both the mind and the heart of the Lamanite who reads or hears it in the right spirit. That is in harmony with the purpose of the Book of Mormon as set forth in the third section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

For inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people— . . . And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved. (D&C 3:16, 19–20)

### Ammon's Speech

**Poetic structure may be seen in Ammon's impassioned response to criticism by the other sons of Mosiah regarding his apparent boasting about the conversion of Lamanites:**

I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God. 5

Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; 10 yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever. . . .

Yea, we have reason to praise him forever, for he is the Most High God, and has loosed our brethren from the chains of hell. 15

Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, he has brought them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation; and they are encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love; yea, and we have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work. 20

Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, 25 and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel. (Alma 26:11–12, 14–16)

Recognized both visually and aurally, the dominant poetic feature in Ammon's defense is parallelism. For example, the denial of boasting in line 1 is completed in line 2; the declaration of joy in line 3 is amplified in lines 4 and 5; not boasting of self in line 8 is reversed in line 9 to boasting of God; the affirmation of God's strength in line 10 is specified in line 11; and everlasting darkness and everlasting light are contrasted in lines 16 and 17.

In each of the three stanzas is an intensification and expansion of feeling. In the first stanza, denial of boasting in his own strength and wisdom is turned into Ammon's emphasis on joy and rejoicing in God. The second stanza moves from limitations of self to praise for the strength of God and exemplification of his miraculous power. The third stanza builds from the simple "let us glory" to "we will glory in the Lord" to "we will praise our God forever."

The climax comes in “who can glory too much” being amplified by “who can say too much,” followed by the three parallel “of his” phrases. This climax is appropriately concluded with the quietly understated reversal, “I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.” In tone, this reversal confirms his earlier confession that “I am nothing” and leaves ringing the repeated words of praise to God while acknowledging the limitations of man in treating spiritual matters in language.

### The Poetry of Prophecy

**As prophecy, Book of Mormon poetry gains power through repeated words as well as through parallel ideas. The following prophecy by Abinadi illustrates this power:**

Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord—

Wo be unto this people, for I have seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and *except they repent* I will visit them in mine anger. And *except they repent* and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will *deliver* them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be *brought into bondage*;

and they shall be *afflicted* by the hand of their enemies. And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people. And it shall come to pass that *except this people repent* and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be *brought into bondage*; and none shall *deliver* them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God. Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall *cry* unto me I will be slow to hear their *cries*; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies. And *except they repent* in sackcloth and ashes, and *cry* mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I *deliver* them out of their *afflictions*; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me. (Mosiah 11:20–25)

Abinadi, like Nephi and Jacob, has a love for the greatness of Isaiah’s poetry and makes it part of his thinking and feeling. Like Old Testament poet-prophets, Abinadi is not concerned with originality; indeed, variation on a familiar theme or phrase was part of the beauty of the matter. One of King Noah’s priests asks the meaning of Isaiah’s words:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings;

that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth; Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion. (Mosiah 12:21–22; cf. Isaiah 52:7–8).

In his response, Abinadi shows the meaning of Isaiah through his poetic variations. Having assimilated Isaiah, Abinadi says regarding the prophets of old, “And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!” He then implicitly applies Isaiah’s words to himself: “And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!” (Mosiah 15:15–16). In tribute to the greatest Prophet of all, Abinadi says:

And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people. (Mosiah 15:18)

The Savior, when he comes to the New World, again quotes this idea from Isaiah (3 Nephi 20:40). Like Nephi, Jacob, and Abinadi, Jesus loves the writings of Isaiah and incorporates Isaiah's words as his words (which indeed they are, since Isaiah in essence had them from the Lord). His variation on Isaiah refers to the time when the gospel will be preached to the covenant people in Jerusalem and the Lord at last establishes Zion:

And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye. (3 Nephi 20:31–32)

Because the Book of Mormon is printed as prose, the full power of numerous testimonies of Jesus Christ has been obscured. When arranged as verse, these testimonies reveal their poetic nature. They “soar” in a manner similar to that attributed by William Everson to Walt Whitman's original preface to *Leaves of Grass*: “Long celebrated among Whitman's prose pieces for its vigor, [the 1855 preface] resists assimilation into that genre. Arranged as prose, its inversions clog, its rhythms fight themselves. Arranged as verse, they soar, proclaiming the presence of an unacknowledged masterpiece of American poetry.”<sup>23</sup> Just so do we see the true power of the Book of Mormon when we read some of its most important passages as poetry instead of prose.

