

TYPOLGY FOR NEPHI: EXEGESIS

A LMA 36 MAKES CLEAR that to read the Book of Mormon as the Book of Mormon suggests it should be read is to read it typologically. But Alma 36 sketches only a basic—though theologically rich—outline of typology: to read typologically is to read in such a way that history is effectively rewritten in light of a graceful event. It is necessary now to say what it means in more “practical” terms to read typologically. And there are two distinct models of typological interpretation in the Book of Mormon, one propounded by Nephi, the other by Abinadi. In the present chapter and the one that follows it, I will focus entirely on Nephi.

Two passages—the only passages in Nephi’s writings that deal directly with typology—will be the focus of this analysis: 2 Nephi 11:4 and 2 Nephi 25:24–27. Importantly, these two texts are situated at either end of the “Isaiah chapters” that play such a dominant role in Second Nephi. This structural positioning of Nephi’s two discussions of typology is not accidental. Consequently, a good deal of exegetical exposition of Nephi’s larger project must precede any attempt to address directly the meaning of Nephi’s two passages on typology. Postponing analysis of Nephi’s explicit takes on typology until the next chapter, I focus the work of the present chapter on the preliminary work of exegesis. The aim of this chapter, then, is to clarify the overarching structure of Nephi’s record, always with an eye to the place of Isaiah’s writings in that structure.

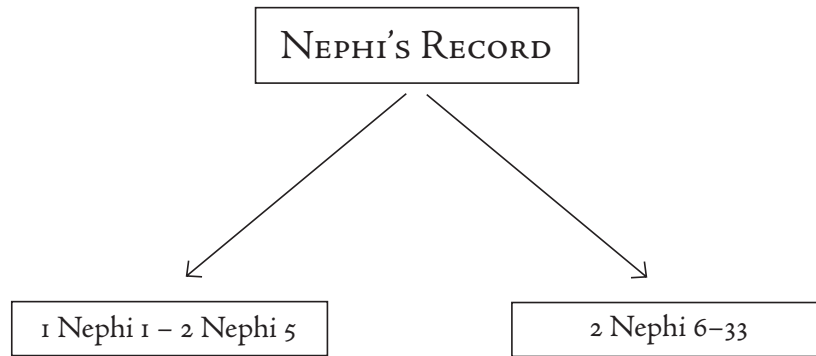
The exegetical work undertaken in the present chapter follows a simple plan. The first section establishes the fourfold theological structure of Nephi’s record. The record begins with (1) an account of the creation of the Lehite

people (1 Nephi 1–18) and is followed by (2) an account of their fall or division into Nephites and Lamanites, with the latter group being cut off from the presence of the Lord (1 Nephi 19–2 Nephi 5). A string of texts then deals with (3) reconciliation, a theme structurally privileged in Nephi’s record as “the more sacred things,” and focuses on the eschatological reconciliation of the Lamanites with God (2 Nephi 6–30), followed by (4) a brief epilogue centered principally on baptism (2 Nephi 31–33).

Having established the basic structure, I then look in more detail at each of the four divisions of Nephi’s record, giving the most attention to the “more sacred things” of 2 Nephi 6–30, investigating the focus on Isaiah that is clearly on display in those structurally privileged chapters. Finally, I take this focus on Isaiah as a clue and look in more detail at the complex role played by Isaiah in Nephi’s larger record. The picture produced in the course of this investigation is one in which Nephi’s record is built on complex, detailed readings of Isaiah, distributed in intentional ways between the two books that make up Nephi’s contribution to the small plates.

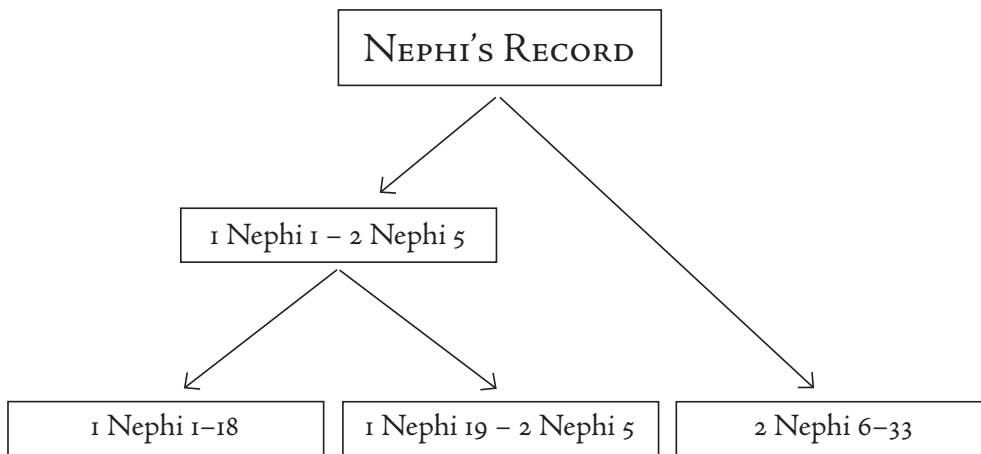
THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF NEPHI’S RECORD

In a neglected but vital study of First and Second Nephi, Frederick Axelgard points to the importance of 1 Nephi 19:1–6 for understanding the “overarching framework in Nephi’s writing.”¹ In these verses, after distinguishing the small and the large plates, Nephi says: “And an account of my making these [the small] plates shall be given hereafter” (1 Nephi 19:5). With this sentence, Nephi points to a later moment in his record, found in the last verses of 2 Nephi 5, where he describes the actual physical production of the small plates. This is important because Nephi goes on in 1 Nephi 19 to explain that only “*then*”—that is, *after* the account of the actual physical production of the small plates at the end of 2 Nephi 5—would he “proceed according to that which [he had] spoken,” namely, to fulfill the “commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these [small] plates” (1 Nephi 19:5, 3). Nephi thus identifies for his readers a basic structural division in his record, one he apparently imposed on it consciously and of which he wanted his readers to be aware. Nephi’s record divides into two major parts: (1) the twenty-seven chapters stretching from 1 Nephi 1 to 2 Nephi 5, leading up to the account of the physical production of the small



plates; and (2) the twenty-eight chapters stretching from 2 Nephi 6 to 2 Nephi 33, following the account of the physical production of the small plates.

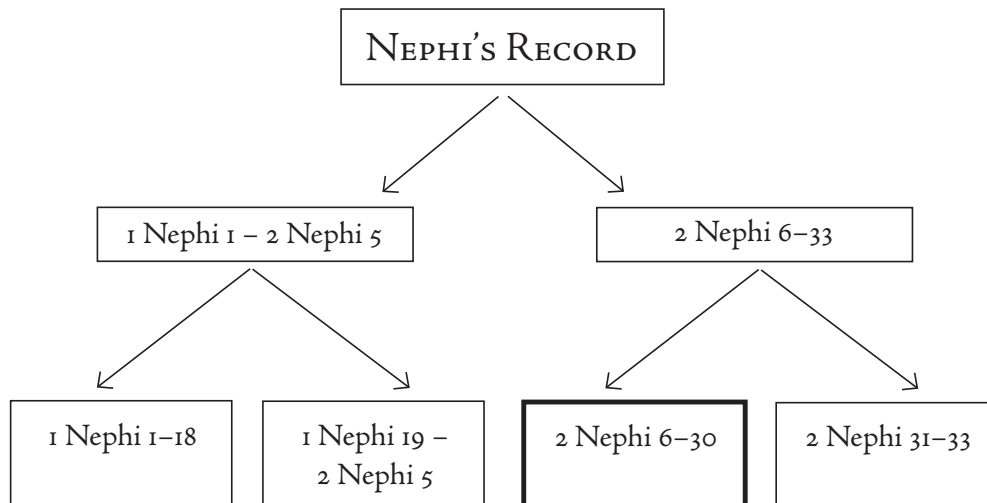
Axelgard further argues that the opening section of Nephi's record can be subdivided into a first stretch of eighteen chapters (chapters 1–18 of First Nephi) and a second stretch of nine chapters (1 Nephi 19 through 2 Nephi 5). As a whole, then, Axelgard understands Nephi's record to bear a three-



fold, essentially progressive structure, (1) “Nephi’s family history” (1 Nephi 1–18) giving way to (2) a series of chapters “focuse[d] on spiritual matters with an intensity that suggests a transitional lead-in” (1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5) to (3) his “final, completely spiritual-prophetic segments” (2 Nephi 6–33).² Going further than Axelgard, it is possible to assert that the second larger division of Nephi’s writings (2 Nephi 6–33) should, like the first division, be subdivided—something indicated in the last verse of 2 Nephi 30: “And now,

my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings.” With this straightforward statement, Nephi effectively breaks his second major division into a stretch of twenty-five chapters (2 Nephi 6–30) and a (rather short) stretch of three chapters (2 Nephi 31–33).

