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To Learn with Joy: Sacred Preaching, Great Revelation, Prophecy

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*To Learn with Joy:
Sacred Preaching, Great
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Monte S. Nyman

Fifty-five years after Lehi and his party left Jerusalem under the commandment and direction of the Lord (about 544 BC), Nephi, the son of Lehi and keeper of the small plates of Nephi, turned the responsibility of keeping this sacred record over to his younger brother Jacob (Jacob 1:1). He also instructed Jacob on what he was to include in his account. As Nephi was the prophet, ruler, and teacher of this people by prophecy and appointment of the Lord (1 Nephi 2:22), it is safe to assume that Jacob considered his instructions as commandments from the Lord. These commandments are important aids to us today in understanding the role of the Book of Mormon in our lives and in determining what emphasis we should place upon our study of it.

Nephi commanded that Jacob “write upon these plates a few of the things which [he] considered to be most precious; that [he] should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi” (Jacob 1:2). This light touch of history is not to be interpreted as a declaration that history is unimportant. The history of Nephi’s people was to be kept by other writers upon another set of plates, while Jacob and his posterity were commanded to keep the more precious

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happenings, or what may be termed the spiritual history of the people, upon the small plates (Jacob 1:3; compare 3:13).

Jacob's people had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy from which to select the contents of the Book of Mormon. Because of "faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest" to Jacob and others those things that were to happen to their people (Jacob 1:5). They "knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come" (Jacob 1:6) and could select those revelations and prophecies which would be most applicable in the day that the Book of Mormon would come forth. Jacob wrote that although it was difficult to engrave upon the plates, he knew his writings would be permanent and he was concerned for future generations (Jacob 4:1-2).

For example, Jacob was concerned that we not fall because of pride, as he knew his brethren would (see Jacob's sermon on pride in Jacob 2:12-22). In 1831, when the Lord commanded the Church to move to Ohio, he warned them to "beware of pride, lest [they] become as the Nephites of old" (D&C 38:39). The Prophet Joseph Smith cautioned the Twelve in his day to beware of pride and gave them this perplexing question: "Why will not man learn wisdom by precept at this late age of the world, when we have such a cloud of witnesses and examples before us, and not be obliged to learn by sad experience everything we know" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 155; hereafter *TPJS*). As believers in the Book of Mormon, we should learn with joy from Jacob's admonitions and not from the sorrow of our own experiences.

Jacob was concerned that the posterity of his people recognize the hand of the Lord in bringing Lehi and Ishmael and their families, along with Zoram, out of the Land of Jerusalem. He wanted those in the last days to "receive [the record of their fathers] with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents" (Jacob 4:1-3). While some may interpret the phrase, "their first parents," as a reference to Adam

and Eve, the context strongly suggests that Jacob was referring to Lehi and Ishmael and their families who migrated to America.

Jacob was also concerned that the descendants of Lehi and Ishmael not be weighed down with sorrow over being a nation of fallen people, but would rather that they recognize the great blessings extended to them in the latter days. He also seemed concerned that they not react with contempt as descendants of the rebellious Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael. This concern may have been fostered by his knowledge that all of the remnants of Lehi and his party would be designated as Lamanites today, and that while even in his day those who sought to destroy the people of Nephi were called Lamanites (Jacob 1:13-14), he did not want the designation to carry a negative connotation in the last days. He obviously knew, as did Alma, that all those who remained after the downfall of the Nephite nation would be numbered among the Lamanites (Alma 45:13-14). As the Lord has confirmed by revelation, there are descendants of all the original families of Lehi's party among those called Lamanites today (D&C 3:16-18). This revelation confirms the teaching that a major purpose for preserving the plates was to make known to all these people the fact that the promises of the Lord would be fulfilled (v 19).

Thus, from Nephi's commandment to touch only lightly upon the history of the people, we learn that the Book of Mormon is not a history book. Neither is it a geography text or an archaeological guide book. It is a compilation of "preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying" as Nephi had commanded Jacob to engrave upon the plates (Jacob 1:4). Furthermore, it is "the heads," or the most significant, of these three categories.

