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## “Our Great God Has in Goodness Sent These”: Notes on the Goodness of God, the Didactic Good of Nephi’s Small Plates, and Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s Renaming

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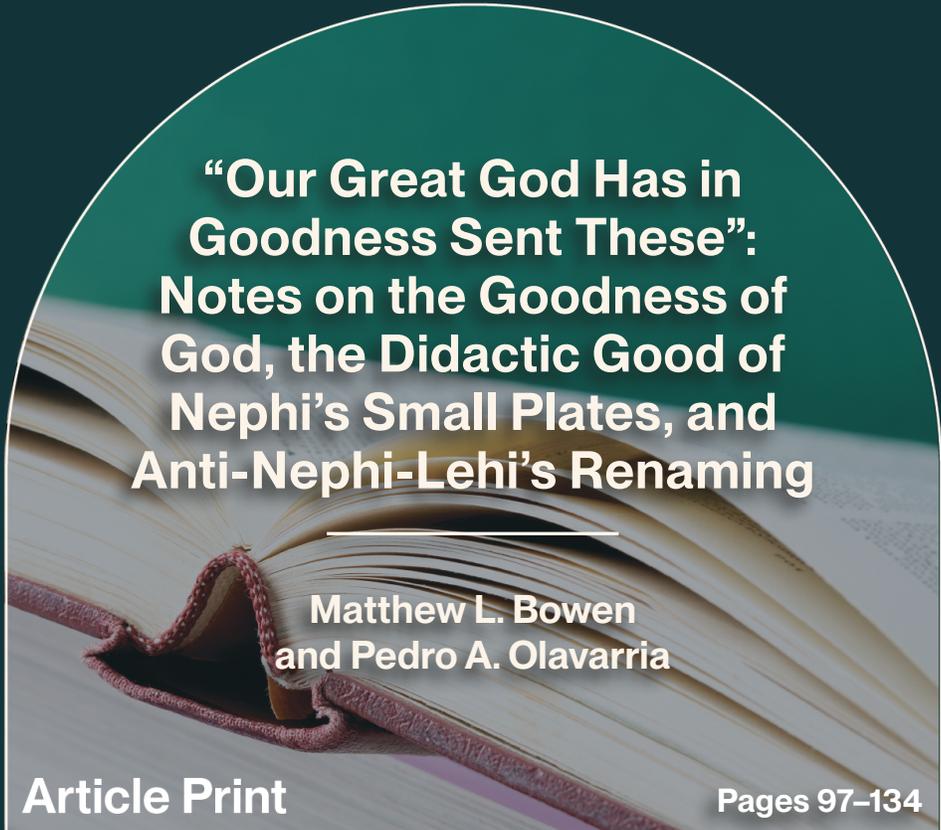
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Faith and Scholarship**



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**Matthew L. Bowen  
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# “Our Great God Has in Goodness Sent These”: Notes on the Goodness of God, the Didactic Good of Nephi’s Small Plates, and Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s Renaming

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Matthew L. Bowen and Pedro A. Olavarria

**Abstract:** *Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech (Alma 24:7–16) reveals multiple allusions to significant texts in Nephi’s small plates record. Thus, when he declares “I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us,” he appears to allude to an inclusio that bookends the two books of Nephi’s small plates record which emphasizes the “goodness” of God as a theme. Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s description of his ancestors as “wicked fathers” appears to deliberately contrast Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael with Nephi’s “goodly parents” in 1 Nephi 1:1. The name Nephi constitutes a key element in Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s own name, a name honorifically bestowed on him as a throne-name by his father. In view of the probable etymological origin of Nephi as Egyptian nfr (“good,” “goodly,” “fair”) and its evident, persistent association with “good” among the Nephites, Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s naming and the introduction to his speech deserve closer examination. This article explores the possible significance of this naming in conjunction with the Lamanites’ reception of divine “goodness” in the contexts of Nephite/Lamanite history and the Lamanite conversion narratives.*

**W**hen Ammon, Aaron, and those who served with them<sup>1</sup> taught the Lamanites the gospel of Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation, they used writings copied from the brass plates and from Nephi’s

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1. In addition to the four sons of Mosiah (Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni),

small plates (see Alma 18:36; 22:12–13). Mormon makes it clear that by this means Ammon, Aaron, and others redressed a longstanding, traditional Lamanite grievance against the Nephites—namely, the loss of the brass plates (see Mosiah 10:16–17; see also 2 Nephi 5:12; 10:16; Alma 20:13)—by restoring their access to the scriptures<sup>2</sup> and thus to a knowledge of divine covenants, especially the Abrahamic covenant.

Moreover, when Ammon, Aaron, and their fellow laborers used the writings from Nephi’s small plates to teach the doctrine of Christ<sup>3</sup> to Lamoni, Lamoni’s wife, Lamoni’s father, Lamoni’s brother (who took the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* after his conversion and likely at this coronation), and others, the Lord fulfilled his covenant with Enos for the first time (see Enos 1:11–18). That covenant included the promise that he would “bring” the Nephites records, including the small plates, “forth” to the Lamanites, in his “own due time” (Enos 1:16). While Nephi’s writings on the small plates constituted something of a political document on his right to rule,<sup>4</sup> they had an intended broader teaching function: “they teach all men that they should *do good*” (2 Nephi 33:10). The Lord instructed Nephi to make the small plates with the explicit command, “thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are *good* in my sight, for the profit of thy people” (2 Nephi 5:30) and Nephi avers, “for their *good* have I written them” (2 Nephi 25:8).<sup>5</sup>

The “good” that Nephi taught that would enable his readers to become bearers of divine “goodness” was the “doctrine of Christ”

Mormon records that Muloki and Ammah were leaders among many others that went on this mission (see Alma 20:2; 21:11).

2. On the linguistic, religious, and sociological impact of the loss of the scriptures, see also Amaleki’s comments regarding the Mulekites/Mulochites in Omni 1:13–18.
3. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Noel B. Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 1996): 26–56; see also Noel B. Reynolds, “How to ‘Come unto Christ,’” *Ensign* (September 1992), 7–13; and most recently, Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75; and Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Mormon,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (2015): 218–34.
4. See, e.g., Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15–37.
5. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘For Their Good Have I Written Them’: The Onomastic Allusivity and Literary Function of 2 Nephi 25:8,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 77–90, [interpreterfoundation.org/for-their-good-have-i-written-them-the-onomastic-allusivity-and-literary-function-of-2-nephi-258/](https://interpreterfoundation.org/for-their-good-have-i-written-them-the-onomastic-allusivity-and-literary-function-of-2-nephi-258/).

(2 Nephi 31:21; 32:6; Jacob 7:2, 6). The “doctrine of Christ” of course, means the *teaching* of Christ<sup>6</sup>—i.e., Christ’s teaching on how men and women may come unto him and be saved. Nephi declared, “the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4).

This same didactic function belonged to the later writings on the small plates as well. Jarom, Enos’s son, explicitly states that the small plates (“these plates are small”) were “written for the intent of the benefit of [i.e., the “making good of,” or “doing good (to)”]<sup>7</sup> our brethren the Lamanites” (Jarom 1:2)—i.e., they were written to teach them and “all men” to “do good” (2 Nephi 33:10; cf. 2 Nephi 33:4). Amaleki draws the small plates record to a close with an echo of Nephi’s closure by “exhorting all men to *come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe* in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in all things which are *good*” (Omni 1:25). That this means living the doctrine of Christ is clear from what he says next:

And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should *come unto Christ*, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, *come unto him*, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and *endure to the end*; and as the Lord liveth ye *will be saved*. (Omni 1:26)

Amaleki makes clear references in merismus<sup>8</sup> to the doctrine of Christ.

The speech of Lamoni’s brother, king Anti-Nephi-Lehi to the Lamanites—as preserved by Mormon in Alma 24—reflects an awareness of the contents of the small plates. For example,

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6. The English word *doctrine* derives from Latin *doctrinus*. In English translations of the Greek New Testament, the Greek word *didaskalia* usually underlies the term *doctrine*. Hebrew Bible texts employ the noun *leqah* (< *lqh*, to “take,” “receive,” “accept,” etc.), usually rendered “doctrine” or “learning” in the KJV (see Deuteronomy 32:2; Isaiah 29:4; Job 11:4; Proverbs 1:5; 4:2; 7:21; 9:9; 16:21, 23). See also Noel B. Reynolds, “This Is the Way,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91. Hebrew *tôrâ* in the sense of “teaching” is another possibility.

7. Benefit < Latin *benefactio* (“a good deed”) < *bene facere* (“to do good”).

8. *Merismus* is a literary device where a whole is referred to by two or more of its constituent parts. Noel Reynolds has shown how this works in relation to the elements or “points” of the doctrine of Christ. Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 106–34.