Because Nephi only begins to “fulfill the commandment” concerning the small plates with 2 Nephi 6, the break between 2 Nephi 6–30 and 2 Nephi 31–33 turns out to be important: it allows one to identify 2 Nephi 6–30 as the core of Nephi’s record. These twenty-five chapters are what Nephi calls, in 1 Nephi 19:5, the “more sacred things” of his record. These structural divisions order Nephi’s record as a four-part progression, from (1) the journey to the New World (1 Nephi 1–18) through (2) a series of theological sermons (1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5) to (3) the culminating, commanded heart of Nephi’s record (2 Nephi 6–30) and (4) a brief conclusion (2 Nephi 31–33).



KEEPING THE MORE SACRED THINGS

What is most surprising about 1 Nephi 19:1–6, on the reading I have offered, is that Nephi there privileges 2 Nephi 6–30 as being somehow *more* sacred than the rest of his record—in fact as the only *mandated* part of Nephi’s writings.

This claim calls for a more careful look at the indicated passage (with italics added for emphasis and bracketed phrases for clarification):

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore [the large plates] that I might engraven upon them the [historical] record of my people. And upon the plates which I made [the large plates] I did engraven [1] the record of my father, and also [2] our journeyings in the wilderness, and [3] the prophecies of my father; and also [4] many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them. And I knew not at the time when I made *them* [the large plates] that I should be commanded of the Lord to make *these plates* [the small plates]; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken [the large plates]; wherefore, the things which transpired before I [physically] made these plates [the small plates] are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first plates [the large plates]. And *after* I had [eventually] made *these plates* [the small plates] by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received *a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates* [the small plates]; *and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.* Wherefore, I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates [the large plates], which gives an account, or which gives a greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions of my people. And this have I done, and commanded my people what they should do after I was gone [concerning the large plates]; *and that these plates* [the small plates] should be handed down from one generation to another, or from one prophet to another, until further commandments of the Lord. And *an account* of my [physically] making *these plates* [the small plates] shall be given hereafter [in, as it turns out, the last verses of 2 Nephi 5]; and *then* [beginning with the first verse of 2 Nephi 6], behold, I [will] proceed according to that which I have spoken [namely, to fulfill the “commandment that the ministry and the prophecies . . . should be written upon these plates”]; and this I do that *the more sacred things* may be kept for the knowledge of my people. *Nevertheless*, I do not write *anything* upon plates [large or small] save it be that I think it be *sacred*. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.

Several remarks are called for. First, these verses sharply distinguish the large plates from the small plates of Nephi—the former being primarily *historical*, the latter primarily *spiritual*, a record of “the ministry and the prophecies.” Of course, as Nephi explains, he will only turn directly to spiritual matters beginning with 2 Nephi 6 (and, as already pointed out, ending with 2 Nephi 30). The obvious question to be asked is: Why would Nephi postpone the “more sacred things” of his record until so late (several chapters into his *second* book)? Indeed, why would Nephi write anything *but* “more sacred things” in his record? Nephi answers: “this I do,” he says, “that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of my people.” This explanation must be read as what it obviously is: *an apology*. Nephi recognizes that what he says he is doing is odd and so he begins in verse 5 to defend his decision.³

In addition to the justification just quoted, to which I will return, Nephi offers an important point of clarification: “I do not write *anything* upon plates [whatever in his record that does not qualify as the “more sacred things”] save it be that I think it be sacred.” Here, it seems clear, Nephi claims that his record does not mingle the “more sacred things” of 2 Nephi 6–30 with merely *secular* materials; instead, the record frames the *more* sacred by the *less-but-nonetheless* sacred. Curiously, Nephi further explains that in framing the more sacred with the less sacred, he is following important scriptural precedent: “And now, if I do err, even did they err of old.” These details help to clarify Nephi’s initial justification. Whatever he means when he speaks of keeping the more sacred things for the knowledge of his people, he suggests that this can only be done by employing the apparently common scriptural strategy of framing the more sacred by the less sacred. Two questions, then, need to be addressed. First, what does it mean to keep the more sacred things for the knowledge of the people? And second, how does framing the more sacred with the less sacred accomplish that?

Taking up the first question, one should note that verse 5 (the claim that the more sacred things must be “kept for the knowledge of [the] people”) echoes verse 3, where Nephi says: “the things which were written [on the small plates] should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land.” The obvious parallel with “instruction” clarifies what Nephi has in mind with the word “knowledge,” though no one will be surprised that Nephi’s record is associated with (religious) instruction. But closer reading complicates things. Nephi does *not* claim in either verse that his intention, in

framing the more sacred with the less sacred, was to ensure that the record would be *used* for instruction/knowledge. Rather, Nephi's task and concern was to ensure that the record would be *kept* for instruction/knowledge. It thus appears that Nephi's decision to structure his record as he did was rooted in his—and, apparently, the Lord's—concern that the small plates might come into disrepute, or even simply be ignored. In short, the most straightforward reading of 1 Nephi 19:1–6 suggests that Nephi had reason to believe that *the very presence* of the less sacred material in his record (1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 5 and 2 Nephi 31–33) *would guarantee* that the more sacred things (2 Nephi 6–30) would continue to be read indefinitely.

The strength of this reading has already been borne out by the work of Noel Reynolds. In a study meant to disclose the political significance of the small plates, Reynolds explains:

Every people needs to know that its laws and rulers are legitimate and authoritative. This is why stories of national origins and city foundings are so important to human societies throughout the world. Such stories provide explanations of the legitimate origins of their laws and their rulers. . . . When Nephi undertook late in his life to write a[n] account of the founding events of the Lehite colony, it appears that he wanted to provide his descendants with a document that would serve this [legitimizing] function. His small plates systematically defend the Nephite tradition concerning origins and refute the competing account advanced by the Lamanites. . . . Thus, the writings of Nephi can be read in part as a political tract or a “lineage history,” written to document the legitimacy of Nephi's rule and religious teachings.⁴

Drawing on Reynolds's understanding of the “political small plates,” one might argue that Nephi hoped the less sacred material in his record, the majority of which would be ideologically important for the Nephites, would ensure that the more sacred things would not be dismissed.

Of course, one might object that such an obviously ideological contextualization of the record's more sacred things would effectively desacralize them, or at least politicize them. But Reynolds's more recent work provides the resources needed to respond to this objection. While still holding that “the need to justify and legitimate the Nephite political regime [in the small plates] was both clear and pressing,”⁵ Reynolds has recently “reconsidered” Nephite kingship through an analysis of what he calls “the uncoronation of Nephi” in 1 Nephi 17.⁶ In essence, he convincingly argues that Nephi understood his

role as “ruler” to be more religious than political, modeled on the prophetic leadership of Moses rather than on the political leadership of the Israelite monarchy. (Laman and Lemuel were, according to this argument, fixated on the monarchical model.) As Reynolds puts it: “It was a contest between the claims of inherited royal right and divine prophetic calling, a contest that necessarily put religious claims at the center of the dispute.”⁷

Thus, while the small plates were arguably designed to serve a legitimizing function, even this legitimization was, for Nephi, sacred—though perhaps *less* sacred than the *more* sacred things of 2 Nephi 6–30. At any rate, there seems to be good evidence that the legitimizing narratives of 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 5 were inserted into the record to guarantee that the more sacred, instructional materials of 2 Nephi 6–30 would remain in the Nephite consciousness.

A CHANGE OF PLANS

The case for the above interpretation is strong. But a question—not quite an objection—should at this point be raised: Why does Nephi bury his explanation of all this in the (relatively obscure) nineteenth chapter of First Nephi? Why are his structural intentions not, for instance, laid out in the very first verses of 1 Nephi 1, or at least of 2 Nephi 1? Why would Nephi not make it clearer that the purpose of his record was to ensure that his readers took most seriously the more sacred things contained in 2 Nephi 6–30? Would he not want readers of his record to hurry their way to the privileged but postponed portion that comes only after the legitimizing narratives? In short, why is Nephi’s table of contents to be found only in 1 Nephi 19?

One way of making sense of this would be to explore the possibility—heretofore unexplored in Book of Mormon scholarship—that the character of Nephi’s project changed dramatically after he finished writing 1 Nephi 1–18. Evidence for such a change can be culled from the italicized inscription that serves as First Nephi’s heading—an inscription that was part of the original record. The inscription ends with “or, in other words, I Nephi wrote this record.” If one assumes that Nephi wrote the inscription *before* he wrote his record, it might be taken as an outline of what Nephi originally planned to write. And, curiously, the inscription sketchily describes only what is now 1 Nephi 1–18. It might be, then, that Nephi eventually took his record in a different direction than he had intended.

Moreover, if this speculation is of any worth, Nephi's change in direction began precisely with the first verses of 1 Nephi 19. If Nephi indeed first intended only to write what is now 1 Nephi 1–18, and if he therefore wrote these chapters before deciding to alter the scope of his record, it would seem that he had no choice but to spell out at the beginning of what is now 1 Nephi 19 the *new* projected structure of his record. On this reading, Nephi's concern in 1 Nephi 19:5–6 that his readers might miss the overarching intentions of his record would have been motivated by the discontinuity of his record resulting from his change of plans. Having decided to restructure his record, Nephi would have to provide an explanation that would gather into the project he *now* saw himself writing what he had *already* written.