In the following prophetic statement found early in the Book of Mormon, we hear a shift from Nephi's prose to the Lord's poetry. There is a rhythm of cause-and-effect relationships (“inasmuch as . . . ye/they shall”), the order is of ascending significance (“land of promise” becomes “land which is choice above all other lands”), and the conclusion shows contrast between punishment and blessing:

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. And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying:

Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren. (1 Nephi 2:18–22)

Again, we find a similar shift in Alma 7:8–9:

Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are according to his word. But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying—

Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

In the last passage, one idea builds on another. Personal repentance is a foundation for preparing the way of the Lord, and in turn, planning (“prepare”) leads to action (“walk in his paths”). Following this pattern, the personal is a basis for the universal, which is presented first as general anticipation of the kingdom of heaven and then specified and intensified as the actual second coming of Christ.



## Connecting Heaven and Earth

Analysis of several additional poetic passages from the Book of Mormon reveals their intricate artistry, heightening features, unity, memorability, and vigor in reaching the heart as well as the mind. Their exalted poetic language acts as a means of connecting earth and heaven.

When God endows Nephi the son of Helaman with power, He speaks poetically. He first defines the power He is giving Nephi through increasing levels of physical power (famine to pestilence to destruction), but then He gives it spiritual significance as well (sealed/loosed in heaven). The intensity of destructive power builds from rending the temple to leveling a mountain to the climax of smiting the people. With the confidence that comes from this vision of God's power given to him, Nephi is now ready to declare to the people the simple but meaningful message: "Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction." In lines 2 through 7 God is explaining the power to Nephi, in lines 8 through 11 God is actually giving Nephi the power, and in lines 12 through 20 God is again explaining the power to Nephi—thus creating a physical-spiritual-physical structure to Nephi's experience.

And it came to pass as he was thus pondering . . . the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, . . . a voice came unto him saying: . . .

Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, 5 and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; 10 and thus shall ye have power among this people. And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done. And if ye shall say unto this mountain, 15 Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done. And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass. 20 And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty:

Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction. 25

And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent. (Helaman 10:3, 6–12)

Nephi's final testimony at the end of the Second Book of Nephi also provides an example of the poetic artistry found in the Book of Mormon:

I glory in plainness; [stanza 1] I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.

I have charity for my people, [stanza 2] and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat. I have charity for the Jew— I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came. I also have charity for the Gentiles.

But behold, for none of these can I hope [stanza 3] except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path

until the end of the day of probation.

And now, my beloved brethren, [stanza 4] and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye— [stanza 5] for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness. And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day.

And now, my beloved brethren, [stanza 6] all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come. (2 Nephi 33:6–13)

Overall, this poetic conclusion to the two books of Nephi is at once Nephi's personal testimony and his solemn admonition to future generations. The resonating word in the first stanza is *glory* as the parallelism moves in a staircase, or climactic, manner. Personal redemption is followed by charity for others (second stanza). Then, in the beginning of the third stanza, the qualification of hope—tying in with the charity and faith of the preceding stanza—links back with Nephi's own reconciliation with Christ ("he hath redeemed my soul"). The motion intensifies in a dynamic way from "enter" to "walk" to "continue," with the long last line also suggesting continuity.

The fourth stanza speaks of the audience in a heightened manner: "my people" becomes "my beloved brethren" and "the Gentiles" becomes "all ye ends of the earth." The echoing word here is "believe," with the simple admonition to "hearken unto these words and believe in Christ" moving to a more complex response to the relationship of "these words" and Christ. In the fifth stanza, the emphasis has shifted from belief in Christ to Christ's own demonstration of his words—with Nephi as witness. The sixth stanza confirms that witness with Nephi's distant yet vital "crying from the dust" to his tripartite audience.