Anti-Nephi-Lehi states that “my great God . . . hath taken away the guilt from our hearts *through the merits of his Son*” (Alma 24:10).<sup>9</sup> On one hand, Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s words echo Aaron’s earlier teachings to the former’s father: “*And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth*” (Alma 22:14). On the other hand, Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s words more pointedly recall Lehi’s statement to Jacob, recorded by Nephi on his small plates: “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be *through the merits*, and mercy, and grace *of the Holy Messiah*” (2 Nephi 2:8). Moreover, Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s words evoke Nephi’s statement, partly directed to Lamanites of a future day: “ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, *relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save*” (2 Nephi 31:19).

Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech reflects the content of Nephi’s small plates in the next verse as well: “it has been *all that we could do* . . . to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed . . . for it was *all we could do* to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain” (Alma 24:11). Anti-Nephi-Lehi quotes, paraphrases, or otherwise has direct reference to Nephi’s oft-misinterpreted declaration: “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after *all we can do*” (2 Nephi 25:23).<sup>10</sup>

In this article we largely focus on issues related to the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and its possible meanings. In relation to this, however, we will propose that Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s declaration regarding Ammon and his brethren, “I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in *goodness* sent these our brethren, *the Nephites*, unto us

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9. Among Book of Mormon figures, only Anti-Nephi-Lehi uses the collocation “great God.” Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech (Alma 24:8-16) uses the expression “Great God” five times (Alma 24:7–8, 10, 13–14).

10. See, e.g., Daniel K. Judd, “A Wonderful Flood of Light,” (Brigham Young University [BYU] devotional address, Provo, UT, 7 December 2004); Camille Fronk Olson, “How Great a Debtor’: Mormon Reflections on Grace,” in *Talking Doctrine: Mormons and Evangelicals in Conversation*, ed. Richard J. Mouw and Robert L. Millet (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 161; Joseph M. Spencer, “What Can We Do? Reflections on 2 Nephi 25:23,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 25–39. On the context of 2 Nephi 25:23, see further Jared W. Ludlow, “After All We Can Do’ (2 Nephi 25:23),” *Religious Educator* 18, no. 1 (2017): 32–47.

to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers,” reflects a dominant theme in Nephi’s small plates record, the “goodness” of God.<sup>11</sup> It seemingly constitutes a deliberate allusion to Nephi’s *inclusio*<sup>12</sup> bookending the two books of Nephi as a single book of God’s “goodness,” an *inclusio* which also emphasizes a connection between the name *Nephi* and “good” (see 1 Nephi 1:1; 33:2–4, 10, 14). The mention of Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s naming (and his people’s taking of that name) in Alma 24:1–4 together with the beginning of Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech extolling God sending the Nephites “in goodness” invites us to consider whether Anti-Nephi-Lehi alludes to the meaning of one of the name-elements he and his people have just taken upon themselves, like the onomastic allusions Nephi himself makes.

Nephi had exhorted his descendants and those of his brothers to partake of God’s “goodness.” In Nephi’s writings, the “goodness” of God is repeatedly associated with theophanies and divine revelation,<sup>13</sup> an association Mormon himself makes (see Mormon 1:15). Mormon’s inclusion of this speech suggests that Anti-Nephi-Lehi had acquired some knowledge of the contents of Nephi’s small plates, from which he had been taught the gospel and doctrine of Christ by Ammon, Aaron, and their fellow-missionaries. This teaching leads to an outpouring of the Holy Ghost, theophanies, and divine revelation (see especially Alma 18:41–43; 19:6, 11–18, 29–31, 33–34; 22:17–23). Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech evidences his awareness of traditional associations between the Nephites as “good”/“fair ones” and “wicked” or incorrect traditions — i.e., “unbelief” — with the Lamanites.

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11. See Bowen, “For Their Good,” 77–78. See also Noel B. Reynolds, “The Goodness of God and His Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 134–35, 145, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-goodness-of-god-and-his-children-as-a-fundamental-theological-concept-in-the-book-of-mormon/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-goodness-of-god-and-his-children-as-a-fundamental-theological-concept-in-the-book-of-mormon/).

12. *Inclusio* is a literary bracketing device in which a literary unit is demarcated by using similar terminology at the beginning and ending of the unit.

13. See, e.g., Lehi’s reported exclamation in his psalm: “thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:14). Lehi made this declaration during the theophany (recorded in 1 Nephi 1). Lehi later referred to this vision in terms of the “goodness of God”: “I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren” (1 Nephi 5:4, see further in this study).

## The Names *Nephi*, *Lehi*, and *Anti-Nephi-Lehi*

Any in-depth discussion of the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* necessarily involves a discussion of the name *Nephi*. Since the Nephites self-identified by the name *Nephi*,<sup>14</sup> this onomastic element is arguably most important for the present discussion. The etymology and meaning of the name *Lehi*, though difficult to determine and of probable secondary importance overall, is nevertheless also worth discussing.

Finally, one must determine the nature of the onomastic element *anti-*, which potentially constitutes the key to a full understanding and appreciation of this name.

### Nephi

Over three decades ago John Gee convincingly argued that the name *Nephi* is best understood as a derivation from the Egyptian lexeme *nfr*,<sup>15</sup> which in its masculine singular adjectival form came to be pronounced *nou-fee*, *neh-fee*, or *nay-fee* by Lehi's time.<sup>16</sup> As a derivation from Egyptian *nfr*, *Nephi* would denote "good," "goodly," "fair," "beautiful," "fine."<sup>17</sup> Regarding the alternative suggestion that *Nephi* derives from *nfw* ("captain"), Gee writes, "The advantage that *Nfr* has over *Nfw* is that *Nfr* is actually attested at the right time [i.e., for it to be the source of the name *Nephi*], whereas *Nfw* is attested but not at the right time."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, *nfr* is not only attested abundantly as an Egyptian personal name, but as an extremely common element in Egyptian compound names.

An abundance of internal textual evidence from throughout the Book of Mormon supports the etymology of *Nephi* from *nfr*.<sup>19</sup>

14. See especially 2 Nephi 5:8–9.

15. John Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 1992): 189–91; John Gee, "Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.

16. Gee, "The Name Nephi," 190–91.

17. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1999), 131. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 2:252–63.

18. Gee, "Four Suggestions," 2.

19. Matthew L. Bowen, "Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," *Insights* 22, no. 11 (January 2002): 2; Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones': An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi" *Insights* 23, no. 6 (January 2003): 2; Matthew L. Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2015): 181–95, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org)

Moreover, the internal textual evidence from throughout the Book of Mormon also suggests that the meaning of the name *Nephi* greatly impacted Nephite self-perceptions (i.e., as “good” or “fair ones,” see further below).

## Lehi

Lehi is attested as both a personal name (e.g., on the ostracon Tell el-Hlaifeh 2071),<sup>20</sup> as the compound name *’blḥy* or *Ablehi* (“Father is *lḥy*”),<sup>21</sup> and as a toponym (see, e.g., Judges 15).<sup>22</sup> The precise etymology and meaning of the name *Lehi*—probably spelled consonantly *lḥy*—remains a matter of debate. One possibility is that Lehi represents the *lahay* element in Beer-lahai-roi (“the well of the living one that seeth me” or “well of the living one who sees”). The etiological explanation offered by the Genesis narrative for this place states: “And she [Hagar] called the name of the Lord [yhwḥ] that spake unto her, *Thou God seest me* [or, “Thou art El-roi” or “thou art God who seeth,” *’ēl ro’ī*]: for she said, Have I also here *looked after him that seeth me?* [*rā’īṯi ’aḥrê rō’ī*; or “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” (NRSV)].<sup>23</sup> Wherefore the well was called *Beer-lahai-roi* [*bē’ēr lahay rō’ī*]; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered” (Genesis 16:13–14). Thus, Lahai (*lahay*), per se, might mean “belonging to the Living

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.org/nephis-good-inclusio/; Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’—Revisited,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–44, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/o-ye-fair-ones-revisited/.

20. Or, Tell el-Kheleifeh 2071. See Hugh W. Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert, Part II,” *Improvement Era* 53, no. 2 (February 1950): 156. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi in the Samaria Papyri and on an Ostracon from the Shore of the Red Sea,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 14–21. See further Charles C. Torrey, “On the Ostraca from Elath (Bulletin No. 80),” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 82 (1941): 15–16; Nelson Glueck, “The Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 225–42; Robert A. Divito, “The Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions,” in *Nelson Glueck’s 1938–1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal*, ed. Gary Davis Pratico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 51–63, 75–86, plates 74–84.

21. See especially Chadwick, “Lehi in the Samaria Papyri,” 18–20.

22. See examples cited in the Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Lehi,” last edited 21 November 2015, onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=LEHI. See also Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Lehi and Sariah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 30–31, 77.