This approach is interesting, and it unquestionably provides answers to a few questions (regarding the nature of the inscription that introduces First Nephi as much as the odd placement of Nephi's discussion of textual structure). But is it necessary? Perhaps not, but—at least for the moment—it seems preferable to the only obvious alternative approach, namely, to assume that Nephi meant actually to hide the more sacred portion of his record by obscurely burying his structural explanation. Whatever the strengths of this alternate account,⁸ it seems to be at odds with Nephi's consistently professed plainness.

SCRIPTURAL PRECEDENT

At this point, it is worth returning to Nephi's claim that he was only following scriptural precedent in framing the more sacred portion of his record with less sacred material. But if Nephi is following rather than blazing a trail, what scriptural precedents can be identified and how does Nephi follow them? Presumably, given that 1 Nephi 19 not only *explains* that Nephi frames the more sacred with the less sacred but *outlines* the larger fourfold structure employed in that framing, Nephi's precedents use the same fourfold structure. In order, then, to look for such precedents, it is necessary to probe into the significance—even the theological significance—of Nephi's fourfold structure. That Nephi bothers to point out the structure suggests its importance, but what can be said about that significance?

The basic theological pattern at work is relatively straightforward: (1) 1 Nephi 1–18 recounts the founding of the Lehiite colony in the New World; (2) 1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5 relates the breaking up of this colony into two rival factions, one of which is cut off from the presence of the Lord; (3) 2 Nephi

6–30 consists of prophecies and sermons focused on the eventual return of that cut-off faction to the Lord’s favor; and (4) 2 Nephi 31–33 offers summary reflections on baptism as a crossing of a limit.

PART 1: Foundation (1 Nephi 1–18)

PART 2: Division (1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5)

PART 3: Redemption (2 Nephi 6–30)

PART 4: Conclusion (2 Nephi 31–33)

Without much imagination, this basic structure might be recast as a pattern familiar from its consistent employment in Nephite missionary efforts:

PART 1: Creation (1 Nephi 1–18)

PART 2: Fall (1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5)

PART 3: Atonement (2 Nephi 6–30)

PART 4: Veil (2 Nephi 31–33)

Nephi’s fourfold structure effectively reproduces what the Book of Mormon elsewhere calls the “plan of redemption.” Moreover, it reproduces what Nephi takes to be the basic pattern of his own life, as he summarizes it in the famous first verse of First Nephi:

I, Nephi,
 [PART 1:] having been born of goodly parents . . . ; and
 [PART 2:] having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,
 nevertheless
 [PART 3:] having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea,
 [PART 4:] having had a great knowledge of the goodness and
 the mysteries of God,
 therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

Through a fourfold repetition, in this verse, of the word “having,” Nephi sets forth his life as falling into the above cosmic pattern:

CREATION: born of goodly parents

FALL: many afflictions

ATONEMENT: highly favored of the Lord

VEIL: a great knowledge of . . . the mysteries of God,

Importantly, when Nephi says, at the end of the verse, “*therefore* I make a record of my proceedings in my days,” it appears he is drawing an explicit connection between the record he is about to produce and the fourfold pattern of his own life—as if the fourfold pattern of 1 Nephi 1:1 were to be taken as a kind of guide for the structure of Nephi’s entire record.⁹

Now, if these reflections are not amiss, Nephi’s claim in 1 Nephi 19:6 suggests that he borrowed the fourfold pattern of creation, fall, atonement, and veil from earlier scriptural texts with which he was familiar—presumably from the brass plates. A more detailed look at the pattern in Nephi’s record makes clear, I think, what scriptural texts Nephi took as his precedents.

CREATION, FALL, ATONEMENT, VEIL

I have identified the first part of Nephi’s pattern with creation. Broadly, the identification seems obvious. 1 Nephi 1–18 tells the story of coming to a new world and creating a new civilization. But such a broad characterization hardly serves as evidence that Nephi *intended* the first part of his record to be a creation story. However, several details from 1 Nephi 18—from the last verses of this first structural subdivision of Nephi’s text—offer evidence of a conscious thematization on Nephi’s part. Setting 1 Nephi 18:21–25 side by side with Genesis 1, this becomes apparent:

1 NEPHI 18	GENESIS 1
<p>And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land. (vv. 21–22)</p>	<p>And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (vv. 2–3)</p>

I NEPHI 18	GENESIS 1
<p>And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land. (v. 23)</p>	<p>And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas. (vv. 9–10)</p>
<p>And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance. (v. 24)</p>	<p>And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind. . . . (vv. 11–12)</p>
<p>And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. (v. 25)</p>	<p>And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind. . . . And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (vv. 24–26)</p>

These parallels, I believe, make clear that Nephi was making conscious allusions to the basic pattern of the creation story as recorded in Genesis.

The second part of Nephi's text seems to make similar allusions to the biblical narratives surrounding the fall of Adam and Eve. Most striking, perhaps, is the fact that 1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5 culminates in the announcement that the Lamanites have been—much like Adam and Eve—"cut off from the presence of the Lord" (2 Nephi 5:20).¹⁰ Moreover, that these same chapters recount the death of Lehi (an obvious Adam figure), as well as the murderous rivalry of Lehi's sons (echoes of Cain and Abel), seems significant. Certainly, there is reason to look for a conscious connection between 2 Nephi 5:21 and Genesis 4:15, linking the "cursing" of the Lamanites to the mark set on Cain and his children. But in addition to narrative allusions, these same chapters record several discussions of, precisely, the fall—most notably Lehi's discourse on Eden and its loss in 2 Nephi 2. That Nephi intended to connect 1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5 with the biblical fall seems clear.

Importantly, on Nephi's telling, both this creation and the fall are rooted in a specific covenant. The foundation of the Lehite colony is laid as early as 1 Nephi 2:19–24 when Nephi, having his first revelatory experience with God, learns that prosperity in the land of promise is predicated on the Lehitese' obedience to the commandments. This "Lehite covenant" thus grounds *both* the creation of the Lehitese (they are only led to the promised land as they keep the commandments) *and* their fall (their division into rival camps comes in fulfillment of the covenantal word that the Lamanites, once definitively rebellious, would be cut off from God's presence).

As a result of this heavy covenantal focus in 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 5, it is not surprising to discover that the atonement portion of Nephi's record is equally covenantal. Indeed, 2 Nephi 6–30 is through and through a question of explaining how the Lehite covenant—a part of which includes the eventual return of the Lamanites to God's favor—will be fulfilled. It must thus be recognized that the word "atonement" here takes on a sense somewhat distinct from its everyday usage in Mormonism. By atonement, I indicate not *personal* or *individual* salvation but a reconciliation and covenant redemption worked out for *an entire people or community*. On this understanding of atonement, 2 Nephi 6–30 is about nothing but atonement, though it has relatively little—indeed, almost nothing—to say about the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

More will have to be said about the atonement portion of Nephi's record and its relationship to the Genesis narrative. First, though, it is necessary to say a few words about 2 Nephi 31–33, the veil portion of Nephi's text.

NEPHI, THE VEIL, AND THE TEMPLE

The last three chapters of Second Nephi are saturated with the theme of the veil. After a few introductory words, Nephi speaks of baptism as “the gate by which ye should enter” (2 Nephi 31:17), associating passage through that gate with passage through the veil of the Old Testament temple—something indicated when he describes those who pass through the gate as able to “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises to the Holy One of Israel” (31:13). The holy of holies in the Old Testament temple was, according to ancient Israelite belief, the dwelling place, precisely, of the angels. Nephi goes on to express concern that his readers have misunderstood him and offers an explanation in terms that confirm that the veil of the temple is what he has in mind: “after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (32:4). Nephi then promises that those who *do* knock at the veil will be able to part it, and Christ “shall manifest himself unto [such] in the flesh” (32:7). Finally, mourning that he “cannot say more” (32:7), Nephi explains that he is not allowed to describe what lies beyond the veil—though he does say that “what [he] seal[s] on earth, shall be brought against [his readers] at the judgment bar” (33:15).