This compilation was "for Christ's sake, and for the sake of [Jacob's] people" (Jacob 1:4). The work of Christ is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Harkening to the messages of the Book of Mormon will enable mankind to partake of that immortality and eternal life.

Jacob and his associates “labored diligently among [their] people, [to] persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest” (Jacob 1:7). Through his writings, Jacob desired to “persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:8). An analysis of the Book of Mormon text illustrates how effectively Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and the engravers of the book of Omni fulfilled the Lord’s commandment to include sacred preaching, great revelations, and prophesyings (Jacob 1:4).

The Writings of Nephi

Jacob explained that the people “loved Nephi exceedingly . . . having labored in all his days for their welfare,” and being desirous “to retain in remembrance his name,” they called those who reigned in his stead “second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth” (Jacob 1:10-11). It can be safely assumed that a man of such character would not ask someone to do something that he had not already done himself. To better understand Jacob and the other writers in this section of the Book of Mormon, it is important to see that Nephi also followed this pattern of emphasizing sacred preaching, great revelations, and prophesying.

1 Nephi

The book of 1 Nephi is slightly more than 52 pages long and contains 22 chapters broken into 618 verses. Over 40 of the 52 pages and 400 of the 618 verses fit into the category of sacred preaching, great revelations, and prophesying. The sacred preaching includes Nephi’s explanation to his brethren concerning the plates of brass, and his counsel that they not return to live in Jerusalem. It includes Lehi’s vision, Nephi’s prophetic testimony of his ability to build a ship, and his explanation of Isaiah’s writings. It also includes Lehi’s teachings on the Messiah, the

prophet who would baptize the Messiah (John the Baptist), and an explanation of the symbolism equating Israel with the house of Israel.

Five of Lehi's visions and dreams are either recorded or referred to in 1 Nephi. In these dreams and visions, Lehi saw God and Christ and the various categories of people and their reactions to the word of God. He also received commandments to leave Jerusalem and, later, to send his sons back for the plates of brass. Nephi also saw four visions. These include the same one his father had seen of the four categories of people, as well as visions of Jerusalem and other cities, his seed's future, and the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles. This last vision was not completely recorded because parts of it were reserved for the record of John the Revelator. Nephi also received revelation to slay Laban and to build a ship. The entire group was given revelation through the Liahona to guide them in the wilderness. These are certainly great revelations, and consistent with other great revelations recorded in scripture.

Five prophecies were also recorded in 1 Nephi. First the Lord prophesied to Nephi that Laman and Lemuel would rebel and that Nephi would become their ruler and teacher (1 Nephi 2:19-24). An angel later reminded Laman and Lemuel of this prophecy and further prophesied that they would go to Jerusalem and that the Lord would deliver Laban into their hands (1 Nephi 3:29). In chapter 5, Lehi prophesied that the plates of brass would not "be dimmed anymore by time," and that they would go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (1 Nephi 5:18-19). In 1 Nephi chapter 10, verses 17 through 22, Nephi seems to have been prophesying concerning the power of the Holy Ghost, though this could also be classified as great preaching. And in chapter 19, Nephi intersperses the Messianic prophecy of an angel with similar prophecies from many prophets (1 Nephi 19:10-17).