23. Cf. Jacob’s words in Genesis 32:20, which serve as an etiology for Peniel: “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

One.” This suggestion for Lehi has the additional benefit of being close in etymology and meaning to Lemuel, “belonging to El [God]” (*lēmô*, “belonging to” [poetic] + *’ēl*, “El” or “God”),<sup>24</sup> the name of Lehi’s second son. If Lehi is a form of the West Semitic onomastic element *lahwi* (in the attested name *lahwi-malik*) that has evolved according to the “normal rules of vowel change,” as Jeffrey Chadwick suggests,<sup>25</sup> then the name *Lehi* have might a meaning something like “life”<sup>26</sup> and Ablehi, “Father is life.”

More likely, but less satisfying as a personal name in terms of meaning, is Hebrew, *lēhî* “jawbone” or “cheek.”<sup>27</sup> The biblical Samson narrative offers an etiological explanation for the place-name *Lehi* or *Ramath-lehi* in Judges 15. The narrator sets the stage with this notice: “Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi” (Judges 15:9). The narrator then goes on to explain the place-name *Lehi* in terms of Samson’s heroic exploits with a “jawbone”:

And when he came unto *Lehi*, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new *jawbone* [*lēhî*] of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With *the jawbone* [*lēhî*] of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with *the jaw* [*lēhî*] of an ass have I slain a thousand men. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away *the jawbone* [*hallēhî*] out of his hand, and called that place *Ramath-lehi* [*ramat lehî*] = “height

24. Lemuel is attested in the Hebrew Bible as a royal name in Proverbs 31:1, 4.

25. Chadwick, “Lehi in the Samaria Papyri,” 20.

26. Janine Wende suggests that the *lahwi* element in *lahwi-Dingir* (*lahwi-malik*) might be rendered “Leben”—i.e., “life.” Thus, perhaps, “the (Divine) King is life” or “my life is the (Divine) King.” Janine Wende, “Frühaltbabylonische Grammatik” (PhD diss., University of Leipzig, 2021), 155n148, [ul.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A79945/attachment/ATT-0](http://ul.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A79945/attachment/ATT-0).

27. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “The Names Lehi and Sariah—Language and Meaning,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 32–34, 77, who argues for “jawbone.” Chadwick writes (p. 33): “Admittedly, Lehi (‘jaw’) would be an unusual personal name. It has been pointed out that Israelite and Judean names rarely featured words denoting body parts.” He also speculates (p. 33) that “Lehi” could be a nickname: “It may have been, however, that Lehi was not a given name at all but a nickname of sorts that originated with family, friends, or associates when Lehi was a youth or full-grown man, which then stuck with him and wound up being used instead of a given name unknown to us.”

of the jawbone"]. And he was sore athirst, and called on the Lord, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God clave an hollow place that was in *the jaw* [or, in *Lehi*], and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, *his spirit came again, and he revived* [*wayyehî*]: wherefore he called the name thereof *En-hakkore* [Well of the caller], which is in *Lehi* [*lehî*] unto this day. (Judges 15:14–19)

Although the foregoing etiology, in its present form, largely revolves around the homonymic connection between *lēhî* ("jaw"/"jawbone") and the place name *lehî* (Lehi), it evidences some important similarities and connections to the Beer-lahai-roi etiology in Genesis 16. First, both etiologies explain the name of springs/wells, En-hakkore and Beer-Lahai-Roi (there is, as Moshe Garsiel has pointed out,<sup>28</sup> a metonymic wordplay involving the clever substitution of *bě'ēr* ["well," "spring"] for *'ayin/ 'ên* ["eye," "well," "spring"] in Genesis 16, a wordplay which has the force of, "the eye of El-roi" or "the eye of the God who sees," cf. the *'ên* of water in Genesis 16:7; cf. Job 7:8). Both well/springs preserve life. In Judges 15, Samson's "spirit came again, and he revived" because of the eye/spring (*'ayin/ 'ên*). A rhyme play on *wayyehî* and *lehî* perhaps emphasizes a subtle midrashic connection between the name *Lehi* and "life," beyond the image of the jawbone.

Another underexplored possibility for the name *Lehi* in this same vein is that it derives from a form of the Semitic/Hebrew root *\*lḥḥ*, "to make moist"; "moisture, strength of youth."<sup>29</sup> In its adjectival forms, *lah*, denotes "still moist, still fresh" and in its nominal form, "(life's) vital force, freshness."<sup>30</sup> The Akkadian noun *lāḥu*, "young shoot,"<sup>31</sup> represents a form of this root. If the name *Lehi* can be traced to this root, perhaps it can also relate to the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) verb *lahaya/lēhya*, which

28. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, IL: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 183.

29. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 525.

30. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 525.

31. Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (SANTAG 5; Wiesbaden, DE: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 176.

denotes to “be pretty, be beautiful, shiny.”<sup>32</sup> The adjectival forms of this verbal root, *lěḥuy/laḥay*, mean “pretty, handsome, brilliant.”<sup>33</sup> The verb’s nominal form, *laḥěy*, means “beauty, splendor, brightness.”<sup>34</sup>

More to the point, however, the Hebrew noun *\*lēaḥ* (“vitality,” “vigor,” “strength of life”)<sup>35</sup> from the root *\*lḥḥ* yields a strong possibility for the name *Lehi*. Moses’s “death” notice in Deuteronomy 34:7 attests this noun with the third person, masculine, singular possessive suffix: “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor *his natural force* [*lēḥô* or *lēḥōh*, his vitality, vigor, or strength of life] abated.” Changing the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, masculine singular suffixed form of the *\*lēaḥ* to first person yields *lēḥî*: “(he is) my vitality,” “(he is) my vigor” or “(he is) my strength of life.” In this framework, *Lehi* would mean “strength of life” and *Ablehi* would mean “Father is my strength of life.” *Lehi* from *lēḥî* (*\*lēaḥ* + *î*) produces a cogent etymology for *Lehi* that fits the consonantal attestation(s) of *Lehi* (*lḥy*), avoids the vowel disparities of *Lahai* (*laḥai*) and the etymological and semantic difficulties of *lēḥî* (“cheek,” “jaw,” “jawbone”).<sup>36</sup>

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32. Wolf Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 7.

33. Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez*, 7.

34. Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez*, 7.

35. Cf. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 525.

36. Additionally, *Lehi* as a derivation from *lḥ(h)* might make lexical and literary connections like the following potentially meaningful. Zenos’s allegory describes “young and tender branches” (Jacob 5:4, 6, 8) that were taken away from the mother tree of Israel. Ezekiel uses similar imagery in his parable . . . “Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a *tender one* [*rak*] and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent . . . And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the *green* [*lāḥ*, vital or fresh] tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it. (Ezekiel 17:22–24) “And Jacob took him rods of *green* [*laḥ*, “still fresh”] poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods” (Genesis 30:37); “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat *moist* [*lahîm*] grapes, or dried. (Numbers 6:3); “And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven *green* [*lahîm*] withs [slender twigs or shoots] that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven *green* [*lahîm*] withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them” (Judges 16:7–8).

## Anti-Nephi-Lehi

As we have seen, the name *Lehi* is at home in Semitic compound names, just as *nfr* is in Egyptian compound names. Mormon first mentions the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* as a "new" name given to the converted Lamanites who were also called the people of Ammon: "And it came to pass that they called their names *Anti-Nephi-Lehies*; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites" (Alma 23:17). In eschewing the name *Lamanites*, and taking on a new one, Anti-Nephi-Lehi and his people were almost certainly trying to free themselves from the historical association of "Lamanites" with unbelief.

Mormon subsequently mentions that other Lamanite-affiliated groups who did not convert, also did not take upon them this new name:

And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who were in the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and who were in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about, *who had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi*, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren. (Alma 24:1)

In fact, these groups rebel against the converted Lamanite king and the royal family:

And their hatred became exceedingly sore against them, even insomuch that they began to rebel against their king, insomuch that they would not that he should be their king; therefore, they took up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. (Alma 24:2)

At this point, Mormon states that Lamoni's father designated one of his other sons as his successor: "Now the king conferred the kingdom upon his son, and he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (Alma 24:3). This sequence appears to suggest that Lamoni's father gave Lamoni's brother the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* after or upon his conferring the kingdom upon him. This "Anti-Nephi-Lehi" does not appear to constitute the royal son's given name. Rather, it seems to have constituted a kind of "throne-name" or "new name" for which there are ample biblical and extrabiblical precedents (e.g., Abraham for Abram, Israel for Jacob, Jehoiakim for Eliakim, Zedekiah for Mattaniah).

But what then do the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and its gentilic<sup>37</sup> derivative *Anti-Nephi-Lehies* mean? Most likely, the name is simply a compound of three personal names. *Anti* itself is an element in numerous Lehite names (see below). *Nephi*, by itself, as a derivation from *nfr*, meaning “good,” “goodly,” “fair,” “beautiful” or “fine” is not only cogent, but enjoys abundant internal textual support within the Book of Mormon.<sup>38</sup> The name *Lehi*, as we have also noted, has at least several plausible and even possibly connected meanings.

