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Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants

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Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants 15

John S. Tanner

The Small Plates as Literature

This volume completes a four-volume study of the small plates. Taken together, these volumes attest to the doctrinal richness of Nephi's record. What may be less apparent is their literary diversity. The small plates range from the sublime (eg, Nephi's vision of Christ's birth) to the mundane (eg, parts of the book of Omni). They develop the Book of Mormon's most elaborate symbols (the vision of the tree of life and the allegory of the vineyard), and recount its grandest story—an epic of exodus and resettlement like that of Moses. The small plates also provide an intimate glimpse into a family in conflict, comparable to stories about the Patriarchs in Genesis. Moreover, the plates assemble all this in a truly impressive array of genres: vision, narrative, psalm, scriptural exegesis, allegory, sermon, prophecy, father's blessing, spiritual autobiography, and more. No wonder that, of the handful of Book of Mormon literary studies to date, so many are drawn from the small plates (see bibliography). To echo Dryden's comment on Chaucer: "Here is God's plenty" (497)! In this essay, I shall sample portions of this plenty.

My focus will be the record left by Jacob and his descendants, or what may be called the "Jacobite" component of the small plates.

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I shall first review the general nature of the Jacobite text, and then examine in more detail Jacob himself as a writer. We do not, as a church, sufficiently appreciate the literary qualities of Jacob and his descendants—nor of scriptural authors generally. Our inattention to scripture as literature stems partly from our great attention to scripture as doctrine. Emphasizing scripture's universal, timeless doctrines—crucially important in their own right —we tend to forget how our favorite verses relate to a particular speaker in a specific historical and rhetorical situation. For example, I recently heard a religion professor refer to Nephi's teaching that "to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29). This quotation, however, is not Nephi's but Jacob's; though recorded in 2 Nephi, it derives from Jacob's magnificent two-day sermon. My colleague remembered the doctrine but forgot both the author and his rhetorical situation. Therefore, a literary reading of scripture such as mine below is largely an effort to restore authors to their authorship.

In the case of the Book of Mormon, this effort is complicated by the double obstacles that (1) the text exists only in translation, often a translation of a redaction, which leaves the reader several removes from the speaker's original words; and (2) God is twice its co-author, inspiring its ancient authors as well as its modern translator. These obstacles should induce caution, particularly about inferences drawn from stylistic evidence. Yet neither is so formidable as to rule out literary analysis altogether, especially of the small plates.

Of all Book of Mormon texts, translation is least a problem for the small plates. These plates invite stylistic analysis because they constitute the only complete source-text included intact, presumably without an editor's transcription or redaction; the only place where Joseph likely found someone's "handwriting" other than that of Mormon or Moroni.

From the first words of 1 Nephi ("I, Nephi") to the last sentence of the Book of Omni ("And I make an end of my speaking"), we are dealing with a collection of first-person documents. Naturally these writers seem more individuated than

those elsewhere, even in translation. This is particularly evident from Jacob through Omni, after Nephi's dominant voice has ceased. The Jacobite record displays all the complex variety one expects of a text from many hands.

By corollary, the juncture between Omni and Words of Mormon evinces precisely the disjointedness one would expect of a bridge between an unedited primary text and a heavily condensed narrative history. Despite Mormon's best efforts to smooth the transition, readers are inevitably confused at this juncture. And well they might be. At this point every major record (the small plates, Mormon's abridgment of the large plates, the plates of brass, and the 24 plates), and every major civilization (the Nephites, Mulekites, and Jaredites), and two different time frames (Mosiah's and Mormon's) are fitted snugly together. Though this transition is usually taught perfunctorily, I regard it as a powerful textual witness that we are dealing with the genuine article. Its textual complexity is of a piece with the small plates' stylistic diversity. Both attest that the small plates are a different sort of document from Mormon's redaction; they testify that the small plates are a first-person document.