Considering the context of all of Nephi's writings, with special emphasis on his interpretation of Lehi's vision of the tree of life, Clinton F. Larson says of Nephi's farewell: The "spirit of the Lord tells him to speak no more—no more will he be stirred to poetic expression. In his humility, he claims that what he has spoken is not poetic, but it is, with the substantive qualities of the best literature."<sup>24</sup>

### Zenos's Prayer of Worship

**The prayer of worship by Zenos in Alma 33 is marked by simplicity and clarity. Its power is developed by repetition that varies slightly but meaningfully.**

Thou art merciful, O God, [stanza 1] for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me. Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me. And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer. And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children [stanza 2] when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, [stanza 3] and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations. Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; [stanza 4] and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son. (Alma 33:4–11)

In the first stanza the imagery changes the location from the dangerous exterior wilderness—a place where one encounters enemies—to the cultivated exterior (“field”) to the safe interior (“house”) to the even more secure interior (“closet”). The second stanza serves as a transition, moving the focus from place (stanza 1) to human environment (stanza 3). In either case, however, whether with fellow Saints (“thy congregations”) or with foes (“mine enemies”), Zenos is confident in the integrity of his direct relationship with God (“to be heard of thee and not of men”).

The third stanza contains a striking variation from the first. In the first stanza, Zenos expresses gratitude that his enemies were turned to him (that is, their hearts were softened toward him). But in the third stanza, when they renewed their unkindness to him (casting him out and despising him), the prophet cried to God over his afflictions, until God chose to punish Zenos’s enemies.

The concluding stanza links Christ with the mercy referred to earlier—bringing to a climactic close the intensified power created throughout the poem by the repetition of “merciful.” This stanza moves from past (“thou didst hear me”) to future (“I will cry unto thee”) to present (“thou hast turned thy judgments away”), closing with the powerful and final repeated phrase: “because of thy Son.”

The poem builds intensity with variations on “hear,” “cry,” and “merciful.” These three words are developed in the first stanza, with “thou didst hear” being intensified through repetition. They are interlinked in stanza 2, with the principle of prayer being applied to all of God’s prayerful children. Then in stanza 3, when we come to “thou didst hear my cries,” we feel the emotional shrillness of “cries” in the context of Zenos’s being “despised by mine enemies”; here the tension is increased as well. The fourth and last stanza resolves the problem and has a calming effect. The preceding stanza repeats the expressions “enemies,” “angry/anger,” and “destruction”; in contrast, the last stanza emphasizes “sincerity,” “joy,” and especially the repeated phrase “because of thy Son.”

### Alma’s Instructions to Helaman

**Alma’s guidance to his son Helaman contains this elevated poetic exhortation, given memorability by its structure:**

O, remember, my son, and *learn* wisdom in thy youth; yea, *learn* in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Yea, and *cry unto God* for all thy support; yea, let all thy *doings* be *unto the Lord*, and whithersoever thou *goest* let it be *in the Lord*; 5 yea, let all thy *thoughts* be directed *unto the Lord*; yea, let the *affections* of thy heart be placed *upon the Lord forever*.

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at *night* lie down unto the Lord, 10 that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the *morning* let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the *last day*. 15 (Alma 37:35–37)

The second line adds to the kind of learning found in the first. Line 3 sets up a relationship with God that in the next four lines intensifies in importance and emphasis, moving from crying to doing to going and, in lines 6 and 7, from thoughts to affections. The relationship between Helaman and the Lord advocated in the second half of the poem is more intimate, starting with “counsel with the Lord” (contrast with the more distant “cry unto God” in the first half). The paired opposites of times of day are used in the climax of the poem. The actions of lying down at night unto the Lord and rising in the morning with thanks unto God are followed by being lifted up at the last day.