The element *anti-* is more difficult. It either represents a transliteration (i.e., it is an ancient word or name with intrinsic meaning) or it constitutes a translated word corresponding to the English word *anti* (cf. *Anti-Christ*).<sup>39</sup> The *anti-* element in *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* (and its gentilic derivative, *Anti-Nephi-Lehies*, Alma 23:17) does not constitute a recognizable Hebrew word or known onomastic element. It doesn’t appear as a distinguishable element in Jaredite names, although it may be an indigenous name or name-element. However, it also may be Egyptian:

If *anti* is a transliteration, it might come from the Egyptian relative marker *nty* (Coptic *ente*) meaning “which is,” which can be nominalized as “that which is”. Since the gentilic of the term is used in the plural, if it were pluralized as Egyptian it should be *ntyw*. This would mean something like “those who are Nephi-Lehi”. In later stages of Egyptian, the relative marker and the genitive marker were confused. If this term derived from such a situation, it would mean something like “those of Nephi-Lehi”.<sup>40</sup>

Of the other “anti-” name forms (i.e., *Ani-Anti*, *Antion*, *Antionum*, *Antionah*, *Antiomno*, *Antiparah*, *Antipas*), only in the name *Ani-Anti* does the *anti-* element appear last rather than first. At a glance, this might seem to weigh against *anti-* constituting the nominalized Egyptian relative. However, at least one additional Egyptian possibility exists for

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37. A gentilic name is a name for a group of people derived from an older, and often an ancestral name (e.g., Israelites, Nephites, Lamanites). In other words, these names are frequently eponymous for ancestral figures.

38. See Bowen, “Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” 2; Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2; Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” 181–95; Bowen, “Fair Ones Revisited,” 315–44.

39. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Anti-Nephi-Lehi,” last edited 21 November 2015, [onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANTI-NEPHI-LEHI](http://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANTI-NEPHI-LEHI).

40. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Anti-Nephi-Lehi.”

the *anti*- (see below),<sup>41</sup> if it does not indeed represent an indigenous homonym of an Egyptian *anti*.

If *anti*- does represent Egyptian *nty*, then Anti-Nephi-Lehi, as a sentence name, would mean something akin to “(one of) Lehi who is good” (“one of Lehi who is *Nephi* [good]”) — i.e., “(descendant of) Lehi who is good.” The giving and receiving of the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* may represent something closely akin to Helaman’s naming of his sons Lehi and Nephi. We recall Helaman’s statement to his sons Nephi and Lehi regarding their given names: “Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents . . . and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that *they were good*. Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do *that which is good*, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them” (Helaman 5:6–7).

Here the Semitic/Hebrew name Judah serves as an analogy. Moshe Garsiel notes that in the Hebrew Bible the name *Judah* is “explained in terms of a derivation from the root y-d-h . . . which [in its causative stem] means ‘to offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude’” (see Genesis 29:35; 49:8).<sup>42</sup> The implication of Genesis 49:8 (“Judah [*yěhûdâ*], thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise [literally, thou — thy brethren shall thank thee, *yôdûkâ*]”) is that Judah’s descendants — *yěhûdîm*, i.e., “Jews” — are those “who are to be praised out of a feeling of gratitude.” Thus, the derived gentilic plural Anti-Nephi-Lehies (Alma 23:7), by virtue of its components, might suggest the meaning “those of Lehi who are good” or “descendants of Lehi who are good.”

As mentioned above, however, there is an additional Egyptian interesting (but far less likely) possibility for the onomastic element *anti*-. The element *ʿn.tj* appears in several Egyptian names,<sup>43</sup> but its meaning remains uncertain. Among several *ʿn.tj*-names, Ranke cites *ʿn.tj-nfr*, which he translates “(der Gott) *ʿn.tj* ist Gut” — i.e., “(the God) *ʿn.tj* is good.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, one could well transliterate the name *ʿn.tj-nfr* as Anti-Nephi, just as one might transliterate the name *ʿn.tj-ḥtp* as Anti-hetep.

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41. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Ani-Anti,” last edited 21 November 2015, [onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANI-ANTI](http://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANI-ANTI), citing input from Robert F. Smith.

42. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 171.

43. Hermann Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen* (Glückstadt, DE: Augustin, 1935–52), 1:69–70.

44. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, 1:69.

Ranke translates this latter name “(der Gott) *ʿn.tj* ist gnädig” — i.e., “(the God) *ʿn.tj* is gracious.”<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the case, the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* at a minimum, like the city name *Lehi-Nephi*, appears to at once honor Lamanite ancestry from Lehi and the spiritual legacy of Nephi, whose visions and teachings they now embraced. In other words, Mormon’s preservation and use of the names *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *Anti-Nephi-Lehies* constitutes a powerful statement that the Lamanites who converted to the “Nephite” religion had become every whit as “good” as the Nephites, their erstwhile enemies.

### **Nephites as the Inconsistently “Good” or “Fair Ones”**

As noted previously, the Egyptian lexeme *nfr*, whence the name *Nephi* derives, denotes “good,” “goodly,” and “fair” (of appearance). Nephi characterizes his people, the Nephites, in his small plates record as “exceedingly fair and beautiful” (1 Nephi 13:5). He states that the Lamanites, like his people, had been “exceedingly fair and delightful” (2 Nephi 5:21) but that after they “dwindled in unbelief” they became “a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations” (1 Nephi 12:23),<sup>46</sup> and that they became “loathsome unto [my] people” (2 Nephi 5:22), and “an idle people full of mischief and subtlety” (2 Nephi 5:24). These characterizations inevitably governed Nephite self-perceptions and Nephite perceptions of the Lamanites after Nephi’s time, even in—and perhaps especially in—times of Nephite spiritual decline (see Jacob 3:7, 9; Alma 26:24; Mormon 6:17–19). The Nephites, when not at their best, believed “chosen-ness” to be something intrinsic rather than conditional. They believed covenant blessings to be covenant entitlements (compare Moroni’s allegations against the ruling elite in his letter to Pahoran in Alma 60).

Nephi’s cultural, political, and religious characterizations are taken up and used by later Nephite writers. For example, Mormon’s abridgment of the record of Nephi the son of Nephi states regarding converted

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45. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, 1:70.

46. Mormon directly quotes 1 Nephi 12:23 when he states, “And also that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles; for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry.”

Lamanites, "And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly *fair*, and they were numbered among the *Nephites*, and were called *Nephites*" (3 Nephi 2:16). Similarly, Mormon later describes the unified believers in Jesus — Lamanites and Nephites — thus: "And now, behold, it came to pass that *the people of Nephi* did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became *an exceedingly fair and delightsome people*" (4 Nephi 1:10). Both 3 Nephi 2:16 and 4 Nephi 1:10 hark back to and are meant to be understood in terms of Nephi's words on the small plates ("wherefore, as they were white, and, and exceedingly *fair and delightsome* . . ." 2 Nephi 5:21) and both revolve around the name *Nephi/Nephites* with connotation "good" or "fair" as well as Nephi's characterization of those who had implicitly partaken of the fruit of the tree of life in his tree-of-life vision. Regarding this coded usage of "white," Amy Easton-Flake writes: "The angel and Nephi have established through repetition that the color white is synonymous with partaking of the fruit: the fruit is white, the tree is white, and individuals who partake of the fruit are made white through the blood of the Lamb."<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps this becomes most evident in Mormon's famous lamentation over the fallen Nephites. After witnessing the final destruction of his people, the Nephites as an entity, Mormon plaintively exclaims:

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!

*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, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones*, how is it that ye could have fallen! (Mormon 6:17–19)

The Nephites had been the recipients and bearers of the goodness of God but had degenerated until "they delighted in everything save that which is good" (Moroni 9:19). Mormon had previously illustrated

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47. Amy Easton-Flake, "Lehi's Dream as a Template for Understanding Each Act of Nephi's Vision," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 189.

at length how the Nephites’ “sorrowing [had] not [been] unto repentance, because of *the goodness of God*; but . . . was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13). Consequently, the Nephites were not “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11), as Mormon had been (“I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of *the goodness of Jesus*” Mormon 1:15, paraphrasing 1 Nephi 1:1 and 2:16, see further below).

### **Partaking of the Goodness of God: Feasting upon the Word and Love of Christ**

Nephi’s autobiographical wordplay on his own name throughout his personal writings has been thoroughly noted.<sup>48</sup> Nephi’s emphasis on “good” and “goodness” as a theme—in particular, God’s “goodness”—begins in the first verse of his writings and continues to the penultimate verse: “I, *Nephi*, having been born of *goodly* parents, . . . yea, having had a great knowledge of the *goodness* and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days” (1 Nephi 1:1); “And *you that will not partake of the goodness of God*, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day” (2 Nephi 33:14).