As a literary critic, I am naturally drawn to first-person documents like the small plates. I savor truths bred in the bone, supposing that nuances of style reveal the man (see Thomas 156), and I listen for echoes of a human voice in every sort of discourse, however ostensibly impersonal—even in prophetic speeches. I do not believe that God's co-authorship normally eradicates an individual's voice, since the Lord speaks through his servants "in their weakness, after the manner of their language" (D&C 1:24). Hence, we can distinguish the inspired discourse of Jeremiah from Hosea's, Matthew's from Mark's, Peter's from Paul's, and one General Authority's from another's. Early in my marriage, my wife used to read conference talks aloud while I tried to guess, from their style and themes alone, who had given them. Below, I try to do something similar with Book of Mormon writers, such as Nephi and Jacob, trying to catch glimpses of the men behind the messages. This does not discredit divine inspiration; rather,

it corroborates it, verifying that the text contains the writing of many different prophets. Close attention to a prophet's words can be—and I mean it to be—an expression of love for those through whom the Lord speaks.

My surmises about Jacobite authors may be quite wrong, of course, just as my surmises about the author of a conference address were sometimes mistaken. But my analysis neither pretends nor aspires to the stature of scientific proof. I come without computer word-prints—a complete concordance is my only tool (I have relied on concordances by Reynolds and Shapiro). I come, rather, with conjectures about the timely, human contexts of timeless, divine utterances, and with confidence that more attention to the human context of the Book of Mormon can greatly enrich our appreciation of its content.

For example, consider the relation between text and context in Nephi's psalm. Nephi's lament occurs just after he records the death of his father and the renewed hatred of his brothers. Of what significance is this for the psalm that follows? Much, I suspect. Think of what Lehi's death meant to Nephi. Father Lehi had held the family together, and that only barely. He and Nephi had shared the same vision, literally and figuratively. Nephi lost a friend as well as a father and prophet in Lehi. He was Nephi's confidant, advisor, and shield against fratricide. Before Lehi's death, Nephi foresaw in revelation the tragic division between Lamanite and Nephite that would occur (1 Nephi 12:22-23). When Lehi died, Nephi must have known that the long-forestalled crisis was now inevitable—and in the New World there were no larger institutions nor higher authorities to protect Nephi and his family from his brothers' barbarism. With no father to turn to but the Father, Nephi cries to him for strength, so lonely is his new burden of leadership, so dangerous his newly empowered enemies, and so strong the old temptation to be "angry because of [his] enemy" (2 Nephi 4:27)—meaning, certainly, his brothers. I approach his psalm, then, by reading it in the immediate human situation the text provides: "And it came to pass that he [Lehi]

died, and was buried. And . . . Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me . . ." (2 Nephi 4:12-13).[1]

The Nature of the Jacobite Record

Now let us turn to the Jacobite portion of the small plates. Let us first review the nature of the Jacobite text as a whole—what literary critics would call its "genre"—in order to better interpret it doctrinally, historically, and in every other way. The record changed in three ways because it passed into Jacob's hands. First, by this act the small plates moved permanently from the line of Nephi to the house of Jacob, eventually to dwindle into little more than a chronicle of Jacob's genealogy. Recognizing the text as family chronicle is critical. Many of its distinctive features can be explained by the fact that its authors wrote because they were related to Jacob, not because they were otherwise the most qualified to write. Eventually, Jacobite authors came to see their function as primarily recorders of genealogies.

Second, with Jacob the plates passed out of the royal line (Jacob 1:9).[2] Jacobite authors were not kings; nor, from all we can tell, were they even political or military leaders. This, too, has major consequences for the nature of the record they left. After Nephi, never again did the authors of the small plates also occupy the central position in the government. Always deliberately non-secular anyway (see 1 Nephi 19:1-6; Jacob 1:2), the small plates were inscribed increasingly from the margins of the community's political life (eg, Enos 1:24).

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[1] My emphasis upon the timely, emotional context of the psalm differs somewhat from Steven Sondrup's on the timeless, formal content of the lyric.

[2] According to Daniel H. Ludlow some unnamed "Book of Mormon scholars have surmised that Nephi's [political] successor was probably Jacob" (156). I see no evidence for this conjecture and much for the opposite conclusion—especially Jacob 1:9 and 15, in which Jacob refers to Nephi's royal successor in the third person. If Jacob were not king, then his temple sermon assumes political implications: it was likely directed specifically against the political-social elite, who would be most likely to take concubines like David and Solomon, and not simply to the people at large.