## Helaman 12

**Alma’s poetic exhortation is contained within essentially prose instructions to his son. In a similar manner, Mormon in Helaman 12 progresses from prose to poetry as he waxes eloquent regarding the increasing wickedness of the Nephites.**

At the very time when [the Lord] doth prosper his people, . . . then is the time that they do harden their hearts. . . . And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.

O how foolish, and how vain, [stanza 1] and how evil, and devilish, and how *quick* to do iniquity, and how *slow* to do good, are the children of men; yea, how *quick* to hearken unto the words of the evil one, 5 and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world! Yea, how *quick* to be lifted up in pride; yea, how *quick* to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how *slow* are they to remember the Lord their God, 10 and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how *slow* to walk in wisdom’s paths!

Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, [stanza 2] who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, 15 they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide.

O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; [stanza 3] yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth. For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, 20 to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God. Yea, behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake. And by the power of his voice they are broken up, and become smooth, yea, even like unto a valley. Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake; 25 Yea, by the power of his voice, do the foundations rock, even to the very center. Yea, and if he say unto the earth—Move—it is moved. Yea, if he say unto the earth— Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours — 30 it is done; And thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun. 35 And behold, also, if he say unto the waters of the great deep— Be thou dried up—it is done. Behold, if he say unto this mountain— Be thou raised up, and come over and fall upon that city, that it be buried up—behold it is done. 40

And behold, if a man hide up a treasure in the earth, [stanza 4] and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of the iniquity of him who hath hid it up— behold, it shall be accursed. And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever— 45 behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever.

And behold, if the Lord shall say unto a man— [stanza 5] Because of thine iniquities, thou shalt be accursed forever— it shall be done. And if the Lord shall say— 50 Because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence— he will cause that it shall be so. And wo unto him to whom he shall say this, for it shall be unto him that will do iniquity, and he cannot be saved; 55 therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved, hath repentance been declared.

Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; [stanza 6] for these are they that shall be saved. And may God grant, in his great fulness, 60 that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.

And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, 65 yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;

Yea, who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery, [stanza 7] fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation. 70 And thus it is. Amen.

(Helaman 12:2–26)<sup>25</sup>

This powerful and sweeping poetry is designed to stir its auditors to profit from Mormon's triple perspective. Mormon responds to the situation of the Nephites whom he has just described, implicitly he is stirred by the iniquity of degenerating Nephites of his own time, and he looks down through time to the audience who will receive his words. Mormon's scope is vast; he presents the power of God to effect cataclysmic changes in the earth. He personalizes God's power to an individual ("if the Lord shall say unto a man—Because of thine iniquities, thou shalt be accursed forever—it shall be done"). He then closes by moving out in his thoughts to the dual possibilities for all humankind, to have everlasting life or to have everlasting damnation.

The first two lines set up the concentrated concern found throughout the remainder of the poem. There is a progression from "foolish" to "vain" to "evil" to "devilish." This culminates in the balance of opposites: "quick to do iniquity" and "slow to do good." The remainder of the stanza builds on the alternation of "quick" and "slow."

Stanza 2 summarizes the position of the unfaithful children of men. In stanza 3, the vanity of man lifted up in pride is put into perspective: man is actually less than the dust. Then follows an ascending action upon physical things. The "dust of the earth" is divided asunder by the command of God; hills and mountains tremble and quake and then are broken up; the whole earth shakes; the foundations rock to the center; the earth moves, and then it goes back—all showing the power of God. Following this action of the "dust of the earth" is another buildup with the potential for even greater miracles: waters of the great deep would be dried up and, instead, a great wave of the earth itself—a mountain—would engulf a city, demonstrating God's total command over the physical world.

References to the physical power of the Lord prepare for specific and intensifying application to potential distress of the people. If a wicked man hide a treasure, the Lord will curse it that it cannot be found; a wicked man will be cursed forever; a wicked man will be cut off from God's presence (lines 41–46).