The latter idiom “partake of [God’s] goodness” appears to originate with Nephi himself, who uses it three times. Nephi’s brother Jacob will use it once (see Jacob 1:7 and below). Nephi employs it first as a part of his interpretation of Isaiah 55:1-2. Nephi asks, “Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not *partake of his goodness*?” Then he immediately answers, “Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” (2 Nephi 26:28). If, as Noel Reynolds has argued, coming unto Christ should be understood in terms of enduring to the end,<sup>49</sup> then, to partake of

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48. See Bowen, “Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” 2; Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2; Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” 181–95; Bowen, “Fair Ones Revisited,” 315–44.

49. Noel B. Reynolds, “How ‘Come unto Me’ Fits into the Nephite Gospel,” *Religious Educator* 18, no. 2 (2017): 15–29; Noel B. Reynolds, “‘Come unto Me’ as a Technical Gospel Term,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 1–24, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/come-unto-me-as-a-technical-gospel-term/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/come-unto-me-as-a-technical-gospel-term/).

God's "goodness" should be understood in terms of "feasting upon the words of Christ" and "upon his love": "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye *shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ*, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20). "O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and *receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love*; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever" (Jacob 3:2).

This connection becomes even clearer in subsequent verses in 2 Nephi 26 where Nephi further avers, "for *he doeth that which is good* among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and *he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness*; and he denieth none *that come unto him*, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). Given Nephi's adaptation of the language of Isaiah 55:1–3 in 2 Nephi 26, the collocation "partake of [God's] goodness" may constitute a development of, or at least relate to, Isaiah's phrase "eat ye that which is *good*" (Hebrew *wē'iklû-ṭôb*). Such statements recall descriptions of "partaking" of the fruit from Lehi's dream of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8:11–18), especially the description of the faithful who "came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree" (1 Nephi 8:30). They also recall Psalm 34:8, a temple text that extends an invitation to worshipers: "O *taste [ṭa'ămû]* and see that *the Lord is good [ṭôb yhw]*." In other words, temple worshipers should experience ("partake of") and even see Yahweh's goodness — perhaps even in theophany — in the temple (see 3 Nephi 11, 17). The Egyptian semantic equivalent of Hebrew *ṭôb* ("good") is *nfr*.<sup>50</sup> As the two dominant and almost-exclusive terms denoting "good" in Egyptian and Hebrew respectively, there is scarcely any reason to doubt that Nephi would have equated the two. Similarly, Hebrew *ṭôbâ* ("good things," "goodness, kindness," "the goodness, happiness, prosperity one encounters"<sup>51</sup> heavily overlaps with the semantics of both *nfr* and *nfr.t* (*nfr.t* as a noun denotes "good things," "good, what is good"; *nfr* as a noun denotes "beauty," "good," "kindness," "goodness," "happiness," "good fortune").<sup>52</sup>

Nephi concludes his personal writings hitting the same notes as

50. Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 131.

51. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 372.

52. Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 131–32.

he did at the very beginning. There at the end, he clearly articulates the didactic function of the small plates: “And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them *to do good*” (2 Nephi 33:4). He then warns his audience, which include his own posterity and that of his rebellious brothers, against failing to partake of the “goodness of God”: “And *you that will not partake of the goodness of God*, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day” (2 Nephi 33:14). Nephi wanted his descendants and those of his brothers to enjoy the same “great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1) that he himself had come to enjoy. But they would have to “knock” (2 Nephi 32:4). Failure to do so would result in their “perish[ing] in the dark” to their eternal “condemn[ation]” (2 Nephi 33:14).

### **“Come unto Christ, and Partake of the Goodness of God”: The Didactic Function of Nephi’s Small Plates**

Nephi’s conclusion of his writings on the theme of “partak[ing] of the goodness of God” (2 Nephi 33:14), gives rise to Jacob’s addition on that theme at the outset of his own personal writings on the small plates. Here too Jacob connects the doctrine of Christ—and coming unto Christ—with partaking of the “goodness” of God:

*Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. (Jacob 1:7)*

In other words, Nephi, Jacob, and others “labored diligently among our people,” i.e., among the Nephites, because only by continuing to come unto Christ and continuing to “partake of the goodness of God” would the Nephites be able to remain “good”—bearers of God’s “goodness.” Jacob also clearly uses and adapts language from 2 Nephi 25:23 (“*For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God*”) and 26:33 (“*inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of*

*his goodness*”). He also echoes 1 Nephi 6:5: “For the fulness of mine intent is *that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.*”

Jacob adds a personal dimension to his use of Nephi’s “partake of the goodness of God.” We recall that Lehi had foretold that Jacob’s days would be “spent in the service . . . of God.” That statement anticipated that Jacob would serve Lehi’s faithful descendants (and those who aligned themselves with them)<sup>53</sup> as a temple priest. Indeed, Jacob employs temple language quite early in his own record. In the language of Jacob 1:7, we easily recognize his use of Psalm 95:6–11. The latter text reads thus:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before [in the presence of] the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that *they should not enter into my rest.* (Psalm 95:6–11)

Jacob frames partaking of the goodness of God in terms of temple hymn language. He describes the sixth point or principle of the doctrine of Christ—salvation in the kingdom of God or eternal life—in terms of “entering into [God’s] rest” as formulated in Psalm 95:11. His use of temple language also recalls the conditional covenant blessing upon Lehi’s posterity (“Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments *ye shall be cut off from my presence*” (2 Nephi 1:20; cf. 4:4; 5:20; see also 1 Nephi 2:21), which itself evidences temple echoes (see especially Leviticus 22:3).<sup>54</sup> In Psalm 95:11, the phrase “enter into my rest” corresponds to entering “the fulness of his glory”

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53. John Gee and Matthew Roper, “I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us: Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon*, ed. Camille Fronk, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty A. Smith, and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2003), 51–65.

54. Leviticus 22:3: “Say unto them, Whosoever he be of all your seed among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things, which the children of Israel

in the language of Doctrine and Covenants 84:24 — ritually speaking, entering into the most holy place of the temple as a representation of entering or “obtain[ing] heaven” (Genesis 14:36 JST; Alma 13:16–19). For Jacob, partaking of the goodness of God in mortality was prerequisite to entering into the Lord’s eternal “rest.”

Jacob finally returns to the interwoven topics of “labor[ing] diligently,” “the goodness of God,” and “entering into [the Lord’s] rest” at a significant point in his writings. In chapter six, Jacob offers an interpretive lens for his quotation of Zenos’s Allegory of the Olive Tree. He evokes and draws together his three earlier uses of the phrase “labor diligently” from Jacob 1:7 (“Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God”), Jacob 4:3 (“we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that *our beloved brethren* and our children will receive them with thankful hearts”), and Jacob 5:61 (“Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard”) when he declares, “And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire” (Jacob 6:3). Jacob, Nephi, and others have been among those “labor[ing] diligently” in the Lord’s ongoing work for the salvation of the human family.

Here, however, Jacob returns to the theme of the “goodness of God,” again linking it to entering into the Lord’s rest as in Jacob 1:7 and this constitutes a major part of his interpretation of Zenos’s allegory:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, *harden not your hearts. Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts* [quoting Psalm 95] for why will ye die? For behold, after ye have been *nourished by the good word* of God all the day long, will ye bring forth *evil fruit*, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire? Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have

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hallow unto the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul *shall be cut off from my presence* [wēnikrētā millipānay]: I am the Lord.”

spoken concerning him; and deny *the good word of Christ*, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you? (Jacob 6:5–8)

Jacob’s use of embrace imagery — “*cleave* unto God as he *cleaveth* unto you”; “and while his *arm of mercy* is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts” — presupposes a situation in which one heretofore standing outside the immediate presence of God receives the invitation to that immediate presence. Jacob’s language here, like Psalm 95 (from which he quotes) presupposes a situation akin to what Jacob described in an early sermon to the Nephites, probably in a temple setting: “the keeper of the gate [i.e., the temple gate = the “gate of heaven”] is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name” (2 Nephi 9:41).<sup>55</sup> Jacob’s description of his audience as having been “nourished by the good word of God” suggests their having “partake[n] of the goodness of God” or the fruit of the tree of life, as in Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision. In this context, the “good word of Christ” probably constitutes a specific reference to the doctrine of Christ (cf. “feasting upon the word of Christ” and partaking of the fruit of the tree of life).

Jacob almost certainly does not limit his literary audience to his Nephite “brethren”—although it would no doubt include the Nephites—the latter term would apply to Lamanites of later generations (see again Jacob 4) who would read his words. Jacob, like Nephi, looked ahead to those future generations despite—and perhaps because of—the failures of the then-present: “And it came to pass that *many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites*

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55. See, e.g., John Gee, “The Keeper of the Gate,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS: 1999), 233–74. On the “keeper of the gate” or “keeper of the door” as a temple functionary, see 2 Kings 12:9; 22:4; Jeremiah 35:4; Nehemiah 3:29. See further Avram R. Shannon, “‘Come Near unto Me’: Guarded Space and Its Mediators in the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament: The 42nd Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. David R. Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey (Provo, UT: RSC and Deseret Book, 2013), 66–84; David J. Larsen, “Psalm 24 and the Two YHWHs at the Gate of the Temple,” in *The Temple Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 211–34.