1 Nephi Preaching Which Is Sacred

3:15-20; 4:1-3	Nephi to his brethren regarding the plates
5:4-5, 8	Lehi to Sariah
7:8-15	Nephi to his brethren regarding returning to Jerusalem
10:2-14	Lehi concerning the Messiah, the prophet who should baptize him, and the olive tree
15:10-16:3	Nephi to Laman and Lemuel on their father's vision
17:23-51	Nephi to Laman and Lemuel concerning his ability to build a ship
19:19-21:26	Nephi cites Isaiah to all the house of Israel
22:2-31	Nephi explains Isaiah and cites other prophets to his brethren

1 Nephi Revelation Which Is Great

1:6-14	Lehi sees God, etc.
2:1-2	Lehi commanded to leave Jerusalem
3:2-4	Lehi commanded to send his sons for the plates of brass
4:10-17	The Spirit directs Nephi to slay Laban
8:2-33	Lehi's vision of the tree of life
11	Nephi's vision of Jerusalem and other cities
12	Nephi's vision of the land of promise
13-14	Nephi's vision of the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles
16:10, 16, 25-30; 18:12, 21-22	The directions through the round ball
17:7-10, 12-14	The Lord to Nephi on building a ship

1 Nephi Prophesying

2:19-24	The Lord concerning Laman and Lemuel
3:29	An angel to Laman and Lemuel
5:18-19	Lehi regarding the plates of brass
10:17-22	Nephi concerning the power of the Holy Ghost
19:10-17	An angel and the prophets on the Messiah

2 Nephi

The book of 2 Nephi is even more spiritually oriented than is 1 Nephi. Only one of its 64 pages and 29 of its 749 verses are historical. There are five incidents of preaching, eight great revelations, and five sections of prophesying. The sacred preaching includes Lehi to his sons in chapter 1 (vv 1-5, 12-27); Nephi to the latter-day reader as he bears his soul upon the plates in chapter 4 (vv 15-25); Jacob's sermon, or sermons, to the people of Nephi in chapters 6 through 10; the written introduction to the writings of Isaiah in chapter 11; and finally, Nephi's words on the doctrine of Christ in chapters 31-33. The eight revelations are the blessings that Lehi gave to Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 1:28-29), Zoram (2 Nephi 1:30-32), Jacob (2 Nephi 2), Joseph (2 Nephi 3), the sons and daughters of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3-7), the sons and daughters of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8-9), the sons of Ishmael (2 Nephi 4:10), and Sam (2 Nephi 4:11). The five prophecies include Lehi concerning the land of promise (2 Nephi 1:6-12), Joseph of Egypt concerning his posterity (2 Nephi 3:5-21), Lehi to his son Joseph (2 Nephi 3:22-25), Nephi concerning the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:21-25), and Nephi interpreting Isaiah and prophesying of the last days (2 Nephi 25-30).

2 Nephi Preaching Which Is Sacred

1:1-5, 12b-27	Lehi to his sons
4:15-25	Nephi bares his soul
6-10	Jacob to the people
11	Nephi introduces Isaiah
31-33	Nephi speaks concerning the doctrine of Christ

2 Nephi Revelation Which Is Great

1:28-4:11	The patriarch Lehi 's blessings to his posterity and Zoram:
1:28-29	To Laman and Lemuel
1:30-32	To Zoram
2	To Jacob
3	To Joseph
4:3-7	To the sons and daughters of Laman
4:8-9	To the sons and daughters of Lemuel
4:10	To the sons of Ishmael
4:11	To Sam
12-24	Nephi quotes Isaiah (includes many prophecies)

2 Nephi Prophesying

1:6-12a	Lehi concerning the land of promise
3:5-21	Joseph of Egypt concerning his seed
3:23-25	Lehi to his son Joseph
5:21-25	Nephi concerning the Lamanites
25-30	Nephi interprets Isaiah and prophesies of the last days (includes more of Isaiah)

The Writings of Jacob

Jacob and Enos together covered 124 years of Nephite history, from the 56th year through the 179th year after Lehi left Jerusalem (544-420 BC). Exactly how long each of the two prophets was responsible for keeping the records is not stated. Estimating that Jacob was the record keeper for 50 to 75 years, we only find two specific historical incidents in his account. The first incident took place during the reign of the second king (Jacob 1:15), which was probably Nephi's successor (see Jacob 2:1). The second incident, concerning Sherem the anti-Christ, happened after some years had passed away (Jacob 7:1). The rest of Jacob's writings are general observations and are addressed to the future reader.