The theme of the veil thus emerges in 2 Nephi 31–33. That baptism is a veil through which the reader is to pass at the end of his record suggests that the whole of Nephi’s fourfold pattern might be connected with the *temple*, or with what might be called “temple theology.” In this regard, it is significant that Hugh Nibley, in connection with 1 Nephi 1:1, says:

But you were always obliged at the end of the initiation (the mysteries) to write down on a tablet, and deposit the tablet there [at the temple], what your experiences had been. At the end of the mysteries, you were required to record this before you could leave the cave, or the temple or whatever it was. You would leave a record of your experiences in the mysteries—whatever visions it was you had. So Nephi said an interesting thing here, “Yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days,” of what I’ve been through. Having been through the mysteries of God, I’m under obligation to preserve that knowledge.¹¹

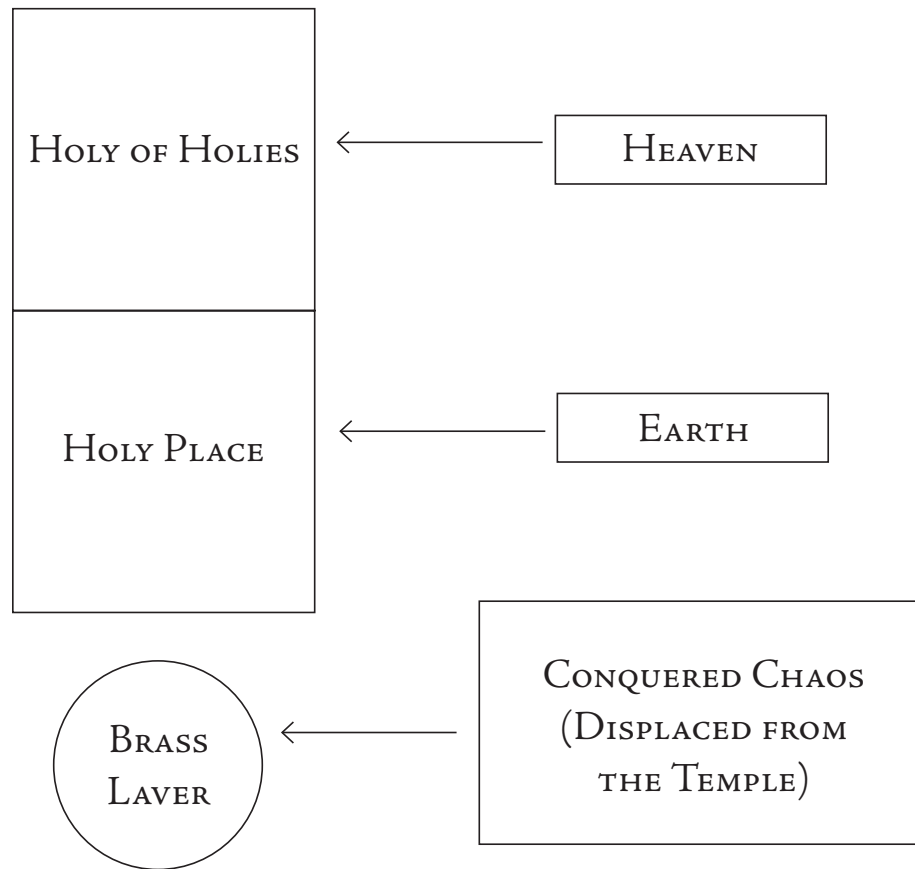
Nibley's comments here perhaps confirm that the whole creation, fall, atonement, and veil pattern in Nephi's record should be connected to the temple. It is certainly interesting, at any rate, that Nephi produces the small plates immediately after—if not in connection with—his “build[ing] a temple . . . after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (2 Nephi 5:16). However, in order to explore this possibility more rigorously, I will draw on the research of two students of the Hebrew Bible: Jon Levenson and Margaret Barker.

Levenson, in his book, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, argues that creation in the Hebrew Bible is associated with a “dialectical theology” that was at work in the liturgy of the First Temple (Solomon's temple). As the best embodiment of the tension that underlies the dialectic, he compares two Abrahamic narratives from Genesis: the story of Abraham's bartering with the Lord over the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18) and the story of the commanded-but-never-completed sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). As Levenson explains:

By itself the theology of Genesis 18 would soon lead to a religion in which God's will had ceased to be a reality. . . . Left to *its* own, Genesis 22, on the other hand, would lead to a religion of fanaticism, in which God would be so incomprehensible that even the praise of him as wise or just would be meaningless. . . . Together, however, the two perspectives delimit a theology in which human judgment neither replaces the inscrutable God who commands nor becomes superfluous within the life lived in faithfulness to him.¹²

This, Levenson argues, is the theology behind the temple: “YHWH in this theology is a deity who can still be aroused, who can still respond to the anguished cry of his cultic [that is, temple] community to effect together a new victory.”¹³

Levenson, interestingly, goes on to point to the architecture of the temple as a physical embodiment of this dialectical theology. In the two-room temple, the heavens and the earth are brought together and yet separated by the partition of the veil. But, according to Levenson, this is only accomplished through the displacement to a location *outside* the temple of the brass laver (supported on the back of twelve oxen), a displacement to be understood as a microcosmic representation of the Lord's ancient and yet ever-renewed victory over the waters conquered at the creation. As Levenson explains: “It would make sense for the Temple,



which bears witness to both enthronement and creation, to have featured a metallic representation of the vanquished adversary [the tamed waters of chaos; see Isaiah 51:9–10; 2 Nephi 8:9–10], now reduced to no more than an item of decoration in the precincts of his victor’s royal palace.”¹⁴ Levenson thus sees in Israelite temple theology an expression of the need to respond to the undeniable reality of evil, of what Nephi calls “affliction.” In Levenson’s words, this theology “avoids the cheery optimism of those who crow that ‘God’s in his heaven — / All’s right with the world,’” even as it refuses to “allow for an unqualified acceptance of the pessimism that attributes to innocent suffering the immovability of fate.”¹⁵ Indeed, Levenson could well have been commenting on the first verse of First Nephi when he wrote: “Present experience . . . is seen [in this theology] as a mysterious interruption in the divine life, an interruption that the supplications of the worshipping community may yet bring to an end.”¹⁶ And all of this, it will be remembered, is rooted, according to Levenson, in commitment to the Abrahamic covenant.

While Levenson's work on temple theology expresses the spirit of Nephi's fourfold pattern, Margaret Barker's work expresses both the spirit and the letter of Nephi's pattern.¹⁷ In a book simply entitled *Temple Theology*, Barker has assembled a definitive introduction to what she divides into a fourfold pattern: creation, (broken) covenant, atonement, and (divine) wisdom.¹⁸ The correspondence between what Margaret Barker describes as temple theology and the pattern Nephi uses to structure his record is striking.¹⁹ This correspondence—suggesting that Nephi's record might have been written in association with the newly constructed Nephite temple—needs, however, still to be turned back to the task of interpreting Nephi's record.

How does the recognition that Nephi's text may be tied to the temple clarify the meaning of especially its creation, fall, and atonement portions? Such an approach to Nephi's record may shed light on both 1 Nephi 1–18 and 1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5, and it has already been shown how it clarifies 2 Nephi 31–33. I want here, though, only to spell out in more detail how this approach clarifies and opens up 2 Nephi 6–30—especially by rooting it (like 1 Nephi 1–18 and 1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5) in Genesis.

ATONEMENT AND TEMPLE

According to a consistent Book of Mormon pattern, Nephi connects the theme of atonement to the appearance of divinely appointed messengers. Examples of this pattern in the Book of Mormon are not difficult to find. King Benjamin, for instance, after reviewing the creation and its fall but before speaking of passing through the veil to be “sealed” to Jesus Christ, introduces the atonement to his hearers through the words of an angel. Later, both Alma the Younger (in Alma 12:22–34) and Mormon (in Moroni 7:20–33) formulated full-blown angelologies along the same lines, making the arrival of divine messengers the crux of atonement in Nephite thought. For Nephi, standing at the beginning of this tradition, the messengers who bring tidings of redemption are less otherworldly than for Alma or Mormon, but they are no less divinely appointed for that reason: Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi himself. Still more significantly, these messengers come—in 2 Nephi 6–30—as a threesome, as what Jeffrey R. Holland has called the three “sentinels at the gate of the book [of Mormon],” positioned authoritatively to “admit [the reader] into the scriptural presence of the Lord.”²⁰

That the appearance of three divinely appointed messengers is associated with the temple has been discussed by Hugh Nibley, who quotes a Mandaean text thus:

I'm sending three, God says to them, giving them instructions. He said to the pure Sent One, his Son, "Go call Adam and Eve and all their posterity and teach them concerning everything about the Kingdom of Light and the Worlds of Light. Be friendly with Adam and keep him company, you and the two angels which will be with you. Warn them against Satan; also, teach them chastity."²¹

But the theme of the three messengers is not only to be found in obscure noncanonical texts; it can be found right in the Old Testament—for example in Genesis 18, mentioned above in the discussion of Levenson. There one finds Abraham sitting "in the tent door in the heat of the day" when, "lo, three men stood by him" (Genesis 18:1–2). The visitors share with Abraham and Sarah the promise of Isaac, thus confirming the Abrahamic covenant that will eventually redeem the fallen creation. The overcoming of the fall is thus set in motion in both Nephi and Genesis by the message of three divine messengers.

