

1 Nephi Header

1 Nephi: Header

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity and they seek to destroy his life. He taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family. Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews. The account of their sufferings. They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife. They take their families and depart into the wilderness. Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness. The course of their travels. They come to the large waters. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship. They call the name of the place Bountiful. They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth. This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.

Comments

Ironically, the Book of Mormon starts with the book of Nephi. This is not an issue of historical timing, but a very real difference in who wrote and why. The beginning of Mormon's book was the book of Lehi, which included the information about the beginnings of Nephite society that we find in the book of Nephi. The difference is that Mormon wrote for specific purposes and in particular ways, most of which differed from the reasons and ways that Nephi wrote. This issue is the result of the loss of the 116 pages which were replaced by the record we know as the small plates. From the book of Nephi to the end of Omni, all of the writing comes from this alternate source.

At the beginning of the book of First Nephi, we have a header that gives a description of the events that are to come in the book. Nephi wrote this header, and included one for Second Nephi as well.

The most interesting part of the header for First Nephi is that the nature of the writing changes for the last line. For the most part, the synoptic header is written in the third person, a practice that continues in all other book headers. Then, in the last line, it shifts to first person. We have "This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record." That line is anomalous not only because it is in first person, but because it comes after the header, it describes the last events.

It would be best to consider that line as a chapter header rather than a book header. Nephi will have a chapter header in 2 Nephi 6, so he clearly has that understanding in his literary arsenal. The printer's manuscript doesn't separate the headers from the text, so the current division exists because that is the way that the compositor read it. Reconceiving that last line as a chapter header is more consistent with the way the rest of the text is written. Chapter headers become more important in Mormon's edited text.