Using present-day chapters and verses, the breakdown of the text is as follows. The first eight verses of the book of Jacob are Nephi's instructions concerning the keeping of the plates (Jacob 1:1-8). These verses would come under the heading of preaching that is sacred. The next four verses record the appointment of Nephi's successor as king, the great love and respect the people had for Nephi, and Nephi's death (Jacob 1:9-12). Jacob then records the segregation of the people into Nephites and Lamanites and explains their differentiating characteristics (Jacob 1:13-14). Of the first 14 verses, eight could be considered historical, but they are really just the changing of the political and ecclesiastical guard.

The next section is part of Jacob's great sermon, given at the temple, on pride, riches, and immorality (Jacob 1:17). This section includes 54 verses (1:15-3:14), 46 of which constitute the recorded portion of the sermon (3:12 is a summation of the unrecorded portion of the sermon). The other seven verses tell us that Jacob was commissioned by the Lord to give the sermon and that he and his brother Joseph had been given the priesthood (1:15-19). They also give a couple of comments about the plates (3:13-14). This sermon is one of the great examples of "preaching which is sacred."

Chapters 4 through 6 are addressed to Jacob's brethren in the last days. The fourth chapter explains why they have written—to persuade their latter-day brethren to believe in Christ and follow his teachings. Jacob then records from the plates of brass the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 5). This excerpt is Zenos' allegory of the tame and wild olive trees, an outline of the prophetic destiny of the house of Israel. According to chapter 4, Jacob quoted this allegory to show that the stone rejected by the builders (Christ) would yet become "the head of the corner" (vv 15-18). Chapter 6 is Jacob's testimony of the allegory and his plea to his brethren to accept it and all the other testimonies concerning Christ. Except for the first three verses of chapter 4, all of chapters 4 through 6 could be classified as prophesying, either Jacob to his latter-day brethren (Jacob 4, 6) or Zenos to the whole world. Zenos' allegory of the tame and wild olive trees could be considered as great revelation. No history of the Nephites or Lamanites appears in this section of the book of Jacob.

The second historical incident recorded by Jacob takes place in chapter seven. It is the account of Sherem the anti-Christ among the people of Nephi. The first part (vv 1-5) introduces and describes Sherem. The last part relates the outcome of Sherem's visit (vv 20-23) together with a couple of verses giving a general description of the times that followed (vv 24-25). The verses in between are an account of the conversations between Jacob and Sherem and would be considered prophecy. This is certainly only a light touch of history.

The last two verses written by Jacob are long and melancholy. They are a lamentation, and technically not historical, except for the fact that Jacob has become old and turns the record over to his son Enos. Of the nearly 19 pages of the present text of the book of Jacob, only about ten percent are historical, one and one-half of those pages, or about 23 of the 203 verses. Jacob's record, a great doctrinal contribution, has ended. He recorded preaching that was sacred, a great revelation, and prophesying.

The Writings of Enos

The history in the estimated 50 to 75 years covered by Enos is certainly only lightly touched upon (Jacob 1:2). The book covers only one specific incident in his life, his conversion. This event is related in the first 18 of Enos' 27 verses. The other nine verses give a general description of the people at this time (vv 19-24), and a concluding testimony of Enos' life as a servant of Christ (vv 25-27). While the six verses describing the people are historical, they are certainly brief, covering the space of a lifetime in about three-quarters of a page. Enos' conversion would qualify as a great revelation, with the voice of the Lord coming to his mind to tell him that his sins were forgiven. He also appears to have received a revelation that his calling and election had been made sure (v 27). In his concluding verses, Enos bears witness of his preaching and prophesying but does not enumerate. Although his book is short, he followed Nephi's commandments concerning what to include on the small plates.