The parallel is even stronger between Nephi and the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 18. There, Abraham's visitors are identified as three "angels which were holy men and were sent forth after the order of God," and they state that their task is to let Abraham know the decisions of the divine council so that, "remembering the things which had been told him," Abraham can himself join the council to converse with God.²² In short, there is at least reason to suggest that, with his three messengers, Nephi continues his series of allusions to Genesis. After the creation (Genesis 1, 8–9) and the fall (Genesis 2–3, 9–11) comes a redemption/atonement (Genesis 11–25, the Abraham story) in which three messengers sent from God restore fallen humanity to the presence of God and his angels by teaching them how to pass through the veil.

Incidentally, this theme of messengers being sent to provide instruction about how to pass through the veil appears also in the work of Barker and Levenson. Though neither of these scholars focuses on the *three* messengers, they do both discuss the idea that Israelite temple rites were intended to allow human beings to become, in Levenson's words, "the functional

equivalent of the pantheon [the council of the gods].”²³ Again: “[Israelite] cosmogony”—that is, the creation of the world—“is not fully grasped until it has been related to the [temple] and to the rites that took place there *and were thought to allow human participation in the divine ordering of the world.*”²⁴ In short, the temple is where human beings are inducted into the divine council. This idea appears in Joseph Smith’s rendering of Genesis 18, but what of Nephi’s writings?

The theme appears as early as 1 Nephi 1, in a story marginally explored in chapter 1. As I pointed out there, the small plates open with Lehi’s first visions. Overcome by a first, fiery vision in which he “saw and heard much” (1:6), Lehi went home to lie down. But he was snatched from his rest and “carried away in a vision” where he saw—as Alma would later see—“God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (1:8). The vision is appropriate, since Nephi assigns it to “the commencement” of the first year of a new king’s rule (1:4), apparently then at the time of coronation, which would have taken place during the Feast of Tabernacles. Barker points out the connection between the angelic chorus and this feast: “The biblical texts show that the song of the angels accompanied the establishing of the creation, and so the renewal of the creation in the New Year rituals of Tabernacles was accompanied by, or perhaps enabled by, the song of the angels.”²⁵ Lehi at first sees this whole scene from a distance, but one of the angelic figures brings him a book, and then, it seems, inducts him into the chorus of angels around the throne. Such is implied by his responsive words of praise: “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! *Thy throne* is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer *those who come unto thee* that they shall perish!” (1:14).

Nephi’s record opens by displaying what *can* happen to the righteous and Lehi’s induction into the heavenly council serves as a model. Significantly, when Nephi comes to the end of his record, he returns to the theme of angelicization and the divine council. Curiously, no commentator has yet recognized what Nephi must have intended as an obvious connection between 2 Nephi 31:13 and 1 Nephi 1:8. The two passages should be set side by side:

1 NEPHI 1:8

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.*

2 NEPHI 31:13

I know that if ye shall follow the Son . . . , repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and *then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.*

The unfortunate consequence of this connection's going unrecognized is that 2 Nephi 31:13 has been a consistent source of frustration for Latter-day Saint scholars, who typically—if they at all address the phrase italicized above—suggest either that Nephi has reference to a rather banally defined “gift of tongues” or that Nephi simply uses a fancy phrase to say that the Holy Ghost allows one to speak with power.²⁶ But the reference is at once simpler and richer than these approaches. In light of the above interpretation of 1 Nephi 1, Nephi offers in 2 Nephi 31 a promise that the obedient can, as Lehi had done, *join the angelic council* to sing and shout praises.²⁷

Not only, then, do divine messengers appear in Nephi's record; they appear there, as in the Israelite temple tradition, precisely in order to induct the recipients of their tidings into the presence of God. But before leaving this theme, it should be noted that angelicization appears in one other crucial place in Nephi's text—in a place that calls for detailed discussion.

THE STRUCTURE OF 2 NEPHI 6–30

I have already established how the structure of Nephi's record privileges the more sacred atonement material of 2 Nephi 6–30. What, though, of the structure within the structure, the structure of those core twenty-five chapters? Just as with the identification of the theme of the three messengers, it is already possible to recognize a basic structure:

Jacob's words (2 Nephi 6–10)
 Isaiah's words (2 Nephi 11–24)
 Nephi's words (2 Nephi 25–30)

Looking more closely, however, it seems best to give pride of place to the central “Isaiah chapters,” since *both* Nephi's *and* Jacob's contributions to 2 Nephi 6–30 amount to little more than commentaries on Isaiah's writings. In his message, Jacob quotes and comments on Isaiah 50–51 (and a few verses from Isaiah 49), while in his message, Nephi quotes and comments on Isaiah 29 (in addition to offering his reflections on the “Isaiah chapters” more generally). In what is thus a beautifully Trinitarian gesture (*three* messengers, *one* messenger), Nephi offers the atonement portion of his record as being principally about what *Isaiah* has to say about redemption.

One might, then, chiastically rearrange the basic triple structure of 2 Nephi 6–30:

Jacob's words *about Isaiah* (2 Nephi 6–10)
 Isaiah's words *themselves* (2 Nephi 11–24)
 Nephi's words *about Isaiah* (2 Nephi 25–30)

As it turns out, this chiastic structure is confirmed by an important parallel between passages at the end of Jacob's contribution and at the beginning of Nephi's contribution: 2 Nephi 10:24 (“after ye are reconciled unto God, . . . it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved”) and 2 Nephi 25:23 (“we labor diligently . . . to persuade our children . . . to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do”). Each of these passages, to which I will return in the next chapter, is crucially coupled *with one of Nephi's two direct discussions of typology* (2 Nephi 11:4–7 and 2 Nephi 25:24–29). Obviously, this will prove to be of some importance.

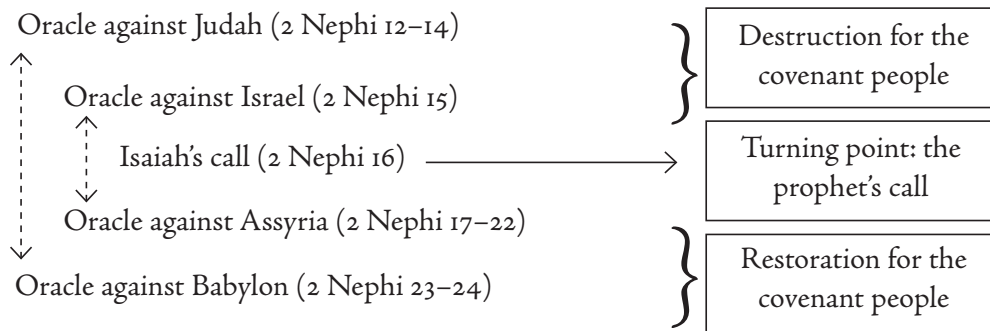
Nephi thus twice privileges the “Isaiah chapters.” Not only are they among the more sacred things of 2 Nephi 6–30, but they form the obviously privileged centerpiece of those more sacred things. Indeed, one might suggest that all of Nephi's careful structural work was intended first and foremost to ensure that his readers would give their most sustained and dedicated study to the “Isaiah chapters.” There is, then, an unavoidable irony about the way Isaiah is usually handled by Book of Mormon readers—that is, as a barrier.

But what of the structure of Nephi's Isaiah selection itself? 2 Nephi 12–24 (Isaiah 2–14) consists of five separable oracles:

Oracle against Judah (2 Nephi 12–14=Isaiah 2–4)
 Oracle against Israel (2 Nephi 15=Isaiah 5)

- Isaiah's call to prophesy (2 Nephi 16=Isaiah 6)
 Oracle against Assyria (2 Nephi 17–22= Isaiah 7–12)
 Oracle against Babylon (2 Nephi 23–24= Isaiah 13–14)²⁸

Just this listing of the distinct Isaianic oracles already betrays a minimal structure: two oracles precede and two follow the central call narrative of Isaiah 6. But from Nephi's historical position (after the Northern Kingdom's fall but still in the thick of the Southern Kingdom's fall), he likely saw these five oracles as having a more intricate and historically relevant structure. Because Assyria had conquered Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Babylon was about to conquer Judah (the Southern Kingdom), Nephi might have seen a complex chiasmic structure here, distributing the destruction-and-then-restoration of the covenant people across two series of events:



Nephi's subsequent summary of covenantal history seems to confirm this structure:

And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities [2 Nephi 12–15=Isaiah 2–5]; and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord [2 Nephi 16=Isaiah 6]... And notwithstanding they have been carried away they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore they shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance [2 Nephi 17–24=Isaiah 7–14]. (2 Nephi 25:9–11)

This structural reading places at the center (Isaiah 6) of the center (the Isaiah chapters) of the center (atonement) of Nephi's record the account

of a vision whose original occasion, according to Marvin Sweeney, “must be identified with the Day of Atonement,”²⁹ and whose contextual aim, according to Brevard Childs, is to mark “a turning point in God’s history.”³⁰ This atonement-focused turning point, structurally privileged several times over by Nephi, recounts—in addition to 1 Nephi 1 and 2 Nephi 31—still another exemplary experience of angelicization, namely, that of Isaiah.