*to the knowledge of the truth*; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually” (Jacob 7:24).

Jacob’s son Enos, for his part, though he prayed for and obtained a covenant from the Lord that the Nephite records would go forth in the Lord’s due time, reports that efforts to restore the Lamanites to the truth were futile:

And I bear record that *the people of Nephi* did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. *But our labors were vain*; their hatred was fixed, *and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness*; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

Like Nephi and Jacob, Enos describes his and his people’s missionary efforts to “restore” the Lamanites to covenant faithfulness as “labors.” Like Jacob, he describes these efforts as “vain.” The Lamanites would not partake of the goodness of God, as Lehi had feared regarding Laman and Lemuel and their posterity (“they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit”; “And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father,” 1 Nephi 8:35).

Although Jarom states that the small plates were being written and preserved “for the intent of the benefit of the Lamanites,” he gives no indication that the labor of attempting to reclaim the Lamanites mentioned by Nephi, Jacob, and Enos continued during his time. Instead, Nephite religious leaders strove to keep their people from quickly apostatizing (Jarom 1:10–12; cf. Enos 1:23). Jarom recalls the aforementioned statements “laboring diligently” on the small plates when he further states:

Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, *did labor diligently*, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; *persuading them* to look forward unto the

Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner *did they teach them*. (Jarom 1:11)

Almost surely, they taught the people the doctrine of Christ and plan of salvation as “revealed” to and by Nephi and his successors (cf. Jarom 1:2).

Like Jarom’s record, the Book of Omni and its five authors record nothing regarding attempts to spiritually reclaim the Lamanites. The text of Omni gives every indication that Nephite faithfulness had greatly declined and that many Nephites had apostatized (see, e.g., Omni 1:2–3, 5–7, 11–13). Amaleki, the last writer in the Book of Omni, writes near the conclusion of the small plates, “exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel” and to “believe . . . *in all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil*” (Omni 1:25). The only way that the Lamanites — not to mention the Nephites — could become and remain “good” was by learning the doctrine of Christ and applying all its principles.

### **“But When I Saw That Which Was Good Among Them”: Divine “Good” Among the Lamanites**

Mormon includes Zeniff’s brief autobiographical royal chronicle wholesale in his abridged record at least in part to lay the historical and narratological groundwork for how the Lamanites came to be evangelized. Although he does not complete this narrative arc until Alma 17–27, Mormon begins in Mosiah 7 (and here in Mosiah 9–10) to show how the Lamanites came to acquire the language of the Nephites.

Zeniff’s royal chronicle begins with an autobiographical introduction clearly modeled on Nephi’s autobiographical introduction from the latter’s small plates (see table 1).<sup>56</sup> It borrows heavily from Nephi’s phraseology (“therefore I was taught in all the learning of my father”/“having been taught in all the language of the Nephites”; “having had a great knowledge of the goodness”/“having a knowledge of the land of Nephi”; “having seen”/“when I saw”; etc., cf. also 1 Nephi 1:2), including replicating the latter’s use of wordplay.

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56. Zeniff appears to have been familiar with Nephi’s small-plates record as quickly becomes evident in Mosiah 10:12–17. Zeniff may have also been familiar with the contents of the Nephite royal chronicles kept before his time.

**Table 1.** Comparing two autobiographical introductions.

1 Nephi 1:1	Mosiah 9:1
I, <i>Nephi</i> , having been born of <i>goodly</i> 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, <i>having had a great knowledge of the goodness</i> and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.	I, <i>Zeniff</i> , having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers' first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them — but when I saw that which was <i>good among them</i> I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.

Zeniff's name may or may not constitute a derived form of the name *Nephi*<sup>57</sup> (cf. Zenephi, perhaps “beautiful son,” “good son” or “son/descendant of Nephi,” Moroni 9:16). From a rhetorical and literary perspective, the homonymy between Zeniff, Nephi, and Zenephi may obviate that issue, since homonymy provides a sufficient basis for the kinds of wordplay that we see in ancient near eastern, biblical, and Book of Mormon texts.

Thus, Zeniff adapts Nephi's autobiographical wordplay (“I, Nephi [e.g. *nfr* > *nf[i]*, ‘good,’ ‘goodly,’ ‘fair,’ ‘fine’] having been born of goodly parents . . . having had a great knowledge of the goodness . . . of God”) in the phrases “I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers' first inheritance” and “but when I saw that which was good among them.” Perhaps more than simply recognizing what was good or praiseworthy—or “Nephite”—among the Lamanites, Zeniff recognized the potential for “good” among the Lamanites.

Moreover, Zeniff here reports that he made an important ethical decision, the full consequences of which he would never live to see. Where some Nephites in his party, including the party's “austere and bloodthirsty” leader, favored preemptive war against the Lamanites, evidently including genocide, Zeniff recognized “that which was good”—or that which was *Nephite* or *nfr*—among the Lamanites. That “good,” such as it was, inevitably came from God (cf. 2 Nephi 26:33, Omni 1:25) and thus somehow evidenced “the goodness of God.” Centuries before the events that Zeniff relates, Jacob had lauded the Lamanite cultural commitment to monogamy and love within family relationships vis-à-vis the lack of both among the Nephites (Jacob

57. See the Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Zeniff,” last edited 7 April 2016, [onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ZENIFF](http://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ZENIFF).

3:5-10, “wherefore, how much better [literally, good]<sup>58</sup> are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?”). Jacob’s rhetoric plays on Nephites’ perception of themselves as the “good” or “fair” ones, a self-description and standard of which they were falling far short.

Zeniff’s recognition of “that which was good” among the Lamanites, his “over-zealous” desire to re-inherit the land of Nephi, and his concomitant desire to seek a peace treaty with their king precipitously led, instead, to war with the Lamanites throughout his reign but also had unforeseen consequences a generation later. The degenerate priests of Zeniff’s son Noah initiated a program of teaching the “language of Nephi” to the Lamanites:

And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman, being called after the name of his father; and therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people. And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people; *and thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites.* And they were a people friendly one with another; nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi; But they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another. And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren. (Mosiah 24:3–9)

Zeniff’s self-described “overzealousness” to inherit the land of Nephi may have produced undesirable results for his people during his own lifetime—conditions exacerbated by the unrighteousness of Noah his son, and further endured by his grandson Limhi. However, by the fourth generation, the “good” that Zeniff saw or foresaw among the

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58. Hebrew and Egyptian both create two-member comparative constructions using a regular adjective with a preposition (*m-* or *min* in Hebrew, *r* in Egyptian). See Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:522–23; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphics*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1957), 47.

Lamanites came to full flower in direct consequence of his “overzealousness” and pity. Even the unrighteous priests of Noah played an unwitting role for good, with the teaching of the Nephite language among the Lamanites. In that generation, conditions became fully ripe for the Lamanites to partake of the “goodness” of God in full.

### **The “Marvelous Light of His Goodness”: Lamoni and the Lamanites at the Veil**

Textual clues strewn throughout 1 and 2 Nephi suggest that Nephi, following his father Lehi, associated the “goodness of God” with divine revelation in general, and theophanies in particular. As noted previously, Nephi begins his autobiography by stating he had been “born of goodly parents” and “had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1). Nephi’s latter statement appears to refer to several divine manifestations and/or theophanies that he received throughout his life, beginning with the following:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also *having great desires to know of the mysteries of God*, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold *he did visit me*, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father. (1 Nephi 2:16)

As a preface to his account of seeing “the things which my father saw” (1 Nephi 11–14), Nephi declares: “For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19). Mormon’s autobiographical statement, early in his own record which itself draws on the foregoing language of Nephi, further confirms that the “goodness of God” was associated with divine revelation and theophanies: “And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore *I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus*” (Mormon 1:15).

Moreover, we have Nephi’s additional testimony in his psalm recorded in 2 Nephi 4. Nephi connected his experiencing the Lord through revelation directly to the Lord’s “goodness.”

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. (2 Nephi 4:17; cf. 1 Nephi 1:1)*

Nephi’s owes his association of the “goodness of God” with divine revelation and theophany to his own father Lehi. At the conclusion of the theophany (or theophanies) in which Lehi was commissioned to go and prophesy in Jerusalem (Lehi’s “first vision”) Lehi declares in psalmodic fashion: “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 Nephi 1:14). Later, Lehi reassures his wife Sariah: “I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision, I should not have known *the goodness of God*, but had tarried at Jerusalem, *and had perished with my brethren*” (1 Nephi 5:4).