Finally, there comes an appeal to iniquitous persons who have been stirred by this progression to repent (stanza 5). If they hearken to the voice of the Lord, they shall be saved (stanza 6). The simple but effective conclusion, contained in paired opposite lines, specifies the everlasting judgments to those who have done good and those who have done evil. "And thus it is," Mormon says, quietly and briefly affirming the truth of the whirlwind experience through which he has taken his auditors—and his readers.

### Mormon's Lamentation

**In what Sidney B. Sperry calls a lamentation, Mormon responds in a poignant and lyrical manner to the destruction of his people:**

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! [stanza 7] O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, [stanza 2] ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, [stanza 3] and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. [stanza 4] But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy. (Mormon 6:16–22)

In the first stanza, a more general departure from the ways of the Lord is portrayed as both absolute and tenderly specific: Mormon's people have rejected Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive them. The same sorrowful finality is contained in the subsequent parallel lines, with the echoed word "fallen" providing the anguished climax of the second stanza.

In keeping with references to the future, the tone of the third stanza is calmer. In the first line of the fourth and last stanza, though, the tone again becomes emotional. Mormon cries from his soul, "O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you." This last part of the lament is linked by the initial "O" with earlier declarations. Most powerfully connecting them is Mormon's simple but profound sense of loss. "But behold, ye are fallen," Mormon says in the first stanza. "But behold, ye are gone," he says in the next. And again in the last, "But behold, ye are gone." This quietly states the finality of their fate. The final paired lines affirm God's knowledge and then his action. The last word, "mercy," befits Mormon's feelings for his people.<sup>26</sup>

## Poetic Enticings to “Come unto Christ”

Scores of other passages in the Book of Mormon can properly be identified and analyzed as poetry. These range from Lehi’s brief desert poems (a form Hugh Nibley identifies as a *QasÉida*<sup>27</sup>) to the extensive poetic sermons of Jacob (as in 2 Nephi 9), of Abinadi (as in Mosiah 12), and of Christ (as in 3 Nephi 27). Some representative excerpts reveal the character and variety of this poetry.

Lehi’s desert poems consist of similes:

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! (1 Nephi 2:9–10)

The next poetic excerpt, one of Lehi’s exhortations to his sons, begins with a terrace pattern—that is, the key word at the end of the first line is repeated and built upon at the beginning of the next line:

O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. (2 Nephi 1:13)

The first simple “awake” is intensified to “awake from a deep sleep”; then the “deep” part of the sleep is defined as the sleep of “hell”. By association, being in “hell” is being bound by “chains”, universalized in the next line to apply to the “children of men.” The passage ends with “carried away” being a motion contrasting with “shake off,” with “bind” being intensified to “captive,” and “hell” expanded into “the eternal gulf of misery and woe.”

Chiasmus in the following passage, from one of Nephi’s sermons in 2 Nephi, was first noticed by John W. Welch, who called this example “relatively lyrical in character.”<sup>28</sup>

And others will he pacify, and lull *them away* into carnal security, that they will say: *All is well* in Zion;

yea, *Zion* prospereth, *all is well*— and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth *them away* carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

The next example, taken from Jacob’s sermon, builds intensity through movement from “marvelous” to “mysteries” and “unsearchable” to “impossible.” It also builds logically in its connection between the greatness of the works of the Lord, the limitations of man, and the necessity of revelation in knowing God’s ways:

Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God. (Jacob 4:8)

In Abinadi’s instructions to visit the court of the wicked King Noah, we find this example of intensification:

Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying— Abinadi, go and prophesy unto this my people, for they have hardened their hearts against my words; they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them in my anger, yea, in my fierce anger will I visit them in their iniquities and abominations. Yea, wo be unto this generation! (Mosiah 12:1-2)

The people are indicted first for preventing the good (hardened against “my words”) and performing the bad. Anger becomes “fierce anger” and the evil doings of the people build up from “iniquities” to “abominations.” In sum, the Lord is saying, “The people are wicked; I will punish; wo to them.”