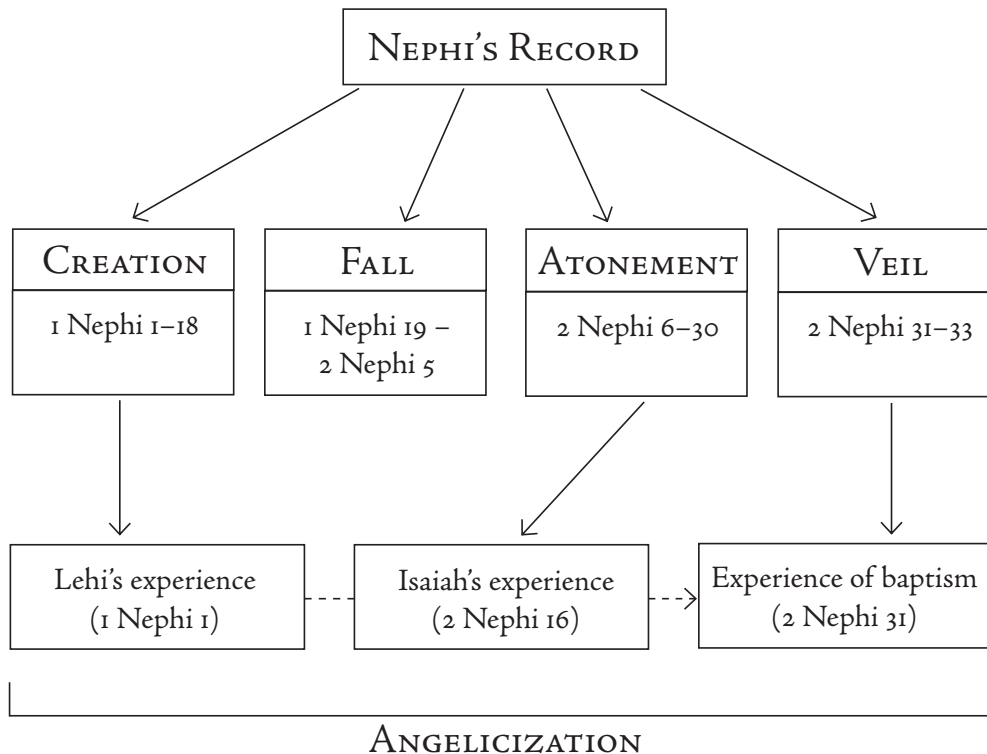
Isaiah 6 (i.e., 2 Nephi 16) begins with the prophet standing—for whatever official or unofficial reason—in the Jerusalem temple.³¹ Overwhelmed by the unanticipated appearance of Jehovah, Isaiah bewails what he takes to be his own imminent destruction: “Wo is unto me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5; 2 Nephi 16:5). Concerned specifically about his *lips*—the Hebrew word can be translated “language,” as it is, for example, in the tower of Babel story in Genesis 11—Isaiah takes himself to be out of place among the seraphic throngs who shout their praise of “Holy, holy, holy!” to “the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3; 2 Nephi 16:3). Responding to Isaiah’s fright, one of the seraphs presses to his lips (to *his language*) “a live coal” (Isaiah 6:6; 2 Nephi 16:6), presumably taken from the altar of incense (the only burning altar within the temple building and significantly symbolic of a kind of truer order of perpetual prayer offered up constantly before the temple’s veil). Thus “purg[ing]” Isaiah’s “sin” (Isaiah 6:7; 2 Nephi 16:7), the seraph with his white stone inducts Isaiah into the divine council (see D&C 130:10–11), as becomes clear when Isaiah immediately finds he has the means—the language—to speak to God, offering himself for an angelic task: “Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8; 2 Nephi 16:8).

Isaiah’s account, situated at the most crucial point in Nephi’s entire record, is strongly reminiscent of both 1 Nephi 1 and 2 Nephi 31:

	1 NEPHI 1	2 NEPHI 31	ISAIAH 6
FIRST VISION	there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him (v. 5)	I would that ye should remember . . . that prophet which the Lord showed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God (v. 4)	I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up (v. 1)

	I NEPHI 1	2 NEPHI 31	ISAIAH 6
OVER- WHELMED	he did quake and tremble exceedingly (v. 6); he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen (v. 7)	if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water! (v. 5)	Then said I: Wo is unto me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts (v. 5)
MINISTERED TO	the first came and stood before my father (v. 11)	the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me (v. 12)	Then flew one of the seraphim unto me (v. 6)
MEDIATING ELEMENT	the first came . . . and gave unto him a book (v. 11)	then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost (v. 13)	a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar (v. 6)
ANGELIC TONGUE (INDUCTION)	he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord (v. 12); when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord . . . after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God (vv. 14–15)	and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel (v. 13)	he laid it upon my mouth, and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. . . . Then I said: Here am I; send me (vv. 7–8)

From this it is clear that Nephi's whole record is oriented by and structured around this most crucial, clearly temple-centered theme:



Redemption for Nephi is a question of receiving angelic messengers who, coming from the divine council and therefore knowing the unfolding history of the covenant, are sent to initiate the faithful into the angelic mysteries that will give *them* to know that same covenantal history, as well as to know the God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who guides that history.

FIRST NEPHI, SECOND NEPHI; FIRST ISAIAH, SECOND ISAIAH

It is worth summarizing what has been outlined in this chapter so far. First and Second Nephi make up a single overarching record associated with the Nephite temple experience. Nephi organized his text into four parts associated, appropriately, with the respective themes of creation (1 Nephi 1–18), fall (1 Nephi 19 – 2 Nephi 5), atonement (2 Nephi 6–30), and passage through the veil (2 Nephi 31–33). Nephi's presentation of these themes is stretched across a covenantal framework punctuated by instances of the Isaianic motif of angelicization. Nephi privileges this motif by framing the more sacred atonement portion of his record with a less sacred contextualizing

narrative, and by structurally emphasizing the “Isaiah chapters” of 2 Nephi 12–24.

Without calling the above discoveries into question, I want to ask two additional questions. First, why does this structure overlook the more obvious structural break between First Nephi and Second Nephi? Second, if Isaiah 2–14 so clearly functions as the theological core of Nephi’s record, what is to be made of the other Isaiah chapters found in Nephi’s text: Isaiah 48–51 (in 1 Nephi 20–21 and 2 Nephi 7–8) and Isaiah 29 (in 2 Nephi 26–27)? To answer these questions, it is necessary to take a closer look at the book of Isaiah.

THE TWO ISAIAHS OF THE NEPHITES

Scholars generally agree that the book of Isaiah consists of three distinct parts: First Isaiah (Isaiah 1–39), Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55), and Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56–66). There is less agreement about how many *authors* lie behind these parts—a question I am not interested in addressing here.³² At any rate, however many authors produced Isaiah, scholars increasingly agree that, theologically, “the book is a unity”³³ characterized by both “continuity and connectedness.”³⁴ In short: “It is now widely held . . . that a conscious intention can be discerned toward uniting the various parts [of Isaiah] into some form of coherent literature as a whole.”³⁵ This development does not mark an abandonment of multiple authorship theories, but a more profound investigation of how the several clearly distinct parts of the book of Isaiah do or do not mesh, theologically speaking.³⁶

The Book of Mormon might be taken to weigh in on this question of Isaiah as a collection of *theologically* disparate texts.³⁷ Though, for example, the Nephites seem to have understood the book of Isaiah to be the work of a single author, there is evidence that they nonetheless distinguished between the themes and theological intentions of First and Second Isaiah. Moreover, as John Welch points out, “chapters 56–66, the so-called Third Isaiah, . . . do not appear in the Book of Mormon” at all.³⁸ In the end, I surmise that the Nephites had something like what today is Isaiah 2–55: a combined edition of First and Second Isaiah without Third Isaiah, and a volume the Nephites understood as having two separable parts with distinct theological intentions (Isaiah 2–39 and Isaiah 40–55).³⁹ Indeed, I think there is strong evidence that Nephi’s writings collectively represent an attempt to think carefully about the relationship and tension between First and Second Isaiah—between First

Isaiah’s decreed “consumption” (Isaiah 10:22) and Second Isaiah’s message of “comfort” (Isaiah 40:1). For the discussion that follows, it is necessary to divide Isaiah’s appearances in Nephi’s record into two groups:

FIRST ISAIAH	SECOND ISAIAH
Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–24	Isaiah 48–49 in 1 Nephi 20–21
Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 26–27	Isaiah 50–51 in 2 Nephi 7–8

Taking up Second Isaiah first, one finds that, though Isaiah 48–49 (in 1 Nephi 20–21) and Isaiah 50–51 (in 2 Nephi 7–8) do not appear together, there is reason to read these two quotations as being in continuity. Not only is Nephi behind Jacob’s choice of text in 2 Nephi 7–8 (see 2 Nephi 6:4), but he seems to have asked Jacob to begin his analysis of Isaiah with the last verses of Isaiah 49—verses addressed in 1 Nephi 20–22. Thus, Nephi connects the Second Isaiah material in 2 Nephi 7–8 to that in 1 Nephi 20–21. And, of course, a single theme inspires both quotations of Second Isaiah. Both Nephi and Jacob are focused on Isaiah’s message about the eventual redemption of the covenant people.