In the context of all the above that we should understand Mormon’s description of Lamoni’s conversion theophany as the first—or really the second<sup>59</sup>—in a succession of theophanies that helped to convert many Lamanites, including the regnant royal family. Notably, Mormon describes this conversion in terms of the “goodness” of God:

Now, this was what *Ammon* desired, for he knew that king *Lamoni* was under the power of God; he knew that *the dark veil of unbelief* was being cast away from *his* mind, and the light which did light up *his* mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was *a marvelous light of his goodness*—yea, this light had infused such joy into *his* soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in *his* soul, yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God. (Alma 19:6)

We note here first the evident wordplay on Ammon and Lamoni in

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59. See Alma 19:16. The “remarkable vision” of Abish or her father would constitute the first. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Father is a Man: The Remarkable Mention of the Name Abish in Alma 19:16 and Its Narrative Context,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 77–93, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/father-is-a-man-the-remarkable-mention-of-the-name-abish-in-alma-1916-and-its-narrative-context/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/father-is-a-man-the-remarkable-mention-of-the-name-abish-in-alma-1916-and-its-narrative-context/).

terms of “unbelief” (cf. Hebrew *lō’-’ēmun*, Deuteronomy 32:20).<sup>60</sup> The “faithfulness of Ammon” and the “faith” that his faithful service instills in Lamoni, Lamoni’s wife, and, eventually, many Lamanites constitutes a *Leitmotif* in the Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27). However, we also detect here an allusive wordplay on the name *Nephi* with Mormon’s use of the phrase “a marvelous light of his goodness” that draws us back to the writings of Nephi on the small plates and the dominant theme of God’s “goodness” that not only brackets but suffuses Nephi’s writings. Mormon himself “had tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” in much the same way (Mormon 1:15). Ammon, his brothers, and their companions—Nephi’s descendants—serve as the primary instrument in restoring the Lamanites to God’s “goodness.”

Mormon’s use of the expression “dark veil of unbelief” also deserves special attention as it constitutes esoteric temple language. We recall that the Nephite temple, which preserved the ancient Israelite temple tradition (see 2 Nephi 5), represents one of the most important things that the Lamanites lost after the separation of the Nephites from the Lamanites. The latter were “cut off” from the Lord’s ritual “presence” (1 Nephi 2:21; 2 Nephi 1:20; 4:4; 2 Nephi 5:20; Alma 9:13–14).

Moroni’s later use of the image of the veil helps us better understand Mormon’s use of it here in Alma 19:6. The Lord’s words to Moroni draw on the language of Mormon, the latter’s father, when he exhorts those of ancient Israelite ancestry, including the descendants of the Lamanites, to “come unto” him and “rend that veil of unbelief”:

Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief. Behold, when ye shall *rend that veil of unbelief* which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel. (Ether 4:14–15)

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60. Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw*, 240–63; Matthew L. Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 64–89.

Two additional passages in Ether confirm that Moroni’s use of this image incorporates priestly language pertaining to the ancient Israelite temple. Moroni states the following regarding the brother of Jared and his faith that had become knowledge: “And because of the knowledge of this man *he could not be kept from beholding within the veil*; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting. Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, *he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him*” (Ether 3:20). Moroni later indicates that the brother of Jared’s “temple”<sup>61</sup> experience became a prototype for many others of surpassing faith: “And *there were many whose faith* [cf. Heb. *’ěmûnâ*] *was so exceedingly strong*, even before Christ came, *who could not be kept from within the veil*, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had *beheld with an eye of faith* [cf. *’ěmûnâ*], and they were glad” (Ether 12:19). Moroni then adds “And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, *for he could no longer be kept without the veil*” (Ether 12:21). We should note that Moroni employs the technical language of the temple, attested in the instructions regarding the wilderness tabernacle with his use of both of the phrases “within the veil” (Hebrew *mibbêt lappārōket*)<sup>62</sup> and “without the veil” (Hebrew *miḥûṣ lappārōket*).<sup>63</sup> When Lamoni, Lamoni’s wife, Lamoni’s father, and the members of their court had “the dark veil of unbelief . . . cast away” from their minds and beheld “a marvelous light of his goodness” (Alma 19:6; cf. especially Alma 26:3) they experienced theophanies that match Moroni’s descriptions for quality.

Mormon’s description of a theophany as “casting away” the “the dark veil of unbelief” to behold “a marvelous light of [God’s] goodness,”

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61. Cf. M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples in the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 388–98. See further: Scripture Central Staff, “Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?,” 237, 21 August 2019, [scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-moroni-use-temple-imagery-while-telling-the-brother-of-jared-story](http://scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-moroni-use-temple-imagery-while-telling-the-brother-of-jared-story).

62. The expression *mibbêt lappārōket* (“within the veil”) is attested in Exodus 26:33; Leviticus 16:2, 12, 15; and Numbers 18:7.

63. The expression *m bowen-v61-2024-97-134-AUDIO iḥûṣ lappārōket* (“without the veil”) is attested in Exodus 26:35; 27:21; 40:22; and Leviticus 24:3.

also recalls Nephi's temple language from his small plates record particularly directed to the descendants of his brothers—i.e., the Lamanites: "Wherefore, now 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" (2 Nephi 32:4).

Nephi's language presupposes a temple (or temple-like) situation<sup>64</sup> like the one mentioned above as described in 2 Nephi 9:41<sup>65</sup> and Jacob 6:5–8: the Lord himself mediates the boundary or veil that separates humankind from the immediate presence of God. Lamoni and other members of his family and eventually many Lamanites transcend that veil/barrier because they have the faith to "ask" and "knock." They were then "brought into the light" that was "a marvelous light of his goodness" (Alma 17:6).

### **“God Has in Goodness Sent These Our Brethren, the Nephites”**

The "marvelous light of [the Savior's] goodness" into which Lamoni and the soon-to-be Anti-Nephi-Lehies were inducted included, at least in some cases, a firsthand experience of the reality of Jesus (see, e.g., Alma 19:13, 29–30). These Lamanites, like Nephi of old, had gained a "knowledge of the goodness and mysteries of God" (1 Nephi 1:1).

In Alma 24, Mormon preserves a speech by Lamoni's brother (vv. 7–16), Anti-Nephi-Lehi, but also the circumstances that attended that speech:

Now when Ammon and his brethren and all those who had come up with him saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren, they came forth to the land of Midian, and there Ammon met all his brethren; and from thence they came to the land of Ishmael that they might hold a council with Lamoni and also with his brother *Anti-Nephi-Lehi*, what they should do to defend themselves against the Lamanites. Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms

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64. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Thy Will Be Done: The Savior's Use of the Divine Passive," in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 243.

65. Gee, "Keeper of the Gate," 233–74.

against their brethren; nay, they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not. Now, these are the words which he said unto the people concerning the matter: I thank my God, my beloved people, *that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us*, and to convince us of the traditions of our *wicked fathers*. (Alma 24:5–7)

Anti-Nephi-Lehi's speech begins with a juxtaposition of the term "Nephites" with "goodness." His words implicitly recognize the Nephites as "good," but emphasize God as the source of the "goodness" of which he and his people were then partaking as Amaleki had done (see Omni 1:25). Anti-Nephi-Lehi's words, like Amaleki's, thus recall Nephi's own manifold statements on the "goodness of God" (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:1, 14; 5:4; 26:28, 33; 33:14).

Moreover, Anti-Nephi-Lehi's remarks on "Nephites," God's "goodness," and "wicked fathers" recall significant elements of 1 Nephi 1:1: Nephi ("good") and his "goodly parents" (Lehi and Sariah) and the "goodness . . . of God." Nephi's "goodly parents" contrast with Anti-Nephi-Lehi's "wicked fathers," especially Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael.

Whatever its precise meaning, we can be sure that the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi*, in its giving and its reception, was honorific of Nephi, Lehi, the new Lamanite king, and his people. In this context, the "throne name" Anti-Nephi-Lehi serves to identify Anti-Nephi-Lehi and his people, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, much more closely with Lehi and Nephi as "goodly" spiritual ancestors, than with the physical ancestors (Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael), with whom they had previously identified.