In the following poetic passage, the Lord is responding to Alma’s fervent prayer. The focus first alternates between Alma and the people he baptized. Then the concern moves increasingly outward to “whoever is baptized.” In the third stanza, the focus turns to the Lord and then back to the believer. The subsequent part of the Lord’s poetic instruction, not given here, develops potential punishments or rewards.

And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying:

Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi. And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them. And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people. Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine. And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed. Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand. For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

(Mosiah 26:14-24)

This segment from Alma’s sermon builds on images of nourishment:

Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire— (Alma 5:34-35)

Amulek’s

instructions on prayer are made memorable by the *anaphora* (initial repetition) of “cry,” by frequent amplification, as in lines 9-12, and by the progressive development of prayer from “call” to “cry” to “pour out your souls”:



Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you;

Yea, cry unto him for mercy; 5 for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks. 10 Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies. Yea, cry unto him against the devil, 15 who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. 20

But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, 25 let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. (Alma 34:17–27)

The following passage, from Christ's sermon to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful, is part of a larger declaration that builds power through use of the refrain, "O house of Israel":

And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto *my people, O house of Israel*, and I will bring my gospel unto them. And I will show unto thee, *O house of Israel*,

that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, *O house of Israel*, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among *my people, O house of Israel*. (3 Nephi 16:11–13)

In the next example we notice poetic repetitions in Moroni's account of the song of the Jaredites and then in his narrative "hymn" describing their preservation.

And they did *sing praises unto the Lord*; yea, the brother of Jared did *sing praises unto the Lord*, and he did thank and *praise the Lord* all the *day* long; and when the *night* came, they did not cease to *praise the Lord*.

*And thus they were driven forth*; and no *monster* of the sea could break them, neither *whale* that could mar them; and they did have light continually, whether it was *above the water* or *under the water*. *And thus they were driven forth*, three hundred and forty and four *days upon the water*.

And they did *land upon the shore of the promised land*. And when they had *set their feet upon the shores of the promised land* they *bowed themselves* down upon the face of the *land*, and did *humble themselves before the Lord*,

and did *shed tears of joy before the Lord*,

because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them. (Ether 6:9–12)

Poetry of the sort Moroni and others write is designed to convince "the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ" and to help them come unto Christ. In his final appeal, Moroni urges his audience to

come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing. And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:30–32)

This poetic challenge incorporates poetry by Isaiah, whom Victor L. Ludlow in *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* says “delivered his prophetic messages in such sophisticated and exalted poetry that his writings attain heights of spiritual, intellectual, and artistic expression almost unparalleled in world literature.”<sup>29</sup> Moroni is not simply quoting Isaiah, though. He has made Isaiah’s writings so much a fabric of his thinking and feeling that at this point Isaiah’s words have become Moroni’s. Further, Moroni’s poetry here is on the high level of Isaiah’s, producing a seamless garment.

Isaiah wrote:

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. (Isaiah 52:1–2)

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. (Isaiah 54:2)

In his inspired understanding, Moroni calls for Jerusalem first to arise from the dust and then to put on her beautiful garments. From that will come a strengthening of her stakes. And then will come enlargement of Zion’s borders and a perfection of Zion as its people come unto Christ in faith, repentance, and love. Moroni says this fully in the spirit of Isaiah, a great prophet of all Israel.

Thus with its penetrating power, stirring rhythms of ideas, and rich texture of striking words and memorable images, poetry in the Book of Mormon is indeed an appropriate medium through which “the spirit of prophecy” can be conveyed. It persuades and stirs the honest in heart to come feelingly to Christ.

Poetry in the Book of Mormon is best appreciated when listened to. We are to *hear* prophets such as Moroni “crying from the dead” and “speaking out of the dust” (Moroni 10:27). Read aloud, exalted Book of Mormon passages will resonate, touching us as beautiful music does. Responding to the Christ-centered poetry of the book, we may well be stirred to join Abinadi in his poetic praise of the Savior:

He is the *light* and the *life* of the world; yea, a *light* that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a *life* which is endless, that there can be no more death. (Mosiah 16:9)

## Notes

1. Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 11.