Turning next to First Isaiah, one discovers a similar continuity between the quoted chapters, though continuity of a different nature. Commentators routinely point to thematic and linguistic connections that link Isaiah 29 to Isaiah 6–8, chapters at the heart of Isaiah 2–14.⁴⁰ These connections all, significantly, turn on writing and sealing texts to be read only by a later generation. Nephi was unquestionably attuned to these themes, as is especially clear in his adaptation of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 26–27. He thus appears to have taken Isaiah 29 to provide an essential key to the interpretation of the rest of First Isaiah.

Nephi recognizes thematic continuity in the chapters he quotes from First Isaiah and sequential continuity in the chapters he quotes from Second Isaiah. But he keeps First and Second Isaiah apart. It is my argument that the relationship between the two sets of Isaianic texts in Nephi’s record is rooted in an implicit “theology of writing” to be found in the texts Nephi borrows from First Isaiah. A consideration of this point paves the way to a final presentation of the structure of Nephi’s record.

ISAIAH'S THEOLOGY OF WRITING

Nephi's interest in Isaiah 29 calls for a rereading of Isaiah 6. In my earlier discussion of that chapter, focused on angelicization, I covered only the verses culminating in Isaiah's "Here am I; send me" (verses 1–8). Taking Isaiah 29 as an interpretive key, however, requires a return to the remainder of the chapter (verses 9–12), to the details of Isaiah's call to prophesy.⁴¹ These verses, read alongside especially Isaiah 8 (2 Nephi 18), lay the foundation of Isaiah's theology of writing.

Isaiah 6:9–12 deserves to be quoted in full:

And he said: Go and tell this people—Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceived not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed. Then said I: Lord, how long? And he said: Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate; And the Lord have removed men far away, for there shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

This text is, in the words of Brevard Childs, "one of the most difficult [passages] in the bible."⁴² Hence, in commenting on these verses, I take as my companion Gerhard von Rad, who I believe has worked out the most theologically productive approach to them.

While recognizing here a genuine "theological dilemma"⁴³—a command to confound Israel so that she would *not* repent and be healed—von Rad dismisses out of hand any attempt to get around the plain fact that "God erected a terrible barrier against Isaiah and his preaching."⁴⁴ In essence, if the "saying about the hardening of the heart in [Isaiah 6] sounds as if it shut the door on everyone," it does so because "it was intended to be understood this way."⁴⁵ But, as von Rad makes clear, with this Isaiah "inherited an outlook which was unchallenged in Israel." And, moreover, "the enigma of obduracy to Jahweh's offer runs through the whole of Isaiah's activity." From this it follows that Isaiah 6:9–12 "ought not to be called a 'peripheral saying.'"⁴⁶ For Isaiah, "the hardening of Israel's heart is a particular mode of Jahweh's historical dealings with her."⁴⁷

No Protestant proclivities seem to motivate von Rad's insistence on God's hardening the hearts of Isaiah's contemporaries. Rather, he sees the significance

of the hardening as tied to Isaiah's theology of history, though this significance does not emerge in the text until Isaiah 8:16–18. There, as von Rad explains, Isaiah "says paradoxically that his hope is founded precisely in this God who hardens the heart," such that the "hardening of the heart is an event from which the prophet looks out into the future."⁴⁸ The passage from Isaiah 8:

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion.

What Isaiah expresses here, according to von Rad, is that

the fact that a prophet's word is not heard [in his own time] is far from meaning that this is the end of it. The message against which Jerusalem hardened its heart is to be written down [and sealed up] for a generation to come. At *that* time—such is Isaiah's meaning—all that had fallen on completely deaf ears in his own day and generation will be fulfilled. Absolutely everything in Isaiah points out into the future—even the saying about the hardening of Israel's heart which is the action of Jahweh himself.⁴⁹

Von Rad's brilliant interpretation complicates the centrality of Isaiah 6 in Nephi's record. On this reading, Isaiah's induction into the divine council leads directly to a frustrating mission to the hard-hearted. But the impossibility of convincing his contemporaries leads Isaiah, it seems, to look to the future, and so to focus on writing, sealing, and burying prophetic texts—all this in anticipation of a later, prepared people who would unearth, unseal, and read those texts. Nephi, as focused as Isaiah on books written for later generations, places this Isaianic theme of the *written* alongside the Isaianic theme of angelicization at the center of the center of his record. First Isaiah thus serves, for Nephi, as a source for thinking carefully about both (1) the possibility of apocalyptic experience (angelicization) and (2) the inevitable turn of the apocalyptic figure to a future covenant people only addressable through writing.⁵⁰

What, though, of Second Isaiah? Nephi's interest seems principally focused on how Second Isaiah can be appropriated ("likened") to provide a template for the prophetically anticipated events of the (latter-day) restoration of the covenant people. But because those events are, for Nephi, to be set in motion by the emergence of sealed and buried books of scripture, there is a

very close relationship between First and Second Isaiah. If First Isaiah traces the production and sealing up of books directed to a later people, Second Isaiah traces the recovery of and response to precisely those books. Second Isaiah, in a word, functions as a *response* to First Isaiah—as, in the end, a *reading* of First Isaiah.

This interpretation of the First Isaiah/Second Isaiah relationship has recently been offered by Edgar Conrad in his book *Reading Isaiah*. Conrad claims that his approach is itself suggested by the book of Isaiah through a connection between Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 40:

In 40:6 a voice reiterates the command to read (*qr'*), a command that reflects the command to read in 29:11. The usual translation of the imperative in 40:6 is 'cry,' as in the RSV [and the KJV]. 'A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"' There is nothing wrong with this translation, but . . . what is to be called out aloud here is what is to be read out aloud.

*To read is also to cry or call.*⁵¹

Conrad argues, perhaps not unlike Nephi, that Second Isaiah records the history of the redemption of those who return to First Isaiah, to the book written because its message was rejected in its own time. In Conrad, as in Nephi, the distinction between First and Second Isaiah is maintained even as a crucial relationship between them emerges. The two "halves" of Isaiah are, through the structure of prophecy-and-fulfillment, essentially intertwined.

I have already shown that, with First Isaiah, Nephi picks and chooses passages that concern his theology of writing. In dealing with Second Isaiah, however, Nephi appears less choosy. Rather than picking out this or that fitting text, Nephi simply begins with Isaiah 48 and then works through Second Isaiah chapter by chapter. Interestingly, what Nephi does not get to, later Nephite prophets take up—and in the order the texts appear in Second Isaiah:

Isaiah 48–49 in 1 Nephi 20–21

Isaiah 50–51 in 2 Nephi 7–8

Isaiah 52–53 in Mosiah 12–14

Isaiah 54–55 in 3 Nephi 22⁵²

Thus, while Nephi, having dealt with the relevant passages necessary to outline the Nephite theology of writing, seems to exhaust Nephite interest in *First* Isaiah, he only whets his successors' appetites for *Second* Isaiah—providing

only the first stretch of a Second Isaianic trajectory that forms the backbone of the Book of Mormon.

All of this clarifies the role of the *other* Isaiah chapters that find their way into Nephi's record. What, though, has any of this to say about the obvious textual break between First and Second Nephi? It is already clear that Nephi's detailed interpretation of *First* Isaiah is located entirely in the atonement portion of *Second* Nephi. It might further be noted that Nephi's systematic work on *Second* Isaiah is to be found more or less entirely within *First* Nephi. If this "distribution" of sorts (First Isaiah in Second Nephi; Second Isaiah in First Nephi) is intended, then it is possible to suggest that there are two distinct overarching structures at work in Nephi's larger record. On the one hand, there is the four-part structure that associates the record with the temple and its concerns. On the other hand, there is the two-part structure that compartmentalizes the intertwined treatment of Isaiah in Nephi's record. These two structures overlap and intertwine, particularly in their joint emphasis on the importance of Isaiah to Nephi's project. Whichever structure one decides to privilege at any given moment, it is always clear that to dismiss Isaiah is, in essence, to miss the whole point of Nephi's project.

With the details worked out in this chapter, it is possible now to turn directly to Nephi's explicit discussions of typology and, eventually, to a full investigation of what Nephi's take on typology has to say about how the Book of Mormon, according to the Book of Mormon itself, should be read. The theological insights culled in the course of this chapter—Nephi's interest in the fourfold pattern of creation, fall, atonement, and veil, the curious idea of angelicization, the Nephite theology of writing—will prove to be as important as the basic structural and exegetical points made.