Last, Jacobite authors eventually passed out of the prophetic line as well. Only Jacob himself appears to have exercised dominant priestly authority, equivalent to that of presiding high priest (Jacob 1:17-19). His son Enos and grandson Jarom each characterizes his position as, at most, but one among many prophets (Enos 1:19, 22; Jarom 1:4). Jarom may not have engaged in a public ministry at all. For, though he refers to "my prophesying" and "my revelations," Jarom speaks pointedly in the third person of "the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers [who] labor diligently, exhorting . . . the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses" (1:11). Similarly, he writes "our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and *they* taught the people the ways of the Lord" (1:7; emphasis added). This phrasing sounds like that of a sympathetic bystander, one outside the loop of government power and cultic responsibility as well.

By contrast, Jarom refers to Nephite warfare and trade in the first person: "Wherefore, *we* withstood the Lamanites. . . . And *we* . . . became exceeding rich in gold, . . . in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war" (1:7-8; emphasis added). This shift from prophecy to weapons of war foreshadows things to come for the descendants of Jacob. Jarom's son Omni fights for the Nephites, but there is no evidence that he does so as a major military leader, nor that he has any prophetic calling. Far from it: he confesses that he is a "wicked man" (1:2). So is it with the other authors of Omni: Abinadom explicitly acknowledges he "knows of no revelation save that which has been written"; Amaleki says that the people "were led by many preachings and prophesyings"—the impersonal, passive construction again implying that he did not himself act as one of the prophets or preachers (1:11-13).

Understanding these three characteristics of the Jacobite record is crucial in drawing valid inferences from it. For example, the lack of either religious or regal stature among later Jacobite writers does not necessarily mean that the entire Nephite civilization,

however wicked (Omni 1:5-7), had fallen into apostasy (see Ludlow 168). Indeed, Jacobite authors quietly contradict this impression, hinting rather that Nephite civilization may have benefited from continuous prophetic leadership: Enos speaks of "exceeding many" unnamed prophets (1:22); Jarom, of men "who have many revelations, . . . mighty men in faith of the Lord" (Jarom 1:4, 7); Amaron, of the Lord's sparing the righteous, proving there was a righteous remnant among the Nephites (Omni 1:7); and Amaleki, of "many preachings and prophesyings" (Omni 1:13). One wonders what sacred experiences the non-Jacobite kings and prophets had, and if these were recorded on Mormon's abridgement of the large plates.

Thus, the Jacobite record does not confirm that Nephite society at large became utterly benighted, but only that Jacob's posterity fell from prominence and, possibly, also from grace. As a family chronicle, the record's spiritual quality varies with the spirituality of each family member; hence, this is the only place I know where a self-professed "wicked man," Omni, writes scripture in a book which, ironically, bears his name.[3] Late Jacobite writers were ordinary men who happened to belong to an extraordinary lineage. Thus, Jacob's posterity became scriptural authors because the plates became genealogy.

The fate of the small plates may have run contrary to Nephi's original expectation. He initially anticipated that the plates "should be handed down from one generation to another, or from one prophet to another, until further commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 19:4). When Nephi entrusted the plates to Jacob, he seems to have followed the second principle of succession—that is, prophet to prophet (though, being so much younger than Nephi, Jacob might also qualify as a next generation kinsman). Still, Nephi gave this record not to a son but to his brother, a prophet.

[3] The book's title is something of a misnomer. If anything, it should be called the book of Amaleki since he composed the last 19 verses, while the four authors preceding him wrote but 11.

At that point, however, Nephi seems to clarify how the custodianship of the plates was to be determined. He instructed Jacob to keep the plates in the family, handing them down to his seed "from generation to generation" (Jacob 1:3). Hence, Jacob and his posterity down to Amaleki gave the plates not to the preeminent prophet but to a close male relative (usually a son) in the next generation. Filial ties became the main qualification of ownership (and hence authorship) until the plates, by then full (Omni 1:30), were finally entrusted to someone outside the family—Benjamin, a prophet-king, the first such figure to have the plates since Nephi. In the interim, Jacobite authors came to regard their purpose as genealogical. Beginning with Jarom, they inscribed the record "that our genealogy may be kept" (Jarom 1:1; compare Omni 1:1), a purpose never mentioned by Nephi or Jacob.