2. Indeed, Kent P. Jackson in his essay on Nephi and Isaiah, in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *1 Nephi to Alma 29*, Studies in Scripture, vol. 7 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 138, says, regarding the Book of Mormon, “Nowhere in it (except when Old Testament prophets are quoted) do we have revelation presented in poetic style.” I trust that in this chapter we shall see otherwise.

3. See Richard Dilworth Rust, “Book of Mormon Poetry,” *New Era* (March 1983): 46–50; Paul Cracroft, “A Clear Poetic Voice,” *Ensign* 14 (January 1984): 28–31; Angela M. Crowell, “Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon,” *Zarahemla Record* 32 and 33 (1986), 2–9, and 34 (1986): 7–12; Angela M. Crowell, “The Hebrew Literary Structure of the Book of Mormon,” *Restoration Studies V*, ed. Darlene Caswell (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1993), 156–69; Donald W. Parry, “Climactic Forms in the Book of Mormon,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 290–92; and Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992). With respect to the last work, though not every unit containing parallelism is poetry (nor is every passage of poetry reformatted here), Parry’s reformatted text reveals visually much of the poetry in the Book of Mormon. I should add that most of the Book of Mormon text still remains prose, and I think Wade Brown takes a good thing too far in formatting the entire text into poetic and parallelistic structures in *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon: Structure and Commentary* (Clackamas, Oreg.: Rainbow Press, 1988).

4. Hugh Nibley says that “in Lehi’s day an inspired leader had to be a poet” (*An Approach to the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 268).

5. David Noel Freedman, “Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry,” in *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu*, ed. John Maier and Vincent Toller (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 92. In my essay “Book of Mormon Poetry,” I comment that “Book of Mormon prose may be likened to a highway: it moves sequentially from one place to the next. Book of Mormon poetry, on the other hand, is cumulative: one idea builds upon another. It is like a beautiful structure such as the Salt Lake Temple” (50).

6. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 141. He also makes this telling point about the connection of poetry and prophecy: “As a rule the formal resources of poetry—its pronounced reliance on figurative language; its strong tendency in parallelism to underscore and complicate connections between related sounds, words, images, and motifs; its gravitation toward symbolic structures; its impulse to realize the extreme possibilities of the themes it takes up—all these lead the prophets to a different order of statement when they cast their vision in verse” (160–61).

7. Orson F. Whitney, “Joseph Smith in Literature,” *Improvement Era* 9 (December 1905): 136.

8. T. R. Henn, “The Bible as Literature,” in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (Surrey, England: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 12–13.

9. Edgar Allan Poe, “Twice-told Tales, by Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Review,” *Graham’s Magazine* 20 (May 1842): 298.

10. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” in *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Vintage Books and the Library of America, 1990), 225.

11. As stated before, with these passages and all the poetry that follows, the line arrangements are mine; likewise, all italicization of Book of Mormon words or phrases is mine. Because the poetry in the Book of Mormon is Hebraic in character, my model for lineation by parallelistic ideas is lined-out Old Testament poetry as found in

books like *The Bible and the Common Reader*, by Mary Ellen Chase (New York: Macmillan, 1956) and *The Dartmouth Bible: An Abridgment of the King James Version, with Aids to its Understanding as History and Literature, and as a Source of Religious Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

12. Victor L. Ludlow in *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 31–39, illustrates seven types of semantic parallelism in Hebraic poetry: (1) “Synonymous parallelism: a theme of the first line *repeats* itself in the second line, but in slightly different words.” (2) “Antithetic parallelism: a thought of the second part of a couplet *contrasts* with an opposite theme in the first.” (3) “Emblematic parallelism: the ideas of two lines are *compared* by means of a simile or metaphor.” (4) Synthetic parallelism: the second line *completes* or *complements* the thought of the first.” (5) “Composite parallelism: three or more phrases *develop* a theme by amplifying a concept or defining a term.” (6) “Climactic parallelism: part of one line (a word or phrase) is repeated in the second and other lines until a theme is developed which then *culminates* in a main idea or statement.” (7) “Introverted parallelism: a pattern of words or ideas is stated and then repeated, but in a *reverse* order. This parallelism is also called chiasmus.”

