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The Learning of My Father

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Abstract: From Nephi to Moroni, the inspired men of the Book of Mormon received instruction from their fathers. By accepting the role of teacher, Nephite fathers fulfilled the same responsibility associated with men in ancient Israel. Fathers in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon were responsible for teaching their children.

Chapter 2

THE LEARNING OF MY FATHER

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father. (1 Nephi 1:1)

In ancient Israel, fathers held the primary responsibility for teaching their children. “Remember the days of old,” instructed the prophet Moses, “consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee” (Deuteronomy 32:7). The same idea is seen in the book of Proverbs, which identifies wise children as those who receive council from their fathers: “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (Proverbs 4:1). Beginning with the prophet Lehi, we see righteous fathers throughout the Book of Mormon fulfilling this same stewardship.¹

The Book of Mormon begins with Nephi praising his father as teacher: “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the

¹ For an in-depth study, see E. Douglas Clark and Robert S. Clark, *Fathers and Sons in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992). Anciently, sons typically took up the same trade as their fathers. For discussions of how this applies to Book of Mormon peoples, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Caste,” *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 296–396; “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” chapter 10 in Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 76–98.

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learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1).² The commencement to Nephi’s record seems to have inspired later Book of Mormon authors.³

In the years following the death of Nephi, the prophet Enos began his own addition to the small plates in a manner reminiscent of 1 Nephi 1:1:

Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos knowing my father that he was a just man, for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it. (Enos 1:1)

This same pattern witnessed in the commencement of both Nephi’s and Enos’s accounts continues throughout most of the Nephite record. In a manner consistent with the cultural standards of ancient Israel, Nephite fathers held the primary responsibility of instructing their children.

In addition to the prophet Enos, King Benjamin seems to have been directly inspired to begin his record by the opening words of Nephi’s account. Both books begin with a reference to the role of father as teacher. “And he [Benjamin] caused that they [his sons] should be taught in all the language of his fathers,” begins the abridged portion of the book of Mosiah, “that thereby they might become men of understanding and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered by the hand of the Lord” (Mosiah 1:2). Mosiah

² Jacob, Nephi’s younger brother, also learned much from his father. For a discussion, see John A. Tvedtnes, “The Influence of Lehi’s Admonitions on the Teachings of His Son Jacob,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/2 (1994): 34–48.

³ Compare the wording of 1 Nephi 1:1 with that of Mormon 1:2.

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1:2–6, which describes how King Benjamin taught his sons, seems to have been patterned after Lehi’s teaching of his son Nephi. The italicized words in the extracts below highlight the parallels in the two accounts.

1 Nephi 1:1–3

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly *parents*, therefore I was taught somewhat in *all the learning of my father*; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great *knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God*, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. Yea, I make a record in the *language of my father*, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the *language of the Egyptians*. And I know that *the record* which I make is *true*; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge. For it came

Mosiah 1:2–6

And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that *they should be taught in all the language of his fathers*, that thereby they might . . . know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their *fathers*, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord. And *he also taught them concerning the records* . . . were it not for these plates . . . we must have suffered in ignorance . . . not *knowing the mysteries of God*. For it were not possible that our *father, Lehi*, could have . . . *taught them to his children*, except it were for the help of these

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to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, *Lehi*, having *dwelt at Jerusalem* in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

plates; for he having been taught in the *language of the Egyptians* therefore he could read these engravings, *and teach them to his children*, that thereby they could *teach them to their children* that . . . we might read and *understand of his mysteries* . . . O my sons, I would that ye should remember that *these sayings are true*, and also that *these records are true*. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain *the records* and the sayings of our fathers from the time *they left Jerusalem* until now, and *they are true*.

Another Nephite who was greatly influenced by his father's teachings was Alma₂, who spent some of his youth trying to destroy the Church that his father, Alma₁, had established among the Nephites. After an angel appeared, he fell into a coma-like state:

While I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son

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of God, to atone for the sins of the world. (Alma 36:17)

These words are drawn from the admonitions Alma delivered to his own sons, recorded in Alma 36–42.

Alma's grandson, Helaman₂, had two sons whom he named after his ancestors: Lehi and Nephi. We read that “they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them” (Helaman 5:5). The Book of Mormon lists some of his teachings, then explains that “these were the words which Helaman taught to his sons; yea, he did teach them many things which are not written, and also many things which are written. And they did remember his words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God” (Helaman 5:13–14).

From Nephi to Moroni, the inspired men of the Book of Mormon received instruction from their fathers. By accepting the role of teacher, Nephite fathers fulfilled the same responsibility associated with men in ancient Israel. Fathers in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon were responsible for teaching their children.