Yet I do not disparage their dogged resolve to discharge their duty—though their own lives must have seemed pale and even paltry beside those of the heroic first generation. Their authorship could be understood with more sympathy than it is usually afforded. I note that, however embarrassing, each man obediently fulfilled his charge, enrolling his name at the end of the record.[4] I note also that many of Jacob's less distinguished descendants (most conspicuously Omni and Abinadom) are refreshingly frank about their felt weaknesses. Most of us could learn from their humility and unblinking self-honesty. I note further that none of these authors treats the sacred record cynically —not even the avowedly "wicked" Omni. All, except perhaps Chemish, appear to sense the plates' power. The very inadequacy that they express suggests that Jacob's descendants had both read the record and been moved by its power. So it is not entirely fair to dismiss these men as apostate; they are certainly not unregenerate. Their commitment to duty, their humility, their honesty, and their reverence for the sacred—all intimate that Jacob's

[4] See John W. Welch's essay on how carefully these writers fulfilled the specific terms of their fathers' charge.

legacy was not entirely dissipated in his posterity. His righteous blood still flowed in their veins, his sensitivity still circulated in their souls.

Jacob's Lexicon

Now let us look at Jacob himself. Even without consulting a concordance, one senses that Jacob's style sets him apart from Nephi. Jacob simply sounds different: he employs a more intimate lexicon and assumes a more diffident posture toward his audience. Nephi "delights," even "glories" in plainness (2 Nephi 31:3; 33:6); he frankly rebukes and frankly forgives his brothers (see 1 Nephi 7:21). Jacob, by contrast, is pained to use "much boldness of speech" in addressing his brethren, especially in the presence of women and children "whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God" (Jacob 2:7). (His solicitude for the women reminds us that, as a boy aboard ship, he had been grieved by the afflictions of his mother [1 Nephi 18:19].) He prefaces his temple discourse by admitting that he feels "weighed down with much . . . anxiety for the welfare of your souls":

> Yea, it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker. . . . Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained . . . to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded . . . and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds (Jacob 2:3, 6, 9).

This is vintage Jacob: intimate, vivid, vulnerable. A concordance verifies that words about feelings, like "anxiety," "grieve," "tender," occur with disproportionate frequency in his writings (Conkling 3-4).[5] For example, half the book's citations

[5] Admittedly, some of these terms occur in Zenos' allegory. As I argue below, however, the emotional content of the allegory is possibly a quality that attracted Jacob to it. Consequently, we may cautiously note the diction of Jacob 5 in a stylistic study of Jacob. Chris Conkling, a college friend, provided a helpful source of word-count tabulation in his unpublished essay on Jacob.

of "anxiety" occur in the book of Jacob, and over two-thirds of the references to "grieve," "tender," and "shame" (or their derivatives) appear in Jacob's writings. He is the only person to use "delicate," "contempt," and "lonesome." Likewise, only Jacob uses "wound" to refer to emotional, not physical, injuries, as in the rest of the Book of Mormon. Similarly, he uses "pierce" or its variants frequently (four of the ten instances) and exclusively in a spiritual sense. Such lexical evidence suggests an author who lives close to his emotions.

Like many sensitive people, Jacob does not preach harsh messages easily. Many times he openly shares his anxiety with his audience, as in his preface to the temple discourse above. He may also betray it covertly in the structure of this sermon against sexual immorality, which disposes first of the relatively easy issue of pride and then, reluctantly, moves to the "grosser crime" of whoredoms (Jacob 2:22-23). This structure suggests a delaying strategy reminiscent of the reluctant prophet motif illustrated by Enoch, Moses, and Jonah.[6]

When Jacob does speak, however, he does so vividly. Notice the concrete diction in the phrase: "instead of *feasting* upon the pleasing word of God [they] have *daggers* placed to *pierce* their souls and wound their delicate minds"; or in his statement: "the *sobbings* of their hearts ascend up to God. . . . Many hearts *died, pierced* with *deep wounds*" (2:9, 35; emphasis added). Strong words for strong feelings: this is the hallmark of Jacob's style, something he may have learned from the "tender" words of his "trembling" father (see 1 Nephi 8:37; 2 Nephi 1:14) and subsequently passed on to his son Enos. Enos' account of his "wrestle" and "hunger" which led to his guilt being "swept"

[6] Another way of viewing this structure intrigues me. In most polygamous cultures, concubines are status symbols, signs of wealth. Thus polygamy is intrinsically linked to acquisitiveness. Jacob's denunciations of his brethren for being "lifted up in the pride of your hearts . . . and persecut[ing] your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they" may be related to their sinful desire to acquire "many wives and concubines" as root to branch. That is, the Nephite experiment with polygamy is not simply an expression of lasciviousness but an extension of the class differentiation that Jacob denounces so roundly in the first part of his sermon.

away, shows that his father's words had "sunk deep" into the son's style as well as soul (Enos 1:2-4, 6). Like his father, Enos finds concrete, economical language for abstract spiritual experience.