The Writings of Jarom

Jarom's record covers 59 years. He divides his comments on these years into two periods: one from the 180th year, when he began to keep the record, through the 200th year (vv 1-4); and the other from the 201st year until he turned the record over to his son Omni 38 years later (vv 5-15). Concerning the first time period, a span of 21 years, Jarom gives a very general description of the contrast between the wicked and the righteous among his people (vv 3-4). He also gives a couple of introductory verses explaining why he is writing so little on the plates, stating that the plan of salvation has already been given. Jarom bears witness that he has prophesied and that he, and many others, received revelation and communed with the Holy Spirit (vv 2, 4).

Jarom only gives a very general description of the second time period (398-361 BC). Though he does include more about the people's lives and accomplishments (vv 5, 8), he does not

include any specific incidents in the history. He relates that the Nephites were fairly righteous, due to the work of the prophets, and were therefore prospered in many ways, particularly against the Lamanites who often came against them. Jarom bears witness of the prophets, persuading the people to believe in Christ. His book is brief but bears testimony of the principles commanded by Nephi; preaching, revelation, and prophesying.

The Book of Omni

Five different authors wrote on the plates of Omni, covering about two hundred years.¹ Of these five writers, only Amaleki relates any historical detail. Omni kept the record for 44 years, recording only that they had seasons of war and seasons of peace. Amaron kept the record for at least 38 years, witnessing that the more wicked Nephites were destroyed while the righteous were spared, showing that the people prospered when they kept the commandments. In the one verse Chemish recorded he did not state how long he kept the record, but since he was a brother of Amaron rather than a descendant, it was probably less time than the others. Abinadom wrote only two verses, stating that there had been wars with the Lamanites and an absence of revelation and prophecy. Perhaps this is the reason these four recorded so little. There were no sacred preachings, no great revelations, and no prophesyings to write upon the plates, and Nephi had commanded that nothing else be written.

Amaleki wrote of the departure of the righteous Nephites from the land of Nephi under the leadership of Mosiah. During their travels, Mosiah and his party discovered the people of Zarahemla who had been led out of Jerusalem at the time it was destroyed by Babylon (about 589 BC). The departure of the

¹ Two hundred thirty-seven years are covered from the end of the book of Jarom (v 13) to the appointment of Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, who replaced his father as king (Mosiah 6:4). The first two writers, Omni and Amaron, covered 82 years, leaving 155 years for Chemish, Abinadom, Amaleki, and Mormon's abridgment of king Benjamin's life. Their individual time periods and the time period of the first six chapters of Mosiah are not recorded. The estimate of 200 years is based on this limited knowledge.

righteous Nephites from the land of Nephi, and that of Lehi from Jerusalem, are two examples of the principle taught by Nephi, that the Lord leads the righteous out of wicked nations and into promised lands (1 Nephi 17:38). The exodus of the people of Mosiah also fulfilled a prophecy made earlier by Jacob, that unless the Nephites would repent, the Lord would lead the righteous out from among them (Jacob 3:4).

In addition to these events, Amaleki also records that the people of Zarahemla had discovered Coriantumr, a survivor of the Jaredites. Thus the Nephite record links together the three migrations from the eastern hemisphere to the promised land of America. He wrote of king Benjamin's succession as ruler of the people of Zarahemla after the death of his father Mosiah, and of a certain number of people who sought to return to the land of Nephi. Many in this group were killed en route due to internal contention, their survivors returning to Zarahemla. A considerable number of people left later on a similar mission and had not been heard from before Amaleki completed his record. It seems that Amaleki quit recording only because he ran out of space. His contribution was short but significant.

In summary, Amaron preaches to us concerning the fulfillment of the Lord's promises (Omni 1:6-7); Amaleki exhorts us to come unto Christ and partake of his salvation (Omni 1:25-26) and speaks of the revelation received by king Mosiah which instructed him to lead his people to Zarahemla. The book of Omni fits the pattern set by Nephi.