We should also briefly consider Anti-Nephi-Lehi's statement, "our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, to preach unto us" in the light of Mormon's subsequent statement: "for they [Ammon and his Nephite brethren] were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction" (Alma 27:4). Many of the converted Lamanites had seen angels from the divine presence appear in their glory: "And behold, many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them; and thus they had told them things of God, and of his righteousness" (Alma 19:34). Ammon, Aaron, and their brethren

having “sp[oken] with the tongue of angels” (2 Nephi 31:13–14)<sup>66</sup> were to be distinguished little from ministering “angels [who] speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they sp[oke] the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3; cf. Alma 17:2). They essentially fulfilled the “office of [the angels’] ministry” which is “to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father [cf. Enos 1:12–18], which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him” (Mormon 7:31).<sup>67</sup>

Taking a larger view of Aaron, Ammon, and the other Nephite missionaries as “angels sent from God to save [the Lamanites] from everlasting destruction” helps us to appreciate the high irony of the Amalekite/Amlicite’s stout boast against Aaron in the synagogue: “Hast thou seen an angel [cf. Heb. *mal’āk*]? Why do not angels [*mal’ākīm*] appear unto us? Behold are not this people as *good* as thy people?” (Alma 21:5). Aaron had not only seen an angel (Mosiah 27:11–18; Alma 36:6–11), he was one, in effect. Aaron, Ammon, and the other sons of Mosiah, of course, were with Alma when an angel first appeared to him. Moreover, the implication of the Amlicite/Amalekite’s use of the term rendered “good” here is clear: the Amalekites/Amlicites as Nephites or former Nephites had as much claim on being “good” as Aaron and the other “good” or “fair” ones. Yet it was Anti-Nephi-Lehi, Lamoni, and their people who were able to recognize that God had sent Aaron, Ammon, and others in his “goodness,” while the Amalekite/Amlicites, failing to recognize this particular manifestation of God’s “goodness,” trusted instead in their own.

### **Anti-Nephi-Lehies: Doing and Becoming “That Which Is Good” and Becoming Bearers of Divine “Goodness”**

As noted previously, the precise linguistic meaning of Anti-Nephi-Lehi is less important than the fact that the name incorporates the names *Nephi* and *Lehi* in an honorific way. That this new name or

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66. On the temple significance of “speak[ing] with the tongue of angels,” see Neal Rappleye, “‘With the Tongue of Angels’: Angelic Speech as a Form of Deification,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 303–23, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/with-the-tongue-of-angels-angelic-speech-as-a-form-of-deification/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/with-the-tongue-of-angels-angelic-speech-as-a-form-of-deification/).

67. See also Mormon 7:30: “For behold, they are subject unto him [i.e., unto the Lord], to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves *unto them of strong faith and a firm mind* in every form of godliness.”

throne-name appears to have been given to Lamoni's regnant brother after the royal family's conversion almost certainly indicates that the onomastic element "Anti-," whatever its precise origin and meaning, had a positive connotation. Understanding Anti-Nephi-Lehi as connoting something like "those Lehites (descendants of Lehi) who are good" or "descendants of Lehi who are of the good one (God)" makes excellent sense within the immediate narrative and within the overall context of Lamanite and Nephite history.

Mormon's statement that the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi "*began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them*" (Alma 23:18) also recalls Nephi's language from the small plates. In the context of his having caused his people to "construct . . . a temple after the manner of Solomon," Nephi states: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, *did cause my people to be industrious* [cf. the Deuteronomistic characterization of Jeroboam as 'industrious,' *ōśēh mēlā'kā*, 1 Kings 11:28],<sup>68</sup> and to labor with their hands" (2 Nephi 5:7). The additional intimation that "the curse of God did no more follow them" seems to suggest that that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were no longer "cut off" from the ritual presence of God, but restored to it. In other words, did the Anti-Nephi-Lehies now build temples/sanctuaries in the Nephite mode—"after the manner of Solomon"—and participate in ordinances "after the order of Melchizedek" (see Alma 13)? Mormon, of course, compresses or collapses the chronology of his narrative somewhat, but the language here is certainly suggestive.

Mormon's overarching point seems to be that these Lamanites became Nephites in virtually every meaningful sense. Taking *anti-* as an Egyptian relativizer, they became Anti-Nephi-Lehi, or descendants of Lehi "who were *Nephi*" — i.e., "Lehites who were good" or "Lehites who were of the good [one] (i.e., of God)." They were descendants of Lehi who exemplified "good," especially the "goodness of God." If so, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi's declaration that "*our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites* [i.e., as bearers of

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68. Mormon's and Nephi's words appear to echo the Deuteronomistic description of Jeroboam who eventually became king of the northern kingdom of Israel when it was divided after Solomon's death: "And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was *industrious* [*ōśēh mēlā'kā*], he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph" (1 Kings 11:28).

divine goodness] unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our *wicked* fathers” (Alma 24:7) takes on additional, rich meaning. Anti-Nephi-Lehi and his people, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, now embodied the “good” stipulated in the doctrine of Christ as taught by Nephi and his successors.

### “Stir[red] Up . . . Against That Which Is Good”

At the conclusion of the Lamanite conversion narratives, Mormon draws particular attention to the reaction of former “Nephite” groups (Amalekites/Amlicites, Amulonites) to the conversion of the Lamanite “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” to what had been theretofore the “Nephite” religion from which the former had apostatized. Following a series of failed battles with the Nephites (Alma 25:3; 27:1), Mormon records,

And it came to pass that the Amalekites, because of their loss, were exceedingly angry. And when they saw that they could not seek revenge from the Nephites, *they began to stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi*; therefore they began again to destroy them. (Alma 27:2)

He then records that Ammon received an oracle of warning from the Lord at the behest of Anti-Nephi-Lehi:

Get this people out of this land, that they perish not; for Satan has great hold on the hearts of the Amalekites, *who do stir up the Lamanites to anger against their brethren to slay them*; therefore get thee out of this land; and blessed are this people in this generation, for I will preserve them. (Alma 27:12)

The language in these passages echoes Nephi’s language from the small plates:

Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and *revile against that which is good*, and say that it is of no worth! For the day shall come that the Lord God will speedily visit the inhabitants of the earth; and in that day that they are fully ripe in iniquity they shall perish. . . . For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and *stir them up to anger against that which is good.*” (2 Nephi 28:16, 18).

While the Anti-Nephi-Lehies became more “Nephite” or “good” than

the Nephites themselves, the ex-Nephite Amalekites/Amlicites and Amulonites increasingly began to play the ancient part of Laman (one of their “wicked fathers”) in stirring up anger against Nephi (see table 2).

Nephi testified “he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33). The Anti-Nephi-Lehies accepted that invitation when God “in goodness” sent the Nephites to restore the former to a knowledge of that goodness using Nephi’s writings (Alma 24:7).

**Table 2.** Filling up the measure of Laman and Lemuel.

<b>Laman</b>	<b>Amlicites/Amalekites and Amulonites</b>
<p>And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren.</p>	<p>Behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him saying: What is this thou hast testified? <i>Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people?</i> (Alma 21:5)</p>
<p>Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. <i>And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.</i> (1 Nephi 16:37–38)</p>	<p>And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites . . . who had not been converted and <i>had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren.</i> (Alma 24:1)</p> <p>And it came to pass that the Amalekites, because of their loss, were exceedingly angry. And when they saw that they could not seek revenge from the Nephites, <i>they began to stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; therefore they began again to destroy them.</i> (Alma 27:2; cf. 27:12)</p>

**Conclusion and Pragmatics:  
“Taste and See That the Lord Is Good”**

One of the hymns of the Jerusalem temple extends the invitation to worshipers in the temple, “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). “Taste”—Hebrew *ṭa’am*, Egyptian *dp*—constitutes a verb of “experience.” We come to know of “the goodness of God”—that God is indeed “good”—as we *experience* him and his grace firsthand.

Nephi came to experience “the goodness . . . of God” that defined his life and teaching at an early age (1 Nephi 1:1; 2:16; 26:33; 33:14), as did Mormon (Mormon 1:15, “And I, being fifteen years of age . . . was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the *goodness* of Jesus”).

Often, we come to taste or experience God’s “goodness” through the ministering of angels — yes, angels (“messengers”) from the presence of God, less often seen than unseen, but often mortal angels who come to us in the darkest moments of our lives and attend upon our deepest spiritual needs as bearers of divine goodness. Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and those who served with them became angels to the Lamanites as they served them and “spake by the power of the Holy Ghost . . . the words of Christ,” including the doctrine of Christ and the plan of salvation. Thus, they became angels through whom the Lamanites “tasted” or “experienced” God’s “goodness.” That “goodness” included visions of the Savior and other divine beings.

Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the brother of Lamoni and the heir of the king of all the Lamanites, recognized that “God ha[d] in his goodness sent these our brethren” as angels in every meaningful sense (Alma 24:7; 27:4). His symbolic name, like the name *Nephi* itself, appears to have been a testimony of that “goodness” and explains why he received it from his father as a throne-name. In Mormon’s view, the subsequent Laman-like enmity of the ex-Nephi Amalekites/Amlicites and Amulonites amounted to a testimony of the reality of the Lamanites’ conversion and acquisition of Godlike “goodness” as the former were literally “stir[red] up . . . against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:20; Alma 24:1; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 10:20).

Nephi, who like Zeniff generations later, recognized the capacity for “good” in all human beings, including their “brethren,” accordingly declared: “he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). But it cannot stop there. “Partak[ing] of the goodness of God” requires that we in turn become “good” through the atonement of Jesus Christ and become the angels that others need. The divinely inherited capacity to re-acquire (cf. Abraham 3:23) and grow in that that “goodness” exists in all of us.



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