Jacob's emotive language cannot be attributed merely to the sensitive subject matter of the temple discourse, for Jacob rings off silver phrases in all his writing, including his speech in 2 Nephi, separated from the book of Jacob by many chapters and many years. Nevertheless, in both sermons, Jacob consistently speaks of ridding his garments of the people's blood and of the Lord's "all-searching eye" (2 Nephi 9:44; Jacob 1:19; 2:2, 10). Both sermons call upon the people to "awake" lest they become "angels of the devil" (2 Nephi 9:9, 47; Jacob 3:11). In the same verse, Jacob uses the term "reality," closely related to a phrase in Jacob 4, "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13)—the only such uses of either term in the entire Book of Mormon. These verbal parallels suggest a common author of uncommon sensitivity.

Structurally, Jacob's first sermon also resembles his later writings. It begins, as does his temple speech, with Jacob's hallmark—an initial expression of anxiety: "mine anxiety is great for you" (2 Nephi 6:3). Then it moves into scriptural quotations, followed by explication and exhortation. This organization compares closely to Jacob's olive-tree discourse, which begins with his prefatory expression of anxiety—"Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you" (4:18)—followed by scriptural quotation, explication, and exhortation.

Jacob's Exegesis

Significantly, Jacob's scriptural citations from Isaiah and Zenos both treat scattered Israel's preservation. This is one of Jacob's favorite themes, no doubt owing to his own experience as an exile. Jacob's exegesis of the brass plates is consistently concerned with the promises made to scattered Israel. He

identifies Isaiah's oracles about Israel on the isles of the sea with the Lehite colony. Note the following comment, expressed in Jacob's characteristically poetic phrasing: "And now, my beloved brethren, . . . let us . . . not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea" (2 Nephi 10:20). Jacob accentuates Isaiah's eloquent message of comfort and hope (see 2 Nephi 7:1-2; 8:3-12). Few descriptions of God's love in all scripture rival those found in Isaiah. It is to these messages of comfort to scattered Israel that Jacob is particularly drawn.

This, I believe, ought to provide a clue as to how Jacob read Zenos. Unfortunately, discussion of this allegory is often so preoccupied with the world-historical interpretations of Zenos' allegory that we miss the central point Jacob likely had in mind: that God loves and looks after the house of Israel, no matter where its branches or blood are scattered. The allegory is more than a complex puzzle whose solution unlocks world history. The allegory dramatizes God's steadfast love, as a recent *Ensign* article has recognized (Swiss). Thematically, Zenos' allegory ought to take its place beside the parable of the prodigal son, for both make the Lord's mercy movingly memorable.

A key phrase in the allegory of the vineyard, "and it grieveth me that I should lose this tree," is repeated eight times. By means of such formal repetition, called by literary critics "anaphora," the allegory sounds a refrain that celebrates the Lord's long-suffering love. The very recurrence of the line underscores the quality of that divine love—unfailing, persistent, tenacious, resolute. This characterization of the Lord matters as much as, if not more than, the historical details of his plan to redeem Israel. The allegory teaches that the Lord of the vineyard works out his grand design in history. But more than this, it shows us that he weeps over sin: "And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept, and said unto the servant: What could I have done more for my vineyard" (Jacob 5:41; see Moses 7:28-41).

The Lord of the universe can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15), for it grieveth him that he should lose any tree of the vineyard. What a remarkable witness: God is not *deus absconditus* but *deus misericors* (or, God is not an absent God, but a feeling God)! I find this allegory one of the most eloquent scriptural testimonies of God's love anywhere. Surely Jacob did too.