The Words of Mormon

A careful reading of verses five through ten of the Words of Mormon discloses that Mormon wrote this brief insert upon the small plates of Nephi. Although Amaleki said that the plates were full (Omni 1:30), he apparently left enough space for Mormon to record a few words. Perhaps Amaleki had been instructed to do so. Mormon wrote many hundreds of years after the coming of Christ (WofM 1:2).

The first nine verses of the Words of Mormon explain how Mormon came to include the small plates in his abridgement of the Nephite record. He records that he was pleased with their many “prophecies of the coming of Christ” and that the Spirit whispered to him that he should include them “for a wise purpose” unto the Lord (WofM 1:4, 7). The last nine verses explain that after receiving the plates from Amaleki, king Benjamin defeated the Lamanites and, with the help of the prophets, established peace by putting down false Christs, false prophets, false preachers, and false teachers. Although these verses are largely historical, the book is divided about equally among history, revelation, and preaching. Mormon, in this brief space, testifies that he received a revelation to include the plates, and bears witness of the preaching of king Benjamin and the other prophets that helped establish peace.

Preaching Which Is Sacred

Jacob	1:2-8	Nephi’s instructions to Jacob concerning the plates
	2:1-3:12	Jacob’s sermon in the temple
Enos	1:26	Enos’ life
Jarom	1:2-11	Jarom teaches us of his people
Omni	1:6-7	Omni teaches us of his people
	1:25-26	Amaleki teaches us of Christ
WofM	1:17-18	King Benjamin and the prophets establish peace

Revelation Which Is Great

Enos	1:1-18	The conversion of Enos
Omni	1:12-22	Mosiah leads his people to Zarahemla
WofM	1:3-8	Mormon includes the small plates of Nephi

Prophesying

Jacob	4:4-6:13	Jacob prophesies of Christ and quotes Zenos' prophetic allegory
Jacob	7:3-19	Jacob debates Sherem
Enos	1:26-27	Enos' life

Conclusion

In fewer than 28 pages, the record from the book of Jacob to the book of Mosiah covers about 421 of the total 1021 years covered by the entire Nephite record. This is about 41 percent of the entire time period written on less than six percent of the pages. Seventy-five percent of these pages contain “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying” (Jacob 1:4). It is definitely a light touch of history (Jacob 1:2). The books that precede and follow this section of the Book of Mormon follow a similar pattern.

Since this was the pattern set for writing on the Nephite record, should it not also be our pattern for studying, teaching, and applying its precepts to our lives, and to the lives of those whom we teach? Should we not learn and teach what the Book of Mormon itself teaches concerning the sacred preaching, the great revelations, and the prophecies rather than what others have said about its contents, literary styles, or external evidences? When I first began teaching the Book of Mormon about 30 years ago, I taught much about the external evidences and what others had said about it. Although I still appreciate and look at these things today, I now concentrate on the internal message of the book, and yearn for more time to analyze and synthesize these messages for myself and my students. This is what I believe Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Moroni, and the Lord intended for us to do. The Lord has blessed us by restoring this record in these latter days. Two and one-half years after the Book of Mormon had been published, the Lord said he was displeased with the Saints because they were not using it properly (D&C 84:54-58). Today

he has raised up another prophet to emphasize the importance of the Book of Mormon in bringing us out of spiritual bondage (Benson 78). Where much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). May we follow the pattern set by Nephi, and followed by other writers and abridgers of the Book of Mormon, and learn with joy now instead of with sorrow at a later day.

As readers and teachers of the Book of Mormon, we should analyze each account to try to determine what the Lord is telling us through his inspired prophets. We can do this best by understanding the historical setting that produced the sacred preaching, the great revelation, or the prophecy. Then we should isolate the doctrinal message or precept and evaluate our own lives in accordance with it. We will then be following Nephi's admonition to "liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23). A testimony of the importance of the preachings, revelations, and prophesyings found in the Book of Mormon is available to all those who will follow the pattern set by Nephi and continued by the other abridgers. Finally, in the words of king Benjamin, "if [we] believe all these things [we must] see that [we] do them" (Mosiah 4:10).

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