13. As might be expected, a much more technical analysis can be made. Some of the principal indicators of Hebraic poetry set forth by Wilfred G. E. Watson in *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), 46–47, are evident line-forms, ellipsis, unusual vocabulary, conciseness, unusual word-order, regularity and symmetry, parallelism in various forms, word-pairs (e.g., day/night), chiastic patterns, envelope figures, and repetition in various forms. In his *Hebrew Poetry: Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), Watson expands on his earlier indicators and includes chapters specifically devoted to word-pairs, chiasmus, and rhetorical devices. See also Parry, *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted*; Crowell, “Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon”; and Alter, *Poetry*.

14. Ruth apRoberts, “Old Testament Poetry: The Translatable Structure,” *PMLA*, 92 (1977): 999; Alter, *Poetry*, 18–19. In her book *The Biblical Web* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 20–23, apRoberts shows that biblical poetry with its rhyme of parallel ideas is readily translatable.

15. According to Freedman, a purpose of chiasmus, or inverted parallelism, is to “concentrate the reader’s or hearer’s interest on the central expression” (in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* [Hildesheim, West Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981], 7). Other purposes, according to John Welch, are to strengthen each element individually upon its chiastic repetition, help in memorization, make the work suitable for use in ritual settings, and help in oral transmission (11–14).

A good example of chiasmus is the quotation from Isaiah in 2 Nephi 16:10 (cf. Isaiah 6:10):

a Make the *heart* of this people fat, b and make their *ears* heavy, c and shut their *eyes*— c’ lest they see with their *eyes*, b’ and hear with their *ears*, a’ And understand with their *heart*, and be converted and be healed.

16. Alter, *Poetry*, 76.

17. Moshe Greenberg, “Job,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 303.

18. Isaiah 55:1–2 reads:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

19. James L. Kugel in *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 59–95, discusses the difficulty of positively identifying the presence of poetry in the Bible and notes instances of parallelism within prose. Tremper Longman III in *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1987) says, “Poetry may be defined over against prose by reference to ordinary speech. Prose represents a certain departure from normal speech patterns and poetry a further departure. Poetry is a more self-consciously structured language. It is self-referring in the sense that increased attention is given to how something is said as well as to what is said. In this manner, poetry is characterized by a higher level of literary artifice than prose. . . . Instead of characterizing prose and poetry as discrete literary forms, we may better represent them as poles on a continuum” (120–21).

20. Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947), 110–11. A carefully detailed analysis of this poem is provided by Stephen P. Sondrup, “The Psalm of Nephi: A Lyric Reading,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 21, no. 3 (1981): 357–72.

21. Alter, “Psalms,” in *Literary Guide to the Bible*, 248.

22. “That which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God” (Moroni 7:13).

23. William Everson, Note (n.p.) to Walt Whitman, *American Bard*; the original preface to *Leaves of Grass* arranged in verse by William Everson (New York: The Viking Press, 1982). Unlike Whitman’s preface, though, most of the Book of Mormon is in prose, not poetry.

24. “A Conversation with Clinton F. Larson,” *Dialogue* 4 (1969): 75. Similarly, Larson calls Nephi “a fine symbolist poet” with “the same vision that his father Lehi had, a vision which involved profound metaphors and the affective interpretation of metaphors” (74).

25. For a lined-out presentation of this poem similar to mine, see J. N. Washburn, *The Miracle of the Book of Mormon* (Orem, Utah: Bok Production Services, 1984), 153–54.

26. S. Kent Brown argues persuasively in his essay “The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 [Fall 1992]: 163–80) that Mormon responded to prophetic and poetic laments by Samuel the Lamanite, especially the lament that people would say, “O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them” (Helaman 13:33; cf. Mormon 2:10–11).

27. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 152.

28. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 201.

29. Ludlow, *Isaiah*, 3.