Just so we don't miss the point, Jacob tells us what matters most in the allegory. It is not figuring out detailed historical correspondences; it is feeling and seeing "how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel . . . and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long," and as a result, repenting: "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" (Jacob 6:4-5). This is the neglected undersong of Zenos' allegory.

Jacob's Biography[7]

When Jacob quotes scripture, one senses an intimate link between text and exegete. Jacob must have felt special poignancy in Isaiah's and Zenos' oracles of hope to scattered Israel, for he himself was a displaced person, a pilgrim wandering between two worlds—one dying, the other still trying to be born. I sense this same intimate link between the man and the message elsewhere. Let me list five facts about Jacob's life and suggest how each might correlate with his themes and style.

1. Jacob was born "in the days of [Lehi's] tribulation" (2 Nephi 2:1). He was raised on raw meat rather than milk. Some people are hardened by hardship, but not Jacob. Lehi consecrated Jacob's afflictions for his gain (2 Nephi 2:2). Jacob's sensitive style provides evidence that this patriarchal promise was fulfilled. Long afflictions seem to have softened Jacob's spirit, verifying

[7] See Matthews in this volume and also Warner for a good overview of Jacob's life.

the famous Book of Mormon dictum about the value of "opposition in all things"—an aphorism located, significantly, in Jacob's patriarchal blessing (2 Nephi 2:11). We should remember Jacob when we allude to the principle that adversity can have sweet uses. The evidence shows the boy took Lehi's lesson to heart.

2. Jacob is a child of a house divided. He saw a family feud evolve into a more or less permanent state of internecine civil war. Think of what it meant that Jacob was Laman's and Lemuel's brother. The Lamanites were not distant, faceless, nameless enemies; they were his brothers, nephews, and cousins whose names and families he knew. Remembering this helps me read with more sympathy Jacob's sad parting observation: "Many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites 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" (Jacob 7:24).

"Against us, their brethren"—Jacob uses "brethren" often in his discourses to the Nephites, too. It is his preferred salutation; he employs it some fifty times and almost never addresses his audience directly as "my people," the proprietary term preferred by Nephi (Conkling 4-5). Jacob's mode of address connotes familial intimacy appropriate to a patriarch and priest; Nephi's suggests rule or ownership befitting a king. Jacob's intimate salutation also bespeaks his humility, at the same time reminding us that his immediate audience—those he castigated for whoredoms—were kinsmen. No wonder Jacob felt anxious and pained: both Lamanites and Nephites were relatives.

3. Jacob is the younger brother of a prophet-colonizer. Nephi must have cast a long shadow, and Jacob's writing suggests a man very conscious of this shadow. Nephite kings adopt Nephi's name as a royal title (Jacob 1:11). But more telling of a brother's personal awe may be that Jacob himself chooses to group all righteous family lines (including his own) under the title Nephites (Jacob 1:13-14). Thus Jacob presents Nephi as non-pareil, and himself, implicitly, as subordinate in stature to the founder.

Equally telling of Jacob's awe may be that neither he nor any of his successors appear to have added new plates to those Nephi fashioned. This may indicate lack of resources or technology, of course, though the former seems unlikely as both Jacob and Jarom specifically mention an abundance of gold in the promised land (Jacob 2:12; Jarom 1:8). More likely, it reveals something about the meaning of the plates in the minds of Jacobite authors—ie, they are primarily Nephi's record, a sacred legacy from an incomparable man, to be added to only sparingly by those that follow. Jacob, whose contribution is sublime and considerable, still confesses that his "writing has been small" (Jacob 7:27). One senses an implicit self-comparison to his illustrious older brother. All Jacobite authors seem to suffer from a similar inferiority complex.

Jacob also seems to live in Nephi's shadow because his writing is more limited in historical scope than that of Nephi. This, of course, conforms to Nephi's explicit instruction and example in 2 Nephi. After the death of Lehi, Nephi says very little more about history. Nephi resolves, rather, to write on the small plates only the things of his soul, and so charges his brother Jacob (2 Nephi 4:15; Jacob 1:2-4). Jacob obediently confines himself almost wholly to his ministry: he records sermons, scriptural exegesis, and one story of his priestly conflict with Sherem; he says nothing of the move to the land of Nephi and little of the colonization. The result of Jacob's exclusively religious focus is that he comes across more as a priest and less as a colonizer. Consequently, he seems for readers to live somewhat in Nephi's shadow (whether or not he in fact did).