NOTES

1. Frederick W. Axelgard, "1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole," *BYU Studies* 26.4 (Fall 1986): 54–55.

2. *Ibid.*, 54. This way of subdividing the first division of Nephi's record seems to be confirmed by the fact that Nephi places the six-verse discussion of structure between the two subdivisions, that is, in the first verses of 1 Nephi 19.

3. This is universally overlooked in the commentaries. For a fascinating example of the difficulties that result from missing the apologetic nature of verses 5–6, see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:360.

4. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27.4 (Fall 1987): 15. See also Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982), 53–74.

5. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 155.

6. *Ibid.*, 178–185.

7. *Ibid.*, 154–155.

8. It is possible that the word “kept” in 1 Nephi 19:3, 5 should be interpreted as “protected” or “guarded.” But this interpretation brings with it a whole host of other questions.

9. One might object here that the presence of the fourfold pattern of creation, fall, atonement, and veil in the first verse of First Nephi unsettles the case for Nephi’s subsequent alteration of his project. This does not, however, necessarily follow. It is possible to find an admittedly somewhat looser fourfold structure in 1 Nephi 1–18 as well as in the larger project of First and Second Nephi (born of goodly parents: 1 Nephi 1–2; seen many afflictions: 1 Nephi 3–7; been highly favored of the Lord: 1 Nephi 8–10; had a knowledge of the mysteries: 1 Nephi 11–15, etc.). One might thus suggest that 1 Nephi 1:1 originally spelled out in advance not the fourfold structure of the whole of Nephi’s record, but an originally projected pattern behind 1 Nephi 1–18, and that when Nephi changed directions so drastically after completing his first eighteen chapters, he effectively rerouted the anticipatory first verse of 1 Nephi 1 so that it described the fourfold structure of his larger record.

10. It is common in the Book of Mormon to connect the phrase “cut off from the presence of the Lord” with the fall of Adam and Eve. See 2 Nephi 9:6; Alma 42:6–7, 14; and Helaman 14:16.

11. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990*, 4 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 1:17–18. In a vein still more speculative than the one followed above, one might moreover suggest that Nephi—given his Egyptian connections—makes an allusion with the last line of 1 Nephi 1:1 to the temple text of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the title of which—*r^bw nw prt m hrw*—can be translated as “the book (or record) of going forth (proceeding) by day.”

12. Jon E. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 153, emphases added for clarification.

13. *Ibid.*, 50.

14. *Ibid.*, 92.

15. *Ibid.*, 24.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Barker's version of temple theology is, in spirit, basically the same as Levenson's. Both scholars base their understanding of temple theology in close readings of the priestly tradition (P document) of the Pentateuch. As such, both Barker and Levenson place strong emphasis on the significance of the cosmic covenant, on the privileged role of the waters of chaos, on the importance of the Hebrew word *קִדְוָה*, and so on. In short, both Levenson and Barker are focused on a Hebraic worldview concerned at once with "the vitality of evil and the fragility of creation." *Ibid.*, 47. It is worth pointing out that Barker has drawn a good deal of attention from Latter-day Saints. See, for example, Kevin Christensen, *Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001); and Margaret Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," in John W. Welch, ed., *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2005), 69–82.

18. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004). "Creation," "Covenant," "Atonement," and "Wisdom" are, interestingly, the titles of the four chapters of *Temple Theology*.

19. It is, I think, all the more striking for me, because I had been working with the creation/fall/atonement/veil interpretation of Nephi's record for several years before I came across Margaret Barker's work for the first time.

20. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 35–36.

21. Hugh W. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 302.

22. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2004), 136.

23. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 139.

24. *Ibid.*, 91, emphasis in original.

25. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 119.

26. Some commentators neglect verse 13 entirely. See George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 1:429; Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 154; and Monte S. Nyman, *I Nephi Wrote This Record: Book of Mormon Commentary* (Orem, UT: Granite, 2004), 747. Most tie it to one form or another of the "gift of tongues." See McConkie and Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 1:369–370; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:451; and Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 2:361–362.

27. Note that in 2 Nephi 31, Christ serves as a model or an example, precisely as Lehi serves in 1 Nephi 1. Note also that, according to Margaret Barker, "The belief that human beings, as a result of their mystical vision, were transformed into angels was . . . what the ancient religion of Israel had been saying for many centuries" by the time Christianity was born. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 6.

28. Nephi's selection (Isaiah 2–14) is somewhat odd. There is a natural break between chapters 12 and 13 of Isaiah, but chapters 13–14 are part of the larger Isaianic collection of the "Oracles against Foreign Nations." John Gee implicitly recognizes this in his brief commentary on "Nephi's Selection of Sections" when he argues that chapters 13–14 of Isaiah function as an antithetical parallel (highlighting Babylon) to chapters 2–12 (which highlight Zion). John Gee, "Choose the Things That Please Me: On the Selection of the Isaiah Sections in the Book of Mormon," in Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 73–75.

29. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 140.

30. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 57.

31. Victor Ludlow mentions a series of parallels between Isaiah's account and the modern temple experience. See Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 128–129. See also Stephen D. Ricks, "Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 171–190.

32. Grant Hardy outlines the difficulties of historicity presented by the quotations of Second Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 66–70. Historicity is, of course, not my concern here. But see Joseph M. Spencer, "Prolegomena to Any Future Study of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," *Claremont Journal of Mormon Studies* 1.1 (April 2011): 53–69.

33. Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 254.

34. Ronald E. Clements, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah," *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 129.

35. Childs, *Isaiah*, 3. But cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 55. Referring to Childs's earlier work on Isaiah (in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*), Blenkinsopp writes: "It seems that none of these rather tortuous conclusions necessarily follows from accepting chs. 40–55 as a canonical text. Whatever we decide about this particular case, a biblical book is not necessarily a well-thought-out, cohesive literary unity, and there is no need to make the book the only appropriate object of theological reflection."

36. See Christopher R. Seitz, "The One Isaiah // The Three Isaiahs," in Christopher R. Seitz, ed., *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 13–22.

37. I place emphasis on the word "theologically" here to avoid the question of how the Book of Mormon might weigh in on the question of Isaiah as a collection of historically disparate texts. Again, my concerns here are not historical, but theological.

38. John W. Welch, "Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 432–433. Grant Hardy suggests in a footnote that part of 2 Nephi 28:32 might be a quotation of Isaiah 65:2, but though the ideas are perhaps parallel, the language is not. Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 130. Three other possible references to Third Isaiah appear in the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi 17:39; Helaman 14:27; and Ether 13:9. Since no Book of Mormon author attributes the roughly Third Isaianic phrases in these passages to Isaiah, none of them should be taken as proof positive that the Nephites had a copy of Third Isaiah. Moreover, the omission of Isaiah 1 in the Isaiah quotation of 2 Nephi 12–24 may suggest that the Nephites had no access to Third Isaiah. Since it "is now widely held that the concluding chapters of the book (65 and 66) are closely related to the first chapter," with "chapters 65–66 repeating almost fifty words from chapter 1," Isaiah 1 is generally recognized to be the product of the same author(s)/redactor(s) who created Third Isaiah. Childs, *Isaiah*, 3; Luis Alonso Schökel, "Isaiah," in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987), 165.

39. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 329, argues that just such a text seems to have circulated at some point in Judah, though he of course places its creation after the time the Lehighites would have left Jerusalem.

40. See, for example: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 243; Childs, *Isaiah*, 218; Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 130–137; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 120; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 75, 84.

41. I have left the difficult verse 13 out of the account here for simplicity's sake.

42. Childs, *Isaiah*, 56.

43. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2:153.

44. *Ibid.*, 2:154.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 2:155. It should be noted that Latter-day Saint commentators have generally been uncomfortable with this approach. Thus some commentators have relied heavily for interpretive guidance on the difference between the King James Version of Isaiah 6:9–10 and the current (1981) rendering of the passage in the Book of Mormon: "The Book of Mormon clarifies these two difficult verses. It teaches that the people to whom Isaiah was sent would fail to understand his message of their own accord. The KJV implies that the Lord did not want them to understand." Nyman, *I, Nephi, Wrote This Record*, 522; see also Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:244. Interesting and

uniquely Mormon as this approach might be, it ignores the work of Royal Skousen. In both the printer's manuscript and the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon, the two verses in question stand as they do in the KJV. The change that resulted in the current rendering seems to have been rooted in an attempt to make sense of difficulties introduced into the printer's manuscript by Oliver Cowdery. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–2009), 2:697–699; and Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 115.

48. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:155.

49. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

50. This calls for a slight emendation of my earlier characterization of the oracles of Isaiah 7–14 (2 Nephi 17–24). It is less that the oracles against Assyria and Babylon outline the full restoration of the covenant people than that they outline the events through which the *possibility* of an eventual restoration was established through the writing and sealing up of texts to be recovered during those later events.

51. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, 137, emphasis added.

52. Things are actually more complicated than this. Full discussion of Second Isaiah's place in Mormon's editorial work will be taken up in detail in chapter 4.