4. Jacob was visited by Christ. In this respect, he was not a whit behind his brother. Interestingly, it is Nephi who tells us of that experience in a tribute to his younger sibling: "Jacob also has seen him [the Christ] as I have seen him" (2 Nephi 11:3; see 2 Nephi 2:4). Jacob's writings are full of the testimony of Christ. Indeed, he is the first Nephite prophet to whom the name "Christ" is revealed (2 Nephi 10:3). His sermon disclosing the Lord's saving name seems to set the agenda for the rest of 2 Nephi.

Nephi, too, quotes extensively from Isaiah about the scattering and gathering of Israel and concentrates on the "doctrine of Christ" (31:2), and he charges his brother to "touch upon" this topic "as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake," in order to persuade "all men [to] believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross, and bear the shame of the world" (Jacob 1:4, 8). Jacob amply fulfills this charge. He writes so that his posterity might look upon their first parents "with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, . . . that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming" (Jacob 4:3-4). "For why not speak of the atonement of Christ?" Jacob asks (4:12), and speaks of it again and again. Appropriately, the last glimpse we have of Jacob's life concerns his refutation of Sherem, the anti-Christ. Jacob "could not be shaken" (7:5) by Sherem because he had "heard and seen" the Lord (7:12). This sure testimony of Christ underlies all Jacob's writing.

5. Finally, to end where I began, Jacob was a pilgrim. He is a wilderness writer. He was twice outcast—first from Jerusalem, across the desert and great sea; then, after landfall, from the first settlements to even deeper into the American wilderness (2 Nephi 5:5-6). Like Abraham and wandering Israel, the only security these New World nomads knew lay in their God and his law: eternity was their covering, rock, and salvation (see Abr 2:16). This may help explain why both Nephi and Jacob quote from the brass plates at greater length than any other Book of Mormon prophets. Those plates were living links to a vanished world; they preserved the memory of its sacred tradition.

How hard it must have seemed to Jacob to forge a new civilization; he didn't even know the old one personally. Yet his lonely lot was like that of Aeneas, legendary founder of Rome, whose melancholy destiny Virgil repeatedly characterizes as burdensome: "*Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*" (1.33)—"it was a thing of such great burden to found the Roman race." So it was with Jacob. Nephite survival must have often seemed perilous; it would have been easy to despair, especially

for a naturally anxious man. Time, geographic isolation, and sin could so easily efface sacred tradition; or, if these failed, an enemy might succeed, for the Lamanites were determined to "destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers" (Enos 1:14).

Jacob's Valedictions

One feels the cost that the wilderness exacted on Jacob most poignantly in his final farewell. Jacob, like Moroni, writes three farewells: at the end of Jacob 3, 6, and 7. His valediction expresses the accumulated sorrows of a nomadic life: "And also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days" (Jacob 7:26). By now, it should be clear that the sensitivity, vulnerability, and quiet eloquence of this leave-taking is of a piece not only with the facts of Jacob's life but with his style.

Jacob's tone differs markedly from that of his brother's powerful farewell. Where Jacob ends quietly and in a minor key, Nephi's farewell strikes a dominant chord and is accompanied by timpani rolls and cymbal clashes: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus." Nephi is all confidence: "I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment seat"; "you and I shall stand face to face before his bar." His last sentence reprises Nephi's lifelong commitment to absolute obedience; it could serve as his epitaph: "for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey" (2 Nephi 33:6, 7, 11, 15). Nephi's farewell never fails to move me.

Jacob's words are no less moving, but in a very different way. Jacob, too, feels assured of personal salvation: he anticipates meeting the reader at the "pleasing" judgment bar (Jacob 6:13). But his farewells are much less sanguine about the

salvation of others: "O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life. O be wise; what can I say more? Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen" (Jacob 6:11-13).

No other Book of Mormon author uses the term "dread." Similarly, no one else uses "lonesome," nor can I imagine any one else capable of the expression "our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream," or "we did mourn out our days." None are so open about anxiety, none so poetic. No wonder Elder Neal Maxwell called Jacob a poet-prophet (1). Jacob is a poet-prophet whose voice we should learn to recognize, and to love.

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